

HOPE AND FAITH

'Faith' and 'Hope' are feel-good words with a built-in warm, rosy glow. People who have faith and hope are held up for our admiration and emulation. We are encouraged to *be like them* – to believe and anticipate that, ultimately, *all will be well*.

Of course, faith *can* be good thing. It's good to have a little faith in those around us – to trust in others. Indeed, without at least some faith in your spouse, your bank manager, in other car drivers, and so on, modern life becomes impossible.

Hope, too, can be important – without at least some hope of success we are unlikely to bother even trying.

Still, I believe faith and hope are *vastly overrated*. We'd be better off prioritizing compassionate action grounded in gritty realism.

First off, faith and hope can be *misplaced*. Yes, placing our trust in others can be reasonable – I have good grounds for supposing my bank manager won't run off with all my money. But the parent who – lacking money to buy presents for his children himself – trusts in Santa to provide the gifts on Xmas day, is an irrational fool. A life lived in the hope of pie in the sky when you die is likely to be a life wasted.

Secondly, that warm, fuzzy, feel-good glow surrounding words like 'faith' and 'hope' can *make us vulnerable to the wiles of the snakeoil sellers*.

Spiritualists and mediums exploit vulnerable people by exploiting their faith and hope that loved ones are not gone forever but have merely 'passed over' to the other side: they're merely temporarily hidden behind a cosmic veil that the medium can helpfully penetrate, for a fee. The vulnerable poor are among those most easily exploited by bookies and lotteries selling them false hope. The sick are

similarly exploited by charlatans peddling their quack cures wrapped in the reassuring packaging of faith and hope. And of course cultists and religionists also typically rely on faith and hope to bring in new recruits.

Whenever you hear anyone using the words 'faith' and 'hope' in the same sentence, your bullshit detector should immediately switch on.

A third – perhaps the most serious – problem with faith and hope is that they can *prevent us from taking effective action ourselves*. Rather than getting up and doing something about their predicament, those encouraged to 'have a little faith' may just sit tight and hope and pray for the best.

Repeating mantras about 'faith' and 'hope' can be an effective way of sending people back to sleep when what they really need to do is rouse themselves and take action.

Don't place faith and hope at the top of your list of virtues, and be *very* wary of those who say you should.

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