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**The Sociological Study of Hope and the Economy:
Introductory Remarks**

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ABSTRACT

The topic of hope is currently not very much studied in the social sciences; and this means that the emerging discussion of economy and hope, in sociology and elsewhere, may still benefit from a general discussion of hope. This paper points to some useful reflections on hope that can be found in the religious and philosophical literature. It also attempts to summarize what the social sciences have said so far about hope, especially economics, sociology and anthropology. - In the general and concluding section of the paper it is suggested that it is important to approach hope from a perspective which is such that it opens up this topic to the social sciences. One that has this quality is the following: hope is *a wish for something to come true*. There are three elements to this description of hope: (1) *the wish*, (2) its focus on *something specific*, (3) and that the wish *comes true*. Elements (2) and (3) have direct links to the social world and therefore present entries for the social sciences. What you wish for depends on society, and so does the attempt to make a wish be realized. The consequences of these ideas for the sociological study of hope and the economy are briefly explored.

The main aim of this paper is to confront two topics with one another that are usually kept apart: *hope* and *the economy*. Since I am a sociologist, I will mainly try to do this from a sociological perspective, that is, with an eye towards society and the way that it influences things.¹ Both hope and the economy are part of the everyday world and familiar to everyone in the sense that we all have personal experience of them. The media as well popular authors have also plenty to say on the two topics of economy and hope. There exist many books on how to start a successful business, get a career going and how to make millions - just as there are books on how to use hope to cure illnesses, conceive children and much more.

The attention that academics have given to these two topics varies, on the other hand, quite a bit. While economics today is a well established field of academic research that has its own Nobel Prize and many accomplishments to its name, very little academic work has been carried out on the topic of hope. This is where this paper comes into the picture, and its task is primarily to discuss the concept of hope in relation to economic phenomena, and how it may make its entry into social science research on the economy, especially sociology.

But even if I have decided to focus on only one aspect of hope, or rather on its role in one set of human activities – the economy - I also feel that it is important to take a broad view of hope and discuss both what is meant by hope in general and what can be learned from the many different contexts in which it has figured, academic or otherwise. The main reason for this is that the current stage of knowledge about hope is unsure and not only in the social sciences. We do not know exactly what hope is and how and when it manifests itself. Once there is more knowledge about these issues, one may focus directly on one's own area of research.

This paper has two main parts. In the first part, I will essentially present and comment on some of what has been said about hope as well as hope in the economy, drawing on literature from as different fields as philosophy, religion, economics, anthropology and

¹ For comments and information I thank Mabel Berezin, Christiane Cunnar, Nicolas Eilbaum, Hirokazu Miyazaki, Wendelin Reich and Hans Zetterberg. The first version of this paper was written in July 2005. I have omitted accounts of the contributions to Hirokazu Miyazaki and Richard Swedberg (eds.), *Hope and the Economy* since this volume has not yet been published. The authors include anthropologists as well as sociologists, such as Mabel Berezin, Yuji Genda, Jane Guyer, Naoki Kusaga, Joycelyn Pixley, Annelise Riles and Katherine Verderey.

sociology. The ambition here is to cast the net wide, in order to catch as many fishes as possible. This will be followed by a second and concluding part, in which I will discuss what this catch may mean for a more precise understanding of hope as well as for research on hope and the economy, from a sociological perspective.

Starting from an Everyday View of Hope

Clear definitions of any word or concept are difficult to come by, for a number of reasons, and hope is no exception. As just mentioned, there is currently little exact knowledge of what precisely constitutes hope. One nonetheless has to begin somewhere, and I will start from a common, non-academic definition.

For such a definition of what “hope” means in English, one may consult *The Oxford English Dictionary*; and the latest edition provides the following main definition: hope means “to entertain expectation of something desired, to look (mentally) with expectations” (OED 1989:377). Various examples from texts which contain the word “hope”, dating all the way back to the 900s, accompany this definition.

The two main terms that are used to describe hope in this definition are *expectation* and *desire*. Both of them share with hope that they are forward-looking and concerned with something that has not yet occurred. But there also are differences. Expectations differ, for example, from hope in at least one respect: what you expect in the future does not necessarily have to be positive. The likelihood that some future event will indeed take place is also higher when it comes to an expectation than in the case of hope, since it is common to hope for things that will not take place. There is finally a rational and cognitive element to the notion of expectation, especially as used in social science, that cannot be found in hope.

Desire has similarly some things in common with hope; and it has been argued that the two are closely related. Both, for example, may be deeply submerged in a person and hard to capture with the help of standard social science methods. But it can also be argued that there are differences between the two. There is, for one thing, a more direct quality to desire than to hope and sometimes also a physical quality to it. While it comes easy, for example, to speak of hope and religion, this is less the case with desire and religion.

There also exist some additional meanings to hope, which are less important according to *The Oxford English Dictionary* than “to entertain expectation of something desired”. These are: (1) “to trust, have confidence” and (2) “to expect with desire, or to desire

with expectation". The latter of these two, the reader is told, is mainly used in poetic contexts and is illustrated by the well-known Biblical phrase "to hope against hope" (after Rom. iv:18).

Hope, as suggested by these additional definitions, also needs to be situated in relation to *trust*. While hope is not a social science concept today, trust is. While both are oriented to the future or, more precisely, to a positive state in the future, there nonetheless also exist some differences. One is that in trust you expect something to happen and would be surprised if this is not the case. When you hope, in contrast, there is much less certainty that what is hoped for will take place. With hope, realization is less of a possibility than in the case of trust.

What meaning of hope is best suited for the social sciences? There are different ways to answer this question. The word hope has been used in a multitude of different contexts over the centuries and acquired many meanings in this process. Instead of making an argument at this point of the paper for one of these as the most suitable candidate, I have chosen to present and discuss several of its different meanings. This way more of the richness and complexity of the concept of hope can become part of the discussion.

Conceived along these lines, the next few pages of this introduction will serve as an introduction both to the concept of hope in general and as a social science concept. I have also made a special effort to touch on some related issues. My way of proceeding will be to present and discuss the way that hope has been used and analysed in religion, philosophy and the social sciences. Among the social sciences I will pay special attention to sociology, anthropology and economics.

The account of the role of hope in religion, philosophy and the social sciences will be fragmentary and incomplete, since there are few good studies on these topics. The reader who also wants to explore the role of hope in the arts, everyday life and academic disciplines other than sociology, anthropology and economics, is referred to the literature in a footnote and to the reference list at the end of this introduction.²

Hope in Religion and Philosophy

In the literature on hope it is often noted that just as there exists a tradition of political hope, there also exists a tradition of religious hope. References are usually made to

² Ernst Bloch's *Principle of Hope* can, among other things, be described as an idiosyncratic encyclopaedia when it comes to hope, including its role in everyday life. For literature and the arts, see e.g. André Malraux, *Man's Hope* and J.M.W. Turner, *Fallacies of Hope*. For hope in everyday life, see e.g. Studs Terkel, *Hope Dies Last*.

the role of hope in the New Testament, especially to the writings of Paul and his famous statement in the first Corinthian Letter about faith, hope and love. The religious tradition of hope sometimes has messianic overtones. It is also explicitly normative, which means that what you hope for is the same as what is good.

The key passage in Paul's Corinthian Letter, written around year 55, reads as follows: "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). This should not be interpreted as a statement that love is superior to hope. The two are rather part of each other, as an earlier passage in the same letter makes clear: "Love bears all things, believes all things, *hopes all things*, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:7; emphasis added).

The three so-called theological virtues of faith, hope and love, are often contrasted in the religious literature to the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude (e.g. Aquinas 1944, Housen 2004). The cardinal virtues, which trace their origin to Greek philosophy, are characterized by the fact that they can be learned, aided by grace. Faith, hope and love, in contrast, cannot be learned, but must be poured by God directly into the soul of the believer.

Besides the famous quote from the Corinthian Letter, the Bible also contains many other important references to hope. According to one of these, hope is hidden: "For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for what we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. 8:24-25). The expression "as long as there is life, there is hope" probably derives from the following passage: "But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion" (Eccl. 9:4). That hope is central to Christianity as a doctrine is also clear from Paul's description of God as "the God of hope" (Rom. 15:13).

While the literature on the role of hope in Christian religious thought is considerable, this is not the case with philosophy. According to a recent article, "it is a scandal that a philosophical theme [hope] that is so central to how we should live our lives, and that has received so much attention in the arts, has gone virtually unnoticed in the philosophical community itself" (Bovens 1999:667). But even if this is true, in the few cases where philosophers have paid attention to hope, the result is of much interest since a number of interesting ideas have been generated. A famous example is Leibniz' ideas on optimism, a term that became popular in the 18th century. According to Leibniz, the world in which we live is the best of all possible worlds, even if we take the existence of evil into account.

The term optimism comes from the Latin *optimus* or best, and is closely related to the concept of hope. Optimism and hope both look to the future, which they cast in positive

colors. But there also exist some differences between the two. While the opposite of optimism is pessimism, the opposite of hope is fear or hopelessness. And while hope is sometimes defined as an emotion or as sharing some features with emotions, optimism is perhaps better described as a disposition or a set of opinions.

Another difference between optimism and hope comes out if we look at the fate of philosophical optimism in the 18th century. The famous earthquake in Lisbon in 1755 delivered a heavy blow to the optimism of the Enlightenment, as evidenced by the reaction of Voltaire. In *Candide, or Optimism* (1759) the ideas of optimism are famously satirized. When Dr. Pangloss for example argues that the existence of the nose shows that nature has wisely provided us with a good place for our eyeglasses, it is Leibniz's optimism that Voltaire has in mind.

That the critique of optimism did not necessarily extend to the concept of hope can be illustrated by the work of Immanuel Kant. In *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) Kant says that reason is interested in the following three questions:

1. What can I know?
2. What ought I to do?
3. *What may I hope?* (Kant [1781] 1965:635; emphasis added)

In explicating each of these three questions, Kant emphasizes that “all *hoping* is directed towards happiness” (*ibid.*, p. 636). The reader of Kant's text on perpetual peace is also told that “there are good grounds for hoping that we shall succeed” (Kant [1795] 1970:130).

There is an existential tone to Kant's formulation of the three questions in *Critique of Pure Reason*, and one can also find many interesting ideas on hope in the works of the existentialists. Kierkegaard, for example, discusses hope in connection with memory and repetition. According to *Repetition* (1843), memory means to repeat backwards, and repetition to remember forwards. Hope, Kierkegaard says, is neither the same as memory nor the same as repetition. Instead it means to do something novel and brittle: “hope is a new outfit, untried, stiff and shining, but which you have never used so you don't really know whether you will look good in it or if it will fit” (Kierkegaard [1843] 1995:6).

There is also a danger to hope, Kierkegaard warns in *Either-Or*; and this is the case when hope gets to set the goal rather than gently drive the action. “It is indeed beautiful to see a person put out to sea with the fair wind of hope; one may utilize the chance to let oneself be towed away, but one ought never have it on board one's craft, least of all as pilot, for it is an untrustworthy shipmaster” (Kierkegaard 1987:292-93).

As to 20th century existentialists, several of these have shown interest in hope, such as Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel and Jean-Paul Sartre. *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) by Camus is of special interest in this context because of its sharp argument *against* hope. According to Camus, modern man is tempted to give in to hope, in the form of a religion or doctrine that assigns meaning to the world and hides its essential meaninglessness or absurd quality. To hope, in other words, means to give in to an inauthentic impulse and to falsify one's relationship to the world. Life is absurd; and this is a truth that should be faced. "The absurd is the contrary of hope"; and "the refusal to hope" is essential to "absurd man" (Camus 1955:44, 26).

Sartre's ideas on hope came to their most concentrated expression in a series of interviews that were published in 1980 and have been collected in a volume entitled *Hope Now*. Sartre here says that he did not think in terms of hope when he wrote his major work in existentialism, *Being and Nothingness* (1943). Nonetheless, since the publication of this work he has increasingly come to feel that "everyone lives with hope" and that "hope is part of man" (Sartre 1996:33, 56).

By the phrase that hope is part of man, Sartre does not so much mean that people are hopeful or that they invest some of their actions with hope. His argument is instead that a person's acts are always set within a broader goal – and since this goal is hopeful, it so-to-speak frames and infuses all other acts with its hope. Or in Sartre's words: "everyone has a goal beyond the practical or theoretical goals of the moment, matters of politics, say, or education; beyond all such matters, everyone has a goal that I would call, if you wish, transcendent or absolute, and all practical goals have meaning only in relation to this goal" (*ibid.*, p. 56).

The foremost philosophical work on hope – and still the only major philosophical work on this topic – is *The Principle of Hope* by Ernst Bloch. This 3-volume work was mainly written during 1938-1947, when Bloch lived in the United States. Its impact on modern philosophy has been minor, partly because Bloch insisted on following his own course and ignored mainstream philosophy, and partly because of Bloch's sympathy for the Soviet Union and East Germany.

Bloch has a broad and multi-faceted concept of hope and argues that it can sometimes be an emotion and at other times more of a cognitive act. One can learn to hope, he says, and hope can also be taught. There is "genuine hope" as well as "fraudulent hope" (Bloch 1986:5). Hope, as is shown in great detail in *The Principle of Hope*, can be

found in many aspects of human existence - in art, music, detective stories, daydreams, utopias and much more.

An important theme in Bloch is that hope is ontologically directed towards the future and what has not yet come into being – what he calls the Not-Yet (*Noch-Nicht*). This Hegelian sounding term should not detract from the fact that there is a concrete quality to hope in Bloch's version. "Expectation, hope, intention towards possibility that has still not become: this is not only a basic feature of human consciousness, but, concretely corrected and grasped, a basic determination within objective reality as a whole" (Bloch 1986:7).

According to *The Principle of Hope*, philosophy has utterly failed to deal with hope, and one important reason for this is that it has exclusively been preoccupied with the past. Not only does philosophy look backwards, it also fails to see the element of hope in the past. Like Freud, Bloch says, philosophy sees as its task to read the future from what has already happened, and not in terms of what will or may happen. It is caught in the past; it does not see hope.

Marxism, according to Bloch, represents a watershed in the history of philosophy as well as in the history of hope. What Marx has brought to hope is first and foremost the idea that hope can be realized in everyday reality. "Becoming happy was always what was sought after in the dream of a better life, and only Marxism can institute it", we read in *The Principle of Hope* (Bloch 1986:17). Bloch refers to his type of Marxism as "creative Marxism", and it is clear that there exist important parallels between his ideas on this score and the political tradition of messianic-revolutionary hope.

Hope in the Social Sciences

Just as with philosophy, very little attention has been paid to hope in the social sciences. Whatever little there is, is also fragmentary in nature. This will be illustrated in the coming pages, where especially sociology and anthropology will be discussed. I will also comment on a few items by economists. Nothing will be said about psychology except that the efforts by C. Richard Snyder to introduce the topic of hope into psychology has been met with considerable resistance (Snyder 1994, 2000, 2001). It has especially been argued that Snyder has failed to integrate the study of hope with existing research traditions in psychology (e.g. *Psychological Inquiry* 2002).

To begin with sociology, there is first of all the classics. Now and then in his analyses, Tocqueville refers, for example, to hope. The most famous example of this is

linked to the so-called Tocqueville Effect and can be found in *The Old Regime and the Revolution*. What the Tocqueville Effect refers to is that towards the end of the 18th century some reforms were carried out in France; and it was precisely in the areas where these were the most successful, that also the revolution received most support from the population. The reason for this, Tocqueville suggests, is that when things improve, people's hope that things can get better is awakened (Tocqueville 1998: 236).

Hope also plays an important role in Tocqueville's class analysis. One effect of the increasing levelling of society, according to *Democracy in America*, is that people begin to hope for material things that they never could have hoped for in the old class society. The poor in the United States, Tocqueville noted on his trip to this country in 1831-1832, had a "hope and longing" for the things that the rich were consuming (Tocqueville 2004:618). Democracy brakes down the barriers between people, and this allows hope to extend in new directions.

Another example of hope and class in Tocqueville's work is the following. One of the major reasons that France, but not England, had a violent revolution has to do with the way that their respective aristocracies acted. The English aristocracy held out the promise that a few successful individuals one day could join its ranks, while the French aristocracy did not – with resentment and hatred towards the French aristocracy as a result. The point was not so much whether people actually did join the aristocracy, Tocqueville says, but that they felt that the chance was there – the *hope* (e.g. Tocqueville 1862:221).

While Tocqueville was an observer that posterity has labelled a sociologist, Max Weber was more of a professional sociologist. And just as with Tocqueville, one can only find scattered references to hope in his work. An entrepreneur, to take one example, has the "hope" to make more money than if he just let the money in the bank (Weber 1946:97).

The two areas in his work where Weber uses hope the most frequently, are in his political sociology and in his sociology of religion. Weber especially refers to hope when he speaks of the early working class movement which was inspired by Marx. *The Communist Manifesto*, he says, is suffused by hope, just as hope underpins Marx's idea that socialism will one day come into being through the collapse of capitalism (Weber 1994:288, 294).

Weber also refers to hope in his discussion of the attitude of the poor to religion; and here he says that hope constitutes a "robust motive" (Weber 1946:79). What motivates those who are "negatively privileged" in their attitude to religion, is "hope for

salvation” and “hope for compensation” (e.g. Weber 1946:273, 1978:172). Charismatic leaders may also channel the hope of people and tend to appear in situations of despair.

Emile Durkheim was much more interested in the general phenomenon of hope than either Weber or Tocqueville, and he also addresses it in an original manner. The place where he does this is primarily in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), more precisely in his discussion of the role of happiness for the evolution of society (Neves 2003). Durkheim firmly resists the idea of the utilitarians that happiness represents the goal of mankind and that there is an increase of happiness in recent history. On the contrary, he says, many countries have experienced an important increase in suicide during the 19th century. Nonetheless, there is plenty of hope around, and room for a reasoned optimism.

What makes Durkheim’s argument interesting from the perspective in this paper, is especially how he accounts for the origin of hope. Hope can in principle be seen as either a biological product or a social product. Durkheim leans towards the latter alternative and suggests that the reason why people feel hopeful, is that they have good reasons for believing that things will turn out well in the end. Hope, in brief, may be an emotion, but like all emotions it is also a product of society. The central passage in *The Division of Labor in Society* reads as follows:

[Hope] has not miraculously fallen from heaven into our hearts, but must have, like all the sentiments, been formed under the influence of the facts. Thus if men have learnt to hope, if under the blows of misfortune, they have grown accustomed to turn their gaze towards the future and to expect from it compensation for their present suffering, it is because they have perceived that such compensation occurred frequently, that the human organism was both too flexible and too resisting to be easily brought down, that the moments when misfortune gained the day were exceptional and that generally the balance ended up by being re-established. (Durkheim [1893] 1984:190)

Is it then hope that stops people from committing suicide? Durkheim hesitates to answer ‘yes’, even if he doesn’t rule out the possibility that there is a link between the instinct of self-preservation and hope. He writes:

Consequently, whatever the role of hope in the genesis of the instinct of self-preservation, that instinct is a convincing testimony to the relative goodness of life. For the same reason, where that instinct loses its power or generality we may be sure that life itself loses its attractiveness, that misfortune increases, either because the causes of suffering multiply or because the capacity for resistance on the part of the individual diminishes. (*ibid.*)

Also modern sociology is incomplete and fragmentary in its analysis of hope. Just like classical sociology, modern sociology seems to prefer to discuss concepts that are in some way related to the concept of hope, rather than hope itself – such as trust, expectations, aspirations, drive and the like. This is also true for the growing branch called the sociology of emotions that sometimes touches on hope but prefers to focus on the major and more important emotions (e.g. Kemper 1987:283, Barbalet 1998:150).

An interesting and rare attempt to turn hope into a useful concept in modern sociology can be found in a lecture by Ralf Dahrendorf entitled “Inequality, Hope, and Progress” (1976). The author begins by making a sharp distinction between “utopian hope” and “realistic hope”. The former he describes by pointing to the early writings by Marx, Marcuse’s notion of a multi-dimensional man and Habermas’ project of human communication. “Realistic hope”, in contrast, refers to what is concrete and possible to achieve. Dahrendorf also terms it “effective hope”. Dahrendorf’s main thesis is that social inequality serves as an important incentive for people to better their condition by awakening realistic or effective hope in them.

From the perspective of hope and the economy, Dahrendorf’s enumeration of situations in which hope plays an important role in energizing people into action is of interest. “Hope...based on experience”, he says, can be awakened by “the villa one has seen on a Sunday morning walk, the television film about skiing holidays, or even about the rich man’s trip to Monte Carlo, the advertisement of a new sports-car” (Dahrendorf 1976:14). He continues,

such hope motivates people to change their conditions, or their lives, in a variety of ways. It may be a stimulus for the individual to move, either geographically, or in the scales of social status. It may be a challenge for solitary action, in associations, trade unions, political groups, in order to gain shorter working hours for all members. It may be international action, the demand for more voting rights in the International Monetary Fund, or membership in OECD. (*ibid.*)

The reason why realistic hope is also effective hope is that it constitutes a very practical kind of hope, ready to be translated into reality:

...in all cases such hope is coupled with demands for change which are capable of implementation, specific demands, promotion or a salary increase, the forty-eight hour or forty-hour week, new uses for special drawing rights, and the like. Whether every change brought about under social conditions in which action is sparked off by realistic

hope is progress, may be open to doubt; but if there is to be any progress at all, such hope is one of its ingredients. (*ibid.*)

While Dahrendorf in his discussion of realistic hope comes very close to supplying the reader with an operational definition of hope, no such definition is given. One of our colleagues, however, who heard about our interest in hope and the economy, has kindly supplied us with such a definition; and we offer it as part of the discussion of hope as a social science concept. Hans Zetterberg, a well-known expert on survey research, wrote to us a propos hope that he very much would like to have the following question asked on an annual basis in countries all over the world: “Do you think that the children who are growing up today will have it better or worse than you have it, when they are your age?” (Zetterberg 2005). Perhaps this can be labelled projected hope or, better, hope for others.

In turning to the issue of survey research, it can be mentioned that the very first attempt to include questions about hope in survey research may well have taken place in the early 1900s in Germany. In 1912 Adolph Levenstein, a self-educated worker and an acquaintance of Max Weber, published an attitude survey in a book entitled *The Working Class Question* (Levenstein 1912; for discussion, see Oberschall 1965:94-106). One of the questions that was asked read “What hopes and wishes do you have?”; and it turned out to be very successful. One 22-year old miner answered, for example, as follows: “I have one desire for myself and the rest of mankind. That she be able to partake very soon in the beauty of the world. The world has enough of it to make all mankind happy and peaceful” (Oberschall 1965:104).

Mentioning this early example of a survey, also gives me an excuse to note that one of the foremost theoreticians of chance and probability, Charles Peirce, has some intriguing ideas about the role of hope in a world ruled by chance. The human community, Peirce appears to argue, inspires “hope or [a] calm and cheerful wish”, since it always will outlast the individual (see in this context Hacking 1990:211-12). No-one, as far as I know, have explored in detail the role that hope plays in Peirce’s philosophy.

Zetterberg’s approach to hope – survey research where you ask someone to compare the situation today to that of tomorrow – points to a whole genre of existing research. To cite one example among many, the surveys on “optimism” and “pessimism” by Gallup International. This organization typically carries out research in some fifty-sixty countries simultaneously, and tries to establish if their inhabitants are optimistic or pessimistic. This is measured with the help of questions on the theme of “do you think next

year will be better than this year?” There are also questions that attempt to look at the economic dimensions of this theme, such as the economic prospect in general, whether unemployment will increase and the like (e.g. Gallup International 2005).

This type of research leads in a natural way to the question if there exists a relationship between the idea of hope in the economy and surveys of consumer confidence. These surveys are very common in contemporary society, where they are closely followed by politicians and business people. Surveys of consumer confidence trace their origin to the work of George Katano, in particular to his Index of Consumer Sentiment from 1952. The two most cited surveys of consumer confidence in the United States today are the Consumer Confidence Index (produced by the Conference Board) and the Index of Consumer Sentiment (produced at the University of Michigan). The questions that are asked in this type of surveys, include the following: “Looking ahead, do you think a year from now you (and your family living there) will be better off financially, worse off or just about the same as now?” and “Turning to business conditions in the country as a whole, do you think that during the next 12 months we’ll have good times financially or bad times or what?” (Weiss 2003). Results from surveys of consumer confidence indicate that young people have more confidence in the future than old people, and well-off people more than poor people.

The notion of consumer confidence overlaps to some extent with that of hope, but there also exist significant differences between the two. Both are, for example, directed at the future and that things may be better in the future. The most important difference is that while surveys of consumer confidence are interested in establishing what will happen, hope is more about what one wants or wishes to happen. It is true that what will happen and what one wants to happen may coincide. But even when this is the case, there is a complexity to the notion of hope that goes well beyond the standard measure of consumer confidence.

What represents so far the most impressive and important attempt to approach the topic of hope through survey research has been made in Japan at the Institute of Social Science at Tokyo University, in connection with the project of Hopology (2005-). The background to this research is the sense among the public in Japan since a few years back that the country lacks hope; hence the interest among some of its social scientists for this topic.

The main survey by this institute, undertaken in 2006, found that the majority of the country’s population (roughly 80 %) had hope and that the majority of these (some

60 %) also believed that they would be able to realize this hope within a reasonable amount of time (Genda 2007). People, it turned out, hoped for different things; and for males hope was typically attached to work. Not only individuals but also households were researched; and wealthy households had more hope than poor households.

Yuri Ganda – the main researcher behind this work – concludes that the data does not allow you to determine if hope has actually declined in Japan or not. Since Japanese society, however, is moving in the direction of a society with more old people, with more unemployment, and certain other features; and since these factors (old age, unemployment and a few other items) have been shown to be associated with low levels of hope, Japan may very well be heading in the direction of less hope.

To fully evaluate the situation in Japan, it can be added, one would also need comparative data, something that does not seem to exist today. While the Gallup International Survey findings for 2005 is based on very different questions than those that were used in Japan, one of their findings should nonetheless be mentioned. This is that the level of optimism varied quite a bit between regions as well as between countries (31% and 26% respectively). Does hope, one wonders, vary equally much?

One also wonders what the results would have been in Japan if qualitative research methods had been used, such as in depth interviews, participant observation and the like. Would these be able to answer more subtle questions that are hard to get at with the help of survey research? Would they, for example, validate the approach of someone like sociologist Zygmund Bauman? According to Bauman, one can find hope in many situations where people have no objective reason whatsoever to be hopeful. “Hope is stronger than all imaginable ‘testimony of reality’” (Bauman 2004:67). “Hope needs no proof”, he also says. “Hope is valid and real even if groundless” (*ibid.*). In brief, the relationship of hope to empirical reality is complex and raises questions that may require many different types of methods to explore.

If we move on from sociology to anthropology, it would appear that equally little attention has been paid to hope in this branch of the social sciences. According to an attempt to trace the history of research on hope in early and classical anthropology, there only exists one work on this topic: *Faith, Hope, and Charity in Primitive Religion* (1932) by Robert Ranulph Marrett (Crapanzano 2003a, b). This, however, does not mean that anthropologists have found no references to hope in the many cultures they have researched over the years. According to the Human Relations Area Files, studies of nearly all the cultures that currently make up this giant data base (146 of 165) contain references to the word

“hope”.³ But hope itself, it should be emphasized, is not a searchable category in HRAF; and this is an indication that anthropology does not see hope as a topic of importance.

The situation is somewhat different in modern anthropology. One of the leaders in the emerging interest in hope among anthropologists is Vincent Crapanzano, the author of an important essay on hope from the perspective of what he calls literary-philosophical anthropology. In this essay, Crapanzano primarily attempts to theorize hope in terms of desire. The two are not identical, he says, but related. When hope is mobilized, it becomes energized and close to desire. Hope that is not mobilized, in contrast, is more difficult to understand, and it also resists interpretation – like hope in general ultimately does.

Crapanzano approaches the subject of hope by presenting and commenting on a number of philosophers and social scientists who have written on hope. Two of these vignettes are of special interest to the theme of hope and the economy. In one of these Crapanzano reinterprets the famous cargo cult from the perspective of hope, emphasizing that the cult members did not just sit around and hope, but actively engaged in various activities to realize their desires. What they wanted, Crapanzano suggests, was not only certain objects, but also the world view and the vision of which these objects were part – a bit like modern consumers do not only want the goods in the stores but also what these signify in terms of status and dreams.

The second example draws on the author’s fieldwork in South Africa, just before the Apartheid system came to an end. Studying the white people, Crapanzano found that they had quite a bit of hope – hope to retain their privileges, their lifestyles and their property. But he also found that they were peculiarly inactive. They were waiting, Crapanzano concludes, and their hope was a negative one. It did not help them to find a solution to their problems; it was a form of *paralyzing hope*.

The second leader in the attempt to turn the study of hope into a theme in modern anthropology is Hirokazu Miyazaki. He is, first of all, the author of *The Method of Hope*, which can be described as an ethnographic study of a community of dispossessed Fijians. What especially interests Miyazaki is the role that hope has played in the attempts by the Suavo people over the years to regain their ancestral lands, but also in some of their other activities such as gift-giving and business ventures. While most analysts of hope whose work has been discussed so far, have approached hope as a topic, and attempted to

³ All in all the HRAF Collection contains material on 370 different cultural, ethnic religious and national groups in the world. Since hope is not captured by one of HRAF’s searchable categories, however, and since a word search can only be made on the electronically available material, I have restricted my comment to the 165 cultures.

explain the conditions under which it becomes stronger or weaker, Miyazaki argues that hope should primarily be studied as *a method*. Drawing on the works of Bloch, Benjamin and Rorty, he says that any other way of proceeding would be to negate the nature of hope.

An important aspect of Miyazaki's approach to hope as a method can be found in his notion of repetition or replication. "Hope", he says, "cannot be argued for; it can only be replicated" (Miyazaki 2004:110). An example of replication in *The Method of Hope* can be found in the analysis of the attempt by the Suavo people to start a real estate project in the 1990s, a venture that they initially approached with deep pessimism because of their earlier failures with this type of enterprise. One of their religious leaders, however, told the Suavo people that they now had God on their side, something which made them see things in a new and hopeful light. In Miyazaki's terminology, hope was thereby replicated and transferred from the area of religious thought to the area of real estate. Similarly – and this is how *The Method of Hope* ends – Miyazaki wants to replicate or transfer hope onto the area of anthropological knowledge itself.

The main question that according to Miyazaki drives his research – *How do we keep hope alive?* – also informs his second major study, which deals with "the economy of hope" (Miyazaki forthcoming). Using a major Japanese securities firm as his research site, Miyazaki shows how some derivative traders' hopeful vision infuses not only their daily economic activities but also their lives more generally. This study represents Miyazaki's most important study of hope and economy so far.

If we now turn to the science of economics, it soon becomes clear that economists have paid even less attention to hope than sociologists and anthropologists. An important reason for this is no doubt connected to the hold that *homo economicus* has had on mainstream economics, from the end of the 19th century till today. Economic man is equipped with superior cognitive skills but he has no emotions. He is never surprised or disappointed, and he never experiences hope or fear. He can, however, calculate probabilities and take risks; and a risk-taker can to some extent be labelled an optimist, just as someone who is risk averse can be called a pessimist.

Even if it is possible to analyse some aspects of hope with the help of concepts such as risk-taking and rational expectations, the fiction of economic man severely restricts the analysis of hope. This becomes clear if one compares the minimal space allotted to hope in microeconomics or rational choice theory to the one that can be found in early economics. In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), for example, Adam Smith touches on the role of hope in economic life in both a complex and realistic way. He notes,

among other things, that the hope of a better life motivates people to work harder – what he calls “the comfortable hope [of the average person] of bettering his conditions” (Smith [1776] 1976:98).

What may well be Adam Smith’s main contribution to the analysis of the role of hope in economic life has to do with a different topic, namely his thesis that hope makes people overestimate their chances of making a profit and underestimate their chances of making a loss. There is plenty of “the presumptuous hope of success” and “the hope of good luck”, he says, but not enough “fear of misfortune” (Smith [1776] 1976:126). Smith notes that the existence of lottery illustrates “the presumptuous hope of success”, and that it is this type of hope that makes adventurers enter into business and young people choose professions for which they have little talent. It is the same “romantic hope”, Smith adds, that makes young men enlist in the army at the beginning of a war and disregard the chance of getting killed (*ibid.*).

As already noted, it is to a great extent the popularity of the idea of economic man that has prevented economists from addressing the role of hope in economic life beyond such notions as rational expectations, risk-taking and the like. Some unorthodox economists, however, have tried a different approach to economic analysis and, in doing so, they have occasionally touched on the topic of hope. One of these is Kenneth Boulding, the author of an interesting article entitled “Sources of Reasonable Hope for the Future” (1984).

The main argument in Boulding’s article is that there exist many reasons for being pessimistic about the future, such as shrinking natural resources, the population explosion and the prospect of nuclear war. But there also exist grounds for optimism, according to Boulding (who has a tendency to equate hope with optimism). “Hope is a complex concept”, he says, “but in all its various meanings it implies optimism about the future” (Boulding 1984:221). That hope is related to optimism is an opinion that the reader of this paper has already encountered, but Boulding adds a new twist to the idea of optimism, namely that of probability. He writes:

Hope, fortunately, does not depend on certainty, or people would certainly not buy lottery tickets. It rests on an optimistic image of the future which is perceived as having positive probability (greater than zero). (Boulding 1984:223)

It should be noted that Boulding does not draw a distinction between uncertainty and risk, something that makes his concept of hope less complex than it has to be. While uncertainty is characteristic of a situation in which it is not possible to assign any

probability at all to an event, this is always possible in situations that involve risk, according to the well-known argument by Frank Knight ([1921] 1985).

Another unorthodox economist who has been interested in the role of hope in the economy is Albert O. Hirschman, author of *A Bias for Hope* (1971) and several other studies that are relevant in this context. In one of these studies Hirschman suggests, for example, that few entrepreneurs realize how many obstacles they will have to overcome in order to be successful, and that they would never have started their businesses if they had known this. What drives economic progress, in other words, is often hope or what Hirschman calls “the helping hand” (Hirschman 1967).

Another theme in Hirschman’s work that is directly related to hope, is what he terms “possibilism”. The main idea behind this term is that much social science research emphasizes how unlikely some countries are to succeed, be it because of structural reasons, because they have not have the prerequisites for a take-off or something else. According to Hirschman, this type of analysis can be destructive; and social scientists should instead try to assist these countries in being successful. He writes:

so what are the many countries [that are in bad shape] supposed to do? Get themselves a different kind of elite? Or forgo any attempt to bring about change? What is at fault here, in my opinion, is the traditional probabilistic approach of the sociologist. (Hirschman 1986:173).

When Hirschman criticizes the faulty probabilistic concept of the sociologist he does not mean that this type of concept can be remedied with the help of more sophisticated mathematics or model-building. What is missing in sociology is the insight that is much more common among historians, he says, namely that unlikely events *do* happen, and that this is something that needs to be better understood:

in the present instance [of sociological research] this consists of the discovery of paths, however narrow, leading to an outcome that appears to be foreclosed on the basis of probabilistic reasoning alone. History and historians are usually in charge of making such discoveries that contradict their own ‘lessons’. But occasionally sociologists could come upon them also, if only they were attentive to the intersections of their numerous probabilistic statements. (Hirschman 1986:173-74)

While the doctrine of *homo economicus* is still strong in mainstream economics, there also exist some recent challenges. One of the most interesting of these, not least from the perspective of hope, is that of behavioral economics (e.g. Camerer et al 2004). This type of economics draws on psychology and experiments as a way of

challenging mainstream economics; and especially one of its major findings is of relevance to the study of hope. This is that people tend to overestimate their chances to succeed and underestimate their chances to fail. This type of research, which is known as overconfidence theory, is sometimes summarized with the phrase “sadder but wiser”; it also brings us back to the argument of Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*.

One study that can be used to illustrate overconfidence theory is “The Borrower’s Curse: Optimism, Finance, and Entrepreneurship” by David de Meza and Clive Southey (1996). Drawing on literature in psychology as well as in behavioral economics, a model is here presented that is based on “the psychology of optimism” but that also has some affinity with the idea of entrepreneurs as risk takers in rational choice analysis. According to the authors, their model successfully accounts for the fact that small business owners badly overestimate their chances to succeed (de Meza and Southey 1996). They also emphasize that this result has important policy implications.

Discussion: Trying to Get Closer to Hope and an Understanding of Its Role in the Economy

After having looked at various attempts to understand what hope is, the time has come to try to pull together the different threads and suggest what may be a fruitful way of approaching hope with the help of the social sciences. First of all, it is clear that none of the social sciences has paid much attention to the phenomenon of hope. While one can find some attention in sociology, anthropology and psychology, there is still a long way to go before studies of hope constitute “normal science” in these disciplines and there is a generally accepted notion of what hope stands for.

Related to this fact, it should be emphasized, is that there is a no need for a general theory of hope at this stage. Such an effort would be premature. Ways towards a clarification of what is meant by hope is more helpful, and especially if it allows us to establish some entry points for the social sciences.

Such clarification may start with the everyday notion of hope. As already mentioned, one such notion can be found in *The Oxford English Dictionary* where hope is described as a way “to entertain expectation of something desired, to look (mentally) with expectations” (OED 1989:377). The central role that the notion of “expectation” plays in this definition, however, makes it less useful when discussing hope from a broad social science perspective. This has to do with the way that the term expectation is currently used in economics, which is very far from its everyday meaning. In modern economics

expectation is closely associated with rational choice and formal calculability – two categories that do not go very well with hope.

The way that hope will be approached in this paper is as follows; and, again, the reason for choosing this particular angle has to do with the purpose of opening up hope to the social sciences. My point of departure is a simple description of hope as *the wish for something to come true*. There are several elements to this definition, but for the moment their unity and overall meaning should be stressed: one does not wish for something abstract, but for something precise; and one also wants this wish for something precise to be realized. Whether it ultimately can or will be realized or not, is not known; but this does not stop the actor from hoping that it will. Hope, in short, is characterized by a certain type of uncertainty, but not because it cannot be calculated for cognitive reasons (Frank Knight's type of uncertainty). The actor is not interested in calculating the uncertainty.

There are three distinct elements to the description of hope that has just been presented, and each of them deserves attention: (1) *the wish* (2) *for something* (3) *to become true* (see Fig. 1). That *hope* can be called a wish reminds us of the fact that while hope is not seen as a sentiment, it is often seen as being close to a sentiment. Its cognitive element is low, even if not absent. One *feels* hope, and one is usually also aware of its existence. Whether there is a biological dimension to hope, as there is to emotions, is hard to say. Anthropological data, as noted earlier, indicates that hope can be found in most cultures.

/Fig. 1 about here/⁴

That hope is *hope for something* means that hope typically does not exist by itself, but rather attaches itself to something else. This gives it a certain illusive and secondary quality that may also help to explain why hope has not attracted as much attention as related phenomena which so to speak stand on their own legs, such as fear, anger or shame.

While it may or may not be the case that the core of hope is social (we currently do not know), it does get linked to the social element through its attachment to *something special*. In one type of society (or group), you can hope for items *a*, *b* and *c*, and in another for *d*, *e* and *f*. The social sciences, in other words, can be brought into the analysis of hope at precisely this point.

The third and last element of hope is that hope includes the wish for *something to become true*. This means, for one thing, that hope has a goal to which it

⁴ For Fig. 1, see the end of this paper.

points. The formulation I have used is “to become true” rather than “to be realized”, since hope does not have the direct and instrumental quality of the latter expression. Hope, it can be added, is always rooted in a person. It can remain in the person or it can reach out through some action from the person into reality.

In the case that hope is translated into action in the world, outside the person, there is another opening for the social sciences, because *something* can usually not become true unless there is assistance or acceptance from other people. If one’s environment, for example, is very positive to something, there is more of a chance that this something will be hoped for, and that it will become true.

Still, hope is always anchored in the person and cannot be reduced to, say, a simple recipe for how to do something. Hope may also *not* inspire to action and thereby remain a wish for something to become true. If this is the case – if hope is passive rather than active - the person places herself in the position to wait for something to happen to her. Hence the affinity between waiting and hoping, with the danger that if one waits too long, hope may vanish and the element of waiting may overtake the person.⁵

If we return to active hope, hope that wishes to be realized outside the person, it would seem that certain types of hope and ways of realizing these may become so ingrained or characteristic for certain groups and societies that they can be described as *social facts* in Durkheim’s sense. They constitute, in brief, the “normal” way to hope, and divergencies from them are accompanied by a sense of coercion and possibly also by sanctions from other people. People may, for example, hope for material success of a certain type, for one’s children to be successful in a certain way, and so on.

Similarly, in case the actor tries to realize his or her hope, the question arises if *the means* to go about this realization constitute a social fact or not. A social fact in this case would mean that there exists ways that are commonly used to realize a goal, as opposed to new and untried ways. The chances that hope will be realized is presumably larger if the means that are used have already been tried out and are commonly used.

But there may be more to hope and its social dimension than so. Kierkegaard speaks of hope as fair wind filling the sails and pushing the wish for something to its goal. But he also makes the interesting comment that hope can so to speak overtake its object and lessen its chances of being realized. This is where hope goes from being helpful to preventing its object from coming into being and sometimes even destroying it. Again, a

⁵ These thoughts are inspired by the work of Naoki Kusaga.

door is opened up to the social since it is easy to imagine situations where the individual succumbs to over-enthusiasm precisely because of what other people do.

One can illustrate some of the view of hope that has been advanced in this paper with the help of a diagram with two dimensions. One denotes whether hope stays within the person or whether the person will also try to realize it in reality (*passive-active*). The other dimension attempts to capture the quality that hope is useful in some doses - to get the wishing going - but that it also can become so strong that it overwhelms the normal unfolding of hope and prevents it from becoming true (*infusing-overtaking*; see Fig. 2).

/Fig. 2 about here/⁶

The transition into reality is a difficult one; and this is where realistic hope separates out from unrealistic hope. Ultimately, it is only possible to decide which is what *post factum*. But there also exist realities that represent impossible obstacles to hope; and if the actor, driven by a very strong wish, still tries to realize his or her hope, disappointment is in store. There may be *social facts* that go counter to the hope (such as that no-one may marry someone of the same sex), just as there may be *natural facts* (such as the law of gravity that prevents man from flying).

Before discussing what this approach to hope implies for the social science study of hope and the economy, something also needs to be said about hopelessness. The notion of hopelessness is often mentioned in discussions of hope, but it is not theorized in its own right. It is typically seen as the opposite of hope, sometimes as fear and sometimes as the lack of hope.

My own sense is that this way of looking at hopelessness may be wrong. Hopelessness, I would argue, is a phenomenon in its own right and as important to study as hope. It is not simply the opposite or negation of hope but can throw new light on the nature of hope. More precisely, while hope would seem to always attach itself to *something*, hopelessness indicates that hope may be more general than so. People with no hope, it is often noted, are people who feel hopeless in general and not just without hope in relation to some special item or need.

Hopelessness gives associations to Sartre's notion of hope as infusing a person's major enterprise in life rather than just some specific project. Hope, from this perspective, may be understood as *a capacity* that people have. It also seems to indicate that this capacity is brittle, and, once destroyed, that something important is missing in the individual.

⁶ For Fig. 2, see the end of this paper.

Again, we have an entry for the social sciences here, to the extent that the destruction of the capacity for hope comes from the outside. It can, for example, have been caused by some specific event; and relevant events may vary from society to society. Perhaps also the opposite is true, namely that the capacity to hope can be strengthened under certain circumstances. Can it also be restored, once it has been destroyed? We do not know.

If one applies this view of hope to the economy, one can get a sense for some of the topics that can be analyzed with the help of the social sciences. As to the element of *wish*, it would seem that people wish for economic things, among other reasons, because of scarcity; there is just not enough of everything for everybody. It would also seem that people primarily wish for material matters when it comes to the economy. This would mean that wishes of this type are more aimed towards the outer world than towards the inner world. Interestingly enough, however, this may not always be the case. People have plenty of economic dreams and wishes about the economy (e.g. Miyazaki forthcoming).

Element # 2 – that hope always means a wish for *something* – takes on a special meaning in the world of the economy. One may wish for a fortune, a good job, success in business and so on. As earlier mentioned, this element has a direct link to the social in the sense that different groups, societies and so on have different economic items to which hope can be attached. In a feudal society, the peasant may hope for a non-rapacious lord; in a capitalist society for a high demand for the crop, and so on.

Similarly, Element # 3 – the wish for something *to become true* – is played out according to its own logic in the world of the economy. If the person knows what to do, the chance of realizing the hope will grow. Hope can also get the person going and be the helping hand that Hirschman speaks about. But if hope overtakes the action to realize the hope, the entrepreneur may go wrong, end up as a speculator or a reckless investor (see Fig. 3).

/Fig. 3 about here/⁷

Ways of hoping that involves the economy may finally also congeal into social facts that people see as “normal” and “natural”, unless they deviate from them (in which case they are experienced as coercive). In the case of the economy one may, for example, hope for a good job (which allows the individual to realize himself/herself), for making money by starting your own firm, and so on.

⁷ For Fig. 3, see the end of this paper.

Just like the object of hope may be a social fact, this is also the case with the means that are used for its realization. Economic means, in brief, may acquire the exemplary or obligatory quality that comes with a social fact. Again, using uncommon means will presumably lower the chances for the hope to be realized.

But lower chances for realization may always not be a handicap in the area of the economy; it can also translate into a large profit if the effort is successful. An argument of this type can, for example, be found in Schumpeter's theory of entrepreneurship. In general, the topic of hope and entrepreneurship may be closely related (e.g. Knudsen and Swedberg 2008).

Finally, hopelessness can have a paralyzing effect, spreading from the area of the economy to the rest of a person's life. In the famous study from the 1930s of the unemployed in Marienthal, such a situation is discussed. The authors divide the unemployed *families* into three categories (Jahoda, Lazarsfeld and Zeisel ([1933] 1971). There are families that are "unbroken", "resigned" and "broken". In the authors' terminology, the unbroken have hope, the resigned have no hope, and the broken feel hopeless.

The purpose of the discussion in the second part of this paper has not been to develop a general theory of hope, and then apply it to the economy. Instead its purpose has been to look at hope in a way that opens it up for social science study, especially the sociological study of hope and the economy. I have indicated two places where hope has direct links to society: you hope for *something* and for this something *to become true*. Hopelessness also appears to be caused by social forces. All of these cases, I argue, invite to further discussion, reflection and research (see Fig. 4).

References and Suggestions for Further Reading

This bibliography contains both the references to the items mentioned in the text and references to a few additional works on hope, to illustrate general statements in the text about writings on hope in different contexts. There currently does not exist a bibliography of writings on hope, but many of the books and articles in this list contain useful references to the role of hope in economics, philosophy, sociology and so on.

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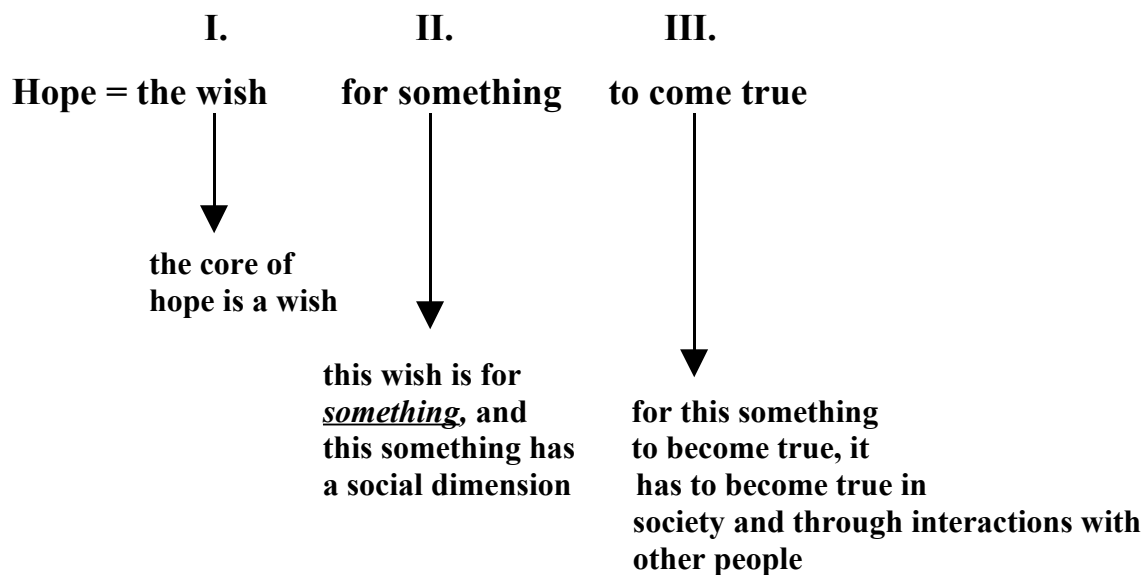
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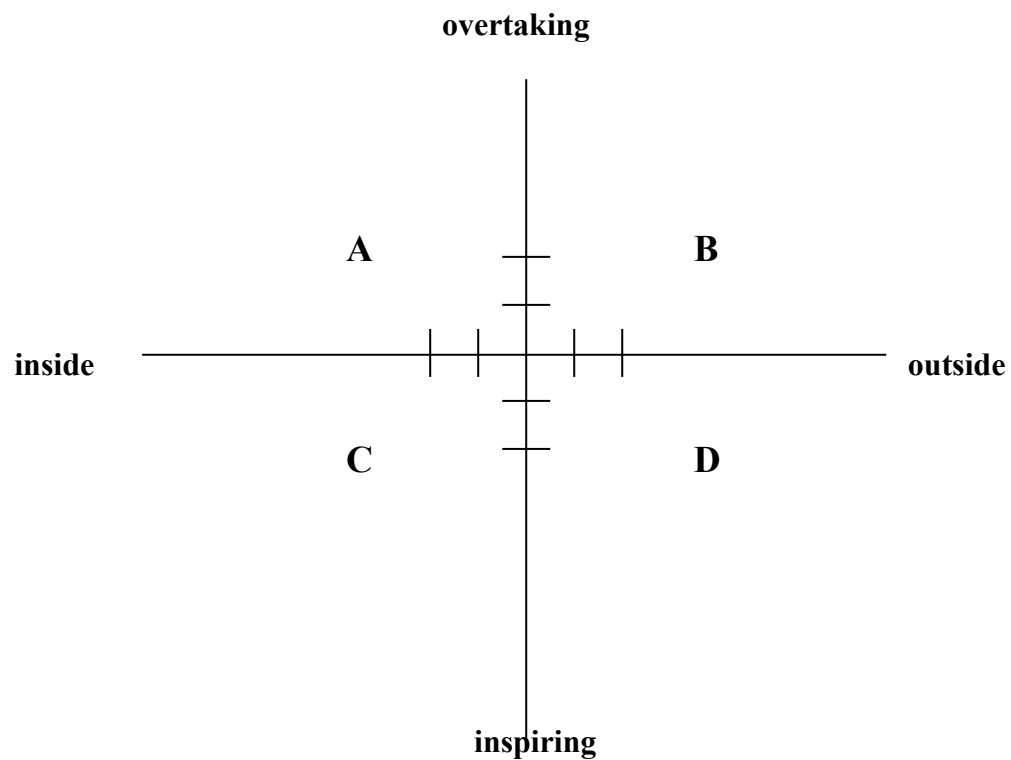
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Fig. 1. Hope and Its Links to Society



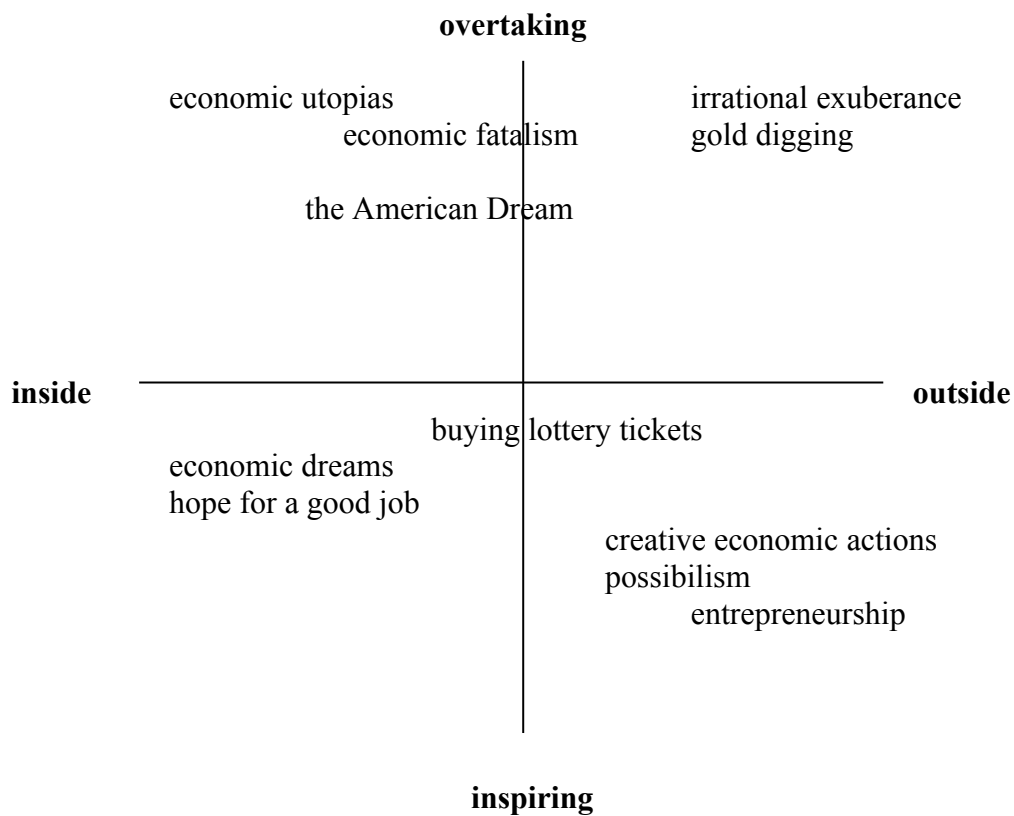
Comment: From a social science perspective it is important to look at hope in a way that allows the social science perspective to be applied to it. Ways of hoping may also congeal into social facts, which people see as “natural” and where deviations are felt as coercive.

Fig. 2. Two Dimensions of Hope



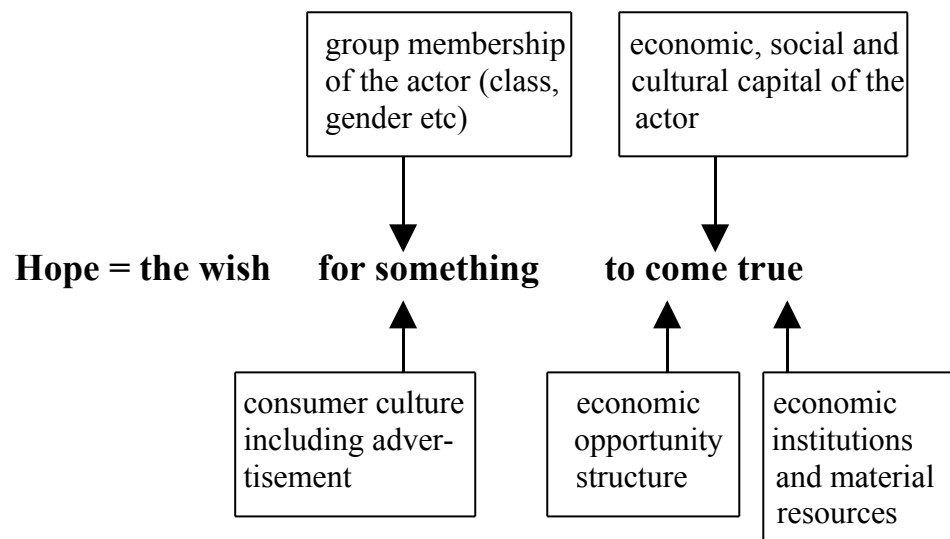
Comment: The figure attempts to express the suggestion the notion that hope can either be centered inside a person or be oriented towards actions by the person on the outside; hope can also work as an inspiration for the object/action of hope or hope can overtake or overpower the attempt to realize it.

Fig. 3. Two Dimensions of Hope and the Economy



Comment: Economic actions are primarily concerned with the outer rather than the inner sphere. But as the examples in the figure shows, some interesting economic topics belong to the inner sphere. The specific items mentioned in the figure may also shift around a bit, depending on the circumstances. The American Dream may be seen as a social fact that involves hope.

Fig. 4. Hope and Its Links to Economy and Society



Comment: The figure shows some social influences on hope relating to the economy in modern capitalist society. The influences relate to (1) the object of hope and (2) how it can be realized. Ways of hoping may also congeal into social facts, which people see as “natural” and where deviations as felt as coercive.