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# Katarina Mihaylova and Anna Ezekiel (Eds). 'Hope and the Kantian Legacy: New Contributions to the History of Optimism'

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**Katarina Mihaylova and Anna Ezekiel (Eds).** *Hope and the Kantian Legacy: New Contributions to the History of Optimism*. Bloomsbury 2023. 312 pp. \$255.50 USD (Hardcover 9781350238084); \$80.50 USD (Paperback 9781350238787).

Immanuel Kant famously introduced three philosophical questions in his *Critique of Pure Reason*: What can I know? What should I do? What can I hope for? It is noteworthy that Kant places the third question on an equal footing with the other two. He characterizes it as both a practical and a theoretical question. Kant introduces the somewhat ambiguous question in the context of the unity of morality and happiness. In his view, hope can be understood as a reasonable anticipation of happiness. The concept of ‘rational hope’, as developed by Kant, represented a significant departure from the prevailing approach to hope within the history of philosophy. Following Kant, a multifaceted debate on the nature and function of hope emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, largely built upon Kant’s conceptualization for further reflection and criticism. The overarching theme of *Hope and the Kantian Legacy*, edited by Katarina Mihaylova and Anna Ezekiel, is Kant’s philosophical foundation on hope and his enduring legacy within Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought.

The volume comprises 17 articles that offer insightful contributions to the subject matter. The initial three articles are devoted exclusively to Kant’s conceptualization of hope and its various dimensions. They provide an excellent basis for the subsequent contributions. The remaining articles examine the diverse ways in which German philosophers from the 18th and 19th centuries engaged with Kant’s conceptualization of hope. The articles are loosely connected to the overarching theme of hope, investigating the connections between hope and familiar phenomena such as faith, reason and freedom. The articles provide a comprehensive overview of the topic, addressing questions such as the distinction between hope and expectation and the role of hope in our daily lives. The articles are presented in roughly chronological order. This provides a comprehensive overview of the philosophical evolution of the debate surrounding hope, highlighting the dialogue that has taken place over time. The collection includes contributions from several well-known and influential figures in German philosophy, such as Fichte, Schelling and Schopenhauer. In addition, it features works by several lesser-known German authors, including Jakob Friedrich Fries, Karoline von Günderrode and Friedrich Creuzer. Without claiming to grasp the entire depth of the collection, I will briefly concentrate on three articles that, in my opinion, exemplify the diversity and academic rigor present throughout the volume.

The first article within the collection is ‘Between Need and Permission: The Role of Hope in Kant’s Critical Foundations of Moral Faith’ by Günter Zöllner. Originally published in German, and translated by the editors for this volume, it provides an excellent introduction to the collection of papers. Zöllner, a distinguished Kant scholar, establishes the overarching tone for the entire volume. The paper provides a comprehensive introduction to the notion of hope within Kant’s thought. He examines the pivotal relationship between faith and reason within Kant’s philosophical framework (25-26). In particular, he examines the complicated interrelationship between Kant’s critique of knowledge and faith and shows the possible practical and theoretical implications that arise from answering the question ‘What may I hope for?’. As he demonstrates the third question ‘consists



[...] in asking what is to be expected, on the presupposition of action conforming to what one ought to do, as the possible consequence (“outcome”) of this action, the advent of which may therefore be hoped for.’ (27) His principal argument hinges on the interdependent relationship between the limits of theoretical knowledge elucidated in the *Critique of Pure Reason* through rational critique that creates a space for moral faith on the one hand, and the rational critique of religious faith on the other that highlights its limitations by establishing the role of moral consciousness. Zöller asserts that, in essence, moral faith, as presented and introduced by Kant, ultimately supersedes both doctrinal faith and rational knowledge (32). The paper is not merely a perceptive contribution to Kant scholarship, elucidating a key concept in Kant’s thought; it also provides a foundation for further reflection on hope and faith in his philosophy.

The next noteworthy article is ‘Humboldt, Education, Language and Hope’ by Susann-Judith Hoffmann. It is distinctive in that it does not focus on the philosopher’s concept of hope, but rather seeks to derive tangible, practical applications from a specific interpretation of hope. In the case of Wilhelm von Humboldt, the concept of hope is evident in relation to his theory of education and development. From this specific theoretical standpoint, he conceptualizes hope as ‘an imaginative projection into a future of possibilities, a positive disposition of openness, and thus a self-critical awareness of the possibility that one might be wrong.’ (205) What is particularly noteworthy about this article is that Hoffmann considers the practical implications and lessons for today’s university and academia not only in relation to Humboldt’s scholarly work, but also in the context of his activities as a statesman and reformer. This provides a novel and previously unanticipated perspective on the overarching subject matter of the book. Humboldt’s concept of *Bildung* reflects the Enlightenment ideas of a general belief in the progress of humanity, with a particular focus on the value and respect of diversity. She specifies that the idea of hope is reflected in the Humboldtian notion of *Bildung* as it represents ‘the highest good of humankind and the perfection of all the powers of the spirit, not just the desire to develop specific capacities and skills.’ (205) Humboldt’s hope in education to achieve this purpose in particular aligns his ideas with ours, as Hoffmann highlights the ongoing efforts of educators to decolonize higher education and challenge the long-standing commercialization of universities. She sincerely believes that Humboldt’s work can serve as an invaluable resource in challenging the dominant view of *Bildung* as *Ausbildung*, which primarily denotes the acquisition of skills, which serves to enhance employability and integrate individuals into the workforce. Hoffmann’s work significantly contributes to the volume’s overarching theme by broadening the context and introducing a contemporary, applied approach to hope.

Finally, I would like to emphasize the article by Anna Ezekiel. In ‘Knowledge, Faith, and Ambiguity: Hope in the Work of Novalis and Karoline von Günderrode’, she explores the poetic and philosophical dimensions of hope in the writings of these two authors. Particularly noteworthy here is the smooth transition between philosophical and artistic reflections on hope in Romantics. Something that is rarely discussed. Although Ezekiel dispels the cliché that both authors share a ‘morbid outlook’ (239) and are therefore representative of Romantic thinking, she highlights the difference that can be found in their writings in comparison to Kant. She vividly demonstrates that

although Novalis had a profound influence on G nderrode’s thought, they differ significantly in the way they conceptualize hope. In particular, she traces these differences to their different responses to Kant's delimitation of human cognition and its implications for theorizing hope. She identifies five main areas in which their thinking about hope differs. These are the hope of being reunited with loved ones after death, the hope of escaping the limits of cognition set by Kant, the hope of moral progress for each individual, the hope of the perfection of the universe, and finally the political hope of an ideal society. In dissecting these areas, Ezekiel paints a nuanced picture of G nderrode’s thoughts on hope, oscillating between pessimism, certainty in progress, faith, and finally conceptualizing hope as a distinctively human capacity, possessed by every human being *qua* being human. The article succeeds in shedding light on a thinker like G nderrode, who is often (unjustly) relegated to a footnote in textbooks on German Romanticism. Yet lesser-known texts often capture the zeitgeist more effectively than the classics. They often capture more vividly the specific cultural, social and political nuances of their time. Revealing these connections is a major strength of the text.

This splendid volume of historical-philosophical reflections on hope is an indispensable first port of call for scholars deeply interested in the enduring Kantian legacy of its use. The three meticulously curated articles presented here provide a representative sample of the diversity and multifaceted nature of the volume, and they compellingly demonstrate the rich intellectual treasure yet to be unearthed in post-Kantian philosophy of hope. Its undoubted value lies in its broad scope, comprehensively covering a great deal of ground. This work may prove invaluable not only to historians of philosophy but also to philosophers seeking insights and inspiration from the rich German tradition within Kant’s legacy. We owe a debt of gratitude to Anna Ezekiel and Katerina Mihaylova for publishing such a balanced volume, with exceptional contributions from rigorous scholars who explore in new depth the rich heritage of thinking about hope. The volumes comprehensive collection ensures its place as a pivotal reference point in the ongoing discourse, cementing its status as a cornerstone and benchmark for any further inquiry in this field.

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