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Inquiring About the Future: The Rationality of Hopefulness

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Abstract

What is epistemically required of the rationally hopeful? In this paper, I propose that, as a subject becomes hopeful that *p*, she also adopts an inquiring attitude toward the question of whether *p*. Moreover, remaining rationally hopeful requires maintaining an inquiring attitude toward those possibilities we are hopeful about. On top of being led by a particular practical goal (that of attaining *p*), I suggest that the hopeful agent is also led by the epistemic goal of knowing whether *p*. Adding the “inquiry” criteria to rational hopefulness helps explain our intuition that there is something wrong with being hopeful that *p* and not disposed to inquire into whether *p*. It also helps us further distinguish hopefulness from other positive attitudes we adopt in the face of uncertainty, such as optimism, and faith.

Keywords: hope; inquiry; rationality; faith; uncertainty; emotion

Consider Rita, a brilliant physicist who is hopeful that her innovative research project will be selected by NASA as part of their annual competition. Every year she works on her application, keeps refining her project, and remains hopeful that, one day, her project might get selected. The question I am interested in is: what is epistemically required of Rita, for her to stay rationally hopeful that her project might get selected?

Rational hopefulness requires both competent epistemic agency, as well as competent practical agency (McCormick, 2017). What kind of epistemic position or activities characterize “competent epistemic agency” in the case of hopefulness? Recently, it has been suggested that hoping that *p* is fitting only if it is rational for one to suspend judgment on whether *p* (Fritz, 2021). It has also been argued that the rationally hopeful must be responsive to mounting counter-evidence against *p* (Benton, 2019). While I think these accounts are on the right track, I argue that they neglect an important aspect of what “competent epistemic agency” consists in, in the case of hopefulness.

In [Section I](#), I introduce the idea that fitting hopefulness that *p* requires (1) that one is in a position to rationally suspend judgment that *p* (Fritz, 2021), and (2) that one responds to mounting counter-evidence against *p* by updating one’s level of credence in *p* (Benton, 2019). I suggest that, while those accounts point to fundamental epistemic features of rational hopefulness, they fail to capture the whole picture. In [Section II](#) I argue that becoming hopeful that *p* generates the setting of a specific epistemic goal, namely, the goal of figuring out whether *p*. Moreover, I argue that remaining rationally hopeful requires maintaining such an “inquiring attitude” toward whether *p*. In [Section III](#), I suggest that this criteria might help us not only explain certain instances of diachronically irrational hopefulness, but also bring us a step further in distinguishing hopefulness from other positive attitudes we adopt in the face of uncertain prospects, namely, optimism, and faith. For instance, while hopefulness and faith both help sustain our commitment toward uncertain ends (Jackson, 2021), genuine faith precludes inquiring into whether *p* (Buchak, 2018), while hopefulness does not.

I. Hopefulness

First, let us take a closer look at the phenomenon in question: hopefulness. In line with many contemporary theorists, I take hopefulness to be best conceived as an emotion (Ben-Ze'ev, 2000; Deigh, 1994; Goldie, 2004; Helm, 2009; Milona & Stockdale, 2018; Rioux, 2022; Vazard & Humbert-Droz, 2025). More specifically, I take hopefulness to be: a positive emotion directed at the obtaining of an uncertain and desired outcome, characterized by a phenomenology of “longing” and a certain degree of confidence, and accompanied by tendencies to pursue and promote the desired outcome. In other words, hopefulness consists in a positively valenced affective evaluation of the chances of obtaining of a desired end, which motivates one to invest in its promotion.

Now, being rationally hopeful that *p* (for instance, that one’s project might be selected by NASA) implies a number of different requirements. Miriam McCormick (2017) has suggested that to be rationally hopeful requires manifesting competent epistemic agency, as well as competent practical agency. Hoping rationally requires consideration for both the practical norms that bear on investing continuing efforts into a given prospect (given both its value for one and its achievability), and epistemic norms that bear on the amount of evidence pertaining to the likelihood that *p* which one needs to possess in order to justify hoping that *p*. Additionally, since both the practical value of an outcome and its attainability may evolve and change, one keeps hoping rationally by keeping track of whether these epistemic and practical reasons keep justifying one’s hope.

In this paper, I propose to take a closer look at the epistemic requirements for rational hopefulness. Beyond possessing a certain amount of evidence pertaining to the likelihood that *p*, which epistemic states, activities, and attitudes are required for one to be, and remain, rationally hopeful?

1. Suspension of Judgement

Let us start with the obvious. Hopefulness belongs to the small class of “emotions of uncertainty”, together with fear (or anxiety), which means that hopefulness that *p* is incompatible with the knowledge that *p* (Thalberg, 1964; Gordon, 1969; Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2015; Vazard, 2022). Being hopeful precludes that one takes oneself to know that *p*—it is precisely because we do not know whether *p* that we may be hopeful that *p*.

Accordingly, it has recently been suggested that hoping that *p* is fitting only if it is rational for one to suspend judgment on whether *p* (Fritz, 2021). As Fritz suggests, when we are not epistemically justified to suspend judgment, it is also unfitting to be hopeful that *p*. For example, once I obtain excellent evidence that my favorite team has lost the game that could have qualified them for the semi-finals, I ought to stop being hopeful that they might win the championship. Hopefulness would not be fitting, because it is not permitted for me to suspend judgment.

This is a reasonable, albeit minimal epistemic requirement on rational hopefulness. Given that the kind of phenomenon we are interested in here is a positive evaluation of the chances of obtaining a desired end (and an evaluation which motivates us to invest in its promotion), I suggest we can expect the rationally hopeful to do more, epistemically speaking, than simply suspend judgment. This line of thought has recently motivated many hope theorists to more clearly and systematically distinguish between hope and “hopefulness”: where hope is merely the awareness of the possibility of a desired state of affairs (I just “hope” we have good weather tomorrow), hopefulness is a positively valenced orientation toward the chances of occurrence of a desired outcome, which motivates our efforts to promote it (Kwong, 2020, 2022). I here focus on this latter phenomenon. While the suspension of judgment is plausibly the epistemic attitude that best characterizes the person who merely hopes, there is more we can say about the epistemic profile of the rationally hopeful.

2. Updating one’s Credences

Matthew Benton emphasizes the idea that hopefulness is not merely an awareness of a desired possibility, but involves both an intentional and an affective investment toward *p*. While the person

who simply hopes that *p* is not necessarily moved by her hope, the hopeful is engaged in thoughts, feelings, and action tendencies; she is affectively and intentionally invested. The question then becomes: what kind of epistemic attitude or activities must accompany this affective and intentional investment, for it to be (and remain) rational?

Benton's proposal is that separating rational from irrational hopefulness requires factoring in (1) an agent's risk-aversion (her sensitivity to the practical costs of continued investment, with respect to the risk of failure and the consequent disappointment and frustration), and (2) her capacity to update her level of credence in *p* in response to mounting counter-evidence (to respond to counter-evidence by lowering her confidence that she will succeed in her project).

Those uncertain ends that we become rationally hopeful about are ones that are likely *enough* and valuable *enough* to warrant the cost of continuous investment, considering the risk of failure. Crucially, Benton proposes:

in the face of mounting inductive counter evidence one will (if one is being rational) be lowering the probability of the desired outcome while also re-evaluating whether the strength of one's attraction to it suffices, under such circumstances, to justify one's ongoing intentional and affective investment in it (2019, p. 17).

Being rationally hopeful, Benton proposes, requires integrating such lowering of probability into one's aversion to the risk of continued failure, and considering how this in turn affects one's continuing desire for the outcome. I think Benton's account significantly enriches our view of what it takes to persist rationally in hopefulness.

However, while I agree that updating one's credences in response to incoming counter-evidence is an important part of the epistemic profile of the rationally hopeful, I think this does not capture the whole picture. As I argue in the next section, the picture can be completed by helping ourselves with recent research in epistemology on the concept of inquiry.

II. Hopefully Disposed to Inquire

1. Hopefulness and Inquiry

Consistent with a view of hopefulness as an intentional and affective engagement toward an uncertain end, I am now going to suggest, that, as a subject becomes hopeful that *p*, she enters an inquiring mode toward the question of whether *p*. Moreover, remaining rationally hopeful requires maintaining an inquiring attitude toward those possibilities we are hopeful about.

I borrow the notion of inquiring attitude from Jane Friedman, whose work has crystallized a lot of the renewed interest in the epistemological concept of inquiry (Friedman, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2024). Friedman famously argued that inquiry is not defined by a set of determinate activities per se. Rather, inquiry is a certain kind of *attitude*; it is an attitude toward a question, and it is an attitude of taking this question to be open, rather than settled (2013, 2019). An inquiry starts as soon as one asks oneself a question, such that the question is now open in one's mind: one has considered this question, and it is not settled for one—we do not take ourselves to know the answer to that question. Being in an inquiring attitude toward a question not only means that this question is open to one but also that one has the cognitive goal to seek an answer to this question. We care about this question, such that we are disposed to wonder about it, be curious about it, attend to evidence pertaining to it, etc. According to Friedman, then, one is in an inquiring attitude when one has mentally asked oneself a question, and one wants to know the answer to that question, such that this question is now on one's "research agenda" (Friedman, 2020).

Importantly, one does not need to be currently actively collecting evidence or deliberating about whether *p*, in order to be in an inquiring attitude toward whether *p*. There are plausibly a lot of questions one is in an inquiring attitude toward at any given time: right now, I want to know at what time dinner will be, and also whether my friend's plane has landed, and whether my students have started completing their assignment. I am in an inquiring attitude toward all these questions: I have

the epistemic goal of answering them, and were I to encounter conclusive evidence (receive a text from my friend), I would shift out of an inquiring attitude about *whether her plane has landed*, and into a settled attitude. That question would now be closed to me.

I suggest we are in an inquiring attitude toward the question of whether *p* when we become hopeful that *p*. When we become hopeful, we have an uncertain possible outcome we care about at the forefront of our minds and the question of whether it will occur or succeed is open in one's mind. Hopefulness is among the mental states which make salient a particular question for one and generates a particular epistemic goal to seek an answer. That Rita is hopeful that *p* does not only mean that she desires that *p*, it also means that she wants to know whether *p*. I suggest that on top of being led by a particular practical goal (of actually attaining *p*), she is also led by a particular epistemic goal: that of figuring out whether *p*. She not only wants to know that *p*, she also wants to know that not-*p* so as to stop investing toward it. In short, she wants to know whether *p*; she wants to answer this question.

This means, among other things, that Rita will be sensitive to information that bears on whether *p*, selecting (and sometimes seeking) evidence, rather than merely receiving it and responding to it. Acquiring reliable perceptual evidence that is fitting to answering a question often involves being able to regulate and maintain one's attentional focus (resisting being distracted by other perceptual information that is irrelevant to the goal of answering the question, etc.). Given the limitations of human attentional and perceptual systems, that implies having to ignore and neglect a whole lot of evidence that is present in our environment but is not relevant whatsoever to answering the questions on one's "research agenda".

Hopefulness is a state that shapes the evidence we seek and pay attention to, the kind of information we tend to be curious about and seek—it translates into patterns of attentional salience which dispose Rita to wonder about the possibility of *p*, reason about considerations that bear on its chances of obtaining, be particularly receptive to pieces of evidence pertaining to whether *p*, etc. The idea that hopefulness sets us up for attentively selecting evidence or information pertaining to its object is highly consistent with its emotional nature. Conceived as an emotion, hopefulness is associated with attentional patterns of salience (Rioux, 2022): it partly functions to make salient information that is relevant to its object, at the expense of the vast array of information that is available but not relevant to the specific goal that hopefulness prioritizes.

I now want to suggest that remaining rationally hopeful demands that the question of whether *p* stays on one's research agenda. To remain rationally hopeful, Rita should not only have epistemic reasons to suspend judgment about whether *p*, and update her level of credence in response to incoming evidence; she should also maintain the cognitive goal of answering the question of whether her project will be selected. She should not persist in feeling hopeful and investing in the thoughts, actions, and feelings characteristic of hopefulness while dropping the question entirely. Again, I am not saying that the rational hopeful is actively gathering evidence at all times. There are many other questions open on Rita's "research agenda" (maybe where she might have misplaced her hat, whether Amy is coming around for dinner, what the results of the election will be, etc.). I am saying that, for Rita to remain rationally hopeful that her project will get selected, this question should feature on the list of questions that she is disposed to be curious and wondering about.

I believe that adding the "inquiry" criteria helps explain several of our intuitions about what defines rational hopefulness. First, it explains our intuition that there is something wrong with being hopeful that *p* and not disposed to be curious or wondering whether *p*. Second, it explains our intuition that hopefulness is very similar, yet very different, from other "attitudes of uncertainty", such as optimism or indeed faith. I will now consider these in turn.

2. Irrational Hopefulness and Lack of Inquiring Attitude

I will start by suggesting that my view accounts for at least a certain way of remaining irrationally hopeful, which is when the hopeful maintains her hopeful engagement with the goal, while dropping her inquiring attitude toward whether *p*. To see this, let us go back to Rita.

Rita applies every year to the NASA competition, and she remains hopeful that her project might get selected. Initially, when she became hopeful, she was thinking such thoughts as: “I wonder if the committee has already deliberated”, or “I’m curious who the other candidates might be” and doing such things as checking her mailbox twice a day to see if she might have received the decision letter. But she has now completely stopped doing all this. She keeps working on her application and remains hopeful about her chances of success. Nonetheless, each year, upon receiving the rejection notification, she adjusts her level of credence in the probability that her project might get selected, and her hopefulness has slowly and progressively been lowering as a result.

It seems that if Rita was our friend, we would blame her for her lack of curiosity, and be concerned that her efforts might be misdirected. We would perhaps ask her questions such as: “Have you checked their acceptance rate for applications lately?”, “Are you not curious about the profiles of the candidates that have had their projects selected last year?”. It seems that a failure to manifest curiosity about her chances of being selected exposes Rita to criticism. This suggests we expect the rationally hopeful to do more than simply suspend judgment on whether *p*, or update their level of credence in response to mounting counter-evidence. We expect the hopeful to be disposed to inquire (deliberating, reflecting, wondering, gathering evidence) in order to figure out whether *p*.

Why would such an expectation be legitimate? I suggest it is because of the unique nature of the proper intentional object of hopefulness, and how vulnerable it is to changes in external factors that are beyond our control. The proper intentional object of hopefulness is an uncertain outcome toward which we have a certain degree of credence, and that is valuable enough to warrant the cost of continuous investment, given the risk of failure (and consequent disappointment). Hopefulness is only rational insofar as it is directed at uncertain ends that indeed *merit* being pursued, promoted, and longed for. However, whether uncertain ends merit (and keep meriting) such an engagement depends on circumstances that are beyond the scope of one’s agency. Changes can easily occur, which affect the likelihood of the success of the project, or indeed its value for one, and in turn make one’s efforts unwarranted. The facts that ground one’s reasons to be hopeful and persist in hopefulness are particularly vulnerable to change, such that one could very easily be wrong in how one evaluates one’s chances as meriting the ongoing investment. Hopefulness without inquiry, I suggest, is irrational because it is too risky; it makes it dangerously easy that one’s reasons for being hopeful have in fact been defeated.

Rita’s “blind” persistence in her hopefulness is problematic because it makes Rita’s hopefulness highly vulnerable to incorrectness: it makes it likely that she is in fact directing her emotional and intentional investment inappropriately toward a prospect that is not worth pursuing. Maintaining rational hopefulness requires an ongoing effort to ensure one is not basing one’s hopefulness on incorrect beliefs and evaluations of the hoped-for object. Epistemic passivity in hopefulness is irrational because of the risk that the object is in fact unworthy of one’s hopefulness.

Remaining rationally hopeful requires staying in an inquiring attitude toward whether *p*, in order to correctly maintain or revise one’s assessment of the hoped-for state of affairs as worth hoping for (promoting, pursuing, longing for, etc.). Now, having an inquiring attitude does not guarantee that one’s hopefulness *will* be correctly directed at ends whose value justifies our ongoing efforts: after all, one might form incorrect beliefs about the hoped-for end’s value or its achievability even after inquiring. But persisting in hopefulness without having an inquiring attitude amounts to blindly investing in uncertain ends that are at high risk of not meriting the kind of engagement that hopefulness consists in.

I suggest that we rightfully view the rationally hopeful agent as disposed to being curious about *p*, to wonder whether *p*, reflect about whether *p*, be selectively attentive to evidence pertaining to this question, and perhaps at times actively searching for such evidence. We view them, in an important sense, as led not only by a practical goal, but also by an epistemic goal. While an important characteristic of the hopeful agent is that she keeps “an open mind” about what might happen (Fritz, 2021), we should not conclude that the rationally hopeful agent simply sits passively waiting for new evidence to come by.

I have emphasized the idea that the hopeful agent is not only active in trying to bring about p ; she is also epistemically active in trying to figure out whether p . Moreover, the rational hopeful should stay curious about whether p —she should maintain an inquiring attitude toward this question. In the next and final section, I suggest that this account also helps us distinguish the epistemic profile of hopefulness from that of other attitudes in its vicinity, such as optimism, and faith.

III. Hopefulness, Optimism, and Faith

1. Hopefulness and Optimism

My account is in line with the idea, put forward by Luc Bovens, and later by Adam Kadlac, and Michael Barilan, that hope is a *process* that characteristically involves a cognitive engagement with one's future.

Hoping, Bovens suggests (1999, 2021), is not a stationary attitude whereby one remains fixated with one's eyes on the prize. It is an active process whereby one deploys mental energy toward assessing the value of some life-shaping goal, gauging its probability anticipating the circumstances of its realization, its consequences for one, etc. (Bovens, 1999, 2021). According to Bovens, one of the functions of hope is to learn about oneself, what one truly desires, and what one would be ready to put into place to achieve it.

In a similar vein, Adam Kadlac and Michael Barilan claim that hoping motivates a continuous evaluation of both the value and likelihood of the hoped-for goal. The absence of such a motivation, in Barilan's view, suggests that one's attitude might not be one of hope after all. He writes:

Once we hope for something, we start deliberating whether the goal is still worth attaining, what priority it deserves relative to other goals and values, whether it is achievable, and which means serve it best. If we avoid deliberating the first two questions, we are confined to issues of optimism, not hope (2012, p. 175).

Optimism is an attitude in the vicinity of hope, which has sometimes been conflated with it. However, optimism does not involve the same proneness to inquire into those desirable futures one is optimistic about and be motivated to find out whether they will come to be (Barilan, 2012). Rather, optimism seems to require facing uncertainty with a settled and unwavering judgment that events will unfold favorably. Instead, hope implies both a more humble and a more active epistemic stance toward the futures one favors.

Adam Kadlac (2015) has in fact argued that one of the functions of hope is to prevent us from falling prey to optimism, by inhibiting our tendency to form outright beliefs that our desired plans will materialize¹. As Kadlac argues:

evidence about what will happen in the future is rarely sufficient to justify confident beliefs about that future, as least when we are concerned with the highly contingent matters that so dramatically affect our daily lives: illness, employment, relationships, and the like. (2015, p. 343).

By contrast to the optimist, the hopeful only forms beliefs about *the chances* of occurrence of desired outcomes. (Kadlac, 2015). The hopeful remains aware of the uncertainty inherent to the success of her projects, such that she inhibits her inclination to take it for granted in her practical reasoning.

¹For an attempt to draw conceptual and psychological distinctions between hope and optimism, see Bruininks and Malle (2005). According to their studies, "hope is distinct from optimism by being an emotion, representing more important but less likely outcomes, and by affording less personal control" (p. 327).

In my own analysis, I have captured this idea by appealing to the distinction between being in an inquiring attitude and being in a settled attitude toward whether p . Hopefulness comes with an inquiring attitude toward this question, while optimism does not. Moreover, when we maintain this inquiring attitude, we remain rationally hopeful by avoiding the risk that comes with assuming that events will unfold as we desire they do. In the next section, I suggest that, if my account is valid, it might also help us set rational hopefulness apart from rational faith.

2. Hopefulness and Faith

Having faith that p (for instance, faith that one's partner will make a good spouse) is an attitude of commitment toward a proposition we cannot be certain about, but which we nonetheless decide to take as a premise in our practical reasoning.

For a relatable example of what faith in a given project might look like, I suggest we turn to lasting romantic relationships. In an article published in *The Atlantic* on February 2021, Arthur C. Brooks writes about the time when he met the woman who would later become his wife:

I met the woman in question on a weeklong trip to Europe, she lived in Spain, we'd only been on a couple of dates, and we didn't speak a word of the same language. Obviously, I told my amused father, "she has no idea I plan to marry her." But I was 24 and lovestruck, and none of that stopped me from embarking on a quixotic romantic adventure. After a year punctuated by two frustratingly short visits, I quit my job in New York and moved to Barcelona with a plan to learn the language and a prayer that when she could actually understand me, she *might* love me.

I think the "prayer" is indicative of the state of mind in which Brooks decided to take the leap: faith that if he keeps investing in the project of marrying this woman (moving to Europe, learning Spanish), he might succeed (she would fall in love with him and say "yes").

Several authors have presented hope as playing a role very similar to that of faith in motivating and rationalizing our ongoing investment toward uncertain long-term projects which require a stable commitment. Philip Pettit (2004) argued that hope is an attitude of "cognitive resolve" which grants us "fixity of purpose" by allowing us to act "as if p ", resist despair, discouragement, or doubt, and remain steadfast in our efforts. In a similar vein, Elizabeth Jackson (2021) proposed that "belief, faith, and hope all play the same role in rationalizing long-term commitments to act over time" (2021, p.53) because they justify us accepting that p and thus acting "as if p ". Acceptance is understood as a decision to take p as a premise in one's reasoning, in spite of one's lack of evidence that p , for the sake of taking a decision toward a certain path of action (Cohen, 1989; Weirich, 2004; Audi, 2008).

According to Jackson (2021), hoping and having faith that p make it rational for us to keep investing in long-term commitments because they both justify accepting that p . While hope conatively justifies a doxastic state of acceptance that p , faith cognitively justifies a doxastic state of acceptance that p (Jackson, 2021). In virtue of the force of her desire that p , Jackson claims, the hopeful typically accepts that p : she takes p on board as a premise of her practical and theoretical reasoning, and treats it as a supposed fact on which she relies for guiding her behavior. This is how hoping that p allows our attraction to p to remain fixed and stable even in the face of "waning affections" (Jackson, 2021).

I think this account leaves out an important way in which hope and faith are in fact significantly different. If we plausibly take the faithful to be in a settled epistemic attitude (perhaps acceptance), we do not view the rationally hopeful as one who persists blindly in her efforts. I now want to suggest that, if rational hopefulness for a certain outcome involves maintaining an inquiring attitude toward whether p , then this criteria might be fit to distinguish those uncertain outcomes which permit faith, from those which permit hopefulness.

To see this, let us go back to Brooks' romance. Let us imagine that his Spanish date—let us call her Camila—hopes that their relationship will work out, but does not have faith that it will work out. That is, although she does desire for it to be true, she is unable to set aside her worries, and, while continuing to invest in the relationship, keeps wondering whether they could build a happy marriage with so many obstacles currently standing in their way. She reads testimonies from other intercultural couples and regularly discusses the matter with her friends, asking for their opinions. If someone were to ask Camila: “Do you think you and Arthur could have a happy marriage?”, she could very well respond: “I hope so... but I'm not sure. In fact, I often wonder about that”.

My point is that, while hopeful Camila should keep wondering about whether to marry Arthur, genuinely faithful Arthur is not. Having genuine faith that *p* seems downright incompatible with such questionings and investigations. In fact, as has been convincingly argued, for Brooks to maintain genuine faith in the project of their marriage, he should refrain from engaging in an inquiry about whether the project might or not succeed. This idea has been defended by Lara Buchak (2018).

Engaging in an inquiry in order to determine whether one's project might succeed, Buchak suggests, constitutes a *lack* of faith that *p* (Buchak, 2018; Kierkegaard, 1846). Having and maintaining faith in some aspect or other of one's future requires terminating the search for further evidence. Genuine faith (that God exists, that one's partner will make a good spouse) precludes inquiring into whether these propositions are true. Particularly, holding faith requires refraining from gathering or examining further evidence for the purpose of taking a decision (such as deciding whether to live one's life in accordance with the existence of God, or deciding to marry one's partner)². Maintaining genuine faith in those propositions requires refraining from inquiring into whether they are true.

Consequently, having and acting on the basis of our faith that *p* can be rational in those circumstances in which one is rationally permitted to refrain from searching or examining additional evidence in order to commit to a decision. Given that genuine faith precludes inquiry into whether *p*, it is rational to adopt faith only toward those propositions that one should not inquire into³. The faithful is the blindly committed agent: she persists in her commitment while having entirely dropped her disposition to inquire about *p*. And certain circumstances call for just this kind of commitment.

Hopefulness, by contrast, is a mental state that comes with an inquiring attitude about whether *p*; a disposition to wonder, be curious, and collect evidence pertaining to *p*. Hopefulness is thus a mental state it is rational to adopt toward uncertain and valuable prospects one is rationally permitted to inquire about. Additionally, as I have argued, ensuring that one's hopefulness remains rational requires maintaining such an attitude. If it is valid that rational hopefulness requires an ongoing epistemic goal to come to know whether *p*, then the circumstances in which it is rational for us to hope should be circumstances that permit those epistemic activities. In situations where it would not be rational to inquire further whether *p*, remaining hopeful (that is, emotionally and intentionally engaged toward the goal of bringing about *p*) is irrational, since one is not in a position to determine whether *p* merits this engagement.

²The question of whether this epistemic rationality condition similarly applies to the attitude of trusting that *p* is an interesting one, which I will not engage with here.

³Note that Buchak focuses here on evidence-gathering, rather than on inquiry as an attitude that also involves states such as curiosity that *p*, wondering whether *p*, etc. Arguably, while evidence-gathering constitutes an absence of faith, it is perhaps less obvious that wondering whether one's partner will make a good spouse also constitutes a lack of faith. However, my intuition is that at least some faith theorists would claim that having faith that *p* precludes having *p* on one's “research agenda” as part of the set of questions one wants to figure out the answer to. Genuine faith is arguably not a state one adopts as one is waiting to obtain the answer to whether *p*. In this sense it is distinct from suspension of judgement. It is rather a state of settled commitment to a state of affairs in spite of epistemic uncertainty (or inconclusive evidence).

We might wonder about the kind of considerations that make it rational for one to inquire into whether *p*. Here I will rely on Buchak's suggestions. According to Buchak, determining the conditions that make it permissible for one to inquire into *p* plausibly involves whether we are in fact likely to find relevant (perhaps even conclusive) evidence and whether spending this time and cognitive resources gathering evidence might mean sacrificing other (and perhaps more relevant) opportunities (Buchak, 2010).

Inquiry into uncertain prospects can be irrational when spending cognitive resources and time inquiring would mean foregoing a significant opportunity. Gathering evidence has costs, such as costs related to the postponement of a decision to act one way or another. In some circumstances, postponing such a decision can mean losing an opportunity, such as when one's spouse has given one an ultimatum on deciding whether to marry them. But the costs can also be purely epistemic, such as when spending this time and resources on a different question is likely to lead to more significant epistemic gains (perhaps there is a more urgent question on our research agenda, for which evidence has become readily available).

Not only does gathering evidence have costs, but it also is not guaranteed to produce value. In cases where the evidence will remain inconclusive, the risk of coming across evidence that will mislead one into choosing the wrong course of action sometimes outweighs the benefits of getting the good kind of evidence (Buchak, 2010, 2018). On this basis, it can be impermissible to inquire into uncertain prospects in cases where it is clear that inquiry would not yield progress toward a rational decision about whether to invest efforts toward the promotion of this goal.

If there are circumstances that make it more or less rational for us to inquire into given uncertain prospects, then it seems we might have a way of distinguishing between the circumstances in which it is rational to hope that *p* (for instance, that my partner will make a good spouse) and the circumstances in which it is rational to have faith that *p*. Both having faith and hoping imply a lack of conclusive evidence about the obtaining of *p*., namely, when faced with uncertain good prospects about which inquiring is irrational (because we are unlikely to find any relevant evidence, or because we ought instead to spend time and cognitive resources on another question), it is irrational for us to adopt hope, but we would be permitted to adopt faith.

If hope inherently involves an epistemic goal to figure out whether *p*, and requires maintaining an inquiring attitude toward whether *p*, those very circumstances that make adopting faith rational, are circumstances in which being hopeful would be irrational. This is because the proper intentional object of faith, as Buchak has suggested, is an uncertain state of affairs the obtaining of which we are very unlikely to gain any conclusive evidence about, and where continuing to gather evidence would be too costly with respect to the possible gains. When we are faced with such uncertain good prospects, then it is rational to drop our disposition to inquire about *p*, and we may instead commit to *p* on the basis of faith that *p*.

Conversely, the proper intentional object of hopefulness is an uncertain good prospect that we are in a position to learn about, in a way that would be conducive to helping us make a rational decision about whether to continue investing intentionally and emotionally into this goal. It is rational to adopt hopefulness toward those uncertain good prospects that can rationally be inquired into. As circumstances change, and inquiring into whether *p* becomes irrational, we may (and I believe we in fact do) move from an attitude of hopefulness to an attitude of faith. What emerges is a picture in which, while it is acknowledged that hope and faith are both attitudes one might adopt in the face of uncertain good prospects, they also have distinct rationality conditions pertaining to inquiry.

Conclusion

Hope can sustain our motivation to persevere toward our goals, but it does not do so in a steadfast and resolute manner, if by "resolve" we mean a cessation of the inquiry into whether *p* (Pettit, 2004; Meirav, 2009). I have argued that we rightfully expect the rationally hopeful to do more, epistemically speaking, than keep an open mind (suspend judgment) and update their level of

credence in response to counter-evidence that *p*. We expect them to be in an inquiring attitude toward whether *p*; that is, we expect them to maintain the cognitive goal to seek an answer to the question of whether *p*. This is because the epistemic rationality conditions of hopefulness (the uncertainty and likelihood of *p*) are determined by factors beyond the scope of one's agency, which can easily change and make one's continuous affective and intentional investment unwarranted.

The hopeful is someone who has practical reasons to invest in an uncertain end, all the while reflecting on her reasons, keeping track of changes in the facts that ground such reasons, and not taking her success for granted. This is best captured, I have suggested, by appealing to the distinction between being in an inquiring attitude toward a question of interest and being in a settled attitude toward this question. This distinction can help us account for some instances of diachronically irrational hopefulness. And it can also help us further distinguish hopefulness from other positive attitudes we adopt in the face of uncertainty, such as optimism, and faith.

Remaining rationally hopeful through time should be demanding, given the costs and risks of investing in uncertain ends. Having the epistemic goal of wanting to know whether *p* alive in one's mind allows us to rationally attempt to shape our future, while ensuring, to the best of our ability, that we direct our efforts toward aims that truly merit it.

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