



Non-redemptive hope and the fragility of meaning: Despair, injury, and the ethics of futurity

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Abstract: Proceeding through a series of scenes of injury, violence, and the collapse of the meaningful, the article offers an account of the post-redemptive nature of hope, despair, and futurity. Where redemption and moral improvement are proffered, hope instead becomes an ontological rift in the self, the world, and temporality (Kierkegaard; Nietzsche; Ricœur; Merleau-Ponty). In line with Veena Das, Elaine Scarry, and Judith Butler, the article then reconsiders despair in the ordinary life of an injured and precarious world, in which meaning gradually thins rather than breaks down. Drawing on Nietzsche, Weber, Camus, Matušík and Tracy B. Strong, the article accounts for despair as an instance of the modern "scarcity of hope", where redemptive narratives are both ethically indecent and philosophically untenable. Adopting the position of responsibility, relational permanence and fragile world-binding (Levinas; Arendt; Nancy), the article shows how non-redemptive hope can align with despair against nihilism and consolation. The final sections develop an ethics of fragile futurity and a conception of political judgment that remain reflective and plural without metaphysical assurances, and ethical without political guarantees. It argues that this meaning and responsibility can remain after the collapse of redemption, but only if understood not as a question of triumph or restoration but of the fragility of continuing life in wounded worlds.

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Introduction:

Hope is often understood in contemporary political thought to be a moral or historical orientation toward emancipation, a projective elaboration of a human striving in a future when injustice is overcome, suffering redeemed, and meaning reconciled into a narrative of progress, liberation, or reconciliation. Such conceptions of hope presuppose the intelligibility of the world, the repair of history, and a political horizon in which loss, violence, and catastrophe are integrated into a meaningful order. Challenging this presumption, the article examines those moments when injury does not merely harm life but shatters meaning: when it destroys worlds, dissolves temporal horizons, and produces forms of despair that are not just psychological, but ontologically disruptive in relation to the self, others and the future (Scarry 1985; Das 2007; Arendt 1958).

What, then, is the problem I want to pursue? It is not simply how political subjects get injured or damaged.

It is how violence can render experience incapable of orienting action, judgment, and expectation; how it renders the future radically insufficient, emptied of promise yet still inescapably open. It is how the resources through which modern politics has imagined hope - redemption, emancipation, reconciliation, rational progress - become fragile, implausible, or ethically suspect. In this sense, as Martin Beck Matušík observes, modernity manifests a "scarcity of hope" (Matušík 1993: 214-15): neither metaphysical consolation nor historical teleology is able to ground meaning in the wake of radical evil, trauma, and systemic breakdown. Thus, while hope remains within modernity, it is without redemption, without the faith that suffering can be morally integrated, politically repaired, or historically redeemed.

It seeks to develop a philosophical account of human hope and despair, not as psychological attitudes or moral dispositions, but as modes of being-in-the-world associated with injury, vulnerability, and loss. In dialogue with

existentialism, phenomenology, and post-secular philosophies, it asks what remains of the political in a world of failed emancipatory promises, collapsed historical narratives, and disillusioning violence that unveils the fragility of worlds without leaving compensatory moral clarity in their wake (Nietzsche 1968; Camus 1955; Strong 2012). It does not desire to recover assurance without reserves, theological or otherwise. It thinks rather about what a non-redemptive ethics of futurity could look like: one that does not negate despair, does not transform suffering into a meaning of sacrifice, but does not abandon responsibility, care, and fragile world-binding.

But despair is not simply the hopelessness of moods. It is the withering of meaning, the futility of action, the retraction of the horizon of futures and the lack of a world to hold experience together (Kierkegaard 1980; Ricœur 1992). This despair can be produced by singular, catastrophic or traumatic violence, or by more distributed and chronic forms of harm, exposure and precarity (Butler 2004; Mbembe 2019). In each

case, despair is not merely the absence of desire. It is the rupture of worldhood and the weakening of bonds that make existence shareable, intelligible and livable (Nancy 2000; Merleau-Ponty 1964).

Likewise, the article opposes the reduction of despair and hope to a simple binary. Hope, in the sense developed here, is not understood as optimism or even consolation or teleological projection. It is not about repair or reconciliatory closure, so much as it is a manifestation of what Matušík calls the post-redemptive horizon: the region in which the future remains open without the promise of moral closure, and the possibility of meaning must be sustained without metaphysical assurance and without historical salvation (Matušík 1993). Such Hope is not triumphalistic, and it is not boundless: it is the hope of knowing that the suffering and injury of the past can never fully be undone; it is the hope that avoids nihilism and moral cynicism.

This involves opposing hope to romantic heroism and therapeutic discourses of resilience, which equate

survival with winning and recast suffering as moral capital or redemptive sacrifice. It seeks to explore how the subjects of broken worlds might continue to inhabit time, sustain relationality and remain answerable to others without erasing loss or sublimating harm into meaning (Levinas 1969; Das 2007). In this sense, we develop an ethics of futurity as an ethics of responsibility, attentiveness and endurance that prefigures a political existence of fragile hope and future-oriented commitment without denying the experience of despair.

The investigation proceeds through a series of inter-related movements around despair as ontological fracture, through the existential and phenomenological concepts of the self, vulnerable corporeality of the self and the loss of world. After an examination of the phenomenology of injury and the dissolution of meaning in ordinary life (drawing on Veena Das, Elaine Scarry and Judith Butler on how violence is formative of subjectivity, embodiment and ethical relation), the third movement proceeds through the collapse of

redemptive and emancipatory narratives in modernity, exploring the failure of hope's metaphysical grounding with reference to Nietzsche, Weber, Strong, and Camus. This involves a non-redemptive approach to hope that does not deny despair or transmute suffering into the stuff of salvation but is instead grounded in responsibility, care, and futurity, with no promises (Matušítk; Ricoeur; Arendt).

This is the ethics of fragile futurity articulated in the final movement, a political and existential orientation that continues to sustain action and responsibility in a world without certain meaning, definite hope, or cure for its injuries. This paper does not rehabilitate hope as optimism or despair as lucidity. Rather it asks what it means to continue to live and to act, and to remain answerable to others in a world of no redemption, and of hope only in fragmented, precarious, non-redemptive and ethical forms.

I. Despair as Ontological Fracture: Self, World, and the Withdrawal of Futurity

We should not, therefore, try to describe despair as a

philosophical phenomenon by speaking at the outset of it, for example, as the affective experience of a pessimist, as an affective collapse or failure of resilience. I want to suggest that it is better to think of it as the failure of structures that usually allow orientation toward the future, coherence within experience, and the shareability of existence. It is not merely the loss of hope as psychological expectation, but the withdrawal of futurity as a meaningful horizon, the sense that time goes on where importance does not.

Kierkegaard's *Sickness Unto Death* (1980) already has the notion of an ontological dimension to despair. For him, despair is not a psychological disorder or sadness but an unhappy relation of the self to the self: a failure to actually be the self (as the self really is). Despair, as the impossibility of conciliation of finitude and freedom, dependence and transcendence, facticity and freedom, thrownness and responsibility for oneself, is hence not exhausted by the theological horizons of Kierkegaard's diagnosis. It is more generally coterminous with the ethical experience of

non-coincidence with oneself or the gap (e.g., between facticity and aspiration) that opens up whenever (genuinely) meaningfulness is no longer livable, credible, or binding.

Nietzsche radicalizes this schism by arguing that despair can occur not just from inner conflicts within an individual but from the collapse of value horizons themselves. Nihilism, as Nietzsche describes it, occurs when the highest values lose their binding power, when the inherited forms of meaning are no longer believed, but where no new value-horizons have taken their place (Nietzsche 1968). Despair is thus a loss of not simply hopes, but a diminishing of world-orientation, the ability to view the world as a meaningful order within which action, suffering, and striving can all be interpreted in a meaningful way; nihilism, thus, exposes the fragility of the value of value. Even the most secure moral or metaphysical order is historically contingent and can be made to collapse.

Camus explicitly registers this perception in his writings on existential-ethics, describing the absurd not

merely as the world's lack of meaning, but as the clash of humanity's wish to make sense of the world and the world's refusal to be intelligible (Camus 1955). The great despair is this. That the world promises not to reconcile the past, that nothing is to redeem the past, that nothing guarantees an advance toward the good or toward the spiritual. For Camus, despair is neither resignation nor a metaphysical escape. The proper answer to despair is lucidity and the resolve to bear it. Despair, therefore, becomes a threshold decision between denying loss by means of rhetorical consolation on the one hand, or enduring the world as broken subject without freedom from responsibility on the other.

Paul Ricœur provides another vocabulary for this fracture in his account of narrative identity and the fallibility of self-interpretation. Self is not a substratum but an active process, a task of interpretation, in which the subject must weave memory, promise and expectation into a unified narrative (Ricœur 1992). What is now at stake is not just agency and autonomy

but also the very possibility of grasping oneself as a historical agent, as the bearer of a life. The despair that follows the interruption of the narrative work of trauma, injury or historical rupture, the undoing of the very horizon in which past, present and future are held together in order to make sense of the narrative, is therefore complete.

This ontological fragility goes hand-in-hand with worldhood: the world is not a neutral space of subjects, but for phenomenology it is the background that gives meaning to all experience. According to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, perception is always already meaningful, habitual, and orientated (Merleau-Ponty 1964). Seen from a phenomenological perspective, despair indicates a rupture of orientated and meaningful access to the world and the loss of its familiar, coherent and inhabitable space. The world no longer gathers experience into a field of possibilities, but recedes or is opaque or indifferent; the subject exists in a time that continues, but no longer opens onto meaningful becoming.

This ontological rupture is deepened by Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of being-in-common: worldhood is co-worldliness, or exposure to others as the condition of sense (Nancy 2000). Thus, despair is not just isolation on the inside, but also the shattering of the relation by which sense can arise from a web of selves. In the case of violence that destroys shared worlds, what disappears is not just orientation, but the being-with of others, the ability to feel oneself addressed and recognized among others. Despair, then, still leaves the subject among others, but dislocated from the common world holding them together and from the shared spaces where sense would circulate, communicate, and orient a world.

Levinas adds to this fracture the ethical dimension which for Levinas precedes ontology: it is the call to responsibility, which occurs in the face-to-face relation to the Other (Levinas 1969). However, violence, exposure or abandonment can destroy or suspend the relational field, the space across which the ethical

summons addresses and is addressed. Despair becomes not merely the loss of hope or possibility for oneself, but the desiccation of ethical relation, the sense that the world no longer enables the responsiveness on which responsibility itself depends. In these experiences, despair is not immoral indifference, but rather the demand for a response to one's situation within this ontological void.

In all three traditions, despair can be understood as a fracture in self-relations, temporality, worldhood, a manner of being.

- the self no longer coincides with itself
- narrative identity loses continuity
- value horizons lose their strength.
- the world withdraws as a field of sense
- relational and ethical orientation becomes fragile

The irony of despair, therefore, is that it is not just an individual subjective state, but a rupture in the conditions of meaning.

This ontological account cannot be understood in an

abstract way. Rather, despair is a historical and material condition. It emerges through injury, dispossession, and forms of violence that slowly, unevenly and bodily eat into worlds. The analysis of how despair is configured in experience must thus turn to the phenomenology of injury and of ordinary life after violence, where the sense of meaning is undone through the ordinary fragmentation of everyday sociality.

The next section therefore explores the represented, relational and temporal horizons of injury through the work of Veena Das, Elaine Scarry, Judith Butler and phenomenological accounts of world-loss, to consider how despair becomes inscribed in life at the level of ordinary practices, speech and silence.

II. Injury, Embodiment, and the Slow Destruction of Meaning: The Ordinary Life of Despair

If we need to understand despair as a kind of fracture along the lines of selfhood, worldhood, and futurity, it is not only in scenes of catastrophic exposure or the spectacular violence of high drama. It happens as well

in the everyday life that forms and unfolds as the accumulation of small injuries, exposures, and erosions of meaning that change how subjects inhabit their bodies, subjectivities, relationships, and everyday worlds. Despair can be precipitated, seemingly, by any shock to the system that results in rupture, though it can also be sedimented in the more indirect, systemic and infrastructural dynamics of violence that unfolds over time.

Elaine Scarry's description of pain as world-destroying has been an important point of reference for this phenomenology. According to Scarry, pain has a double structure: it is at once intensely real to the sufferer and radically resistant to expression (Scarry 1985). In more intense or chronic pain, the world disappears, words are reduced to moans, the body centers the experience of the instant, and pain renders it impossible to think in terms of time or in relation to others. The pain thus not only wounds the body, but it also unmakes the world: the shared meaning of experience is stripped out of the suffering individual, who is rendered

isolated within a horizon that can no longer be spoken or shared. Despair here is simply the withdrawal of worldhood, the bodily suffering wherein the ability to interpret and tell about experience disintegrates.

In addition, as Veena Das points out, the experience of what she calls the "descent into the ordinary" (Das 2007) happens in the aftermath of violence - violence does not just go away after the event. The violence migrates into the fabric of every day: into domestic routines, speech, memory, silence. Injury itself becomes embedded in relationships, gestures, and temporal rhythms. The ordinary becomes the context in which subjects have the possibility of living with the injuries that violence has produced. For these reasons, despair may not be a moment of dramatic collapse, but a kind of quiet endurance, the labor of living on in a world that can no longer be reliably counted upon for meaning, trust, or futurity.

This is vital to the narrative, as it refuses the possibility of survival as a happy-ending narrative, or even recovery as the structure of life after the injury. For Das,

violence's aftermath is not surviving or restoring wholeness, but tentatively reintegrating a dismembered world, and tracing the injury as interruption, absence, and silence. Despair becomes ordinary not because it becomes common but because it becomes part of the everyday life structure such as body movement, speech allowance timing and method, future anticipation, or future evasion.

Judith Butler's thinking on precariousness and vulnerability helps us understand how banal despair is distributed in society (2004, 2009): Life is always livable in relation to infrastructures, institutions, and forms of recognition that establish and compromise conditions of livability. Where these differential arms of support are unevenly distributed, some lives are made more vulnerable to loss, insecurity, and abandonment than others. Despair is not, however, simply an existential state: it is the outcome of structures in which people are repeatedly denied recognition, protection, or security. Crucially, this ordinary experience of precariousness

weakens faith in the future, as exemplified by different forms of exhaustion and weariness in which life goes on without renewal.

The phenomenology of injury is thus also a phenomenology of time. Slow forms of violence - poverty, marginalization, bureaucratic neglect, environmental degradation, chronic illness - do not occur as moments of rupture, but as the accumulation of delay, suspension and stagnation. What characterizes quantological time is not the disappearance of futurity but its attenuation. The subject now has to plan or hope, threatened by the knowledge that their temporal horizon has receded and that they can still conceive of other futures but can no longer open themselves to them. Therefore, despair becomes temporal attenuation. One suspends oneself in the present with no felt substance of futurity.

Merleau-Ponty stressed embodiment for clarification of this. He explains the body is not something we have and inhabit but the medium that opens us to the world (Merleau-Ponty 1964). Injury, illness, or chronic

vulnerability redefines a body's powers and restructures the actions the body can take in the world. That is how the body's despair is expressed in posture, gesture, and movement. It is expressed by the world taking the body as weakened, depleted, or confined: a body in the world as no longer possessed of initiative. The loss of importance is not only cognitive or narrative; it is kinaesthetic, borne in the very manner of inhabiting space.

Nancy's being-in-common posits that embodiment is always relational, and an injury is not just an interruption to the continuity of a person's identity, but also an interruption to the common space of being, through which meaning flows (Nancy 2000). As Das shows, even when concern with ordinary despair is a diminished relationality, where trust is given up and people lose hold of their speech, life continues even in the diminished world of despair. Not as restoration, but as a recommitment to relationships that are compromised, but also indispensable.

All of these perspectives understand despair as sedimented across time, relationally mediated, and ultimately grounded in material conditions.

- in catastrophic rupture, and also during long-term exposure.
- not only in psychic breakdown, but in exhausted endurance
- not only as loss of meaning, but as attenuated world-binding
- not only as silence, but as speech altered, withheld, or burdened

Thus, despair must not be an absence of life or action or relations but rather these become possible under worlds no longer available to the same extent or futures open yet not fully livable.

But what about hope? If, after all, we no longer think about despair with hopelessness or pessimism because definitions seem too subjective, psychological, and individualist, but rather because meaning and futurity thin structurally, then hope is optimism, resilience, or moral reassurance alone. We need to

see that hope can exist, even in racked and wounded worlds, where redemption cannot happen, and pain cannot be avoided by anyone, and the future cannot guarantee redemption.

On that note, the following section then outlines the collapse of redemptive and emancipatory narratives, whereby modernity enters an age of loss of meaning: the inability to ground hope in metaphysical, theological or teleological guarantees gives way to a post-redemptive ethics of futurity.

III. The Collapse of Redemptive Narratives: Modernity, Nihilism, and the Scarcity of Hope

If despair is represented and relational life is a thinning of worldhood and futurity, despair also appears in the extended historical recalibration of sense. Modernity is not simply a crisis of social coherence or metaphysical grounding. It is also a crisis of stories of redemption, stories that would promise reconciliation, moral intelligibility, or historical closure. In this sense, despair is

not simply personal injury or circumstance-related violence, but it is rather the world within which the salvation or redemption of the future cannot be imagined, nor can the conditions that grant hope within that world be justified through moral or material plausibility anymore.

Nietzsche's account of nihilism is at the beginning of this modern process. Nihilism, he wrote, arises when "the highest values devalue themselves," when the world loses its meaning (Nietzsche 1968). This is not simply the loss of individual meaning, but the collapse of a metaphysical order, the loss of metaphysical guarantees which made sense of suffering, and even gave a sense of direction to history. Nihilism does not eliminate our thirst for meaning. It simply tears the supporting framework of meaning from the world, leaving the thirst intact. The despair is therefore the impossibility of returning to metaphysical certainties or to any secular substitutes that work within the logic of transcendence in disguise.

Max Weber restates the condition of nihilism as

disenchantment, signifying a world increasingly governed by instrumental reason, bureaucratic rationalization, and the disintegration of value spheres (Weber 1946, 1978). Disenchantment does not eliminate meaning, but pluralizes and destabilizes it, thus depriving political life of unified metaphysical or theological foundations. And now, those projects of justice, equality, liberation, and so on still continue, but they lack the moral legitimization of a teleology of historical progress. And so, hope becomes unreliable, in the sense that the world no longer provides historical or transcendent justification for the costs of suffering towards some future redemption.

Camus radicalizes this idea by refusing to fit the suffering that human beings endure into any moral or cosmic schema. The absurd, he argues, is not the suffering of humanity but the confrontation between our desire for reason and the silence of an indifferent world (Camus 1955). Theologians and theorists who try to redeem human suffering risk turning violence into a necessary evil or

a salvific act. In both moments Camus refuses despair-as-resignation and hope-as-salvation, insisting instead on a lucid fidelity in the absence of justice. If some hope is to be retained, then it cannot be reconciliation; it is to exist without metaphysical reward.

Another post-Holocaust and post-catastrophic formulation of this condition is Martin Beck Matušík's conception of the scarcity of hope (Matušík 1993): after radical evil, such as genocide, totalitarian terror, and systematic dehumanization in the Holocaust, the possibility of redemption is morally and philosophically untenable. Hope remains, but in the death of redemption: freed from metaphysical certainty, chastened by historical catastrophe, and vigilant against the normative or ethical necessitations of loss that have so often sought to redeem historical catastrophe by turning it into a calling, a purification, a necessity or even a sacrifice. A lack of hope does not mean that hope is impossible; it means that we refuse to resurrect hope at the cost of forgetting or sublimating irreparable harm.

In other instances, Tracy B. Strong explores the implications of this vision-less politics: To think politics "without vision" is not to think without meaning, but to accept that political life is without metaphysical guarantees: plural, conflictual, and fragile, not redeemable by reference to ultimate truths or final historical purposes (Strong 2012). A hope that operates in this world cannot be eschatological confidence or emancipatory certainty but a hope that is reimagined in the finitude, contingency and vulnerability of this world.

In this respect, Hannah Arendt also opposes teleological narratives of politics, in which it finds its meaning in metaphysical or moral terms. For Arendt, political action is not telos-driven. Instead, it is based on the principle of natality; on the capacity to start something new in a world that never makes sense (Arendt 1958). But this is not to redeem suffering or otherwise reconcile the past. To hope is to open a space of futurity to come in which forms of meaning can arise without negating loss. So, hope is not

the guarantee of victory, but the capacity to act under non-redemptive conditions.

But what collapses in these traditions is not hope itself but rather a particular grammar of hope.

- hope as historical progress
- hope as moral reconciliation
- hope as metaphysical salvation
- hope as teleological inevitability
- Hope as justifying the sacrifice

Yet these redemptive forms of hope are in themselves ethically suspect because they risk transforming what is unjustified violence into an instrument of rational necessity or incorporating that which can no longer be alluded to as irreparable suffering into the narrative of development, fate, or liberation. Such a loss of hope in modernity is not to be understood as a victory of despair but rather an alteration in how things are made thinkable. Hope must be rearticulated without redemption, without the promise that history will make

up for its losses or that meaning will prevail over contingency.

This raises the central question of the present article: What would it mean to nurture hope when no future promises repair, and suffering could not be redeemed and despair, within the non-teleological horizon, remained an abiding ontological possibility?

This requires hope to be disentangled from triumphalist or restorative imaginaries and reconceived as a non-redemptive ethical orientation, neither negating despair nor converting it into a moral imperative.

The third task is to articulate non-redemptive hope not as optimism, not as solution, not even as teleological projection, but rather as a fragile, ethical and relational orientation within any wounded world.

IV. Hope After Redemption: Toward a Non-Redemptive Ethics of Futurity

While it may be true that modernity has no hope because all redemptive narratives, from the parade of Enlightenment ideologies to the finality of religious traditions, have

collapsed or become suspect, we cannot but need to rearticulate hope in a situation where the teleological guarantee of history is no longer available. Hope must be understood as a frail and moral form of orientation within an irreparable world of loss, where no loss is redeemed and no despair finally overcome.

Martin Beck Matušík's critique of redemption provides a good starting point: After radical evil, no political or theological teleology can assimilate catastrophe without moral distortion, without demanding that suffering cohere, that it be regarded as necessary or productive, and thus without effacing the irreducible wrongness of suffering (Matušík 1993, 145). The post-redemptive horizon resists this move. From the evil of the world, no metaphysical justification or historical resolution is to be found. Hope is a possibility, but it is unassuring: it does not entail that suffering fits into the justification of another promise.

This refusal is, instead, the condition by virtue of which hope becomes again possible. But this hope cannot be based,

as before, on faith that history will mend its wounds. Hope must begin with the realization that these wounds will never heal. In this sense, hope is fidelity to a broken world: it is the willingness to inhabit and respond to a broken world, and to cultivate what remains of the world's fragile continuities, without the promise of complete healing ever being realized. One way to think through the idea of hope without redemption, but still in relation to Ricœur's thinking on narrative identity, is to understand selfhood as a process of drawn-out interpretation, where memory, promise, and projection weave together to create a narrative that is always open to the condition of not-quite-being. If hope is the persistence of interpretation in spite of rupture (Ricœur 1992), then it does not deny trauma nor attempt to integrate it into a closure that makes sense. Rather, it moves forward with an interpretation that is open, vulnerable, incomplete with regard to the future.

Thus, hope is not triumphalistic, heroic or transcendent: it co-exists with despair, since it understands that

despair is a name for a real ontological breach in a being's relationship with itself, with the world and with futurity, which cannot always be repaired. But there is also hope in such a fracture as attentiveness, as the willingness to continue to interpret, to promise and to act, without any guarantee that these practices will lead to reconciliation or redemption.

For Levinas, hope, as a second, distinct register, is not the continuity of a narrative. Hope is not the projection of subjective desire into the future, but rather the perseverance in the exposure to the other, which exacts responsibility from the self in spite of hopelessness, fatigue, and uncertainty (Levinas 1969). It does not redeem suffering or resolve uncertainty, but stops despair from coming to a close by reminding the self that meaning is not something to be found in working it out from the inside. It is in the call to answer before others that we see hope's ethical power: hope is ethical not only because it makes claims for a better world, but because it does not indifferently depart when this is not assured.

A related concept is natality. Natality is not a recouping of former times nor is it a guarantee of progress. It is the capacity to begin anew: to act, and to introduce the unexpected into the world (Arendt 1958). As such, the horizon of hope after the redemptive horizon is an orientation toward natality without triumphalism, a recognition that in the most wounded worlds, action remains the possibility of fragile new beginnings that do not deny loss or promise reconciliation but instead coexist with despair and open up, if momentarily, a space for plurality, speech, and judgment.

Jean-Luc Nancy goes even further to show how fragile and non-substantial any such communal renewal would be: community is not the fusion of identities nor an already given ground of meaning, but the exposure of singular beings to one another, the continuous production of sense in the between (Nancy 2000). It is hope not as waiting for a reconciled plural to emerge but as the task of sustaining the fragile co-existence of irreconcilably different worlds

even when trust in the possibility of worlding has been shattered. It is hope as fidelity to finitude, as the struggle to do co-world-making that can neither redeem nor replace injury.

Veena Das's ethnography of life after violence best illustrates this moral commitment. Where the descent into the ordinary does not involve heroics or grand transformations, hope manifests itself in acts of re-attachment to damaged worlds: the tentative work of relationship-building, the slowing return of speech, the cautious resumption of everyday routines (Das 2007). These gestures are not healing the trauma. They are a hope that acknowledges that loss is irreversible, but that does not abandon the dead. The hope gestures neither toward cure nor toward transcendence. It is a mode of fragile survival that does not try to make sense of what has happened.

This non-redemptive conception of hope has important ethical implications because it rejects the idea that it is possible or even desirable to make sense of suffering, for instance by re-writing injury as

sacrifice or presenting despair in terms of moral progress. This means rejecting a logic whereby the harm becomes retroactively justified precisely by the redemption of the situation that the harm created. More broadly, it means rejecting attempts to subsume suffering into a narrative that would thereby render it intelligible at the cost of singularity.

This narrative does not lead to nihilism. The breakdown of redemption opens up the possibility for a more modest and vigilant ethics of responsibility, care, and fragile continuity of life, an ethics that does not rely on the promise of redemption and triumph in any transcendental or metaphysical narrative. Hope is possible only to the extent to which we renounce the promise of purity, closure, definitiveness, or the historical inevitability of the outcome.

What emerges is a conception of hope as:

- non-redemptive rather than reconciliatory
- ethical rather than teleological
- relational rather than self-assured

- fragile rather than triumphant
- clinging to life even in despair's grip

But hope does not offer an alternative to despair. Hope is present in the world, which is scarred. It lives out of a relation to the future that is open yet undetermined, committed yet contingent, fragile yet real. It is therefore not something you can be sure of.

This thus raises yet a further question, which is the subject of the next movement: How, then, does such a non-redemptive hope sustain the texture of political and ethical life when it does not rid the world of despair and injury?

Instead, we must focus on the ways in which hope and despair co-inhabit fragile worlds, as interspersed orientations that fill the moral and existential space of life after injury, rather than oppositions that exclude and replace one another.

My goal is to explore the possibility of ethical responsibility, fragile world-binding, and partial forms of futurity in a world that remains

irrevocably permeated by pain and loss.

V. Living with Despair: Coexistence, Responsibility, and the Fragility of Futurity

If hope, within a non-redemptive horizon, does not thereby lift despair from existence but lives side by side with it, the question is rather how (or if) life is to be lived near the edge of despair. The answer to this question is found in a relation to despair not as a transitory condition to be transcended, but as a differential element of life in injured worlds together with fragile forms of commitment, responsibility, and world-binding. Hope in these circumstances does not displace despair, but occupies its space and reinterprets its meaning without destroying it.

Williams' writing on moral luck helps to illustrate why moral commitment or the rational will can by no means simply deflect despair (Williams 1981). Human life is conducted under conditions of contingency, finitude and unintended consequence, and responsibility cannot guarantee innocence. In relation to the ethical life as such, this is

irreducibly open-ended. Yet there is still vulnerability, as agents remain open to results they cannot control, to losses they cannot recoup, and to histories they cannot rewrite. The post-redemptive ethics does not deny this vulnerability of human agency. It acknowledges that despair is part of the moral texture of finite action.

Yet remaining with despair need not imply paralysis. Arendt's concept of action as the capacity to begin again offers a way of negotiating how fragile futurity is enacted even under conditions of existence that are characterized by despair (Arendt 1958). For Arendt, beginning does not redeem past suffering or restore identity. To begin is rather to create temporary, partial spaces of appearance in which plurality, speech and judgment briefly interrupt the brokenness, the fragmentation of the world. It is to re-open a world that cannot be repaired but can at least be shared. In this sense hope is not certainty, it is continuation - risk with no guarantee, a willingness to keep on acting in the face of loss and its consequences.

Levinas proposes a second register of ethics, supplementary to coexistence: when despair has thinned the world of meaning, the call of the other does not withdraw (Levinas 1969). Not responsibility, but obligation, the ethical relation, survives the condition of the world, and does not depend on it. Hope in this sense is not hope in a better world, but the refusal to break off responsiveness, the refusal to give in to despair. The endurance of responsibility, however, even at and beyond the limit of exhaustion, vulnerability or the constant threat of uncertainty, is a sort of hope that keeps the ethical relation open to articulation even when the world no longer permits it.

Veena Das's description of the ordinary after violence likewise suggests that coexistence with despair can take the form of quiet, undramatic perseverance (Das 2007); hope after violence need not be recovery as catharsis. Hope is the persistent persistence of keeping the relation, of caring, of re-engaging the sociality, even when trust is flimsy, and the

world has thinned out. This care does not pull us out of despair; it ties us back to the world with each fragile thread woven through an act. But hope here does not promise a certain future: it is the work of sustaining attachment, even when conditions are unfavorable to keep it and no guarantees of results exist.

Judith Butler's concept of grievability is also used in connection to the dialectic of hope and despair. When lives are less grievable, and less deserving of mourning and protection, the despair that settles in as a result is not just a psychological disposition but a political structure (Butler 2009). There is a way of mourning, a way of solidarity, a way of public recognition that can re-open the field of recognition without redeeming the losses. The hope that is invoked here does not promise to erase despair, but rather to create a space within which it can be shared, politicized, and held in common. Fragile futurity, then, arises from the shared burden of loss rather than closure.

What is at stake is a conception of futurity which is neither redemptive teleology

nor nihilistic foreclosure but is rather the minimal openness of time as such, the fact that the world goes on, that action is possible, and that responsibility is renewed moment by moment, even in the absence of certainty (Strong 2012). Hope does not promise that this futurity becomes true. It is modest, uncertain, and exposed to failure. But this modesty is a feature not a bug. It is the feature of an ethics that refuses both triumphalism and resignation.

The combination of hope and despair has important implications for political and ethical life in a world that seems irredeemably imperfect:

- However, ontology and history inevitably fall back into despair.
- Instead, hope is a kind of ethical endurance.
- Responsibility continues even without guaranteed purification
- The action continues, however.
- Futurity continues, but can never be promised.

Yet from this perspective, how can we historicize the possibility of

lived coexistence, without giving in to either the consolation of redemption, or nihilistic, paralyzing despair? What forms of ethical life, judgment, and world-building, can occupy this fragile space in-between, without slipping into despair or the denial of despair?

In this context, I want to build an ethics of fragile futurity, an ethics of responsibility and care that is neither redemptive nor apocalyptic, an ethics that understands hope as a patient, non-redemptive practice of remaining with the world rather than escaping it.

VI. An Ethics of Fragile Futurity: Responsibility without Redemption

If there is any hope in a post-redemptive horizon, then ethics cannot be derived from the eschaton, from reconciliation, salvation or even from the closure of history, but must be instead a practice of dwelling with the world, of sustaining a sense of responsibility and care in a context where meaning is fragile, injury irreparable and the future uncertain. It is not an ethic of resolution or triumph but an ethic of fragile futurity,

of inhabiting a time in which action stretches on without the support of redemption.

Prominent features of such an ethics are the idea that responsibility itself cannot be accepted in the absence of innocence, and that moral life in conditions of finitude and contingency unavoidably exposes agents to tragic conflict, complicity, and moral luck (Williams 1981). One cannot act in the world without producing irredeemable forms of responsibility. A redemptive ethic responds to the irredeemable liability produced by action by narrating sacrifice as a necessity, loss as meaningful, and tragic cost as the price for future human flourishing. Thus, redemptive narratives seek to extract moral clarity from otherwise irredeemable loss. Ethics grounded in an ethics of fragile futurity does not offer us such solace. It holds us accountable for the consequences of an action, even when it causes harm, even when its effects on the world remain ambiguous, even when they cannot be reconciled.

A similar account of promise and narrative

responsibility is offered by Ricœur, who notes that to promise is to bind oneself to a future without knowing whether one will be able to fulfill it, or what unforeseen events will alter its meaning (Ricœur 1992). Promise is thus an act of vulnerable fidelity: a commitment given and taken in circumstances where one remains exposed to the possibility of failure, reversal and reinterpretation. Such acts become even more precarious and even more obviously important under conditions of injury and despair, in becoming an act of being willing to be held answerable by others, even in a world where such guarantees become problematic. Hope, not the assurance of success, but rather steadfastness amid trials beyond one's control.

Levinas radicalizes this even further by arguing that ethical responsibility must be prior to autonomy, justification, or reciprocity (Levinas 1969). Responsibility is not something that is chosen. It is called forth by the other's vulnerability. An ethics of fragile futurity understands this call as standing in no relation to a metaphysical guarantee that the future will

unfold and a historicist faith in the march of progress, while accepting the call as unsecured, uneven, and binding nonetheless. Hope is not necessarily the expectation that our ethical work will save the world, but the refusal to withhold from responsibility when the task seems impossible: we are still responsible, not because the world is already redeemed, but because the other is.

In addition, Arendt's concept of forgiveness and promise lend another dimension to this ethics; they do not pretend to wipe out the deed or take away uncertainty. Instead, forgiveness and promise are ways in which humans can live with the irreversibility and contingency of action (Arendt 1958). Forgiveness does not redeem the past. It does not cure injury. It does not quell despair. But it interrupts a cycle of violence that would otherwise foreclose a future. Promise does not guarantee safety. It does not guarantee stability. But it makes the space of the relation strong enough to secure speech. These are not healing or reconciling, but practices that hold open the

world under conditions in which it might otherwise collapse.

According to Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of being-in-common, this kind of ethics is not represented as heroic individual determination but rather a sharing and exposure, on a world whose sense is, from the beginning, always co-produced, fragile and incomplete (Nancy 2000). Where despair conditions futurity, futurity is living on in a shared world that no longer makes sense as a coherent totality. It is the collective, active work of working out meaning with others without the expectation of completeness. Ethics is not achieved in harmony, but maintained in relation across fracture and discord.

Veena Das's attention to ordinary life following violence shows how this ethics is lived. Ethical life does not re-emerge in the form of heroism or moral clarity but as the acts that sustain life: caring for another, speaking again, inhabiting the everyday despite the burden of injury (Das 2007). And yet, these gestures do not redeem suffering, nor do they abandon it. They testify to a

kind of hope that does not cover over tragedy, nor abandon relational life. Instead of grand moral projects, Cohen believes fragile futurity is enacted in efforts to remain with others in a damaged world.

In Butler's writing on vulnerability and interdependency, this ethics is never only a matter of the personal, but never apolitical, either (Butler 2004, 2009). The conditions in which fragile futurity can be sustained are not equally available. Some lives are made so precarious that to be responsible to them just feels impossible. An ethics of fragile futurity must therefore pay careful attention to the concrete and structural contexts of being-with, promising, grieving, and acting. In a politicized context, hope ceases to be the ethical ideal of salvation but rather the political work of keeping worlds liveable, of not allowing environmental, political, economic, and social conditions to turn hope into despair, and despair into nihilism.

Across these perspectives, ethics after redemption attunes itself to a mode of endurance,

commitment, and attentiveness that:

- does not redeem suffering, but refuses indifference.
- does not eliminate despair, but lives alongside it
- does not promise moral clarity, but sustains responsibility
- does not secure futurity, but keeps it open
- does not restore unity, but maintains relation across fracture.

Hope within this ethic does not imply confidence or optimism but carries on the responsibility in contexts that lack metaphysical foundations and cannot guarantee redemptive effects.

Yet fragile futurity is not only existential or ethical. It is political, too: what would it take for political life -- judgment, action, collective orientation -- to endure in a context in which despair is not so far from one's imagination, worlds are injured, and resolution is not to be promised?

This leads to the second section, the question of how action, and of judgment, are still possible after despair, when hope is not redemptive, that is

precarious, and when responsibility is not purifiable.

VII. Judgment After Despair: Action, Plurality, and the Limits of Meaning

If the ethics of the post-redemptive horizon consists in sustaining fragile futurity and responsibility in the absence of metaphysical assurance, how is political judgment to be exercised in the post-redemptive horizon? Political judgment presupposes some kind of horizon of meaning in which actions can be evaluated, justified, and criticized. But when despair thins that horizon, when worlds fall apart, meanings are lost and suffering is irredeemable, then judgment seems both impossibly heavy and frustratingly totalizing. If there is no purity, no redemption, and no final coherence, how do we judge?

Hannah Arendt's account of judgment offers one of the best resources for thinking through this difficulty: it is not grounded in universal ethical principles or even a teleological conception of history. Rather, it is a reflective judgment that interprets the particular in its singularity while appealing, as it

does so, to a plurality of perspectives (Arendt 1982). Judgment remains fragile: it combines an exercise of imagination, dialogue, and exposure to others, with a refusal to embrace absolute correctness. Judgment, in a context of nihilism, does not secure reconciliation or closure but keeps open an existential space of plurality where action and responsibility can still be found.

It is not a weak fragility, but rather an ethical refusal of redemptive or totalizing narrative. That fragility is at stake in judgment in times of despair. One is the nihilistic withdrawal from judgment, so that there can be no moral value, as nothing has meaning to discern between. The other is the absolutist overcompensation: judgment is applied, but becomes rigid and punitive or redemptive, either making a moral delivery mechanism from suffering or a historical inevitability. But Arendt's reflective judgment resists both temptations: it is grounded in the willingness to look out upon the world with others, to think from the

standpoint of others without knowing the outcome.

Paul Ricœur's writings on memory, responsibility and forgiveness suggest the frailty of this form of judgment (Ricœur 2004). Judgment requires reconciling the imperative of acknowledging a wrong-doing with the hopelessness of being able to recount or repair past suffering. To practice responsible judgment is to name the wrong without claiming to repair it, to recognize the suffering victim without signaling them into a story of redemption. Where there is only despair, where there is only injury, judgment cannot redeem the past. Instead, it acknowledges, and thus preserves, the irreversibility of suffering that cannot be turned into necessity or sacrifice.

This is closer to Camus' insistence that revolt - in the sense of ethical refusal rather than rebellion - must avoid nihilistic indifference and ideological salvation (Camus 1955). This means that post theodicy, as much as post despair, the political judgement of the ethical entailment of an act must refuse to justify evil in the name of progress, nor

abandon an ethical response in the face of fragility. It is to the judgment, knowing itself to be finite, provisional, and morally exposed, that a political life that will continue to be political must commit itself.

Butler's analysis of precarity and grievability is also relevant here, whereby judgment is not only always concrete and represented, never abstract (Butler 2009), but who and what is seen as subject to judgment, as grievable, is always already shaped by normative assumptions, which distribute vulnerability asymmetrically. The political work of judgment in a world of mourning is to address hierarchies of recognition that render some injuries intolerable and others unrecognizable. Hope is not the promise of some future redemption but the labor of expanding the field of recognition without the pretense that recognition will redeem and repair what has been lost.

At the same time, however, judgment is intrinsic to action, because, as Arendt argues, political action 'takes place in a world in which consequences are unpredictable and irreversible' (Arendt 1958).

Acting in such a world is tantamount to exposing oneself to contingency, error and the possibility of unintended harm, and thus to the ontological conditions characteristic of despair. A post-redemptive account of judgment is neither avoidant of risk, nor does it seek to purify the morality of its actions. It asks for tempered heroism, for the courage to act, and vigilance against narratives which would add a post hoc legitimacy to the cost of such acts.

As philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy observes, sense is never fully ours, thereby marking the limit of sovereignty (Nancy 2000). Political judgment beyond despair does not find its grounds in sovereign certainty, but is reestablished as a shared and fragile web of signification in the performative scenes of disagreement and openness to difference. Judgment does not close debate; rather, it is what keeps the world in circulation and prevents despair from strengthening into silence.

In these perspectives judgment after despair emerges as:

- reflective rather than foundational

- plural rather than totalizing
- attentive rather than redemptive
- courageous yet ethically restrained
- finite yet indispensable

It does not restore coherence to a fractured world but it keeps the world as a site of shared responsibility, where speech and action and care can continue and proliferate even when meaning is scant and the future is uncertain.

Yet this fragile judgment also leaves open the question of how to draw together the ethical and political orientations (non-redemptive hope, coexistence with despair, fragile futurity, and reflective judgment) in an overarching philosophical account of meaning, politics, and life after injury.

This conclusion brings together what this article has articulated, and the contribution that it makes to debates on despair, hope and politics in the context of irreparable harm.

VIII. Conclusion: Scarcity of Hope, Fragility of Meaning, and the Ethics of Futurity

In this article, I have elaborated the movement between despair as ontological fracture, the gradual dissolution of the fabric of meaningfulness in the everyday, the shattering of redemptive narratives, and the post-redemptive horizon of a hope that admits no more than its weakest, most stringent, and most ethically restrained form. Neither have I sought to redeem redemption as a moral or political resource, nor to advance despair as the ultimate truth of human existence. Rather, it has sought to articulate the circumstances under which hope might be possible, where redemption is not an option, and where despair is neither accidental nor eliminable. What I call despair in this sense is not just a mood. It is a structural feature of selfhood, worldhood and futurity. It is a thinning of meaning in which the world fails to draw experience into a coherent horizon, and the future remains open but insufficiently habitable. It is not only a fractured existence. It is a fractured history sedimented with injury, vulnerability, precarity, and forms of violence that erode worlds slowly and

unevenly. This ordinary life after violence is neither the heroic recovery from violence nor survival after violence. It is the fragile continuation of life under conditions in which despair is normalized.

If modernity is a time without hope, this is not because hope is absent: it is simply that the master narratives of redemption, teleology, salvation, progress, emancipation, supplanted in humanistic modernity by a morality without any demand for redemption, have been rendered both ethically suspect and philosophically implausible. To refuse redemption is not nihilistic, but is to be vigilant against suffering transmuting into necessity or sacrifice. Therefore, one has to re-articulate hope without promising reconciliation or guaranteeing redemption of what has been lost one day through history or theology.

This article has argued for a non-redemptive account of hope one that does not overcome or contradict despair but co-exists with it and sustains responsibility, care, and fragile world-binding even in the face

of indeterminate meaning and irreparable suffering. Hope, in this sense, does not become optimism or project temporally, but it endures, attends, and persists relationally so that it is still possible when facing despair. It exists without denying the wounded world, without undertaking to convert despair into instrumentalized, moralistically motivated hope of any kind.

But fragile futurity is also the ethical and political space of hope and despair where futurity is neither assured in its redemptive force nor entirely out of reach. In this space, futurity is the minimal openness of time at every moment, where responsibility can be reassessed and resumed (and shared) in promise and forgiveness, in the attentive care of the other, in mourning and speech, in the sustaining and marking of worlds we cannot make whole again. This thought is not innocent. And it is not certain. It is necessary. It is not performed in the name of a promise that can be fulfilled, but in the name of fidelity owed to others, and to the world.

To judge politically in such a context is, by necessity,

to reflect, to pluralize, and to restrain ethically. It does not claim to redeem the past or to settle the indeterminate, but to keep open the space of plurality, to acknowledge suffering without reducing it to necessity. Particularly about judging after despair, it neither retreats to nihilism, nor returns to redemptive absolutism, but practices world-maintenance that does not need metaphysical legitimation.

Such a reading suggests that even as hope erodes, meaning is not lost, but is rather transformed, requiring that we settle for provisional, ethical, and shared worlds that remain contingent and imperfect. This means teleology, transcendence, or redemption can no longer guarantee meaning, but the immanent world must maintain it. Hope is represented in acts of care, sharing responsibility and enduring together, which do not deny the actuality of despair, nor give in to it; we continue living even though we know that certain things cannot be put right.

The account developed here does not offer a program of restoration or a vision of

reconciliation. It offers a philosophical orientation towards non-redemptive hope and fragile futurity as the ethical horizon of life after injury: a horizon in which despair remains an abiding possibility, the future lacks guarantee, and responsibility continues to be called for, not because the world is redeemed, but because it is still ours to inhabit, to care for, and to sustain with others, however precariously.

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