

## Hope and Agency

Hope is hard to characterise because of the exceptional diversity of its applications, to the point that one may wonder whether there is continuity between ordinary cases of hope and what is often called ‘hope against hope’.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I shall follow the relatively small but growing literature on hope and examine propositional hopes,<sup>2</sup> i.e. hopes of the form ‘hoping that p’, with a particular focus on recent work by Philip Pettit and Adrienne Martin. I shall do this first by identifying a significant difficulty encountered by what has become known as the ‘orthodox definition’ (Martin 2014, henceforth ‘OD’). The OD defines hope by means of two necessary and sufficient conditions: A hopes that p if and only if (1) A desires that p and (2) A assigns to p a degree of probability between (and excluding) 0 and 1. On this definition, to hope is to desire an outcome we deem neither certain nor impossible.<sup>3</sup> Note that the relevant probability assignment is subjective: the OD allows, for example, that children can hope for Father Christmas to visit them on Christmas Eve.

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<sup>1</sup> I can express hope for myself (‘I hope they’ll find a cure for my illness’), for those whom I love (‘I hope my daughter likes her new school’), or even for people I don’t know (‘I hope that the accident did not result in any lethal casualties’). Although it is most common to hope for the future, we can hope for things past (‘I hope that he made it home safely’) or present (‘I hope that what I’m saying is right’). I can hope for events which do not depend on me at all (such as the weather being good tomorrow) or conversely for things over which I have a significant degree of control (such as finishing my paper in time). I can also form hopes for what is likely, unlikely, or even seemingly impossible (as in cases of so-called ‘hope against hope’). In addition, our hopes can differ widely both in intensity and meaningfulness: I can express mild hope for something which does not matter much to me and which I would give up without a second thought, such as having lunch in a particular restaurant tomorrow. I can also hope strongly for things of vital importance to me and which I could not let go of without changing my practical identity. Thus hope can attach itself to objects that are close or remote to the self; its temporal modality spans all three dimensions of time; it can be mild, almost irrelevant to the self, or identity-defining. And if this wasn’t enough, hope can be reflective and determinate (as in propositional forms of hope) or non-thematic and inchoate (as in being generally hopeful about unspecified good things to come).

<sup>2</sup> Thus I will leave aside for now what Matthew Ratcliffe (2013) calls ‘pre-intentional’ forms of hope.

<sup>3</sup> See for example: J. P. Day (1969: 89), ‘A hopes that p is true’ if and only if A wishes [desires] that p, and A thinks that p has some degree of probability, however small’. See also R. S. Downie (1963: 249) ‘there are two criteria which are independently necessary and jointly sufficient for ‘hope that’. The first is that the object of hope must be desired by the hoper (...). The second (...) is that the object of hope falls within a range of physical possibility which includes the improbable but excludes the certain and the merely logically possible’. Pettit (2009: 153) and Martin (2014: 4) summarise the ‘lowest common denominator of analysis’ or the ‘orthodox definition’ in the following terms (respectively): ‘I can be said to hope that something is the case (...) so far as I want the scenario to materialize and believe that it is possible but not inevitable that it does materialize: I assign a nonzero, non-unit probability to that desired prospect’; [on this account hope is] ‘the combination of the desire for an outcome and the belief that the outcome is possible but not certain’.

Most recent commentators start from the OD but deem it insufficient on two distinct but related grounds: a) it cannot account for the difference between ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ or ‘substantial’ hope (Pettit, Martin respectively), or more radically b) it cannot account for the difference between hope and the absence of hope (Meirav). The first line of criticism is illustrated by Martin as follows: two cancer patients, Alan and Bess, are trialling a new drug. They know that the probability of the drug being effective is ‘typically less than 1%’ (Martin: 1). They both say they hope to be cured, but Alan ‘emphasises how improbable it is and rarely appeals to his hope as a justification for his decisions, moods or feelings’ (Martin: 15); by contrast, Bess says that the bare possibility is what keeps her going. According to Martin, ‘Alan and Bess don’t differ in their desires or in the probability they assign to a cure, but their hopes do differ — so it seems that the orthodox definition must leave something out’ (Martin: 14).<sup>4</sup> The second line is illustrated by Meirav’s example from *The Shawshank Redemption* (also discussed extensively by Martin): Andy and Red are both prisoners in a high security prison. Andy strongly hopes to escape, and Red doesn’t hope at all: ‘Red will say: I grant you that this is *possible*, but the chance is only one in a thousand!’, whereas Andy will say: “I grant you that the chance is only one in a thousand but it is *possible!*” (Meirav: 223, his italics). Andy is sustained by his hope, and Red thinks that it would be irrational to hope. Yet both satisfy the conditions of the OD in that they desire freedom and deem the prospect of being free neither impossible nor certain.

Both Alan’s and Red’s attitudes exemplify responses to what I shall call the ‘Low Probability Assignment Problem’ (henceforth ‘LPAP’): in both cases the probability assignment, while satisfying clause (2) of the OD, is extremely low (less than 1% and one in a thousand respectively). As it is comprised between 0 and 1, it makes hoping formally possible; but since it is so low, it makes hoping practically very difficult, because it serves implicitly as a reason *not* to hope. Thus the low probability assignment allows in theory for the possibility of hope and yet seems likely to cancel it out in practice. If we desire an outcome which the low probability assignment makes us see as practically unavailable, the two conditions of the OD are met even though there is no hope. This difficulty can be brought to the fore if one considers that the OD is compatible, not just with weak hope or the absence of hope, but with resignation of even despair. Suppose that a third patient, Chris, has been offered to take part in the same protocol: upon hearing about the highly experimental character of the drug and its infinitesimal probability of success, he despairs of ever

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<sup>4</sup> Pettit’s criticism is formulated thusly : ‘the analysis misses out on the fact that while the word hope is ordinarily used for attitudes that range over an enormous variety of scenarios - personal and impersonal - hope is characterized by a more specific, substantial structure in some central cases. Or so, at any rate, I shall be arguing’ (154).

being in remission. Presumably Chris also wishes to be cured, and he assigns the same probability to the drug being effective as do Alan and Bess. But he is keenly aware that the very low character of this probability assignment makes it statistically very likely that the treatment will not work for him, and this thought makes him despair.

Thus strong hopers are those who can overcome the LPAP: but the way(s) in which they do so are not captured by the OD.<sup>5</sup> Although neither author identifies the LPAP explicitly, Pettit and Martin broadly adopt the same strategy to deal with it: they try to fix the OD by adding extra conditions meant to counterbalance the low probability assignment. For Pettit, we must show ‘cognitive resolve’ by bracketing our belief in the low probability assignment and by acting as if the desired outcome was going to obtain. For Martin, we must adopt a ‘licensing stance’ which will allow us to view even a low probability assignment as licensing the taking of our desire for the outcome, and the outcome’s desirable features, as reasons to engage in hopeful thoughts, feelings or plans. Either way, the possibility of strong hope turns on whether we can gain control by making a decision (to exercise cognitive resolve or to adopt the licensing stance), according to a practical syllogism which treats the implementation of this decision as the privileged means to avoid despair.<sup>6</sup> Both Pettit and Martin regard their implicit solutions to the LPAP as providing a defence of hope by enabling it to find ‘its place in the mind’ (Pettit), i.e. to be part of our rational agency, and as allowing us to distinguish between hope on the one hand, despair and resignation on the other.

In what follows, I propose an immanent critique. I argue that Pettit’s and Martin’s implicit solutions to the LPAP rely on a voluntarist and cognitivist conception of agency which is incompatible with the agential implications of the OD.<sup>7</sup> In other words, I argue that Pettit and

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<sup>5</sup> It may seem tempting to prevent the LPAP from arising altogether by specifying a higher minimal threshold for the probability assignment in clause (2). But where exactly should one draw the line, especially given the fact that the way in which individuals react to the probability assignment is subjective? A percentage that is high enough to allow an optimistic person to hope may be much too low for their pessimistic counterpart. And more fundamentally, fixing the OD in this way would result in leaving out a slew of cases, namely all the instances of strong hope which would be disqualified by a higher probability threshold from fulfilling the OD. Since it would mean giving up both on a unified theory of hope and on particularly interesting cases, this would be an undesirable move.

<sup>6</sup> While Pettit restricts cognitive resolve to cases of strong hope, Martin claims that what she calls the ‘incorporation thesis’ applies to all forms of hope and proposes a unified theory (Martin: 35, 142).

<sup>7</sup> Pettit’s account has been criticised by a number of interpreters, including Meirav, Martin and most recently Segal and Textor, who also criticise Martin’s own position. However, none of these criticisms identifies the LPAP as such, nor proposes an immanent critique focused on the tension between the agential picture of hope that emerges from the OD on the one hand, and the voluntarist and cognitivist character of the suggested fixes on the other. Meirav argues that even with the addition of cognitive resolve Pettit cannot account for the difference between hope and despair (Meirav: 227). Segal and Textor mention in passing that hope is not a matter of choice but the thrust of their critique is that cognitive resolve is

Martin could only be successful at the cost of denying key features that follow from the very definition of hope they want to build from. In the first part of this paper, I look closely at the OD with a view to clarifying the constraints it puts on the agency involved in hoping. In doing so, I show that any solution to the LPAP that starts from the OD has to fulfil two requirements: (a) from the criticisms of the OD, it must account for the difference between hope on the one hand, and despair or resignation on the other, and (b) from the OD, it must integrate the fact that hope constitutively involves a (pre-) reflective<sup>8</sup> experience of agential limitation. In the second part of this paper, I examine Pettit's and Martin's proposed solutions in the light of these requirements and argue that they fail requirement (b). Finally, I clear the way for an alternative fix to the LPAP by exploring an alternative model for the agency involved in hope, a model which promises to be compatible with the OD and to meet the above requirements. Building on previous work, I characterise the relevant exercise of agency as 'medio-passive' and outline some of the ways it is played out in strong hope. For lack of space, I leave my own suggestions for an alternative fix to the LPAP to another paper.

### *Hope and the experience of agential limitation*

According to the first clause of the OD, hoping constitutively involves a desire for the hoped-for outcome. As noted by many, this desire moves us psychologically. It is a form of caring for the outcome, and without such care we could not hope for the outcome at all: in Augustine's words, 'hope has for its object only what affects the man who entertains the hope' (*Enchiridion*: 7).<sup>9</sup> According to the second clause of the OD, we (implicitly or explicitly) assign to the realisation of the hoped-for outcome a probability between zero and one. This means that we know, at least pre-reflectively, that the realisation of the outcome, while not impossible, is not certain and does

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insufficient to guard against despair: one needs a 'further mental state' (Segal and Textor: 13). As for Martin, she suggests that cognitive resolve 'does not look much like hope' but for a reason radically opposed to the view developed in this paper, namely that 'Pettit has described something more like faith than hope' (Martin: 22). Finally, Segal and Textor argue against Martin that 'one can act with the hope that p while lacking readiness to justify one's activities related to the hoped-for outcome' and more generally that her account suffers from 'excessive reflectiveness' (Segal and Textor: 14 and 15 respectively), but do not comment on the self-licensing claim nor the exclusivity claim.

<sup>8</sup> By 'pre-reflective' I mean that the content of the awareness, while not immediately available to the agent, is not hidden from her either. By analogy, in standard conditions we are not (or very marginally) aware of the perceptual content of our peripheral vision; however if need be we can refocus on such content and bring it to full awareness. So contrary to unconscious contents, which are repressed, pre-reflective contents can be brought to awareness by an effort of attention. By '(pre-) reflective' I mean that the content of the awareness may be either reflective, or pre-reflective only.

<sup>9</sup> Note that it doesn't follow that hope is always self-interested: I can (and do) have hopes for others so long as I care about them.

not fully (if at all) depend on us: we can only hope for what we take as beyond our own power alone to bring about. This is perhaps most visible *a contrario*: if we understood the outcome as theoretically certain, or for all practical purposes as within our control, we could still desire it, expect it or look forward to it, but we could not hope for it. Unless I am a die-hard Cartesian convinced that God is out there to demonstrate the absoluteness of his power, I cannot hope that two and two make four because I know that they do. Similarly, I may desire to move my arm to reach for a cup of tea but I cannot hope that I will because I know from long experience that (in standard circumstances) doing so is both up to me and within my own power alone. I implicitly treat the outcome as practically certain and thus not as an object of hope. Conversely, if I did entertain the hope to move my arm, this would *per se* signal that the circumstances are not standard - perhaps the arm was broken and the cast has just been taken out.

So we can see from the OD that to hope is, at the same time, to desire something and to be (pre-) reflectively aware that no matter what we do, our desire may not be satisfied.<sup>10</sup> Hope constitutively involves a (pre-) reflective experience of agential limitation: hoppers feel unable to bring about the desired outcome by the sole exercise of their agency. In particular, they feel that there is no intention that they could form and carry out (directly in the action, or as a result of the action) which would ensure the realisation of the desired outcome. If we hope for something over which we believe we have no control at all, such as a loved one surviving a difficult surgical procedure carried out by someone else, this experience of agential limitation is radical and reflective: we are both convinced and aware that there is nothing that we could do to bring about the desired outcome. By contrast, if we hope for something over which we believe we have some, but not total, control (such as winning a race), our experience of agential limitation is relative and may remain pre-reflective: we feel that there are intentions we can form (such as training harder) but that the resulting actions would not suffice on their own to bring about the desired outcome. Either way, we experience (a degree of) agential limitation. Three points are worth noting in this respect. Firstly, this experience of agential limitation is first-personal: whether we would, in fact, be capable of bringing about the hoped-for outcome by our own power alone, and thus whether the experienced agential limitations are objectively real, is irrelevant to the experience itself. Secondly, these agential limitations should be understood in a particularist manner: they are not experienced in general but in relation to the hoped-for outcome, the realisation of which is

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<sup>10</sup> Meirav picks up on this particular aspect of the desires involved in hope by calling them 'resignative'. According to him, such desires involve 'acceptance or acknowledgement of the fact that one does not have control or determinative power over something' (Meirav: 228). While I think that Meirav is right to identify this feature, in my view the term 'resignative' links hope too strongly to resignation.

understood as outstripping our agential capacities. Finally, at the time of hoping we implicitly take this experience of agential limitation to be ineliminable: while we may believe that the agential limitations that apply to the realisation of the hoped-for outcome could disappear in the future, for example if our skills improve or if circumstances change and allow for full control, our current hope for the outcome is premised on experiencing such limitations as ineliminable at the time of hoping.<sup>11</sup>

Thus we can see from the OD that to hope is to desire an outcome the realisation of which we deem possible but beyond our own power alone to bring about: hoping constitutively involves a (pre-) reflective experience of agential limitation. Importantly, such an experience does not attach to all our desires. Consider the desire to scratch an itch, the desire for food or drink when I am sitting down to lunch, or for a particular object which I am about to buy: none of these desires involves an experience of agential limitation since I take their satisfaction to be up to me, and unproblematic. Similarly, not all exercises of human agency are perceived by the agent as involving an experience of agential limitation. In a very large number of everyday situations, such as navigating my lived-in space or performing well-known tasks, my subjective sense of my own agency is one of empowerment and control: I do not hope but expect to be able to move around or to perform these tasks successfully, and would be taken aback if I didn't. It is usually in situations of disorientation or breakdown, for example if we feel lost or if our mobility or our skills are impaired by circumstances, that this implicit and habitual sense of control is eroded and that we have an experience of agential limitation.<sup>12</sup>

Importantly, the (pre)-reflective experience of agential limitation attached to hope does not only apply to the hoped-for outcome but also to hoping itself. To see why, we need to return to the OD. As we saw, desire is a necessary condition on hope because it is a form of caring for the outcome. By itself, this desire is not sufficient to generate hope: if Bess and Alan were utterly convinced that a cure is impossible, they could not hope for it. But if the second condition of the OD also applies, i.e. if the desired outcome is deemed possible, and if there is no LPAP, then the probability assignment itself counts implicitly as a reason to hope. As Augustine puts it, 'when, then, we believe that good is about to come, there is nothing else but to hope for it' (*Enchiridion*,

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<sup>11</sup> One may object that at least in certain cases such agential limitations *are* eliminable. Suppose that I hope to solve a particular mathematical problem. As we saw, the very fact that I hope for this presupposes that I feel that I cannot do so at the moment. Say that with some time and effort, I do solve the problem: I have become a better mathematician and my experience of agential limitation in this respect turned out to be temporary only. However at that point I cannot hope to solve the problem anymore (because I know that I can do it and thus will expect, not hope, to solve it). Hence, whether or not the relevant experience of agential limitation is eliminable in the long term, it is involved in hope at the time we are hoping.

<sup>12</sup> This subjective sense of control and empowerment can also be

p. 7). Conversely, if the LPAP is present and the desired outcome seems out of our reach, then this counts implicitly as a reason *not* to hope, and we are inclined to resignation or despair. Two points follow. Firstly, we cannot will ourselves into hoping: whether we hope depends on whether we desire the outcome in the first place, and this is not a matter of willpower. Secondly, even if we do desire the outcome and the probability assignment allows us to hope for it, we cannot control an existing hope through willpower either. The probability assignment which hope is responsive to answers to evidentialist norms and works as a constraint on how much we can influence our hopes. We cannot simply decide to be more (or less) hopeful.

Thus whether one considers the genesis of hope or existing hopes, hope involves an experience of agential limitation also in relation to hoping itself. This is attested by everyday examples: it is a common phenomenon to feel oneself impelled to hope, almost against oneself, and to feel the resistance of hope to adverse reasons or facts. Anyone who has been in love knows how strongly our hope for our feelings to be reciprocated grips us, and how developments which would be considered as trifles by a third party are enough to propel us to new heights of hopefulness. And conversely, anyone who has tried to talk someone into hoping by listing the (good) reasons that they have to hope will also know that even if this person were to acknowledge that these are objectively good reasons and that they do apply, the attempt would still be likely to fail, and may even make the person more depressed (because she would view the fact that she feels hopeless even though she has all these good reasons to hope as being in itself depressing). In fact, our agential limitations in relation to hoping itself are experienced so readily, and so often, that such experience has been inscribed in our collective awareness by the founding myth of Pandora.<sup>13</sup> Although ancient sources vary about the details, there is widespread agreement that the fact that hope remained stuck under the rim of the jar was not a testimony to Zeus' mercy but part of his curse: this way hope – whom the wise should have identified from the start as nefarious from its very presence in a jar containing all *evils* – would relentlessly motivate mortals to struggle

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<sup>13</sup> The *locus classicus* is Hesiod's *Works and Days*, lines 57-101, as well as a shorter passage in the *Theogony*, lines 570-590. Other, less well known versions include work by Babrius, Pliny and Pausanias. In Hesiod's rendition of the myth, Pandora was the simulacrum of a beautiful woman formed of earth and water by Hephaistos. A *kalon kakon* ('beautiful evil'), she was the instrument of Zeus' revenge on mankind for the theft of fire. She was granted gifts by all the gods (hence her name, 'pan-dora', all-gifted) and taken as wife by Epimetheus in spite of his brother Prometheus' warnings against accepting the gift of an Olympian. Pandora had a sealed jar which contained all the world's evils. Once on earth, 'the woman took off the great lid of the jar with her hands and scattered all these and her thought caused sorrow and mischief to men. Only hope remained there in an unbreakable home within under the rim of the great jar, (...) by the will of Aegis-holding Zeus' (lines 90-98). For a compilation and analysis of different versions, see Panofsky (1956), in particular the first chapter.

and live on in the face of prospective suffering and certain death.<sup>14</sup> It is only with the Christian reinterpretation of hope as a (theological) virtue that the myth acquired its present meaning, namely the thought that at least hope (now seen as a good) was left to mankind.<sup>15</sup> But the reason why Hesiod originally described hope as a curse laid upon ‘men who eat bread’ is *precisely* that it cannot be relinquished at will, nor according to reasons.

Thus close analysis of the OD shows that hoping constitutively involves a (pre-) reflective experience of agential limitation, both in relation to the realisation of the hoped-for outcome and to hoping itself. This has an important consequence for the psychology of hope: the hoper feels vulnerable both to the possibility that the outcome she is hoping for may not happen, and to vagaries in hoping. This is evidenced *a contrario* by the fact that for some agents, like Red in the *Shawshank Redemption*, the prospect of such exposure to hurt counts as a reason to try to discourage hope rather than facing greater disappointment further down the line. As many have noted,<sup>16</sup> this feeling of vulnerability results in a degree of fear and/or anxiety, depending on how focused and manifest our intentional attitude is: we may fear that a particularly important event, upon which the realisation of the hoped-for outcome depends, will not take place. Or we may experience a general background anxiety about whether the outcome will be realised or not, about what may happen if it isn’t or even, in more psychologically complex cases, if it is.<sup>17</sup> In most cases

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, section II, §71: ‘a single evil had not yet slipped out of the box: then, by the will of Zeus, Pandora shut the lid (...). Now man (...) regards the evil that has remained behind as the greatest piece of good fortune – it is hope. – For what Zeus wanted was that man, though never so tormented by the other evils, should nonetheless not throw life away but continue to let himself be tormented’.

<sup>15</sup> For example see Nietzsche, *Dawn*, book 1, §38, p. 31: ‘Hesiod offered the most violent intimation on hope in a fable, something indeed so alienating that no late interpreter has understood it – for it runs counter to the modern spirit which, owing to Christianity, has learned to believe in hope as a virtue’.

<sup>16</sup> Spinoza states that ‘there is no hope unmingled with fear, and no fear unmingled with hope’ (*Ethics*, III, Proposition xiii) and Hume makes the same point in his ‘Hypothesis concerning hope and fear’ (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, book II, Part III, section IX). See also La Rochefoucauld, ‘Hope and fear and inseparable. There is no hope without fear, and no fear without hope’. Prior to this, the connection between fear and hope had also been noted (*inter alia*) by Seneca: ‘[Fear and hope] march in unison like a prisoner and the escort he is handcuffed to. Fear keeps pace with hope (...) Both belong to a mind in suspense, to a mind in a state of anxiety through looking into the future’ (*Letters from a Stoic*, letter V). More recently, there has been a number of empirical studies focused on the correlation between hope and anxiety. Interestingly, there are no uniform results: the correlation is sometimes positive and sometimes negative. But for my purposes here, what matters is that there should, in all cases, be a correlation between hope and anxiety. See for example *Interaction of hope and optimism with anxiety and depression in a specific group of cancer survivors: a preliminary study* (<http://www.biomedcentral.com/1756-0500/4/519>), ‘Relationship between Hope and Anxiety amongst university students’ (<http://www.idpublications.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Relationship.pdf>), ‘Anxiety and Hope during the course of the three medical illnesses: a longitudinal study’ (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10559710>), ‘Longitudinal study of the effects of hope on depression and anxiety’ (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17214591>).

<sup>17</sup> (as picked up on by the Middle Eastern curse, ‘may you get what you desire’).



we are likely to experience both emotions at some point or other, and since whether the emotion experienced is fear or anxiety does not affect my argument I shall use the more indeterminate term and refer to the emotional content of such experience as ‘anxiety’. In cases of weak hope, when we do not desire the outcome strongly, both our experience of agential limitation and its associated feelings of vulnerability and anxiety are low in intensity, and may remain pre-reflective. For example, I may hope to have lunch at a good restaurant tomorrow and thus incur the risk of disappointment if the restaurant is closed; yet even though I would prefer the lunch to happen, I do not feel very anxious about the outcome. But in the cases of strong hope considered by Pettit and Martin, the low probability assignment will *by itself* make the hoper explicitly aware of the perceived unlikelihood of the outcome being realised, and thus of how vulnerable she is. This, in turn, makes the anxiety in hoping both manifest and very difficult, if not impossible, to ignore.

To sum up: detailed analysis of the OD allows key features of hope to emerge. Firstly, hope involves a (pre-) reflective experience of agential limitation, both in relation to the realisation of the hoped-for outcome and to hoping itself. Secondly, while there is something that we do when we hope, hoping is not something that we can will ourselves to do, nor have full control over when a particular hope is in place. Hoping constitutively involves a degree of passivity on the part of hopers, which is the correlate of their experience of agential limitation. Thirdly, hope is accompanied by a complex set of emotive intentional attitudes, in particular feelings of vulnerability and anxiety (whether reflective or not). In the cases of strong hope considered above, these emotions are intensified and brought to the explicit awareness of agents by their belief in the low probability assignment. In no case is hope experienced as a matter of agential control.

Any solution to the LPAP that seeks to build on the OD needs to do justice to these key features of hope. In particular, it must integrate the fact that hope constitutively involves a (pre-) reflective experience of agential limitation (requirement (b) above). Additionally, it must not rely on willpower alone nor seek to eliminate the emotive aspects of hope. I shall now examine Pettit’s and Martin’s proposed solutions in the light of these *desiderata*.

#### *Pettit and cognitive resolve*

Philip Pettit’s suggestion consists in identifying substantial hope with what he calls ‘cognitive resolve’. According to him, just as it is both rational and cautious for an agent, in the case of a building quote, to factor in an extra 10% even if she doesn’t really believe that costs will overrun,

in the same way, ‘substantial’ hopers will deliberately put aside their low probability estimate and ‘act as if the desired prospect was going to obtain or as if there were a good chance that it was going to obtain’ (Pettit: 155). Even though she believes that she has less than 1% chance of being cured, Bess will show cognitive resolve by comporting herself as if she was going to be cured. Pettit is careful to say that this does not require her to *change* her belief, as it is very unlikely that an evidentialist norm could be successfully violated on pragmatic grounds. Furthermore, such violation would be irrational, which would defeat the overall purpose of finding hope a place in rational agency. By contrast, the bracketing of the belief in the low probability assignment relies on the consideration and implementation of a practical syllogism. The practical syllogism takes as its end the furthering of our interests, in particular protecting us against ‘loss of heart’ (Pettit: 158), and treats the adoption of cognitive resolve as the means to such end. The ‘signal danger’ of the loss of heart ‘prompts the agent to adopt a *strategy* that consists in acting as if the desired prospect is going to obtain (...). This *strategy* promises to avoid that danger and to secure the related, secondary benefit, relevant even for someone relatively optimistic, of ensuring stability’ (Pettit: 158, my italics). Thus cognitive resolve is understood as a strategic response motivated by practical reasoning — a rational decision implemented by an assertion of will.

Pettit relies on two key suppositions: the first is that it is possible (and desirable on practical grounds) to decide to bracket our belief in the low probability assignment. The second is that the cognitive resolve we show in bracketing our belief can legitimately be conceived of as the intensification of weak hope into substantial hope. Both suppositions are, I suggest, problematic, for empirical and conceptual reasons. For one thing, one may doubt that agents will ever be in a position to decide in favour of such bracketing, let alone to implement their decision sustainably. To do so, they would need a degree of detachment which will give them the mental and emotional space to consider and implement the relevant practical syllogism. Yet this may prove empirically very difficult. In this respect, Pettit’s analogy with the building quote is misleading because it focuses on a case where our emotional investment in the issue at hand is relatively low. Bracketing my belief that I’ll have to pay \$100 000 and allowing for \$110 000 is not very difficult because nothing of vital importance rides on it: it is my money, not my life, which is at stake. Of course I’d rather pay \$10 000 less, but according to the principle of caution if I couldn’t pay that sum I wouldn’t have accepted the quote in the first place. Although I have a preference, I do not have a strong emotional investment in the outcome. This, I suggest, is at best analogical to *weak* hope, when I desire an outcome and see it as possible but also know that I won’t be very adversely affected if it doesn’t materialise. But substantial hope is different: in the sort of cases that Pettit

considers (he mentions, *inter alia*, surviving a Nazi concentration camp or coping with a serious disease), both the experience of agential limitation and the emotions associated with hope are extremely strong. In such cases, the ambivalent emotional charge attached to hope (and particularly to substantial hope) is likely to prevent the agent from ever reaching an appropriate standpoint for the consideration and implementation of the relevant practical syllogism.

Still, one could reply that this is merely an empirical consideration which leaves open the possibility, and legitimacy, of identifying substantial hope with cognitive resolve. From this perspective, whether one can achieve the latter would be a test of strength, and a way of distinguishing true hopers from merely wishful thinkers — precisely what Pettit wants it to be. But there is a more radical worry, namely that cognitive resolve could succeed only at the cost of becoming unrecognisable as a form of hope. This, I submit, is because cognitive resolve is designed to eliminate some of the very features which (in line with the OD) make hope what it is in the first place, namely our (pre-) reflective experience of agential limitation and its associated feelings of vulnerability and anxiety. Pettit acknowledges that we are not masters of ourselves in the following (naturalistic) terms: ‘we are ruled by lymph and gland and brain stem, not just by the computational processing of the cortex, and we are incapable of the detached adjustments to reality that Mr Spock routinely achieves’ (Pettit: 160). On this murky background, cognitive resolve is intended to ‘give us firm direction and control’ (Pettit: 160) and to ‘handle the rough and tumble of desire, silencing any inclination to do something inconsistent with the action’ (Pettit: 159). The vocabulary used by Pettit to describe the appropriate agency is both voluntarist and cognitivist. We need ‘the *active* adoption of a particular attitude’ (Pettit: 159): ‘if we gain heart by the *assertion of will* involved in putting our hope in success, then (...) the cognitive resolve that hope brings with it can be our salvation’ (Pettit: 161, my italics). Cognitive resolve is a ‘*focused enterprise* in which people are *willing* to (...) *order* their mental and active lives around more galvanizing assumptions, around a *cognitive plan*’ (Pettit: 159, my italics). Thus strong hope is a ‘positive piece of mental *self-regulation*’ (Pettit: 159, my italics), the ‘cognitive counterpart of planning’ (ibid.).<sup>18</sup>

But as we saw, hope constitutively involves a (pre-) reflective experience of agential limitation, both in relation to the desired outcome and to hoping itself: it is not primarily, if at all,

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<sup>18</sup> Note in this respect that Pettit explicitly rules out self-deception, presumably because any reliance on such processes would preclude hope from being part of our rational agency: ‘there is no self-deception of any kind involved in hope, not even the innocuous sort that occurs toward the second extreme in this spectrum [when ‘I realise that exposure to evidence may disturb something that I currently believe but decide not to seek that evidence’] (Pettit: 162).

a matter of self-regulation. Just as we cannot bring about the hoped-for outcome by forming an intention and carrying it out in action, we cannot make ourselves hope by forming an intention of ordering our lives around a galvanising cognitive plan. The carrying out of the intention, were it possible, would result in a life over which we exert a significant degree of emotional control, but not in hope. The emotive, irrational aspects of hope may well have the potentially deleterious consequences which Pettit identifies: they can weaken or even defeat us as rational agents. Yet this is true of hope itself — there are reasons why it was in Pandora’s jar in the first place. By contrast, cognitive resolve rather looks like the sort of ‘hope’ that Mr Spock might have, namely the reassertion of the ‘computational processing of the cortex’ over the ‘mists and vapors of a biological mind’ (Pettit: 160). In this, it is remarkably akin to stoic *apatheia*. Like the Stoa, Pettit emphasises the power of the agent’s will and judgment — in this case, the decision to bracket of our belief in the low probability assignment resulting from the consideration of a practical syllogism. Like the Stoa, he seeks to ensure the agent’s immunity from external circumstances, so that we are not ‘blown about by the vagaries of incoming data’ (Pettit: 155). And like the Stoa, he sees cognitive resolve as a bastion for our personal integrity, ‘our only way of remaining capable of seeing ourselves in what we do’ (Pettit: 161). A distant cousin of *apatheia*, cognitive resolve is meant to curb the irrational aspects of hope through rational planning and self-regulation. It is also intended to suppress negative emotions and to put the agent in control in the face of trying circumstances. Yet for the Stoa, such an attitude neither required nor even left any place for hope: ‘cease to hope and you will cease to fear’, Seneca admonishes us. For him most emotions, including hope, are not capable of being corrected by judgment and so must be ruled out of the life of the virtuous agent.<sup>19</sup> Pettit, however, fails to draw the same conclusion and to see that his proposal, rather than accounting for the genesis of strong hope out of ordinary hope, over-rationalises the former to such a degree that it becomes unrecognisable as a species of the latter. Identifying strong hope with cognitive resolve is a categorial mistake.<sup>20</sup>

This is further evidenced by the fact that cognitive resolve does not account for, and is even incompatible with, the agency operative in a number of the very cases which Pettit means to capture, namely hope against hope. Consider religious hope against hope: in such cases, agents

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<sup>19</sup> (*Letters from a Stoic*, I, Letter 5). Emotions in their natural state were viewed by the Stoa as mistaken assents to unwarranted ascriptions of value that accompany our impressions. Like diseases of the soul, analogous to diseases of the body, they had to be ruled out from the life a purely rational agent. As Sellars put it, ‘while our ‘first movements’, i.e. our physical reactions towards external objects are not under our control, whether we surrender to these is a matter of judgment and control’ (Sellars: 116).

<sup>20</sup> Along the same lines, Segal and Textor note that cognitive resolve can be adopted without hope, and may even get in the way of hope. See (2015): 12-13.

hope for an outcome which, by empirical lights, would be deemed impossible. They put their trust in the divine and open themselves to the future being pregnant with possibility even in circumstances where it seems to them that all the good options they can think of are defeated in advance. But their hope is not an exercise in rational planning and self-regulation: it is a form of temporal openness sustained by their faith in God's love and omnipotence. This kind of hope involves forms of intentionality which rest upon an explicit experience of agential limitation, in particular the letting go of control and a trusting attunement of the self to the divine whereby hopers welcome the possibility of being radically transformed by their hope: they accept their agential limitations in a way which paradoxically empowers them. Thus for a religious thinker like Gabriel Marcel, '[hope] appears as a response of the creature to the infinite being to whom it is conscious of owing everything that it has' (Marcel: 41). In this context, the idea of a constitutive link between hope and forms of end-means reasoning is explicitly rejected: 'it might be said that in a sense hope is not interested in the *how*: and this fact shows how fundamentally untechnical it is, for technical thought, by definition, never separates the consideration of ends and means' (Marcel: 45).<sup>21</sup> Alternatively, consider a non-religious person waiting in a hospital room while life and death surgery is performed on someone whom they love, with a very low chance of success. This person may, of course, despair; if she hopes, she will hope against hope. Yet it seems implausible and even jarring to imagine that this hope will take the assertive form of a bracketing of the belief that the operation is very likely to fail and of the making of plans in case of success. With the stakes so high, and her awareness of the precariousness of the situation so acute, such positive anticipation would likely be impossible to sustain. It would also feel inappropriate to the gravity of the situation and almost presumptuous, as if the terrifying, knife-edged character of the moment could be waved aside through an act of will. It seems more plausible that, in hoping against hope, this person will accept her agential limitations in the face of the situation and put her trust in the openness of the future even though statistical probability suggests foreclosure.

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<sup>21</sup> Note that this understanding of substantial hope as supported by faith and incompatible with cognitive resolve is not reserved to those of Christian extraction: according to J. Lear, the Crow chief Plenty-Coups' hope was sustained by the dream vision of the Chickadee he was given as a young man (see Lear: 70-71). The vision did not urge him to bracket his belief that the Crow way of life was coming to a terrible end, nor to behave as if this was not going to happen: on the contrary, it confirmed that the disaster was imminent and advised him to 'sharpen his ears' and be like the Chickadee person, a 'good listener' (Lear: 70). This vision, which he believed to be of supernatural origin, gave Plenty Coups the confidence to guide the Crow towards a future where being Crow would still be possible, even though in ways that outstripped the current limits of his imagination. Thus rather than buttressing Plenty-Coups' existing understanding of what it meant to be Crow, his hope opened him to the possibility of radical and indeterminate change, beyond the scope of rational planning.

*Martin and the incorporation thesis.*

Although Pettit picks up on a genuine difficulty presented by the orthodox definition, namely the LPAP, his solution is inappropriate because it seeks to eliminate the experience of agential limitation constitutive of hoping as well as its associated emotions, and to make hope a matter of self-regulation. Martin (2014) criticises this overly voluntarist character as follows: ‘while Pettit is right that hoping means being disposed to act as if the hoped-for outcome is going to occur, or is likely to occur, he is wrong about the hopeful’s person’s *rationale* for acting in this way. The hopeful person doesn’t act like this because she has *decided* to act (...); rather, she acts like this because she sees the outcome’s probability as good enough to permit it’ (Martin: 23). *Prima facie*, Martin’s proposal seems more sensitive to the kind of agency involved in hope; but evidently much will depend on what is involved in ‘seeing as’. Martin formulates her central thesis as follows: ‘to hope for an outcome is to *desire* (be attracted to) it, to assign a *probability* somewhere between 0 and 1, and judge that there are sufficient *reasons* to engage in certain feelings and activities directed towards it. The element that unifies hope as a syndrome is this final element, which I argue is a way of *incorporating* hope’s other elements into one’s rational scheme of ends’ (Martin: 7-8, her italics). Martin refers explicitly to Henry Allison’s interpretation of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, in which he argues that our capacity for free action relies on what he calls the ‘incorporation thesis’, namely our ability to take some of our sensible inclinations as reasons to act by incorporating them into maxims. Likewise, Martin’s analysis of hope relies on an opposition between desires, which are not norm-sensitive and move us causally, and reasons, which are norm-sensitive and allow us to determine our actions as rational agents. Within this framework, Martin understands hoping as a two stage process: ‘first, the hopeful person takes a ‘licensing’ stance towards the probability she assigns the hoped-for outcome — she sees that probability as licensing her to treat her desire for the outcome and the outcome’s desirable features as reasons to engage in (...) forms of planning, thought and feeling’ (Martin: 35). Second, we ‘incorporate our desire for the outcome and its desirable features by treating them as reasons to engage in hopeful activities within the larger framework of an overall “scheme of ends”’ (ibidem).<sup>22</sup> Hoping as a process is governed both by evidentialist norms (pertaining to the probability assignment) and practical norms (pertaining to the adoption of the licensing stance and the incorporation itself), with a dominance of the practical itself understood in a purely internalist manner: what makes

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<sup>22</sup> ‘The second part of hope’s incorporation element is the hopeful person actually treating her desire and the outcome’s desirable features as reasons to engage in said forms of planning, thought and feeling’ (Martin: 35).

hope rational, in a particular situation, is solely whether or not it coheres with the agent's overall life plan and fosters her ends.

Thus hope is interpreted as a fully positive mental state governed by rational norms. Yet both aspects of the incorporation thesis, namely the adoption of the licensing stance on the one hand, and the incorporation of one's desire for the outcome and the outcome's desirable features as reasons to engage in hopeful activities on the other, are problematic. I shall examine each in turn.

Martin regards the adoption of the licensing stance as the 'missing element from the orthodox definition' (Martin: 35). It plays a crucial role in her argument because it is implicitly meant to allow the hoper to overcome the LPAP: it relies on the deliberate shifting of our perspective about the odds involved, so that they appear as allowing for ('licensing'), rather than impeding, the possibility of hope. Like Pettit, Martin is careful to avoid an open violation of evidentialist norms: the issue is not to change the belief in the low probability assignment, but to take a second order stance and evaluate it in accordance with practical imperatives. And as with cognitive resolve, such evaluation relies on the consideration and implementation of a practical syllogism, the structure of which is given in the following passage: *'I'm facing incredibly bad odds but if I focus on this fact, I'm going to be paralysed by despair. (...) So I'd best not think about how poor the odds are, and instead focus on the fact that they are in the realm of possibility; (...) miracles happen, and so it is possible that I will get what I so desperately desire'* (Martin: 49, her italics).<sup>23</sup> Avoidance of despair is the given end, and the adoption of the licensing stance the privileged means. If the conclusion of the deliberative process is that it is in the hoper's interests to view the odds in a licensing way, 'then she proceeds to see the situation as she has concluded she needs to see it' (Martin: *ibidem*). Thus, Martin claims, it is 'psychologically possible to adopt the licensing stance on the basis of deliberation about how useful it would be to see things as that stance dictates' (Martin: 49). What is supposed to ground this claim is a further thought, which I shall call the 'exclusivity claim': the idea that by contrast with the low probability assignment, the 'seeing as' involved in the licensing stance is not bound by evidentialist norms. Thus 'the licensing stance is governed *exclusively* by what I have called 'practical' fundamental norms of rationality'

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<sup>23</sup> Martin's reconstruction of the psychological process involved in cognitive resolve is as follows: *'I know the truth is that I almost certainly won't be cured by this drug, but that truth is too crushing; if I focus on it, I will live out my few remaining days in misery. Instead, then, I will go forward as if that miracle cure had a better chance of happening — I should prepare for the event that it doesn't, but I will also see extended life as a real possibility'* (Martin: 22: her italics). On this reconstruction, cognitive resolves differs from her position in that the former relies on a decision to 'go forward as if' the odds were not so bad, whereas the adoption of the licensing stance requires us to operate a Gestalt switch from the unlikely to the possible. Both suggestions, however, rely on the consideration of the same practical syllogism involving an end-means structure.

(Martin: 50, her italics).<sup>24</sup> Martin expounds on the exclusivity claim by developing the example of learning to see shapes in an abstract painting as particular objects: the viewer ‘learns to apply certain concepts to the shapes of the painting — this bump is a *hill*, this smooth area a *lake* (...). Once she has this know-how, she can shift between seeing it as only washes of colour and seeing it as a landscape. Moreover, she can shift in response to practical considerations. If someone offers her a reward to see it as a landscape she can do so’ (Martin: 49, her italics).

Yet the exclusivity claim is problematic. Martin herself seems aware of its counter-intuitive nature and considers the following objection: ‘could it be entirely rational to see the duck-rabbit as a lamp post (...) if one were going to receive a million dollars for it?’ (Martin: 50). She answers in the following way: ‘my answer is that it might be *weird* but nevertheless yes, entirely rational, at least potentially’ (ibidem). In her view this is warranted by the rationality of the endpoint: ‘a way of seeing has to genuinely promote a *rational* end in order to be practically rational’ (Martin: 50). Yet both the objection and the response fail to focus on the key issue: the question is not whether it would be *rational* to see the duck-rabbit as a lamp post for a million dollars (on Martin’s definition of rationality there is no doubt that it would be, so long as increasing my wealth is part of my scheme of ends), but whether it would be *feasible* at all. And from this perspective, the claim does not just sound ‘weird’, but wrong. The analogy with the abstract painting is misleading because the shapes on the canvas are indeterminate enough to allow for several visual interpretations. There is no particular evidentialist norm involved because there is no fixed concept under which to subsume the shape and which would allow for its identification. But in the case of more determinate objects (such as the duck rabbit, even though it is still ambiguous) and of fully determinate objects (the lamppost), perception is beholden to a number of norms, some of which are evidentialist and others, practical.<sup>25</sup> Unless the empirical concept of a lamp post was not available, not seeing the lamp post as a lamp post would be *failing* to see it appropriately. This is something that may result from perceptual illusion; but it is not something I could do at will, even for a large sum of money.<sup>26</sup>

So the exclusivity claim is wrong: the ‘seeing as’ of perception is not just a matter of practical norms and cannot be changed at will. In the case of strong hope, our ‘seeing as’ is equally bound by evidentialist norms, namely those which regulate the probability assignment. However, as we saw the *Gestalt* shift involved in the adoption of the licensing stance does not require a violation

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<sup>24</sup> See also Martin: 52: ‘[the licensing stance] is governed exclusively by a practical norm’.

<sup>25</sup> See for example S. Kelly (2014).

<sup>26</sup> Segal and Textor make a similar point in relation to hope itself: ‘I might offer you a million pounds to hope that the asteroid will not hit the earth, but any hope may still evade you’ (2015: 12, their italics).



of evidentialist norms, since it is not predicated on an arbitrary modification of the probability assignment but on our deciding to change our view on the odds for practical reasons. So would weakening the exclusivity claim to a priority claim, according to which the licensing stance is *primarily* governed by ‘practical fundamental norms of rationality’, make Martin’s account of the adoption of the licensing stance more plausible? It seems doubtful. As we saw from the analysis of the OD, the probability assignment plays in itself a significant role because it is implicitly taken as a reason to hope (or not): it is not inert but has intrinsic motivational force. This is precisely why Pettit recommended that it should be put aside through cognitive resolve in cases where the LPAP arises; yet Martin has even higher requirements. We are supposed to both keep the very low probability assignment in mind and to view it against the grain, as a reason for hope rather than for despair. Martin’s practical syllogism may give us a good reason to try to do this; but having a good reason to do a thing is no warrant that we can or will do that thing. In this respect, her analogy with the painting is misleading exactly in the same way as Pettit’s building quote, namely because it significantly downplays the feelings of vulnerability and anxiety associated with strong hope. In cases of aesthetic ‘seeing as’, nothing vital rides on how one sees the coloured shapes on the canvas: should I fail to see the shapes as hills or lakes, all I risk is being mildly irritated by the ambiguity of the painting, or annoyed by my own perceptual limits. But in the cases of strong hope under consideration the hoper’s explicit awareness of her agential limitations and of the very low probability assignment will result in a very high degree of vulnerability and anxiety, and this is likely to get in the way of her being able to see very low odds as licensing her to hope. This is not to say that we can never see the odds in such a manner – rather that whether we do is not a matter of forming an intention to do so. As Segal and Textor put it, ‘more often than not, hope just ‘grows’ in one, or one finds oneself hoping for an outcome, but one has not made any resolution or decision’ (2015: 12).

The second part of the incorporation thesis is also problematic. Martin describes it as follows: ‘with this license in hand, the hopeful person is then free to treat her desire of the hoped-for outcome and the outcome’s desirable features as reasons to engage in fantasies about the outcome, build the outcome into her plans, and feel positive anticipation about it’ (Martin: 37-38).<sup>27</sup> Correlatively, Martin claims that hope as a mental state is fully responsive to such reasons: we can ‘adopt, relinquish, revise or maintain the state of hoping (hereafter, just ‘revise’) as a *direct* result of deliberation about the reasons for doing so’ (Martin: 38, my italics). Thus the second part of the

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<sup>27</sup> See also: ‘the second part of hope’s incorporation element is the hopeful person actually treating her desire and the outcome’s desirable features as reasons to engage in said forms of planning, thought and feeling’ (Martin: 35).

incorporation thesis rests on what I shall call the ‘self-licensing claim’, namely the thought that incorporating one’s hope into one’s rational agency is tantamount to ‘*giving oneself permission to treat one’s desire for the hoped-for outcome, and the outcome’s desirable features*’, as reasons for hoping, or for engaging in hopeful fantasies (Martin: 52, my italics). But this is a dubious claim. To see why, we need to return to Martin’s previous assertion. For one thing, the umbrella term ‘just revise’ is misleading, since as we saw (and as illustrated by the myth of Pandora) we can neither ‘adopt’ nor ‘relinquish’ hope simply because we think that we have reasons to do so. But leaving out cases of genesis and extinction, let us consider the revision process itself: can it rely solely on our licensing ourselves to hope, or to engage in hopeful fantasies? As we saw, our hopes can plausibly be revised as a result of deliberation about newly disclosed facts or information. Our hopes will go up, for example, if the probability assignment is modified upwards, or if our response to the treatment suggests that we are going to be included in the small set of successful cases. But such revisions are based on information that is governed by evidentialist norms and tracked by the deliberation process, and which provide us with objective reasons to revise our hope. These are reasons the force of which we recognise, not reasons whose authority comes from us. Correlatively, such revisions do not result from our having made a decision but from our having acquired new beliefs which are relevant to our hope (or of our existing beliefs having been modified in ways which are not up to us).

By contrast, it is dubious that we could legitimately, or even effectively, revise our hopes simply by licensing ourselves to take our desire for the outcome, and the outcome’s desirable features, as reasons to act. For one thing, this would be tantamount to judging ourselves warranted to engage in hopeful activities just because we strongly desire the outcome and find it very attractive. Yet recall that, in the cases of strong hope under consideration, the agent is keenly aware that her desire will very likely *not* be satisfied. Then the very same kind of practical reasoning which takes as its end the furthering of her interests may well lead her to conclude that in order to avoid disappointment later, it is more rational to try not to build up hope now, and thus not to take her desire as a reason to act. In other words, the principle of caution may incline the agent to refrain from licensing herself to hope. But there is more: let us assume that the conclusion of the practical syllogism is that it *would* be in a person’s interests to take her desire for the outcome as a reason to hope (for example because even though the risk of disappointment is very high, it would be even more detrimental not to hope). In that case Martin’s account would be confronted with a dilemma: according to its first horn, if the agent is lucid about what she is doing then her knowing that the self-licensing is warranted only by her practical syllogism would get in

the way of her desire being *able* to work as a reason. For why should she believe that her desire for a cure, even viewed in the permissive light of the licensing stance, should count as a good reason to hope when she can see that she is motivated by self-interested practical considerations rather than objective reasons of the sort previously outlined? This perceived lack of objective grounding is very likely to make the agent suspicious of her own motives in taking her desire for a cure as a reason to hope: then caution would, again, incline her to refrain from doing so in order to avoid self-deception and disappointment further down the line.<sup>28</sup>

Thus there is a significant worry that the self-licensing claim will turn out to be psychologically self-defeating because our very awareness that our hope is justified by practical considerations will only bring out the merely subjective character of such reasons. It will undermine their authority from the start, thus preventing the self-licensing process from getting off the ground. One may, however, reply that this objection only applies if the hoper is aware *that* her adopting the licensing stance and her treating her desire as a reason to hope are motivated exclusively by practical considerations. Perhaps, one may say, in some cases the hoper's degree of self-awareness will be low enough to allow her to revise her hope in the way Martin describes: if I am not aware that my desire for the outcome can only count as a reason subjectively, then perhaps I can treat it as objectively legitimate. But here the second horn of the dilemma kicks in: for in this case hope would require as its precondition a degree of self-deception, at least in the form of a failure of self-knowledge (by failing to see that my taking my desire as a reason to act is motivated solely by my self-interest), and at worst as a violation of evidentialist norms (by lying to myself about the probability assignment). And if this is indeed the case, then hope could not be part of our rational agency in the way Martin describes, since the latter is taken to exclude self-deception in general, and 'epistemic irrationality' in particular.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> One may object that there is a possible way out of the first horn of the dilemma if one takes the hoper's stance on the probability attached to her hope as *itself*warranting the treating of her desire for the hoped-for outcome and its desirable features as reasons to hope, or to engage in hopeful fantasies: in that case the agent's viewing of the probability in a favourable light would be enough to license her hope. But are two problems with this option. First, in that case it is not clear why Martin would insist on the need to 'give oneself permission to treat one's desire for the hoped-for outcome, and the outcome's desirable features, as reasons' (Martin: 52), nor why the incorporation thesis would need a second part: no further permission would be required. Second, the exclusivity claim would have to carry the weight of the whole process, as it is what is supposed to allow the hoper to view even a low probability as licensing her hope. But we have seen it is a dubious claim: we cannot decide to view the probability in a favourable light according to practical norms alone.

<sup>29</sup> Martin condemns irrational forms of hope by revisiting Marcel's example of a woman who hopes for her son's return even though there is strong empirical evidence that he is dead: 'if she maintains hope by deceiving herself about the possibility that her son is still alive, then she is epistemically irrational. If she is clear-eyed about this impossibility, but manages to adopt the hopeful licensing stance toward it nonetheless,

*Hope and medio-passive agency.*

As we saw, any solution to the LPAP needs to meet two requirements: (a) from the criticisms of the OD, it must account for the difference between hope on the one hand, and despair or resignation on the other; and (b) from the OD, it must integrate the fact that hope constitutively involves a (pre-) reflective experience of agential limitation. I have argued that regardless of whether they meet requirement (a),<sup>30</sup> Pettit's and Martin's implicit solutions to the LPAP fail to meet requirement (b) because they both rely on a conception of agency whose voluntarist and cognitivist aspects do justice neither to the OD, nor to the phenomenon of hope.<sup>31</sup>

In my view, this is largely because they start from a stark contrast between what they understand as passivity (being causally moved) and activity (determining oneself to act on a maxim according to rational principles), and from the unquestioned prioritisation of activity over passivity. They see the desire and emotive aspects involved in hope as passive and potentially harmful to the agent, and seek to reduce this passivity by making hope a matter of cognitive insight and self-regulation. On both their readings strong hope is ultimately a matter of making a rational decision to hope and following it through practically. At the very end of her book, Martin acknowledges some of the more passive aspects of our lives: it is, she says, 'a general truth about our experience of the world and ourselves in it [that] we are moved by things, and we are also movers' (Martin: 144). She also accepts that we are 'sensuous, desirous — i.e. passive — creatures with serious epistemic limits' (ibidem). But rather than taking this ambivalence between activity and passivity as *constitutive* of the exercise of agency involved in hope, Martin seeks to eliminate

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then she is likely practically irrational' (Martin: 114). Martin defines hope, by contrast, as a fully rational activity: 'hope is thus a distinctive way of exercising one's rational agency. It is a way of making an attractive outcome a part of one's mental, emotional and planning activities' (Martin: 69). See also: 'under the incorporation thesis, hope emerges as an attitude governed by both theoretical and practical norms; it is bound to represent the world accurately, but also to support our rational agency' (Martin: 62).

<sup>30</sup> Meirav, Martin and Segal and Textor have argued that Pettit's cognitive resolve fails requirement (b) because it is compatible with despair.

<sup>31</sup> One may object that Martin only intends her account to be a 'rational reconstruction' of how we hope. Yet even so the following dilemma arises: either the reconstruction must be available to the agent at the time of the action, in which case it would play a genuine role in the performing of the action but the account would be overly cognitivist – a possibility Martin is aware of and strongly rejects; or, it is enough that the reconstruction should be available to the agent retrospectively, which seems to be the route that Martin, following McDowell, is inclined to take. But in that case there is no guarantee that the reconstruction played any role in the performing of the action, nor even that it is appropriate to the original experience of hoping because becoming retrospectively appraised of the reconstruction may in itself alter one's recollection of the experience.

passivity from hope.<sup>32</sup> Yet the OD is not committed to the idea that hope is a matter of self-regulation. On the contrary, it allows its more passive aspects to surface: not only are hoping agents moved by their desires, their hopes rest on a (pre-) reflective awareness that they are beholden to circumstances beyond their power and that they can control neither the realisation of the outcome nor the hoping process itself. This irreducible element of passivity is the reason why attempts to turn hope into the expression of our rational agency are bound to fail.

There are, however, valuable insights to be gained from Pettit's and Martin's attempts to fix the OD, in particular the thought that hope *is* a matter of agency. For the OD is not committed either to the view that hope happens to us like rain falls on the ground: as both Pettit and Martin argue, it is responsive to reasons, and just as it would be a mistake to deny the passivity inherent in hope, it would be equally mistaken to deny that we can, up to a point, influence our hopes. Both Pettit and Martin are right to be sensitive to this more active aspect of hoping but – and this is where they err – they go too far towards making hope a matter of cognitive insight and self-regulation.

Although we do not have a solution to the LPAP (if there is one to be found), we are now more advanced in the sense that we have a better grasp of the relation between hope and agential limitation, and of why attempting to fix the OD by identifying hope with rational self-regulation does not work. We also know that any solution to the LPAP must do justice to the constitutive link between hope and (pre-) reflective experiences of agential limitation, and to the passivity involved in hoping, while allowing for the distinction between hope on the one hand, and despair or resignation on the other. It goes beyond the remit of this paper to present such a solution; yet some notes on the relation between activity and passivity in the case of strong hope may help lay the ground by allowing an alternative conception of the exercise of agency involved in strong hope to appear, a conception which promises to meet both requirements (a) and (b). For it seems clear from the above that in order to do justice to the phenomenon of hope, and to cultivate it in appropriate ways, we need to reconceptualise the relation between activity and passivity so that these are not mutually exclusive. Unless or until we do this, we will lack the conceptual tools to understand the exercise of agency involved in hope, and this will most likely result in a

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<sup>32</sup> In this respect, the implicit function of the incorporation thesis is to side-line the more passive aspects of hope (our 'subrational' desire and associated emotions) by allowing for their incorporation as reasons in our rational agency. Conversely, when Martin considers the relation between hope and emotions, she does not make any distinction between engaging in hopeful 'thoughts, feelings and plans'. Yet arguably I can have control over my plans, but much less so (if at all) over my feelings or thoughts. The fact that Martin ignores this difference is further indicative of her leaning towards activity and rational agency in her account of hope, an inclination Pettit shares.

continuation of the age old-debate between, on the one hand, detractors of hope who insist on its passive aspects and deny that it is an exercise of agency, and on the other hand advocates like Pettit or Martin who want to make hope part of our rational agency but at the cost of denaturing it. So how should we construe the relation between activity and passivity in the case of strong hope?

A currently available option is to suppose that agents are more or less active depending on how aware they are of what moves them, and how effective they are at guiding their actions through deliberation.<sup>33</sup> On this picture, which seems to underlie Pettit's and Martin's accounts, the more reflective and deliberate the agents, the more active they are. Yet there are reasons to doubt that reflective self-control is *per se* a guarantee of activity, or even a good criterion to ascertain whether an agent is genuinely active: in particular, deliberation can fail to suspend motives. Katsafanas' analyses of anorexic cases (Katsafanas: 2011) show that a person can be hyper-reflective and act very deliberately and yet remain passive in the sense that the parameters and the manner according which she reflects and acts are constrained in ways which she does not see but would not approve of if she did.<sup>34</sup> More generally, as we saw the emphasis on rational self-regulation is ill suited to account for the phenomenon on hope.

Yet there may be a different way of understanding the relation between activity and passivity. We can conceive of strong hope as part of a number of cases (such as praying, surrendering, loving, creating) where an agent responds to an experience of agential limitation in a manner that integrates this experience as presently ineliminable, and acts without trying to assert control. For example, praying is usually a response to an experience of agential limitation. Yet we cannot pray appropriately if we seek control over the outcome, or over the praying itself: the prayer would become a demand, or rote reciting. This would also prevent the possibility of the praying developing on its own and transforming the agent in unforeseen ways.<sup>35</sup> And yet there is

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<sup>33</sup> Martin seems to see the relation between activity and passivity in precisely these terms. Expounding on the example of love, she states that 'we might conceive of love as both a passivity and an activity. Its passive aspects are, at first, the feelings that give rise to certain subrational attractions. (...) Then, when this passive side of love develops into love in its fullest sense, we actively adopt the ends of being near to the beloved, and of contributing to her flourishing. These become active projects, exercises of our agency' (Martin: 143).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. also Katsafanas (2013), in particular chapter 5 where Katsafanas argues that deliberation is not capable of suspending motives and thus cannot in itself count as a sufficient criterion for active agency. He introduces instead the notion of 'equilibrium' as defining activity: an agent is in equilibrium if 'the agent A's and approves of her A-ing [and] further knowledge of the motives that figure in A's aetiology would not undermine her approval of A-ing' (p.138).

<sup>35</sup> For example, Simone Weil recounts that she often felt powerless to pray. Rather than reciting the Paternoster, even with conviction, she would say the words in Greek and in reverse order to empty her mind and allow for the true prayer to come to her. This experience transformed her, in her words, into a 'thin film' on the surface of the world.

something we do when we pray: we open ourselves to the divine in a way that changes our self-relation.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, we cannot hope strongly without being aware that we do not have control over the realisation of the outcome or over our hoping itself, and without experiencing this agential limitation as presently ineliminable. And yet, there is something we do when we hope: we open ourselves to the indeterminacy of the future in a way which changes our experience of the present situation, and of ourselves.<sup>37</sup>

In these and in similar instances, agents can only act if they understand themselves as also passive *in the acting itself*: their acting integrates the perceived agential limitation into their agency. In previous work I have called this exercise of agency ‘medio-passive’ (in reference to the ancient Greek middle voice) and put forward a provisional definition and some examples.<sup>38</sup> Medio-passivity involves a (pre-) reflective experience of agential limitation as presently ineliminable, to which the agent responds by integrating this experience into her agency. Typically, such integration takes the form of a ‘letting go’ which does not seek to overcome the perceived agential limitation or to assert control. Such ‘letting go’ is paradoxical and very difficult to describe, if only because ordinary language and grammar are strongly polarised between activity and passivity and treat them as opposites.<sup>39</sup> In the cases of strong hope that have been the focus of this paper, the exercise of mediopassive agency involved has, I suggest, three aspects which are only dissociated here for the sake of clarity.

Firstly, when we hope strongly we understand ourselves as responding to a particular situation (rather than as being causally moved) and thus as agents, not spectators or victims. Perhaps an agent’s medio-passive response to her experience of agential limitation is best described in negativist terms: her letting go is a doing, not because it is the expression of her will or of her rational agency, but by virtue of the agent not responding to her perceived agential

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<sup>36</sup> Another example can be found in aesthetic creation: seeking to exert control over the whole process is rarely (if ever) conducive to good art. On the contrary, the artist needs to give up the prospect of control and to open herself to the demands of the work itself, so that she can become responsive to the ever-shifting balance that the addition of each stroke of paint, each spot of colour, generates. It is precisely her relinquishing of control which empowers her responsiveness to the creative process, of which she becomes a part rather than the orchestrator. For an evocative description of this paradoxical agency in relation to literary creation, see Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, ‘The Gaze of Eurydice’.

<sup>37</sup> It may be pointed out that some of our hopes can bear on the past or on the present (so long as there is indeterminacy about the hoped-for outcome). Yet that its object should in certain cases be past or present does not change the effect of strong hope on the agent’s self-relation or on her perception of the future. My fervent hope that someone I love did not die in an accident I just heard about on the radio, while it brings to the fore the gravity of the situation and my relative agential limitations in the face of it, feels empowering and opens up positive futural possibilities which would otherwise be closed to me.

<sup>38</sup> See for example B. Han-Pile (2009) and (2013).

<sup>39</sup> Perhaps significantly, the middle voice has disappeared from most modern Indo-European languages except for a few Nordic languages and Sanskrit.

limitations by adopting other, more assertive agential options such as denial, defiance, or the assertion of control through planning. Such refraining from a more assertive exercise of agency is not itself a matter of choice, as this would re-establish the need for critical distance and deliberation. Yet it is an exercise of agency because of the hoper's sensitivity to alternative ways to act: just as one can follow a rule by being sensitive to it so as not to break it, rather than by deliberating about it,<sup>40</sup> in the same way strong hopers let go of control and integrates their agential limitations by comporting themselves in their light. And they can do this even though they haven't reflected on alternative possibilities, nor even consciously endorsed their experience of agential limitation.

Thus the letting go involved in strong hope, while not as assertive an exercise of agency as voluntary self-regulation, is nevertheless an agential response shaped by the agent's (pre-) reflective experience of agential limitation in the face of a particular situation. Yet (and this is the second, more passive aspect) this letting go also seems forced upon agents by their very experience of agential limitation. In the cases of severe illness previously evoked in relation to strong hope, such agential limitations are directly palpable in physical, emotional or mental weariness, in the narrowing down of our options, a feeling of being worn away or overwhelmed. In a very real sense agents feel that they *have to* let go. But how should we understand this modal operator? One might say that the force involved is that of reasons: strong hopers would be compelled by their assessment of their situation to recognise that they have to let go. Alternatively, one could describe this letting go in causal terms, as a change in the hopers' physiology (due to the parameters of their illness, for example) which would result in a change in their comportment. Both options are undesirable in my view: the first because it would make strong hope the conclusion of a process of reflection and deliberation and so return precisely to the sort of cognitivist picture I have criticised; the second, because adopting the causal story would be tantamount to giving up on agency altogether and denying that there is anything that we do when we hope strongly.

Merleau-Ponty's notion of a 'motive' may afford us a way out of the dilemma. For Merleau-Ponty, a motive is neither a reason nor a cause: it picks out the manner in which our body influences how we experience and respond to the solicitations of the world. A motive is not a reason because it does not feature on the horizon of our consciousness and is not available as such

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<sup>40</sup> I am grateful to Dan Watts for this example.



for inference or justification.<sup>41</sup> Yet even though it is grounded in bodily processes, a motive is not a cause because it should be understood intensionally: its operative force depends on its being experienced in the first person.<sup>42</sup> Consider the case of a severe illness: physical constraints bears upon me bodily. They affect my daily comportment and put strong limitations on what I understand myself as capable of doing. Yet the intensional aspect of such constraints is manifested by the fact that different sufferers will respond to identical or very similar manifestations of the same illness (which can be objectively measured in terms of blood count, various biological markers, etc.) in very different ways. Each sufferer experiences their physical constraints in an irreducibly first personal way which colours their self-understanding and their responses to the solicitations of the world. Such constraints work as motives, not as causes: their physiological effects can be objectively measured, but this will not capture how the constraints feature in a person's lived experience and influence the ways in which we exercise our agency. I submit that the constraints according to which we 'have to' let go are best understood as motives: even if they are grounded in somato-psychological processes (such as the weariness, suffering or anxiety mentioned above), they depend for their operative force on our first person understanding of ourselves and of our situation. Such understanding is itself part of the (pre-) reflective experience of agential limitation involved in hope. In cases of strong hope, where the odds are very low and this experience is reflective, our agential response is further shaped by our understanding of the constraints as motives, without being causally determined by such constraints.

One may object at this point, however, that while this characterisation meets requirement (b) above, it fails to meet requirement (a): in other words, that it is compatible with resignation or despair. But this is where the third aspect of the agency involved kicks in: the letting go of the strong hoper is such that the agent feels empowered by it. It is akin to a giving in, but not to a giving up. By letting go, strong hopers are not defeated by their experience of agential limitation but open themselves up to new agential possibilities.<sup>43</sup> The unfolding of such possibilities is

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<sup>41</sup> In most cases such experience is not conscious but pre-reflective. This is not to say that motives can never be articulated: they can. But when they are, this is at the cost of simplification and isolation from their holistic context, the nuances of which are too complex to be fully captured (especially since — a paradox familiar to all phenomenologists — the articulation itself modifies the phenomenon).

<sup>42</sup> This is classically illustrated by the fact that specific elements of the description of a motive cannot be replaced by another component, even if this component is objectively identical to the substituted one: as a motive, the proposition 'Lois Lane loves Superman' is not equivalent to 'Lois Lane loves Clark Kent', even though from a third person point of view Clark Kent is Superman. Correlatively, Lois Lane's love for Superman makes the world salient to her and governs her responses to it in specific ways, whereas love for Clark Kent does not.

<sup>43</sup> For example, suppose that a person who is accustomed to planning ahead and managing her own life and that of others (professionally or in a familial context) is diagnosed with a terminal illness. This faces her

perceived by such agents as empowering because their future does not feel foreclosed anymore. It establishes or restores a sense of open-endedness, of good things (including the desired outcome) being possible. Gabriel Marcel picks up on this very important aspect of strong hope by pointing out that the latter ‘has the power of making things fluid’ (Marcel: 35). Strong hope ‘makes things fluid’ by giving agents a sense of possibility which goes beyond what they might have been able to foresee or bring about on their own by exerting the control they have go of. Importantly, this fluidity attaches itself not only to the agent’s outlook on her circumstances but also to her self-understanding: it loosens up her relation to herself and allows for the possibility of self-transformation.

I am well aware that this account of the medio-passive exercise of agency involved in strong hope needs further fleshing out, and that the question remains of whether it applies to all forms of hope. The key notion of ‘openness’ also needs more analysis. However, let me point out for now that this model meets both requirements (a) and (b). It integrates the constitutive link between hope and experiences of agential limitation, and is compatible with the OD. It also helps us to distinguish strong hope from despair and resignation. Indeed, strong hope, despair and resignation all have in common that they involve an experience of agential limitation. While the despairing person is crushed by this experience to the extent that no future seems possible, the resigned person accepts her perceived agential limitation and tries to carry on with it, even though she deplores it and longs for different agential possibilities. By contrast, the strong hoper feels empowered because her letting go, while it integrates the perceived agential limitation into her agency, also opens up new possibilities, both in relation to her situation and to herself. In this respect, strong hope is the very opposite of a life plan whereby future possibilities are charted and controlled in advance from the perspective of the agent’s current self-understanding, and with a view to maintaining the *status quo* of such self-understanding (as Pettit put it, of ‘remaining capable of seeing ourselves in what we do’ (Pettit: 161)). By contrast, the letting go of strong hope both allows agents to relate positively to the indeterminacy of the future, thus avoiding despair or resignation, and for their self-understanding to be transformed in the process.

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explicitly with an experience of agential limitation. Suppose also that she strongly hopes that an experimental protocol will be developed which may allow for a cure, and to be enrolled in such a protocol. This hope manifests her acceptance of her agential limitations in the face of the situation, and her letting go of the prospect of control. But it also opens up agential possibilities for her which wouldn’t have been on the map before, such as accepting help from others or making the most of the present moment, and these new possibilities empower her and transform her self-understanding.



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