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Hope as the Essence of Freedom: Fundamental Hope, Certainty, and the Vital Strength of Human Life

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Abstract

This paper develops an original philosophical anthropological account of hope, arguing that hope is the essence of freedom—the inner propulsive principle without which freedom cannot move or sustain itself. Three levels of hope are distinguished. Ontological hope is the invariable, pre-reflective orientation of the human being toward the possibility of adequate response to the demand of ontological emptiness—the *raison d'être* of freedom itself, and the central contribution of this paper. Fundamental hope is its variable existential actualisation—the dispositional, non-object-directed orientation that emerges from the human being's encounter with the totality of reality and is carried by the spiritual unconscious. Fragmental hope is the most variable and most familiar mode—the hope directed at particular, temporary needs and solutions. It is ontological hope—invariable, constitutive, and prior to every conscious act of hoping—that is the essence of freedom: the phenomenon that opens the space of ontological emptiness and gives freedom access to the demand of the latter, making its exercise possible at all. The paper further introduces and analyses three original concepts: certainty-mania—the obsessive quest for certainty that severs consciousness from the unconscious and from the fundamental hope it carries—showing that the loss of hope is always rooted in fear and the compulsive need for predictability; the distinction between anticipating joy (*Freude-auf*) and existential joy (*erlebte Freude*), arguing that pre-emptive certainty eliminates the tension that genuine hoping requires and thereby empties the present of its capacity to fulfil; and an original etymological and phenomenological analysis of disappointment as *Enttäuschung*—disillusionment, the medicinal return from illusion to reality. The paper situates its account in relation to Marcel's ontological hope and Moltmann's eschatological hope, and engages Frankl, Marcel, Moltmann, Fromm, Heidegger, Camus, Kierkegaard, Tillich, and Blondel as principal interlocutors.

Keywords: hope; fundamental hope; freedom; certainty-mania; anticipating joy; disappointment; *Enttäuschung*; philosophical anthropology



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1. Introduction: Hope as the Propulsive Principle of Freedom

Throughout this philosophical anthropology, freedom has been identified as the defining characteristic of the human being—the comprehensive actualising principle that encompasses the conscious and the unconscious, the rational and the spiritual, and that gives the human being its distinctive mode of existing in the world. But freedom, however real and however fundamental, does not move by itself. It requires an inner principle that propels it forward, that sustains it in its movement toward the self, the other, and the totality of reality, that keeps it oriented when the road is difficult and the goal is not yet visible. That principle is hope.

This paper's central claim is that hope is the essence of freedom. Freedom is the ability of the human being to see farther than the now, underlined by the hope for a better now or at least for the prolongation or repetition of the now¹.

The argument rests on a tripartite distinction that is the paper's primary structural contribution. At the most familiar level stands fragmental hope—the variable hope directed at particular, temporary objects and needs, ceasing when the need is satisfied or the object obtained. Beneath it, and irreducible to it, stands fundamental hope—also variable in its existential expression, but non-object-directed and pre-reflective, carried by the spiritual unconscious and persisting through disappointment and adversity. Beneath both, and invariable, stands ontological hope—the permanent, pre-personal orientation of the human being toward the possibility of adequate response to the demand of ontological emptiness. It is this third level that occupies the centre of the paper's argument. Ontological hope is not an existential achievement or a psychological disposition but a structural given—as invariable and as constitutive as the ontological emptiness whose demand it opens to freedom. It is the phenomenon that gives emptiness its direction, connects it to freedom as the ability to respond, and thereby constitutes the coinherence of emptiness and freedom that is the living structure of human existence. This is why it is not merely a condition of freedom but its essence—its *raison d'être*.

This account of hope does not stand in isolation: hope is constitutively interwoven with the other structural features of human existence that philosophical anthropology identifies. Hope is the inner dynamic of the anthropological circle of fulfilment: the structure that keeps the human being oriented toward home even while still on the road. It is the inner principle of the fundamental desire: the forward-leaning orientation toward wholeness that animates every authentic human act. It is the foundation of the trust in reality that makes *Gelassenheit* possible—the composed openness that characterises genuine fulfilment. And it is the structural companion of love: as love is the logic of fulfilment, hope is the inner sustaining dynamic that makes love possible through time².

The paper proceeds through five movements, each of which contributes a necessary step toward the central claim that hope is the essence of freedom. The first establishes the ontological ground: by distinguishing fragmental from fundamental hope and showing that the human being's constitutive emptiness requires a propulsive inner principle that only fundamental hope can supply, it demonstrates why hope is not merely a condition of freedom but its dynamic essence. The second analyses the destructive effects of certainty-mania—the obsessive quest for certainty that severs consciousness from the unconscious and from the fundamental hope it carries—thereby showing, from the negative side, what freedom loses when hope is destroyed: its movement, its orientation, and its capacity to inhabit the present. The third examines the wish-tradition and its systematic elimination of the tension that genuine hoping requires, showing how the pre-emption of uncertainty forecloses the anticipating joy that hope generates and empties the present of its capacity to fulfil. The fourth offers an original etymological and phenomenological analysis of disappointment as *Enttäuschung*—disillusionment, the medicinal return from illusion to reality—showing that genuine hope is not destroyed by disappointment but purified by it. The fifth draws out the implications for the understanding of freedom, the present, and the whole: that the vital strength of human life lies not in its object but in the act of hoping itself, and that it is this act—sustained, dispositional, forward-leaning—that constitutes freedom's most fundamental expression.

2. Fragmental Hope and Fundamental Hope: Two Modes of the Hoping Self

Before developing this distinction, however, a prior clarification is necessary. At several points in this account—and already in the claim that hope is the inner principle that keeps freedom oriented when the road is difficult and the goal is not yet visible—a philosophically alert reader may ask: is this not faith rather than hope? The question deserves a direct answer. Faith and hope share a common foundation: trust. Trust, when directed toward a spiritual being, deepens into relationship—into *sich anvertrauen*, the act of entrusting oneself to a Thou who receives and holds the one who trusts, and this is what we call faith. Hope is structurally different and, in the order of existential genesis, prior. It requires no Thou. It requires only a minimal trust—sufficient to generate the existential disposition toward the possibility of positive development, whether in a specific situation of difficulty and adversity or simply in the ongoing process of existential self-unfolding. Hope can be expressed in connection with a personal other—when a person says “I hope he will be there when I come” or “I hope she can help”—but even then what it expresses is uncertainty in trusting, not the full confidence of *sich anvertrauen*. Faith, at least in the Christian sense, presupposes an intensive trust—the wholehearted entrusting of oneself to a personal God who is believed to receive and sustain that trust. But this intensive trust already requires that the person is existentially open to a positive outcome, already oriented toward rather than closed against reality. That prior existential openness is hope. Hope is therefore not a weaker version of faith, nor faith a stronger version of hope: hope is the existential disposition that trust generates, and faith is what becomes possible when that disposition meets a spiritual Thou and deepens into relationship. Faith presupposes hope—not the other way around. This is precisely what makes hope, and not faith, the inner propulsive principle of freedom: it is the existential ground from which faith itself must begin.

There are two fundamentally different structures of hope corresponding to two fundamentally different relationships to one’s own existence. The first is what this paper calls fragmental hope—the hope directed at particular, temporary needs and solutions. In this mode, life is experienced as a series of fragmental units of now, each presenting its own demands and each drawing its hope from some available person, object, or circumstance. These hopes are multiple, simultaneous, and temporary. They cease as soon as the need is satisfied³.

Fragmental hope is real and necessary. It is not to be dismissed. But it cannot carry the human being in the deepest sense, because it is always proportioned to particular needs and objects, and the human being’s most fundamental need—the need to be, to feel itself as being that which it is—is not particular. It is transcendental. It cannot be satisfied by any temporal object, however capable; it requires a ground of hope that is itself not contingent, not limited, not proportioned to any particular lack.

Fundamental hope—closely related to what may be called fundamental trust—is not directed at any particular thing. It emerges from the human being’s encounter with and identification with the totality of reality—from the deep familiarity with reality that is the fruit of genuine inner communication. Unlike fragmental hope, fundamental hope does not begin with knowledge and proceed to encounter; it begins with encounter and extends itself to knowledge. It is experiential before it is rational. It arises from the unconscious—from what Frankl [6] called the spiritual unconscious, the experiencing thing at the depth of the person—and is carried by it even when the conscious mind is overwhelmed with doubt or despair.

The concept of the spiritual unconscious requires a word of clarification for readers unfamiliar with Frankl’s framework. Frankl’s point of departure is a critical restriction

of the phenomenon that Sigmund Freud described as the unconscious. For Freud, the unconscious is a unified domain—the repository of repressed drives, wishes, and conflicts that press upward against the ego’s censorship. Frankl argues that Freud’s account, while real as far as it goes, captures only a part of the whole. The dimension Freud identified—the reservoir of instinctual life—Frankl terms the instinctual unconscious. But beneath and alongside it, and irreducible to it, lies what Frankl calls the spiritual unconscious: the deepest dimension of the person as a free, responsible, meaning-oriented being, at which conscience, love, and genuine creativity have their pre-reflective origin [6] (pp. 29–34) and [7]. It is unconscious not because it is hidden by repression, but because it is more primordial than reflection—the experiential ground from which reflection itself emerges. Fundamental hope has its home precisely here. Because it belongs to this pre-reflective depth, it can persist even when the conscious mind is overwhelmed with doubt or despair: it does not depend on the intellect’s calculations but on the continuity of the person’s pre-reflective encounter with the totality of reality—an encounter that goes on below the surface of deliberate thought and constitutes the experiential certainty on which the whole person rests, whether it knows this or not.

An objection presents itself at this point. If fundamental hope is grounded in the spiritual unconscious—in a dimension of the person that operates below the threshold of conscious awareness—does this not render it unfalsifiable, and therefore philosophically suspect rather than genuinely philosophical-anthropological? The objection deserves a direct answer. The claim being made here is not an empirical hypothesis about hidden psychological states that might or might not be confirmed by neuroscientific investigation. It is an eidetic claim—a structural assertion about the invariant constitution of the human person as such, arrived at through phenomenological analysis rather than through experiment. Its method is not the method of the laboratory but the method of careful attention to the phenomenon as it presents itself in lived experience. And the evidence for fundamental hope, though indirect, is genuine: it shows itself precisely in its effects—in the person who continues to orient toward reality, to love, to engage, to find meaning, even when conscious hope has entirely collapsed. The persistence of this orientation below the level of deliberate willing is not a postulate but an inference from what is observably the case: that human beings regularly demonstrate a resilience and forward-movement that their conscious states do not explain and cannot account for. The same structure of inference governs all the central concepts of phenomenological anthropology—Heidegger’s being-toward-death, Frankl’s will-to-meaning, Marcel’s ontological exigence—none of which is empirically falsifiable in the positivist sense, and all of which are verified not by experiment but by whether they illuminate the phenomenon with greater precision and fidelity than the alternatives. The grounding of fundamental hope in the spiritual unconscious is verified in the same way: by whether it accounts for the full range of the phenomenon—including precisely those cases in which hope persists where on any purely conscious account, it should have disappeared entirely.

The distinction between fragmental and fundamental hope is not without precedent in the philosophical tradition. Gabriel Marcel, in *Homo Viator*, distinguished between desire and hope, arguing that genuine hope is not directed at a particular object but is a response to a situation of captivity—a fundamental orientation of the being toward a transcendence that exceeds any particular fulfilment [1]. Jürgen Moltmann, approaching from the direction of theological eschatology, similarly argued that genuine hope is not the extrapolation of present possibilities but the openness of existence to a future that cannot be derived from the present—a future that breaks into history from beyond it [2]. Both accounts illuminate something real: that fundamental hope is not proportioned to any particular object and that it involves a structural openness to what exceeds the present. The

account developed in this paper shares these insights but grounds them differently. Where Marcel grounds fundamental hope in the ontology of being-in-situation and its orientation toward transcendence, and where Moltmann grounds it in the eschatological promise, this paper grounds it in the structure of the unconscious and its encounter with the totality of reality. Fundamental hope, on this account, is not primarily a theological or eschatological category—though it is compatible with such interpretations—but a phenomenological–anthropological one: a structural feature of the human psyche as a being constitutively open to a reality larger than its conscious self.

Fromm identified this dimension of hope when he characterised the human being as *Homo sperans*—the hoping being—arguing that hoping is a fundamental condition of being human, and that the moment a human being gives up all hope, it has entered the door of hell, whether it knows this or not, and has left its own humanity behind [8]. Heidegger, approaching from the direction of fundamental ontology, observed that the one who hopes takes themselves with them into the hope—brings themselves up against what they hope for—and that this presupposes having somehow arrived at oneself, having an ecstatico–temporal relation to the thrown ground of the self [9]. Both observations converge on the same insight: fundamental hope is not a psychological state layered on top of human existence. It is a structural condition of it—as foundational as freedom itself, and, this paper argues, its very essence.

Not all accounts of the human being’s constitutive groundlessness, however, arrive at hope. Albert Camus, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, begins from the same recognition—that the human being hungers for clarity and unity while the world meets that hunger with silence—but draws the opposite conclusion. For Camus, this collision between human longing and the world’s indifference is the absurd, and the honest response to it is not hope but revolt: the lucid, defiant continuation of life without appeal to any transcendent ground or future fulfilment. Hope, on Camus’s account, is not a virtue but an evasion—what he calls philosophical suicide, the refusal to face the absurd honestly by appealing to something beyond it [10] (p. 28). One must imagine Sisyphus happy, but one must not imagine him hoping.

The account developed in this paper accepts Camus’s starting point and rejects his conclusion. Camus correctly identifies the constitutive groundlessness of human existence—what this paper calls ontological emptiness—and correctly sees that no particular object or achievement permanently fills it. But he misreads its significance. Ontological emptiness is not the terminus of the human being’s encounter with reality but its motor—the *élan de vie* that keeps existence oriented beyond every present situation toward a reality always larger than what has been attained. Camus sees the weight of emptiness but not its direction. And his revolt—the defiant continuation of life without hope—is precisely freedom without its dynamic essence: motion without orientation, energy without forward movement, the human being circling back upon itself rather than pressing through its groundlessness toward the encounter with reality that fundamental hope sustains. Sisyphus without hope is not the honest human being. He is the human being that has mistaken the weight of emptiness for its final word.

Kierkegaard’s analysis of anxiety in *The Concept of Anxiety* and of despair in *The Sickness Unto Death* represents the most penetrating account in the philosophical tradition of what freedom feels like when it is without orientation. For Kierkegaard, anxiety is the dizziness of freedom—the vertigo that arises when the human being confronts the abyss of its own possibility without any ground beneath it [11] (p. 61). And despair is the structural misrelation within the synthesis that constitutes the self: the synthesis of necessity and freedom, in which necessity names the given and determined and freedom names the open space of self-determination and possibility [12]. The account is illuminating as far as

it goes—but it does not go far enough, because the conceptual framework within which it operates already contains a decisive limitation. By constructing the self as a synthesis of necessity and freedom, Kierkegaard places the two as opposites within a dialectical structure. Freedom, on this account, is what exceeds and resists necessity—the open space that is not yet determined. But this is already to conceive freedom as free-room: as the variable field of expression in which the self moves between what is fixed and what remains open. It is not freedom as the constitutive ontological ability of the human being—the irreducible given that persists regardless of how narrow or wide the field of expression has become, and that no external or internal condition can diminish. Kierkegaard's anxiety is therefore the anxiety of free-room—the vertigo of an open field without orientation—and his despair is the misrelation within that field. What he does not ask—and what the present account takes as its primary question—is what freedom itself is prior to and beneath that field. Freedom as ontological ability, the invariant given that no synthesis of necessity and freedom can contain, is not Kierkegaard's object. And consequently, his account has no resources for the invariable ontological hope that connects emptiness to freedom at the level beneath free-room—the level at which the possibility of adequate response to the demand of existence is never exhausted by any act of despair.

Paul Tillich, approaching from the direction of existential theology, advances the discussion by grounding courage in the structure of being itself. In *The Courage to Be*, Tillich argues that the affirmation of being against the threat of non-being—the courage to be oneself despite anxiety—is rooted not in any particular psychological resource but in the power of being as such [13] (p. 143). This is closer to the ontological level this paper seeks: Tillich correctly sees that the ground of genuine human affirmation cannot be a contingent psychological state but must be something more fundamental. But his account operates without the anthropological infrastructure that would specify what that ground looks like within the constitution of the human being. The coinherence of ontological emptiness, freedom, and the hope that connects them—the invariable infrastructure from which the possibility of adequate response is never exhausted—is what Tillich's courage to be ontologically presupposes but does not name. Fundamental hope, on the account developed here, is the anthropological specification of what Tillich calls the power of being as it operates within the structure of the human person: the pre-reflective, dispositional trust that keeps existence open to what is not yet, and that sustains freedom in its movement even when anxiety threatens to convert the openness of the future into the vertigo of the abyss.

Maurice Blondel's distinction in *L'Action* between the *volonté voulante* and the *volonté voulée* illuminates a related dimension of the same phenomenon [14] (p. 138) (French original). The willing will—the *volonté voulante*—is the dynamic, restless, inexhaustible drive that always exceeds every particular object it reaches for, never satisfied by any finite achievement because it is oriented toward a fullness that no particular object can contain. The willed will—the *volonté voulée*—is the particular object, choice, or project that the will actually settles on and pursues. The gap between the two—the perpetual excess of the willing will over every willed object—corresponds precisely to what this paper calls ontological emptiness: the constitutive groundlessness that belongs to existence as such and that no particular fulfilment can permanently fill. Blondel's insight that this restlessness is not a defect but the deepest motor of human existence anticipates the account developed here. The present account, however, operates at a purely ontological and phenomenological level: it neither requires nor excludes any particular interpretation of the fullness toward which the *volonté voulante* is oriented, and grounds the connection between emptiness and freedom in the invariable infrastructure of ontological hope rather than in any specific teleological terminus.

But to say that fundamental hope emerges from the encounter with the totality of reality is not yet to say why it is the essence of freedom rather than merely its companion or its condition. The ontological argument requires one further step. The human being is constitutively characterised by ontological emptiness—the irreducible groundlessness that belongs to existence as such, the structural openness that no particular object, achievement, or relationship can permanently fill. This emptiness is not a defect. It is the *élan de vie* of human existence—the restless motor that keeps the human being oriented beyond every present situation toward a reality always larger than what has been attained. But emptiness alone, without hope, would be a *Fauxpas* in the human constitution: a weight with nowhere to go, a pressure with no direction, a demand that freedom could neither hear nor answer. And freedom without hope would be equally compromised: an ability with nothing to react to, since it would not be connected to the emptiness that makes its exercise necessary. It is ontological hope—the invariable, pre-reflective orientation of the human being toward the possibility of adequate response to the demand of emptiness—that gives emptiness its meaning within the structure of human existence and connects it to freedom as the ability to respond. Without hope, emptiness presses nowhere and freedom answers nothing. With hope, emptiness becomes the permanent pendant of freedom and freedom becomes the permanent pendant of emptiness—and the coinherence of the two is the living, forward-oriented structure that constitutes the human being as such. Fundamental hope, as developed in this paper, is the existential actualisation of this invariable ontological possibility: the lived, experiential form in which the human being inhabits and draws from the ontological ground that is always already there. This is why hope is not merely a condition of freedom but its essence—not something freedom happens to need in order to function well, but the dynamic inner principle without which freedom would not be freedom at all, but a static given with no movement, no orientation, and no life.

Ontological hope must be distinguished from the two variable forms of hope with which it is easily confused. It is not fragmental hope—the familiar, object-directed hope that ceases when its particular object is obtained or denied. Nor is it fundamental hope—the existential disposition of trust that sustains the inner condition of the will and that, though not object-directed, is genuinely variable: it can be depleted by sustained loss of self-trust, by the collapse of affirmation, and by the withdrawal of genuine encounter with reality. Ontological hope operates at a deeper and invariable level. It is the ontological possibility of adequate reaction to the demand of ontological emptiness—inscribed in the very coinherence of emptiness and freedom, given with existence rather than achieved through it, and incapable of being extinguished without extinguishing freedom as ability itself. It belongs not to the field of the will's expression but to the ontological infrastructure of the human being as such: the permanent, pre-personal connecting element between the emptiness that constitutes existence as a demand and the freedom that constitutes existence as the ability to respond.

But why is ontological hope the essence of freedom rather than merely its companion or its structural correlate? And how does it perform this function? The answer to both questions lies in the specific role that ontological hope plays within the coinherence of emptiness and freedom. Ontological emptiness is constitutive of human existence—the irreducible groundlessness that no particular object, achievement, or relationship can permanently fill. Freedom is constitutive of human existence—the irreducible ability to respond to the demands that existence makes. But emptiness and freedom do not connect themselves. Left to themselves—without the phenomenon that opens the channel between them—emptiness would be a weight with nowhere to go, a pressure with no direction, a demand that freedom could neither hear nor answer. And freedom, correspondingly, would be an ability with nothing to react to—a static given with no demand to answer, no direction

to move, no reason to be. It is ontological hope that opens this channel. It is the phenomenon that creates the possibility of the demand of emptiness being answered at all—that gives emptiness its direction within the structure of human existence and gives freedom its access to the demand of the latter. Without ontological hope, the demand of emptiness remains not merely unanswered but unanswerable: freedom is present but has nothing to respond to, nothing to hear, nowhere to go. With ontological hope, emptiness becomes the permanent pendant of freedom and freedom becomes the permanent pendant of emptiness—and their coinherence is the living, forward-oriented structure that constitutes the human being as such. This is the precise sense in which ontological hope is the essence of freedom: not that it accompanies freedom or conditions it from outside, but that it is the inner phenomenon that makes freedom's exercise possible as such—the phenomenon that gives emptiness its meaning as a demand and gives freedom its reason for being. Freedom is, because ontological hope opens up the space of ontological emptiness and gives freedom access to the demand of the latter. This is its *raison d'être*.

This invariability—the fact that ontological hope cannot be destroyed without destroying freedom and personhood itself—has a further implication of the greatest importance. The despair of freedom—freedom's own act of self-rejection at the existential level—can collapse fundamental hope and render fragmental hope meaningless. It cannot touch ontological hope. The ontological pipe remains open. The possibility of adequate response to the demand of existence is never exhausted by any act of despair and foreclosed by no condition of existence. What stands between the fullest possible self-expression and the deepest possible self-destruction is therefore not fragmental hope for particular outcomes, nor even fundamental hope whose strength fluctuates with the conditions of inner life, but ontological hope—inscribed in the very coinherence of emptiness and freedom, invariable, inviolable, and permanently pressing. This is the ultimate ground of human dignity—and the ultimate reason why the invitation to transcendence never expires.

At this point, a further precision is necessary. To say that ontological hope and freedom are coinherent—that each is the permanent pendant of the other—might still leave open the question of why hope occupies the position of essence rather than that of condition, companion, or correlate. Could not the same coinherence be claimed for other structural features of human existence—desire, attention, or the capacity for meaning-making? The answer lies in the specific function that ontological hope performs within the structure of the coinherence itself. Desire, attention, and meaning-making are all modes of freedom already in motion—they presuppose freedom already connected to the demand of emptiness, already in the act of responding. They arrive after the channel between emptiness and freedom is open. Ontological hope is what opens that channel. It is the phenomenon that creates the possibility of the demand of emptiness being answered at all. Without ontological hope, the demand of emptiness would remain not merely unanswered but unanswerable—not because freedom is absent, but because freedom would have no access to that demand, no way of hearing it, no reason to move. Ontological hope is therefore not one structural feature among others that happens to accompany freedom. It is the *raison d'être* of freedom itself—the phenomenon without which freedom would have nothing to respond to, nothing to be for. Freedom is, because ontological hope opens up the space of ontological emptiness and gives freedom access to the demand of the latter. This is what it means to say that hope is the essence of freedom: not that hope and freedom happen to coincide, nor that hope is a necessary condition freedom requires from outside, but that hope is the inner phenomenon that makes freedom's exercise possible as such—the ground from which freedom draws its reason for being.

Hope plays a connective role at each level: at the ontological level it forms a triadic structure of emptiness, hope, and freedom in which hope is the *raison d'être* of freedom; at

the fundamental level, it paves the way for freedom in the latter's reaction to the demands of the fundamental desire, disposing the person toward external and internal possibilities; at the fragmental level, it is co-constituted by freedom in choosing whom or what to hope in and which properties count—sometimes, in the act of transcendence, with freedom making it possible despite imperfection in the object—and chosen by freedom as an instrument of resilience. Moreover, freedom regulates the relationship of the hopeful and the object of their hope through forfeiture and/or acceptance in the act of transcendence.

3. Certainty-Mania and the Destruction of Fundamental Hope

If fundamental hope is the vital principle of human life, what destroys it? The answer this paper proposes is certainty-mania: the obsessive, compulsive quest for certainty that severs the consciousness from the unconscious and from the fundamental hope the unconscious carries. Fear and the obsessive need for predictability destroy the relationship between the consciousness and the unconscious, so that the union with reality and the hope that accrues from it can no longer be felt. And from this, the consciousness can move even further to block the unconscious from further encounter, creating a dichotomy between the self and reality that manifests in inauthenticity.

The mechanism of this destruction is precise and worth examining carefully. Fear prevents the human being from giving room to an open future. Openness is a necessary character of the future—it is the condition under which the future can offer something genuinely new, something that has not yet been pre-empted by the consciousness. The future ceases to be, in the relevant sense, once it is fully certain: once it has been mapped and controlled in advance, it is no longer a future but a past that has not yet arrived. It can offer no positive surprises. It has nothing to add to the being of the human being.

A small excursion into the phenomenon of having clarifies this dynamic. When we speak of having, we refer to the inner bond between the subject and the object of having—the feeling of security and certainty the haver derives from possessing the have. But experience shows that this feeling can be pre-empted: when one has the certainty of the means to secure an object one wishes to have, one can feel that the object already belongs to one before acquiring it. The unseen consequence of this pre-emptive having is that the tension inherent in hope is eliminated—the characteristic oscillation between certainty and uncertainty that constitutes the inner dynamic of genuine hoping. And it is precisely this tension that generates the anticipating joy of hoping: the Freude-auf, the joy-toward-something that energises the present with the vitality of the future⁴. When this tension is eliminated by pre-emptive certainty, the anticipating joy is replaced by a latent joy that is never actually felt.

This analysis reveals something important about the preservation of fundamental hope. It depends on the willingness of the consciousness to draw from the wells of the unconscious—to trust the certainty of the unconscious rather than insisting on the calculated certainty of the intellect. This trust converts the tension inherent in hope from an anxiety into a disposition: a readiness for the future and for whatever it may offer. In this relationship, the unconscious constantly holds the consciousness—caresses it, in a sense, quieting its worries and quelling its compulsive need for total control. This is why trust—genuine confidence in reality—is the finest feeling in the human being. It is the condition under which the consciousness can relax its grip and allow the fundamental hope of the unconscious to carry the whole person forward.

4. The Wish-Tradition and the Impoverished Present

The cultural consequences of certainty-mania are visible with particular clarity in what this paper calls the wish-tradition—the practice, widespread in contemporary western

culture, of specifying in advance exactly what one wishes to receive as a gift: its form, colour, size, and timing. This tradition presents itself as an expression of freedom—the freedom to choose, to avoid waste, to ensure the recipient gets what they genuinely want. But it is, on closer examination, a systematic elimination of encounter: the encounter with the unexpected, the encounter with the imagination and care of the giver, the encounter with the surprising character of a gift that was not anticipated.

The gift, properly understood, enhances encounter—not only with the giver but with the given itself, which ceases to be a mere thing the moment it is given and becomes a symbol of relationship and love. The magical power of the gift lies precisely in its surprising character. When this character is eliminated by the advance specification of the wish-tradition, the gift loses its power to generate the encounter it was designed to create. The child who has specified exactly what they want for their birthday receives it with a coldness that puzzles the giver—but the coldness is explained by the analysis offered here. The joy that should accompany the receipt of the gift has already been pre-empted by the certainty of its acquisition.

The result is the habit of insatiability. Shortly after receiving the wished-for object, one wishes the next—because the just-received has already finished its service through the latent joy embedded in the certainty of its receipt. The present is impoverished, kept futile and empty. One can no longer dwell in the present and find fulfilment there, because before arriving at the present, one has pre-empted it. The emptiness of this impoverished present pursues the person through new wishes into a future that is transformed into the past before it can be encountered and experienced as a fulfilling present.

A brief eidetic analysis of the phenomenon of anticipating joy clarifies what is at stake. If we subject *Freude-auf* to imaginative variation—asking what must remain invariant across all possible instances of genuine anticipating joy for it still to be recognisable as such—one structural feature proves ineliminable: the tension between the certainty that the anticipated good will come and the uncertainty of not yet possessing it. Remove the certainty pole—the confidence that the good is genuinely on its way—and what remains is not anticipating joy but anxiety or dread. Remove the uncertainty pole—the not-yet, the open interval between the present and the arrival of the anticipated good—and what remains is equally not anticipating joy but something categorically different: eager waiting, perhaps, or impatience, or the flat satisfaction of a *fait accompli*. Anticipating joy requires both poles simultaneously and in tension. It is constituted by the oscillation between them—the forward-leaning movement of a consciousness that is confident enough to rejoice and open enough to not yet possess. This oscillation is not a contingent feature that some instances of anticipating joy happen to have and others lack. It is the eidetic core of the phenomenon—what makes *Freude-auf* the specific joy it is rather than some other affective state.

The wish-tradition's advance specification of the gift eliminates precisely the uncertainty pole of this structure. The recipient who has specified the gift's form, colour, size, and timing knows not only that the good is coming but what the good is. The open interval—the not-yet in which anticipating joy lives—has been collapsed into a mere waiting for what is already, in effect, possessed. What might appear to be a heightening of anticipatory joy through concreteness is therefore not anticipating joy at all in the eidetic sense: it is the subjective experience of impatience—the restless consciousness of a not-yet that has been stripped of its openness and reduced to a delay. The gift, when it arrives, confirms what was already known rather than bringing what was genuinely not yet possessed. And it is precisely this—the arrival of the genuinely not-yet-possessed—that generates the existential joy, the *erlebte Freude*, that anticipating joy was oriented toward. When the uncertainty pole is pre-empted, the *Freude-auf* that should have energised the waiting and

the erlebte Freude that should have crowned the arrival are both foreclosed simultaneously. The wish-tradition does not merely modify the experience of giving and receiving. It structurally eliminates the phenomenological conditions under which genuine joy—both anticipating and existential—becomes possible.

This analysis also reveals the anthropological value of the double gift—giving someone something they did not specifically request. The giver who takes the trouble to know the recipient well enough to surprise them gives something greater than any wished-for object: the gift of being known and thought of. And the child who receives something they did not ask for receives, alongside the object, an early lesson in the art of generosity—the art of separating oneself from things, of giving and receiving in the spirit of love rather than in the spirit of acquisition.

5. Disappointment as Disillusionment: The Medicinal Return to Reality

If expectation is dangerous—if it pre-empts the joy it was meant to secure and leaves the person disappointed whether or not it is fulfilled—then disappointment itself, existentially integrated, can be understood as a form of medicine. This is the original argument this paper develops through an etymological and phenomenological analysis of the concept⁵.

The English word disappointment derives from appointment—to be chosen, placed in a position, entrusted with something. Every appointment is therefore a gift, a grace from the other—a demonstration of mutual trust. Disappointment, as the negation of appointment, means dismissal: being dethroned from the position one's expectation had assigned to one, being displaced from a particular place in one's relationship with reality. If this displacement is, as the paper argues, a blessing, then it means being made to fall into the true line from a wrong position—being corrected, redirected, returned to reality from the false position that expectation had constructed.

The German equivalent is still more revealing. Enttäuschung derives from täuschen—to deceive, itself related to tauschen—to exchange, to mistake one thing for another. To be enttäuscht is therefore to be dis-illusioned: to have the illusion removed, to be shown clearly what one had been mistaking. The prefix ent- is a negating or undoing prefix. Enttäuschung is the undoing of the deception, the dispelling of the illusion. Disappointment is therefore, at its root, a clarification: the moment in which one is shown the inauthenticity of one's position, wish, intention, or belief—returned to reality from the false position that one had constructed through expectation.

This does not make disappointment painless. The pain is real, and it belongs to the process. But understood and existentially integrated, disappointment is medicinal—it is the moment of return that the organism of the self needs in order to reorient itself toward reality. The person who receives disappointment with this understanding does not become despairing or bitter; they become, gradually, more realistic, more genuinely open, more capable of the kind of hoping that does not build on fixed expectations but on the dynamic, tension-filled orientation toward reality that fundamental hope requires.

6. The Vital Strength of Hoping: In the Act, Not the Object

One of the most important and most counterintuitive insights of this paper is that the vital strength of hope lies in hoping itself rather than in that which is hoped for. The strength that hoping gives is in the present act of hoping, not in the future attainment of the hoped-for object. This is a crucial distinction, because it means that hope can carry the human being even before any of its objects have been achieved—that the mere act of genuine, open, tension-filled hoping is itself a source of existential vitality.

Reaching the hoped-for object usually means an end to the hope—the hope has been fulfilled and ceases. And once the hope ceases, the strength it gave also ceases. Building

on the object of hope rather than on the act of hoping therefore leads, sooner or later, to hopelessness: because objects are finite, objects are reached, and objects disappoint. The person whose vital strength is invested in particular hoped-for objects is always one disappointment away from despair. The person whose vital strength comes from the act of hoping itself—from the dynamic, tension-filled, open orientation toward reality—is sustained even when particular hopes are not realised, because the fundamental hope that underlies all particular hopes is not dependent on any of them.

This insight has direct practical implications. One of the ways of preserving and nursing fundamental hope—of maintaining the rapport with reality from which it emerges—is gratitude. Gratitude is the acknowledgement of what has been given, the recognition of the encounter that has already taken place, the affirmation of the reality that has already offered something. It is the opposite of the consumer attitude that reaches for the next wished-for object the moment the current one has been received. Gratitude dwells in the present, recognises its richness, and by doing so keeps the door open for the next encounter, the next gift, the next surprise that the open future, carried by fundamental hope, will bring.

The fundamental hope is, in this paper's most concentrated formulation, a residence permit in the bosom of the totality of reality. Its secret lies in its ability to keep the human being open for the future while carrying it, protected, into the future's dining room. It is not a guarantee of any particular outcome. It is a mode of inhabiting existence—the mode in which the human being is most fully itself, most fully free, most fully alive. And like love—which is the logic of fulfilment—hope is not primarily rational. Both love and hope stem from the unconscious—from the experiencing thing, the spiritual unconscious—and are pre-rational in their deepest origin. The certainty that sustains the human being is therefore not the calculated certainty of the intellect but the experiential certainty that emerges from the encounters of the unconscious with reality: the certainty of having been held, known, and carried by a reality that is larger than any particular need or fear.

7. Conclusions

This paper has argued that hope is the essence of freedom—the propulsive inner principle without which freedom cannot move, cannot sustain itself, cannot orient itself toward the fulfilment that is the goal of this philosophical anthropology. It has distinguished between fragmental hope and fundamental hope, arguing that the latter is the proper vital principle of human existence, emerging from encounter with the totality of reality and carried by the unconscious even when the conscious mind is overwhelmed with doubt. It has analysed the destructive effects of certainty-mania—showing that the obsessive quest for certainty severs the consciousness from the fundamental hope of the unconscious and empties the present of its capacity to fulfil. It has introduced the distinction between anticipating joy and existential joy, arguing that the wish-tradition's elimination of uncertainty pre-empts the former and therefore forecloses the latter. It has offered an original etymological and phenomenological analysis of disappointment as *Enttäuschung*—disillusionment, the medicinal return from a false position to reality. And it has argued that the vital strength of hope lies in the act of hoping rather than in its object.

Fundamental hope is not a psychological state that human beings happen to possess. It is a structural condition of human existence—as foundational as freedom itself, and, this paper has argued, its very essence. Without hope, freedom would be motion without direction: energetic, perhaps, but blind, circling back upon itself, unable to sustain the forward movement toward fulfilment that constitutes the deepest logic of human life. What fundamental hope provides is not a guarantee of any particular outcome. It provides something more important: a mode of inhabiting existence in which the human being remains genuinely open—open to the future, open to encounter, open to the gift of the

unexpected—while being carried, protected, by the experiential certainty that reality is not hostile to the movement toward wholeness. This is the certainty that does not come from calculation or control but from the encounters of the unconscious with reality: the accumulated, pre-rational confidence of a being that has been held, known, and sustained by something larger than its own fears.

The following observations do not constitute further steps in the argument but draw out its existential implications—describing the lived form in which the human being who has appropriated the insight of this paper inhabits existence. The human being who lives from fundamental hope is not naïve about the world’s difficulty. It is precisely because he or she has integrated disappointment—has received disillusionment as the medicinal return to reality that it is—that the hope which sustains him or her is genuine rather than fragile, resilient rather than brittle. This is the hope that does not cease when particular hopes are not realised. It is the hope that carries the human being through the difficulties and disappointments that no life escapes, and it is, this paper has argued, the vital principle of human life—the inner sustaining dynamic without which freedom cannot move, love cannot persist, and the human being cannot become what it most deeply is.

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Notes

- ¹ The definition of freedom as the ability of the human being to see farther than the now, underlined by the hope for a better now or at least for its prolongation or repetition, is the author’s own formulation, developed in this paper as the most precise account of the relationship between freedom and hope.—The Scholastic tradition offers an earlier structural parallel: Aquinas defines *spes* as an appetitive act directed at a *bonum arduum possibile*—a future, difficult, but genuinely possible good (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 17, a. 1)—anticipating the present account’s articulation of hope as forward-leaning disposition, though operating within a faculty-psychology rather than phenomenological framework.
- ² The concepts named in this paragraph—the anthropological circle, the fundamental desire, *Gelassenheit*, love as the logic of fulfilment—are established concepts within philosophical anthropology. This paper is self-contained and can be read independently of any prior acquaintance with these concepts, each of which is sufficiently characterised in context.
- ³ Marcel’s distinction between desire and hope, and his account of genuine hope as a fundamental orientation of the being toward a transcendence that exceeds any particular fulfilment, is developed in *Homo Viator* [1], p. 5. Moltmann’s argument that genuine hope is not the extrapolation of present possibilities but the openness of existence to a future that breaks into history from beyond it is from *Theology of Hope* [2]. For a comparative account of theological perspectives on hope, see also Volf [3].—The philosophy of hope has received significant attention in recent analytic philosophy of mind. Andrew Chignell’s “Focus Theory of Hope” [4] analyses hope as a dispositional state constituted by a probability assessment, a desire, and a focusing of attention on the hoped-for outcome. Jack Kwong’s “The Phenomenology of Hope” [5] approaches hope from a broadly Husserlian perspective, emphasising its intentional structure. Both accounts illuminate important features of the phenomenon. The present account differs from both in identifying a dimension of hope—fundamental hope—that is pre-propositional, pre-intentional, and non-object-directed.
- ⁴ The distinction between anticipating joy (*Freude-auf*) and existential joy (*erlebte Freude*) is the author’s own, introduced in this paper to articulate the specific way in which pre-emptive certainty destroys the possibility of genuine joy.—The most systematic treatment of hope as an ontological category in the twentieth century is Ernst Bloch’s *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* [15]. Bloch’s account shares with the present paper the conviction that hope is a fundamental ontological orientation. The present account does not engage Bloch directly: Bloch’s ontology of hope is grounded in a Marxist philosophy of history, whereas the present account grounds hope in the invariant structure of the individual person as such, prior to any social or historical configuration.

- 5 The etymological analysis of disappointment as Enttäuschung—deriving from täuschen (to deceive, related to tauschen, to exchange or mistake)—and the consequent reading of disappointment as dis-illusionment and medicinal return to reality, is the author’s own original contribution. The English etymology—from appointment, meaning to be chosen and entrusted—is offered as a parallel, reinforcing the same insight from a different linguistic tradition.

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