

Kazantzidis, George; Spatharas, Dimos (Hrsg.): *Hope in Ancient Literature, History, and Art. Ancient Emotions I*. Berlin: de Gruyter 2018. ISBN: 978-3-11-059687-8; VIII, 399 S.

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The most common definition of hope within analytic philosophy combines the desire for an outcome and the belief that the outcome is possible, but not certain.¹ Deconstructing this definition into its two components is helpful to shed light on how Greek *elpis* differs from the ordinary meaning of „hope“ in English: when *elpis* does not entail a desiderative dimension – either because it focuses on a bad outcome or because it represents the anticipation of some future good, but is devoid of affective implications in terms of yearning – it is more appropriately rendered by the English „expectation“ than by „hope“.

The subject matter of the book is the affective variant of *elpis*, that is, an attitude that entails (i) the belief that something good is neither impossible nor certain and (ii) a yearning for its realisation. The orthodox definition of hope is assumed, more or less explicitly, by all the contributors to the volume and it emerges in the editors' introduction as well. Here, Kazantzidis and Spatharas address two main methodological issues of emotion research: what an emotion is and whether hope is an emotion; how a wide-ranging exploration of the lexical field of the terms *elpis* and *spes* needs to be combined with a more dynamic „script“ approach. In fact, by providing an analysis of culturally embedded manifestations of emotions, the „script“ approach minimizes the risk of projecting contemporary categories onto ancient ones. Furthermore, especially if combined with conceptual metaphor theory, the analysis of affective episodes and scenarios provides a greater understanding of one of the most salient features of experience, that is: that experience is layered and multidimensional and yet feels as an undivided whole. This observation should alert us to the dangers of an „object-based“² way of thinking and hence it should lead us to talk of „hope“ (and other emotions) as a way of experiencing things, rather than as a „thing“ we experi-

ence. This is important, as I will try to show, because it raises several problems with the orthodox definition of hope as it is assumed by the contributors to the book. On the other hand, the authors' exploration of the sources is in most cases so fine-grained that not only does it make up for such theoretical drawback, but it also makes the gap between the pitfalls of the assumption and the richness of the material visible to the reader.

The orthodox definition of hope – what Philip Pettit calls „the lowest common denominator of usage“ of the term hope³ – provides a componential model based on an „addition strategy“: hope consists in believing that something might or might not obtain, while desiring that it does. Belief and desire are distinct psychic items that, when occurring together, amount to hope. Still, the phenomenology of hope suggests there is something more to it than simply desiring something that one does not deem to be impossible. Johnston's study of Pindaric hope, for example, discusses the importance of hope as a form of endorsement of desires, a drive to action and prosperity: the „too hesitant“ hopes of Aristagoras' parents in *Nemean 11* have indeed prevented him from fulfilling his athletic potential. Hope is an antidote to despair in Ovid's exilic poetry, as Michalopoulos shows in his chapter on the *Tristia* and the *Epistulae ex Ponto*. The relation between disillusionment and progressive decline and so, at least indirectly, the role of hope in promoting better alternatives is touched on by Papaioannou's reconsideration of the traditional view of Tacitus' pessimism.

The sustaining power of hope is acknowledged by Pettit as well, who introduces an extra element in his definition of „substantial hope“: the „cognitive resolve“ to „act as if that desired prospect were going to obtain or as

¹ Adrienne M. Martin, *How We Hope. A Moral Psychology*, Princeton 2014, calls this the „orthodox definition“, explores its roots in early Modern philosophy and compellingly shows its drawbacks and limitations.

² Daniel Hutto, *Beyond Physicalism*, Amsterdam et al. 2000.

³ Philip Pettit, 'Hope and its Place in Mind', in: *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 592, Hope, Power and Governance (2004), pp. 152–165. This is what Pettit qualifies as „superficial hope“, as opposed to „substantial hope“ that features the extra element of „cognitive resolve“.

if there were a good chance that it was going to obtain".⁴ He considers hope as the reverse of precaution, each of the two protecting one from specular risks: precaution prevents one from being unprepared should things go wrong; hope prevents one from acting in such a way to actually reduce the chances that one's hope will be fulfilled. Again, however, Johnston's Pindar sheds light on subtler nuances: given the epistemic deficiencies which characterize human life, hope and precaution should be companions. Good *elpis* must attain a pragmatic equilibrium between hesitancy and overconfidence. Michalopoulos' Ovid, too, is aware that hope might be deceptive, lead to the bitterness of frustration and, eventually, be replaced by despair. Those who most insisted on the importance of precaution as an insurance policy against unexpected disaster were probably the fifth-century historians to whom Lateiner's chapter is dedicated. In Thucydides, in particular, hope goes hand in hand with imprudence: results rarely conform to our assessment of the odds, even when the assessment is affectively neutral; and when *elpis*-hope (as opposed to *elpis*-expectation) is at play miscalculation and distortions in one's perception of reality are even more likely to occur.

Greek and Roman psychology of hope therefore suggests we should not conceive it merely as a state entailing an epistemological assessment of the odds backed up by a yearning for good outcomes. An object-based view of this kind obliterates the interaction between the two alleged components – an interaction that is so close to make the two items phenomenologically indistinguishable. Rather, we should consider hope as a specific response to worldly offerings that brings forth their epistemological and desiderative significance in a value-laden way. Hope makes a difference in how we experience things because it represents a specific way of experiencing them and interacting with them.

In this respect, Fisher's study of hopelessness in Euripides' *Hecuba*, *Troades*, and *Hercules* sheds light on one further feature of hope that is neglected by the orthodox definition. In ordinary experience, we do not experience only the actual, but the possible as well: experience of reality is based on, and always en-

tails, a sense of what we could do. It is one's perception of one's situation as susceptible to change that makes hope possible: in hope, we do not merely experience some good as possible, but – more specifically – as not-yet-achieved. It seems to me that the tragic characters whose despair Fisher explores have lost precisely this ability: that of perceiving possibilities. Polyxena sees „no confidence“ in her position, „no grounds for hope or belief“ that she should ever be happy. Likewise, Hecuba is no longer rooted in the world: „the children I had are no more alive, *I myself am gone. . .*“. These two women have lost hope not simply in the sense that they recognize their condition to be desperate: they are demoralized and any possible content for their hopes lacks meaning. Therefore, in my view, Hecuba's desire for revenge cannot be explained – as it is by Fisher – on the basis that it could not make things worse than they already are: Hecuba's revenge represents her ultimate attempt to vindicate her own agency in circumstances where she has lost her footing in the world.

These are only a few of the multiple threads one could follow when reading *Hope in Ancient Literature, History, and Art*. The collection includes much more than has been mentioned so far. Slater's survey of Greek Old, Middle, and New Comedy is complemented by Fulkerson's chapter on Roman comedy. The latter discusses hope as a fallback emotion, related to the impossibility of undertaking action and thus typical of those who, because of status-based limitations or personal failures, lack the means to bring about what they wish. From this vantage point, Fulkerson also touches on the relation between hope and divinity by focusing on hope both as an object for prayer and as an addressee of prayer. Tsoumpra discusses the place of hope in political discourse and decision-making, the way it was used as an antidote to fear, and its association with erotic passion in Aristophanes and Thucydides, while the political aspect of hope in the Virgil's epic is illustrated by Paschalis, who investigates the link between *spes* and

⁴ Pettit Philip, 'Hope and its Place in Mind', in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 592, *Hope, Power and Governance*, 2004, pp. 152-165, 157.

Trojan future by focusing on the episode of the burning of the ships by the Trojan women in Aeneid V. Finally, Augoustakis discusses the role of *spes* in Statius' Thebaid and offers a pessimistic reading of the poem as foreshadowing a gloomy future where violence will be repeated indefinitely.

The third section of the volume, „Scripts of ‚Hope‘ in History, Art, and Inscriptions“, features Vlassopoulos's fine study of slave hope as a way of negotiating power relationships and the slaves' own identities beyond their relationship with their masters. The role of *spes* in transitions of power within the domus Augusta is illustrated by Stiles in his chapter on Velleius Paterculus, while Lampinen explores Greek and Roman perceptions of northern barbarians' hopes from three viewpoints: hopes for an afterlife, hope for plunder or land, and hope for revenge. Heuer provides a study of a red-figure neck-amphora, attributed to the Owl Pillar Group and, she argues, featuring the depiction of Zeus commanding Elpis to remain inside Pandora's jar. Here, hope is represented as a human female head protruding from the mouth of the pithos: according to Heuer, the concealment of the body stands for the multivalent nature of hope in Archaic and Classical Greece and for the uncertainty and unpredictability it entails. Bobou's chapter studies the association of hope with individuals under eighteen years of age in funerary monuments and votive and public inscriptions in the Greco-Roman world. The book is completed by Chaniotis' essay on the variations of the meaning of *elpis* in funerary epigraphy, honorific decrees, and public documents from the Imperial period.

The wide-ranging scope of the volume and the richness of the material surveyed compensate for some theoretical weaknesses that could have been profitably addressed by a dedicated philosophical chapter or a more comprehensive introduction. Nonetheless, the book is valuable reading for anybody interested in how the ancients represented the experience of hope and the complexities of its implications.

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