



Towards a Sociology of Hope: Looking Beyond

by Guido Gili and Emiliana Mangone, London, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2024, 164 pp., €160, ISBN 9781032600215

Alberto Gil

To cite this article: Alberto Gil (2025) Towards a Sociology of Hope: Looking Beyond, Church, Communication and Culture, 10:1, 184-186, DOI: [10.1080/23753234.2025.2481250](https://doi.org/10.1080/23753234.2025.2481250)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23753234.2025.2481250>



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 26 Apr 2025.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



BOOK REVIEW



OPEN ACCESS

Towards a Sociology of Hope: Looking Beyond, by Guido Gili and Emiliana Mangone, London, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2024, 164 pp., €160, ISBN 9781032600215

Hope is as essential as the air we breathe. How can this statement be made so definitively? Because it is a common experience that the meaning of life and existence is intrinsically linked to hope. Suicide often occurs when individuals see no way out, no light at the end of the tunnel, or when they recognize no meaning in life.

Hope is not only vital for the survival of individuals but also for the continued existence of cultures, whether they are young and full of potential or old and in decline. This opens up avenues for investigation in a specific sociology of hope, as developed in the book under discussion. The authors emphasize that it is not merely the hopeful perspectives of individuals that are of interest but rather the dynamics of hope among people in society. This sociological view underscores the relational dimension of hope, asserting that hope is also a social relationship.

From a sociological perspective, several questions arise that shape the structure of the book: What are the essential elements, fundamental forms, and dimensions that characterize hope? Who are the prophets that have historically embodied hope? Who are the subjects of hope, and what or whom do they hope for? Under what conditions or contexts is it easier (or more difficult) to nurture hope? Is there a connection between hope and transcendence?

Discussing hope in the 21st century demands even greater effort, as we cannot ignore the crises we are facing—ranging from pandemics and climate change to various wars, the threat of nuclear catastrophe, and the uncertainties surrounding artificial intelligence. Sociologically speaking, people tend to focus on their personal interests rather than engaging in collective projects, prioritizing individual survival over the common social good.

Sociology, as we know, does not provide solutions to crises, but like all human thought, it cannot remain merely descriptive and neutral. The authors propose a starting point in the title of their work: ‘Looking Beyond,’ adopting the rarely used concept of ‘possibility’ in this field, which reorients the discussion toward new approaches for sociological intelligence and imagination in the search for hopeful social projects.

To provide answers, the book embarks on a journey through six chapters, the last summarizing the study’s findings. These findings are characterized by a specific object of analysis and a unique perspective. This does not imply that the sociology of hope is a standalone approach or paradigm alongside others, but rather that it represents a viewpoint, a sensitivity to the human elements that can inform any sociological interpretation of contemporary society.

In outlining the key features of a sociology of hope, the book develops a particular sensitivity to hold together the scientific and humanistic dimensions of hope, focusing on the individual with their uniqueness and inherent relationality at the center of sociological discourse. It adopts both historical and contemporary perspectives, enriching the overall understanding of hope.

The main thesis of the book is, therefore, that hope is not merely an individual experience but something that occurs between people, highlighting its relational nature.

Hope is also a highly ambivalent concept; while it is often said that hope is the last thing to die, it is also a fragile attitude that can shatter at any moment.

Now, let's examine some statements from the individual chapters of this thought-provoking book to delve deeper into the stages that lead to these conclusions.

To explore the sociological vision of hope more deeply, it is essential to define the concept, as there are various perspectives from which this fundamental idea is understood (ch. 1). The authors examine these perspectives: hope as an emotion, a feeling, a personal disposition, a habitual action, a virtue, and a permanent anthropological structure. Against this backdrop, it is asserted that the sociological vision of hope does not focus on what occurs within individuals but rather on what transpires between individuals; it is a relational phenomenon.

Building on the ideas of classical sociologists such as Comte, Spencer, Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, the authors develop a concept of hope that encompasses the totality of the human experience, integrating thought, emotion, and action. Hope also

constitutes and therefore must be analyzed as a social fact, that is, as an expression of the ways of thinking, feeling and acting that characterize a community and which impose themselves on the individual conscience (1.3.2).

And so they summarise the fundamental dimensions of hope from the sociological perspective in the following way: condition, content and product of social relations (1.4). The emerging effect of the relationship is that it becomes easier to sustain hope together.

In the chapter on the relational universe of hope (ch. 2), the sociological concept of hope is explored in depth. Starting with hope as a social relationship, it is emphasized that there is still a noumenal, individual mode of being because we are not simply a part of society. Thus, a relationship can be observed between individual values and those of the society in which one lives. From this, points of identification (or lack thereof) and loyalty emerge; this is why we speak of different hierarchies of identification and varying hierarchies of hope, often linked to the different stages of each person's life.

One can also be considered a traitor in society if one distances oneself from it and its values because one does not share them; indeed, there may be a significant gap between one's own values and those of society. This leads to the discussion of:

- a) Common hopes: In society, there is solidarity and cooperation because goals are shared, allowing for the realization of common projects.
- b) Complementary hopes: One person's hope supports and enhances another's; this represents a form of relational good. Typical examples include the relationships between doctor and patient or between teacher and student.
- c) Conflictual hopes: What is a promise to some may be seen as betrayal by others. A typical case is the differing views on immigration. In the end, the sum of these interactions is zero or negative.
- d) Negotiated hopes: These are situations in which attempts are made to reach an agreement, such as in extreme cases of war. In these situations, it is important to know how to limit social egos to reach a compromise that benefits all.

In the chapter on the shapes and dimensions of hope (ch. 3), the authors start from the premise that we should not speak of 'hope' but rather 'hopes.' They distinguish between general and particular hopes, personal and collective hopes, short-term and long-term hopes, as well as realistic and utopian hopes.

As is typical in this book, everything is very well-structured and thoroughly documented.

I would like to highlight the idea that readers can find important insights in this chapter to overcome a widespread attitude: indifference. What happens when my initiatives and the hopes associated with them are not fulfilled? Often, one falls into an 'I-don't-care' attitude.

The authors advocate for a combination of humility and vision. Striving for a goal is good and important, but even more crucial is the ability to detach oneself from the

exclusivity of one's ideas and to constantly confront them with reality and feasibility. Hope does not always have to be the expectation of great change. In this sense, the authors speak of a 'subjective hope' that is not utopian but realistic.

Is hope directed toward abstract principles or primarily toward individuals (cf. ch. 4)? Just as in the case of faith (one always believes *someone*), hope is linked to 'bearers of hope.' These bearers are those who take the lead in processes of transition and historical innovation within specific sociopolitical and cultural contexts.

Essentially, it is about charismatic leaders, whom people look to for guidance and who inspire hope for a better future. These can come from the political and military sphere, such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Napoleon. They can also be heroes of science, technology and industry, such as Gutenberg, Hume, and Copernicus. But they can also appear as witnesses and Prophets, for example, Rosa Luxemburg and Pope John XXIII. However, following Max Scheller, the authors point out that these models can be both leaders (Führer) and corruptors (Verführer).

In my opinion, this aspect should be particularly emphasised because, depending on the culture or historical experience, these charismatic leaders can be very appealing or suspect, potentially leading entire generations into catastrophe. Therefore, the authors wisely remind us that every leader should be subjected to objective criteria of credibility to avoid manipulation. In this sense, Christianity is highlighted as a type of hope primarily aimed at promoting human well-being.

The correlation between bearers of hope and recipients of hope is also interesting; these recipients can be qualitatively characterized as those who are already satisfied but strive for more, those who know someone who can solve their problems, and finally, those who are engaged in a project and seek ways to realize their ideals.

In this context, I would like to emphasize the characteristics of this active component of hope from chapter 5: hope as action and practice. The authors provide an overview of social experiences that have been made in difficult times and under challenging conditions to restore hope to those directly affected and the surrounding social environment, such as voluntary work, social solidarity, and a positive neighbourhood. For each area and social space impacted by the crisis, experiences and projects are presented that have sought to respond creatively through various forms of association and organization of civil society.

Particularly helpful are the reflections on the transformative power of human cooperation in the various projects presented, where personal and collective hopes, as well as small and large hopes, are experienced and nurtured together.

In summary, it should be emphasized that this book is characterized by its systematic approach, precision, and originality. It is excellently documented, making it indispensable for anyone seeking to gain a thorough understanding of the social dimensions of hope.

Alberto Gil

School of Church Communications, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome, Italy

 a.gil@rhethos.de

Received 25 November 2024; Accepted 10 March 2025

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/23753234.2025.2481250>

