



Hope as a Democratic Civic Virtue

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Introduction

As a framework for reflecting about hope as a civic virtue, the last ten years of American presidential politics have been, to say the least, interesting. Barack Obama published a book entitled, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* in 2006, and in 2008, campaigned for president on the promise of hope. In his presidential campaign of 2016, Donald J. Trump reversed that vision, sowing chaos and despair. The front cover of the October 15-21, 2016 issue of *The Economist* depicted a red, white, and blue elephant with a questioning look on its face at one end and the profile of Trump on the rump with the headline, “The Debasing of American Politics.” The front cover of the November 5-11, 2016 issue depicted a hand with fingers crossed and a sketch of Hillary Clinton’s face on one finger, accompanied by the headline, “America’s Best Hope.” After the election, on the front cover of its March 2017 issue, *The Atlantic* featured a sketch of Trump addressing a crowd with the headline, “How to Build an Autocracy.”¹ Many people, in commentaries in the news and on social media, express the view that American democracy is imperiled by the Trump administration.

Fears for American democracy have been accompanied by similar worries in other countries. Far right political parties in the United Kingdom and Europe have gained traction, in part from Trump’s ascendancy, and their clout has caused some mainstream political candidates

¹ See *The Economist*, October 15-21; November 6-11; *The Atlantic*, March 2017, took the title of its cover from a story in that issue by David Frum.

to lean toward the right.² Russia’s meddling in the U.S. election has given rise to qualms that it will interfere in elections in other nations, for example, in France.³ As Mittleman (2009, 269-270) remarks: “A new dark ages may be in the offing.”⁴

Yet some bright spots are worth noting. Federal judges stopped both versions of Trump’s travel ban, most recently on the grounds that it would likely not survive a challenge to its constitutionality (see Kendall and Lovett 2017, A1, A8; Kendall 2017, A4; Liptak 2017, A1, A13). The far right One Nation party garnered less than 5% of the vote in elections in the state of Western Australia, contributing to a conservative party loss (see Pannett and Cherney, 2017, A9). Geert Wilders, the far right candidate in The Netherlands, did not prevail in the Dutch election (see Pop and Walker 2017, A10, and Rubin (2017b). Remarking on the victory of the center-right candidate, Prime Minister Mark Rutte, a Dutch citizen stated, “In Europe we all see the developments in the United States, and that’s not where we want to go because we see it as chaos” (Quoted in Rubin, 2017a, A4). A recent article in *The Wall Street Journal* opines that the populist approach on the European continent of riding the wave in the light of Trump’s election and Brexit has backfired, and that far-right populist movements have faced “. . . election defeats, recriminations, and self-doubt” (Meichtry, Troianovski, and Walker, A1).

Against this backdrop, I wish to argue for a conception of hope as a civic virtue, especially well suited to democracies, that is most valuable in times like the present, when

² See, for example, Walker (2017, A8), who discusses Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte’s populist pivot as he faces challenges from the far-right candidate Geert Wilders.

³ See The Editorial Board, *The New York Times*, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/17/opinion/keeping-the-kremlins-hands-off-frances-elections.html?_r=0. Accessed March 19, 2017.

⁴ Mittleman’s comment is made in the context of concerns about climate change. Eight years after the publication of his magisterial work, we have even more reason to fear the advent of “dark ages.”

democracy faces significant challenges. In Part I, I offer a general overview of hope and sketch an initial conception of hope as a democratic civic virtue. In Part II, the stage is set for further theorizing of this conception in the present American context. Drawing on the work of Ghassan Hage (2003), I make the point that the United States is in the process of becoming a nation of worriers in part because of the failure of the government to distribute social hope. In Part III, I flesh out what hope as a democratic civic virtue could look like in the United States today.⁵ Part IV concludes with brief comments about theorizing civic hope in the context of a modified pragmatism.

Before beginning, a caveat is in order. My concern here is with hope as a *democratic* civic virtue, by which I mean hope as a civic virtue in the context of democratic political systems, that is, systems that embrace the notion that citizens elect those who govern. Democracies can take many forms, for example, representative and direct, or can be combined with forms of socialism. I do not doubt that hope can be a civic virtue in other types of political systems, such as pure socialism, Marxist societies, theocracies, or monarchies. Whether it can be a civic virtue in authoritarian fascist or communist societies is an interesting question here left aside.

I. Hope

A review of literature on hope from various disciplines gives rise to two distinctive theories of what hope is and how it is generated. The first has been called ‘agency’ theories; I call the second ‘receptivity’ theories. Common to both is what I will call the ‘bare bones’ conception or ‘belief-desire’ model of hope.

⁵ I use the phrases ‘hope as a civic virtue,’ and ‘hope as a democratic civic virtue’ interchangeably.

The 'bare bones' conception or 'belief-desire' model can be gleaned from the work of philosophers as diverse as Thomas Aquinas (2008), Thomas Hobbes (1968), Victoria McGeer (2004) and Margaret Walker (2006). According to this account, hope, at its most basic, is the desire for an end or object and the belief that it is possible to attain it. The belief that the end or object is possible carves out a space for hope between certainty and impossibility. If a desired end is certain, it does not make sense to hope for it. If it is impossible, hoping for it is fruitless and can be self-destructive.

The belief-desire model has been enhanced in various ways. One way is through the development of 'agency' theories of hope, which focus on personal agency as a pathway to attaining hoped-for ends, and on hope as enhancing the agency of the individuals who possess it. Walker (2006, 47-48), for example, stresses that hope is not simply a belief-desire complex, but an emotional attitude consisting of a variety of hope phenomena – such as plans, imaginings, and expectations. Some of our hopes, of course, outstrip the reach of our agency. For example, we can hope for good news about a biopsy outcome, or pleasant weather for the afternoon ball game. Other hopes might engage our agency, yet the effects of our hope might be minimal, as when we hope for an end to war, animal abuse, or famine. McGeer (2004) and Walker (2006), as well as the psychologist C. R. Snyder (2000), however, emphasize the motivational force of hope and its connections with agency. Hope, in their view, can motivate us to rise to challenges and undertake tasks that are possible, even though not probable. In yet another expansion of the belief-desire model, Shade (2001, 136) writes of the virtue of hopefulness, which is an entrenched character state or disposition of energetic openness to future possibilities. This kind of disposition forms the basis of hope as a virtue, which, according to some theorists, such as

Aquinas (2008), lies between the extremes of presumption, which is the certainty that good things are to come, and despair, which is the certainty that they won't.⁶

Specific hopes can, but need not, arise from a hopeful disposition. That is, even if I am not a hopeful person, it is possible for me to have specific hopes, both on specific occasions and in more temporally enduring ways. This is possible because even unhopeful people can care about certain things. I might be generally unhopeful, for example, but have loyalty toward my alma mater's football team and take pleasure in watching it play. Because I care about the team, I can hope that it wins this afternoon, or that it has a good season, or that it maintains a strong coaching staff and player base into the indefinite future, even if I am generally unhopeful about other things. One might wonder how this is psychologically possible. The answer can be found in individual histories and life experiences. Our unhopeful person could be middle aged or older, and might have had some hard knocks in life that left him cynical, depressed, and generally lacking in hope. Perhaps he is a military veteran whose experiences of war have left him emotionally battered and scarred. Despite such negative experiences, it seems possible for such a person to care about something in the present. Perhaps what he cares about sparks some bright spot, or harks back to better days in the past. Caring about an alma mater's football team, for example, could conjure up memories of happier days. To be sure, such memories could be

⁶ For Aquinas (2008), we hope to achieve unification with God at the eschaton. Simply put, presumption is the certainty that we will achieve this; despair, the conviction that we won't. For a nuanced discussion of presumption in Aquinas, see Lamb (2016, 309). Some philosophers question whether hope fits nicely as a mean between extremes in this way. Luc Bovens, for example, suggests that fear, as well as despair, is a contrary of hope (personal conversation, December 28, 2014; see also Spinoza (Wild, 1958, 270), Hume (1978, 439-448), Day (1969, 89), and Miyazaki (2017, 3) for discussions of the complexities of hope.

romanticized. Even so, they could form bright spots in a dark horizon, giving rise to a specific and narrow range of hopes in an otherwise bleak emotional landscape.

The second way in which the ‘belief-desire’ model of hope has been enhanced is through ‘receptivity’ theories of hope. Receptivity theories do not preclude the importance of agency for hope, nor roles for hope in promoting and sustaining effective agency. Instead, they are larger theoretical frameworks within which individual agency and hope’s effects on it are theorized and contextualized. According to this type of theory, hope is “received from” or “inspired by” external sources, and then empowers the agency of its possessor. Examples of receptivity theories include those of the French Christian existentialist Gabriel Marcel (1978), the East German Marxist Ernst Bloch (1986), and the conception of hope attributed to the Crow tribe by Jonathan Lear in his book, *Radical Hope* (2006).

Marcel (1978), for example, argues that hope occurs most profoundly in situations of ‘captivity,’ in which the forces of individual agency have been stymied or brought to a halt. In such situations, an attitude of patient expectation allows us to receive inspiration in the form of God’s grace, which gives us hope. Often, we receive insights into how we can move forward, into what to do, or how to respond in our difficult circumstances. We cannot act or abide with hope, however, without having been receptive to divine guidance.

Bloch (1986) and Lear (2006) write of similar dynamics. For Bloch (1986), hope, a drive akin to hunger, is inspired by the ‘*noch nicht*’ – the ‘not yet.’ Our achieving the ‘not yet’ is based upon our ability to cut through the deceptions of life in capitalist society and be inspired by a vision, however dim but ever developing, of a Marxist utopia. We are pulled forward through and out of the capitalist miasma by our hope of attaining that vision. Similarly, Lear (2006) attributes ‘radical hope’ to the Crow tribe through the dreams and visions of their Chief,

Plenty Coups. These dreams and visions allowed Plenty Coups to receive wisdom from the spirit world by interpreting the words and signs of the Chickadee Person. This wisdom enabled Plenty Coups to lead his tribe forward into a future, dominated by whites, which threatened to destroy traditional Crow ways of life and replace them with conventions, such as private property, that outstripped the tribe's conceptual repertoire. Interestingly, Allen Thompson (2010) has applied the idea of radical hope – a hope for a future that we cannot fully conceptualize – to the challenge of climate change.

I mention agency and receptivity theories because both contribute to hope as a democratic civic virtue. Hope as a democratic civic virtue relies on the agency of individuals. At its strongest, it is a disposition that is theorized and contextualized by democratic traditions. These traditions function as receptivity theories in the sense that hopeful citizens draw knowledge as well as motivation from them. These democratic traditions are specific to different countries. Even within a country, different variants of the traditions can be in play. For example, the American political tradition is informed by pragmatists as diverse as Walt Whitman, John Dewey, Richard Rorty, and, arguably, Barack Obama (see Whitman 2002, 2004; Westbrook 2008; Dineen 1999; Rorty 1989, 1999; and Kloppenberg 2011).⁷ Yet pragmatist readings of American democracy differ from those that view it as a form of civic religion rooted in the Puritan era (see Gorski, 2017; Westbrook 2008, 141).

Writing of hope in a different context, Miyazaki (2017, 8) notes that “Hope suggests a willingness to embrace uncertainty and also serves as a concrete method for keeping knowledge moving in conditions of uncertainty.” Part of the method of hope is the ability to draw on familiar traditions in the sense of being receptive to the knowledge and tools they offer that can

⁷ For a different reading of Obama, see Miyazaki (2017, 181-186).

aid in the pursuit of hoped for goals. Consistently with both Miyazaki (2004)'s view of hope as a method and with Snyder (2000)'s agentic conception of the skills of high hoppers, flexibility is required to be able to adapt those resources effectively.

These themes will be revisited in Part IV. For now, we can draw upon the foregoing remarks to sketch an initial conception of hope as a democratic civic virtue:

Hope as a democratic civic virtue is the entrenched disposition of openness to the political possibilities a democratic government can provide. It includes a desire to promote or attain the legitimate ends of democracy, and the belief that such ends are possible. To be a democratic civic virtue, the disposition of hope must include a commitment to democracy and democratic processes. As with other civic virtues, hope is fully theorized and contextualized within specific political traditions.

II. Worriers and Carers

To frame the discussion of hope as a democratic civic virtue in the present American context, we need an analysis of the current political situation. *Against Paranoid Nationalism* (2003), a book by Ghassan Hage, a Lebanese-Australian anthropologist and social theorist, provides a useful framework. A brilliant indictment of immigration policies in John Howard's Australia, this work advances the thesis that societies, by distributing or failing to distribute what Hage calls 'societal' hope, can create citizens who are worriers or carers. 'Societal' hope refers to the fact that society distributes social routes by means of which people can envision and lead worthwhile lives. Such social routes include the provision of goods that meet basic needs such as health care, safety and security, and infrastructure, without which people will be unable to attain the minimum needed to lead worthwhile lives. Most importantly, perhaps, such routes include education, which enables people to imagine the kinds of futures they want to have, and

empowers them with the knowledge and skills to make those dreams into realities. Strong, vibrant economies with opportunities for employment and advancement are also routes by means of which society distributes social hope, for they enable people to put their educations to use to fulfill dreams of having careers and families. In these and other ways, society provides conditions conducive to the development of dispositional hope.

Part of Hage's analysis focuses on how collective national identities – national senses of “we” – can sustain or undermine hope in society (2003, 12-18). He gives a homely but apt illustration of how a collective “we” can sustain hope and inspire uplift. Hage (2003, 13) confesses that he is hopeless at cricket; yet, through identification with the Australian national cricket team, he vicariously participates in their triumphs and experiences a sense of hope. The “we” has many uses. For one thing, it can be used comparatively: “we” are generally more educated than the people of Afghanistan. Another effect is aspirational: “The child uttering ‘we are good at football’ sets himself or herself on the road of ‘trying to be good at football.’ The imagined ‘we’ . . . actually becomes causal in influencing the capacity of the person who is trying to be what ‘we’ all are” (Hage 2003, 13).⁸ By supporting the aspirations of citizens to improve themselves in specific ways, the imagined “we” – a collective identity – fosters conditions under which the disposition of hope is nurtured.

More can be said about Hage (2003)'s complex analysis. Here let us note his thesis that societies, by distributing or failing to distribute hope, can create citizens who are carers or worriers. Hage (2003, 26ff) draws on attachment theory from psychoanalysis to explain this. He

⁸ Of course, it is not always true that assertions such as “we are good at football,” have the causal roles that Hage attributes to them. Such utterances could be self-deceptive, or mere wishful thinking lacking in causal force. I take it that Hage's claim is not that such statements always or necessarily have causal efficacy, but that they sometimes do, and can thereby shape conceptions of the self and influence action.

(2003, 26ff, esp. 32ff) sees the nation-state as analogous to a parent; the language of “motherland” and “fatherland” reflects this role. According to him, we form attachments to our homeland, just as we do to our parents. As with parental attachments, the nature of our bonds to our homeland affects whether we are worriers or carers. Worriers are those whose attachments are insecure; they have not been sufficiently nurtured, nor given a sense of security and mastery over their own agency. A scarcity of hope, according to Hage (2003, 20) creates a society of worriers. Lacking hope, a citizenry sees threats at every turn, and lacks the wherewithal to see how to overcome the problems that beset it. Failures of imagination and of cognitive openness to new possibilities form part of the worrier’s mentality. The worrier’s horizons are closed, instead of expansive. The worrier, insecure from the start in her attachment to her homeland, sees novelty as a threat. Instead of seeing problems as challenges, the worrier takes a defensive posture, circling her wagons against innovation and change. Fear is the worrier’s best friend; the fear of losing her nation causes the worrier to retreat to a mental landscape of nationalistic fantasies. Here, too, psychoanalysis informs Hage (2003)’s analysis: the fantasies of the paranoid nationalist are akin to those of persons who suffer from borderline personality disorders. In both kinds of case, the lines distinguishing fantasy from reality become blurred.

Paranoid nationalism results from a scarcity of hope. This is not to say that hope is completely absent from the paranoid nationalist’s emotional landscape. Worriers can have hope, for example, hope that anti-immigration laws will be put in place, hope that a homeland they perceive as weakened will become great again, and so on. Such hopes, however, seem to be linked with and driven by fear. Paranoid nationalism is a kind of defensive nationalism that sees external or alien factors as threats – to cherished traditions, national integrity, indeed, to the very

survival of the nation. For many nations today, immigration issues are focal points for paranoid nationalism.

By contrast, carers are those who have benefitted from secure attachments to their homeland. They are confident in their agency and in their capacity to solve problems and meet challenges. Characterized by cognitive openness, the ability to use imagination, and the ability to deploy resources creatively, they are not afraid to experiment with new programs and policies. They are secure enough in their national self-identity to extend the benefits of their homeland to immigrants who seek to share them. Hage (2003) believes that the strength of carers resides in hope. Their hope results from a strong sense of identity and agency that has been nurtured through healthy attachments to their country. Here I can only note that Hage (2003), joined by other commentators, sees the forces of global capitalism as undermining the power of the nation-state, and thus, eroding its ability to inculcate hope.⁹

Hage's (2003) analysis, published fourteen years ago, offers prescient yet chilling insights into the rise of far right political parties and anti-immigrant populism in Europe and the United States today.¹⁰ A spate of recent books examines deep social, cultural, and political divisions in the United States, focusing mostly on multiple schisms between affluence and liberalism in urban America and poverty and populism in rural areas.¹¹ In one the most eloquent analyses, J. D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (2016), the author tells the story of his family's migration from rural Kentucky to Ohio. Though the author

⁹ See, for example, Tremonti (2008), Moïsi (2009), and Prideaux (2011).

¹⁰ For an analysis of the rise of globalism on the emergence of far right nationalism, see Ip (2017).

¹¹ See, for example, Packer (2013), Cramer (2016), Hochschild (2016), Isenberg (2016), and Vance (2016). See also, Coontz (2016), "The Shell-Shocked White Working Class," <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/23/opinions/shell-shocked-white-working-class-opinion-coontz/>. Accessed March 16, 2017.

and his sister eventually escape the cycle of poverty and despair, his grandparents and parents were trapped in substance abuse, addiction, poverty, and family violence. Believing themselves abandoned by both political parties, his family and those in the circles in which he moved in his early life experienced a sense of hopelessness and despair, often coupled with a deep distrust of and skepticism about the effectiveness of ‘systems,’ such as health care, education, and social services, to provide them with the means to become economically self-sufficient.

For these people, the American government failed to distribute societal hope. They and others in similar situations across the nation fueled the populism that elected Donald Trump. In their view, the collective “we” with which they identify has been abandoned and disrespected, if not victimized, by government. Feeling alienated from the political mainstream, they sought a candidate whom they believed would promote their interests and take their concerns seriously, who would “drain the swamp” and create policies that would integrate them into the life of the nation. Trump’s campaign preyed upon their hopelessness, their frustration with government, and their fears and mistaken beliefs about immigration – that all Muslim immigrants are prospective terrorists and that all immigrants take jobs that would otherwise be held by whites. His campaign also legitimated hatred and violence based on racism, sexism, and homophobia. In short, Trump tapped into the biases, hatreds, and fears of a pre-existing nation of worriers who had become devoid of hope in the government, whipping them into a visible and voluble crowd of paranoid nationalists.

This is one side of the current political story. On the other lies a range of reactions from liberals. Some, for example, those who purchase and read books such as those previously mentioned, seek to understand what happened. Some look for ways to unify and move forward (see Altman 2017, A15; McGurn 2017, A15). Those of this ilk are potential “carers,” who might

seek to bind the wounds of the nation. On the other side are those who, like Garrison Keillor (2016), are critical of Trump's claims to champion a forsaken working class and criticize members of that class for irresponsible choices. He predicts that the disasters of a Trump presidency will fall mainly on Trump's working class supporters, and does not lament that. He advises liberals, not responsible for electing Trump, to retire to private life and wait until the disaster of his presidency is over.

In the midst of this fractured landscape, what might hope as a democratic civic virtue look like?

III. Hope as a Democratic Civic Virtue

I believe that hope as a democratic civic virtue is best displayed in grassroots citizen action. It is especially visible when citizens themselves organize and motivate initiatives despite governments' failures to act. Educational scholar Amanda Lashaw (2008), who studied a movement for small, equitable schools in Oakland, California, offers an inspirational example. The movement began at the grassroots level in response to the need to provide better schooling for black and Latino working-class children. Eventually, it garnered support from Oakland city agencies and beyond, attracting a \$350 million bond from Oakland to build and improve schools, as well as a \$9.5 million donation from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. In such cases, I would say that citizens display hope as a civic virtue. Even when government fails, citizens are still free, and might have good reason, to initiate hope-based movements. Of course, civic hope is also displayed in grassroots initiatives that dovetail with or support government policy. However, hope as a civic virtue of citizens need not depend on the acquiescence of government in citizens' projects and goals. Witness how hope as a civic virtue has been displayed in acts of

civil disobedience, such as occurred during the Civil Rights movement or in actions protesting the Vietnam War.

Civic hope is also displayed in the actions of individual citizens who do not band together for a common cause. Individual acts such as running for a position on a school board, attending a school board meeting, or voting, can express the civic virtue of hope, provided they are done from the appropriate motivation of promoting a democratic end. The question of motivation is interesting, for it seems overly stringent to insist that hope is a civic virtue only if citizens' hopeful dispositions and actions spring from a purely disinterested commitment to democratic ends and processes. In LaShaw's example, we can note how odd it would be to think that the parents of black and Latino children in Oakland were moved only by a commitment to the generic end of providing better schooling because of the disinterested desire to enhance the ends of democracy and democratic processes. They legitimately wanted higher quality schools for their children, and worked for this within political constraints. This suggests that the appropriate motivations for hope as a civic virtue can include not only commitments to the ends of democracy and democratic processes, but also legitimate self-interest.

The inclusion of legitimate self-interest as a possible motivation for civically hopeful dispositions and actions is not arbitrary, but is premised on the principle that democracy exists to further the interests of citizens within certain parameters. This principle can be traced to the earliest exponents of liberal democracy. It is, for example, found in the Lockean proviso, which states that denizens of the state of nature may appropriate resources so long as they put them to good use and leave as much and as good for others (see Locke, 1980, Chapter V). It is also found in John Stuart Mill's harm principle, which affords the individual the freedom to live as she sees fit, provided that she does not harm others (see Mill, 1869, Chapter IV). The scope and

nature of legitimate interest is difficult to specify, and has clearly changed since the days when Locke wrote. Mill's harm principle, too, raises questions about what counts as 'harm,' its scope, and how to distinguish harm from offense. So how are we to identify the kinds of motives that can work with hope as a civic virtue?

Elsewhere I have argued that virtues can be 'impure' (see Snow, forthcoming).¹² A virtue is impure if the motives it includes are not all morally worthy, but are mixed. A set of mixed motives consists of morally worthy and morally neutral motives. The presence of morally vicious motives in a set renders the set not mixed, but vicious, and can render the trait that includes the set a vice.

To illustrate how this works with civic hope, consider that parents of black and Latino children in the Oakland example likely acted from legitimate self-interest. We could call this a morally benign or worthy motive, since they acted on behalf of their children, or we could call it morally neutral. The point is that neither the desire to promote or attain the legitimate ends of democracy, nor a commitment to democracy and democratic processes, is intrinsic to the desire to obtain better schools for one's children. That is, the desire for better schooling is not part of the desires required to appropriately motivate civic hope. Yet, appropriately constrained, it can work in conjunction with the desires required for hope. Civic hope in such cases would count as an impure virtue.

Introducing the distinction between pure and impure virtues allows us to accommodate the notion that many citizens do not act from pure love of democracy, but take advantage of democratic processes to legitimately advance their interests. The Oakland parents were probably not motivated by the pure desire to improve schooling in a democratic society, but, instead,

¹² I draw upon Snow (forthcoming) in the paragraphs that follow.

wanted something much nearer to the ground: better schools for their own children. If that was their primary motivation for acting, they cannot be said to have acted from a purely virtuous motive in a robust Aristotelian sense, according to which people do what is hopeful, generous, brave, etc., from the selfless desire to act virtuously. Yet, because of this, I do not want to deny that the parents displayed hope, or that their hope was a civic virtue.

When is a legitimate self-interest appropriately constrained so that it can function as a morally neutral motive alongside those required for civic hope? The answer is that self-interest is rendered 'legitimate,' when it is not morally tainted. If I seek to advance my self-interest by harming you or wronging you, my self-interest is morally tainted. If the Oakland parents had sought to provide better schools for their children by harming others, say, by redirecting vital funds for a program for disabled children and thereby denying them crucial care, that would have been a morally tainted, and consequently, illegitimate, exercise of self-interest. Alternatively, if the parents had used nefarious means to advance their cause, for example, by bribing school board officials to support their project, this, too, would have rendered their motives and actions morally vicious.

A measure of unavoidable imprecision attends the question of when morally bad motives render a trait a vice that would otherwise be considered an impure virtue. How many morally bad motives are required to taint or outweigh the morally good and neutral motives that a trait displays, thereby rendering our evaluation of that trait morally negative? How strong does a single morally bad motive have to be for it to do this? Are there some morally bad motives, such as the desire to control another rational adult for one's own gain, which, if the only bad motive in a set of otherwise morally good and neutral motives, would render an otherwise seemingly benign trait, such as impure generosity, vicious? Such cases seem to me best judged on a case-

by-case basis using practical wisdom, but they speak to the complexity of evaluations of traits and actions in real-world situations. One can imagine people whose hope is a pure civic virtue, who are motivated purely by love of their country and its democracy. For many others, I suspect that civic hope is an impure virtue in the sense described above. In other cases, I suspect that civic hope is tainted by malevolent ambition or other immoral motives, as when a person seeks political office from love of power or the desire to enact questionable policies, such as a ban on Muslim immigrants. Such individuals might have civic hope, in the sense that they could seek to advance the ends of democracy (as construed by their lights) and be committed to democracy and democratic processes, yet their hope would not be a virtue because their disposition and actions are mixed with immoral motives.

Given this discussion of motivation, we can amend our initial sketch of hope as a civic virtue as follows:

Hope as a democratic civic virtue is the entrenched disposition of openness to the political possibilities a democratic government can provide. Hope must include the belief that the ends of democracy are possible. Hope is a pure civic virtue when it is motivated solely by the desire to promote or attain the legitimate ends of democracy, and includes a commitment to democracy and democratic processes.¹³ If, in addition to these motives, hope includes motives of legitimate self-interest, it is an impure virtue. As with other civic virtues, hope is fully theorized and contextualized within specific political traditions.

¹³ What of someone who is lacking a commitment to democracy and to democratic processes? I believe such a person might have hope, even civic hope, but she would not have hope as a democratic civic virtue. What of someone whose commitment is weak, perhaps because of multiple political disappointments and setbacks? In that case, I would say that her democratic civic virtue of hope is also weak.

IV. Theorizing Hope: A Modified Pragmatism

The Oakland parents were unlikely to have had a theory to contextualize their hope, though they might have been inspired by democratic ideals from American history. Yet if we wish to promote activities like theirs, and hope as a civic virtue more generally, we would do well to theorize hope in the context of American political traditions.¹⁴ Articulating a background theory for civic hope can enable actors in the public realm to deliberately draw upon established democratic traditions, values, and ideals for inspiration and guidance, thereby expanding their knowledge base so as to explain and justify civic action to would-be participants as well as critics. As mentioned earlier, two traditions of American democracy could furnish a background theory: American pragmatism and the tradition of democracy as a civic religion that traces its roots to the Puritans. Here I briefly sketch a modified pragmatism as a background theory for the conception of hope as a civic virtue offered here.

The philosopher Richard Rorty draws on the pragmatism of the philosopher John Dewey and the poet Walt Whitman for his vision of social hope and maintains that both figures substitute hope for knowledge (1998, 106-107). Hope, as defined by Rorty and attributed to Whitman, Dewey, and the American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, is “. . . the ability to believe that the future will be unspecifiably different from, and unspecifiably freer than, the

¹⁴ Lamb (2016, 320) makes a similar point when he suggests using democratic traditions as a motivational resource to make democratic hope concrete for citizens. Doing so, he believes, could help motivate them to action in pursuit of goods that are difficult to obtain, thereby overcoming an abstract faith in democratic systems that are dominated by political and elites. Lamb (2016) offers an interesting account of democratic hope that draws on Aquinas’s account of hope as a theological virtue. For an account of hope as a political virtue from a Kantian-inspired perspective, see Moellendorf (2006). For a Deweyan theory of hope in dialogue with Snyder’s hope theory, see Fishman and McCarthy (2005).

past . . .” (1999, 120). Hope is “. . . the condition of all growth” (Rorty 1999, 120). Rorty’s idea of social hope is cast in an American idiom, and directed to a distinctively American end: it is a hope that motivates us to “achieve our country” (Rorty 1999, 34; 1998, 106-107; see also Westbrook 2008, 140-141). The foundations of American pragmatic hope lay in the “stuff” of America – its history, its social, political, and economic institutions, its distinctive spirit, and its emerging culture and national character (see Westbrook 2008, 141). I believe that the poet Walt Whitman best gives the flavor of the hope that Rorty commends.

Whitman’s poetry is a love affair with a nation in its adolescence – an America that has survived its infancy and is emerging, in the mid-nineteenth century, into the robustness of youth. His work conveys identification with the fullness of being in America, and pays homage to any and everything that America can or has produced. Ebullient in its tone, his poetry brims with hope for the present and the future. “Song of Myself,” first published in *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, is especially instructive in this regard (see Whitman 2004, xxi; 63-124). The poem is an extended identification with all that Whitman encounters. He sees himself in all, and all in him, and he loves all with force and fullness of being. The poem illustrates Rorty’s claim that moral progress is “. . . a matter of increasing *sensitivity*, increasing responsiveness to the needs of a larger and larger variety of people and things” (1999, 81; italics his). The poem expresses an ideal of social democracy – seeing equal value for all, having equal respect for all, and most importantly, loving all and seeing all as engaged in a common life. This Whitmanesque ideal is further developed in the philosophy of John Dewey in the early twentieth century, and taken up again by Rorty later in the same century.

Leaves of Grass, published in 1855, predated the Civil War. Did the slaughter and horror of a nation turned against itself sour Whitman, causing him to abandon his hopeful vision? It did

not. Arguably, the horrors of the Civil War and the superficiality of the age that followed it tempered and fortified Whitman's hope. In *Democratic Vistas*, printed in 1888, Whitman shares his own experience of the Civil War. Additionally, he registers dismay, indeed, revulsion, at what Mark Twain called America's "gilded age" – an age in which Whitman believed superficiality reigned in intellectual life, greed prevailed in business, vulgarity characterized manners, and hypocrisy infected morals (Whitman 2002, 11-14). Whitman is well aware of the trauma the young nation has endured, as well as the ills that beset it. Yet he finds in his experiences, especially his Civil War time in army hospitals, reasons for hope. Underlying the carnage of the Civil War he sees the nobility of brave soldiers who fight and die for cherished causes. Beneath the superficial veneer of mediocrity and evidence of moral decay he sees strength and the ability to overcome temptation and weakness. He notes that the justification of American democracy ultimately lies in the future, specifically, in the ability of the new nation to produce people of good moral character and religious disposition (Whitman 2002, 2, 40). The foundation needed to support American democracy, he contends, has yet to emerge. This foundation is a truly national imaginative literature – one that points the way for the people with stories of worthy role models (Whitman 2002, 70-71). According to Whitman (2002, 8), this literature will shape the nation's moral identity. Here we find adumbrations of Hage (2003)'s collective "we."

Rorty and Whitman share a vision of American social democracy, yet both were aware of the failures of American political life. Failures in American political life beset us today. In light of the turmoil of our times, I suggest that we not follow the pragmatists in substituting hope for knowledge, but, instead, buttress hope with knowledge. Recall the passage, quoted earlier, from Miyazaki (2017, 8): "Hope suggests a willingness to embrace uncertainty and also serves as a

concrete method for keeping knowledge moving in conditions of uncertainty.” Recall, too, Snyder (2000)’s view that high hopers display flexibility in pursuing their ends and the means to them. The work of psychologist Gabrielle Oettingen (2014) furnishes resources for a method of hoping that incorporates knowledge into the process of hoping, allows for flexibility, and fits well with the pragmatist vision of civic hope as involving imaginative possibilities.¹⁵ She summarizes decades of studies that support her view that dreaming, indeed, many kinds of positive imaginative thinking, do not help people to achieve their goals, but lead them to become frustrated and unhappy. Dreams and imaginings, she argues, must be supplemented. Elsewhere I’ve characterized Oettingen’s work as follows: “Her findings indicate that those who engage in what she calls ‘mental contrasting’ are happier and more successful. Mental contrasting involves tethering one’s positive outlook to reality, that is, combining one’s dreams with visualizing the obstacles that stand in the way” (Snow 2015, 214). Visualizing obstacles enables one to anticipate and overcome them in actual goal pursuit. This is integral to Snyder (2000)’s ‘agency-pathways’ theory of hope: the hoper must be able not only to imagine attaining the hoped-for end, but must also be able to adopt effective means to achieving it. This requires cognitive flexibility and emotional resilience. High hopers are cognitively flexible; they are able to adjust their ends as well as means when obstacles are encountered or the circumstances of goal pursuit change. Mental contrasting, I suggest, provides a promising method for hopers to employ.

The modified pragmatism so briefly outlined here serves as a kind of receptivity theory or resource for hopers to better understand the content, forms, and functions of civic hope within the American democratic framework. Hoppers can look to that resource for guidance and inspiration, and through reflection on it, might come to discern the contours of ways forward

¹⁵ I draw on Snow (2015, 214) in describing Oettingen’s work.

through difficult political times, much as Bloch urged for Marxists, Lear thought of Plenty Coups, and Marcel thought of those who were stuck in agentic ‘captivity.’ Unlike Marcel and the case of Plenty Coups, I am not arguing that divine grace or guidance from a spirit world is part of the story. My view is more akin to Bloch’s insofar as he thought that Marxists could draw upon a tradition for the cultivation of hope. By enlarging the access of civic hopers to the rich trove of ideas and experiences that have contributed to the American democratic tradition and using mental contrasting as a method for formulating ends, obstacles, and means, the agency of civic hopers can be empowered.

Conclusion

I have argued for a conception of hope as a democratic civic virtue, and have suggested that, in the American context, it is best theorized by adopting a modified pragmatism. Modified pragmatism embraces the spirit and flexibility of Whitman and Rorty, but insists that hope should not supplant knowledge. Instead, modified pragmatism looks to empirical psychology for advice on how best to achieve hoped-for ends. In short, today, we can draw upon the tradition of American pragmatism, with its emphasis on vision and inspiration despite setbacks and hardship, yet fortify it with empirical research that highlights roles for knowledge, strategy, and planning in efforts to achieve the goals we set for ourselves through civic imagination.¹⁶

¹⁶ I am grateful to fellow participants in “The Nature and Norms of Hope” conference, Cornell University, April 27-29, 2017, for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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