Psychological States After the Loss of Hope

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Abstract

Recent psychological and philosophical research has placed emphasis on aspects of hope that were left unnoticed by earlier problematic attempts to define hope through a set of necessary and sufficient conditions. This development has been coupled with the introduction of distinctions between different psychological states that share some of hope's features. Less attention has been given on applying analogous distinctions to the examination of hope's loss and to the psychological states that result from hope's absence. The essay aims to bridge this gap, by offering a description of the psychological states connected with the loss of hope and of the effects that these states have. It begins by discussing the orthodox account of hope and by listing some of its shortcomings. It then offers a more refined account of hope, of its abandonment, and of its absence. Focusing on three distinct states, hopelessness, desperation and despair, the essay examines cases where one can experience despair or desperation without experiencing hopelessness, and vice versa. The main supposition behind my analysis is that elements of hope remain even in cases where one's attitude is no longer hopeful, and can affect one's beliefs and actions in significantly different ways.

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