A Hope for Hope: The Role of Hope in Education

Dror Post
Teachers College, Columbia University

> Where then shall Hope and Fear their object find?
> Must dull Suspense corrupt the stagnant mind?
> Must helpless man, in ignorance debate,
> Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate?[1]

The concept of hope is often used in association with education, yet the meaning of hope and its function in relation to education is still considerably unexamined.[2] The aim of this paper is to examine the role of hope in education. The first part of the paper will look into the concept of hope using three sources: a Greek myth, a Renaissance emblem, and a philosophical definition. The second part of the paper will employ the renewed understanding of the concept to examine the role of hope in education. Eventually, I introduce a distinction between two kinds of hope, Promethean hope and Epimethean hope, which I would like to suggest as an outline for a further investigation in the subject.

Beautiful Evil

I would like to open the inquiry with a myth about the origin of hope from Hesiod's poem "*Works and Days*."[3] The myth tells about Prometheus who stole fire from the gods and gave it to mankind. As revenge Zeus decided to send mankind a "beautiful evil."[4]

> He bade famous Hephaestus make haste and mix earth with water and to put in it the voice and strength of humankind, and fashion a sweet, lovely maiden-shape, like to the immortal goddesses face; and to Athene to teach her needlework and the weaving of the varied web; and golden Aphrodite to shed grace upon her head and cruel longing and cares that weary the limbs. And he charged Hermes the guide, the Slayer of Argus, to put in her shameless mind a deceitful nature.[5]

Endowed with gifts from all the gods she was called Pandora (All-gifts) and she was sent as a gift to Epimetheus, the hasty brother of Prometheus, who had been warned by his brother never to accept a gift from Zeus. In spite of his brother's warnings, Epimetheus accepts the "beautiful evil" and brings Pandora to his home, where she opens a sealed jar, "Pandora's box," containing all the evils that were ever to plague mankind.[6] The evils flow out into the world and, when Pandora eventually closes down the lid, the only thing that doesn't flow out, but remains sealed in the jar, is *Elpis* (Hope).

There is an ambiguity concerning Hope in this story. The myth tells us that the only thing remaining in the jar was Hope. Ought we consider Hope a good thing or evil? Some commentators support the view that Hope is really an evil, one of the evils that were sent to mankind by Zeus in the jar.[7] Others consider Hope to be a good thing, one's only comfort within this world of suffering.[8] Still others hold that hope is indeed a good thing, but since it is shut in the jar and is denied to men, the human condition is ultimately hopeless.[9] The Greek notion for hope (*Elpis*) encompasses a wider range of associations than the modern use of the concept and allows all the

above interpretations.[10] Hope can be either a good thing or a bad one. It can inspire one in times of difficulties, but it can also lead one to irresponsible deeds and disasters. This double-edged characteristic of Hope is epitomized by the chorus in *Antigone:* "For far reaching hope is a boon to many men, but to many a delusion born of thoughtless desires."[11]

As my aim is not to disclose the moral of the story but to look into the nature of hope, I will not try to decide between these different interpretations. Rather, I would like to call attention to some further aspects of the myth, as I believe this myth to hold within it all the elemental components of hope. Hope was brought to men by Pandora, who was devised by Zeus as an object of desire, delusive desire. Pandora was accepted too hastily by Epi-metheus, whose name literally means "After-Thought," in spite of the warnings of his brother Pro-metheus, which literally means "Before-Thought." Hope is thus associated with a desire, a dangerous one, and it is located between the recklessness of Epimetheus and the precaution of Prometheus.

Tomorrow, Tomorrow

The next source that I would like to employ is a woodcut illustration from Andrea Alciati's emblem book *Emblemata,* which is entitled "On the Image of Hope."[12] The woodcut depicts Hope (*Spes*) sitting on a vat together with a crow whose feet are caught beneath the cover of the vat, holding "the broken weapon of death," and accompanied by Love (*Amor*) and Good Outcome (*Bonus Eventus*). The illustration is accompanied by a poem in the form of a dialogue, which I would like quote a few lines from:

> — Why do you (Hope is asked) sit lazily on a cover of a vat.
>
> I alone (Hope answers) stayed at home while all the evils fluttered about everywhere. As the hallowed Muse of the Ascraen sage has told us.
>
> — Which bird is accompanied you?
>
> The crow, most faithful of augurs, when he cannot speak, it is well, and when he does speak, so it shall be.[13]

The portrayal of Hope sitting alone on the vat while all the evils flew off and the mentioning of the Ascrean sage allude to the myth of Pandora. The presence of Love and Good Outcome brings forth the elements of expectation and desire that we have already detected in the Greek myth. In earlier versions of the emblem,[14] as well as in the poem, another character is present, *Nemesis*, "the Rhamnusian avenger,"[15] the goddess who warns us not to become avaricious in our expectations or too lustful in pursuing our hopes. Once more we find ambivalence within the portrayal of hope, an amalgamation of lure and rejection, of promise and warning, invitation and restrain.

Another figure in the emblem is the crow, which is depicted with his feet caught beneath the cover of the vat, like Hope in the Greek myth who was locked beneath the lid of the jar. The crow is described in the poem as an "augur," as he cries, "*cras, cras*" (tomorrow, tomorrow), which brings forth the connection between hope and the future. Hope is heading toward the future, we hope for what we consider not to have at present and we want to have in the future. An additional element in the

10.47925/2006.271

emblem is the broken spear which is carried by Hope, a symbol of Death, the most reliable augur and the ultimate limit for any hope.

Hope and Fear

The next source I would like to employ is Spinoza's definition of hope in the *Ethics*, in the third part of the book that is called "On the Origin and Nature of the Affections":

> Hope is a joy not constant, arising from the idea of something future or past, about the issue of which we sometimes doubt.[16]

> I would like to continue and quote also the following definition, the definition of "fear":

> Fear is a sorrow not constant arising from the idea of something future or past, about the issue of which we sometimes doubt.[17]

Spinoza concludes:

> From these definitions it follows that there is no hope without fear nor fear without hope.[18]

Hope, according to Spinoza, is *affectus* (affection) a mental phenomenon that has emotive as well as cognitive aspects. We feel hope, and it is a feeling that is related to "joy;" that is, a feeling that intensifies one's vitality, that motivates one "to act and to live — that is, to actually exist."[19] However, hope is "not constant," it is not stable, as it is always mixed with fear. To exemplify this point with a familiar example: when I have a test, I hope to succeed in the test, yet I am also afraid to fail in it. The more important the test is to me, the more intense are the feelings of hope and anxiety. From the cognitive aspect, every hope includes an element of doubt and uncertainty. We do not hope for what we consider to be evident. When I take the bus to the University, I do not "hope" to find the University in its place; I know it is going to be there. However, I do hope to arrive on time, as I am not confident about it. Hope is an admission that one has incomplete power over the situation.

The realm of hope is the realm of the possible. I do not hope for what I presume to be out of my reach, though I can indeed desire such a thing. I can wish to visit Plato's Academy, but I do not have any real hope for it. Even in the most disastrous situation, as long as one carries some hope, one believes that deliverance is still possible. That is what makes hope so inspiring, and that is what makes it is so prone to delusion.

Hope is essentially human. Neither Gods nor beasts hope, while human beings are always moving up and down along the axis of hope and despair: *"we are always filled with hopes, all our lives*."[20] Every hope contains elements of Pro-metheus and Epi-metheus, of preliminary plans and afterthoughts. Hope cannot grow in pure light where everything is clear and transparent, nor in a complete darkness, but it needs a hidden space in the shadow where the rays of light meet the depth of darkness, where good and evil are mixed with each other, and where Promethean foresight is intermingled with Epimethean blindness. As hope is directed towards the future, it displays one's ability to look beyond the given situation. Yet, it also discloses one's limitations, one's inability to fully control one's life. Hope is a vigorous power; it motivates one to act, to create, and to achieve. Yet, adherence to one's early hopes limits the range of one's future possibilities, and high expectations are likely to yield frustration and paralysis.

10.47925/2006.271

Hope in the Classroom

And so by hoping more they have but lesse[21]

A classroom is a crossing of many hopes: the hopes of the teacher, the hopes of each student and the hopes of the class as a whole. On the surface it looks simple: the teacher hopes to teach, to convey his knowledge to the students, and to cultivate their aptitudes; while the students hope to learn, to obtain knowledge from the teacher, and to use his experience to develop their talents. The teacher's hopes and the students' hopes complement each other. However, a crossing of hopes is also a crossing of fears, desires, expectations, progressions, regressions, and uncertainty. There is no guarantee that the teacher's hopes coincide with the student's. To use a metaphor of Kierkeggard: "Hope is a new garment, stiff and stretched and lustrous, but it has never been tried on, and therefore one does not know how becoming it will be or how it will fit."[22]

Let's assume a teacher called W. W was an outstanding student of Philosophy and a great promise in the academic world. An idealistic young man, he decided to leave the academy and teach young children in the countryside; not out of necessity, but to change education. W certainly had the intellectual ability to teach the children. He also attended teacher's seminary and acquired teaching skills. His teaching methods were progressive ones. He rejected rote learning and focused on developing the child's curiosity. He encouraged his pupils to think independently by using practical exercises that allowed them to make their own discoveries. However, W's new methods were not welcomed by his pupils; they found them too difficult and demanding. The pupils did not meet W's expectations either, as he found them to be lazy and uncooperative. As a result, W became harsher in his teaching, and the pupils became suspicious and hostile. The distance between W and his pupils grew wider and wider until W decided to quit teaching.[23]

W's hope did not coincide with the given reality. His expectations didn't meet his students' expectations. Upon realizing that his ideals were not in tune with reality, W still refused to give up his hope or to compromise his ideals. Instead, he attempted to force his ideals upon the given situation, upon his students, even by using physical violence — an act that is an expression of frustration more than a manifestation of hope.[24] In such a case of conflict between the teacher's hopes and the given situation, should the teacher give up his hopes and adapt to that situation? Or, should he endeavor to fulfill his hopes despite the given conditions, risking the possibility of mutual frustration — his and his students?

Throughout the remainder of the paper I would like to suggest another option — a hope for hope — of upholding one's hope to make change in the classroom and at the same time adjusting to the given situation within the classroom. An option which is neither a slothful compromise nor a miraculous solution, but a long journey that demands hard work, patience, and courage.

In order to illustrate this option and to clarify what I mean by bringing hope into the classroom, I would like to return to the myth about Pandora, Prometheus, and Epimetheus. I would like to suggest that, in the myth, hope was not brought to

10.47925/2006.271

mankind only by the notorious box but that Prometheus, by giving fire to mankind, provided them altogether with hope. In other words, I would like to present the act of giving fire as an example of giving hope, and as a model for educational activity.

Prometheus's Hope

> We ought to consider both, the measure of our stride
> and the measure of our hope, by what is possible.[25]

The basic human condition, as it is depicted in Plato's version of the Promethean myth in the dialogue *Protagoras*, is rather unprivileged.[26] Unlike other living beings, some of them endowed with thick fur to protect them from the cold, others with hooves to aid in walking, and others with sharp teeth to prevail over their enemies — the human being in his "bare" condition is "naked, unshod, unbedded, and unarmed."[27]

Wanting to help mankind, Prometheus could have satisfied human needs with immediate solutions. He could have provided them with "coats of skin" to protect them from the cold, as God provided Adam and Eve in the biblical story.[28] He could have sent them sandals to ease their walking, or given them spears to overcome their enemies. Yet, he decided to provide them with an educative gift, the fire: "a teacher in every *techne* and a mighty means."[29]

Instead of providing mankind with solutions, Prometheus supplied them with a means. If he had chosen to help mankind by solving their problems, human life could have been a much easier and safer affair. Yet, it would have been a "childlike"[30] kind of life, where there is no place for thought, no place for making decisions and no place for taking responsibility. Moreover, it would have been a hopeless kind of life, as where there are no open possibilities there is no room for hope. The giving of fire, on the other hand, was a liberating act. Instead of discharging mankind from the care for their needs, it allowed them to take care of their needs themselves; instead of subjecting them to external sources, it enabled them to make use of their own resources.

By providing mankind with fire, Prometheus demonstrated, not only an understanding for the actual needs of humanity, but also, as his name implies, the forethought of its future development. Fire is the source of every *techne*. "Every art (*technai*) possessed by man comes from Prometheus."[31] By bringing fire, Prometheus provided mankind with stimulation to develop *technai*: arts, crafts, and sciences. Every *techne* implies *logos*; it implies knowledge, order, and aim. The order of the *techne* is not an external order that is furnished from the outside, but an intrinsic one. It is an outgrowth of the specific needs and the peculiar use of the *techne*. For example, the tailor and the pilot both have *techne*. However, the *techne* of the tailor is quite different than the pilot's. Every *techne* has its peculiar aims, rules, and knowledge that develop in accordance with its distinctive function. By bringing the fire, Prometheus enables mankind to transform themselves from brute creatures into thoughtful ones, living in accordance with rules and aims; from childlike beings into mature ones, capable of organizing and directing their own lives.[32] Fire, as the source of *techne*, is thus more than merely a means, it has an educative value; it is "a teacher in every *techne*."[33]

10.47925/2006.271

By giving the fire, Prometheus not only exemplifies his own gift of forethought but, to a certain degree, bequeaths it upon humanity. The work of *techne* is heading towards the future — by settling goals, by making hypotheses, by using forecasts, men are making use of forethought. However, given that human foresight is rather limited, the work of *techne* cannot provide humans with full answers or complete solutions for their needs and problems, but it is an everlasting enterprise. Every human achievement, every new discovery, does not discharge the need of further inquiry or more efforts, but rather brings about new difficulties and reveals more questions. Yet, endowed with *techne*, man does not stand hopeless anymore against the forthcoming difficulties. For, although he cannot have full control over reality, he still has the resources to make change and improve his given situation. Moreover, he might even welcome the forthcoming difficulties as a new challenge, as a possibility for new discoveries, and an opportunity to exercise his thought. The more difficult is the problem, the more it encourages creativity and opens the door for self-expression. When the problem at issue is too complicated, it invites cooperation from different people and becomes a common enterprise — a common hope.

Prometheus's giving of fire provides us with a model of a teacher who is attentive enough to the given situation in the classroom to be able to identify the true needs and authentic wishes of his students; and is endowed with enough foresight to recognize the range of future possibilities, where these wishes and needs could meet reality. It presents us with a model of education in which bringing hope into the classroom does not mean providing students with foreign hopes from outside; but, rather, furnishing the classroom with the appropriate conditions to enable them to articulate and pursue their own hopes, individually and as a group. However, it does not provide us with a readymade blueprint of how to bring hope into the classroom. Instead, it urges us to take part in a journey in which one navigates one's way by confronting difficulties, and moves forward by learning from one's mistakes.

Epimetheus's Hope

Imagination is the true fire stolen from heaven.[34]

Yet, it is not enough. Something is missing, something that without which no educational venture can be valuable; another kind of "fire," which was brought by Prometheus's opposite and complementary brother Epimetheus, the fire of love.

By welcoming Pandora, the first mortal woman, to his home, Epimetheus had endowed humanity not only with plenty of evils, but also with desire and love. Moreover, hope was not brought with Pandora only through the notorious jar but, by bestowing love upon humanity, she also granted them hope. Hope and love go hand in hand. Both are sort of hybrid creatures, always oscillating between joy and sadness,[35] "always wedded to need,"[36] always longing towards the good and the beautiful, and always carrying with them fear and uncertainty.

By trusting Pandora and letting her into his home despite his brothers' warnings, Epimetheus bestowed upon humanity not only love and desire; but also faith and trust. According to later versions of the myth, Epimetheus married Pandora, and thereby provided humanity with the bond of marriage, with responsibility to one's kin and with care to one's offspring's future.[37]

10.47925/2006.271

In order to bring hope into the classroom, a teacher must carry with him not only Prometheus's forethought but also Epimetheus's gifts. Unlike that of Prometheus, human foresight is rather limited. There are too many variables in the classroom that are not in the teacher's control: there is anger and frustration that pupils carry with them from outside the classroom, as well as many other destructive forces that the teacher cannot anticipate and nevertheless they are likely to happen. Consequently, every educational project is prone to unexpected mishaps and every teacher is liable to crises and disappointments along their course of work. In order to be able to endure crises, as well as to keep one's pupils hopeful, a teacher needs something stronger than Prometheus's foresight, he needs Epimetheus's faith and trust.

Moreover, Prometheus's wisdom is the wisdom of *techne*. It is practical wisdom. It strives to know things in order to use them. By using *techne*, man organizes the world according to aims and rules; in order to make it available to human's understanding and accessible to human's needs. Yet, there are some regions in a human life, as well as in the outside world, which are beyond the reach of Prometheus's foresight: broad areas of human feelings, most of human imagination, important parts of hope, death, love, madness, joy, and countless other regions that refuse to obey the rules of *techne*, and yet play an indispensable role in one's life. As these places, or at least part of them, are vital to human's growth, it is necessary to find a way to bring them into the classroom. A classroom needs to be a place not only to provide the pupil with means to control the world, but also with the power to trust it; not only with the ability to know the world, but also with the possibility to love it.

The entry to these regions is not impassable, there are many ways to approach them; by playing games, telling stories, creating art, idling in nature; as well as by furnishing the classroom with an atmosphere of trust and faith, to enable the pupils to bring out, as well as to absorb, more sensitive and delicate issues, beside intellectual challenges.

Being human, we are endowed with gifts from both, Prometheus and Epimetheus. Similar to Prometheus, we are endowed with forethought; yet in a more limited way, that is why we are always carrying some doubt and uncertainty. Similar to Epimetheus we are endowed with trust; yet in a more limited way, that is why we are always carrying some fear and anxiety. In order to be able to bring hope into the classroom, we have to endeavor to make use of all of our gifts; to be thoughtful and resourceful like Prometheus, and faithful and patient like Epimetheus. However, since we can never be thoughtful and faithful like the titanic brothers, uncertainty and fear are always going to accompany us into the classroom. That is what makes education exciting, that is what makes it hopeful.

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1. Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas, Poems and Selected Prose*, ed. Bertrand H. Bronson (New York: Reinhart Press, 1971), 343–346.

2. One can find in twentieth century philosophy two prominent philosophical studies of hope: Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysics of Hope*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); and Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Steven Plaice and Paul Knight,

10.47925/2006.271

(Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986). However, these important philosophical works have hardly influenced the discourse of philosophy of education.

3. Hesiod, *Works and Days,* in *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, trans. Huge G. Evelyn-White (London: William Heinmann, 1915), 45–105.

4. Hesiod, *Theogeny,* 585.

5. Hesiod, *Works and Days,* 60–69.

6. Originally there is no box in this myth. The Greek is "pithon," a storage jar.

7. Francis M. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1907), 225, n. 1.

8. Martin L. West, *Hesiod: Works and Days* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 169–170.

9. Bernard Knox, *Essays Ancient and Modern* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 10–11.

10. Henry G. Liddle and Robert A. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), s.v. "Elpis."

11. Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Andrew Brown (Wiltshire: Aris & Phillips, 1987), 615–618.

12. Alciati's *Emblemanta* was first published in 1531. "On the Image of Hope," "In Simulacrum Spei.," appeared in the second and third editions of the *Emblemanta* (1534, 1536). The illustration in the appendix is taken from Dora and Erwin Panofsky, *Pandora's Box: The Changing Aspects of a Mythical Symbol* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), 31, illustration no. 12.

13. For the full text of the poem see Alciato, *Book of Emblems,* http://www.mun.ca/alciato/.

14. See Panofsky, *Pandora's Box*, 28, illustration no. 9; 29, illustration no. 10.

15. Nemesis in Greek means righteous anger, resentment, vengeance. Rhamnus, is a small town in Attica that was the principal sanctuary of Nemesis.

16. Benedict De Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *Ethics and On the Improvement of the Understanding,* trans. W.H. White (New York: Hafner Publishing, 1966), III.12.

17. Ibid., III.13.

18. Ibid., III.13. Explanation.

19. Ibid., IV.21; see also III.28 and IV.41.

20. Plato, *Philebus*, trans. R. Hackforth, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945), 39e.

21. William Shakespeare, "The Rape of Lucrece," in *The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 137.

22. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition,* trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 132.

23. More details about W's teaching affair one can find in Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 192–234.

24. Research has been showed that one of the main reasons that many beginning teachers do not remain in the classroom longer than few years is "the difficulty teachers have of reconciling their hopes with the reality of having to work with large numbers of students who bring to the classroom varying degrees of interest and readiness to learn." David T. Hansen, *The Call to Teach* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1995), 153.

25. Epictetus, *The Discourses as reported by Arabians, The Manual, and Fragments*, trans. William. A. Oldfather (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1978).

26. Plato, *Protagoras,* trans. W.K.C. Guthrie (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 320d–322d.

27. Ibid., 321c.

28. *Genesis* 3, 21.

29. Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, trans. Herbert Weir Smyth (London: William Heinmann, 1973), 109–111. The Greek term *techne* is usually translated as "art," "skill," "craft," or "science." However, since it has no adequate translation in English, I will continue to use the term in transliteration.

10.47925/2006.271

30. Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 443.

31. Ibid., 506.

32. Ibid., 443–506.

33. Ibid., 109–111.

34. Mary Wollstonecraft, “Letter to Gilbert Imlay, September, 22, 1794,” in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 6, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (New York: New York University Press, 1989).

35. Spinoza, *Ethics,* IV 47; Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Tom Griffith (London: Collins Harvill, 1989), 203e.

36. Plato, *Symposium,* 203d.

37. Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca,* II.2.

10.47925/2006.271