HOPE: THE JANUS-FACED VIRTUE (WITH FEATHERS)[1]

Michael Schrader and Michael P. Levine
University of Western Australia

"And sore must be the storm; that could abash the little bird; that kept so many warm"
- Emily Dickinson

"Hope doesn't pay the bills"
- The Indian Detective (Netflix, 2017)

Abstract. In this essay we argue for the Janus-faced nature of hope. We show that attempts to sanitise the concept of hope either by separating it conceptually from other phenomena such as wishful thinking, or, more generally, by seeking to minimise the negative aspects of hope, do not help us to understand the nature of hope and its functions as regards religion. Drawing on functional accounts of religion from Clifford Geertz and Tamas Pataki, who both—in their different ways—see the function of religion in terms of its capacity to satisfy deep psychological needs, we demonstrate that religion uniquely positions itself with regard to hope's two faces, simultaneously exploiting positive and negative aspects of hope.

I. INTRODUCTION

If hope is a virtue, with attendant vices rooted, as Aristotle would have it, in excess or deficiency, it is a Janus-faced one. This is not only because of hope's associated vices (hoping at the expense of doing; hoping for morally repugnant things; unreflectively catering to unworthy — and worthy — desires), but also because of hope's functions and nature. As a virtue, hope is necessary for living even minimally well. As with other abilities, dispositions and strengths of character, it often eludes us when we need it most. Nevertheless, if one can muster

1 Emily Dickinson, "Hope is the Thing with Feathers (254)", accessed September 5, 2017, https://poets.org/poem/hope-thing-feathers-254.

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AUTHOR: MICHAEL.SCHRADER@RESEARCH.UWA.EDU.AU
AUTHOR: MICHAEL.LEVINE@UWA.EDU.AU

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enough of it, hope lets us makes the best of bad situations, and helps us to go on not only in the midst of tragedy, but also in the face of the lesser difficulties that constitute much of the quotidian. As with other virtues, hope forms and moderates our characters, thoughts, actions, feelings and emotions. In its religious dimension, it may serve as a response to evil or the problem of evil (two quite different things). This is different from regarding hope as essential to a theodicy since theodicies, as justifications of God's goodness in the face of evil, rarely rely on hope even though the justification of God's goodness in some way or another is the object of much of the hope associated with religion.

But there is a quite different, though not necessarily opposing, aspect to hope; one that sees it rooted not only in our moral natures, but as much, if not more, in our orectic natures. This aspect of hope is grounded in our mental states as governed by desire, wish-fulfilment and phantasy. Unlike Walker[2] and Day,[3] who are at pains to distinguish "hope" proper from wishful thinking and phantasy, as we see it, there is no clear demarcation between hope and wishful-thinking because in varying degrees the two are connected. There would be no hope apart from wishful-thinking and little or no wishful-thinking apart from hope.

Religion uniquely positions itself with regard to hope's two faces. And it is necessary for religion (and so for the religious), to simultaneously exploit these two aspects of hope. This essay argues for the Janus-faced nature of hope, and explains why it is essential to religion and how it functions. Section II looks at definitions of hope. Section III examines hope as a virtue. Section IV looks at how hope functions positively and negatively on two different functional accounts of religion.

II. WHAT IS HOPE?

What is striking about analytic definitions of hope is not merely that they are essentialist — seeking and often stipulating necessary and sufficient conditions. Rather, it is that such definitions tell us very little about the function or even the nature of hope. How insightful is it to discover that we generally hope for what we (i) desire, (ii) think "good" and hence desirable, and (iii) believe to be at least remotely possible? How significant is it for understand-

2 Margaret U. Walker, "Hope's Value", in *Moral Repair*, ed. Margaret U. Walker (CUP, 2006).
3 J. P. Day, "Hope", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (1969).

ing hope if it turns out that hope is not an emotion *per se* but a psychological attitude — one that, like love, is individuated "by the character of the subject, the character of the object, and the relation between them"?[4] And suppose hope, like love, is also constituted by a set of various dispositions, attitudes, feelings, and desires that are at times accompanied by predictable actions?[5]

Walker says, "we look at our concept of 'hoping' as ascribing an emotional stance or 'affective attitude,' a recognizable syndrome that is characterized by certain desires and perceptions, but also by certain forms of attention, expression, feeling, and activity."[6] This is similar to Wollheim's psychoanalytic account of emotion as that which attitudinally orients us to the world. He describes the role of emotion as providing one "with an orientation… an attitude to the world. If belief maps the world, and desire targets it, emotion tints or colours it: it enlivens it or darkens it as the case may be."[7] For Wollheim,

> that emotion rides into our lives on the back of desire is a crucial fact about emotion, as well as a crucial fact about us. The colour with which emotion tints the world is something to be understood only through the origin of emotion in desire.[8]

Much the same can be said of hope. Hope too, "rides into our lives on the back of desire," and, like emotion, the way in which hope "tints the world" is to be understood "through the origin of [hope] in desire." If this is so, then the way hope functions in our lives — as with desire, emotion, and even love — must be both positive and negative.

This may strike some as strange. It is easy to be sentimental about hope — the "thing with feathers" — and to want an unproblematic conception of hope as

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4 Amélie Rorty, "The Historicity of Psychological Attitudes: Love Is Not Love Which Alters Not When It Alteration Finds". In *Mind in Action: Essays in the Philosophy of Mind* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1988), 121.

5 Walker, "Hope's Value", 44 describes hope as a "powerful and pervasive emotional attitude." But she then adds (2006:44) — referring to Day, "Hope": "Hope is a 'state of mind.' Is it an emotion or feeling, a state of belief, or a combination of belief and desire?" In any case, unlike Day, "Hope", her concern is less definitional and more about the nature and function ("efficacy") of hope: "I want to look at the nature, role, and value of hope in its elements of *futurity*, *desire, belief in possibility*, and, above all, its *efficacy*, hope's dynamic tendencies to move us in feeling, thinking, expression, and action toward what it seeks, sometimes in surprising and improbable ways… [hoping] is as basic to us as breathing…, and basic in the same way: it is something we must do to live a human life."

6 Walker, "Hope's Value", 48.

7 Richard Wollheim, *On the Emotions* (Yale Univ. Press, 1999), 15.

8 Wollheim, *On the Emotions*, 16.

a force for good, one clearly distinguishable from related psychological phenomena (i.e., wishful or magical thinking). In a sentimental mood, it might be tempting to agree with Kierkegaard who thought that, "if one hopes for something for which it is a shame to hope… one really does not hope."[9] For Kierkegaard, to call such things "hope" is a "misuse" of a "noble word."[10] Nonetheless it is a truism that we are often led astray by hoping. We counsel against "getting one's hopes up," and we criticise others (and ourselves if we are self-aware) for *vain* hopes, *idle* hopes, *false* and even *immoral* hopes. Yet for Kierkegaard and for others, the very idea of an immoral hope involves a confusion, for hope (as he hopes it to be) "is essentially and eternally related to the good."[11]

In "The Right to Hope" Tillich complained that "philosophers and theologians… devaluate hope by calling it wishful-thinking or utopian phantasy."[12] When applied to more recent treatments of hope by analytic philosophers the complaint is groundless. What is more common are analyses that shadow Tillich's and that are similar in spirit to Kierkegaard's. Their interest is not so much in exploring the nature of hope, but of trying to find ways of distinguishing "genuine hope" from "foolish hope"[13] — which, as it turns out, is not hope at all. Even Walker, who sets out in earnest to "look at the nature, role, and value of hope in its elements of *futurity, desire, belief in possibility,* and, above all, its *efficacy,*"[14] devotes pages of argument to a distinction between hope and wishful or magical thinking. Her purpose is to show that certain dangers others have identified in hope[15] are in fact not problems with *hope* at all. Properly conceived, these are dangers that attach to wishful and magical thinking. They are "not, so to speak, hope's problem."[16]

Is it unfair to call this sentimental? Seen in a different light, what Kierkegaard, Tillich, Walker and others share is not a blind spot, but rather the idea that hope is a normative concept. This is a point that Nicholas H. Smith makes explicit. In Smith's view, that the concept of hope "would contain a

9 Soren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* (Harper Collins, 2009), 244.
10 Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 244.
11 Ibid.
12 Paul Tillich, "The Right to Hope", *Neue Zeitschrift Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 7, no. 3 (1965): 371.
13 Tillich, "The Right to Hope", 373.
14 Walker, "Hope's Value", 44.
15 See Luc Bovens, "The Value of Hope", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 59, no. 3 (1999).
16 Walker, "Hope's Value", 53.

standard in relation to which the worth or significance of actual particular instances of hope could be assessed,"[17] is precisely what we should expect, and he sees it as the job of philosophers to spell out what this standard consists in. We have no quarrel with the project of articulating a normative conception of hope *per se*. If we are interested in the question of the value of hope, there is, in a sense, no important difference between, on the one hand, constructing a normative conception of hope, and on the other, defining hope in such a way that one must go on and distinguish "good" hopes from "bad" hopes.

But here's the rub. If we want to understand the nature and function of hope as it pertains to religion, we need to be able to take religious hopes at face value. That is, we need to be able to understand certain characteristically religious hopes as *hopes*, and this involves affirming that "bad" hopes are still hopes — something Smith and Walker seem to deny. Consider the following from Kierkegaard:

> A vindictive individual says sometimes that he hopes to God that vengeance will fall upon the hated one. But, in truth, this is not to hope, but to hate, and it is impudent to call this a hope; it is blasphemy to wish to make God an accomplice in hating.[18]

Kierkegaard is offering a theological view disguised as a definition. He is trying to say that vindictive hopes have no place in the life and character he recognises as "Christian," thereby imploring his reader not to hope vindictively. While in many cases there is only a rhetorical difference between saying "to hope for *that* is not hope" rather than "you should not hope for *that,*" what is crucial for present purposes is that hopes relating to beliefs about (divine) justice are an important part of many religions and that many of these beliefs are morally dubious.

To understand the relationship between hope and religion, we need to understand how religious beliefs can become the objects of hope. Often, it is our hopes and desires that shape our beliefs rather than vice-versa. As Walker says, "the ability to imagine and embody imagination seems profoundly intertwined in the human capacity to hope."[19] But she is mistaken in distancing embodied imagination from magical thinking. Isn't embodied imagination

17 Nicholas Smith, "From the Concept of Hope to the Principle of Hope", in *Hope after Hope*, ed. Rochelle Green and Janet Horrigan (Rodopi, 2010), 16.

18 Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 245.

19 Walker, "Hope's Value", 59.

a form of magical thinking? How could it be efficacious if it was not? As we see it, there is no clear line between magical thinking and embodied imagination in hoping, and so Walker's distinction between hope and wishful thinking is artificial rather than conceptual as she claims.[20] A great deal of hoping — actual cases of hoping — are indivisible, in the act, from wishful thinking — which is itself a form of magical thinking.

No essentialist account of hope in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions is going to be satisfactory. Such accounts are invariably prescriptive, and we see no need to decide upon a categorisation of hope as either an attitude, an emotion, an activity, or a disposition in some exclusive sense. Hope is all these things. For this reason, a Wittgensteinian "family resemblance" account would be a step in the right direction, though it hardly gets to the heart of the matter — that is, if we are wanting to explore how hope functions, and not merely when and where the word can be applied. Instead, we recognise that no single account will suffice. What is needed are accounts of the varieties of hope (much like the varieties of love), as well as of the many functions — positive and negative — hope plays in our lives. While stories help contextualise and illustrate the varieties and functions of hope, theorising (a variety of theories) about hope's role and nature is also needed.

III. HOPE AS VIRTUE

We have just noted that the concept of hope picks out a number of different things; that hope may accurately be thought of as a psychological attitude, an emotion, an activity, or disposition of character. McGeer has argued that this is not simply a consequence of "ordinary language looseness with the term," but rather, it is because hope is "a unifying and grounding force of human agency … a condition for the possibility of leading a human life."[21] As McGeer characterises it, hope involves the "imaginative representation of future possibilities,"[22] and it is easy to see why such a process might be thought of as essential to effective practical reasoning. It is through the activity of hoping

20 Walker, "Hope's Value", 53.

21 Victoria McGeer, "The Art of Good Hope", *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 592, no. 1 (2004): 101–2.

22 McGeer, "The Art of Good Hope", 105. Cf. Bovens on "mental imaging." Bovens, "The Value of Hope", 674.

that we set goals for our future, explore the options for their achievement, and muster the willpower to pursue them. To the extent that this is so, hope is necessary, as we have said, for living even minimally well.

Just as important however, is the experience of hope in situations where we understand our own agency as being limited in regard to the fulfilment of some desired future good. As McGeer observes,

> hope signifies our recognition that what we desire is beyond our current (or sole) capacity to bring about — and in the limiting case, it is beyond our capacity *tout court*: We hope for something that could not be in any way affected by our efforts to bring it about.[23]

It might be thought that this observation undermines the connection between hope and agency just asserted, or, at least, reduces its significance. However, as Bovens notes, even in the limiting case where our own efforts can have no effect in bringing about whatever it is that we are hoping for, hope maintains an "aura of agency."[24] This is insightful, and it need not be understood — as Bovens himself tries to explain it — in terms of a "mistaken generalisation" about hope *as such* from those situations where it may be true that "hoping makes things so — or, at least, helps make things so."[25] Bovens thinks that much like prayer, hope "builds on an illusion of causal agency,"[26] where we imagine that merely by hoping we are having some causal effect on the way things turn out.[27] Contrary to Bovens, McGeer argues that,

> hoping is … a way of actively confronting, exploring, and sometimes patiently biding our limitations as agents, rather than crumbling in the face of their reality. Thus, hope in the limit case is still about taking an agential interest in the future and in the opportunities it may afford. It is about saying the following: although there may be nothing we can do now to bring about what we desire, our energy is still oriented toward the future, limitations notwithstanding.[28]

The scope of these remarks ought to have been restricted to something like "hoping-well", and not allowed to range over hoping *as such*. It is just as likely

23 McGeer, "The Art of Good Hope", 103.
24 Bovens, "The Value of Hope", 679.
25 Ibid., 680.
26 Ibid., 679.
27 Compare the "thoughts and prayers" routinely offered in response to gun violence in America in place of real action in legislating gun control.
28 McGeer, "The Art of Good Hope", 103.

that the "imaginative representation of future possibilities" which McGeer takes to be constitutive of hope may lead to the ignoring or downplaying of agential limitations, or conversely, a "crumbling in the face of their reality." Though McGeer does assert that "hoping is essentially a way of positively and expansively inhabiting our agency, whether in thought or in deed,"[29] that comment, and those quoted above, suggest a sanitised normative conception of hope that conflicts with the main thrust of her argument — that hoping well is an art. More than most, McGeer is alert to the liabilities of hope in excess, and she does not conceive of them, as Kierkegaard does, as "misuses" of a "noble word." McGeer acknowledges that too much hope can lead to "increased vulnerability or despair"; that it can compromise "one's ability to think about … one's situation or one's own capacities realistically"; that it often supports "self- and other deception"; and she points out that through hoping, "one may become so fixated on the hoped-for end that one may cease to think sensibly or morally about the means one employs to achieve it."[30] In this way, along with the very real possibility of hoping for morally repugnant things, the list of vices associated with hope must also include the unreflective catering to both unworthy and worthy desires.

Vices of hope notwithstanding, it is still possible to regard hope as a virtue. There is no need to adopt the Socratic view that virtues can never be misused. Hope is a virtue not only because of the essential and constitutive role that it plays in the lives of agents (all of us) who must live with an eye toward (and a plan for) the future, but because of the orientation and the colour with which it "tints the world." Adam Kadlac has argued that hopefulness as a general quality of character should be understood in terms of the nurturing of "a specific hope, namely, the hope that the future will be good."[31] In a slightly different way than Kadlac explicitly intends, this remark can be taken to mean that insofar as hope is a virtue, it is a disposition involving the cultivation and maintenance of hope that the future will be good.

This is not to say that hope as a virtue involves a belief that the future will be good. That would be to confuse hope with optimism, and to deny the obvious truth that hope is — thankfully — quite compatible with pessimism.

29 Ibid., 104.

30 Ibid., 102.

31 Adam Kadlac, "Hope(s) and Hopefulness", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2017): 209.

One can be altogether convinced that things will turn out poorly and yet remain resolutely hopeful for the future. Indeed, this is one of hope's greatest strengths, and for the hopeful person it is made manifest in every area of life. From mundane events and everyday challenges, through to the extremes of tragedy, in its steady anticipation of a future that is good, hope enables us to make the best of bad situations. Like other virtues hope forms and moderates our characters, thoughts, actions, feelings and emotions. We hope that the weather will be fine on the day of a celebration, and when things turn out otherwise we think nothing of it and enjoy ourselves regardless. We hope that the workday won't be swamped by unforeseen difficulties, and, when it is, we rise to the challenge. The terminal cancer patient may be full of hope for recovery or a cure, but when it becomes clear that illness will have its way, rather than clinging to false hopes, her focus shifts to the task of meeting death with courage.[32] McGeer articulates this general point with clarity. Hope need not degenerate into a "rosy-hued delusion" that "makes the impossible seem possible, and the possible seem more desirable than it often really is."[33] Rather,

> it is characteristic of those who hope well to resolutely shift their target of hope when the world proves adamantine with respect to some hoped-for end. Under particularly difficult circumstances, when choices of ends are highly restricted, this may even involve shifting the focus of our hopeful energy onto the manner with which things are done.[34]

As regards religion, we can see this aspect of hope at play in attempts to deal with the problem of evil and suffering. Geertz writes that, "as a religious problem, the problem of suffering is, paradoxically, not how to avoid suffering but how to suffer, how to make of physical pain, personal loss, worldly defeat, or the helpless contemplation of others' agony something bearable, supportable — something, as we say, sufferable."[35] What we have in mind is not the kind of response that takes the form, as in theodicy, of a speculative justification of God's goodness in the face of evil. Responses to the religious dimension of the problem have much more to do with "action and the catharsis of

32 The example is McGeer's.

33 McGeer, "The Art of Good Hope", 110.

34 Ibid., 109.

35 Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System". In *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1971), 104.

feelings and emotions,"[36] and so, much more to do with hope. Even though belief in some theodicy is the object of much of the hope associated with religion, strictly speaking, those who affirm a theodicy have no need to rely on hope. Their psychological state is much closer to optimism. For others who are less impressed by the logical possibility of a given justification, theodicy appears to deal with the problem of evil only by explaining it away, and taking refuge in a "transcendental illusion."[37]

IV. HOPE'S OTHER FACE

Although theories concerning the function of hope in one aspect of our lives may overlap with its function in other areas, no reductive (prescribed) theory is likely to suffice. Thus, even for religion, it is unlikely that a comprehensive account of the varieties of hope and its functions can be given. Nevertheless, what we intend to do here is to give an account of what we take to be the central roles that hope plays in religion — so much so that, in part, hope functionally explains religion. To do this, we need to first give an account of what we take religion to be. The accounts we adopt are those of anthropologist Clifford Geertz,[38] and a recent psychoanalytic account by Tamas Pataki.[39] Either account can be seen as essentialist and reductive, but they need not be. And while we regard these accounts as insightful, we do not regard them as exhaustive. In doing so we think we are in line with Geertz's and Pataki's own thinking.

Both Geertz and Pataki see the function of religion in terms of its capacity to satisfy deep psychological needs. For Geertz, following Weber, this is largely framed in terms of the Problem of Meaning. On Geertz' account, our very "creatural viability" depends upon the capacity of our "symbols and symbol systems" to cope with "bafflement, suffering, and [the] sense of intractable ethical paradox."[40] Pataki instead emphasises the needs of desires and phantasies — those that, in the interest of ego-protection, serve to appease, at least

36 Paul Riceour, "Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53, no. 4 (1985): 644.

37 Riceour, "Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology", 642.

38 See Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" in *The Interpretation of Cultures*.

39 See Tamas Pataki, *Wish-fulfilment in Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 2014); Tamas Pataki, *Against God* (Scribe Books, 2007).

40 Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 99-100.

temporarily, fundamental needs and wishes generated by narcissism, envy and guilt. Both accounts support the view that religion is a self-solicitous response not only to how we would like the world to be, but also to what we need it to be. Rather than our emotions and desires being determined by what we believe, as noted earlier, it is often the case that beliefs about ultimate reality (including religious beliefs) are determined by wishes, desires, phantasies and emotion.

From Geertz, we extrapolate an account of the role that hope plays in mediating "worldview" and "ethos". As a "dynamic force," capable of "recharging or rearranging our larger picture of what we desire, including the nested goals and goods that make it up,"[41] the way hope functions in religion is in part to align our conceptions of reality with our attitudes toward life and how we live in view of these. As such, hope helps us cope, as we must, with "chaos" (meaninglessness). But on Pataki's psychoanalytic account, as with Freud's, hope's rootedness in our orectic/ self-protective natures implies that the impact of hope in religion is largely negative and predominantly serves our darker side. In thinking about hope it is important that this side of hope be acknowledged. One misses half of what is important about hope and of what it is to understand hope if one minimises its negative aspects.

IV.1 Clifford Geertz on religion: Hope's mediation between belief and ethos

Geertz defines religion as "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and longlasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."[42] For Geertz, religious symbols function so as to,

> ... synthesize a people's ethos — the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood — and their world view — the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive idea of order. In religious belief and practice a group's ethos is rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the world view describes, while the world

41 Walker, "Hope's Value", 51.

42 Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 90. We note that Geertz's use of the term 'man' is an unfortunate anachronism and wish to register that our preference is for a more inclusive expression such as 'humankind.' Nonetheless, here, and in subsequent passages where reference is made to 'mankind,' we ask the reader to bear in mind that we are directly quoting Geertz.

> view is rendered emotionally convincing by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly wellarranged to accommodate such a way of life. This confrontation and mutual confirmation has two fundamental effects. On the one hand, it objectivizes moral and aesthetic preferences, by depicting them as the imposed conditions of life implicit in a world with a particular structure ... On the other, it supports these received beliefs about the world's body by invoking deeply felt moral and aesthetic sentiments as experiential evidence for their truth…[43]

Though the role that religion once had of explaining and controlling nature may have been relinquished to science by modern religion, for Geertz, this role is just part of the function, more broadly construed, that religion and culture necessarily retain even in the modern world. The distinction between traditional and modern religion should not obscure the fact that religion retains the same basic functions it always had; that of enabling people to cope with anomie by establishing a sense of order. Geertz observes that, "bafflement, suffering, and a sense of intractable ethical paradox are all, if they become intense enough or are sustained long enough, radical challenges to the proposition that life is comprehensible and that we can, by taking thought, orient ourselves effectively within it."[44] In the face of these challenges, religion creates meaning and maintains a sense of order through an alignment of cognitive beliefs about the nature of things (a "worldview") with affective attitudes towards them (an "ethos"). Geertz's key insight is that these two elements are dynamically interactive. What a particular cultural system (i.e. religion) sees as morally right and wrong reflects — and in turn sustains — the way in which the nature of ultimate reality is understood (i.e. how things really are).

Geertz's account is focused on the nature and function of religion, but, with some extrapolation, an account of hope's role in religion can be inferred. Where Geertz sees religion as concerned with various threats to "our powers of conception,"[45] in part, "hope" addresses such threats by wishfully and imaginatively allowing us to cope with, if not disarm them. Each of us has a deep need

43 Ibid., 89–90. The similarities between Geertz's anthropological view of religion and Peter Berger's sociological account are significant. In Berger's account "humanly constructed *nomoi* are given a cosmic status" which promotes the legitimation of social institutions and "world-maintenance.", Peter L. Berger, *Sacred canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Doubleday, 1990), 36.

44 Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 100.

45 Ibid., 99.

to be right about our worldview and ethos, because we need the order, meaning and direction that comes with the feeling we (and the world) are right. Hope services this need. We hope our beliefs about the nature of things to be true because we have a need to believe and feel that they are. Thus, we see hope at work in religion through the dynamic interaction of worldview and ethos.

The role we are attributing to hope is revealed through Geertz' account of ritual:

> In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world ... any religious ritual ... involves this symbolic fusion of ethos and world view… religious performances ... for participants ... are ... not only models of what they believe, but also models for the believing of it. In these plastic dramas men attain their faith as they portray it.[46]

Religious hope, and much non-religious hope, is expressed by means of such religious symbols; and hope employs, manipulates and is manipulated by them.

Geertz's account also goes a long way toward explaining why religion is arguably universal in terms of its function. In contrast to many contemporary accounts of religion, Geertz's account does not require a belief in a God or Gods because such belief is not essential to its function. To be sure, Geertz does explicitly distinguish the religious perspective (a perspective being that "in terms of which men construe the world"[47]) from scientific and aesthetic perspectives.[48] Nonetheless, it seems that religion, as Geertz defines it, subsumes the rest. Scientific, aesthetic or indeed any other kind of perspective presupposes both a world-view and symbiotic ethos. If this is so, Geertz's account also implies that religion is universal.[49] Everyone — atheist, theist, scientist, Marxist,

46 Ibid., 112–14.

47 Ibid., 111.

48 "… to speak of the 'religious perspective' is, by implication, to speak of one perspective among others. A perspective is a mode of seeing, in that extended sense of 'see' in which it means 'discern,' 'apprehend,' 'understand,' or 'grasp.' It is a particular way of looking at life, a particular manner of construing the world, as when we speak of an historical perspective, a scientific perspective, an aesthetic perspective, a commonsense perspective, or even the bizarre perspective embodied in dreams and in hallucinations." ibid., 110.

49 Ibid., 109, n. 33 denies that religion is universal: "The oft-heard generalization that religion is a human universal embodies a confusion between the probably true… proposition that there is no human society in which cultural patterns that we can… call religious are totally lacking, and the surely untrue proposition that all men in all societies are, in any meaningful sense of the term, religious."

whatever — must (though not explicitly) "formulate conceptions of the general order of existence" and address the problem of "meaning." They must do so by means of a cultural system to which symbolisation is essential. Worldviews are strategies for interpreting and controlling the world that enable people to believe and feel they are living in accord with reality. In Geertz's terms this makes everyone "religious." In the context of his theory, this is not a trivialisation of the term "religious," but its most important sense. It explains the need for, and universality, of hope and its function; that we are getting things right — understanding the world, and living and feeling more or less as we should. This is as true of the miscreant as it is of the saint and intellectual.

IV.2 Tamas Pataki: Religion and the orectic

As Geertz describes it, religion is necessary to humans, to culture, and so too are the beliefs, hopes and desires at its core. But Geertz's account seems neutral with respect to the question of whether such desires are good or bad. They can after all be necessary — even in the service of a necessary wish-fulfilling illusion — and still unfortunate.[50] Pataki takes a different view. Sure, there are many good actions (and people) attributable to and bound up with religion. Overall however, religion manifests much of the negative aspects of our wish-fulfilling, phantasising orectic natures.

It may seem odd to call religion a prejudice; nevertheless, religion functions in ways that make it analogous to prejudice. This is not an attempt to define religion, but a claim about the fundamental character of religious (particularly "religiose" — see below) conviction. The needs that religion responds to are identical or similar to those that other prejudices temporarily assuage. Religious conviction functions as a kind of ego defence, at the heart of which is an attempt to recover the narcissistic ease of early childhood in symbolic form. But unlike other prejudices, because religion feigns to regard itself as socially respectable — and is generally taken to be so — it is able to mask certain reprehensible attitudes and behaviours that may be more difficult for other prejudices to sustain.[51]

50 Freud sees religion as a detrimental illusion, but not a necessary one. He thinks it can and should be replaced by science. See Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (W.W. Norton and Company, 1961).

51 See Damian Cox, Michael Levine, and Saul Newman, *Politics Most Unusual* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009), 24–42; Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *The Anatomy of Prejudices* (Harvard

Religious conviction is reinforced and legitimated at the levels of discourse, practice, community and institution. It manages this through every means at its disposal: self-deception, mendaciousness, hypocrisy, manipulation, force and others. But of course, not all religious people are violent, and religion does not always function in prejudicial or immoral ways. For some people, religion may be an overall positive feature of their lives. To make sense of this, Pataki distinguishes between what he terms the religious and the religiose: "between those for whom religion can be conceived, approximately, as a matter of opinion or belief; and those for whom it is a powerful expression of conviction and character."[52]

> The religiose are people for whom the relationship with God … and with their religion is an intense and deep engagement. Their belief is tenacious, rooted deeply in the personality, and influences remote aspects of their lives. The religion of the religiose is driven by intense need articulated in rigid unconscious phantasies and dispositions, and this explains why their religious attitudes are, as a rule, mirrored in other attitudes — to politics, nationalism, gender issues, and so on.[53]

On a psychoanalytic account, the most prominent needs that religion phantastically satisfies are those generated by narcissism, envy and guilt. The psychoanalytic idea of narcissism is of a "self-reflexive libidinal relation" that serves to satisfy needs and protect one's fragile ego. It often does so by means of phantastic representation and the construction of prejudices. Such needs are present to a degree in all people, but they are prominent in the religiose, and religion finds special ways of satisfying them. As with other prejudices, the modes of satisfaction the religiose obtain are attuned to their character types and individualized in respect to each person's psychic history and constitution. The religiose may think they believe what they do on the basis of reason, experience and evidence, but on a psychoanalytic account of religious conviction they do not.

Pataki sees a close connection between the religiose and fundamentalism — which refers, in his usage, to the ideological or belief component of religion. Religious fundamentalisms tend to be assertive, are often violent, and are fiercely controlling with regard to the expression of religious conviction and

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Univ. Press, 1996); Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2006); Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford Univ. Press., 1997); Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*.

52 Pataki, *Against God*, 15.

53 Ibid., 34–35.

group membership. Fundamentalists are characterized by dogmatic assertion of God's law (to which their group has special access) over secular law. As a rule, fundamentalists find it very difficult to accept something like the principle of secular reason, according to which public debate must be wholly carried out through the exchange of a common currency of non-religious reasons.[54] To the fundamentalist, the principle of secular reason appears, rightly, to be a flat denial of (their) God's sovereignty. With their penchant for Manichean world views (we are good and the "other" is evil), their suppression of sexuality (particularly female sexuality) and their revelling in the ersatz superiority conferred by the membership of an elected or a chosen lot, fundamentalists are the most dangerous and destructive part of religion. But there would be no fundamentalists without the religiose; and it is the psychological vulnerability of our species to religiose character formations that is of concern here.

Religion caters to the intense unconscious hopes, needs and desires of people for self-esteem, superiority, belonging, relief from guilt, envy and shame. If this is so, it suggests that the quest for ecumenicalism, tolerance or the acceptance of religious pluralism is far more difficult than is often realized. But it also shows that Freud's hope, in *The Future of an Illusion,* that one day people would psychically outgrow the need for the satisfactions that religion delivers is itself illusory — driven by wish fulfilment and accompanied by hopes. In the case of both the religious and the religiose, elements of narcissism and envy, rather than logic and argument, tend to generate beliefs. No doubt many see religion as one of the most valuable and profound aspects of humankind. But on psychoanalytic accounts of religious conviction, such as Pataki's, this too is explicable. The idealizing of religious leaders involves projective and/or introjective narcissistic identification. Those kind priests in the Hollywood movies of the forties are motivated by narcissism and a need to feel superior, as are we who identify with them and love them to pieces. So too, with the kind old learned or imperious rabbis or imams. What we perceive are our own projections.

Once religion is seen as a prejudice rooted in narcissism, envy and a compelling need to feel special, the connection between religion and violence (and hope) is easier to explain. Religion's connection to violence can be as direct as that of any of the other prejudices. Motivationally speaking, hatred of what is

54 On the principle of secular reason, see Robert Audi, *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason* (CUP, 2000).

alien is only part of this. As Pataki puts it, "Religion becomes especially dangerous and violent because of its deep roots in narcissism and omnipotence, in the frustrations and rage of relinquishing narcissism, and in the distorted and uncompromising internalized object-relationships in which these things are consolidated."[55] In an effort to re-establish satisfying relationships with objects symbolically representative of important early relations (usually one's parents), violence is not only seen as unproblematic, it may also come to seem necessary.

One crucial way of restraining the religiose which is essential to democracy in a pluralistic society is the upholding of a principle of separation of church and state. Pataki explains the motives, predominantly fear, behind the refusal among the religiose to adhere to so sensible and necessary a principle:

> For all their front and bellicosity, the narcissistic states we are considering are, at bottom, frangible, precarious, and fearful. They are essentially states of withdrawal in which goodness is phantastically assigned to the self and the group with which it is identified, and most badness to the others. For this reason, amongst others, those of the religiose in whom narcissistic trends predominate are driven by fear: fear of autonomy and fear of other people. The only acceptable political organization in this circumstance is one governed by subjection to the authority of God, and under law proclaimed by God ... the idea of being ruled by divine law excludes the possibility of being ruled by other people; the religiose fear others because unconsciously they expect retribution for the effects of their own unconscious aggression, envy, and devaluation of others.[56]

In practice, the attack on the separation clause of the US constitution seeks to legally enforce what the religiose take to be moral, even though they do not agree among themselves about what is moral. They insist that everyone must live, legally and morally, as they do — in accordance with their divine scriptural injunctions. They collapse any distinction between the legal and moral, insisting on a theocentric account of both ethics and law. We must do as their God tells them to do. For the religiose, politics is a "plastic drama" that presents an opportunity for the ritual enactment of hope's mediation between worldview and ethos through the reshaping of institutions.

If the account of religion sketched here is right, then it is not just the violence associated with terrorism and war that is sourced from religion, but so too much of what has come to be termed institutionalized violence associated with our so-

55 Pataki, *Against God*, 82.
56 Ibid., 57.

cial and political fabric. Religion is not a source only of what is good or just or valuable, nor are the overall effects of religion predominantly good. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that per impossible, were religion to be eliminated, all would be socially, personally and politically well. There is every reason to believe that were religion not an obstacle to self-understanding and peace, various other psychological constructs and prejudices would rush to fill their place.

Where does "hope" stand — what is its role, given the account of religion, and its broader account of human nature sketched here? There is much to say. First and foremost, the account suggests that hope in relation to religion — where hope is understood in varying degrees as an amalgam of desire, wishful thinking, belief, envy, affect, emotion and phantasy — is fundamentally about self-solicitation. Hope services one's psychic needs. These are rooted in infantile phantasy and result from, among other things, forms of ego-protection related to prejudice and narcissism; needs to feel special, chosen and better than and separate from certain other individuals and groups as one conceives them. Religion's very nature is to be divisive and without being so it could not effectively function as it does and as we need it to do.

Unsurprisingly, on Pataki's account much of what is true about hope with regard to religion is also true about hope generally. Hope is at least very often (if not more) about self-solicitation and ego-protection, and self-solicitiousness (a form of preservation) and ego-protection are ubiquitous. It is part of who we are and could not be any other way given our natures. Being self-solicitous is just an aspect of our orectic selves. It is not a negative or demeaning view of who we are. It is simply who we are. Nevertheless, it is in religion, more than in quotidian life, that the darker side of Janus-faced hope makes an appearance. But even if one rejects this, to accept the idea that hope is virtually always positive is to submit to a naïve account of what it means to hope. And the positive — even wonderful — things about hope and its functions are not well served if they fail to take into account hope's other face. We think that even Kierkegaard would agree with this much. Though we earlier painted him as an exemplar of a sentimental naivety about hope, Kierkegaard is an author with many faces. We conclude with a passage published under one of his pseudonyms that expresses the same ambivalence about hope we have tried to articulate throughout this essay:

> It is indeed beautiful to see a person put out to sea with the fair wind of hope; one may utilize the chance to let oneself be towed along, but one ought never have it on board one's craft, least of all as pilot, for it is an untrustworthy shipmaster.

> For this reason, too, hope was one of Prometheus's dubious gifts; instead of giving human beings the foreknowledge of the immortals, he gave them hope.[57]

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57 Soren Kierkegaard, "Either / Or, A Fragment of Life, I". In *The Essential Kierkegaard*, ed. Hong, Howard V., Hong, Edna H. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), 56.

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