

The Theological Virtue of Hope as a Social Virtue

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Abstract: Analyses of the theological virtue of hope tend to focus on its interior dispositional structure, shifting attention away from the social dimensions crucial to its formation and exercise. We argue that one can better appreciate the place of hope in Christian thought by attending to communal features that have been peripheral to or excluded from traditional analyses. To this end, we employ resources from the literature on the extended mind and group agency to develop an account of the theological virtue of hope as a socially extended virtue—that is, a virtue scaffolded by and enacted within a community whose practices are ordered toward a shared conception of human flourishing.

I. Introduction

Contemporary analytic philosophers have, until recently, largely neglected questions concerning the nature and value of hope.¹ Discussions of hope within the Christian tradition, however, have not suffered the same neglect.² Hope occupies a central place in Christian thought; along with faith and charity, it is one of the theological virtues. And as a theological virtue, hope is crucial to a person's anticipation of and striving

¹ Discussion of hope within contemporary analytic philosophy often begins with what has come to be known as the "Orthodox" or "Standard View" of hope (see Day 1969 for an articulation of this view). On this view, to say that *S* hopes that *p* is to say that *S* desires *p* and believes that *p* is possible. So, when I hope that I can save up enough money for a comfortable retirement, I desire this outcome and I think that it could occur. But I'm aware that the outcome is neither guaranteed nor impossible. For all I know, it is possible and its realization would satisfy my desires. This is a capacious account intended to cover superficial hopes for favorable weather as well as substantive hopes for effective treatments for an aggressive form of cancer. Many contemporary philosophers have been critical of this approach. They seek to show what must be added to desire and belief to provide an adequate characterization of hope. See, in particular, Bovens 1999; Martin 2008, 2011, 2014; McGeer 2004, 2008; Meirav 2008, 2009; Pettit 2004; and Walker 2006. For other recent works on hope, see Govier 2011; Gravlee 2000; Kadlac 2015; Lear 2008; Shade 2001; Snow 2013; van Hooft 2011; and Webb 2007.

² For recent treatments, see Cessario 2002; Cobb 2016, 2017; DeYoung 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Doyle 2010; Mattison 2012; Pinches 2014; Pope Benedict XVI 2008; Roberts 2007, and Walls 2012.

toward her ultimate fulfillment in union with God. The Christian life can be characterized as a pilgrimage and hope as a virtue of the wayfarer who yearns for the coming of the kingdom of God.³

But analyses of the theological virtue of hope tend to focus on its interior dispositional structure, shifting attention away from the social dimensions crucial to its formation and exercise. In this essay, we question this narrow focus. We ask about the social conditions crucial to the cultivation and exercise of hope. In particular, we consider how communities mediate and scaffold an individual's hopes. We maintain that one can better appreciate the place of hope in Christian thought by attending to communal features that have been peripheral to or excluded from traditional analyses. To this end, we develop an account of the theological virtue of hope as a socially extended virtue—that is, a virtue scaffolded by and enacted within a community whose practices are ordered toward a shared conception of human flourishing.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In section two, we offer a rationale for developing a social model of the theological virtue of hope. In section three, we use the literature on the extended mind and on group agency to establish a framework in terms of which we can articulate our model of hope as *socially* extended. In section four, we articulate our socially extended model of theological hope, highlighting the crucial function of Christian communities in the development and exercise of hope in a person's life. Finally, in section five, we conclude by addressing some concerns one may have for our analysis.

II. The Social Dimensions of Hope — Extending the Traditional Analysis

Christians have traditionally distinguished between natural hope and hope as a theological virtue. In the classical and scholastic tradition, natural hope is a passion, an affective orientation to perceived goods one takes to be impeded by various obstacles. It aims at finite goods the person construes as possible but difficult to attain. As a passion, natural hope is neither virtuous nor vicious.⁴

The theological virtue of hope, on the other hand, is an infused virtue that disposes a person to entrust herself to God to bring her into union with Him both now and in the fullness of time. We may consider the differences between natural hope and the theological virtue of hope by considering one traditional analysis of the

³ See Pieper 1986 and Schumacher 2003 for the language of hope as a virtue of the wayfarer.

⁴ One need not accept the classical and scholastic view that natural hope is not a virtue. One may develop a Christian account of natural hope as a kind of virtue distinct from the theological virtue of hope. Construed as a passion, natural hope can move a person toward finite goods impetuously or immoderately. And if it is unrestrained, the passion of hope may cause the agent to engage in costly and irrational activities aimed at securing these goods. For this reason, St. Thomas Aquinas argues that natural hope needs the virtue of humility to curb hope's naturally impetuous drive. One might, however, think that the process of moral formation may shape and direct natural hopes such that they are well-formed and properly-tuned to important goods without thereby qualifying as the theological virtue of hope.

theological virtue of hope. St Thomas Aquinas argues that the theological virtue of hope differs from natural hope in its (i) object, (ii) cause, (iii) dispositional seat, and (iv) relational aim. Consider each in turn. First, unlike natural hopes for finite goods whose realization cannot bring ultimate satisfaction, the object of the theological virtue of hope is an infinite good the full possession of which is the ultimate end of human striving. Second, the theological virtue of hope is an infused virtue—a gift of God that must be received. This distinguishes it from both an affective response and an acquired virtue the agent cultivates through habituation or instruction. Third, as a virtue, it is a disposition more deeply rooted in the individual's will than her emotions, though one can expect it to influence the emotions one has. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly for our purposes, it is a disposition essentially oriented toward a relational good: friendship with God. In contrast, natural hope may or may not focus on relational goods. Natural hopes often take relationships as their focal concern; the theological virtue of hope, on the other hand, aims essentially at a relational union.⁵

This last point about the relationality of hope, though, does not shed adequate light on the social environment essential to the possession and exercise of either natural hope or the theological virtue of hope. In this section, we seek to highlight the dynamic interaction between individual and community that gives rise to these distinct forms of hope. First, we appeal to the developmental pathways by which we cultivate the capacity for natural hope. Second, we consider implicit but underemphasized social dimensions of traditional analyses of the theological virtue of hope. Reflecting on these sources enables us to appreciate the ways individual hope is embedded within a range of social dependencies. And it forms a backdrop against which it will be easier to see how hope can be socially enacted.

Consider, first, Victoria McGeer's (2004, 2008) developmental analysis of how human relationships foster hopeful dispositions. McGeer focuses on the role of what one might call parental scaffolding in early childhood development. Engaging in imitative behaviors, infants begin to develop a sense of their own agency by

⁵ Given these differences between natural hope and the theological virtue of hope, one might suppose that natural hope and the theological virtue are developmentally and functionally orthogonal to one another. We are not committed to this view and we do not think that a Thomistic analysis requires such a view. Even if one accepts the classical and traditional view that natural hope is not a virtue, there are important connections between well-formed natural hopes and the theological virtue of hope. Although some natural hopes may be contrary to one's ultimate good, there are natural hopes that are aligned with the object of the theological virtue of hope. And the theological virtue of hope can transform, deepen, and energize one's hopes for those finite goods that are aligned with the ultimate good. Finally, the developmental processes by which one cultivates a capacity to depend upon others in the pursuit of natural hopes may strengthen one's dispositional capacity to depend upon God—a capacity crucial to the exercise of theological hope. Or, to put this point negatively, if one fails to cultivate the kinds of dispositional capacity to depend upon others in the pursuit of natural hopes, one may fail to cultivate a dispositional capacity to depend upon God for the provision of one's ultimate good. In short, if one takes God and Goodness to have an intimate relationship (and on Thomistic metaphysics the relationship is identity), then one might think that growth in natural hope would, at least in an implicit, *de re* sense, bring one closer to hope in God. Likewise, placing one's hope in God should have a downstream effect that enfolds one's natural hoping within a broader, transforming context. For further discussion of these connections, see Cobb 2017 and Mattison 2012.

interacting with adults who support their maturation by a kind of “hopeful pretence” (2004, 106). When a parent interprets her child’s non-descript vocalizations (e.g., “mama, mama”) as a form of meaningful address (e.g., “Are you calling for mommy?”), she treats her child as if the child is engaged in self-directed activities—activities she knows outstrip the child’s current cognitive capacities. McGeer concludes, “to keep the activity going, parents themselves must reenact the infant’s role by reading meaning and purpose into what the infant does, often repeating these interpretations back to the infant in an exaggerated fashion and inviting the infant’s imitative response” (2004, 106). This process underpins a person’s ability to develop an understanding of herself as an agent.⁶

As children engage in more complicated forms of agency, they rely on caregivers for a sense of how they should understand their powers and limitations. Children confront obstacles to agency early in life, but they learn to navigate these limitations through the on-going scaffolding of caregivers. Caregivers help to model for children how to deal with progressively more difficult and demanding tasks by “communicating, in both word and deeds, a hopeful vision of what their children can be or do” (2008, 249). Thus, individuals become hopeful persons by internalizing this social scaffolding.

The transition from parental scaffolding to mature hopeful agency is not simply a move from dependence to independence; rather, it is often a move from dependence to interdependence.⁷ One of the things caregivers model, after all, is when it is appropriate to trust or place hope in other people. Learning to hope well involves an appreciation of the ways in which our hopes depend upon others. And the best way to encourage hopeful agency is often to engage with others in ways that involve mutual investment in our individual hopes. McGeer writes,

Hoping well thus involves cultivating a meta-disposition in which some of one’s hopeful energy becomes directed toward supporting the hopeful agency of others and, hence, toward creating the kind of environment in which one’s own hopeful energy is supplemented by the hopeful energy renewed in them. (McGeer 2004, 123)

This insight draws attention to the kinds of communities that are most conducive to the thriving of hope. Caring for the hopes and the hopeful agency of others is fundamentally about creating an ethos in which the person can develop a clear view of the range of possibilities open to her. But more than this, it is about creating a community in which the process by which the person comes to understand her own agency is simultaneously an environment in which she feels the care of others who value her and her hopes. In a community like this, mutual care can become a basis for the cultivation and pursuit of hope.

If this analysis is correct, then the individual capacity for natural hope is dependent upon social scaffolding for its growth if not its mature exercise. A

⁶ This emphasis on the way that a parent in interacting with a child provides it important developmental tools has a long history in developmental psychology. Indeed, it is one of the main themes in the work of Lev Vygotsky the co-founder of experimental psychology (cf. Vygotsky 1978).

⁷ Cf. chapter 3 of Green 2016.

community that fosters well-tuned hopes is a community that helps to cultivate proper dispositions toward one's agency as well as dispositions of care and concern for the hopeful agency of others. Social scaffolding is crucial both to the development of the initial capacity for hope as well as its on-going exercise. Understanding natural hope requires attending to the relationships that enable one to exercise mature hopeful agency.

The preceding discussion underscores the social dependence crucial to the development of a capacity for natural hope. By itself, this could ground a model of natural hope as social in important respects. But given the traditional distinction between natural and theological hope, it is helpful to offer additional evidence that can justify the development of a social model of theological hope. Thankfully, there are elements of the traditional analysis that give us good reason to construct such a model.

First, as we have already noted, theological hope is a hope for a relational union with God. The good one seeks is the good of friendship with God. Second, friendship with God implies a love for all whom God loves. One cannot make sense of sharing in the life of God while being indifferent to what God cares about. Hope for union with God is, by extension, a hope for relational union with those whom God loves, those whom God intends to participate in this common life. Christian hope is not merely a hope for individual beatific vision; it is a hope for the full realization of the kingdom of God. St. Augustine describes the life of the city of God as a "social life" which consists in "a perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God and of one another in God" (*City of God*, XIX).⁸ Dante's vision of the mystic rose in his *Paradiso* provides us a picture of Heaven in which one's vision of the beatitude of others in Heaven is an essential part of one's own bliss (cf. *Paradiso*, XXXI). And although friendship with other humans may not be definitive of eternal happiness for Aquinas, St. Thomas maintains that "the fellowship of friends conduces to the well-being of Happiness" (*Summa Theologica* I.II.4.8). And elsewhere Thomas writes, "The end of every rational creature is to arrive at beatitude, and this cannot be save in the kingdom of God. And this, in turn, is nothing but the ordered society of those who enjoy the divine vision, in which true beatitude consists" (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4.50).

Third, there is a connection between hope and love such that loving one's neighbor implies that one will have hopes on behalf of one's neighbor. Again, Thomas writes,

...if we presuppose the union of love with another, a man can hope for and desire something for another man, as for himself; and, accordingly, he can hope for another's eternal life, inasmuch as he is united to him by love, and just as it is the same virtue of charity whereby a man loves God, himself, and his neighbor, so too it is the same virtue of hope, whereby a man hopes for himself and for another (Aquinas 1948, 1238).

⁸ For further discussion of the social dimensions of Christian eschatology, see Volf 2000.

And in *Disputed Questions on Virtue*, Thomas observes that “one may hope for other people to possess [blessedness] insofar as they are in some way united with one, and one desires and hopes for their good as one’s own” (2005, 236). Thus, love for others involves construing the ultimate good of others as a constituent of one’s own flourishing. There is a fusion between one’s private hopes and one’s hopes for others that is made possible by love.⁹

There is even a hint that this social dimension to our hopes can lead to hope being enacted in a different manner than it otherwise would be.

...when a man hopes to obtain something by his own power, he is not said to wait for it, but simply to hope for it. But, properly speaking, he is said to await that which he hopes to get by another’s help as though to await implied keeping one’s eyes on another, in so far as the apprehensive power, by going ahead, not only keeps its eye on the good which man intends to get, but also on the thing by whose power he hopes to get it. (*Summa Theologica*, I.II.40.2)

It is worth noting that there may also be interaction between our capacity for natural hope and the theological virtue of hope. There is some plausibility to the thought that training in social dependence at the level of natural hopes can strengthen dispositions essential to receiving and exercising the theological virtue of hope. The cultivation of a mature capacity for natural hope is a kind of habituation toward acknowledged social dependence which may prepare one to more deeply enter into dependence upon God and the family of God.¹⁰ As Robert Miner (2011) writes,

God *can* infuse the virtue of hope even in souls that have no prior discipline in aiming for the difficult good. But in the usual order of things...things do not happen in this manner. Souls indifferent to the achievement of human things cannot be expected to exert themselves in divine things. (227–228)

If this thought is cogent, then it invites the question of whether some of the social dynamics that characterize natural hope such as its growth with and internalization of a kind of scaffolding might also apply to theological hope. Indeed, insofar as the

⁹ A referee helpfully points out that Kierkegaard explores the connection between hope and love, for oneself and for others in his *Works of Love*. These connection points are helpfully discussed in Bernier 2015.

¹⁰ Consider briefly the contrasting vice of presumption. The presumptuous person overestimates her ability to secure the good of full union with God, failing to take into account her need for mercy. She presumes that she is guaranteed full union with God regardless of what she does and independent of her need to repent. The vice of presumption creates a false sense of security because of a willful refusal to acknowledge one’s need. The hopeful person, by contrast, sees her great need and understands that full union with God is a gracious gift she can appropriate only through entrusting herself to God. There are two forms of dependence implicit in this hope. First, we depend upon the gift of hope essential to placing our trust in God. Second, we entrust ourselves to God who brings us into full personal union with Him. So, even though the theological virtue of hope is a disposition of the will, it is essentially a form of social attachment made possible by the grace which enables a person to entrust herself to God.

object of theological hope is always social and the object of natural hope is only sometimes social, one might wonder if the social dynamics noted for natural hope might take a heightened form in the theological case and all the more so once one notes the social elements internal to the tradition that we have described. The suggestion, to borrow a phrase from Charles Pinches (2014), is that perhaps the theological virtue of hope “moves ahead by leaning to the side” (360).¹¹ In order to build towards a model that makes good on this suggestion, the next section will draw on the extended mind and group agency literature in order to provide a framework within which our model can be articulated.

III. The Socially Extended Mind

It is useful to begin by contrasting the most familiar form of extended mind in the literature with the clearest examples of group agency. Close attention to these phenomena shows that they mirror each other in certain respects. They are two ends of a continuum. The sense in which we want to claim that theological hope is socially extended lies between them.

At one end of that continuum, Andy Clark, in particular, has emphasized that there are cases in which tools we rely on can do some of our thinking for us.¹² These tools can help us to remember, to detect the presence of things, or to perform inferences. We have, in effect, developed cognitive prostheses to make up for our limitations or to acquire new strengths. Clark-style extension of human agency is a matter of imposing functions on systems outside of the body. The thought is that one’s agency does not simply have a causal effect on the world. Rather, mind and agency bleed out into the world. The agent expresses agency within the operation of things outside the body-bound agent, even if there remains a sense in which the agency within the body-bound agent is proprietary over that which isn’t.¹³ Clark’s work is often what people most strongly associate with the phrase “extended mind”.

In contrast, there are forms of group agency in which one’s agency is, in a sense, co-opted. Instead of imposing a functional economy on one’s surroundings, the exercise of one’s agency helps to make possible a group state or action. It helps to make possible agential states the seat or bearer of which is located elsewhere in the agency of the group. In paradigmatic cases of group agency, there is some independence between the individual and the group such that the attitudes of the group needn’t be shared by individuals that compose that group. For example, a jury might declare someone accused of a crime to be innocent because enough of the jurors believe that the evidence failed to meet the relevant threshold for conviction.

¹¹ For further discussion of the ways in which the theological virtue of hope can take root and mature in the life of the person through the practice of friendship, see DeYoung 2014b.

¹² For the initial formulation of the extended mind hypothesis, see Clark and Chalmers 1998. Clark 2008 is his most visible and influential articulation of the view. See Clark 2010 for an important response to early objections to the view.

¹³ The centrality of the body bound agent in determining whether, how, and why cognition extends emerged in debate with opponents of Clark-style extension and is associated with what have come to be called “trust and glue” conditions.

And this is consistent with none of the jurors believing him to be innocent. The court then takes up an official stance on the innocence of the accused, one typically expressed unequivocally. The institutional commitment of the justice system to the defendant's being not guilty plays a role analogous with or identical to the belief of an individual. The group entity now acts as if the defendant is not guilty. It does not hedge in the way that the individual jurors might if asked about their opinions. This commitment of the institution is not reflective of the parallel beliefs of the individuals whose actions explain this institutional commitment even if the combination of the individual's beliefs with institutional structures caused that institutional stance. Hence, although an institution might require people with beliefs and desires to function, there is good reason to think that the "belief" of the institution is independent in an important sense from the beliefs of the individuals who compose it. Indeed, some authors are tempted to make this potential independence of perspective of the group from its members a criterion for when group agency is present (Pettit and List 2011).

One might think that the alternative to agency that co-opts the environment on the one hand or is co-opted by a group on the other is agency that is self-contained. The body or soul is the locus of agency. It does not bleed out into the world, but it also relates asymmetrically to it as far as agency is concerned. There are, however, other kinds of cases. Agency can be dynamically integrated with one's environment and with other agents in particular without either co-opting or being co-opted by what one is dynamically integrated with. Rather, one's agency can be expressed through patterns of attention and response situated in symbiotic relationships. In these cases, the symmetry between the agents makes it inaccurate to think of either agent as the extension or tool of the other. Likewise, however, the nature of the collective actions made possible by the symbiotic relationship is such that there is a convergence in the interests and perspectives of the parties at issue rather than a de-coupling of the group perspective from that of the individual.

Consider two examples.

Memory: Dorothy and Irving have been married for forty years. Across their long life together, they have each developed their own ways of telling stories from their common life together. When either tells one of these stories apart from the other, the story gets told in a somewhat selective, distorted way reflective of the interests, biases, and habits of the storyteller. When they tell their stories together, however, their patterns of interaction suppress some of those biases and interests while at the same time cuing, refining, and highlighting aspects of their stories. As a result, the stories that they tell together are different from and more accurate than those that they are capable of telling alone.¹⁴

Dance: Sofia is a gifted dancer. She is competent in many styles, but where her talents find their best expression is in ballroom dancing. She is completely fluid and attuned to her dance partner, but as she

¹⁴ Sutton 2010; Sutton *et al.* 2010.

specializes in the role traditionally belonging to the woman in a ballroom pair, what she can do on the dance floor is dependent on the skill of her partner. The better the partner, the more she gets to manifest her own excellence. It would be a mistake to think that Sofia is passive in what she is doing, but the exercise of her gifts of attunement, poise, and dexterity is dependent on a certain kind of dynamic social environment for their exercise.

In these cases, responding to and acting with the other is not a matter of imposing agency onto the other person but of welcoming the other's agency and tailoring one's agency to work well with the other. Dorothy and Irving are equal members in their common life, and their stories belong to each of them. Similarly, even in a case like Sofia's where the role she occupies is responsive to the agency of the other, it would be misleading to characterize Sofia as a glorified prosthetic of her dancing partner. Even in those cases in which one agent is receptive or responsive to the agency of the other, there is wide scope for the expression of agency. In short, Clark-style extension lacks the symbiotic element present in our examples.

But it would also be a mistake to suppose that socially enacted agency of this kind is primarily a form of group agency or at least the kind of group agency whose hallmark is the independence of group states from the interests and perspectives of the group's members. Group agency lies at the other end of the continuum of extended agency from Clark extension, but still misses our cases. In both the memory and the dance case, the collective activity is a function of the harmonious interlocking of agency at the individual level. Interdependence of this sort serves to reinforce individual agency unless something has gone wrong.¹⁵ The give and take of Dorothy and Irving's collaborative story-telling and the synergy of dance partners ideally produce a form of agency that is more potent than that of the individuals taken separately. But it is a form of agency put in the service of what they both individually value.¹⁶ Cooperation can break down. Irving might prefer to tell his stories in a way that casts him in a better light; Sofia might get tired of taking her cues from someone else. When cooperation breaks down in these ways, however, individuals opt out of those ways of relating to others that made a kind of socially enacted excellence available in each case.

One might say, then, that one form of extended mind involves the mind leaking out into the world in order to impress it into service whereas another involves being impressed into the service of a group entity whose desires, beliefs, or analogous states are independent of one's own. In between these two views is a conceptual space where some theorists want to articulate a deep functional dependence on others or one's environment that nonetheless preserves the integrity of the persons involved.

¹⁵ In the kinds of cases that List and Pettit pay attention to, the discrepancy between the individual level and the group level may be a sign that the system is working well. When a prediction market, for instance, generates a different prediction than many of the individual members by pooling information, the prediction market may be doing exactly what it is supposed to do.

¹⁶ We don't mean to imply that there couldn't be an emergent group state in the kind of cases we're concerned with. Consider, for instance, Hutchins (1995) classic study of pre-digital ship navigation which is often thought to describe an emergent group agency due to the harmonious cooperation of individuals.

We will briefly describe two such theories and then argue that the dynamics described in these two theories is what we see in our examples.

Kim Sterelny (2010) is a gentle critic of the extended mind. He proposes that much of what interests advocates of the extended mind thesis can be captured by reference to cultural scaffolding. Somewhat colorfully, he uses the example of “extended digestion” to illustrate in a non-mental case. Other animals spend a large amount of their time chewing and digesting their food, much longer than we do proportionally, and they invest a lot more of their resources in comparatively powerful jaws and teeth. Humans, by contrast, developed cooking. We use cleavers, pots, fire, and the like to make it easier to digest food by breaking it down first with tools, which, according to Sterelny (and *pace* raw food enthusiasts), is a more adaptive way to approach food. Sterelny claims that it is strained at best to think of digestion as extended; instead, it is made easier through scaffolding. The availability of certain cultural artefacts and practices of using them make a diet possible that would otherwise be much harder to have if it was available at all. The scaffolding puts us in reach of certain behaviors as it were. Analogously, he proposes that cultural scaffolding—that is, language, testimony, and information technology—take raw information and makes it available and easy to digest mentally. Humans do their thinking in an environment that is at least partly artificial; there are no libraries or double-blind experiments in the state of nature.¹⁷

Arguably, the cases of memory and ballroom dancing offer helpful illustrations of Sterelny’s insights. Couples who tell their story together build on a shared history of interacting across contexts as well as a shared history of telling stories together. It isn’t the case that any two people, even people who have a shared experience, will be able to tell stories the way Dorothy and Irving do. They can tell better or more accurate stories together because of the common life they have created together over forty years and because of the patterns for interacting that have developed within that common life. Likewise, Sofia could not be excellent as a ballroom dancer without the cultural scaffolding necessary to define, promote, and sustain a practice of ballroom dancing. She needs to be trained. She needs there to be places and people to dance with, and so on. In the one case, the scaffolding has to do with the trajectory of a particular relationship and the practices it fosters. In the other case, the scaffolding is something more widespread and less dependent on particular relationships so much as the availability of contexts in which one may adopt a role and follow a script with any suitably qualified stranger.

Unlike Sterelny, Richard Menary (2007) defends a qualified form of the extended mind he calls “cognitive integration.” He construes the mind as a dynamical system that does its work through a process of interaction with elements of the environment. This does not require imposing a function on one’s environment; rather, a continued process of interaction and mutual adjustment fosters a productive relationship of embodied responsivity to one’s social context. Consider the way that perception is often not simply like experiencing a movie passively from within the theatre of one’s mind.¹⁸ Rather, one moves one’s head and body. One attends. One explores, pursues, retreats. One engages with salient parts of one’s environment, and

¹⁷ For an extended treatment of the epistemic import of cultural scaffolding, see Green 2016.

¹⁸ We borrow this example from Noë 2004.

in so doing, opens oneself up to being cued by one's environment on how to attend. And sometimes, as when what we are perceiving is a person, our moment-to-moment responsivity to the environment is complemented by and reacts to the responsivity of those to whom we are responsive.

This dynamic integration seems evident in our examples. Dorothy and Irving cue and inhibit each other. The initiative in telling the story bounces back and forth between them as they commit to a way of telling the story that they endorse as their own but which they own in common. It isn't simply that their story-telling is a social activity; rather, the means of generating and preserving their stories is dependent upon the other person for its best expression. They have developed a way of being together and responding to one another in their telling of a story. The agency involved in telling a story is channeled through, is expressed in a socially aware and responsive way of behaving. Likewise, Sofia, puts herself in a state of responsive readiness to her dance partner. She is not simply being led; her dancing is enacted in a way that is perpetually open to her partner, a connection crucial to their movements moment to moment. She has an excellence that requires a suitably skilled partner, but in this case, a shared history with a particular dance partner is not necessary. One can imagine dancers developing chemistry over long years of dancing together, but it is not necessary in order to manifest excellent pairs dancing. Dancers who have disciplined themselves so as to align their agency and instincts with the practice of ballroom dancing can achieve a kind of synergy mediated only by the roles and patterns for interaction dictated by the practice itself.

IV. Socially Extended Hope and the Theological Virtue of Hope

In this section, we employ these insights about social scaffolding and cognitive integration to construct a model of the socially extended nature of hope. Like the previous section, it will be instructive to consider a concrete case.

Natural Hope: It is the 2008 presidential election and Monica and Teri both hope for Obama to win the Presidential election. Their hope gradually changes what they think about and what they talk about to reflect this hope. As opportunities to act on this hope emerge, Monica and Teri take these actions. At first the actions are small but eventually the structure of their day to day activities is reflective of the fervency of their desire for their candidate to win. The changes that they have made put them into each other's lives as they work for the campaign together. They acquire dispositions not only to cherish Obama's victories and mourn his losses, but dispositions to be mindful of and attach value to the related joys and sorrows of the other as well. At some point, Teri starts to have doubts about whether Obama can win, but because of the changes already wrought in her life by living in accordance with her hope, others like Monica are able both to support

Teri indirectly and to intercede directly with Teri on behalf of her prior hope in a way that helps to preserve Teri's commitment.

What holds for the cases of memory and dance also holds for our case of natural hope but in a subtler way. Whether one is telling a story alone or together with someone else is usually apparent, at least to those in the room, and one strictly speaking isn't engaged in ballroom dancing if one is dancing alone. In contrast, hoping alone is not conspicuous and it might be easy to miss that two people are hoping together. Nonetheless, there are parallels between what happens between Monica and Teri and our other cases. If Teri's political hope is not stunted, if it is allowed to express itself in thought and action, then it will draw her into contact with others whose behavior is shaped by a similar hope. This might not happen for all of our natural hopes, but the object of hope in our case is picked advisedly. The object of Teri and Monica's hope has implications for each of their lives that draw them into common practices and an at least partly shared way of life. Because of the way that a political hope of the kind they share naturally manifests itself, the hopeful activity of each is made available to the other, and they develop the means necessary to support the other in their common hope.

There is also a great deal of cultural scaffolding that goes into the political arena. For political hope, though, one needs to trust that one's cultural scaffolding is sufficient to sustain a genuinely valuable achievement. Political hope can be damaged if one experiences the system as rigged or as one too mired in bureaucracy and partisanship to get anything worthwhile done. Because having political hope for Monica and Teri is hoping for something that is beyond their power to achieve on their own, it requires them to place some trust in the cultural scaffolding required for their hopes to be realized. Political hope requires cultural scaffolding that facilitates conative integration.

Furthermore, as Monica and Teri work together towards their common goal they, in a more modest way than Irving and Dorothy, develop a history of interaction that allows them to engage in hopeful activity together at a deeper and more effective level over time. Thus, in the political hope case, one should expect scaffolding at the level of individual relationships and scaffolding at the broader, cultural level to both have a role to play.

Finally, Teri and Monica's values bring them together in a way that allows them not only to have an enhanced impact on the world but to take part in the hopeful activity of the other. Because the hopeful activity of Teri is naturally expressed through patterns of attention and responsivity to Monica, there is a sense in which Monica is granted access to Teri's agency. This access grows hand in hand with dispositions to care for the other and value her hope. Much like Dorothy can cue, filter, or reinforce aspects of Irving's telling of one of their stories. So, Monica can cue, filter, and reinforce Teri's hopeful activity because of the way they have come to share a common project and a measure of the dispositional structure undergirding that project. This is partly dictated by the nature of the project and the way in which hoping for the fulfillment of that project naturally disposes one to care about certain hopes of others. Monica cannot consistently hope for Obama to be her president without also hoping for Obama to become Teri's president. Because these hopes are

likely grounded in values that Monica values in others as well as herself, Monica will naturally want to partner with Teri not only in attempting to realize their common political goals but to partner with her in keeping their common hope alive. Thus, when the political hopes of Teri and Monica are in full bloom they will manifest themselves in a sharing of hope manifested in dynamic integration with the hopeful activities of others.

It may be helpful here to distinguish cases in which one's agency is merely socially influenced or socially embedded from cases in which it is socially enacted. These are progressively more intimate ways of being involved in the agency of another person. For a case of mere causal influence, consider the way in which one's behavior is affected by having a phone conversation in public. One may not even be attending to the attitudes and interests of others overtly. Nonetheless, one may well find oneself talking more quietly and expressing emotions more reservedly because of the proximity of other people. By contrast, there are other cases in which one is exercising one's agency in an individualistic manner but nested within a social context, where being nested in a social context is important to understanding the sort of action being undertaken and the way it is exercised. The cellist playing a solo for an audience seeks to do the same thing she did in countless hours of private practice, though perhaps with an extra dramatic flourish or two, but her experience of the action is different because of how that individualistic activity fits within the social context of performance.

For agency to be socially enacted, however, is for the exercise of one's agency itself to be importantly channeled through ways of attending to and responding to others. One can contrast the phone conversation had against one's will in a crowded coffee shop with the difficult phone conversation taken in the presence of one's spouse where subtle attunement to the presence of even a silent other creates a sense in which the call is experienced as something done together with one's spouse. Likewise, contrast a cellist's solo performance with one done as part of a quartet where what one is doing is not only embedded in a social context but the playing of the music takes on an extra social dynamic, an attunement and responsivity to the playing of the other members of the quartet.

Let us now turn from natural hope to the theological virtue of hope.

Theological Hope: Maurice and Ted both convert to Christianity. As part of this process, they acquire a hope for union with God that gradually changes what they think about and what they talk about to reflect this hope. As opportunities to act on this hope emerge, Maurice and Ted begin to perform these actions. At first the actions are small but eventually the structure of their day to day activities is reflective of the fervency of their hope. The changes that they have made put them into each other's lives as they pursue becoming the sort of people who can enjoy union with God and sharing in the divine life. They acquire dispositions not only to cherish what God values and mourn what he doesn't, but they acquire dispositions to be mindful of and attach value to the related joys and sorrows of the other as well. At some point, Ted starts to have doubts about whether this hope he has acquired is well-

founded, but because of the changes already wrought in his life by living in accordance with his hope, others like Maurice are able both to support Ted indirectly through a common life of devoted activity and to intercede directly with Ted on behalf of his prior hope in a way that helps to preserve Ted's commitment.

What would it look like for the theological virtue of hope to be culturally scaffolded and dynamically integrated with others? As the example above illustrates, one might think that cases of natural hope in which it is plausible that agency is shared are parallel to the spiritual life of a believer who is integrated into a religious community. One can, for instance think of liturgy, Scripture, and the life of the Church more broadly as providing cultural scaffolding that supports the faithful in hope. In the Scriptures and the lives of the saints, one encounters stories that portray what it means to live with hope even through circumstances more challenging than one's own. In the formal and informal life of the church, one encounters others striving to live lives of hope, including those who are older, wiser, and further along on the pilgrimage of faith. In liturgy, one is taken corporately through seasons that invite one to work through the darkness and doubt of a human life within a context that inevitably points to Easter. The corporate spiritual life offers one the hard-won insights of others, the rhythms of faithfulness that have sustained others, and companionship along the road. In all these ways, the church provides cultural scaffolding for hoping in God. The idea is not that one cannot hope on one's own any more than one cannot hope for the election of a candidate on one's own. Rather, it is that the church provides an enhanced context for enacting hope in God that allows one's hoping to express itself most naturally and fully.

What makes Christian community an enhanced context for living out the Christian life, however, is in no small part the way in which it makes possible a shared spiritual life. It is not simply a shared scaffolding for private projects. There is an intimate connection between the hope for union with God of Maurice and Ted. The hope of each may begin by being focused entirely on the agent alone, but progress in faith should lead to a broadening of what one hopes for that leads to the enfolding of the other in one's hopes. There should be an evolution of one's narrative identity. Pursuing union with God cannot be tacked onto just any old understanding of one's life. Adopting union with God as an end exercises an influence on how one should understand the means to that end, and, according to orthodox Christianity, God chose the church as the context for the human earthly journey towards Him. Divine fiat aside, however, to value the inner life of God for its own sake is to value a shareable good, one that does not diminish when you share it. Shareable goods of great intrinsic value to all parties are good bases for common projects, and all the more so when one can experience the other person's valuing of the shareable good that you yourself value. Much like the joy of seeing your child "get" your music from your youth, experiencing others joining together with your intrinsic valuing of a shareable good adds to your enjoyment in it. Just so in the life of faith expressed in community.

When the other expresses something related to her hope for the kingdom of God, this automatically bears on what I am also hoping for, and when the other is hoping effectively, I experience them as making progress in a shared project. To the

extent that my practice of faith becomes integrated with the practices of my community and the relationships I develop within it, it can become socially enacted. There is a dovetailing between the way in which I and the other are manifesting our hopes. The doing of community becomes a way of manifesting the dispositions of hope, of enacting hope. Thinking this way about religious community and the life of faith involves re-conceiving the life of faith as one that *ceteris paribus* is symbiotic in character. Rather than thinking of the theological virtues as something the having of which serves as a point of commonality for those who happen to form a community, we can begin to think of community as serving the function of practicing faith, hope, and love.

V. Conclusion

In this paper, we have sought to characterize the theological virtue of hope as a socially extended virtue—a virtue scaffolded by and enacted within a community whose common life together is rooted in a shared conception of the ultimate good for human life. Theological hope is deeply social. We aimed to build upon insights already within the tradition but in a way, that takes the social character of hope more seriously than is normally the case. On our view, one receives the seed of hope as a gift and our immersion within community provides us with the resources to grow in hope. In the same way that the child's hopeful agency is scaffolded by a caring parent, hope in God and God's redemptive work is something into which one grows through the help of others. Through relationships mediated by creed and cup, one taps into the hope of those who have come before and those who are journeying now. The support of these others is meant as a tangible form of grace as one works out one's hope in dynamic interaction with a community that shares one's hope, a hope for union with God and through God for union with each other.

But there are some outstanding questions and concerns one might raise for this analysis two of which we seek to address in this section. First, one might wonder to what extent the content of the hope of another person can be a constituent of my own hope. When we participate in each other's hopes, does the content of our hopes need to be the same? When it comes to theological hope specifically, what if two people have very different visions of the kingdom of God?

In order to have a socially enacted activity, arguably there needs to be a convergence in what we are each doing which should show up in the content of our respective states. It does not follow that the content has to be identical, but, incompatibility or poor compatibility can be seen by looking at the content of our respective states. If the theological content of our hopes radically diverge, weaker forms of shared hope are available. But as long as there is some important overlap, the other person can figure in my hope. To the extent, that there is more important overlap, the shared hope can be deeper. For example, it is not hard to imagine a universalist and exclusivist having different tastes when it comes to evangelism and

missionary work, but it wouldn't be surprising if they can unite over soup kitchens and praying for each other's daily trials.¹⁹

There is a matter of degree here, of course, but it's not an unfamiliar dynamic. Parents can work together in the raising of their families despite differences of approach to different situations that arise in the life of a parent and it is, in fact, rare to find a couple who do not have at least some major differences of parenting philosophy or application. Nonetheless, congruent agency is very well illustrated by many of these same parents. There may well be some parents whose perspectives on parenting differ to such a degree that they cannot share the task of parenting and likewise it is surely possible for one's view of who God is and what life in God looks like to diverge too much from that of another person to share one's hope with her. Nonetheless, there is no reason to think that shared theological hope cannot handle some substantive theological diversity just as there is no reason to think that parents can't share the task of parenting without complete agreement on good parenting.

The idea isn't that theological hope is a static state with a social expression. Rather, hope grows over time and our understanding of what we are hoping for grows with it. Although some theological differences may resist convergence, we would wager that mutual spiritual growth brings with it increased facility in working together in our hoping. Our increased facility in doing spiritual life together may be reflected in converging beliefs. It may be reflected in converging practices that allow for divergent interpretations. Alternatively, maturity may express itself in a de-prioritizing of beliefs about which devout and well-meaning Christians tend to disagree. In any event, it would be more than a little mysterious if spiritual growth didn't manifest itself in an increased ability to find common ground.

One might, however, have a different kind of concern. What about those who are cut off from community or whose community is dysfunctional? Does our view commit us to the idea that the hope of such individuals is impoverished? Are we saying there is something lesser about the hope of someone isolated from community who nonetheless holds onto hope over long years of imprisonment and persecution? After all, isn't the theological virtue of hope essentially a virtue irrespective of the social context?²⁰

On a general level, possessing a virtue implies both that one is disposed to act virtuously in normal contexts and that one is more likely to act virtuously in contexts that demand more of the agent. It does not imply that the possession or exercise of virtue will be unaffected by context. And, at this level of generality, it is an open question whether the range of normal contexts against which one measures virtue possession will include social elements. This is accentuated for any virtue one takes to be essentially social in how it is enacted under normal conditions. But even if one can appropriate dispositions normally oriented towards living well with others, re-directing them into a project of living well alone, the importance of community does not disappear because one has accomplished this re-appropriation. Rather, the need to re-direct these dispositions underscores their social nature.

¹⁹ We would like to thank Brandon Warmke for raising this question about the overlap in the content of a shared hope.

²⁰ We would like thank a referee for putting the objection in exactly this last way.

We have maintained that Christian hope is essentially social. It aims at a relational union; and the means by which it secures this goal is, itself, relational. Hope is a gift of God that enables the person to entrust herself to God in the hope that God will bring her into full union with God. One may receive this gift in a wide range of social contexts including contexts in which one is isolated from a good community or in which one is a member of a dysfunctional community. But the fact that one can appropriate hope in impoverished contexts does not imply that these contexts are best or ideal for the appropriation, possession, or exercise of mature Christian hope.

For our purposes, the specific cases of the dysfunctional community and a lack of community are importantly different, but, absent special grace, one's hope should be negatively affected in both cases. God can find a way to compensate for the lack of community, but this fact reflects more on God's power than on human nature. In the case of the isolated believer, isolation should be and often is psychologically and spiritually oppressive. Such a person, however, has a kind of access to a community of believers in that they can have a sense of sharing a project with many other people across the world and a great cloud of witnesses who have come before. Engaging in a shared project without being able to interact with others puts an extra pressure on one's belief or faith that we are together making progress when one cannot go out and experience others engaged in it. The situation is similar to the soldier deep behind enemy lines who can maintain a confidence in the campaign of which he is a part but who would have a much easier time doing so if he could see his compatriots taking ground.

The case of the dysfunctional community is different. If our soldier comes across his army in disarray, firing shots at each other, and giving up important territory, pressure is put, once again, on the soldier's belief that his efforts are not in vain. Whereas in isolation the soldier experienced a lack of evidence that tempted him to think of it as counterevidence, now the soldier just does have counterevidence. Something similar holds of the believer in an unhealthy community. Life in community should express itself in shared faith and shared hope. My access to the hopes of the other person is a two-way street. If I can participate in and reinforce your hoping, then in the natural order of things I should be able to damage your hopes and make them more difficult to sustain as well.

As a parting thought, the import of a moral scandal in the church takes on a different tenor when one takes seriously the idea that the life of faith naturally should express itself in shared agency. When a priest or pastor abuses his position of power, one does not simply shame the church in the eyes of outsiders and damage the ability of faithful, hopeful people to organize their efforts. One scars the bonds of trust that allow a community to enact their faith and do hope together. Rather than fostering an objection to our view, a consideration of the ways in which hope can be impoverished by a community brings further clarity to the gravity of sinning against community. In short, our reflections underscore the moral weight of the task of enacting hope within a virtuous community.²¹

²¹ We would like to thank the participants in the 2nd Theistic Ethics Workshop for their helpful feedback on an early version of this paper. In particular, we would like to thank Marilyn McCord Adams, Robert Adams, John Churchill, Anne Jeffrey, Alida Liberman, Christian Miller, Mark Murphy, Christopher Tucker, Kevin Vallier, Candace Vogler, and Brandon Warmke for their helpful comments.

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We would also like to thank Philip Reed for comments on an earlier draft of the paper. Finally, Aaron would like to thank The Beacon Project at Wake Forest University and the Templeton Religion Trust for funding that helped to support the writing of this paper. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Beacon Project, Wake Forest University, or the Templeton Religion Trust.

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