

'Hope' vividly dissects a basic, universal truth

Hope is important to everyone. When you lose hope, nothing else matters.

In "Hope in the Age of Anxiety: A Guide to Understanding and Strengthening Our Most Important Virtue," Anthony Scioli and Henry Biller vividly capture and dissect one of the most salient and universal truths of human existence.

Although not a self-help book in the traditional sense, "Hope" offers insight and direction for those who are struggling with issues of meaning and hopelessness in their lives.

"The quest for hope is not limited to the sick or troubled but applies to every man, woman, and child who seeks a brighter tomorrow," the authors assert. "The relatively few who have abandoned hope appear more confused than liberated in their decision-making."

Scioli and Biller are both professors of clinical psychology — Scioli at Keene State College and Biller at the University of Rhode Island.

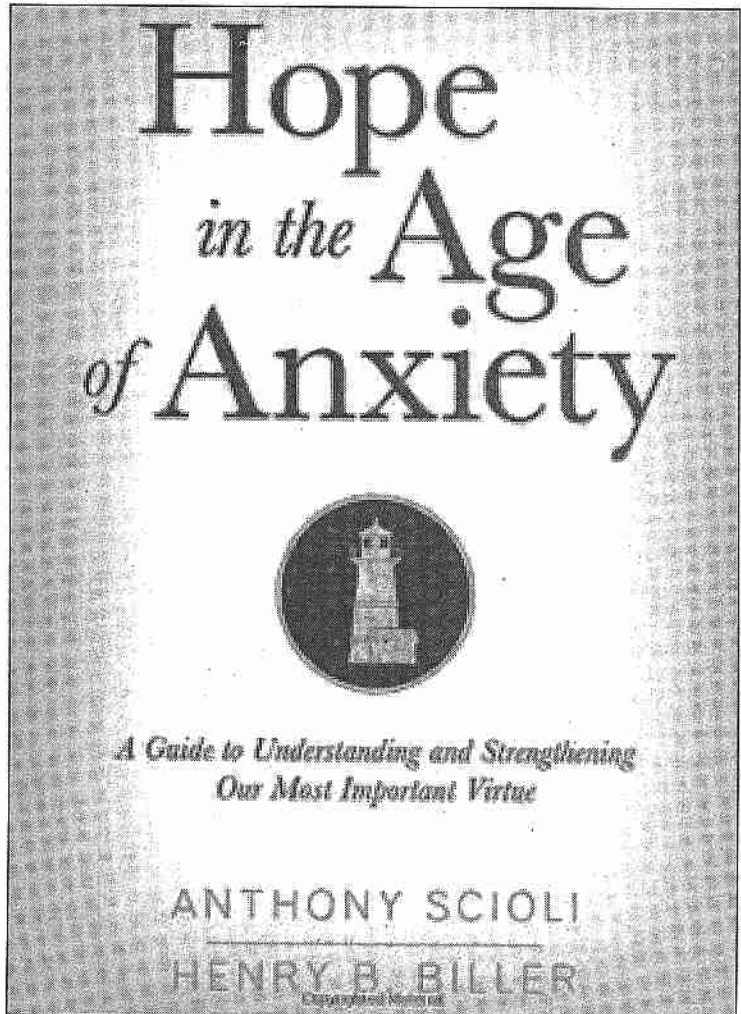
The authors argue that how people view hope, and the extent to which they perceive they have it, defines their approach to adversity and sets the stage for how they deal with circumstances that seem beyond their control. They infuse their work with interesting and illustrative examples that serve to bring their primary points to life in a powerful and poignant manner.

Hope is written in two parts. The first half of the book, "The Roots of Hope," is composed of eight chapters built around the notion that hope is essential to ultimate success in the human experience. "The Wings of Hope," which is made up of the last eight chapters of the book, explores the implications of the arguments made in the first section.

Scioli and Biller meticulously explain how hope is conceptualized and valued in different cultures; they are particularly interested in those that prize community over individuality. How a group of people view hope is closely related to their collective worldview. The authors also investigate the religious origins of hope across different cultures.

"We believe there are many different ways of experiencing and expressing faith," Scioli and Biller write. "When confronted by disaster, war, genocide, or any other form of evil, some see a world that has turned dark. For those who are spiritually minded, the only adequate response to human evil is unwavering faith and hope."

Moreover, the authors see faith as the framework for sustaining trust in life when all seems otherwise hopeless.



"Hope in the Age of Anxiety: A Guide to Understanding and Strengthening Our Most Important Virtue," by Anthony Scioli and Henry Biller. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 427 pages, \$29.95.

Scioli and Biller are very much at ease with the subject matter they have selected for this volume. Both demonstrate an extensive understanding of, and appreciation for, religion and philosophy as well as psychology. They interweave concepts and lines of reasoning that seem disparate at first, but the connections become readily apparent as the narrative proceeds.

"Some scholars have suggested that the tension between psychology and religion may reflect an underlying turf battle rather than a genuine difference in principle," they explain. "And yet many more people seek advice on personal and family matters from members of the clergy rather than from mental health professionals."

The authors offer several strategies for dealing with a wide variety of challenging situations in life that have the capacity to render human beings helpless and hopeless. In essence, they provide a roadmap for overcoming many of life's obstacles and recasting them in a more favorable light.

"But if there is a single, unifying theme in the experience of hopelessness, it is a sense of entrapment — the sense that one cannot escape one's own hellish demons or free oneself from the

bonds of a life gone awry," they write.

In one of their better chapters, the authors describe three specific approaches to overcoming hopelessness: cognitive therapy, healing relationships and spiritual practices. They contend that all three bases must be covered for an individual to develop — or regain — a sense that life is indeed worth living. Scioli and Biller have little patience for psychologists and others who believe that the spiritual aspects of life are not equal to the cognitive, emotional or behavioral dimensions.

With reference to depression and suicide, the authors offer a "safety plan" that entails creating a safer environment, building up support systems, creating a safer internal cognitive and emotional environment, and requesting a comprehensive treatment plan.

"Hope in the Age of Anxiety" is a good book; it is as accessible to the person on the street as it is to psychologists, philosophers and the clergy. And even if you are feeling fine at the moment, you might want to pick up a copy. You never know when you might need it.

— Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.