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## Epistemological Aspects of Hope

Matthew A. Benton

**H**OPE is an attitude which typically has propositions as its content, where propositions represent possibilities or events or states of affairs, that is, the world as being a certain way.<sup>1</sup> Thus when one has such propositional hope, one hopes that the world is (or will turn out) a certain way. For example, one may hope that it not rain for the upcoming outdoor party, or one may hope that one's team won their recent game. One's hopes are fulfilled when one learns that the propositions one hopes for are (or become) true; one's hopes are frustrated or dashed when one learns that they are (or turn out) false.

Hope clearly has a desire element to it, for one only hopes for those propositions which one wants to be true. But hope also has an interesting epistemological element to it, namely, it is an attitude which is somehow incompatible with knowledge: we do not hope for propositions which we know, or take ourselves to know, to be either true or false. When one comes to know that what one hoped for obtains, one's attitude changes from hope to satisfaction, or even joy, at learning that one's hope was fulfilled. Yet when one comes to know that what one hoped for does not obtain, one's attitude changes from hope to mere wish, or even regret, at learning that one's hope was dashed. In both cases it would be somehow irrational, perhaps even psychologically impossible, to retain one's hope upon coming to know the outcome. The present essay focuses on these epistemological aspects of hope.

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<sup>1</sup>There are other sorts of hope, which arguably have a different structure: e.g. one may place hope *in* a person, or perhaps an institution (e.g., "hope in democracy"), or even a life project. For work on the interpersonal version of such hope, see Adrienne Martin's contribution to this volume.

Because our main concern will be hope as it relates to knowledge, probabilities, and inductive generalizations, we shall keep an eye on the epistemic constraints which can make hope either impossible, or, when hope remains possible, how one's epistemic situation might make hope rational rather than irrational. I shall begin, in §1, by rehearsing some of data which reveal the incompatibility of hope with knowledge. Then in §2, I consider a range of propositional emotive attitudes, and compare the epistemological dimension of hope with that of other attitudes. Next, in §3, I examine whether there are any norms of rationality invoking epistemological concepts which govern being hopeful, and whether there are related norms concerning when hope may permissibly figure in practical deliberation over a course of action. Finally, in §4 I consider second-order inductive reflection on when one should, or should not, hope for an outcome with which one has a long record of experience: in other words, what is the epistemology behind when one should, if ever, stop hoping for outcomes which have failed one many times in the past?

## 1 Knowledge and Hope

In addition to our intuitive judgments about cases, a range of linguistic data provides grounds for regarding propositional hope as somehow incompatible with knowledge. Our language offers a window into the rules for how we may deploy the concepts of hope and knowledge, and thus these data reveal not only how we speak about these notions, but how we reason with them and rely on such reasoning socially. Thus examining such data enables us to discover important aspects of our cognitive lives.<sup>2</sup>

Suppose you and a colleague, Tim, are at a park for lunch, away from your workplace. You are getting ready to head back to the office when you get information about a dangerous emergency situation at work: your notification indicates that you should stay away from the office. You begin discussing the whereabouts of your coworkers, including your mutual friend, Janice, whom

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<sup>2</sup>For a more thorough treatment of such data see Benton 2018. Here I only consider linguistic data from English, but I am assured by native speakers of Spanish, French, German, and Korean that such data is cross-linguistic. (Note that in some languages like Mandarin, there is no word comparable to the English “hope”; the closest word only means something like “wish” or “desire”. In such languages, there is no linguistic data like those discussed here, because they have no word expressing the same concept of hope.)

you both know sometimes works from home. Tim says,

(1) I hope that Janice is at home.

You agree with Tim, of course, since you prefer that Janice not be at the scene of the emergency, where she could be in danger. Notice that Tim might have just as easily instead said:

(2) I hope that Janice is at home, but she might not be.

Your agreement with Tim's having said either (1) or (2) consists not simply in your both desiring that Janice be safe. It also consists in neither of you knowing whether Janice is at home.

But now suppose that an hour later, you come to learn that Tim knew all along that Janice was in fact at home.<sup>3</sup> You will likely regard Tim's having said (1) as being highly misleading, perhaps even insincere. For if Tim knew that Janice was at home, why would he say that he *hopes* that she is?<sup>4</sup> If he knew, Tim arguably claimed something false by asserting (1). At the very least, by saying (1), Tim invited the inference that he did not know Janice's whereabouts (and similar reactions would attend to Tim's having said (2) instead). What is more, Tim's knowing Janice's whereabouts when he told you (1) throws into question the idea that you *agreed* with Tim. While you might have agreed, in some sense, with what he said in asserting (1), you will likely now judge that you both didn't actually hope that Janice was at home, even if you both desired that she be there. Yet Tim, in knowing she was home, knew that what he desired was true; rather than hoping she was home, he surely instead felt relief that she *was* home. So Tim didn't hope that Janice was home. And if he didn't hope, then the idea that you agreed with Tim in hoping for this seems to vanish.

These reactions strongly suggest that hope that *p* is incompatible, in some

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<sup>3</sup>Or, alternatively, that Tim had known all along that Janice was *not* at home.

<sup>4</sup>This reaction might be undergirded by an "assert the stronger" rule: see especially Grice (1961, 132, though he omits this from its reprinting in his 1989: see 229–230); cf. also DeRose 2009, 87, and (related to hope) Chignell 2013, 198 and 200. For more general considerations on how such language can hedge our assertions, see Benton and van Elswyk forthcoming.

strong sense, with knowing whether  $p$  (that is, with either knowing that  $p$ , or with knowing that  $\neg p$ ). And these evaluations surface again in the availability of other conversational moves. Consider the following exchange, where A's question prompt to B involves whether B hopes for a particular outcome about a match known to have already been settled:

A: Do you hope that she won?

B: # Yes, I know that she won.<sup>5</sup>

B's response beginning with "Yes" to the question, about whether B (now) hopes, is bizarre given that B claims to know. If B had intended to convey that B desired her to win, and had earlier hoped for this, it would have been much more appropriate to reply with "I did, and then I learned that she won." Yet the propriety of claiming that B *did* hope, but now knows, points up the fact that it is somehow impermissible, or psychologically impossible, to continue to hope when one now knows whether the hoped-for event has come to pass.<sup>6</sup>

Such judgments are reinforced by noting our reactions to various attempts to conjoin self-ascriptions of hope in some proposition with self-ascriptions of knowledge concerning that proposition (or its negation). Consider how bad each of the following sound:

(3) # I know that John is not in his office, but I hope that he is.

(4) # I hope that John is in his office, but I know that he is not.

(5) # I hope that John is in his office, and/but I know that he is.

Note that the example of (5) shows that it is even strange to consider hoping for what you know, where your hope and knowledge 'agree' on their propositional object (as B's response in the above dialogue showed). Taken together,

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<sup>5</sup>I use "#" to mark sentences or responses which clearly clash, suggesting some inconsistency or incoherence.

<sup>6</sup>Such examples should also make clear that, although we often think of hope in "forward-looking" terms about the future, one can clearly hope for already settled outcomes: what is forward-looking is the time at which one comes to know the outcome.

our judgments of (3)–(5) provide further evidence that hoping that  $p$  is incompatible with knowing whether  $p$ .<sup>7</sup>

Similar judgments attend to conjoining hope self-ascription with outright assertion of that proposition (or its negation), which suggests that the difficulty is not simply due to explicitly claiming knowledge:

(6) # John is in his office, but I hope he is not.<sup>8</sup>

(7) # I hope that John is in his office, but he is not there.

(8) # I hope that John is in his office, and/but he is.

An alert reader may notice that the knowledge conjuncts of (3)–(5) entail their outrightly asserted conjuncts of (6)–(8), respectively, because knowledge is “factive”: one can only know facts or true propositions. So a speaker of (3)–(5) would be committed to (6)–(8), which they entail. Yet this latter triad of sentences seem problematic even though we can clearly envision how their conjuncts could both be true together: to take (6) for example, it is quite possible for John to be in his office while I hope that he is not in his office. So (6)’s conjuncts, as well as (7)’s and (8)’s, are semantically consistent (in contrast to (3)–(5), which seem semantically inconsistent<sup>9</sup>). Thus (6)–(8) are, even if not semantically inconsistent, somehow pragmatically inconsistent: the attempt to assert the conjunction generates a felt infelicity.

But importantly, (6)–(8) reveal that there is something epistemic about features we normally evaluate in an outright assertion, and that epistemic dimension plausibly concerns knowledge. As many philosophers have argued, properly asserting that something is so requires knowing that it is so:

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<sup>7</sup>That data discussed here (and more thoroughly in Benton 2018), show that propositional hope is not, *contra* Ninan 2012, a counterfactual attitude like imagining, which we may take toward propositions we know to be false.

<sup>8</sup>Some may be able to hear (6), and perhaps also (3) above, as (somewhat) felicitous. But such an interpretation appears to track only the desire aspect of hope, and thus such claims would be better put in terms of a mere *wish*: and indeed, substituting “wish” (plus its subjunctive mood) for “hope” in these examples makes them sound much more apt for such an interpretation.

<sup>9</sup>In Benton 2018, I discuss embedding tests which provide strong evidence that they are semantically inconsistent.

knowledge is in this sense the *norm* of assertion, such that one ought not assert unless one knows.<sup>10</sup> The knowledge norm explains, among other things, why our assertions represent ourselves as knowing what we assert. Given the knowledge norm, we may explain what is incoherent about asserting any of (6)–(8), as follows. Asserting their hope conjuncts has the effect of representing the speaker as not knowing whether John is in his office. But by asserting the other conjuncts, which claim outright that John is (or is not) in his office, the speaker represents herself as knowing whether John is there. So the infelicity attending to each of (6)–(8) is aptly explained in terms of knowledge: each conjunct represents something contrary to the other conjunct, with respect to the speaker’s knowledge.

So far we’ve seen data which is well-explained by the idea that hope in a proposition is itself somehow incompatible with knowledge of that proposition or of its negation. And this is exactly how most philosophers have recently theorized about hope. For example, two earlier theorists put it this way: “one cannot hope that something will occur if one already knows that it will; knowledge overshoots the criterion of probability” (Downie 1963, 249); and “one cannot, logically, want, and so hope for, what he already knows that he has... [nor] hope for, what he... knows he cannot have” (Day 1969, 95). Robert Gordon argues that “a person hopes that  $p$  only if he *does not know* that  $p$ ” (1969, 412; 1987, 26). And Adrienne Martin suggests that “hope entails uncertainty... e.g. lack of knowledge” (2011, 154).<sup>11</sup> Yet many of these same philosophers tie the possibility of hope in part to the subject’s credences, that is, their subjective probabilities. Day says that in order to hope that  $p$ , a subject must “think that  $p$  has some degree of probability, however small” (Day 1969, 89). Luc Bovens insists that “one cannot hope for some state of the world, unless one has a degree of credence that it will come about which ranges between some threshold value close to 0 for confidence that it will not come about and some threshold value close to 1 for confidence that it will come about” (Bovens 1999, 673). Or, as Adrienne Martin recently puts it,

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<sup>10</sup>This is sometimes called the Knowledge Norm of Assertion. See Williamson (2000, ch. 11), Hawthorne (2004, 23ff.), Turri (2011, 2014, 2016), Benton (2011, 2016), and Benton and van Elswyk (forthcoming), among many others. Rival norms of assertion are offered by Weiner (2005), Douven (2006), Lackey (2007), McKinnon (2015), and Gerken (2017), among others. For an overview of this literature, see Benton (2014, section 1).

<sup>11</sup>For some related ideas, cf. Egleton 2015, Pasnau 2015 and 2017, Ch. 6.

the subject must “assign a probability between and exclusive of 0 and 1 to the outcome” (Martin 2014, 62).

These formulations strongly support an intuitive “Chances License Hope” principle for a proposition  $p$  which one, all things considered, desires to be true:

(CLH) If there is a chance for one that  $p$ , and a chance for one that  $\neg p$ , then one may hope that  $p$ .

CLH provides an epistemic norm of permissibility on hope. Yet how might we square CLH’s bare probabilistic conditions on hoping with the above claims, and the substantial evidence, suggesting that hope is also incompatible with knowledge? One approach is to endorse infallibilism about knowledge, namely, to accept that when one knows a proposition  $p$ , there is no (epistemic) chance or possibility for one that  $p$  is false. Infallibilism straightforwardly handles the incompatibility of hope and knowledge given CLH.<sup>12</sup> But infallibilism about knowledge has been quite unpopular in recent epistemology, in no small part because it seems to many that we can have propositional knowledge without being certain of what we know, or without our evidence eliminating all chances of error. So fallibilism has instead been the dominant view; but fallibilism plus CLH seems to predict the compatibility, rather than the incompatibility, of knowledge and hope. For such theorists, one approach might be to articulate a theory of the conditions under which one’s epistemic chances become psychologically salient to one’s deliberations, and reframe CLH in terms of only those epistemic chances which are salient to one’s context (whether that context concerns practical deliberation, attitude formation, or both). This latter approach could perhaps fit with fallibilism about knowledge,<sup>13</sup> but it may run the risk of divorcing the possibility of hoping from the possibility of knowing, such that it may not predict the incompatibility revealed by the above data after all. For if CLH is reframed so as to focus on what the subject considers the epistemic chances concerning

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<sup>12</sup>See Benton 2018 for more.

<sup>13</sup>Fantl & McGrath (2009) develop a related account of the practical relevance of such chances and their relation to (fallibilist) knowledge; but they do not consider hope or a principle like CLH.



$p$  to be, it conceives of such chances along broadly internalist lines;<sup>14</sup> yet most in epistemology have sided with externalists about the sorts of evidence or cognitive processes which produce knowledge. For those theorists pulled in both directions, a challenge for this approach will be to formulate suitable bridge principles connecting their internalism about the chances relevant to hope with the externalist conditions on knowledge, in such a way that their incompatibility is still upheld. I shall leave such explorations to others.

It should be clear from the foregoing that hope possesses significant epistemic dimensions which render it incompatible<sup>15</sup> with knowledge. In the next section we consider several other emotive propositional attitudes with connections to knowledge.

## 2 Emotives: Factive and Epistemic

Hope is among several emotive attitudes which are propositional in structure, that is, they take propositions as their objects; their paradigmatic linguistic schema of expression is “S emotes that  $p$ .” For example, one can be happy that  $p$ , pleased that  $p$ , thankful that  $p$ , excited that  $p$ , proud that  $p$ , surprised that  $p$ , embarrassed that  $p$ , disgusted that  $p$ , sorry that  $p$ , angry that  $p$ , can regret that  $p$ , and so on.<sup>16</sup> As Gordon (1987, Ch. 3–4) demonstrates, these emotions divide into two classes: those on the former list, and more besides, are *factive* emotions which take facts as their objects. Because we bear these emotions toward what we regard as facts, we are psychologically disposed to feel them only when we take ourselves to know the relevant facts. Thus Gordon argues that these factive emotions are *knowledge-requiring*: for these emotions, one emotes that  $p$  only if one knows that  $p$  (see also Unger 1975, 151–152, 171ff., and Dietz 2018). Of course, one can also fear or be afraid that

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<sup>14</sup>Such chances might then be identified with credences or subjective probabilities, rather than objective probabilities or what Williamson (2000, Ch. 10) calls “evidential” probabilities, namely the probability on one’s evidence. Note that on Williamson’s E=K view of evidence, which identifies one’s evidence with all and only one’s knowledge, CLH’s chances could be evidential probabilities; and on E=K a version of infallibilism is upheld since whenever one knows  $p$ , the probability of  $p$  on one’s evidence is 1.

<sup>15</sup>The incompatibility could be logical, or psychological, or rational in nature; I take no stand on this here. But see Benton 2018 for arguments that cannot simply be explained by conversational pragmatics.

<sup>16</sup>For a more thorough list, see Gordon 1969, 410, and 1987, 26–27.

$p$ , be worried that  $p$ , and, as we've seen, one can hope or be hopeful that  $p$ . By contrast with those emotions from the longer list, those on this latter list involving hope and fear are *knowledge-precluding*: one hopes (or fears) that  $p$  only if one does not know that  $p$ . Gordon calls these "epistemic" emotions.

Some evidence for the knowledge requirement on factive emotions comes from the following. As Gordon notes (1987, 38), with factive emotives, one can first assert what one emotes about, then as a separate claim, ascribe the emotion:

(9) They lost. I regret that (fact).

(10) She got the job. I'm surprised about that (fact).

If, as I've noted above, knowledge is the norm of assertion, one represents oneself as knowing by asserting the initial conjunct. The anaphoric use of "that" in the second claim, to refer back to the object of one's emotion, along with the availability of adding "fact" after it, complements the idea that one's expected epistemic position is that of knowing the fact which one regrets or is surprised about: knowing that fact, which is required to assert that it is a fact, also positions one epistemically to emote about that fact. But the relevance of knowledge here is reinforced by attempts to deny knowledge once one has self-ascribed the factive emotion:

(11) # I regret that they lost, but I don't know whether they did.

(12) # I am surprised that she got the job, but I don't know that she did.<sup>17</sup>

Unsurprisingly, these two sets of data, when explained in terms of the requirement of knowledge, combine to enable us to predict that asserting, then disavowing knowledge immediately in the next sentence, will sound quite strange:

(13) # They lost. I regret that, but I don't know whether they lost.

(14) # She got the job. I'm surprised about that, but I don't know that she did.

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<sup>17</sup>Note also that many of such conjunctions sound bad even in third-person form:  
# She is surprised that she got the job, but she doesn't know that she did.

Thus while (9) and (10) implicate the speaker in knowing and sound fine, the infelicity of (11)–(14) support the idea that knowledge is *required* for self-ascribing such factive emotions. For if it were not required, we should expect that one could disavow knowledge of the fact emoted about.

Additional evidence emerges from similar linguistic data as that considered in §1, concerning self-ascription of hope and self-ascription of a factive emotion, each with the same propositional object. Infelicity judgments comparable to (3)–(5) apply to the following:

(15) # I regret that John is not in his office, but I hope that he is.

(16) # I hope that John is in his office, and/but I am grateful that he is.

(17) # I hope that John is in his office, and/but I am surprised that he is.

And it likewise sounds strange to self-ascribe hope using anaphoric “that” after having asserted the fact:

(18) # They lost. I hope that (fact).

(19) # She got the job. I hope that she did.

Similar results ensue for (18) or (19) self-ascribing “fear” instead of “hope”.<sup>18</sup> If we can make any sense of what such a speaker of (18) or (19) would be trying to say, the interpretation would seem to require a retreat from their commitment in having first asserted the claim, as in “They lost, I hope.” (Thus one may, perhaps awkwardly, convey the idea behind (18) with “They lost. That is what I hope.”) But such constructions would, of course, amount to a hedging of one’s assertion rather than an outright assertion with a discrete hope ascription added subsequently; and hedged assertions are most

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<sup>18</sup>See Gordon 1980; and 1987, Chap. 4. Gordon acknowledges that there are some conventional uses of “I fear” which seem like exceptions to the knowledge-precluding requirement: like when one says “I fear I will have to get another job,” or “I fear going to the dentist this afternoon.” Gordon insists that these are parasitic on the standard use (1987, 68). But also, these cases seem more like stative attributions than propositional attitudes: one fears the state or process of having to find a new job, or going to the dentist, etc.

plausibly understood as hedging against the requirement that one know what one asserts.<sup>19</sup>

So while many emotions are naturally held when and only when we think we know some facts, the epistemological aspects of hope, like fear, involve not knowing that for which one hopes, or that which one fears. Events or outcomes which we regard as epistemically possible and not already known are eligible to hope for (or to fear), depending on our desires and their importance to us. But this is a rather thin constraint on the possibility of hope. In the next section we consider some additional epistemological considerations which bear on the rationality of being hopeful, and of acting on the basis of such hope.

### 3 Rationally Hopeful

For all that has been said so far, one may hope that  $p$  so long as one does not know whether  $p$ , and one prefers or desires that  $p$  over  $\neg p$ . But this is a somewhat bare notion of hope, describing a set of merely necessary conditions. There are great many propositions that I do not know which I desire to be (or become) true, but I plausibly do not hope for all of them. Furthermore, this thin conception of hope will be unable to distinguish between people with the same low probability that  $p$  and the same strength of desire for  $p$ , but where only one of them hopes that  $p$  while the other despairs that  $\neg p$ .<sup>20</sup> What more can be said about why one may or should hope, and how this might matter to one's practical life? Many of these considerations will invoke non-epistemic norms on hope, but articulating these allow us to examine some epistemically relevant features, especially once we get to §4.

Let us move beyond merely hoping that  $p$  to being *hopeful* that  $p$ , where being hopeful labels something stronger. I might, for example, hope that I win the lottery, or that the vastly outmatched underdog team win through to become eventual tournament champions. But should I be *hopeful* for these things? To be hopeful about something being or becoming true presumably involves being disposed to refrain from anxiety and despair at the first signs

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<sup>19</sup>See Benton and van Elwysy forthcoming for more.

<sup>20</sup>See Gordon's (1987, 8, 33) case of the two farmers; Meirav's (2009) Shawshank Redemption case; and Martin's (2014, 14–15) Cancer Research case.

that what one hopes for will not turn out true. If I am to be hopeful as opposed to merely having hope, I would need to be somewhat resistant to giving up my projects aimed at, or otherwise linked to, the outcomes for which I hope. In addition, I would need to be disposed, within limits, to act in ways that suggest some minimal measure of confidence that these outcomes will turn out as I desire.

Such helpfulness is the target of analyses given by Martin 2014 and Blöser and Stahl 2017.<sup>21</sup> Martin's influential Incorporation Analysis recognizes the relevance of desire and probability (insufficient for knowledge), but also appeals to the idea that the hopeful person integrates their hope into their motivational scheme, such that it plays a crucial role in justifying their plans and actions:

hopeful people stand ready to *justify* dedicating certain kinds of attention and thought to the outcome, as well as hedged reliance on the outcome in their plans; moreover, they stand ready to appeal to the outcome's probability as part of their justification for these activities. (Martin 2014, 24)

When we are hopeful, she says, “we *incorporate* our attraction to an uncertain outcome into our agency by treating it as a reason for hopeful activities and feelings” (2014, 25). For Martin, this incorporation element involves two parts. First, “the hopeful person takes a ‘licensing’ stance toward the probability she assigns the hoped-for outcome,” where this stance involves her “see[ing] that probability as licensing her to treat her desire for the outcome” and its desirable features “as reasons to engage in the forms of planning, thought, and feeling” characteristic of one who is hopeful for that outcome. Second, the hopeful person goes beyond this “seeing as” characteristic of said licensing stance to actually treat her attraction to that outcome and its desirable features as reasons to engage in such planning, thinking, and feeling. These two parts involve ways in which the subject represents their probability assigned to, as well as their attraction to, the hoped-for outcome; together

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<sup>21</sup>Martin (2014, 62) explicitly states that her Incorporation account aims to capture hope “in its fullest sense,” that is, when it is “full-fledged,” and this she is mainly concerned with helpfulness even though she also acknowledges the more bare notion of hope such as we have discussed above. Note that Martin also uses the language of “hopeful” throughout her presentation of it, as cited below.

they elucidate what it is for the hopeful person to be stand ready to offer a justifying rationale for their actions (2014, 35–36; cf. also 62).

For Martin, while theoretical norms exclusively govern one’s probability assignment to an outcome, the norms governing the hopeful person’s two-part representation of the probability and the desired outcome are practical rather than theoretical in nature. Taking a licensing stance toward that outcome’s probability, and treating one’s attraction to it as a reason for such thoughts, plans, or feelings, are governed solely by practical rationality in terms of rational-ends-promotion, that is, whether doing so coheres with and promotes the hopeful person’s rational ends. On this approach, part of what makes hopefulness rational,<sup>22</sup> is that the reasons which figure in the justification which one stands ready to offer of one’s thoughts, plans, or feelings, serve to promote the ends at which they are aimed. Because some of such doings can involve simply thoughts or feelings related to fantasizing about the outcome, it is possible on Martin’s analysis for one to be hopeful even for outcomes over which one’s actions have can no control (Martin 2014, 66–68).

One possible shortcoming of Martin’s account is that the reasons for hopefulness might seem to be merely instrumentalist in nature: the reasons which make hopefulness rational do so because they are instrumental to securing the ends of either hoped-for outcome or the practical and mental activities characteristic of desiring that outcome. As such, Martin’s account may fail to capture certain sorts of hope grounded in one’s practical identity, where what makes it rational to continue being hopeful that  $p$  is not that one’s probability for and attraction to  $p$  license one in incorporating that attraction into one’s rational scheme of ends, but rather, that such a hopeful attitude is partly constitutive of the agent’s identity and so in some sense is intrinsically valuable to them. Blöser and Stahl 2017 argue that such “fundamental hopes” can be non-instrumentally rational if they are “essential to the hopeful person’s being who she is”: the rationality of such hopefulness is not grounded in “that of end promotion but that of upholding one’s personal integrity,” such that “the relevant hope is a constituent part of a scheme of ends that one has reason to uphold” (2017, 354–355). Examples of such practical identities might be “the cancer patient who continues to hope despite the low probability of her recovery, and the political activist who hopes for the end of global inequality

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<sup>22</sup>Given a theoretically rational probability assignment between 0 and 1 on one’s evidence.

in full knowledge of its unlikeliness” (356).<sup>23</sup> For such cases,

the crucial condition is that the identity of the agent must be partly constituted by a certain *perspective on the world* in which certain considerations count as reason-giving, and that giving up hope would entail the unavailability of those lines of reasoning. ... If it is true that being responsive to certain reasons is constitutive of an individual’s practical identity, then adopting a perspective of resignation endangers parts of their identity. To the extent that they want to maintain their identity, they have reason to resist such a change of perspective and to maintain hope. ... the fact that the hopeful activities form part of a person’s practical identity provides a reason to continue to hope that may outweigh the reasons given by cost-benefit analysis. (357)

For these fundamental hopes tied to one’s practical identity, a natural question will be what could make it rational for one to give up these sorts of hope. Blöser and Stahl (2017, 364ff.) consider some of the ways this might become rational, due to a revision of one’s probability (or whether the original probability no longer suffices a licensing stance), or due to a revision of their practical identity (by no longer viewing the practical identity as being constitutively connected to such hopeful activities, or because of a devaluing of that practical identity). Such revisions are instructive, and are arguably related to a concern about what might make it rational, or irrational, to continue on in hopefulness under certain circumstances. In particular, it will help to consider the epistemic dimension of inductive cases which can seem to threaten the rationality of persisting in hopefulness.

#### **4 Inductive Considerations**

Suppose that you have studied and received many years of training to be employed in a certain profession, which you regard as ideal for you given your passions and your considerable skills. Perhaps you even regard such work as somehow fundamental to your identity, the sort of work you were “born to

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<sup>23</sup>They also cite the case of “a religious person’s hope for life after death” (350).

do”. But this profession is very competitive and there are far too few full-time positions for how many qualified applicants there are applying to any given post. You are able to support yourself presently through employment related to your intended career, all while submitting numerous applications for positions in your profession. Despite a few interviews and some encouragement here and there, you never get to the final interview stage, nor have you been offered a full-time position. And this discouraging pattern goes on for *years*. While you began hopeful that you would eventually secure such a post, it is beginning to look more and more unlikely, and you cannot continue to apply for such jobs indefinitely. The evidence, inexact as it is, appears to be mounting that you will not get such a post no matter how long you try. At what point should you decide not to pursue this career any more and move on to something else?<sup>24</sup> At what point, that is, ought you to give up hope?<sup>25</sup>

In some cases like these, we may regard one who persists in hopefulness, against very strong evidence that their hope will be fulfilled, as exhibiting a series of *virtues*: being steadfast, brave, faithfully and unwaveringly committed to the increasingly unlikely but hoped-for outcome. Yet in other (perhaps very similar) cases, we will view such a hopeful person as exhibiting a kind of intellectual *vice* or irrationality: we may regard them as stubborn, unrealistic, or even delusional. What, if anything, might mark the difference between such divergent judgments? Is there any principled way to draw the line between virtuous and vicious hopefulness, which tracks some fact of the matter about the right or best conditions in which to be hopeful and act hopefully?

A skeptic about the possibility of such a principled account might insist that there can be no such account, because all there is to our divergent judgments is the following. Perhaps, on the one hand, we are disposed to label retrospectively as virtuous people who are hopeful, in the face of strong induc-

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<sup>24</sup>Note that comparable (sometimes tragic) cases abound: for example, how long should a couple who wants a baby try to conceive before turning to adoption or other options? How long should one hold out for finding a life-partner before deciding to remain single? How long should loved ones search for a missing person? And so on.

<sup>25</sup>Such a case seems related to Martin’s (2014, 14) examples of people who “hope against hope,” as in her Cancer Research case. But the above case varies in that the strong counterevidence in question is gained diachronically and applies to the subject’s own situation, whereas in a Cancer Research case, the strong statistical evidence is gained from others’ experiences with an experimental drug. See also Blöser and Stahl 2017, §3.2 for related cases on when to give up hope.



tive counterevidence, for outcomes that we also desire (or might desire were we in their shoes) which end up turning out as they desire. Whereas on the other hand, we are disposed to label retrospectively as vicious people who are hopeful, in the face of strong inductive counterevidence, for outcomes which either we do not similarly desire (or would not desire were we in their shoes) or which, unfortunately for them, do not turn out as they desire. On this rather natural idea, our hypothetical judgments of praise and blame in these cases of hopefulness simply track how we ourselves would like things to turn out for us were we in their shoes: we will praise as virtuous the person who is hopeful against all odds when it turns out well for them, whereas we will scorn as irresponsible the person who is hopeful against all odds for something which we either do not ourselves want, *or* which, if we also want it, does not turn out well for them (or us).<sup>26</sup> In other words, such a skeptic urges us to accept that our virtue-theoretic evaluations just amount to a kind of affective counterfactualizing, informed by our moral psychology regarding how we ourselves would prefer to act in similar circumstances, which include the circumstances of how things turned out.<sup>27</sup>

Yet this natural explanation of the skeptic's<sup>28</sup> cannot, it seems, be correct as it stands. For we often admire those who in hopefulness persevere even when we do not desire what they do, marveling at their pluck even if in the end they never achieve or arrive at their desired outcome. We can applaud the hopeful efforts by the losing team even as the possibility of winning appears to be increasingly out of reach. Somewhat differently, but perhaps

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<sup>26</sup>These ideas bear some similarities to what Williams (1981, 30–37) suggests may ground retrospective judgments of our own actions.

<sup>27</sup>Such affective counterfactualizing, if this is what we do, might be related to work on affective forecasting in psychology (e.g., work by Wilson and Gilbert, esp. 2003 and 2005, among others). I shall leave it to the interested reader to draw any relevant comparisons or contrasts.

<sup>28</sup>This story would justify skepticism about a principled account of rational hopefulness because the skeptic has offered a deflationary relativism to explain why different individuals will make the hypothetical judgments that they do: relative to a certain individual A's preferences, plus B's evidence, plus how things turn out for B, we have the whole story about why A would judge B's hopefulness as (say) rational/virtuous, without needing any underlying principle which accurately represents some facts which make B rational to be hopeful in B's case. This skepticism would be borne of a kind of relativism insofar as it leads the skeptic to insist that there is no fact of the matter which makes for rationality here; and without such facts, no principled account can accurately represent them.

relatedly, the atheist can admire the hopefulness of the faithful, even to the point of wishing they had such faith themselves. On the other hand, we can regard as irrational one who takes an unacceptable risk out of hopefulness even when we desire what they do and it turns out, against all odds, well for them. So, against the skeptic, perhaps instead there *is* a principled way of demarcating virtuous from vicious hopefulness, at least in cases of mounting counterevidence, which appeals to a combination of risk-aversion and the rationality of updating one's credences. Here I shall only provide the briefest sketch, but my hope is that it can still be profitable for understanding a line between rational and irrational hopefulness.<sup>29</sup>

In Martin's terminology, whether one ought to continue to treat one's attraction to the increasingly unlikely but hoped-for outcome as a reason for engaging in one's efforts, plans, thoughts, or feelings, depends on whether adopting the licensing stance (toward the probability of the desired outcome) and engaging in the hopeful activities (of thinking, feeling, and planning for the outcome) ends up promoting one's rational ends. Whether doing both of these does promote one's rational ends is in part a function of how probable it is for one that the outcome will obtain, but also of how strong one's desire is for that outcome. And in the face of mounting inductive counterevidence, one will (if one is being rational) be lowering the probability of the desired outcome *while also* re-evaluating whether the strength of one's attraction to it suffices, under such circumstances, to justify one's ongoing intentional and affective investment in it. In particular, if the wait for the desired outcome takes long enough, and coincides with enough counterevidence, the hopeful person will have to add into her considerations the undesirability of prolonged and ongoing frustration of her hopes: not only must she contend with the increasing unlikelihood of the desired outcome, but also the concern that even if her desired outcome obtains, gaining it only after years of disappointment may make the total situation less desirable. Sunken costs (among other factors) may push her to continue on in hopefulness, but opportunity costs and being

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<sup>29</sup>I am assuming here that virtuous hopefulness must at least involve some sort of rationality or responsibility, and that vicious hopefulness at least involves a corresponding irrationality or irresponsibility. Of course, our focus here is on the epistemic or evidential dimensions; it could be possible, however, to be rational along these dimensions while nevertheless exhibiting a different sort of vice, for example, by valuing and desiring certain (immoral or evil) ends. But for present purposes I put those vices aside.

risk-averse with respect to continued failure, given the lowering probability, may make her feel that she can no longer justify her intentional and affective investment in her hope.<sup>30</sup> Yet such risk aversion is not simply a product of how strongly one wants to avoid continued disappointment; how probable such episodes of disappointment are is also relevant, and this probability appears to increase with the mounting counterevidence.<sup>31</sup>

My suggestion then is that the rationality of persistence in hopefulness, despite mounting counterevidence, will depend on how resilient one can anticipate being in the face of further likely disappointments. But whether one can anticipate being this resilient depends on how probable it is, given one's evidence, that it will be worth it for one to persist through more disappointment. And whether it will be worth it so to persist is related to how (i) hard such disappointments have been on one in the past (a practical judgment), as well as (ii) how likely, and how often, one's hopes will be frustrated in the future (a theoretical/probabilistic judgment). One persists rationally in such hopefulness if one continues to incorporate one's probability and attraction to the outcome into one's rational agency, while also not neglecting how the counterevidence has affected both one's continuing desire for the outcome under these circumstances (concerning the probability and affective impact of future frustrations) *and* the probability that it will occur. One persists irrationally in such hopefulness if one neglects how the mounting counterevidence has affected both one's desires for both the outcome and for avoiding future disappointment, and the probability that one can be resilient to further frustrations.

## 5 Conclusion

We have encountered a variety of epistemological dimensions related to hope. In particular, our conceptual and linguistic judgments suggest very strongly

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<sup>30</sup>Buchak's 2013 risk-weighted expected utility (REU) theory might shed some light on such cases, though her theory is not framed in terms of hopefulness; however, I suspect that one will be rational in persisting in hopefulness in at least those cases where her REU theory sanctions as rational the relevant actions done from hopefulness.

<sup>31</sup>Calhoun 2018, Chap. 5, explores some related matters concerning hope's role in motivation when one contemplates the possibility that one's present and past efforts will have been wasted: see esp. pp. 77–80.

that bare hope that  $p$  is somehow in compatible with knowledge whether  $p$ , and one is licensed in such hope when there is an epistemic chance for one both that  $p$  and that  $\neg p$ . Given their incompatibility with knowledge, first-personal propositional claims to *hope that*, or to *fear that*, distinguish themselves from a wide range of emotive predicates which plausibly require that one know, or at least take oneself to know, in order to satisfy the emotive relation. Yet such bare hope may be distinguished from *hopefulness*, which brings several of its own epistemological features. These include the ways in which one's assessment of the probability of the outcome to which one is attracted bears on the rationality of persisting in the thoughts, feelings, and actions characteristic of hopefulness. And cases of mounting inductive counterevidence in the face of that for which one seeks to maintain hopefulness, particularly when such hopefulness is grounded in one's practical identity, provide further interesting cases for investigating the evaluative aspects which might make for rational, as opposed to irrational, hopeful persistence.<sup>32</sup>

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