



Hope without Optimism (Page-Barbour Lectures)

By Terry Eagleton

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In his latest book, Terry Eagleton, one of the most celebrated intellects of our time, considers the least regarded of the virtues. His compelling meditation on hope begins with a firm rejection of the role of optimism in life's course. Like its close relative, pessimism, it is more a system of rationalization than a reliable lens on reality, reflecting the cast of one's temperament in place of true discernment. Eagleton turns then to hope, probing the meaning of this familiar but elusive word: Is it an emotion? How does it differ from desire? Does it fetishize the future? Finally, Eagleton broaches a new concept of tragic hope, in which this old virtue represents a strength that remains even after devastating loss has been confronted.

In a wide-ranging discussion that encompasses Shakespeare's *Lear*, Kierkegaard on despair, Aquinas, Wittgenstein, St. Augustine, Kant, Walter Benjamin's theory of history, and a long consideration of the prominent philosopher of hope, Ernst Bloch, Eagleton displays his masterful and highly creative fluency in literature, philosophy, theology, and political theory. *Hope without Optimism* is full of the customary wit and lucidity of this writer whose reputation rests not only on his pathbreaking ideas but on his ability to engage the reader in the urgent issues of life.

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Editorial Review

Review

In our predicament every direct optimism is by definition a fake--the only bearers of true hope are those who dare to confront the abyss we are approaching. *Hope without Optimism* is the best formula of the authentic religion that fits our dark times.

(Slavoj Žižek, author of *Living in the End Times*)

For years now, Eagleton's work has been 'must-read' across the board. There are theological tomes on hope but nothing that cuts so cleanly and incisively across the disciplines of literary theory, Marxist theory, politics, and theology as does this work. The final chapter is not only a brilliant piece of theology; it is also a very moving essay on what we have to hope for: if not much, still, not nothing. And the difference between something and nothing is the only difference that finally matters. Eagleton shows why that is so.

(Denys Turner, Yale University, author of *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God*)

Optimism is woefully pre-programmed. What we need, the Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton argues in his most recent book, *Hope without Optimism*, is something deeper and more reason-responsive. Enter hope.... If hope is to be more than a campaign theme or an idle fantasy, it requires an awareness of the darker aspects of life than optimists realize. But as Eagleton rightly argues, though "justice may not flourish in the end, a life devoted to the pursuit of it remains a creditable one."

(*Los Angeles Review of Books*)

This provocative book portrays hope as a virtue, a moral orientation that can be cultivated actively, a matter of will. The book also generates hope, validating Eagleton's conviction that hope is self-fulfilling.

(*Christian Century*)

[A] witty and insightful tour of hope's complicated linguistic terrain that carefully avoids proposing some once-and-for-all grand Theory of Hope.

(*Commonweal*)

This is a scholarly book in many ways, and requires a clear and concentrated mind. However, Eagleton is not given to academic jargon and, like any good teacher, inserts regular doses of humor and skeptical asides. In conclusion, he underscores the necessity of hope for radical social and political change.

(*Shelf Awareness*)

[About the Author](#)

Terry Eagleton is Distinguished Professor of Literature at the University of Lancaster. He is the author, most recently, of *Culture and the Death of God*.

Users Review

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Shawn Croll:

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