

Belief, faith, and acceptance

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Abstract Belief is a central focus of inquiry in the philosophy of religion and indeed in the field of religion itself. No one conception of belief is central in all these cases, and sometimes the term ‘belief’ is used where ‘faith’ or ‘acceptance’ would better express what is intended. This paper sketches the major concepts in the philosophy of religion that are expressed by these three terms. In doing so, it distinguishes propositional belief (belief *that*) from both objectual belief (believing something *to have a property*) and, more importantly, belief *in* (a trusting attitude that is illustrated by at least many paradigm cases of belief in God). Faith is shown to have a similar complexity, and even propositional faith divides into importantly different categories. Acceptance differs from both belief and faith in that at least one kind of acceptance is behavioral in a way neither of the other two elements is. Acceptance of a proposition, it is argued, does not entail believing it, nor does believing entail acceptance in any distinctive sense of the latter term. In characterizing these three notions (and related ones), the paper provides some basic materials important both for understanding a person’s religious position and for appraising its rationality. The nature of religious faith and some of the conditions for its rationality, including some deriving from elements of an ethics of belief, are explored in some detail.

Keywords Acceptance · Belief · Ethics of belief · Conviction · Defeasibility · Evidence · Faith · Hope · Justification · Probability · Rationality

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Belief and its objects

The concept of belief may well be basic in a sense implying that a standard philosophical analysis offering illuminating necessary and sufficient conditions is not possible.¹ I refer here to belief as instanced by a *person's* believing a proposition. We should set aside immediately the use of 'belief' in which it designates a *proposition* believed or hypothetically believed, as in some cases in which a person asks whether (for instance) there is any evidence for the belief that the universe has always existed.

From a structural and ontological point of view, there are several basic cases of belief. One is *propositional*: this is believing that *p*, where *p* is a proposition. Another is *objectual*: this is either (1) believing a thing to have a property, say the sky to be threatening, or (2) believing, *of* a thing, such as the sky that it has a property.² Neither (1) nor (2) entails believing any particular proposition. An important locution explicable in terms of these two is 'believing a person'. This is roughly a matter of believing certain propositions the person affirms, on the basis of the person's affirming the proposition(s) in question (perhaps the notion also includes—less commonly, to be sure—having an objectual belief the person conveys).

An important locution not explicable simply in terms of the first two is *believing in*. Believing in God—which might be called *attitudinal belief*—is not in general explicable in terms of propositional and objectual believing. Attitudinal belief is a central concept in the philosophy of religion and should not be assimilated to either of the first two kinds. (I will return to it below.)

What of *belief about*, as where someone is said to have a false belief about God's forgiveness? *Belief-about* locutions can function either objectually, especially where the believer is in perceptual contact with the object, or *topically*, as where we speak of someone's beliefs about the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia or even about whether one round square can be larger than another. The locutions are useful because we need a way of indicating the subject matter of cognition without commitment to the existence of its topical objects. In this spirit, atheists doing philosophical theology may be said to know what they are talking about even if atheism should be true.

It is well known that instances of propositional belief, unlike instances of propositional knowledge, are not by their very nature true. To say however, that belief is never truth-entailing in any sense would be a mistake. It is obviously false for beliefs of necessary truths. But consider objectual beliefs. We cannot believe the sky to be threatening unless there really *is* a sky *of* which we believe this. This illustrates the kind of existential truth entailed by the existence of objectual belief. To be sure, what one believes *of* a thing that exists may be mistaken; my point is that there is an important notion of belief which connects the believer with reality in a way that facilitates (though it does not entail) forming true beliefs about the object.

From a phenomenological point of view, many writers have contrasted occurrent with dispositional beliefs.³ The former are roughly beliefs in consciousness, such as my belief that there is printing before me, as opposed to beliefs one *has* that are stored in memory but not, at the time in question, manifested in consciousness in the sense that they or their

¹ I have argued for this point about belief in (1972). Further discussion of belief in relation to the philosophy of religion and pertinent to this paper is provided by Alston (2007).

² The difference between propositional and objectual beliefs is discussed in detail in Audi (2007) and in McKinsey (1991).

³ For an early treatment of the distinction between dispositional and occurrent beliefs see Goldman (1970). A detailed analysis of the distinction is provided in Audi (1994).

contents are before mind.⁴ This distinction is important; but it can cause trouble if taken to indicate *kinds* of belief, as opposed to two ways beliefs may be held: roughly, actively in mind as opposed to being just in memory.

From a psychological point of view, beliefs of any kind have many dimensions. Three in particular should be mentioned in relation to understanding religious beliefs: entrenchment, centrality, and intensity.

Entrenchment is a matter of how ‘rooted’ the belief is, where rootedness is understood in terms of how much is required to eliminate it. One counterforce is hostile evidence, directly encountered or presented by others. Another is memorial fading (though this is normal for, e.g. beliefs we ‘need’ only briefly, as in driving). For almost anyone, a license number is easily forgotten; almost none of us can forget our names. And if a plausible skeptic can get undergraduates to doubt that there is an external world, it would be a rare success that results in their doubting that they are hearing someone make the case. The belief-forming power of perception is a central epistemic fact. Perceptual beliefs tend to be deeply entrenched, if only for the duration of the sensory stimulation that grounds them.

Centrality is a matter of how influential the belief is in the person’s psychology, especially the belief system but also behavioral tendencies. What other beliefs rest on it? What pro or con attitudes does it underlie? What conduct does it tend to generate? Centrality so understood is often proportional to importance, in an intuitive sense involving relevance to guiding thought and action, and in a religious person some (but not all) religious beliefs will be both important and central.

Intensity is roughly a matter of the felt conviction—the sense of truth—that accompanies a belief when it is occurrent, say the degree of conviction that God has a plan for humanity, felt when this proposition is before the mind. Intensity is no doubt correlated with entrenchment, but they can vary independently. Both can be referred to under the common phrase ‘strength of belief’. (So can subjective probability; but strength in these other senses is a distinct variable and need not be accompanied by a corresponding degree of probability, as where the person ascribes a high probability to a proposition firmly believed.)

Maps provide a useful metaphor for the belief system. Our belief systems serve as our maps of reality. *Given* motivation, and intentions in particular, they determine our itineraries. A map alone pictures destinations, but does not incline us to go to them. And if we had motivation without a cognitive map, we would be at a loss to find our way. If we have objectual beliefs, we are in contact with reality, but this alone may not help us. Consider again believing the sky to be threatening. Having this belief guarantees that there is a sky but not that it is threatening. Verisimilitude in the object slot, one might say, guarantees nothing about the truth or even justification of the attribution in the predicate slot.

Religious belief

Suppose we now consider religious belief in the light of the conception of belief now outlined. We can see immediately that ‘religious belief’ can apply to the content notion, roughly

⁴ It is an interesting (and neglected) question what it *is* for an objectual belief to be dispositional versus occurrent. If, as I drive along, I continue to believe the road to be slippery, must I be seeing the road or otherwise perceptually aware of it? This seems doubtful, and it may make room for such a belief to be dispositional; but here what is in my memory need not be a proposition, as opposed to a predication (say *being slippery*). What is required for such a belief to be occurrent? A consciousness of the road and a thought of the predication *being slippery* would seem sufficient (where one does in fact believe the road to be slippery), but this is probably not the only way such a belief may be occurrent.

to an “article of faith,” or to the psychological notion, the holding of a belief. It can also designate propositional beliefs or attitudinal beliefs. Both have what might be called fiducial applications: each kind of ‘belief’-locution may designate a kind of faith. Indeed, faith is perhaps the most common referent of ‘belief in’, though the faith designated is not necessarily religious. To be sure, belief in, say wood nymphs may simply come to believing that there *are* such beings; but more commonly ‘belief in’ implies a positive attitude and not just existential belief.

If religious belief can be equivalent to religious faith, we would expect faith to be similar in dividing into propositional and non-propositional cases. It does. There is faith that God has a plan for humanity as well as faith in God. But is the latter objectual? It is true that we cannot properly speak of faith, *of* God, that God has a plan; but we can speak of faith, concerning God, that God has a plan. But could ‘concerning’ be just topical? It can be when used in a certain tone of voice, say sarcastically. The same holds for ‘belief in God’. But the typical uses of ‘belief in God’ presuppose that God is the object in question. The question is important for understanding the notion of a *religious believer*, sometimes abbreviated to ‘believer’. Those phrases are used in political philosophy and indeed in politics and everyday life. Their use by theists tends to presuppose God’s existence (or that of some deity). We need a way to characterize religious believers that does not presuppose this, and this can be done by appeal to the notion of a person’s having religious faith, quite apart from using the locution ‘believes in God’. Let us turn to that.

Religious believers are commonly taken to be persons of (some) religious faith. Is religious faith, then, a kind of belief? One might think that propositional faith, say faith that God has a plan for humanity, is simply a matter of believing this proposition. But that is not so. For one thing, a person could believe this but be sorry that it is so and regard it as a bad thing. Faith that p (for some proposition p), by contrast, implies having a positive attitude toward p ’s being the case. Belief by itself does not imply this (with the possible exception of a belief whose content, say that God has a plan *good* for humanity, implies a positive attitude of the same sort).

Given the positive attitudinal element of propositional faith, it may be that an adequately rich set of such fiducial attitudes (believing that God loves us, that God will resurrect us, and the like) would suffice for being a religious believer. There may, however, be an additional requirement: the presence of what the believer would express as attitudinal religious belief, say believing *in God*. If this is not required, we can at least see that sincere denial of such an attitude would be *inconsistent* with being a religious believer. There is no need to settle this here, however. My main point here is that faith does not reduce to belief conceived simply doxastically. This is important for many issues in the philosophy of religion, including the special question of whether a person may have direct voluntary control of belief-formation (may ‘believe at will,’ in one terminology). If more is required for propositional faith beyond what is needed for belief having the same propositional object, then more volitional power is needed for producing faith at will as opposed to just belief with the same content. Whether faith even entails belief and how its rationality conditions should be conceived are topics that remain.

Acceptance

Before we approach those questions, however, it is important to compare faith with acceptance. The reason is not only that religious believers are supposed to accept what they hold in faith; there is also a duality in the use of ‘accept’. On one use, acceptance entails belief;

on another, it does not. A recent paper by William P. Alston is a good focus for developing the contrast, particularly since he considers acceptance a good intuitive anchor for a kind of faith we both take to be important, a non-doxastic kind (to be characterized shortly) that does not entail believing the proposition that constitutes its content.

Alston says of this kind of acceptance,

I find the voluntary character of the act of acceptance to be the best way of giving an initial idea of it. The act of acceptance, unlike a state of belief, is the adoption, the taking on of a positive attitude toward a proposition. . . a mental act . . . But when we come to saying just what positive attitude to a proposition is adopted when one accepts it, we are back to the pervasive similarity of acceptance and belief. . . accepting that *p* is both a complex dispositional state markedly similar to believing that *p*, but distinguished from it by the fact that this state is voluntarily adopted by a mental act.⁵

One could, then, consider a theological proposition and then accept it and thereby pass into a state of acceptance of it that is an instance of non-doxastic faith. I propose to call the posited act *behavioral acceptance* and the resulting state *cognitive acceptance*. Alston gives a useful example:

Consider an army general . . . facing enemy forces . . . He needs to proceed on some assumption as to the disposition of those forces. His scouts give some information about this but not nearly enough to make any such assumption obviously true. . . He *accepts* the hypothesis that seems to him the most likely . . . He uses this as a basis for disposing his forces in the way that seems mostly likely to be effective, even though he is far from believing that this is the case. (*Ibid.*)

There are acts of acceptance, as the military example shows in noting the decision to use a hypothesis as a basis of action. But what is the ‘voluntary act’ whose result is entering a *cognitive* (truth-valued) state, such as belief that God has a plan for humanity? Granted that we can *cause* the formation of such states *indirectly*, say by exposing ourselves to certain external stimuli (or brain manipulation), can we do this directly, i.e., at will? I doubt it. Even if we can, is this what behavioral acceptance is?

If you tell me something controversial and I accept what you say, have I performed an act of forming a positive cognitive attitude, or does ‘accept’ here designate something like (1) my *not* resisting, say by asking for evidence, and (2) my cognitive system’s responding in my forming the appropriate attitude—which, in this case, would normally be belief? ‘He accepted what I said’, for instance normally implies his believing it. By contrast, our commanding general need not pass into a state of cognitive acceptance of the proposition in question. He may simply accept it *as a working assumption*, which is mainly a matter of deciding to act in certain ways.⁶ In this case, it is not an instance of willing to believe.

I believe, then, that behavioral acceptance is not a good candidate to yield a cognitive state, and cognitive acceptance is not a good candidate for the kind of non-doxastic faith both Alston and I consider important and insufficiently emphasized in the literature. I grant that some cases of propositional faith may also be cases of cognitive acceptance; but the latter typically implies belief.

The term ‘accept’, moreover, has a liability from the point of view of the philosophy of religion. Suppose it is taken to designate a kind of faith. References to acceptance often imply a contrast with rejection and will then wrongly suggest that forming the faith attitude

⁵ Alston, op. cit., ms. p. 11.

⁶ This issue is considered in detail in Audi (1999).

in question *requires* some voluntary act. But a person can have faith that p without having definitely accepted p . This is not to deny that in having propositional faith one may cognitively accept p . Still, propositional faith does not entail cognitive acceptance, and that in turn does not require behavioral acceptance.

Granted, if I have faith that God loves us, it would be at best misleading to say that I do *not* accept that proposition. This may be mainly because ‘do not accept’ strongly suggests having *considered* and rejected, or at least having considered and not come to believe, a proposition. There is, to be sure, the locution ‘accepts on faith’. But this does not imply behavioral acceptance; the beliefs or other cognitions in question may have arisen spontaneously in response to experiences, including prayers, in which their propositional objects simply appear as true.

We can also say, of things people accept, that they are *part* of their faith. In these cases ‘accept’ normally implies belief. It does not imply, however, that the cognitive attitudes in question have been voluntarily adopted or even adopted as a result of voluntary acts. Supposing, then, that there is a kind of cognitive acceptance that is equivalent to non-doxastic propositional faith, it may also be equivalent to what I call *fiducial faith*, a kind of trusting that I will shortly describe. But ‘fiducial faith’ and ‘trusting’ are in my judgment more appropriate, in part because (1) neither can be used to designate an act or even an event, (2) neither of the relevant fiducial attitudes must be formed as a *result* of a voluntary act (as at least typically holds in the scheme Alston is proposing), and (3) neither is as close to implying belief as is acceptance understood cognitively. Let us consider fiducial faith more closely.

Varieties of religious faith

Philosophers and many others addressing the relation of faith and reason have tended to think that although religious faith implies more than believing certain propositions—for instance, an attitude of trust—the notion of faith is nonetheless fundamentally *doxastic*, that is, belief-entailing. But consider faith that God loves humanity. Might this be a distinct kind of attitude? On my view, just as one can have faith that a friend will survive cancer, without either believing *or* disbelieving this, one can have such non-belief-entailing faith regarding religious propositions. Even when faith concerning divine action does not embody *belief* of the proposition in question, say that God has a plan for us—and hence is *non-doxastic*—it can play a central role in a person’s religious life.⁷ I will return to this kind of faith; it is a special case of the first of a number of kinds of faith we must briefly sort out before explicating any one kind.

There are at least seven different faith-locutions in English alone. I shall begin with the corresponding basic fiduciary notions. These seven are *propositional faith*, faith *that* something is so; *attitudinal faith*, faith *in* some being (or other entity, such as an institution); *creedal faith*, i.e., a religious faith, the kind one belongs to by virtue of commitment to its central tenets; *global faith*, the kind whose possession makes one a *person of faith* and can qualify one as religious provided that the content of the faith is appropriate; *doxastic faith*, illustrated by believing something ‘on faith’ (or, perhaps not quite equivalently, ‘in faith’); *acceptant faith*, referred to when someone is said to accept another person, or a claimed proposition or proposed action, ‘in good faith’ or, sometimes, ‘on faith’; and lastly, what we might call

⁷ I have elsewhere argued that non-doxastic faith can play such a role, e.g. in Audi (1993).

allegiant faith (or *loyalty faith*), which is roughly fidelity, as exemplified by ‘keeping faith’ with someone. Let us take these in turn.⁸

If I have faith that God loves humanity, I have a certain positive disposition toward the proposition that this is so. This disposition is something beyond hope. But the cognitive component of propositional faith, though stronger than the minimal cognitive element required for hoping, does not entail belief. Propositional theistic faith is, to be sure, incompatible with believing that God does *not* exist; but that is a different point. Because of the positive way in which propositional faith is more than hope, it is also incompatible with a pervasive or *dominating* doubt that God exists, though it can coexist with some degree of doubt or even with a tendency to have *moments* of deeply unsettling doubt.⁹

If I believe *in* God, and so have attitudinal faith, I presuppose certain propositions about God, the kind one might affirm as expressing tenets of one’s religious faith. Religious faith, whether propositional or attitudinal, implies certain attitudes, such as reverence and trust. But those attitudes, while they do imply a measure of conceptual sophistication (at least enough sophistication for comprehension of their objects) and also imply certain cognitive attitudes stronger than hope, do not entail belief that God exists.

When we come to the third case, that of *a* religious faith, we are in the abstract domain, at least regarding the main sense of this phrase. To have, or ‘be of’ a credal faith is chiefly to hold certain tenets and attitudes; and these may be specified in such a way that one could speak of a faith no longer held by anyone, or of a faith people ought to aspire to. *The* faith in question is, then, the appropriate set of propositions; *holding* it is constituted by having the appropriate attitudes toward (or connected with) them; and there are many *ways* to hold those attitudes and thereby to be *of* the faith in question.¹⁰

The fourth case, global faith, is the richest. The basic notion is that of being a person of faith—roughly (in the main use), of having *religious faith*—as opposed both to lacking faith and to having a *particular* religious faith, which implies holding certain doctrines (usually, institutionally embodied). People with their own views of God who do not fit any existing

⁸ I should note here that keeping faith with a person has both global and focal forms; if my relation with someone is dominated by a single obligation, keeping faith with that person may then be naturally considered just a matter of living up to that obligation (perhaps in a generous sense). For much valuable discussion of various kinds of faith see the special issue of *Faith and Philosophy* on the Nature of the Christian Faith, volume 7, no. 4 (1990). It is noteworthy that one author, Nicholas Wolterstorff, stresses not only the existence of different kinds of faith but also that “The question, ‘What is the nature of Christian faith?’ is . . . ill-formed. Both in the Scriptures and in the Christian tradition this single word ‘faith’ is used to pick out a number of somewhat different phenomena. Each of those has its own ‘nature.’” See Wolterstorff (1990), p. 397. For a different view see Adams (1989).

⁹ This is not to say, as Richard Creel does, following Tillich’s claim (which he quotes) that “Faith is the continuous tension between itself and the doubt within itself;” that a mature faith “grows out of [doubt] or over against it. Doubt is a *structural feature* of a healthy, mature religious faith, for we do not want to commit ourselves to that which is less than the absolute.” See Creel (1977) pp. 58–59; cf. pp. 80–81. I am not suggesting that *all* faith implies doubt, or even that non-doxastic faith has it as a ‘structural feature.’ One might claim that *whenever* we take (or are disposed to take) a proposition to have a probability lower than 1/2 we doubt it to some degree; but this seems too strong and misses some of the distinctive character of doubting. In any case, non-doxastic faith does not imply any disposition to attribute a probability or even a specific range of probabilities to its propositional object.

¹⁰ What I am calling a credal faith is the sort of thing that Keith Yandell calls a religion: “*a conceptual system that provides an interpretation of the world and the place of human beings in it, that rests on that interpretation an account of how life should be lived . . . and that expresses this interpretation in a set of . . . practices*” (1990). There is controversy over just what constitutes a religion, or a faith in the relevant sense; my concern is simply to note a use of ‘faith’ that covers the same, broadly doctrinal range. I have, however, added the words ‘or connected with’ to indicate that to be a person of a religious faith may require such non-cognitive attitudes as desires to do God’s will. These and other-non-cognitive attitudes are implied by ‘faith in’, which some might argue is an essential attitude for being a person of religious faith.

religion can be persons of faith, though they do not belong to any faith in particular. (There is indeed a secular notion of a person of faith, but I will not explore that interesting possibility here.)

The fifth case, doxastic faith, is faith that something is so, where this faith entails believing that it is so. Doxastic faith is often thought to imply the absence of evidence, as where someone says, “Do you expect me just to believe that on faith?” or “I believe the tenets of my religion on faith; it isn’t a matter of arguments”. The existence of doxastic faith does not imply anything whatever about how much evidence the person has or about how much there is in some objective sense. What is crucial is that doxastic faith—like other kinds of faith—is conceived as an attitude that is not simply a *response to evidence*, where that is taken to be above all formation of a cognitive attitude having a content and strength appropriate to the nature and amount of the evidence in question (indeed, it is not strictly necessary that faith be a response to evidence, or what is taken to be evidence, at all).¹¹

A person who believes on faith need not have any view about relevant evidence. One need not think that there *is* no evidence and may even think that there is much evidence, or may perhaps even take certain propositions to *be* excellent evidence.¹² But it might be possible to have doxastic faith while believing there is evidence, whether one has it or not. In part, doxastic faith may be called *faith* because of the positive *attitude* of the person toward the truth of the proposition. As to negative conditions, lack of psychological certainty of the proposition is a necessary condition—as it plainly is for fiducial faith—but that point is widely accepted. From the lack of psychological certainty implied by faith, one might be tempted to infer that whatever normative standards are implied by the ethics of belief do not apply to at least doxastic faith. This is not so. It may be true that insofar as there is an ethical responsibility to have evidence for one’s beliefs, the responsibility is greater in proportion to (among other things) the degree of one’s conviction; but it does not follow (and does not seem to me true) that there is no such responsibility where the degree of conviction is weak. Any belief we hold puts a proposition on our map of reality; any belief may in some situation determine some action.¹³

Acceptant faith can be a case of attitudinal faith, as where one trusts a person on faith (and in that way *believes in* the person). But often it is constituted by propositional faith, whether doxastic or not. To accept someone’s excuse in good faith is (typically) to accept it with faith that it is genuine. There may also be cases in which the acceptance is behavioral rather than cognitive. Perhaps one could accept a plan on faith in virtue of deciding to try it out open-mindedly and without depending on prior evidence of success (one might also lack the special positive attitude appropriate to attitudinal and propositional faith). Here the notion of faith may come in more as an indication of keeping faith with someone else than of having it.¹⁴

¹¹ I am of course distinguishing a response from a mere effect; faith could arise as a result of (exposure) to evidence: its nature, not its genesis, is at issue here, and the kind of faith in question is not a causal notion in any sense precluding any particular kind of cause—or at any rate, not mere causation by evidence.

¹² Here I differ with Basil Mitchell, who says that “Raziel Abelson is correctly reflecting ordinary usage when he remarks that “the expression ‘faith that . . .’ functions as a disclaimer of plausible evidence for (and sometimes even as an admission of strong evidence against) the proposition whose truth it asserts” (1973), p. 137.

¹³ For discussion of related aspects of the ethics, see Audi (2006).

¹⁴ We must then, qualify James Muyskens’ claim that “It is fidelity rather than trust that makes faith a virtue” (1985), p. 44. But does faith entail fidelity? Couldn’t a person (unfairly) have faith in someone but not be faithful to her? Cf. faithfulness. Rev 2:10.

As to acceptance, there are several kinds, two of which have been described, and the term is used so variously and with such elusiveness that we do better to focus instead on the behavioral and cognitive notions, and on the related conduct, that surely constitute the main raw material for understanding acceptance in the first place.¹⁵ Indeed, I think it will turn out that insofar as acceptance as a candidate for a kind of faith is distinct from belief, it will be at least roughly equivalent to the kind of non-doxastic faith I shall shortly explore.

When we come to fidelity (allegiant faith), we encounter a kind of faith that differs markedly from the other cases. To keep faith with someone is mainly to do, for the right reasons, the things the other person would expect. (The expectation might or might not be owing to the person's faith in one). I say 'would expect' because we can keep faith with people who in fact do not expect us to. So it was with Desdemona and Othello. We can also keep faith with someone *in* whom we have little or no faith and who may or may not have faith in us. Many marriages have exhibited this asymmetry. The notion of keeping faith is important for understanding religious commitment. But conceptually, the notion seems at least largely reducible to some combination of the others, whereas that does not appear to hold of any of the first four—propositional, attitudinal, credal, and global faiths. These are apparently the basic kinds of faith, at least among those figuring in non-technical English.

The relations among these kinds of faith are complex. On the assumption that faith *in* implies the existence of the entity in question, attitudinal faith is not implied by propositional faith, which lacks such existential import. Faith that the devil will be foiled does not imply his existence. But if—without inverted commas—we can truly say that someone has faith in the Savior, then the Savior exists.

It does seem, however, that attitudinal faith implies propositional faith concerning the object of the former. Could one have, for instance faith in God, but no faith that (say) God loves humanity? Faith in a person implies faith regarding a suitably wide and important range of actions and associated attitudes, emotions or other characteristics bearing on conduct. It might seem that *all* the propositional attitudes integral to attitudinal faith might be attitudes of (psychological) *certainty* towards the relevant propositions. A person's faith in God, for example might be surrounded by certainty that God will protect us, chasten us, and so on. Ordinarily, however, we do not speak of faith in a person, or even of belief in a person (which seems to allow for more in the way of certainty than attitudinal faith), on the part of someone who is certain of that person's every deed of the kind to be desired as part of the positive attitude that goes with faith. Perfect predictability, even in this specific realm, is an occasion for firm expectation, but not for faith.¹⁶

In the light of these points, it is plausible to hold, then, that every instance of attitudinal faith implies at least one instance of propositional faith regarding the same object. I also suggest that, as usually conceived, a person of faith will *have* faith of at least one of the two kinds relevant here: attitudinal and propositional faith. But even this weaker conception may be too strong, for special cases I will explore.

¹⁵ Difficulties surrounding the term 'acceptance' are detailed in my 'Doxastic Voluntarism and the Ethics of Belief,' cited above.

¹⁶ Robert Merrihew Adams has made a similar point in 'The Virtue of Faith,' in Adams, op. cit. Scott MacDonald takes exception to it, noting that certainty regarding the conduct of a spouse is compatible with faith in that person. If these are compatible, however, that does not entail perfect predictability. See MacDonald (1993). MacDonald's point is more plausible for believing in a person; as suggested in the text, this locution allows for more in the way of certainty than 'faith in'. Someone could, e.g. fanatically believe in a political leader. If genuine attitudinal faith can be fanatical, it would seem to be so in a different way, for instance in leading to fanatical devotion as opposed to certainty about what the being in question will do.

As to fidelity, in the sense of keeping faith with someone, people *of* faith in the main, religious sense of ‘faith’, must in certain ways *keep* faith: with God, or with others sharing their religion, or at least with some appropriate ideals. For those who hold that religious faith is a kind of relationship, this is a central requirement.¹⁷

I have already granted that in the literal sense, faith in a being entails its existence; but there is a psychological make-up that one could have even if the being one takes oneself to have faith in does not exist (and certainly propositional faith does not guarantee the truth of the proposition in question, nor the existence of any entity that proposition concerns¹⁸). Moreover, the rationality conditions for faith must be discussed independently of assuming the existence of the beings or entities in question, and I therefore set aside the relationship notion of faith as either aspirational—indicating how faith *should* occur in human life but not identifying a basic concept—or as conceptually stipulative. In any event, it is plain that even if being a person of faith entails having a kind of fidelity to one or more others, achieving this kind of fidelity is possible without having faith in its beneficiary. Many have *kept* faith with spouses *in* whom they themselves have *lost* faith.

Fiducial faith, trust, and belief

In arguing that there is a kind of faith that does not entail belief, I have not meant to deny important connections between the two. It is true, for instance that faith that God loves us implies a disposition to believe that God loves us, just as faith that a friend will recover from cancer implies a disposition to believe *that*. Moreover, these dispositions tend to be realized—i.e., manifested in the formation of the relevant belief—by perceptions of certain positive signs, such as a pervasive sense of God’s protecting one, or the discovery of the friend’s improvement. But even readily realized dispositions to believe are not, and do not entail, believing the propositions in question; and this is one among other reasons why propositional faith does not entail having the corresponding belief.

Indeed, at least in non-religious contexts the closer we come to having a belief that *p*, the less natural it is to speak of faith rather than simply of belief that *p*. If I *believe* a student will find a position, it would be misleading to say I have faith that this will occur, except perhaps as a way of indicating a lack of confidence. It is possible to have faith that something is so when we also believe it is, but propositional faith—faith that—is often non-doxastic. When it is, I call it *fiducial* faith.¹⁹

This term ‘fiducial’ goes with the notion of *trust*. Trust has been rightly considered an important element in faith. You cannot have faith in a person you do not trust. You could have a *relativized faith* here, say in the person *as* a money manager, but not faith simpliciter.

¹⁷ The relationship notion is explored in great detail by Sessions (1994).

¹⁸ This point ignores the content externalist view that the very cognition of a proposition might require the existence of certain entities it is about. I doubt that such a view can be shown to undermine the point made here; but even if it does, the needed qualification of my position does not affect anything major in this paper.

¹⁹ Cf. L. J. Cohen’s view that “Faith (in the everyday sense) that God exists is an example of belief, not acceptance,” where “to accept that *p* is to have or adopt a policy of claiming positing or postulating that *p* . . .” and “Belief that *p* on the other hand, is a disposition to feel it true that *p*, whether or not one goes along with the proposition as a premise.” See ‘Belief and Acceptance,’ (1989), p. 386. I reject the suggested assimilation of propositional faith to belief, but it seems to me that such faith *is* something like what Cohen (mistakenly, I think) says belief is. Joseph Runzo quite explicitly treats faith *that* as “basically equivalent to the cognitive state of belief” (1990, p. 44) though on other points his treatment of the distinction between propositional and attitudinal faith is consistent with my construal of it.

A close connection between faith and trust is also suggested by the locution ‘I trust that’; this implies faith, provided the subject matter and context are appropriate. Trusting that a colleague will be supportive in a major matter is not on a par with trusting that I have my car keys. The former is a candidate to be a kind of faith; the latter is unlikely to rise to that level of significance. Trusting that p does not, however, imply unqualifiedly believing p . The closer one comes to being altogether sure, or even to absence of any doubt, the less appropriate it is to say ‘I trust that’. Granted, it is also true of belief that it does not preclude *some* degree of doubt; but typically, if one believes a proposition, one does not doubt it.

What of Hebrews 11:1, however: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Does such ‘conviction’ entail belief, as opposed to a steadfast trusting that the thing in question is so? Must assurance wholly rule out doubt? The answer in both cases may be negative. Assurance is called for where doubt is to be overcome. Conviction is roughly *felt* cognition, but the cognition—especially if it is of what is ‘not seen’—may not have to be belief. There is little question, however, that doxastic faith is suggested by much of what follows in this chapter of Hebrews. Still, Paul’s overall emphasis in the context is on the power of global faith and on what is required to achieve that faith. Here a major role for fiducial faith as an element in global faith is not ruled out.

I do not mean to imply any account of Biblical faith. It is far too complex and varied to allow brief treatment. I am simply noting how what may appear incompatible with my view is in fact mainly consistent with at least one kind of Biblical faith.

One reason why (propositional) faith may seem to imply belief is that it is apparently incompatible with *disbelief*. If I believe that not- p , surely I cannot have faith that p , just as I cannot (at least normally) believe both that p and that not- p .²⁰ I *can* have such faith compatibly with an absence of any feeling of confidence regarding p , and even with a belief that p is not highly probable. But if I disbelieve p , I do not have faith that p . Moreover, although I need not (and probably cannot) have any sense of certitude regarding the proposition, there are limits to how much doubt I can feel toward it if I have faith that it is so. When the strength of doubt that p is true reaches a certain point, hope, but not faith, will likely be my attitude.

Hope that p may indeed be so desperate as to coexist with as much doubt as is possible consistently with not reaching unqualified belief that not- p . Faith may alternate with such doubt, but cannot coexist with any doubt sufficient to undermine a basically positive overall outlook, a kind of trusting that the desired state of affairs obtains. Hope also differs from faith in other ways. It does not imply a favorable attitude, as opposed to desire. I may find myself hoping that something will occur where I am ashamed of wanting it.²¹ The same holds for wishing, anticipating, wanting, yearning, and other attitudes. But if I do not have a favorable attitude toward something’s happening, I cannot have faith that it will. This is not to say that I cannot have any ambivalence whatever; but faith is, overall, a positive attitude.

To be sure, for some uses of ‘faith’ a contrast with belief or hope is inappropriate. Unqualified belief that God loves us may be an article of one’s *religious faith* in a common sense of that phrase—the creedal sense, in which one can lay out one’s religious faith by formulating its content. But if one’s cognitive attitude is unqualified belief that God loves us, it is (in everyday as opposed to theological and other special contexts) misleading to call it faith *that*

²⁰ I am distinguishing between separate beliefs of contradictories and beliefs of a contradiction. The case against the possibility of the former seems less strong than that against the possibility of the latter, but I leave its possibility open. Arguably we should, for similar reasons, leave open the possibility of having faith that p even while disbelieving it. It may be, however, that faith is *dominant* in a way belief is not, so that genuine faith that p rules out the kind of negative attitude toward p implicit in disbelieving it.

²¹ Religious hope might be said to be different; but imagine someone hoping that God will kill an enemy, though disapproving of the maliciously desired deed and aware that it would be most ungodly.

God does. The point is more easily grasped in a context in which no major philosophical issue is at stake. If, from previous experience (or indeed for whatever reason), I unqualifiedly believe that Frederica will meet a certain challenge, I will tend not to express my attitude by saying I have faith that she will.

The distinction between belief and propositional faith having the same content can be brought out further by noting two related contrasts. First, other things being equal, for believing that p as opposed to having faith that p , there is more tendency to be surprised upon discovering not- p to be the case. (Distress is another matter; and here the ‘investment’ often required for faith is highly pertinent.) Second, consider the relation between faith and the emotions. In Mark 4:40, Jesus says to those fearing a storm, “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” Even outside religious contexts, faith tends to eliminate or diminish fear and other negative emotions, such as anxiety, depression, and anger. Like hope, belief, even if it has the same content as fiducial faith, need not have this kind of effect, nor is belief required in an attitude that can have it. Belief that I will go through surgery with minimal discomfort and ultimate success is entirely compatible with high anxiety about the envisaged events; faith that I will achieve this tends to reduce such emotions and does not allow as much residual anxiety.

Might the sort of propositional faith I am talking about be a kind of tentative belief? I think not. In one sense, ‘tentative belief’ designates (roughly) belief which, whether strong or weak, is held with a self-conscious openness to reviewing the relevant grounds or content. This is not what propositional faith is, though that faith is compatible with such an attitude. In the other relevant sense, ‘tentative belief’ designates belief that is simply tentatively *held*, quite apart from whether there is the kind of self-conscious (often second-order) attitude just described. But propositional faith need not be held in this way, even when it is non-doxastic. The steadfastness of the attitude is not proportional to its cognitive strength measured on a spectrum that ranges from inking at one end to absolute confidence at the other.

Fiducial faith can be utterly steadfast and, in part because it is attitudinally positive, is commonly an important element in a person’s outlook (at least where it is to the effect, or presupposes, that God is sovereign in the universe). Weak belief—roughly the kind closer to inking than to certitude—though not steadfast, need not be tentative, but (even given the same content as fiducial faith) tends to play a less important part in the person’s outlook. I suggest, then, that the similarities between non-doxastic propositional faith as I have portrayed it and the corresponding beliefs, though significant, are consistent with treating such faith as distinctive in the ways I have described. But suppose that the only major difference between propositional faith that does, and propositional faith that does not, embody belief, should be one of confidence. That would be a significant difference. It would *at least* affect the standards of rationality and justification appropriate to the faith. For, other things being equal, the greater the confidence embodied in a cognitive attitude toward a proposition, the more is required for the rationality or justification of a person’s holding that attitude.

It is important to see that I am not suggesting that fiducial faith is in general preferable to doxastic faith or that the latter is not, for many cases, including many religious ones, preferable to the former. I consider the two kinds of faith complementary. Indeed, doxastic faith may be a natural aim of someone with fiducial faith. But if we do not countenance fiducial faith as sufficiently rich to constitute a kind of religious faith, our conception of religion and of the fulfillment of its ideals in human life is unduly narrow.

Moreover, fiducial faith may be what remains when certain people undergo intellectual change, as where they are distressed by the problem of evil and become less confident of some of the tenets of their religion. To say that if they lose confidence in certain propositions in a way that precludes unqualified belief of the tenets of their religion, then they cannot remain

religious is to exaggerate the importance of the doxastic side of religious commitment. For people in this plight, fiducial faith may be argued to be a position of some retreat; but it is not a position of surrender. Indeed, the position may be both steadfast and rational in the light of one's evidence. It may be in part because one's ethics of belief requires giving up unqualifiedly believing certain theistic propositions that fiducial faith emerges as a position in which one can maintain both intellectual confidence and religious commitment. And if fiducial faith does not represent an *ideal* for faith, it is nevertheless a position from which ideal faith can develop. This may be mainly a matter of increasing confidence in its propositional content.

The Bible and other major religious texts probably contain more passages in which faith is apparently conceived as doxastic than passages suggesting non-doxastic kinds. But I am not here doing theology or scriptural interpretation; I am suggesting that there are non-doxastic religiously significant attitudes deserving the name 'faith'. This should be obvious given how often (propositional) hope—which clearly does not entail belief (if it is even compatible with believing the proposition in question)—is taken to have religious significance.

The rationality of fiducial faith

Hope differs from belief in part because it can be rational to hope that something is so when it is not rational to believe it is. The contrast between hope and fiducial faith is less marked. It seems clear that one might have, and accept, such strong evidence of a disease's being fatal that although one could have faith that God has disposed things for the best in the end, one could not have faith, as distinct from desperate hope, that the patient will recover. Even fiducial faith cannot coexist with the strong doubt one would have.

To be sure, cases that tend to evoke serious doubt about an object of faith may constitute a 'trial of faith.'²² But the possibility that faith may survive the challenges posed by such doubts does not entail that it may amount to only a hope accompanied by the appropriate positive attitudes. One may pass the test by retaining the trusting attitude that goes with fiducial faith. This faith precludes having—as opposed to entertaining—extreme doubt regarding the desired outcome; but it does not require unqualifiedly believing that this outcome will occur. One may also pass a test of faith and emerge with greater confidence than one had before. This is one reason why the line between fiducial and doxastic faith is fluid. Indeed, one might pass from fiducial faith to acceptance combined with hope. One could resolve to act as if this is a world under God even if one only hopes this is so and regards the evidence as giving the proposition only very low probability. One's behavior would be largely like that of someone with fiducial faith, but it would not be true that one trusts that the world is under God; one's attitude would be only a hope.

If, as I have suggested, the rationality of faith that something will occur entails that of hoping for its occurrence, but not conversely, then it is natural to think that other things equal, the rationality of doxastic faith entails, but is not entailed by, that of fiducial faith with the same content. Why should this be? There is a sense in which belief is a commitment of the intellect, rather as intention is a commitment of the will. Hope entails no such commitment: it entails neither believing a proposition one hopes is true nor intending to do anything to bring about what is hoped for.²³ But, although, on the volitional side, fiducial faith may embody a will to act in a certain way and strong positive attitudes that allow passion and spiritual

²² Cf. Adams's discussion of a 'trial of faith' and related notions in Adams (1989).

²³ Hope may not entail intending to do anything to bring about the hoped for thing because one can think of nothing one can do that might help. But even if one can, one might think the chance of success is too slim, thus only hope, rather than intend, to do the things in question. A more interesting case is the one in which

commitment, it is, on the cognitive side, only a strong disposition of the intellect rather than an intellectual commitment to its propositional object.

To say that, other things being equal, less is required in the way of rational grounding for the propositional element in fiducial faith than for doxastic faith is not to say just what is required. One might be tempted to say that the grounds must make it more probable than not that the proposition is true (that is, there must be at least a better than fifty percent chance that it is true). But how would we determine the probability (or other epistemic status) of our basic grounds for the proposition in the first place? If some can do this, not everyone capable of rational faith has the intellectual sophistication to do it.²⁴ And can we really assign numbers in such a case with any reasonable confidence? I doubt that reasonable quantification of just this sort is possible for everyone capable of rational faith. Of course, if we may hold that we are, on balance, justified in believing that, for instance God is sovereign in the universe, *then* it is safe for us to say that the probability of this is better than even. If this were not so, we would not be warranted in holding that, for a given person and set of grounds, justification for *p* is superior to and precludes justification for *not-p*.

One way to consider the conditions for rational fiducial faith is to recall its close similarity to trusting that. How good ground does one need for rationally *trusting* that a friend will survive risky surgery? Must one's ground make this outcome more likely than not? I can see a case for that, but I leave the matter open. What of having rational *faith* that the friend will survive? Here it seems to me unclear that one needs grounds for believing survival more likely than not. The difference may be in part due to the sense in which faith is not mainly a response to evidence (and need not be so at all). Trust is not always so, but rational trust seems to be more closely tied to evidence than rational faith. In either case, it helps to keep in mind that rationality should be understood in contrast with irrationality. Whatever one might want to say about whether it is irrational to trust that the friend will survive without believing this more likely than not, it does not seem irrational to have the corresponding faith without that belief. Granted, it might be irrational to have that faith while (rationally) believing that survival is *less* likely than not, but that is a different point. Defeasibility of the rationality of attitudes by negative evidence does not entail that they must be positively grounded in a (rational) belief that such negative evidence is absent.²⁵

Conclusion

We have seen that there are importantly different kinds of belief, acceptance, and faith. Much discourse about religious belief and religious believers invites us to think that religious faith is simply a kind of belief, but it should now be clear why this is not so. Propositional faith need not be doxastic. Attitudinal faith—*belief in*—is also not a doxastic attitude, though it

Footnote 23 continued

one is ashamed of hoping for the outcome, hence does not intend to do things to bring it about. To be sure, if one hopes for something one is ashamed of, one might also form intentions against one's better judgment. This possibility is discussed in Audi (1990).

²⁴ Richard Swinburne's work illustrates at once the complexity of the task and its apparent achievability by people of normal intelligence who receive the requisite education in philosophical theology.

²⁵ The distinction in question here is between defeasibility and (positive) epistemic dependence or, in another terminology, between positive epistemic dependence—ground dependence, of a kind—and negative epistemic dependence, which is vulnerability to defeat given a certain kind of counter-evidence. This distinction is developed in Audi (2001), esp. pp. 25–26.

may embody beliefs. It is a complex attitude that has a substantival rather than a truth-valued object and has motivational as well as cognitive elements.

In understanding religious commitment in general and faith in particular, it is of great value to bring acceptance into the picture. A cognitive kind of acceptance is implied by propositional belief; a behavioral kind may be implicit in many sorts of full-blooded religious commitment. But cognitive acceptance, as implying belief of the accepted proposition, should not be taken to be necessary for propositional faith; and behavioral acceptance, as implying an act of accepting of the kind that contrasts with an act of rejecting, should not be considered an element in every kind of full-blooded religious commitment—some people of faith, unlike those who acquire faith by ‘rebirth’ with all its ardent affirmations, never perform such acts.

Positively, I have argued that faith must be understood in its own terms. It may, but need not, embody belief of the proposition in question or, where it is attitudinal, belief about its object. It may, but need not, be supported by or even arise as a result of, acts of acceptance. When propositional faith does not embody belief, but does embody a kind of trust, it is fiducial. When it has the right kind of content and a certain kind of place in the overall dispositions of its possessor, it is religious. When it is religious, as where its content is that this is a world under God, the conditions for its rationality are different from those for its doxastic counterpart. They are less strong, though not so weak as to fail to imply that meeting them is intellectually significant; nor is fiducial faith immune from the kinds of normative standards that are required for a sound ethics of belief. Evidence is relevant to fiducial faith and may be sought in support of it without doing any injustice to its fiduciary character; but the evidential support required for its rationality is less than that required for its doxastic counterpart. Whether the rationality conditions for theistic fiducial faith can be met, and how they bear on the problem of evil and on the challenge of contemporary philosophical naturalism are major questions that have not been answered here.²⁶ My aim here has been to clarify the problem of faith and reason in a way that facilitates dialogue and appraisal in the philosophy of religion.²⁷

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²⁶ The challenge posed by naturalism for the rationality of a theistic world view is examined at length in Audi, *Rationality and Religious Commitment* (in preparation), esp. ch. 8.

²⁷ For helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper I thank Kevin Hart and the participants in the Claremont Conference on the Ethics of Belief arranged by D. Z. Phillips and dedicated to his memory. The paper may owe more than is evident to his work and my conversations with him over several years beginning in the 1990s.

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