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Hope as Habits

The last chapter began to paint a picture of pragmatist hope by describing its key elements of inquiry, growth, truth, and meliorism. This chapter fleshes out that image by adding in the final important component: habits. Habits are the resources through which we enact hope. Perhaps, for our struggling citizens, habits may be an important part of the answer to their question: "How can I hope?" While one's will can play a significant role in shaping one's outlook on life, one cannot merely choose hope over despair.[133] We require mechanisms that enable us to enact hope and to sustain it across time. And while hope can be a good choice for a citizen to make, it cannot be cast in such easy terms, as something you just personally decide to have or not. Hope does not rely merely on our commitment to it; instead, it is a way of life that grows out of our interactions with others and is facilitated by our habits.

Our unique pattern of habits gives us our distinct characteristics as individuals. But our habits also connect us to other people because our habits are developed alongside and are assessed relative to other people. Notably, habits can be taught and nurtured; they can be revised and improved. This opens opportunities for reviving hope among American adults and for developing hope among children in schools, one of the primary places that we learn habits. In this chapter, I put the final touches on a pragmatist vision of hope. I make a case for the usefulness of such hope, especially for countering and ameliorating some of the struggles we face in America today, but also for the long-term health of our democracy and our future identity as Americans.

Pragmatist Habits

Habits begin with impulses—natural or instinctual urges, often in response to our environment. While the exact makeup and intensity of these impulses vary among people, most of us are born with similar impulses, such as sucking to acquire nutrition and crying when hurt. Dewey explains:

Learning How to Hope. Sarah M. Stitzlein, Oxford University Press (2020). © Oxford University Press.
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780190062651.001.0001

> Man continues to live because . . . He is instinct with activities that carry him on. Individuals here and there cave in, and most individuals sag, withdraw and seek refuge at this and that point. But man as man still has the dumb pluck of the animal. He has endurance, hope, curiosity, eagerness, love of action. These traits belong to him by structure, not by taking thought.[134]

These initial sources, aligned with instincts toward survival, are common, but not necessarily present, in all of us. They are largely noncognitive; in other words, we don't stop and think about those behaviors. But those initial inklings do not stay confined to such an individualized and nonreflective location for long. Rather, they quickly make their way into social living and become fodder for reflection and deliberation with others. So, while we may suckle our mother's breast as infants, as we come to understand and reflect on the process of eating, discover tools to assist us, and witness typical ways that our families eat, we move on to eventually use a utensil to deliver solid food to our mouths ourselves.

As we grow and interact with the world around us, we observe and reflect on cultural norms that govern accepted ways of behaving and we begin to craft our impulses into habits. People develop similar habits when they have similar interactions with their environments that tend to reinforce certain patterns of behavior. When those behaviors serve us well by meeting our needs, we tend to do them again and again. When they don't, we reflect on their shortcomings, then tweak or drop those behaviors accordingly. When they function well over time, we increasingly perform those acts without conscious attention until some new situation calls those habits back into consideration. In addition to learning habits from interactions with our environments, we learn them more overtly from people. Their cultivation is most obvious in schools, where we learn about common and socially acceptable behaviors while also imitating the behavior we see from our teachers and peers.

Most people think of habits as dull routines that we repeat exactly—doing the same things in the same ways, though in different places or at different times. But Dewey views habits slightly differently. He sees them as dispositions, proclivities to act in certain ways. Dewey notes, "Any habit marks an *inclination*—an active preference and choice for the conditions involved in its exercise. A habit does not wait, Micawber-like, for a stimulus to turn up so that it may get busy; it actively seeks for occasions to pass into full operation."[135] Habits, then, strive to be put into intelligent action; they are

not mere default patterns we thoughtlessly rely on. They are active and energetic; they project themselves.[136] Habits make up our ways of being and we enact them with ease and familiarity because they have proven to help us lead our lives smoothly.

Habits sometimes cause us to desire particular outcomes or objects in order for our lives to flourish. Those desires align with our growth from one experience to the next; they may unite our experiences or serve as ends-in-view to guide us. Importantly, habits also offer a way to pursue those desires, often through thought or bodily movement. For Dewey, habits "do all the perceiving, recognizing, imagining, recalling, judging, conceiving and reasoning that is done."[137] As we encounter new stimuli, habits help us to filter and make sense of those encounters, enabling us to develop ideas about them. They organize our perceptions based on past experiences so that we can form ideas about the world that we test out in order to overcome indeterminate situations. Habits then provide the know-how to act in the world because they entail our working capacities. Finally, we reflect on our experiences and our inquiries to determine which habits bring about our growth by promoting smooth and just transactions with the world and with other people.

Habits take many forms, from the way we carry our bodies (posture, use of personal space) to our tendencies in communicating with others (dominating conversation, listening carefully) to our skills and judgment making (careful consideration, hasty conclusions). Dewey explains, "All habits are demands for certain kinds of activity; and they constitute the self."[138] So, we *are* a collection of habits. Habits shape who and what we are, including how we understand ourselves and how others see us. But, while habits compose us as individuals, they are also intimately linked to other people. They arise from our interactions with others and we reflect on their impact on others as we assess whether they are good ways to continue to act. In other words, we secure our growth and flourishing not merely by pursuing our personal desires, but also by ensuring that we are able to work in coordination with others to achieve mutual well-being. When problematic conditions or novel situations arise, we employ inquiry not just to determine how to change our world, but also to reconsider and reshape our habits so that we can continue to grow and live fruitfully with other people.

It is the intellectual aspect of habits that gives them meaning and keeps people elastic and growing. Good habits are flexible, enabling us to respond to our changing world and carrying us over from one experience to the next, thereby bringing about growth. Bad habits, however, are those that become

fixed and disconnected from intelligence. Much like the problems of latching on to unchanging goals described in the last chapter, bad habits are restrictive and have a hold on us, rather than us on them. Bad habits freeze plasticity, disabling the conditions for growth.[139] Dewey explains: "the acquiring of habits is due to an original plasticity of our natures: to our ability to vary responses till we find an appropriate and efficient way of acting. Routine habits, and habits that possess us instead of our possessing them, are habits which put an end to plasticity. They mark the close of power to vary."[140] When we are deep in despair, our selves may come apart. Unsure of how to proceed, our habits may flounder. We may then succumb to bad habits that lack flexibility. In our political lives, these might include cynicism or apathy, which render our lives stagnant and fail to keep up with the changing world. But rather than reconciling ourselves to such a state, Dewey's philosophy offers us ways of life that can help to reorient us.

In the context of democracy, a bad habit is one that keeps democracy from functioning well. It may be one that is stagnant and doesn't keep up with the changing population or social needs, is exclusionary, blocks interactions with others, or is unjust. Essentially, a bad habit is one that keeps us from adapting in the ways we need to as we encounter new situations involving our fellow citizens or our shared experiences. In my first book, I detailed bad habits of race and racism.[141] American democracy has long been plagued by habits of privileging white people over others. These habits, for example, impact the way we hear, fail to hear, or ignore the perspectives and experiences of people of color, thereby shaping a democracy where not all participants are fully equal and where the interests of some citizens are weighted more heavily than others as we determine common goods and just desserts for individuals.

We cannot easily drop bad habits, but we can work through a process of changing and replacing them with better habits that are more just or inclusive. Ideally, because habits are "adjustments of the environment, not merely to it," adopting new habits (through a careful process of intellectual reflection or education) can change the environmental phenomena that produced the problematic old habit, in this case possibly making democracy better or reducing racism.[142] For example, a white child raised in an all-white family and neighborhood may develop a bad habit of only interacting with other white children at his integrated school. The child may choose to self-segregate when selecting peers to sit with at school, thereby engaging in an exclusionary practice that prevents him from learning from children of color or

learning how to work across differences. A novel situation may arise, such as joining a county-wide baseball team largely populated by children of color, leaving the child unsure of how to play with his new teammates as a result of this lack of cross-racial interaction. Reflecting on this situation and discussing the struggle with his teacher might prompt a change to his seating habit at school. Selecting a new seat with children of color not only changes his opportunities for new interactions and growth but also changes the environment, presenting new opportunities for other classmates.[143]

There is a reciprocal relationship between habits and thought. Habits enable us to test our ideas and then reflect on those experiments to see whether the idea is worthwhile and whether we need to adjust our habits or develop new ones. Similarly, when we find ourselves in an indeterminate situation, we consider our habits. When we learn to form habits tentatively, as hypotheses about how we might best act in unpredictable future circumstances, habits can become flexible agents of change whose form emerges as situations unfold. Or, in Dewey's words, "the intellectual element in a habit fixes the relation of the habit to varied and elastic use, and hence to continued growth."[144] When habits are tied to intelligent reflection and inquiry, they are projective and sites of agency.

Understanding Hope as Habits

We arrive now at my chief contribution to understanding hope and the foundation for how we might cultivate a form of hope capable of reviving democracy in America. I contend that *hope, as a set of habits and their enactment, is most essentially a disposition toward possibility and change for the betterment of oneself and, typically, others*. It is a way of being that overcomes the paralysis of pessimism by bringing together proclivities and intelligent reflection to motivate one to act while providing a sustainable structure for doing so. Hope is a way of projecting ourselves toward a better future, positioning us toward action. In Dewey's words, pragmatist habits of hope are "active attitudes of welcome."[145] They are ways we greet the world and are disposed toward action in it.

Unlike common understanding of habits as mere thoughtless, repeated action, pragmatist habits of hope are attitudes and dispositions that shape how we transact with the world. They often lead us to seek out or create possibilities when we face challenges. Differing from individualist accounts of hope

in terms of desire for a self-serving goal or faith in other savior figures, habits of hope entail action that moves us toward better ways of living. Hope helps us envision a desired future that arises practically out of our conditions and with knowledge of the past. Yet, we move beyond those conditions through assessing possibilities, determining whether outcomes are desirable, and imagining how we might rearrange our circumstances to achieve new and better conditions.[146] For Dewey, imagination heads off failures that can derail hope because "thought runs ahead and foresees outcomes."[147]

Unlike other accounts that put hope in a savior figure or in a distant and unchanging goal, pragmatist habits of hope respond to the problems of the present using knowledge of the past so that we can craft a better future ourselves. These habits support us as we test hypotheses and imagine ways that we might reconstruct our circumstances in order to better our lives.

Hope theorist Alan Mittleman argues that hope is not just about change, however. He rightly argues that hope can also be about maintaining conditions that help us flourish. I would add that even when intended to preserve, hope is about change away from how things are currently going or the direction in which they are trending, where those long-standing conditions we value may be in jeopardy.

The practical, intelligent, and generative nature of pragmatist hope leads contemporary pragmatist Patrick Shade to rightly conclude that it entails "conditioned transcendence," where hope has two modes: "being grounded in real conditions and being productive of new and better ones."[148] Pragmatist hope focuses on the agency of people in realistic settings, rather than resorting to supernatural forces or optimistic pipe dreams. But it also recognizes that hope must be realistic and generative, otherwise, as in the case of the poor and racial minority citizens urged to keep on hoping in spite of a long history of seeming insurmountable injustices, "If hoping exhausts our resources, it is better not to hope."[149]

Pragmatist hope also emphasizes intelligence, where "Intelligence is critical method applied to goods of belief, appreciation and conduct, so as to construct freer and more secure goods. . . . [I]t is the reasonable object of our deepest faith and loyalty, the stay and support of all reasonable hopes."[150] Michael Eldridge adds an important point, linking intelligence and democracy:

> Intelligence as criticism is the transformation of what is in terms of what might be preferable. Democracy in the wide sense is the public

> transformation of experience, the constructing of "freer and more secure goods" by mean of the "free communication of shareable meanings." This deliberative, communicative, constructive process, when considered from a social psychological (or less well-defined) perspective is intelligence, but when considered from a political perspective is democracy.[151]

Here we see the weaving together of a Deweyan account of inquiry and growth with the social and political practices of shared living.

Many citizens today tend to proclaim whether they do or do not "have hope," as though hope is an object that is passively possessed. Pragmatist habits of hope, however, are better understood as a verb—hoping, an ongoing activity we do, often, with or alongside others. As we hope, we use our imagination to construct creative solutions and envision using our agency to impact the world and change our circumstances. Most people overestimate how much control they have over the future; yet when we choose to act, we need courage because we always face unpredictability, no matter how well we plan and how much control we have.[152] Courage considers and assesses risks, uses intelligence and resourcefulness to determine means to desired ends and to recognize the limits of our control, and then willingly faces those risks in order to pursue that end. Imagination, resourcefulness, courage, and agency operate hand-in-hand as elements of hoping.

Such emphasis on agency and action suggests that we should not stand idly by, as we see many citizens doing today in the face of significant social problems. Nor should we throw up our hands in the air, asserting that we've lost some object called 'hope,' for hope is within us and is realized in our actions. It is not something we hold or claim, but rather something we are in the practice of doing or can flexibly develop when needed. It may not be *in* our hands, but it's *on* our shoulders. We should not be left to our own devices, however, or bear weighty culpability when we fall short or find ourselves exhausted by our best efforts. For hope, as I will argue in the next chapter, suggests collective work to ameliorate knotty social issues. Hoping is not up to us alone.

Habits of hope, as well as the process of inquiry and problem-solving, can be intentionally cultivated. This suggests heightened need and opportunity for schools to nurture hope in students and to help them enact it well, which I will address in detail in the final chapter. For now, let me say that schools can help burgeoning citizens to assess which habits are fruitful, so they can learn tools to continually keep themselves aligned with and engaged in hoping.

Interaction with people who demonstrate and act on hope can foster agency and courage in others and motivate them to take hopeful action themselves. Relatedly, "Our sense of possibility may depend on our seeing that others are acting on behalf of similar goals."[153] Schools, located in communities that may share similar goals, are ripe spaces for demonstrating such action and spreading hope.

The Social and Political Elements of Pragmatist Hope

A pragmatist account of hope, which arises out of inquiry, truth, growth, meliorism, and habits, bridges together the individual with the social and political. Hope connects us to other people and situates us within a network of power, where groups influence one another as they pursue their desired good life. In this section, I'll discuss how that works and why it is a useful understanding and practice of hope to apply in today's context. To set the stage, Dewey says in *Creative Democracy*, "democracy is a personal way of individual life. . . . Instead of thinking of our own dispositions and habits as accommodated to certain institutions, we have to learn to think of the latter as expressions, projections and extensions of habitually dominant personal attitudes."[154] Notice how Dewey flips the typical understanding; instead of democracy shaping who we are, we may shape democracy. How radical to rethink of democracy as a projection of our own hoping.

To begin, hope is more than just an aspect of our inner lives, our pursuit of self-serving goals, or our faith in a deity. Rather, hope emerges amid specific contexts, thereby raising implications for shared social living. While habits of hope are located within and compose individuals, hope is not individualist. Habits grow out of our individual impulses, but those impulses are later shaped by our community, often taking the form of customs. Habits of hope employ the resources of our community and relationships to provide means for us to pursue our ends-in-view. And many of those ends-in-view have been influenced by those around us, as we talk with them about our desires, witness popular desires of others, and more. Pragmatist hope extends into the social world and is fruitful there because it is guided by growth and meliorism, each of which takes into consideration the well-being of others. It pushes us from individual pursuit of our goals to reflective, collective public work to make the physical, social, and political world a better place.

For Dewey, problem-solving is seldom done alone; rather, we must reach out to others to collect their interpretations of the current state of affairs and suggestions for change. Anthropologist Lia Haro, who studied and quotes the Zapatistas, an entire culture based on hope, concluded: "Hope is tended and increased in dialogue and receptive listening: 'Our hope grows and we become better because we know how to listen.' The political dimension of insurgent hope, of creating a different future, requires the work of listening and speaking with others to find 'pockets of light' and possibility that would be invisible without the advantage of multiple, distinct perspectives."[155] She rightfully draws attention to the fact that hoping requires listening in order to discover and pursue new possibilities, especially when they have the potential to impact the lives of others. In Dewey's words, we need "an attitude of mind which actively welcomes suggestions and relevant information from all sides."[156]

Hoping engages in open-minded listening and collaboration; it brings people together rather than distances them, as cynicism does. While listening often is confined to only our most immediate relationships or communities, the increasing interconnectedness of our decisions and implications on others should urge us to listen to and include others—something pragmatist Judith Green dubs "a global network of social hope."[157] Hoping connects us to other people, some of whom may also be engaged in hoping. Listening to others who may be impacted by our aims or who may hold conflicting goals may reveal imbalances of power or injustice at play. Pausing the march toward action and opening ourselves to truly listen to the views and competing accounts of others, including seeking out the perspectives of minority communities, can help us craft not only more feasible visions but also more just ones. Inquiry and meliorism connect us to an understanding of the past and visions of the future, including those held by others. These connections between people, ideas, and imaginative visions provide us with resources needed to pursue our ends-in-view and enable us to see that we can, indeed, improve the world.

Let me pause here to consider President Trump's call to "Make America Great Again (MAGA)," which echoed similar slogans used earlier by Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and Bill Clinton. This slogan certainly invokes a sense of improving our lives and our country, though perhaps not as strongly as the alternatives he first considered, including "We Will Make America Great" and "Make America Great."[158] But many Trump supporters picked it up in a way that fell victim to some of the problems of privatized hope I described earlier. It could have been a forward-driven call to remember the

best of our past, to draw on those successes as evidence of Americans' power to rebuild anew, and then to use that past to shape a better direction for the future. But rather than asking, "Great for whom?," many Trump supporters stopped at individually reflecting on previous times that were better for them or their families. They did not engage in listening to the accounts of others who did not fare well during those times (for a host of reasons, including racism and sexism that were prominent during the popular period of the 1950s that many supporters nostalgically recalled).[159] They did not engage in open-minded listening to or collaboration with those different from themselves—skills important to successful work in today's political context where we tend to seek out like-minded perspectives of those politically and demographically similar to us. Instead, the hats bearing the slogan became not just a marker of support for Trump, but a way for citizens to identify peers yearning for the return of better days, assuming that their visions were shared even when not discussed.[160] As a result, the hope conveyed in MAGA was not checked by inquiry or experience, nor confirmed for its role in bringing about a flourishing life, leaving it uninformed and largely unsustainable. It also precluded discussions about what the ends-in-view of MAGA were and what actions citizens might take to achieve them, leading some citizens to turn over the task to the president, as evidenced in the inauguration day interviews I noted in chapter 1.

Hoping moves us beyond ourselves, connecting us not only to other people but also to "what was" and the "not yet."[161] Through such connections we find resources to pursue our ends-in-view and develop a sense of accomplishment—an assurance that in cooperation with others, we can envision and craft a better world without relying merely on the promises of politicians or throwing up our hands in isolated resignation. Akiba Lerner powerfully urges that we must "embrace the radical contingency that our personal hopes are connected to our ability to mutually recognize, create dialogue with, and help actualize the hopes of our fellow citizens."[162] Such contingency and mutual dependence, alongside agency and action, serve as important counters to trends we see among citizens today.

Hope and Trust

Pragmatist hope relies on trust—trust in each other and trust in the ability of people to positively impact the world. And, importantly, engaging in

hope also builds trust. There are many reasons why trust is struggling in America today: from increased polarization to corruption and scandals that render us leery of elected officials to a context of neoliberal competition that champions each of us enterprising for our own personal success and leaves us suspicious of anyone else who might get in our way. In response, pragmatist hope demonstrates, at best, a spirit of togetherness and a "we" of political life, and, at minimum, an acknowledgment of our necessary relationships with others and the idea that achieving our own well-being is often dependent on fruitful interactions with them.

In other words, as hope urges us to act to improve our lives, we may discover shortcomings in our abilities or come to see that our efforts are enhanced or more successful when paired with others. Conceding the limitations of our own agency, we are ushered into trusting others. They may pick up where we leave off, fill in the gaps where we fall short, or they may empower and expand our own agency. But we must also be leery of naive trust, where we may jeopardize our well-being or that of others by trusting people who seek to take advantage of us. When we recognize our limitations in fulfilling our particular hopes, we expose our vulnerability by turning to others for help or support in achieving our aims. Sometimes, through dialogue about shared needs, our particular aims become shared aims or are revised due to mutual consideration.

This is done, in part, through careful consideration of those who have acted harmfully or maliciously in the past and guarded willingness to work with them again, often under conditions where previous harms are named and attended to. It is also done through open communication about motives, consequences, risks, and benefits. Such restorative and open discussion is especially important within the context of racism, where many minority citizens are rightfully leery of some of their white peers, especially within the context of white supremacy, which may embolden some white people to take advantage of citizens of color.

Trust and support don't just move in one direction. Hopers should engage in mutually supportive activities together. Victoria McGeer explains,

> Hoping well thus involves cultivating a meta-disposition in which some of one's hopeful energy becomes directed toward supporting the hopeful agency of others and, hence, toward creating the kind of environment in which one's own hopeful energy is supplemented by the hopeful energy renewed in them. In this way, hoping well draws less on

> the egocentric preoccupations of desire and of dread and more on the alterocentric concerns of care.[163]

When we project an image of that peer as trustworthy and capable to them, we lend the energy of our hope to scaffold them in enacting their agency.[164] As a result, "when we hope in each other, reciprocally, we make a commitment to each other in addition to that made to our shared objective of hope."[165] It is the forming of this "we," this mutual care through hoping together that can help reaffirm the value of democracy and shared political life. Such a caring community can support the hoping of its members, nurturing their agency, while also creating an environment that fosters communally endorsed and pursued ends.

We know that democracies work better when they are small, enabling citizens to know each other, to feel committed to each other, and thereby trust one another. But within the American context of 325 million citizens, those committed and trusting communities are often only confined to our families, neighborhoods, or local Civil organizations. Yet, it has been well documented that when we work on local issues with or in close proximity to someone significantly different from ourselves, we become more trustful of not only that person but also others who share his demographic characteristics. This suggests the possibility of opening up networks of burgeoning trust by starting with small or local projects.

In order for trust to work on a national scale, I follow Charles Taylor in calling for a "strong collective identity" where we have a commitment to doing common work together.[166] I contend that part of that work is engaging in hoping together. In a rather cyclical way, we may form a shared identity when we hope together. We may extend the feelings of mutual concern and trust that we are more likely to hold in our immediate contexts or develop while working on local projects into larger practices of democratic living in a spirit of shared fate so that we may develop a collective identity around democracy and hope. Such a large community may also bolster our feelings of belonging and security, thereby addressing some citizens who feel "left behind," those who feel distrust in members of opposing political parties, and those who may fear that others will render them or the country unsafe.

Unlike positive psychology, which uses a Snyder scale to measure hope without considering its impact on others, and unlike individualist accounts that are self-serving, pragmatist hope is social and political. It is guided by the need to work with and flourish alongside other citizens who are all deeply

embedded in long-standing battles over power and recognition. Whereas contemporary American democracy is plagued by apathy about social problems, distrust of the motives of others, white supremacy, and civic disengagement, pragmatist hope pushes us into the fray of those problems, urging trust in others and action alongside them. Pragmatist hope shifts one's identity from self-serving individual to belonging to a collective "we" of hopers. Such an identity enables citizens to better detect social problems and recognize their mutual stake in them, rather than passively or cynically sitting by.[167] I'm not saying that we can make a sudden switch from being disengaged and distrustful individuals, but when cultivating pragmatist habits of hope is integrated across civil life and schooling, we can slowly make such an important transition and can sustain that effort through larger democratic habits that I describe in chapter 6.

We have a tendency to think of our constitutional republic democracy in terms of its formalist components, like having a constitution and enabling citizens to vote for leaders to represent them. But for Dewey and other pragmatists, a focus on habits shows that democracy is also cultural. It is a way of living—patterns of behavior, inclinations, and proclivities aligned with shared social living, addressing communal problems, and developing organizations of people and environments that support the flourishing of citizens. To revive democracy is not merely to reassert the institutions and laws of government, but rather to breathe new life into cultural practices of togetherness, trust, and mutual concern. Habits of hope are integral to such an improved democratic future, as I will explain in the next chapter.

Benefits of Pragmatist Hope

Throughout my description of pragmatist habits of hope, I've highlighted some of its strengths as a philosophical account and its usefulness in American life today. In this section I want to summarize its benefits as a whole in order to justify why citizens not only should cultivate hope but also should embrace pragmatist hope rather than some other approach.

Notably, pragmatist hope heads off some potentially problematic outcomes or forms of hope, such as the self-centered obsessions that we may develop, like the aforementioned marathon training. It is also possible, under other forms of hope, to hope for something that is harmful to others because it may benefit the particular hoper. While there may be some legitimacy to reasons

for desiring harmful aims and they may provoke initial hope, actually engaging in the pragmatist process of inquiry would likely deter or end action to achieve them. Remember that pragmatist habits of hope are a disposition toward possibility and change for the betterment of oneself and, typically, others. Through inquiry and experimentation, we determine what ways of life allow ourselves and others to flourish. We may not know the outcomes of our hoping when we start our projects, but pragmatist hope entails the sort of ongoing checks and reflections that would cause us to stop when our project proves harmful or the consequences don't lead us to growth or out of ruts.

Pragmatist hope, then, contains a process that helps to keep our hopes aligned with things and activities that enable ourselves and others to live fruitful lives. Within the pragmatist process of inquiry, proponents need to do their due diligence in reaching out to wider communities to gather their perspectives and perhaps even include them with a spirit of solidarity to ensure that their hope is wise and justified. Admittedly, this can be a challenging standard. There may be times when it is unfair or inappropriate to ask oppressed groups, in particular, to bear the effort of continued reaching out and listening, such as black citizens who have born considerable harms by engaging with racists and may need to protect themselves or find ways to cope that cut off continued interactions. The expectation of listening to opposing peers can similarly stymie groups championing identity groups who may intentionally exclude competing views or members of other demographic groups in order to protect themselves from harm, prevent the foreclosure of new ideas by naysayers, and more.

Perhaps pragmatism's staying power and its relative resurgence recently stems from its being firmly grounded in real-life struggles, while striving to improve everyday life. Such an orientation is ripe for supporting a realistic yet robust concept of hope that appeals to Americans. First, a pragmatist concept of hope weds thought and action, yielding hope that is a practical and wisely driven activity, as opposed to positing hope as a fixed trait or desire that is possessed and wielded. It derives its directions from imagination as well as pluralistic and inclusive inquiry with others. Relatedly, a pragmatist conception of hope that is located within the complex circumstances of everyday life, rather than simply being applied regardless of circumstances, as is the case in the sense of hope often attributed to children and popular in contemporary theories of grit in schools, which I will explain in the next chapter. Finally, pragmatist hope is connected to life's activities, and hope can direct these activities as outcomes of habits and imagination. It is not a sense

of entitlement as one anticipates a specific future, which can lead one to passively wait, and then to be angry when it doesn't arrive.[168] It's a bent toward action and a willingness to take risks as one's complicated path unfolds.

The shared work of democracy that rises from pragmatist hope is more fruitful and just than mere independent wishes, optimism, or grit because the well-being of others plays a key role in constructing narratives of the future and determining whether or not our ideas are true and our ways of living promote growth. This pragmatist version of hope is tied to the growth of individuals and the well-being of communities. It has the ability to bring together individuals into democratic communities, unlike other accounts of hope that focus on an individual's feelings or a god figure. The active sense of hoping urges us to take some level of responsibility for shaping our lives, in part by hoping with others. Rather than throwing in the towel when facing difficult problems, it's a call to do something about them and a practice that can build our agency and that of others.

Insofar as it can be cultivated as a set of habits, we have the ability to nurture pragmatist hope and stave off the debilitating impact of apathy, cynicism, pessimism, and loss of faith in democratic living. This ability reveals that one's hope is not fixed, but rather may be targeted and educated. Both the content of one's hopes and the practice of hoping may be cultivated. Such a view opens up considerable avenues for reviving hope in America today. In sum, a pragmatist theory of hope is realistic, flexible, social, generative, and educable.

Shortcomings of Pragmatist Hope

While there is much to celebrate about pragmatist hope, it also presents some potential shortcomings. First, those who've held a relatively privileged position in society or in life in general may be more inclined to support this view, which may appear utopian or naive to those who've faced significant hardship. What I mean here is that pragmatist habits of hope may seem reasonable to people, like myself, who have generally led lives where things have gone well and have not had to face significant, prolonged despair or personal struggle. That's not to say that I and others don't feel significantly troubled over the suffering of other people; indeed, we may feel outraged or forlorn in response to the plight of others. Nor is it to say that I and others hold an optimistic view, assuming that things will necessarily work out for

the best for ourselves. Instead, we simply have not personally encountered overwhelming, intense, and long-term despair to really test whether our enactment of hope can withstand such strains. Nor, as a white woman, have I had to face, for example, structural racism, which can exhaust even ardent hopers. In other words, is this account of hope muscular and robust enough to really do the heavy lifting needed in the face of great problems?

In order to take potential objections seriously and provide a few responses, let me briefly consider one example that is representative of the sort that may press against or challenge my account of hope: sustaining the hope of African Americans in the face of entrenched and systemic racism, despite continued attempts to end the problem. Yes, pragmatist hope, with its varying efforts across time and environments, may give people of color some temporary or partial respite from the strain of racism, even if that only happens in moments where they are merely imagining a better and more just world, rather than actually getting to live in one. I'm reminded here of gospel songs and stories, which have played a significant role in tiding over those in the midst of struggle. Stories of a land of justice and plenty may provide some level of comfort when enduring the opposite, especially when considering what the future might bring. Surely, they have played a significant role in the courageous lives and efforts of exceptional champions of racial justice like Ida B. Wells and Sojourner Truth. But, they are likely not sufficient to sustain the sort of ongoing, challenging work that pragmatist hoping poses of ordinary individuals and groups of people who require clear-eyed hoping from day to day. And if such stories put too much emphasis on the role of the Savior, they can risk becoming an opiate that pacifies one during hardship, rather than provoking action or even justified outrage.

Prominent pragmatist and African American thinker Cornel West has responded to the situation of structural racism and white supremacy with hope. To begin, he provides a unique contribution to pragmatist hope by tracing the roots of his musically inspired "blues" version of hope to the struggles of black folks in America. He attends carefully to the harms of the past as he considers hopeful visions of the future. He contends that despair and hope are often intimately connected. He explains, "It is impossible to look honestly at our catastrophic conditions and not have some despair—it is a healthy sign of how deeply we care. It is also a mark of maturity—a rejection of cheap American optimism."[169] Rather than a mere rose-colored glasses outlook on life, West recognizes that things are, in many ways, not getting better, and he points to the history of his race for evidence. And he extends

care to his black peers by acknowledging the seriousness of their plight, even as he calls for continued effort in the face of it.

But importantly, his call to meliorism is one that upholds a belief that other people—namely whites—can do better. As such, it entails a historically informed and wary trust in others. He says, "I never give up on any human being no matter what color, because I believe they all have potential."[170] Moreover, his meliorism is driven by virtues that enable one to flourish as one faces despair, a drive "to try to keep struggling for more love, more justice, more freedom, and more democracy."[171] Such a hope—one that is closely connected to a painful history and ongoing suffering—is, as he says, "always blood-stained and tear-soaked." [172] Whereas his pragmatist predecessors established that hope must always attend to and grow out of the real conditions of our lives, West drives home the point that those conditions are often quite horrid, and that hope is closely related to the despair that those conditions cause. But his call to effort in spite of and because of those conditions is strong: "Real hope is grounded in a particularly messy struggle and it can be betrayed by naïve projections of a better future that ignore the necessity of doing the real work. So what we are talking about is *hope on a tightrope*."[173] West recognizes the difficult and precarious position of hoping.

West's version of hope is situated within his account of prophetic pragmatism. Though I will not detail prophetic pragmatism here, it is worthwhile to point out that it entails the sort of critical outlook that I will say more about in the next chapter. It arises from an informed understanding of the atrocities of the past as well as frustrations revealed when our world falls short of visions of what could be—understandings shaped by the accounts of prose and poetry. Such a "critical temper," as West calls it, takes despair head on with an "experimental disposition" and a faith in the ability of people to work democratically together.[174] "The critical temper motivated by democratic faith yields all-embracing moral and/or religious visions that project credible ameliorative possibilities grounded in present realities in light of systemic structural analyses of the causes of social misery (without reducing all misery to historical causes)."[175] As a result, West calls for hope as a sort of cultural criticism that reveals injustice, pushes us to act on that injustice, and sustains us through our experiments to alleviate such injustice. For West, this prophetic, blues hope is bolstered by habits of courage and Christian love, which is focused less on a savior figure and more on how people can support each other.[176]

Black public intellectual Ta-Nehisi Coates, whom some have deemed an Afro-pessimist or black atheist, provides a counterview to West, asserting that hope can be harmful. He closes his letter to his son about racism by also issuing a call.[177] He urges his son to struggle on behalf of himself and his ancestors who've sought freedom and safety for their black bodies. And he urges his son to struggle not under the false pretense that his son's struggle will convert racists to the ways of justice, but rather to recognize that racists and white people who benefit from racism must also "learn to struggle themselves."[178] Coates warns that our "goal-oriented" era poses too many magical and quick fixes for the problems of white supremacy, and chooses instead to focus on the spaces of refuge, pleasure, and comfort that black people have created for themselves within the midst of oppression.[179] Eddie Glaude also highlights "Black churches, social clubs, schools and colleges, newspapers, masonic orders, and fraternal and sororal organizations."[180] He explains that those "institutions afforded African Americans spaces to deliberate, to think, to organize—to breathe. They are (or were) key sites for black democratic life, especially in a country where black lives aren't as valued as other people's lives. They provided the elbow room to challenge white supremacy."[181] So while Coates emphasizes these spaces as providing some escape from despair related to white supremacy, Glaude seems to endorse using them for refuge as one practices democratically living among safe peers, and as one reenergizes and plans for continued effort to end racism while engaged with whites.

While his call to struggle may seem aligned with meliorism, Coates does not endorse collective political action as a way to wipe out racism. He argues that those who call for such transformation are naive, warns that those who write with a hopeful spirit tend toward presenting only myths about the triumphs of justice rather than facts about its shortcomings, and asserts that he does not have hope that America will significantly change to end racism.[182] He sees racial progress, if even possible, as always connected to deep injustice, and when he tries to imagine a better world taking shape, he fears the violence and injustice that might accompany it.[183] As a result, he endorses a form of political fatalism, largely accepting racism as a native and enduring way of life in America.

Pragmatist Melvin Rogers, aligned with my spirit of meliorism, summarizes and counters: "But there is a sleight of hand in Coates's 'black atheism'; it conflates hope with certainty, and hope becomes our fatal flaw. Yet we don't need to believe that progress is inevitable to think that, through our efforts, we may be able to move toward a more just society. We can, however,

be sure that no good will come of the refusal to engage in this work."[184] By conflating hope with certainty, Coates confused hope with optimism—the belief that things will necessarily work out for the best. And the appropriate opposite of optimism is pessimism. By retreating to pessimism, he similarly upholds a certainty that things will not improve, as Rogers calls out. Coates, then, has not so much debunked hope, as optimism. Moreover, my account of hope is more nuanced than some critiques might expect. Rogers, a meliorist, holds open possibility for improvement and wisely showcases how Black Lives Matter has produced impact through transforming voices who have experienced injustice into action for justice by working locally to identify problems and craft and implement solutions.

Taking a different stand on struggle and outlook on the future of race in America, I'm reminded of Langston Hughes's description of incredible suffering and simultaneous hope that America can improve and one day may fulfill what he seemed to see as its ideals. As a result, he pledges his allegiance to America as a place of adapting justice earned through hard work and struggle in his poem, "Let America be America Again"—a harkening to the experimental spirit of America and its quest to be freer and more equitable. Unlike Coates, who sees America as a rather finished tale, Hughes believed that there is still much of the story to write.

Glaude urges that in the writing of the story of American democracy we must first recognize that the paradigm of American ideas has long been bound up with practices of white supremacy. We cannot simply achieve a better life by working harder to ensure the principles of democracy if we fail to see how deeply entangled they have been with race and class privilege. We must overtly describe the devastating impact of valuing some people more than others as we craft a new, more expansive notion of democracy. Writing a new story of democracy can also change our identity within it. "We can create new identities together that take traumatic pasts into account, rather than turning our past into celebrations of progress."[185]

Martin Luther King Jr. sought to transform the "fatigue of despair into the buoyancy of hope."[186] And he even tried to best his racist opponents with the claim, "be assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer."[187] But there is hard evidence illustrating that racism takes a sizable toll on people of color. Even King was hospital-bound, feeling down, and battling exhaustion on the very day he found out he won the Nobel Prize for his efforts.[188] In a racist culture, many bodies of color are breaking down, increasingly susceptible to illness, and continually exhausted. Philosophers Calvin Warren

and pragmatist Shannon Sullivan warn about these physical ramifications.[189] Sullivan, in the pragmatist spirit of assessing truth by looking at the impact of the effects of racism on health, adds that African Americans would do better to stop hoping for an end to racism. Instead, they should start working on new habits and coping mechanisms that enable them to flourish within the racist world and set their sights on other, more useful and feasible goals for ensuring fruitful lives.

Like Coates, Warren and Sullivan also address the problem of constantly telling minority people to pursue what increasingly looks to be an impossible goal: the defeat of racism. In some regards, this seems to be a form of cruel optimism, always directed to the future and always out of reach, asserting with certainty a progress that doesn't pan out. In other regards, "political hope," as Warren dubs it, holds that political action is the only legitimate avenue for pursuing the end of racism, while other forms of resistance, coping, or struggle (such as those championed by Coates and described by Glaude) are seen as not doing anything at all. As a result, Warren claims, "we must hope for the end of political hope."[190] I recognize that my case for adopting habits of hope is not drastically different from being pressured to pursue political hope via political activism, though I intend for my practices of hoping to be wider and more flexible, providing for an array of resistance, coping, and imaginative strategies. But like the theorists of political hope via activism, and the theorists of grit I describe in chapter 5, the risk is conveying to people of color that they must conform to some dominant-dictated mold of behavior in order to earn a better and happier life. I intend, however, for my account to be more open, more nuanced, and more inviting.

These criticisms do reveal some worrisome implications of pragmatist hoping and suggest shortcomings with my approach and that of West. At the very least, the call to ongoing effort to alleviate racism may invite continued suffering when effort might well be better spent elsewhere to forge spaces and means of protection from harm. And, pragmatist hope may not be strong enough to endure ongoing effort unless there is more motivation for the whites benefiting from privilege to step up to share the load, while at the same time knocking down the hierarchies that support them. What the example of racial suffering and the wide variety of political experiences in America does expose is that there may be particular moments or situations where people are justified in not embracing or enacting the form of political hope I describe in this book. This does not mean that pragmatist political hope falls short of the general needs for political life, civic engagement, or

citizenship education I emphasize in these pages. This matter of racism and turning away from hope is certainly not closed and is worthy of much more attention, but addressing it in more detail is beyond the primary focus and space permitted here.

Other criticisms of pragmatist hope rise from the reliance on individuals upholding meliorism. Evidence from the Gallup World Poll shows that "the vast majority of people on the planet think their lives will be better in time . . . generally believing that tomorrow holds some promise, and that things can change for the better."[191] Yet, continual encounters with terrible situations that reveal appalling elements of human conduct may lead one to doubt the possibility of humans positively improving the world in substantial ways. While I claimed earlier that preachers, teachers, and community leaders can teach about the history of success in one's community, the personal experiences of some individuals may run counter to the evidence for meliorism presented and the collective body of evidence for ongoing harm or injustice may outweigh signs of improvement or justice. Personally confronting atrocious human acts may rightfully make one suspect of evidence for meliorism.

Or, individuals who lack significant power, social positioning, money, or other elements that influence their ability to impact the world, may doubt their own agency and therefore avoid making effort, seeing it as impossible or a waste of time. Relatedly, truly dire situations where human effort is extremely limited (those dying of terminal diseases, those constrained in concentration campus during the Holocaust) may decrease the meaningfulness and usefulness of pragmatist hope. In some of those situations, especially those that are more personal and less tied to social or political life, a more religious notion of hope may be a better approach to help people transcend those conditions, even if only in spirit. In light of this, I want to be clear that, to engage in pragmatist hope, people often need to first have their basic needs met. Those needs include not only fundamentals like food and shelter but also a sufficient degree of self-determination and influence over decisions that affects one's life. Asking those whose needs are unmet to take up and sustain pragmatist hoping may simply be too great of a burden, though they certainly can develop habits of hope and extend some effort. Instead, this prerequisite reveals that those whose needs have been generally met have a greater responsibility to hope and to take action in service of change.[192]

Finally, pragmatist hope is a largely collective endeavor. Yet, our current environment increasingly lacks a sense of a "we" that works together.

Many citizens are increasingly hostile toward public projects and even public things (schools, parks), which are often a part of the sort of hoping and its ends-in-view that I describe. This environment poses considerable obstacles for practicing pragmatist hope, even if doing so may actually nurture such a "we." This is, in part, why I, like Dewey before me, turn to beginning early with children, thinking that within schools we may be able to reach them before debilitating worldviews fully take hold. Yet, I also recognize that I may be asking too much of schools that are already strapped with teaching content, sustaining communities, and more. Not to mention that schools have a tendency to reproduce the status quo rather than change it, as hoping might urge.

The situation for older students in colleges and universities also faces challenges, though of a different sort. Institutions of higher education have long been communities of inquiry that tackle vexing social and scientific problems. Yet, recently some citizens have become less trustful of those institutions, especially when dealing with politically controversial issues. Some question the usefulness of such inquiry and desire a focus on learning more narrow job skills that serve the individual and economy instead.[193] Relatedly, some citizens are skeptical of science as a whole, a discipline and approach central to pragmatist inquiry and university-based research, and more so of science being conducted in controversial areas like vaccination, climate change, and genetically modified food.[194]

Acknowledging these shortcomings, I turn in the next chapter to articulating the connection between hope and democracy. Democracy is a relationship where we test out hoping together, continually revising and reconstructing our environments to meet our mutual ends-in-view and to sustain human flourishing. We hope with others, rather than merely by ourselves. The democratic community becomes a concrete location and source for both forming the objects of our hope and engaging in hoping—an important place where we can sort out "What should I hope for?" and "How can I hope?"