

# Hope as Our Deepest Orientation

## 1 What is Hope?

What is hope, and what is it to us? Some might say that hope is simply an emotion that comes and goes in us. Or, that vague sense that someday things will be “right”. Hope seemingly seems to be ascribed to anticipation, maybe even a fleeting passive idea, wishful thinking. Hopes might be dashed, or fall apart, someone might even be described as running out of hope, as if it was some commodity. But what if hope was always with us, fundamental to us, even our most fundamental state? Not something that rides on the surface, or that is a quantity we can run out of, but instead our deepest orientation that is expressed through action.

## 2 Hope is Future Oriented

It is said that there is past, present, and future. Most popularly in our day, we are told the present is all we have. The past we are told is off limits, and only serves to make us depressed from the mistakes we cannot fix: enter with caution, the past does not exist! The future similarly we are told does not exist yet...and so we cannot “have it”. The present is all we have then, because it is all we directly experience. However, one should note the clever trick being played here, because we can experience and relive the past, so much so it becomes our present. So it very much is real, real enough to merit our brains holding onto parts of it. The future also will be experienced, and how “soon” depends upon many factors and how we construct what we wish to call the future. The present is all that exists between what was, and what could/will be. It might be all that exists in that moment, but how odd that that moment should be all we have, as if we were static. We can learn and plan, is this not grasping the past and the future? What is the present then other than somewhere undefined as yet between a start and an end? Rather, can we not see the past as what’s real? The present is pure becoming, unformed, pregnant with the imminence of the future. The past is as far as we know settled and permanent. We live from the very real past towards a seemingly unsettled future. The future and

the present then are simply the becoming and what's to come. This is where we live and experience our core, we are not oriented to live present to past, but rather past to present to future, in other words, we are oriented as creatures to be future-focused to anticipate the next moment, however imminent it is. We live what has been described as forwards in time. What is the future but possibility and potential, potential that we can actuate, that can be worked towards, that could be achieved or found. This is hope, and hope through action. If the present is all we can claim, then we are trapped in between two non-existent realities, incapable of learning or planning.

### 3 Hope as Our Deepest Orientation

Ernst Bloch's philosophy in *The Principle of Hope* (1954–1959), here he describes hope as the “principle” that propels human life forward. For Bloch, hope is an ontological force, a basic drive toward utopia, or a better world, that manifests in everyday dreams, art, myths, and even revolutionary action. He writes that “hope, superior to fear, is neither passive like the latter, nor locked into nothingness. The emotion of hope goes out of itself, makes people broad instead of confining them” Bloch, 1986. It's not a passive waiting but an expansive, creative energy that orients us toward unrealized potential, hope expanding into hope. Bloch surveys utopias in forms like medical advancements, social ideals, and fairy tales, arguing that hope is “anticipatory consciousness”, or, our innate tendency to imagine and strive for what is “not-yet” but could be. In this sense, hope is always with us, even in despair, because it's the guiding light through the present into a future. Hope is then that that critiques the present and envisions alternatives. Hope is fundamental, because without it, we'd be trapped in the stasis of the only present, unable to bridge the gap between what is and what could be. This contrasts with more reductive views of hope as simple passive or vague anticipation. Hope typically involves two key elements: (1) a desire for an outcome, and (2) a perception that it's possible, though uncertain. As outlined in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, hope is “an attitude towards the possible,” distinct from expectation (which assumes higher probability) or fear (which anticipates harm) Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020. It can be “intentional” (directed at specific goals, like hoping for recovery from illness) or “dispositional” (a general outlook, like being hopeful). Hopes can indeed be “dashed” when reality intervenes, but that doesn't diminish hope's essence; it just redirects it. Hope in this way is not a commodity that runs out like when we can't get up that metaphorical hill. Rather hopes not realized in one future can be redirected to other hopes. Søren Kierkegaard echoes this by saying, “To hope is to act as if you await the possibility of good” Kierkegaard, 1995, it's active and lived. If we hope in the present moment we link to the future, and it becomes real to us. Maybe not the concrete lived experience of direct apprehension we experience in daily life, but real enough to feel the edges of it's frame.

We relate to hope not as owners of a finite resource but as beings defined by it. It's what makes us goal-oriented, imaginative, and resilient.

## 4 Hope in Dark Places: Resilience and Self-Knowledge

Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor and founder of logotherapy, argued in *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946) that even in the abyss of suffering, hope as we have been exploring earlier, drives discovering towards personal meaning. He wrote, echoing Nietzsche, "Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how'" Frankl, 2006. Frankl observed that prisoners who retained hope weren't those with the strongest bodies, but those who acted out of hope, whether in love, work, or attitude toward unavoidable suffering. He elaborated, "We may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed. For what matters then is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one's predicament into a human achievement" Frankl, 2006. This meaning often requires deep self-knowledge: understanding one's values, strengths, and capacity for choice. Hope, for Frankl, is resilient because it's not contingent on external circumstances alone; it's also an internal stance, tied to human freedom to choose one's attitude toward a future, even a future that is inescapable. He famously stated, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms, to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way" Frankl, 2006. While here he is referring to choice and the will, and to find one's purpose, it is clear that without the future-link of hope, one's way is not clear. Without hope, the present suffering would all there is for these people.

Self-knowledge is central to Frankl's sense of meaning, one must choose how to respond to even dire situations. This requires a deep sense of knowing one's own character. To find meaning, one must know one's values, desires, and inner strengths. In the camps, Frankl reflected on his love for his wife, his unfinished manuscripts, and his spiritual convictions, which anchored his self-direction towards a future, albeit, one that was unknown. This introspective process, knowing what matters to one, makes one resilient because our hope is imminent, as it's not tied to fleeting circumstances but to an enduring sense of actualizing many futures. Frankl's hope is not blind optimism but drives a defiant act of will, a refusal to let suffering define one's existence, and one that does not see the present as the only defining feature.

In a similar vein, David Goggins offers a modern, visceral take on this hope through resilience and self-knowledge in *Can't Hurt Me* (2018). Goggins, who undertook an extreme personal transformation, emphasizes the hope we are discussing as central to

his journey. For Goggins, actualizing his hopes of greatness (or simply daily betterment) became his entire aim in life. Like Frankl, Goggins realized that hope was always there as he writes, “From the time you take your first breath, you become eligible to die. You also become eligible to find your greatness” Goggins, 2018. For Goggins, greatness is hope in action, what we see as possible, and moving towards it with all we have. Like Frankl, Goggins came to understand that finding your purpose begins within, to understand yourself enough to know where hope comes through in you, he writes, “The most important conversations you’ll ever have are the ones you’ll have with yourself” Goggins, 2018. Understanding oneself allows hope to flow from within into action, even that requires resilience. It is worth pointing out that resilience isn’t a stoic endurance but hopeful adaptation. Knowing yourself, your limits, desires, and meanings fortifies your adoption of a hope against despair. If a hope is to be acted upon, it’s because it is allowed through the channels of our self-awareness, turning dark places into sites of potential transformation. Frankl’s experiences show hope isn’t always naive, it can be defiant. Goggins shows how hope through action can transform a person. Ultimately, while our hope in some a particular future may die, we can always access hope to place in another.

## 5 Hope as Fundamental

In relating to hope, we embrace our humanity’s forward thrust. It’s not just anticipation or expectation; it’s the engine of possibility, actualizing potentials amid uncertainty. If hope were merely surface-level, we’d indeed “run out” in tough times, but as illustrated, it’s deeper, always available as long as we orient toward the future with purpose and self-insight. We’re not just present-dwellers but future-makers, with hope as the thread connecting past realities to unborn possibilities.

## References

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