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Hope in Environmental Philosophy

Lisa Kretz

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Abstract Ecological philosophy requires a significant orientation to the role of hope in both theory and practice. I trace the limited presence of hope in ecological philosophy, and outline reasons why environmental hopelessness is a threat. I articulate and problematize recent environmental publications on the topic of hope, the most important worry being that current literature fails to provide the necessary psychological grounding for hopeful action. I turn to the psychology of hope to provide direction for conceptualizing hope and actualizing hoped for states of affairs. If positive moral action is the goal, hope is a vital concept for underwriting ecological philosophy and a practice requiring considerably more attention.

Keywords Hope · Despair · Ecological catastrophe · Moral psychology · Environmental action

Hope is engagement with the act of mapping our destinies—Valerie Braithwaite (2004, 6).

Introduction

Ecological philosophy requires a significant orientation to the role of hope in both theory and practice.¹ I trace the limited presence of hope in ecological philosophy, and outline reasons why environmental hopelessness is a threat. I articulate and problematize recent environmental publications on the topic of hope, the most

¹ I use the terms ecological and environmental interchangeably.

I wish to highlight the limits of the study below; my context is that of an academic working in the global North. This is one small contribution to a much larger dialogue that I hope occurs.

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important worry being that current literature fails to provide the necessary psychological grounding for hopeful action. I turn to the psychology of hope to provide direction for conceptualizing hope and actualizing hoped for states of affairs. Hope, on my account, is substantive, motivates action, can be taught, is catchy, has a multitude of beneficial outcomes, empowers, and is epistemically and socially responsive. Moreover it is a self-fulfilling prophecy given the causally efficacious enabling function of hope when, through placing oneself in a state of hope, one begins a process that brings to realization desired states of the world. The future is shaped, in part, by our current attitudes, methods of framing, and attendant actions. Hope bridges the gulf between the beliefs and actions of today and possibilities for tomorrow. If positive moral action is the goal, hope is a vital concept for underwriting ecological philosophy and inspiring positive ecological action. As such, hope is a practice requiring considerably more attention.

Ecological Philosophy: Not a Lot of Hope

Notable philosophical discussions of hope are to be found in the work of Thomas Aquinas, Thomas Hobbes, Baruch Spinoza, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant. In twentieth century analytic philosophy, however, theoretical analysis on hope is conspicuously lacking. A historical survey of hope literature in philosophy reveals that although “hope has been theorized as a virtue, at least since the time of Aquinas...there was very little written about it in twentieth century analytic philosophy, despite the renaissance in virtue theory” (Nunn 2005, 64). Contemporary philosophers and social scientists have given little attention to hope, despite hope’s centrality in lived experience, literature and art (McGeer 2004, 100–101).² Exempt from this trend was the pronounced growth of hope literature in the specialized field of bioethics (Elliott and 2005, 3). With the exception of bioethicists, though, recent philosophers had yet to engage substantially with hope.

We find two academic philosophers in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century lamenting the lack of philosophical hope literature. Given how fundamental hope is to our lives, Luc Bovens postulated in 1999 that it is outright scandalous that the concept of hope has gone virtually unnoticed in the philosophical community (667). Philip Pettit observes in 2004 that hope does not only fail to bulk large, it scarcely bulks at all among topics engaging philosophers over the last half century or so (152). Indeed, he goes so far as to say philosophers of mind completely ignore it, while moral philosophers have given it short shrift (Pettit 2004, 152).³ Bovens’ and Pettit’s concerns were met with a sizeable spike—albeit a relative one—in

² Even in sociology Michelle Lueck notes that in 2007 “the powers of hope in sociology have been greatly unexplored including the ability of collective hope to create social change” (2007, 251).

³ When hope has received philosophical attention, says Pettit and Bovens, it has tended to be markedly religious (Pettit 2004, 152; Bovens 1999, 667). Though such developments are not to be undervalued, a secular account of hope provides a different orientation and a wider scope for application. Although outside the scope of this article, I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who highlighted that religious studies/theology are rich sites for exploration of the intersection of hope and the environment.

philosophical hope literature, which more than doubled between 1990 and 1999, and more than doubled again between 2000 and 2009.⁴

My specific interest pertains to the intersection of environmental philosophy and hope. In 2007, when I began presenting research on the intersection of hope and ecological philosophy, there was such a pronounced absence of theoretical attention that I made the case that there was a lacuna.⁵ According to the *Philosopher's Index*, between the years of 1950 and 2012 there was a meager total of 69 publications with search terms referring to hope and either environment or environmental.⁶ On a closer analysis roughly 10 actually address this intersection in any meaningful way in the last 62 years. In contrast with this trend there was a *relative* proliferation of articles in 2010, albeit with a mere three articles appearing in philosophical journals.⁷ I will discuss my concerns with how the relationship between hope and environmental philosophy are conceptualized therein shortly. For the purposes of contextualization it is worth noting that the same database, when used to do a search for publications pertaining to responsibility and either environment or environmental, identified 591 articles with 71 of those appearing in 2010.⁸

In the wider cultural milieu, popular literature has engaged with the pragmatic importance of the role of hope within the ecological movement. In *The Geography of Hope* Chris Turner suggests that a crucial downfall of the American ecological movement is that “environmentalism has failed as a common language of hope or a ritual of rebirth. It has failed as a myth” (2007, 18–19). The predominant emotional reactions to the ecological crisis, contends Turner, are horror, outrage, alarm and overwhelming fear—fear that generates conservative reactions (2007, 25).⁹ A more

⁴ Data retrieved from the Philosopher's Index 07/04/2012. Search term: Hope. Findings: 1940–1949: 28 records, 1950–1959: 46 records, 1960–1969: 78 records, 1970–1979: 248 records, 1980–1989: 277 records, 1990–1999: 577 records, 2000–2009: 1,232 records, 2010–07/04/2012: 217 records. Bear in mind that I have not gone through all the abstracts individually to ascertain how centrally discussions of hope factor into them; this simply serves as a rough indication of that increase.

⁵ I first presented on this topic at the Atlantic Region Philosopher's Association Conference in 2007. I have yet to resolve the question of *why* there has been this absence, which is a research question deserving of focused study itself. As far back as Aristotle we find an emphasis on moral psychology and, in more recent times, Elizabeth Anscombe made a strong case for a paradigm shift in ethics toward seriously attending to moral psychology. Thus I am uncertain as to why hope has been sidelined; particularly given the renaissance of virtue theory and the rise and proliferation of care theory. I extend my gratitude to the anonymous reviewer who posed the question and offered the suggestion that the omission of a robust engagement with hope in Western ecological philosophy may be, in part, related to an overarching paradigm of ecological despair.

⁶ Data retrieved from the Philosopher's Index 07/04/2012. Search term: All (Hope) AND all (Environment or Environmental). Findings: 1950–1959: 1 record, 1960–1969: 1 record, 1970–1979: 4 records, 1980–1989: 2 records, 1990–1999: 16 records, 2000–2009: 33 records, 2010–07/04/2012: 12 records.

⁷ One of these fails to be mentioned in the Philosopher's Index, which, unfortunately, currently does not include the excellent scholarship contained in *Ethics & the Environment*.

⁸ Data retrieved from the Philosopher's Index 07/10/2012. Search term: All (Responsibility) AND all (Environment or Environmental). Findings: 1962–2012: 591 records, 2010: 71 records. Given the sheer amount of publications I am unable to do a more nuanced analysis of the actual content of each publication, but the number still serves as a good general contrast.

⁹ To substantiate the legitimacy of hope for a greener future Turner highlights success stories and technological advances that are seeking to minimize humanity's carbon footprint. He appeals to Stephen

sustained and philosophically rigorous argument for the essential role of hope in ecological philosophy, one which includes attending to the social, moral and political dimensions of justified hope, could augment and further substantiate efforts such as Turner's to inspire hope. Such work is vitally needed given the threat of hopelessness.

I belong to a generation that grew up in a world facing ecological crisis. We live in an age of global warming, an exploding human population, depletion of land and water supplies at an ever-expanding rate, massive species and habitat destruction, an alarming decrease in biodiversity, and pollution and toxic waste accumulating at such a pace that safe disposal is impossible (Fiala 2010, 51). Humans now have technologies that enable destruction with a velocity and scope that was impossible a generation ago. In less than 75 years humans have burned 97 % of all the oil that has ever been burned (Thompson 2010, 45). During the last minute nearly 100 acres of rainforest have been destroyed (Eichler *Forests* 2008a, b, 305). In 2004, marine scientists estimated that in the last 50 years 90 % of all large ocean predators were fished out by industrial fleets (Eichler *Fisheries* 2008a, b, 280). Despite the devastating impacts of deforestation, global warming and ocean degradation, a low priority is afforded to dealing with these issues (Plumwood 2006, 1). The impact of the human species has been so pronounced that some geographers refer to this as the Anthropocene Epoch (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000). The impacts of climate change are not equitably distributed. It is those who are already multiply oppressed, and least responsible for causing environmental harms, that suffer first and worst from the ecological crisis (Abelsohn and O'Hara 2011, 31–32; Gaudiano and Gonzalez 2010, 134; Glazebrook 2010, 2011; Singer 2010, 183).

In spite ample evidence that negative human impacts are destroying the ecological systems that underwrite the possibility for life as we recognize and value it, little progress has been made toward sustainable solutions (Fiala 51–52). The social change necessary for reducing harmful human impacts, at minimum to a level that facilitates the future survival of human society, has not occurred (Plumwood 2006, 1–2). Dominant political institutions both nationally and internationally are failing to adequately address the ecological crisis (Plumwood 2006, 1). As stated in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2007 Synthesis Report for Policymakers greenhouse gas emissions are going up, not down—with projected global increases of 25–90 % between 2000 and 2030.¹⁰

Given the enormity of global problems, the ability of any one person to achieve change can appear a hopeless undertaking (Courville and Piper 2004, 40). Hopelessness, at times like these, is a profound threat. Thus, there is pressing need for ecological philosophy to address the role of hope—particularly given how much of future survival and quality of life rests on our decisions today. I will first

Footnote 9 continued

Pacala and Robert Socolow's (co-directors of Princeton University's Carbon Mitigation Initiative) 2004 article in *Science* where they argue "Humanity already possesses the fundamental scientific, technical, and industrial know-how to solve the carbon and climate problem for the next half-century. A portfolio of technologies now exists to meet the world's energy needs over the next 50 years and limit atmospheric CO₂ to a trajectory that avoids doubling the preindustrial concentration" (Turner 2007, 48).

¹⁰ http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/ar4/syr/en/spms3.html.

outline the trajectory of current articles in prominent philosophy journals dealing with hope as it intersects with ecological philosophy, and then problematize ethical and psychological dimensions of the views discussed. The account of hope I recommend is developed in conversation with these articles. As such, elements of my own account are found woven throughout my analysis below. The more explicit articulation of my own analysis of key features of hope is found in the section “[The Psychology of Ecological Hope](#).” In brief, however, I advocate for an account of hope that is substantive, is psychologically informed, induces positive action, enhances agency, is responsive, is socially supported and is proactively pursued. Prior to turning to it, though, it is helpful to chart the current theoretical landscape.

But first, I wish to table some premises I will be taking as given. In what follows it is assumed that ecological hopes, in the positive sense, pertain to a desire for the flourishing of diverse life forms (human and more-than-human) and the complex ecological systems that support them. Additionally, I take moral ecological action to be motivated by a desire to respect, protect, care for, and generally not oppress non-human others. Altruism is contrasted with egoism. Selfish desires serve as the core motivation for egoism, while concern for the well-being of others is at the heart of altruistic action. These two need not be mutually exclusive in terms of the resultant action. One can be motivated toward the same action for multiple, complex, and sometimes even contradictory reasons (for example both self-centered and other-oriented reasons). In any case, however, I do not characterize *selfish* motives as having *moral* worth. Moral worth, on my account, is non-contingently linked to altruistic motivations.¹¹

Hope as a Duty to Ourselves

In *Hope, Self-Transcendence and Environmental Philosophy* John Nolt (2010, 162) provides an unusual argument wherein we have a duty to ourselves to value nature’s goods as ends, which he grounds in an imperative of hope. On Nolt’s view we have a duty to ourselves to optimize individual and collective hope, and he argues that the best way to optimize hope is by valuing nature’s goods as ends (2010, 162–63). The definitional terms of engagement for Nolt’s argument are as follows. Self-transcendence is understood as valuing a distinct object’s good as an end in itself, and we are capable of valuing the goods of living things in nature (2010, 163–64). Hope is defined as an “intentional attitude of a person toward a state of affairs which is thought to be possible;” Nolt calls this the “object-state” (2010, 166). Hope can be experienced in degrees in terms of the strength of hope’s desire (2010, 166). Hope has three additional dimensions, namely: anticipated goodness, likelihood, and duration of the object-state (2010, 166). The combination of these three amounts to the magnitude of the hope, and if any are absent hope does not apply (2010, 167). A hope is satisfiable if its object-state is both possible and the above

¹¹ I am obviously borrowing a page from Immanuel Kant here, but I am certainly not borrowing the whole book. I agree with him that moral motive plays a role in the determination of an action’s moral worth, but the similarity ends there.

dimensions of the hope are not based on misconceptions or overestimations (2010, 167). Aggregate hope is the totality of one's hopes at a given time (2010, 167).

The premise that we have a *moral* duty to prevent and relieve suffering is assumed, and as such we have a moral duty (individually and collectively) to uphold hope because hopelessness is a form of suffering that we call despair (2010, 167–168). Despair makes us unable to help others (2010, 167). Given the communal nature of the imperative of hope, we have a duty to encourage it in one another and cultivate it at the societal level (2010, 168). An otherwise overwhelming obligation is qualified with the proviso that “we (both individually and collectively) ought to prevent or relieve suffering insofar as this is reasonably possible and consistent with other obligations” (2010, 168). The maxim we are left with is a moral duty to optimize hope wherein we keep the magnitude of aggregate satisfiable hope high enough to avoid despair (or to increase it if we deem it to be at an unacceptable level), insofar as is reasonably possible and consistent with our other obligations (2010, 169). Self-transcendence sustains satisfiable hope by increasing the number of hopes one adopts—for they are no longer limited to one's own; the sustainability of hope increases by diversifying aggregate hope (2010, 169–171). The duty for self-transcendence (valuing distinct other's goods) follows not from a duty to those others, but a duty to ourselves grounded in the duty to optimize hope (2010, 171). Because we are aiming for greater magnitudes of satisfiable hope, self-transcendence directed toward humans and nature is a better approach than just self-transcendence directed toward humans (2010, 173).

Thus, Nolt postulates a theory wherein we use a moral imperative to avoid suffering in the form of despair to root our obligation to optimize hope, which is best facilitated by caring about not just human goods but non-human goods (thereby extending the probability of achieving our hopes given a wider set of goods to hope for). He is identifying low hanging fruit for increasing and diversifying the set of entities one can have hopes about. My most central concern about Nolt's approach is the prioritization of our own benefit (avoiding suffering) to motivate what should instead occur because it is the right thing to do. Nolt recognizes this worry in stating that his argument involves a genuine desire for the good of others (because we desire both our own and other's goods) (2010, 178). Nonetheless the *primary motivation* for adopting concern about the goods of more-than-human others is to alleviate our own suffering in the form of despair. When motivation gains its foothold via “rational self-interest” it is no longer altruism grounding such behavior, and ipso facto no longer brings to light questions of moral right and wrong so much as questions of how to best maximize self-interest. It may currently, conveniently, contingently be in our own best interest to recognize and value other's goods as goods in themselves, but there is no necessary link—it could be otherwise. I take it to be the case that actions properly described as moral require a non-contingent connection to a moral motivation. Moral motivation is derived, in part, from an acknowledgement of the goods of others as being good in and of themselves and is manifest through a commitment to care for/respect/not oppress said others. Contrast this with it being *good for you* to conceive of their goods as being valuable and therefore opting to value them. Both hope and ecological philosophy premised on the primary

motivation of alleviating our own suffering works against an altruistically motivated ecological ethic to protect, care-for, and respect human and non-human life forms. We require a far richer account of how the concept of hope can and does function in ecological philosophy. Although Nolt explicitly states that his account is not an environmental ethic, rather it is a partial account of moral valuing (2010, 178), such moral valuing remains suspect due to the prioritization given to avoidance of one's own suffering as a motivation for hope and environmental protection. As Nolt notes, our duty to optimize hope does not involve a direct duty to defend nature, rather we have a "duty to ourselves to defend nature" (2010, 170). That being said I take Nolt's reflection—that the communal nature of the imperative of hope results in a duty to encourage it in one another and a duty to cultivate it at the societal level—to be an important theoretical vein to pursue. The claim that we have a duty or responsibility to hope and to create communities and institutions that support and generate hope certainly merits further research, as does a focus on methods for extending hope related care to non-human entities.

The End of the World and Radical Hope

Allen Thompson argues in *Radical Hope for Living Well in a Warmer World* that impending radical alterations in global climate will likely precipitate such extensive changes to dominant world culture that we will need new virtue concepts (2010, 44). Insofar as extensive cultural and environmental changes will happen in relatively short order, Thompson contends we need to look at character traits suited for radical change and he advances a novel form of courage (appropriate to a culture in crisis) called "radical hope" (2010, 44). The notion of radical hope is inspired by Jonathan Lear's book *Radical Hope*, where Lear argues that the last principal chief of the Crow Nation—Plenty Coups—led his people well through cultural devastation (2010, 47). Previous methods for manifesting virtues such as courage were made impossible, so Plenty Coups utilized imaginative excellence which helps constitute radical hope (2010, 47–48). Thompson foresees ecological changes ending significant parts of our cultural perspective (2010, 48). The virtue of radical hope that Lear points to is "basically the hope for revival: for coming back to life in a form that is not yet intelligible" (Lear 2006, 95 in Thompson 2010, 49). Radical hope, says Thompson, "is against despair, even in the face of a well-justified despair. It is the idea that an inadequate grasp of the good should not lead one to believe it is not to be hoped for" (2010, 49). The imaginative excellence Thompson refers to reflects our need to conceptualize new cultural patterns and forms of human life (2010, 50). On Thompson's view, one should accept as inevitable widespread harms such as massive species extinctions, degraded ecosystems, and considerable human injustices and suffering (2010, 51). In the face of such challenges, we must not give up resistance and the effort to change things—indeed "character dispositions against a reluctant acquiescence stem from radical hope, as a form of commitment against what may be justifiable despair" (2010, 51).

I am extremely sympathetic to Thompson's position that we ought to explore and embrace the virtues still to be found amidst even certain destruction. For example, we could choose to act in morally virtuous and integrity preserving ways even if we

knew with certainty that ecological degradation will put a cap on the years in which the human species might survive. I am concerned, however, about the relation between hope and justification on Thompson's account.

On a "thin" standard account of the nature of hope, it is a complex attitude comprised by a desire for some prospect (the desiderative component) and the belief that the prospect is the sort that one can assign a probability to (the estimative component) (Meirav 218, 2009). Karin Dufault and Benita Martocchio's position begins to provide the sense of a "thick," more substantive, conceptualization of hope that I will draw on in what follows. They define hope as "a *multidimensional* dynamic life force characterized by a *confident* yet *uncertain* expectation of achieving a future *good* which, to the hoping person, is *realistically* possible and *personally significant*. Hope has implications for action and for interpersonal relatedness" (1985, 350).¹² Hope is necessarily uncertain because it describes future, as of yet unrealized, possibilities. That it be realistically possible demands that one's hopes be justified. Without such a qualification, the substantive notion of hope could be problematically groundless and therefore fundamentally irrational.

The component of Dufault and Martocchio's definition I object to is the demand for a *confident* expectation of achieving the future good. To be justified, what is hoped for must be possible. One must be rationally justified in thinking it a possibility. Confident expectation, however, is an overstatement—such strong conviction about the expected outcome is not necessary for justified hope. On my view, for hope to be justified, there must be the possibility of realizing what one hopes for.¹³ There can be gradations in the strength of one's hope, in that one's sense of hope can be strong or weak. One's hopes can reflect and be grounded in how likely the possibility of realizing the future good is, but provided the expectation is greater than zero then there is space for hope. If something is absolutely impossible there is no justification for hope. If it is certain, then hope is not needed; rather one can happily anticipate a desired state of affairs coming to fruition. Thus, hopes can fall anywhere on the spectrum from the possible to the likely; they just do not apply to the impossible or the inevitable. For a hope to be justified, though, there must be a non-zero probability of realizing the hoped for state of affairs.

Here, then, is the rub. Thompson suggests radical *hope* is a commitment against what may be justifiable *despair* (2010, 51). But if this is the case then the relationship between hope and justification is potentially problematic—in that despair is a form of hopelessness premised on the impossibility of the hoped for state of affairs coming to fruition.¹⁴ We cannot have an account of hope wherein hope can be founded on

¹² I do not adopt Dufault and Martocchio's accompanying distinctions regarding the spheres and dimensions of hope. This is because on my account a thick sense of hope requires that one's hopes be justified. In contrast an optimistic demeanor, what Dufault and Marocchio call a generalized hopefulness, can remain unattached to factual evidence and outcomes.

¹³ In accepting a minimalistic threshold for justified hope, I align myself with Ezra Stotland. For Stotland "hope is an expectation greater than zero of achieving a goal" (Stotland 1969, 2). Pettit (2004, 153) and Drahos (2004, 22) are also sympathetic to this view.

¹⁴ Trudy Govier writes in *Hope and Its Opposites* that "Despair is hopelessness. To despair is to lose all hope, to be without hope, to be overcome by a sense of futility or defeat, to believe that there is no

despair—as despair is, by definition, the absence of hope. One way out is to say that although there is justifiable despair in terms of our knowledge that there will be continuing impacts such as massive species extinctions and degraded ecosystems, we can have justifiable hope about minimizing additional negative impacts through our current actions (thus the object of our hope and despair are differentiated).

The more serious worry I have about Thompson’s account is the depressing vision of the future it encapsulates. One is left to imagine inevitable, catastrophic ecological devastation and despair. On Thompson’s account we need a form of hope that can rise from the ashes of a demolished planet; past hopes will likely not have a place in the apocalyptic aftermath so we will need to act on the faith that future possibilities for hope, ones we cannot yet recognize, will appear. This view is not, on my reading, a particularly hope-inducing one. If the shift to sustainable action is swift then the horrors Thompson alludes to need not be realized. And if swift action is needed it is crucial to imagine the future in hope-inducing ways, as will be argued shortly. Even less paradigmatic shifts can ground a more positive vision. For example, when Thompson says that considerable human injustices and suffering are inevitable I think it important to highlight that such injustices can be minimized through the behaviors we adopt. As a case in point, there will be a sharp increase in ecological refugees over the next few years. There can be a global response launched that evidences a commitment to human rights regardless of how one is geographically and economically situated. Likewise, we can choose to embrace a moral response toward the non-human animals and environments that will be threatened.

Thompson identifies an important connection between radical hope and ecological activism. Radical hope is taken to be realized in commitment to the social and political struggles connected with environmental activism (2010, 51). The theme of moral responsibility is taken to play a central role in tomorrow’s environmentalism (2010, 54). Thompson puts forward environmental responsibility as a virtue. Although difficult questions about the distribution of collective responsibility among individuals remain, Thompson suggests that “a significant part of human environmental excellence in the Anthropocene will involve character traits disposing individuals to act well at all times as agents both causally and morally responsible for the conditions of all life on earth” (2010, 55). Teasing out collective and individual responsibility, and highlighting it in day-to-day actions, will be crucial for behavior change. Too often group harms are imagined to happen at the group level in such a way that no individual action can make a difference—but (a) this way of thinking ensures that positive large-scale group change *will* be impossible and (b) group action is *necessarily* composed of the combination of individual actions, so denying the important role of individual actions for group change runs contra to fact. In the same way that no one acting ensures no change, a ground swell of behavior change with a majority of individuals acting at the collective level ensures change is indeed possible. How the situation is conceptualized can make the difference between the

Footnote 14 continued

possibility at all of getting the desired object or outcome” (2011, 247). She discusses in some depth cynicism, fear, despair and pessimism as oppositional to hope. Other possibilities include desperation, disappointment, resignation, and presumption (2011, 246).

possibility or impossibility of far-reaching positive change rooted in justified hope. As such, it becomes imperative to explore what motivates morally responsible behaviour and to discover how it can be habituated now and in future generations.

The End of the World and Rational Selfishness

In Andrew Fiala's piece *Nero's Fiddle: On Hope, Despair and the Ecological Crisis* he identifies a problem he calls the problem of Nero's Fiddle. He notes that despite living in the middle of a crisis of millennial proportions we are wasting our time pursuing self-interests—or, to put it metaphorically—we fiddle while Rome burns (Fiala 2010, 52). Although Fiala does not believe it rational to fiddle in the face of crisis, he identifies the argument that if indeed the ecological crisis is too far gone it “*seems* rational to enjoy oneself before ‘it hits the fan’” (2010, 52). If the perceived rational response to crisis is to pursue self-interest, particularly when others are pursuing self-interest, then the crisis is exacerbated (2010, 52). He argues that such an analysis works on the assumption that most of us are egoistic, short-sighted, and therefore focus on short-term self-interest (2010, 53). Fiddling, says Fiala, may seem rational when the crisis appears unsolvable (2010, 53). The problem, runs the argument, is that we are then left with a situation wherein painting a grim picture of the future is needed to stimulate adequate action in a timely manner, but that same grim picture is used as justification for the rationality of fiddling while Rome burns (2010, 53). Contra this view, empirical research on how message framing influences perceived climate change competence, engagement, and behavioral intentions indicates that positive, agential, proactive messaging is the best method for instigating action (Gifford and Comeau 2011).¹⁵ Indeed, I will be making the case that a vision of the future that highlights positive possibilities is precisely what is needed to motivate action toward sustainable ways of being.

One solution offered by Fiala is to develop an alternative form of rationality that looks beyond short-term utility; however, he notes that if there is no future to speak of then it may appear rational to maximize one's enjoyment before catastrophe hits (2010, 53). Alternative solutions offered by Fiala include: developing a form of rationality less concerned with short-term self-interest (potentially through Good Samaritanism in the form of the rich willingly sacrificing luxury in the name of altruism or broadening self-interest to include one's descendants), generating more interest in sustainability (perhaps by understanding the intrinsic rewards of sustainable lifestyle choices—such as health), and taking up the global perspective (2010, 55).¹⁶ Fiala himself recognizes the need for hope, noting that an obvious

¹⁵ In Fiala's defense, his paper was published prior to the publication of these findings. Additionally he does recognize that if the picture that is painted is too grim it will lead to the belief that inaction appears rational (2010, 53).

¹⁶ As was pointed out to me by Michelle Willms: In the story ‘The Good Samaritan’ two rich, religious men passed by and ignored a beaten, dying man on the side of the road. The Samaritan—who had very little, and was from a group of people shunned by society—was the only one who stopped to show mercy. Resultantly, the relation between Good Samaritanism and the rich in Fiala's work takes on new dimensions.

solution would be to “find some way to stimulate hope so that the crisis can be averted through individual action and collective reform” (2010, 64). Even if the crisis cannot be averted, Thompson helpfully provides evidence that we can generate radical hope in times of crisis and that we can act morally better or worse even while Rome burns. All bets are not off when crisis hits.¹⁷ We are not then at liberty to engage in irresponsible and harmful behaviors. Crisis is no excuse to abandon morality.

I question the appeal to Good Samaritanism which, in the context of Fiala’s paper, rings of superogatory ethical actions involving going beyond what is minimally ethically expected. Given the grave imbalances that are the result of the “luxuries” of the rich I take it to be an obligation to alter such behaviours to more equitable and sustainable ones as a course of being a morally decent person rather than something that should be construed as ethically superogatory. I also question the “enjoyment” involved in behaviors that maintain a mode of life expansively, and unnecessarily, harmful to other entities. Indeed, Chrisoula Andreou argues that current excessive consumption trends in North America are to no avail because in self reports of happiness we are not happier as a result (Andreou 2010). In a related vein Kate Soper (2008, 571) contends that the grotesque and pathological aspects of hyper-consumerism actually lead to decreases in pleasure. I suggest that it is only through a profound ignorance of the negative impacts hyper-consumptive behaviours have on a myriad of innocent others that one could live with oneself. In other words, a destructive, consumeristic existence is not enjoyable—it generates a sense of vacuousness in one’s life, leaving one feeling miserable and empty most of the time. At root I question what is “enjoyable” about treating others poorly and embracing a perennially selfish existence.

Furthermore, I question the construal of rationality and human nature in Fiala’s piece. Plumwood argues in *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* that the anthropogenic destruction of what necessitates human existence is not a rational course and if we are being told it is then we need to look more critically at what is meant by ‘rational’ (2006, 1).¹⁸ Moreover, I question the analysis of human nature in this article. In contrast, Yochai Benkler amasses psychological evidence that humans are hardwired for co-operation and collaboration, and are motivated accordingly (Benkler 2011).¹⁹ Given inescapable enculturation I think rather than hypothesize ‘chicken-egg style’ regarding human nature versus nurture it is more pragmatically

¹⁷ Appeals to other’s failures to do the right thing as justification for you failing as well are strongly countered by Peter Singer’s thought experiment in *Famine, Affluence and Morality*. In the thought experiment a child is drowning in a shallow pond, and saving the child would only take you wading into the water to save their life. Imagine now the claim that you need not do so because others are walking by and failing to do so. “Should I consider that I am less obliged to pull the drowning child out of the pond if on looking around I see other people, no further away than I am, who have also noticed the child but are doing nothing? One has only to ask this question to see the absurdity of the view that numbers lessen obligation. It is a view that is an ideal excuse for inactivity...” (Singer 1972, 233).

¹⁸ Although Fiala recognizes that a central issue is how one defines what is “rational” (2010, 42) he fails to define it in ways consistent with ecological health—though this may be for rhetorical effect.

¹⁹ The evidence Benkler provides ranges from Wikipedia and open software, to field studies identifying co-operative systems which tend to be more stable and effective than incentive based ones, to evolutionary biologist’s and psychologist’s identification of neural evidence of a human predisposition to co-operate (2011, 78–79).

useful to recognize evidence of a capacity for competition and co-operation, for selfishness and altruism, and to work toward habituating the behaviors we find morally beneficial. Provided our moral goals are within the scope of human capabilities we should proactively inculcate and support ethically virtuous character traits.

Last, I am concerned about Fiala's way of framing the discussion. Such a construal prescribes despair in all cases where the crisis cannot be averted, and hope is available only through such aversion. Two diametrically opposed options are presented with success being the absolute aversion of catastrophe and all else amounting to failure. This is a grim view. If hope is a goal, I recommend a more nuanced understanding of what the ecological crisis presents us with. Given the role realizability plays for justified hope, it is crucial to be cognizant of not having goals so grandiose that they are fundamentally unrealizable (such that we are hopeless that we can ever achieve them). Simultaneously, we cannot make goals so easily realizable that justified hope is attained at the expense of no longer challenging ourselves to fully embrace our espoused values. Importantly, what is reasonable to hope for will evolve as people think and act in hopeful ways. Although it may not currently be realistic to hope for an all out end to human over-consumption, pollution, and the rapid destruction of the environment, this should not rule out the hope that we can, over time, substantially curb consumption patterns, pollution, and ecological destruction. It is dualistic, black-and-white thinking that makes hopelessness (given the current state of affairs) appear fitting. I propose a more balanced and realistic analysis where one can acknowledge serious, even dire circumstances, without feeling that it necessitates giving up all hope. Even for one convinced that it is too late, that humans have already done too much damage to reverse it quickly enough to afford a long and healthy future, we can be hopeful about stopping humans' contributions to that damage such that we lengthen the period of time both we, and the non-human world as we know it, are around. Though we may not be able to protect non-human entities from destruction in the complete and absolute sense, this is not to say there is not a plethora of comparative ways we can protect the non-human world—having a more or less destructive impact, over a longer or shorter period of time. Thinking in terms of spectrums makes feasible wider and more flexible sets of goals to hope for. I find it troubling that these publications neither generate a robust sense of hope nor provide a recipe for generating it (in non-apocalyptic settings). Fiala ends his paper saying that suggestions about how to stimulate hope and Good Samaritanism require a different paper (2010, 65). I write this paper as a contribution to the dialogue that needs to happen regarding how we can stimulate hope and moral decency²⁰ amidst ecological crisis.

The Psychology of Ecological Hope

To summarize, I have identified the importance of addressing hope in environmental philosophy that is being written in a time of ecological crisis. I have identified areas of concern regarding how hope is conceptualized in the above accounts. I contend

²⁰ As opposed to Good Samaritanism insofar as it is conceptualized as superogatory.

Nolt's account of how hope should function in environmental ethics is wrongly motivated. This is because on his view adopting concern about the goods of others is, at root, motivated by the desire to alleviate our own suffering in the form of despair. This, I claim, is ethically untenable. An account of hope in ecological philosophy should be rooted in an altruistically motivated ecological ethic. My worries about Fiala and Thompson are primarily psychologically rather than ethically grounded. Namely, Fiala and Thompson's accounts work against hope insofar as their accounts are largely, to put it simply, depressing. Here is where the tricky terrain between current facts and future possibilities must be broached with epistemic and psychological care. Justified hope requires a factually grounded account of the current state of affairs, but the associated emotional response can lead one to despair or hope pending on how one envisions future possibilities. Looking at the psychology of hope indicates how to think and act in hopeful ways.²¹

When hopeful, in the thick substantive sense, one acts in ways to bring about the hoped for end.²² In contrast, hopelessness and despair "are the cause and consequence of inaction or immobilism" (Freire 2011, 3). Active dimensions of hope are involved in orienting your life toward realizing a hoped for state of affairs. Rather than wishing something might be so, we plan and act in ways to try to make it so. On psychologist Charles Snyder's widely accepted analysis hope has an agency and pathway component. Hope is "a cognitive set that is based on a reciprocally derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed determination) and (b) pathways (planning of ways to meet goals)" (Snyder 1995, 355). This is a mutually supportive relation where planning produces action and the outcomes of the action contribute to planning and expectation (Drahos 2004, 22). Thus, the process of hope leads to "a cycle of expectation, planning, and action that sees the agent explore the power of her agency" (Drahos 2004, 22). Sasha Courville and Nicola Piper take hope to be a key ingredient that needs to be harnessed through action that is directed at social justice objectives in the effort to press for social change (Courville and Piper 2004, 44). On their analysis hope requires concrete action, and likewise, concrete action requires hope (Courville and Piper 2004, 44).²³

Hope is necessary, catchy, and can be taught. Having hope about the future is a necessary condition for life (Stotland 1969, 8, 21–22; Farber in Snyder 1995, 358; Freire 2011, 2; Elliott 2005, 14; McGeer 2004, 100). More than the minimal threshold for survival, however, needs to be met for robust positive action to

²¹ I turn to psychology because my interest is in motivating positive environmental action and psychological insights are essential for facilitating hopeful action and for treating ecological despair. It is not the sole research direction possible, alternative approaches and emphases would bear additional fruit. Though it is beyond the scope of this paper my thanks to the anonymous reviewer who indicated environmental history would be a fruitful site for exploring ties between hope and action.

²² It is widely recognized that thick concepts of hope are linked to action (Braithwaite *Inclusion* 2004c; Drahos 2004; Snyder 1995; Cartwright 2004). Stotland likewise takes hope to be a prerequisite for action. After noting the "importance of hope as a prerequisite for action" he provides evidence including "data from controlled laboratory experiments...from schools, from peace-time disaster, from hospitals, [and] from concentration and prisoner-of-war camps," all of which point "to the importance of hope for action, even action to prevent the greatest of all disasters, death" (Stotland 1969, 20–22).

²³ Valerie Braithwaite notes that for social institutions of hope to be effective they must encapsulate hope that empowers, is action-oriented, is subject to analysis, and is authentic (*Collective* 2004b, 14).

occur.²⁴ Hope is infectious. This is extremely important information for a pragmatic approach to generating hope. Kenneth Cunningham (2004, 9) points out in his psychological study of hope that affective experiences are generally contagious. Hope is something you can catch from someone else; it can be “transmitted” or “inoculate” (Elliott 2005, 11; V. Braithwaite *Collective Braithwaite* 2004b, 11).²⁵ Hope can provide a very powerful psychological hook given both its emotional and motivational effects (Drahos 2004, 19). Spreading hope provides the psychological underpinnings necessary for positive action. Additionally crucial to recognize is that hope can be taught. When hope is taught at the grade school, junior high school, and university level it not only increases hope, it positively influences academic performance and student self-esteem (Cheavens et al. 2005, 126). Shockingly this is not the direction the ecological education of children is taking.

Elin Kelsey met with children aged 10–14 years old from 92 countries (ranging from the very impoverished to the very wealthy) at a United Nations conference (2012). When questioned regarding their feelings about the environment the children’s responses, rather than ones of wonder, were of despair, anger and worry (2012). Kelsey (2012) hypothesizes that this is the result of educating youth with a negative environmental narrative of doom and gloom. This is counter-productive given that educators and conservation psychologists are finding that despair leads to terror management, where problems are downplayed and hyper-materialism serves as an ineffective panacea (2012). What is needed, says Kelsey, is a groundswell of positive stories that inspire ecological hope (2012).

There is evidence in the psychological literature showing that beyond hope being necessary for action it is beneficial in various other ways. Higher “levels of hopeful thinking are related to improved outcomes in academic and athletic performances, physical health, and psychological adjustment” (Cheavens et al. 2005, 119). Hope has positive correlations with self-esteem, optimism, positive affectivity, positive outcome expectancies, perceived problem-solving capabilities, and perceptions of control in life (Snyder 1995, 357). Higher hope individuals have more mental energy and pathways to their goals—particularly when there are blocks to both—perceiving that they can utilize alternate routes and possess the agentic thinking to activate themselves (Snyder 1995, 357). People with higher hope have an increased number of goals which are more difficult, have greater success at achieving their goals, perceive these goals as challenges, experience less distress and more

²⁴ If hope is a condition for leading a human life then we can never forgo hope, but we can hope well or poorly (McGeer 2004, 102). Although hope is necessary and ubiquitous, hoping well or living a life rich in hope are not givens. Hoping is analogous to eating in that it is necessary for living, but one can eat better or worse. One can have nutritional knowledge or lack it. One can go to bed hungry or satisfied. One may have access to healthy options or not. We might have the knowledge and resources to eat well and maintain health, or be lacking in these which results in illness. So too with hope—we can be better or worse at hoping. We can have the knowledge of how to increase it and the resources to do so or lack them. The above presences or absences are reflected with an impoverished or healthy sense of hope. There is a spectrum between having the minimum amount needed for surviving and having a thriving sense of hope.

²⁵ Hope is contagious: “correlational evidence has revealed that the hope of staff members (in rehabilitation agencies) correlates positively (and significantly) with the level of hope reported for their clients” (Crouch 1986, in Snyder 1995, 358).

happiness, have superior coping skills, are better able to recover from physical injury and report less work burnout (Snyder 1995, 357–58). High hope often assures people of success in reaching their goals (Snyder 358). Hope engenders more active coping, prevents disengagement from stressful situations and reduces denial (Alloy, Abramson, and Chiara 2000 in Braithwaite 2004a, 83–84). Generally higher hope is virtually always “related to more beneficial life outcomes” (Cheavens et al. 2005, 127). Therefore, being hopeful is a positive force on multiple levels.

Agency plays a central role in thick conceptualizations of hope, but such agency must be understood as socially derived. Most writing on hope acknowledges a crucial and positive connection between hope and agency (McGeer 2004, 103). Given hope’s tie to action, for one’s hopes to be grounded one must have sufficient agency for altering the world in ways that support hoped for states of affairs. Without the ability to effect change in the world that supports our goal-directed activity we are without justification for hope. Without agency people may have wishes, but not hope in the sense outlined above which requires a link to exercising action that contributes to the hoped for end goal. There is a critical feedback relationship between hope and agency both in thought and deed (McGeer 2004, 41). Thus, hope in the context of ecological philosophy must be discussed in tandem with methodologies for enabling the agency of individuals and communities committed to ecological sustainability.²⁶

Hope is responsive. We are responsive to real world constraints on pursuing and formulating our hopes and we are also responsive to others in a way that acknowledges the importance of “peer scaffolding”—psychologically reinforcing others effective agency via recognizing and respecting their hopes (McGeer 2004, 109). Communities of mutually responsive high hope persons can be generated where one not only supports others but a community of support is likewise generated for the support of one’s own hopes (McGeer 2004, 109). Such a community generates energy, a synergistic interanimation of others and one’s own hopes occurs (McGeer 2004, 123).²⁷ Hope develops relationally—in and through relationships with others. The relational nature of hope is illustrated by the fact that the fulfillment of our individual hopes is dependent directly on wider circles of action by others (Drahos 2004, 20). Communities of good hope can be formed through supportive relations. Growing hope requires environments where people interact in a supportive atmosphere such that individual and collective goals can be met (Snyder 1995, 359). Through creating such environments people can increasingly perceive that they have both the agency and the pathways to succeed (Snyder 1995, 359). How hoped for goals come about, and who is given a voice in

²⁶ I extend my gratitude to the anonymous reviewer who helpfully pointed out that given the thick concept of hope I recommend it is possible that “hope is part of the cluster of virtues and actions that increase the possibilities of positive change.” Moreover, the reviewer suggests hope could be part of a larger set of virtues such as “activity, responsiveness, engagement, commitment, initiative, creativity, participation, etc.” This is an exciting possibility for future research regarding how hope is related to/in conversation with/necessarily linked to and simultaneously arises with various other virtues that seek to empower and motivate positive ecological action. It is, however, beyond the scope of this particular paper.

²⁷ This hope is not generated from egocentric concerns; it is generated from the altercentric concerns of care (McGeer 2004, 123).

the generation of shared hope are questions of social justice. Socially hoped for goals may come about through domination, stigmatization and the denial of alternative voices—or they may come about through inclusivity and prioritizing different voices (Braithwaite *Inclusion* 2004a, b, c, 134–135). Politically, socially, and morally responsible ways of bringing about hope require the inclusion of a diversity of voices.

Hopefulness, like hopelessness, is a self-fulfilling prophecy. This generative role of hope is captured in Michelle Lueck's article *Hope for a Cause as a Cause for Hope: The Need for Hope in Environmental Sociology*. Hopelessness is disengagement, a release of agency where effort is not made because the belief in any action making a difference is absent (Lueck 2007, 251). Hopelessness is thus a self-fulfilling prophecy (Lueck 2007, 251). If the idea of trying to move society to a sustainable condition seems too enormous an undertaking, many may conclude it is pointless to try and the resulting sense of hopeless malaise “turns the belief that society will not change into a self-fulfilling prophecy” (Milbrath 1995, 108, quoted in Lueck 2007 253). In contrast, collective hope allows for more individuals to visualize goals, anticipate potential obstacles, and generate flexible plans for goal attainment (Milbrath 1995, 108 in Lueck 2007, 253). Therefore, social movements and groups create possibilities for change which could not have occurred without hope for the specific outcome (Milbrath 1995, 108 quoted in Lueck 2007, 253) By providing tools for plan creation, hope is a crucial part of the feedback loop that occurs between planning, action, and outcomes that generate or alter expectations and hope (Lueck 2007, 252). Thus, states of the world are causally dependent on one's choice of whether to hope or not to hope (Bovens 1999, 671). There is a causally efficacious enabling function of hope when, through placing oneself in a state of hope, one begins a process that brings to realization desired states of the world. Hoping initiates hopeful action, which initiates greater incidences of reason for hope. There is both a bootstrapping that occurs via this process (wherein hope itself substantiates and generates further hopes) as well as a snowballing (wherein the catchiness of hope generates increasing amounts of persons acting hopefully, thereby escalating what groups can achieve and hope for).

Acting hopeful and generating social communities that support hoped for collective goals provide the action that generates achievements which in turn give further justification for future hopes. As communities build, so too does capacity. Mapping developments between local, national, and international community building through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) thus becomes important. Courville and Piper, in *Harnessing hope through NGO activism*, show ways in which individual hopes can be translated into collective action—namely through strategies of empowerment (Courville and Piper 2004, 54). The four stages of the process of empowerment by NGOs include: gaining access to resources, consciousness raising, participation in decision making, and influencing others (Inaba et al. 2001, cited in Courville and Piper 2004, 54). NGOs are one way in which communities can support, generate, and justify hope. Providing supportive resources, empowering those who are multiply oppressed, ensuring the voices of all are heard, and then spreading the collective hope is an ethically responsible method for bringing positive social change to fruition. An ecological philosophy that seeks

to enable hope would therefore instigate support of, and participation in, not-for-profit socially just environmental organizations.

The Essential Role of Hope in Ecological Philosophy

I write from the perspective of a white, middle-class individual born in the global North. The power associated with my positioning enables me to instigate hope and exercise agency in unique ways, and brings with it the associated responsibilities. A robust account of hope will map how hope functions in various social, political and ecological locations. What I offer above is a very small contribution to what I hope will become an important vein of philosophical research that is epistemically grounded in the findings of a diversity of voices.

What might seem unattainable currently, for example, the possibility of stopping the human destruction of both ourselves and the non-human world, could in the future be a reasonable thing to hope for—given the positive trajectory that hope moves in. In traumatic situations, such as the global ecological crisis, it is helpful to note what Ted Bernard and Jora Young recount in *The Ecology of Hope*. The Chinese word for crisis has “two characters: one for ‘danger,’ the other for ‘hidden opportunity.’...crises shake people enough to let them break free of old conceptions” (Bernard and Young 1997, 198). The ecological crisis can serve, for example, to disrupt old western conceptions about human separateness and superiority, providing an opportunity for fundamentally re-conceptualizing human relations with the non-human world.

I begin with a litany of ecological harms, which, without a hopeful framing give rise to thinking of our ecological future as dire, and even potentially hopeless. The negative impacts of such a framing work against the possibility of positive action for change. Hence my worries about the current trajectory of hope literature in environmental philosophy. I want to turn to a framing that situates us for hopefulness, an emotional and dispositional orientation which supports and enables positive action. Geneticist, environmentalist, and public figure, Dr. David Suzuki has spent the last 35 years sounding a warning about the harms humans commit against the very environment that sustains our ability to live, citing our “seemingly irrational response to mounting evidence of ecological catastrophe” (Boyd 2011, 12). However, Suzuki eschews a hopeless stance, recalling the paradigm ethical shift he saw over the span of decades with regard to racism. As a child Suzuki was forced to live in a Canadian Japanese internment camp, his family unjustly punished for their heritage during World War II (Boyd 2011, 13). Seven decades later he was named the most trusted man in Canada, and was voted the greatest Canadian living (Boyd 2011, 13). Such large-scale overhauls of political and social institutions in a relatively short time frame grounds the possibility of similar shifts in the future. We have seen incredible moral gains regarding action and policy against the oppression of persons due to race, class, gender, ability, and affectional orientation—we might likewise see political and social paradigm shifts toward respectful and loving engagements with non-human forms of life. Consider, also, the increase in community supported agriculture, the local organic food movement, improvements

in public transit, serious questioning of the quality of life associated with hyper-consumption, widespread and growing critique of the pervasive shaping of consumer identities, and the rising number of environmental and social justice protests. There are a growing number of studies indicating “that while neoliberal economic globalization gathers pace, so do dissenting social and political movements, which resist the current trend of marketization, privatization, liberalization, and deterioration of labor standards” (Gills and Galbraith 2000, in Courville and Piper 2004, 43). Furthermore—we know how to mobilize and act in the most fruitful way possible—through activating hope.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have argued that hope is under-theorized in philosophy. This is unfortunate given how centrally hope functions in human life. Although there has been a very recent (relative) spike in papers discussing intersections between hope and ecological philosophy, hope has been generally underrepresented in ecological philosophical literature. This is surprising given (a) the threat of ecological hopelessness, (b) the necessity of hope for positive action, and (c) the bevy of psychological insights available regarding how hope functions, spreads, and can be intentionally facilitated. Interestingly it is when things are most dire that we need hope the most—to get us motivated to act in ways that help bring about the possibility of better states of affairs. For example, one might hope that humans set about realizing more ethically appropriate relations with the non-human world and act in ways to realize this goal, doing what they can both in their own life and their wider social and political communities. Through doing this one helps bring about possibilities for furthering this goal, increasing the justification for hope, *ad infinitum*. If instead hopelessness were to stop a person dead in their tracks, no such possibilities would be forthcoming. Let me emphasize again that this is crucial about hope. Not only does hope motivate action, performing said action often brings about states of affairs that serve to justify further hope in that direction. Hope is thus desirable for pragmatic reasons in that it can be self-perpetuating. This is additionally important given that hope is infectious and can be fostered through teaching.

My goal in this paper was to establish a need for more philosophical attention to the concept of hope as it pertains to ecological philosophy. Psychologically hope is necessary for positive action, and carries many additional merits. Given the current ecological crisis, hope can mark the difference between acting morally and responsibly and failing to do so. Acting hopefully can set in process a chain of events where what one might not initially be justified in thinking realizable becomes justified as persons feeling hopeful act hopefully. Possibilities for positive change increase with each hopeful engagement with the world, and especially so through community social and political capacity-building activism. Through embracing and generating hopeful ways of being we can proactively map our destinies.

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