

Reason and Faith

Lara Buchak

The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology

Edited by William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino

Print Publication Date: Jun 2017 Subject: Religion, Theology and Philosophy of Religion

Online Publication Date: Jul 2017 DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199662241.013.34

Abstract and Keywords

Faith is a central attitude in Christian religious practice. The problem of faith and reason is the problem of reconciling religious faith with the standards for our belief-forming practices in general ('ordinary epistemic standards'). In order to see whether and when faith can be reconciled with ordinary epistemic standards, we first need to know what faith is. This chapter examines and catalogues views of propositional faith: faith that *p*. It is concerned with the epistemology of such faith: what cognitive attitudes such faith requires, what epistemic norms govern these attitudes, and whether Christian faith can ever adhere to them.

Keywords: Christian practice, epistemology, faith, propositional faith, reason, religious beliefs, religious faith

Introduction

FAITH is a central attitude in Christian religious practice. The Christian typically sees it as her moral duty to have one or more of the following: faith in God; faith that God exists; faith that God is good; faith in the elements of various creeds; and faith that what God tells her is true. *The problem of faith and reason* is the problem of reconciling religious faith with the standards for our belief-forming practices in general ('ordinary epistemic standards').

In order to see whether and when faith can be reconciled with ordinary epistemic standards, we first need to know what faith is. In this chapter, I will primarily examine views of propositional faith: faith that *p*. And I will primarily be concerned with the epistemology of such faith: what cognitive attitudes such faith requires, what epistemic norms govern these attitudes, and whether Christian faith can ever adhere to them.

There are two tasks for an account of rational faith. The first is to argue that it fits the 'data' we have about faith: descriptions of faith in scripture, intuitions about cases of having or lacking faith, linguistic practice regarding the term 'faith', the function of faith in religious and interpersonal practice, and feelings and attitudes associated with faith. The

Reason and Faith

second task is to show that faith in the relevant 'faith propositions' (the propositions that the Christian ought to have faith in) can sometimes meet our epistemic standards.

However, there is widespread disagreement both about what our ordinary epistemic standards actually are, and whether, according to these standards, belief in the faith propositions is rational. (I will use 'rational' to mean 'meets the epistemic standards', whether these standards are a matter of justification, warrant, intellectual virtue, reasonableness, or something else.) For our purposes, there are two important axes along which epistemologists disagree. The first is whether truth-directed reasons are enough for a rational subject to believe (or reject) the faith propositions. Some hold that arguments and evidence are enough to show that God exists, or that God does not exist; while others hold that arguments and evidence still leave open the question of God's existence. The second is whether rational beliefs can ever be sensitive to reasons that are non-truth-directed. Some hold (p. 47) that what an agent should believe is fully determined by truth-directed reasons. Others hold that non-truth-directed reasons can rationally make a difference to what a subject believes—or, indeed, *must* rationally make a difference to what a subject believes—when truth-directed reasons leave it underdetermined what she should believe.

Accounts of faith can be divided into three types, based on the cognitive attitude that faith requires. Some hold that faith that *p* requires belief that *p*, and I will call these doxastic accounts. Others hold that faith only requires a weaker belief-like attitude, such as acceptance, and I will call these weakly doxastic accounts. Finally, some accounts hold that the primary attitude involved in faith is something entirely different, such as hope or commitment to an action—I will call these non-doxastic or practical accounts. (Many accounts of all three types include the additional condition that faith requires a pro-attitude, such as desire, towards the truth of the proposition in question.)

Our taxonomy will be organized both according to the type of cognitive attitude that faith requires, and to the two epistemic axes mentioned. Before we begin, three caveats. First, I am primarily examining accounts of Christian faith, although most of these accounts are meant to apply to other cases of religious faith and cases of mundane faith as well. Second, any taxonomy will be imperfect, and several of these accounts have multiple possible interpretations; nonetheless, I hope to capture the essential divisions between the accounts. Finally, I am concentrating here on the rationality of faith in a static rather than dynamic sense: what it is to have faith in a proposition at a particular time, and how such faith is arrived at or justified at that time. Many accounts of faith add that faith is robust in the face of counterevidence, and although I will mention this feature in conjunction with several accounts, I do not have space to discuss it fully.

Doxastic Accounts of Faith: Truth-directed Epistemologies

We will first examine doxastic accounts of faith that all share a particular view in epistemology: that truth-directed reasons are conclusive in determining that a subject should believe (or not believe) the faith propositions.

Faith as Belief in Faith Propositions

The first of these views is fairly widespread: faith is just belief in the relevant faith propositions. Swinburne (1981) says that although the Fathers of the Council of Trent developed this view—he calls it the Thomistic view—it is widespread among Catholics, Protestants, and many outside Christianity. (One could add that faith is belief plus something else. For example, what Swinburne calls the Lutheran view holds that faith also requires that one trust God and commit oneself to God, though since my concern (p. 48) is in distinguishing views of faith by what they require epistemically, I will not distinguish these two views here.) That this view is widespread is illustrated by the fact that it is sometimes left implicit: some authors defend faith that God exists by arguing that it is rational to *believe* that God exists, without explicitly defining faith; and others reject faith that God exists by arguing that it is irrational to believe that God exists.

What theistic authors who hold that faith is just belief in faith propositions have in common is that they think all or some of us have good, objective epistemic reasons to believe in God. For example, they may hold that natural theology is successful and therefore that we can reason to God's existence on the basis of what we know about the world around us. Or they may hold that for those people who have had religious experiences, these experiences make it rational for their possessor to believe in God. Alternatively, atheistic authors who hold that faith is just belief in faith propositions may hold that no one has conclusive truth-directed reasons to believe in God—that is, that faith is always irrational.

Faith as Belief Formed via Testimony

Other accounts of faith that adhere to truth-directed epistemologies hold that faith is belief that is formed in a particular way, or that has a particular basis. One such account holds that faith is belief on the basis of testimony: one has faith in a person if one relies on that person's testimony in forming beliefs, and one has faith in a proposition if one believes that proposition on the basis of someone else's testimony. So, to have faith that p is to believe that p on the basis of testimony—as Anscombe puts it, to believe *someone* that p . Proponents of this account include, historically, Augustine (1892) and Locke (1996), and more recently, Anscombe (1979, 2008), Zagzebski (2012), and Dougherty (2014); furthermore, Aquinas (1946) discusses at least two senses of faith, one of which is deference to testimony. Versions of this account can be more or less restrictive about what counts as faith. They can hold that the testimony itself must come from God (or be believed to come from God) in order for the resultant attitude to properly count as faith; or alternatively

Reason and Faith

that believing based on testimony in general always counts as faith. Similarly, they can hold that the attitude is properly called faith only if the content of the attitude—the propositions in which one has faith—is religious in nature; or they can be more permissive.

According to these accounts, whether a particular instance of faith is rational will hinge on the circumstances under which it is rational to accept testimony more generally. In particular, it will hinge on whether belief formed via testimony is just an application of ordinary epistemic practices, with testimony playing no special role, or, if testimony is to be treated differently than other sources of belief, whether testimony is superior, inferior, or on a par with ordinary reasoning. Hume (1999) takes the view that believing via testimony is largely an application of our ordinary reasoning process (induction): in our experience, testimony is generally reliable, though it ought to be rejected when we have better (inductive) reason to suppose that it is false. Locke and Augustine distinguish between the epistemic status of testimony and other kinds of reasoning. Locke takes the view that it is better to understand truths through use of our (p. 49) own reason than to take someone else's word for it, and that deferring to others' opinions often prevents us from employing our own reason, so that testimony is an inferior source of knowledge. By contrast, Augustine holds that we might need to defer to someone else's opinion in order to understand a truth (we need to 'believe in order to understand'), so that testimony is often a necessary source of knowledge.

Faith as Belief Formed via a Sense of the Divine

A different view according to which faith is belief formed in a particular way claims that faith is belief formed on the basis of an innate faculty or 'divine sense'. To hold that such faith is rational is to hold that belief in religious propositions needs no articulable, publicly accessible justification. This position is associated historically with Calvin (1995) and contemporarily with Plantinga (1983, 2000).

To understand Plantinga's view, it is helpful to understand his epistemology. He is a foundationalist and an externalist. Foundationalists distinguish between basic beliefs—those that need no further justification, as long as there are no positive reasons to reject them or to worry about their source—and non-basic beliefs—those that are justified by other beliefs, in a chain which can eventually be traced to beliefs in the foundation. For example, beliefs formed on the basis of perception (e.g. that the cat is in front of me) may be basic and thus in need of no further justification, and beliefs inferred from this belief (e.g. that the cat is not in the garden) are justified insofar as they are correctly inferred from other justified beliefs. Externalists hold that what *makes* a belief justified can be external to the subject—some fact about the world or about the subject vis-à-vis the world, rather than some fact only about the subject himself. For example, what makes my basic belief justified is that my perceptual faculty is working correctly, regardless of whether I have good evidence for this fact or know precisely how perception works.

Reason and Faith

Foundationalists must answer the question of which beliefs are basic and why. Plantinga holds that a belief is basic if it was produced by a belief-forming process functioning properly in the environment in which it was designed to function. For example, vision is a reliable belief-forming process that generally functions properly in our world. Following Calvin, Plantinga claims that if the Christian story is true, then God has implanted in us a very particular reliable belief-forming process: a 'sense of the divine', which, when activated in the right circumstances—for example when we see something of great beauty—produces beliefs such as 'God loves me' and 'God created this'. These beliefs are thus basic and justified, and from them we can infer other propositions, such as that God exists.

Whether Plantinga is correct that beliefs formed in this way are rational depends on a number of factors. First, it depends on whether we indeed have a sense of the divine, which in turn depends on whether God in fact exists—Plantinga explicitly notes that the *rationality* of belief in God, according to his picture, depends on whether this belief is *true*, but argues that this poses no special problem. Second, it depends on whether we accept Plantinga's foundationalist, externalist epistemology. Finally, even if we do accept his epistemology, then although religious beliefs are basic, it will still be irrational to (p. 50) hold onto them if we have positive reason to think these beliefs are false ('defeaters') or special reason to think that the faculty that produced them was working incorrectly at the time ('underminers')—so the rationality of religious beliefs may still be undermined by, for example, the problem of evil or the problem of disagreement.

Faith as Believing in the Absence of Sufficient Justification

There is one final category of truth-directed epistemologists who have a doxastic view of faith: those who hold that truth-directed reasons are insufficient for belief in the faith propositions, and hold that faith, then, is a matter of believing in the faith propositions against what the evidence dictates or in the absence of sufficient justification. Or, if the account is generalized to include mundane cases of faith, they hold that faith is generally a matter of believing a proposition in the absence of sufficient evidence. In other words, they hold that faith fills the gap between evidence and belief, but that this gap ought not to be filled.

Many who hold this view of religious faith are detractors of religion—it seems to be a common view among the 'New Atheists'. However, one can hold this view and also hold that religious (or mundane) faith can be virtuous in some respects, if one thinks that faith should not be judged primarily by epistemic standards but instead by the standards of morality or practical rationality. For example, one might hold that it is noble or morally virtuous to believe in the innocence of one's friend despite all evidence to the contrary, even though doing so is not epistemically virtuous. Similarly, one might hold that there is something good about believing in God, even when it is epistemically irrational to do so.

Epistemological Issues

Since all of these accounts hold that truth-directed reasons alone dictate the doxastic attitude an individual should take towards the faith propositions, the primary epistemological questions for these accounts concern what these reasons actually say about the faith propositions. This is not the place to wade into this debate, so I refer the reader to the myriad discussions of reasons and arguments for God's existence, reasons and arguments against, and reasons that we ought to suspend judgement.

Doxastic Accounts of Faith: Broader Epistemologies

Some accounts hold that faith that p requires belief that p , but that rational belief is sometimes responsive to non-truth-directed reasons when truth-directed reasons are not decisive—and, in particular, that this holds when it comes to belief in faith (p. 51) propositions. These accounts locate faith as the attitude that fills the gap between evidence and religious belief. To show that such faith is rational, they must explain why and how non-truth-directed reasons can rationally affect what an individual believes. They must also explain how non-truth-directed reasons can psychologically cause belief, since our ordinary picture of belief is one in which beliefs are resistant to being formed for reasons other than that we think them true.

Faith as Belief Fostered by the Will

We begin with Aquinas's (1946) second account of faith. (As mentioned, Aquinas gives an account of at least two senses of faith, the other being belief on the basis of testimony.) In order to understand how Aquinas thinks about religious beliefs, we must understand how he thinks beliefs are formed and justified generally (I follow Stump's 2003a, 2003b interpretation). To understand this, it is important to see how Aquinas understands the will. The will is not an entity that actively makes choices, but rather an inclination for goodness: when the will apprehends something as good, the will cannot help but will it, just as a plant cannot help but be drawn to the sunlight. Thus, a person acts 'under the guise of the good'—he does things that he sees as good under some description—and a person cannot help but see happiness in this life and God in the next life as good.

Aquinas also discusses the relationship between the intellect and the will. The intellect is typically what judges a course of action as good, and it then presents this course of action to the will as good. The will can direct the intellect—direct it to adopt or reject a belief, or to think about certain things or avoid thinking about others—but it cannot direct the intellect against the way it normally works—it cannot, for example, direct the intellect to adopt a belief it knows to be false. Given this picture, belief can be brought about in two different ways: if epistemic considerations are decisive, belief can be brought about by the intellect alone; and if they are not, belief can be brought about by considerations that move the will. Belief brought about by the will is psychologically possible because the will

Reason and Faith

produces beliefs in a way that is not directly under our control, and because the will can only work in accordance with the intellect.

Aquinas does hold that there is epistemic justification for the belief that God exists. However, he also holds that many people are not in a position to know this, and thus believe by faith instead. To have faith is to assent to the faith propositions in the second way mentioned above: a person who has faith assents to these propositions on the basis of considerations that move the will, namely that believing these propositions presents itself to the will as good. In addition, a person who has *formed* or *salvific* faith (the faith of the Christian, rather than the faith of the devils) must be moved to assent to the propositions by the right motivations—by a hunger for God’s goodness, rather than by a love of power.

Aquinas additionally argues that faith is rational, but not because believing propositions on the basis of the will rather than the intellect is generally rational, but because the faith propositions themselves entail that believing in this way is in fact (p. 52) truth-directed—his argument for this is complex, and rests on the connection between being and goodness. (For this reason, we might place this account of faith in the previous section, since it endorses believing for what turn out to be truth-directed reasons, but since the path is roundabout, I place it here.) Although non-truth-directed reasons arising from the will do not generally make a belief rational, in the particular case of the faith propositions, the reasons arising from the will *are* (surprisingly) truth-directed.

Faith as Doxastic Venture

Doxastic venture views hold that the will can take over when reason is not decisive, but they typically see the will as a mechanism for choice rather than a passive response to goodness. Perhaps the most famous doxastic venture view is that of Pascal (1910) in his famous Wager. Pascal argues that if reason cannot decide the question of whether God exists, then we are *rationally required*—from the point of view of practical rationality—to believe in God, since a decision-theoretic analysis shows that believing in God is better than not believing in God or remaining agnostic. Pascal gives three separate decision-theoretic arguments, but the most famous one says that since believing in God yields ‘an infinity of an infinitely happy life’ if God in fact exists, then believing in God has a higher expected value (infinite expected value) than not doing so (finite expected value). Belief in God is also morally permissible, since by believing, one will attain moral virtues, whether or not God exists.

Pascal appears to hold that belief in God on the basis of the pragmatic considerations adduced by the Wager is psychologically possible. This is because he seems to see unbelief as primarily caused by sin: in response to the worry that we cannot believe in God at will, he exhorts us to have Masses said and take holy water so that we may remove unbelief. Adams (1987a) makes a similar point about an individual involved in the sin of unbelief (lacking faith), though he concentrates on Christians who resist believing and acting on some truth that God is telling them. He argues that unbelief is a sin precisely because this resistance is the result of an emotional failing, for example, wanting control. So, for

Reason and Faith

Pascal and Adams, rather than faith filling the gap between evidence and belief, a lack of faith creates a gap where there need not be one. Thus, the will is primarily involved in *removing irrational unbelief*. This explains both why belief in God is psychologically possible and why it is epistemically rational.

James (2005) holds that the will can play a role in belief when epistemic considerations are not decisive, and that it is the believer's situation that makes relying on the will rational. By the will, James primarily means non-epistemic considerations that influence belief (our 'passional nature'), though he clarifies that these considerations come *before* the intellect has examined all of the evidence—this is why taking these considerations into account is psychologically possible. When epistemic considerations are not decisive, and when the decision of whether to believe something or not is *genuine*—one cannot avoid choosing between two or more hypotheses that are each plausible and there is a great deal at stake in the choice—then the will not only may, but *must* decide (p. 53) whether to believe something, believe its negation, or suspend judgement. One particular consideration that James singles out as not determined by reason alone is how much evidence one needs to believe a proposition, which he holds is determined by how our passional nature weighs the goal of knowing truth against the goal of avoiding error. A focus of James's argument is that there are practical consequences associated with failing to believe something that is true, just as there are practical consequences associated with believing something that is false.

Bishop (2007) takes James's insights, plus the idea that faith essentially involves a risky act, as his jumping-off point in his doxastic venture view of faith. When we lack adequate evidential support for both a proposition and its negation, we are sometimes entitled nonetheless to believe the proposition and to give it full weight in our practical reasoning. When these three conditions hold—we recognize that we lack adequate evidential support for a proposition, we give the proposition full weight in our practical reasoning, and we do so while believing the proposition to be true—then we have faith in the proposition.

Bishop's epistemology largely follows James's. One is epistemically entitled (though not required) to have faith that *p* if—and because—whether to take *p* as true in one's practical reasoning is essentially undecidable by the evidence alone *and* whether to take *p* as true in one's practical reasoning is a genuine choice (in James's sense). Bishop calls principles about what counts as evidence *framing principles*, and he calls framing principles that concern the most fundamental evidential connections *highest-order* framing principles. Framing principles present genuine options, and highest-order framing principles are essentially undecidable by the evidence alone. Furthermore, some of the faith propositions are highest-order framing principles. (To see this, notice that how to take the claims of the Bible into account in forming our beliefs about the world depends on whether we think these claims were inspired by God.) Thus, faith in these propositions meets the criteria for epistemically rational faith.

A final view in this vein comes from a popular interpretation of Kierkegaard's (1983) pseudonym Johannes de Silentio: religious faith requires believing something that is irra-

Reason and Faith

tional or absurd, and yet religious faith is the highest possible thing a person can aspire to. Similarly for Kierkegaard's (1992) pseudonym Johannes Climacus, as Adams (1987b) understands him: faith requires total commitment to a belief, the kind of commitment that could not in principle be arrived at rationally via evidence, precisely because reason always leaves room for some doubt or future revision. (Whether faith counts as merely filling the gaps in the evidence, or believing something that positively ought to be disbelieved, depends on how we are to interpret the status of the objective evidence.) Here, it is not that faith ends up epistemically justified, but that epistemic justification is the wrong criterion to apply to faith, since faith is something higher.

Bishop's model captures the idea that faith involves a risk. Since the person who has faith that p gives p full weight in his practical reasoning while recognizing that p is not fully supported by evidence, he will act in a way that seems less than fully justified. Similarly, even though other doxastic venture models might not explicitly mention action, insofar as every belief one holds has the potential to issue in action (see (p. 54) Clifford 2005), they seem to recommend acting in a way that one is not (at least initially) fully confident in on the basis of epistemic reasons alone. And, since action is evaluable according to practical and moral standards, we can, in addition to asking whether having faith is epistemically rational, ask whether and when having faith is practically rational or morally laudable.

Faith and Theory Choice

Authors who take scientific inquiry as a model for individual epistemology echo Bishop's point that highest-order framing principles are generally underdetermined by evidence. Van Fraassen (2002) and Murphy (1990) each draw on an account of how science progresses—Kuhn's (1970) account and Lakatos's (1970) account, respectively—to explain why individuals might believe faith propositions. Van Fraassen's aim is not to defend religious beliefs, so his mention of them is more in passing, but Murphy's aim is to defend religious beliefs. (Neither explicitly gives an account of faith, but since both give accounts of why we might rationally believe faith propositions without decisive evidence, they are worth including in this discussion.)

Kuhn and Lakatos reject the naïve view that science is a discipline in which progress is primarily linear and a growing body of knowledge is continually added to. Instead, they hold that scientific progress is a battle between successive (Kuhn) or simultaneous (Lakatos) paradigms. A paradigm involves high-level concepts, laws, theories, and instrumentation, on the basis of which data are interpreted; in addition, what count as data are partially determined by which paradigm one accepts. According to Kuhn, which paradigm a scientist accepts is a matter of non-evidential factors: scientists may begin in one paradigm as a matter of historical accident, maintain it dogmatically, and change paradigms when a crisis arises (for example, an inability to solve a persistent problem). Lakatos sees science as a series of competing rather than successive paradigms, and holds that there are often objective epistemic reasons for choosing one paradigm over another; namely

Reason and Faith

that one is more *progressive*: it has a better record of modifying itself in response to challenges in such a way that it predicts novel facts.

Van Fraassen and Murphy take the view that individual belief-formation is analogous to science, and they hold that faith propositions are components of high-level research programmes that one might adopt or reject. Van Fraassen holds that one will change 'individual' paradigms (undergo a conversion to or away from religious beliefs) through experiencing a crisis in one's current beliefs, where emotion is the primary factor that resolves the crisis. Murphy holds that such a change can be driven more by epistemic factors: one changes individual paradigms when evidence shows that one's current paradigm is less progressive than an alternative. (Notice that since one always has some reason to continue working in one's current paradigm rather than switching, these views provide a ready-made answer to why religious beliefs, once adopted, should be somewhat robust in the face of counterevidence.)

(p. 55) In combination with Bishop's view that religious faith involves taking a stance on highest-order framing principles, we can use these authors' insights to fill in particular reasons that one would adopt the faith propositions. On van Fraassen's account, the religious person might find herself adopting faith because of an emotional upheaval brought about by incongruences and failures in her previous belief system; and on Murphy's account, the religious person might hold the view that a particular set of faith propositions constitutes a progressive research programme. When these form the core of her thinking, she tends to do well at understanding the world around her and predicting how things will go, and when they do not, her understanding of the world around her is filled with ad hoc hypotheses and not much predictive power.

Epistemological Issues

The accounts of faith in this section will appeal to those who hold that although evidence for religious propositions is not decisive, believing religious propositions can nonetheless be rational. However, these accounts raise additional questions.

First, can it be epistemically permissible to believe a proposition partially for non-truth-directed reasons? If we think that belief aims at truth, then why should we allow belief to be influenced by something other than truth? To put the worry metaphorically: if responding to evidential considerations gets us closer to the goal of attaining truth, does responding to non-evidential considerations at best move us orthogonally to the goal, and at worst move us away from the goal? These accounts also raise an additional question: is it even *possible* to believe for reasons one recognizes to be non-truth-directed? (Can we intentionally move in any other direction than towards the goal?)

The accounts that we have seen answer these questions in different ways. Aquinas holds that we can be pulled by both our intellect and our will, and that being so pulled is largely a matter of how these two faculties function rather than conscious choice. Our intellect can only pull us towards the goal, and while our will is not so restricted, in the particular case of belief in God, it turns out that the pull that we feel towards believing the faith

Reason and Faith

propositions is actually a pull towards truth. Pascal and Adams hold that we can only indirectly be moved by our will—by non-truth-directed reasons—but that in the case of the faith propositions, to subject ourselves to the indirect influence of our wills is to release ourselves from the forces that pull us away from truth.

James, Bishop, van Fraassen, and Murphy all hold that the picture of responding to evidence as responding only to truth-directed reasons is mistaken, and that if we are to believe anything at all, we must adopt certain principles before forming any conclusions about what the evidence suggests. Thus, we must first locate ourselves somewhere and then try to aim at truth from that point. While what determines our location can be more or less intentional—it could be a historical accident, a matter of passion or emotion, or a conscious move from a different starting point—we cannot help but start from a location if we are going to engage in the project of truth-seeking in the first place. So, (p. 56) there will be nothing epistemically objectionable about starting from some particular point, although given this fact, the choice of starting points is also open to moral and prudential evaluation. Murphy's extra-evidential factor is perhaps the only factor that turns out to be, in the end, epistemic, though even on her view one still needs to start somewhere.

So, the distinction that Aquinas, Pascal, and Adams draw between religious faith and wishful thinking is that faith allows us to have what are in fact justified religious beliefs; and the distinction that James, Bishop, van Fraassen, and Murphy draw between the two is that religious beliefs are of the high-level type that evidence cannot, or cannot directly, settle.

Weakly Doxastic Accounts of Faith

Weakly doxastic accounts hold that faith requires adopting a belief-like attitude—a positive cognitive stance—but an attitude that is less committal than belief. This is sometimes put by saying that faith is a *sub-doxastic venture*. These accounts are partially motivated by the thought that though belief is not under direct voluntary control, closely related cognitive attitudes are. Since an individual's evidence may not decide whether the faith propositions are true, and belief that *p* cannot coexist with belief that the evidence does not decide whether *p*, but faith requires a positive cognitive stance towards the faith propositions, then the required cognitive stance must not be belief. All of the accounts in this section identify the cognitive stance that faith requires to be something weaker than belief; however, all but Schellenberg's also hold that if the individual *does* believe, then that is sufficient for the 'cognitive stance' requirement of the account: what is required for faith is that one have belief *or* the weaker attitude identified.

Golding (1990), and Buckareff (2005) following him, note that being religious entails pursuing a good relationship with God. Thus, the required cognitive stance for faith is *pragmatic assumption* that God exists for the purpose of pursuing a good relationship with God. Pragmatically assuming that *p* is only rational if one believes that there is at least some chance that *p* (presumably, a very low epistemic bar to meet in the case of pragmatically assuming that God exists). In addition, as long as the goal is not immoral, then prag-

Reason and Faith

matically assuming that p for the sake of some goal is morally permissible; and as long as pragmatically assuming that p is instrumental in achieving the desired goal, then doing so is practically rational.

Alston (1996) identifies a slightly different attitude as the required cognitive stance for faith: Cohen's (1992) notion of *acceptance*. Acceptance differs from belief in two crucial respects: acceptance that p does not require that one have a high degree of felt certainty that p ; and acceptance is under our direct voluntary control. Like belief that p , acceptance that p requires that one use p as a premise in theoretical and practical reasoning. Alston's full analysis of faith is that faith involves a weak epistemic position with respect to p (this may not be required, though it is a feature of central cases of faith), a pro-attitude towards p (e.g. one wants p to be true), and a cognitive attitude towards p which could either be belief that p or acceptance that p .

(p. 57) The cognitive stance that Schellenberg (2005, 2014) identifies is *imaginative assent*. One imaginatively assents to p if one deliberately represents the world to oneself as including the truth of p ; if one intends to be mentally guided by this picture of the world on an ongoing basis; and if one follows through and is so guided. Faith that p requires that one have a pro-attitude towards p , that one does not believe not- p , and that one imaginatively assent to p . (For Schellenberg, faith that p is incompatible with belief that p .)

Howard-Snyder's (2013) account shares features with the above accounts, but takes a broader view about what the relevant cognitive stance is. He holds that faith that p requires a positive evaluation of p , a positive conative orientation towards p , a positive cognitive stance towards p , and resilience to new counterevidence to p . Also, for each of the first three elements, there is no single attitude that is required; for example, the positive cognitive stance can be belief that p , acceptance that p , or assumption that p .

All of the above, except for Schellenberg, hold that propositional faith can be realized in a number of different ways, since the cognitive stance involved in a particular case of faith can be belief or something weaker. Audi (2011), on the other hand, allows that a person with faith can either believe or take a weaker cognitive stance, but that these are two different kinds of propositional faith—doxastic faith and fiducial faith. Both require a positive evaluation of their object. Audi adds that faith tends to eliminate negative emotions such as fear.

It is easy to see how faith is epistemically permissible according to weakly doxastic accounts of faith, since these accounts do not require that one believe the propositions in question. And even though they require a positive cognitive attitude of some sort, the standards governing this attitude do not seem primarily to be epistemic in nature, save for the weak standard that the proposition must have some chance of being true, or alternatively that one does not believe its negation. However, we might hope to identify stronger epistemic standards concerning these attitudes, so that the norms governing them are not mostly practical or moral in nature. For example, is it not better to assume or accept, of two propositions, the one that is more likely to be true, given one's evi-

dence? Might it be epistemically superior not to accept any propositions at all, if one can live one's epistemic life without doing so? Thus, the primary epistemological question for these accounts is what epistemic standards govern cognitive states such as pragmatic assumption, acceptance, or imaginative assent—and whether the faith propositions meet these standards, given any particular subject's evidence.

Practical Accounts of Faith

Some authors hold that faith does not primarily involve a cognitive attitude at all, but rather involves a commitment, choice, or action. Faith, however, may rest on cognitive attitudes in the sense that it would be irrational or incoherent to have faith without some particular beliefs. Thus, some of these accounts give rise to an epistemological question of their own: even if faith does not require anything like belief, is it ever rational to have the beliefs that justify the attitude that faith does require?

(p. 58) Faith as Acting without Believing

Pojman (1986) elucidates a view of faith as *profound hope*. Hope that p requires belief in the possibility of p ; a lack of certainty that p ; a desire for p ; and a disposition to do what one can to bring about p . *Profound hope* requires a particularly intense desire for p and a willingness to take great risks in order to bring about p . Religious faith involves profound hope in the faith propositions.

This account shares some features in common with Swinburne's (1981) *pragmatist faith*, which consists in acting on the assumption that p , and doing so where one has good purposes. One can have such faith without believing that p . Another possible proponent of this view is Kierkegaard, if we read him as primarily emphasizing *action* rather than *belief*, as we do if we see de Silentio or Climacus as recommending a practical commitment to a proposition that outruns the evidence for that proposition—or a practical commitment even in the face of evidence that seems to tell decisively against that proposition. Along these lines, Cross (2003) holds that de Silentio's Abraham has faith precisely because although his evidence tells him that he certainly will have done grave wrong in the act he intends, he trusts that this will not be so, where this trust is a 'practical orientation towards the world' rather than a propositional attitude.

Faith as Commitment without Further Evidence

A more recent proponent of a practical account of faith is Buchak (2012). She holds that a proposition is only a potential object of faith if the individual has a pro-attitude towards p and if the evidence is not enough to guarantee the truth of the proposition. Like some of the above authors, she holds that faith involves an element of risk: faith that p requires that one is willing to take risks on p —that one is willing to choose acts that do best if p is true over acts that do best if p is false. What is distinctive about her view is that faith that p requires that one commit to these acts without looking for further evidence in the matter of p —at least, without looking for evidence for the sole purpose of deciding what to do

Reason and Faith

—and that one maintain one's commitment even in the face of new counterevidence. Thus, faith is a matter of stopping one's search for evidence and taking action.

Whether such faith is rational is primarily a matter of whether it is practically rational: whether stopping one's search for evidence and making a commitment (and sticking to a commitment in the face of counterevidence) is apt to get the agent what she desires. Buchak identifies three conditions that jointly entail that committing to a risky act on p without examining further evidence is superior to postponing one's commitment until more evidence comes in: the subject already has a lot of evidence in the matter of p and on its basis she is fairly confident that p ; the subject believes that any evidence she might find will not conclusively tell against p ; and postponing her commitment would be costly or she is risk-averse. (There may be other situations in which faith, in Buchak's sense, is rational.) Thus, faith is practically rational if these conditions are met.

(p. 59) The first two of these conditions concern the subject's beliefs and her evidence (actual or potential), so we can ask whether an epistemically rational subject can meet these conditions in the case of the faith propositions. (Whether closing inquiry itself is epistemically rational is beside the point, since the subject with faith is allowed to examine more evidence for the purposes of belief-formation, although if such evidence tells strongly against p , then faith that p might cease to be rational.) Buchak holds that these conditions will be met for some religious believers, but not all.

Faith as Allegiance to an Ideal

The final account holds that faith is not a matter of having some attitude—cognitive or otherwise—towards a proposition. Dewey (1934) and, following him, Kvanvig (2013) hold that faith does not primarily concern one's attitude towards a proposition but rather towards an *ideal*. (Discussion of Dewey in this section follows Kvanvig MS) There may be additional readings of Kierkegaard's *de Silentio* that support a similar idea. For Dewey, 'moral faith' consists in submission to the authority of an ideal end—taking that end to have a rightful claim over one's desires and purposes—and religious faith consists in submission to the authority of an ideal that is so overarching that it unifies the entire self. What is key for Dewey is that faith is identified by the role it plays in an individual's life, not by the content of any propositions.

Does faith in this sense require anything by way of intellectual commitment? Dewey holds that the propositional commitments required by particular religions ought to be eliminated from such faith because they stifle inquiry—religion requires committing to (belief in) certain propositions regardless of what the evidence turns up, which is incompatible with open inquiry. Kvanvig adopts Dewey's conception of faith but holds that religion—even traditional Christianity—requires no specific intellectual commitments. Thus, while an individual who has faith might have intellectual commitments that are epistemically irresponsible, there is nothing essentially irresponsible about faith, because there are no intellectual commitments that are essential to it.

Reason and Faith

According to this view of faith, then, the primary locus of evaluation is the ideal itself. This could take a number of forms, depending on how we think ideals are adopted and what norms govern them. If ideals are, as Kvanvig suggests, primarily a matter of our deepest affections, then we can ask whether those affections are good or understandable or beautiful. Kvanvig thinks that a wide range of affections pass this test. If ideals are primarily a matter of moral commitments—one holds an ideal because one sees the goal as good or worthy—then we can ask whether these commitments are indeed good, although admittedly it might be hard to evaluate them apart from our own ideals. Finally, if there are any beliefs necessary to holding an ideal (the belief, for example, that that ideal is the best one), then these beliefs can potentially be evaluated epistemically.

(p. 60) Epistemological (and Other) Issues for these Accounts

What is unique about these views of faith is that they deny that faith forms any part of the chain from evidence to cognitive attitude. Rather, faith is an attitude that may arise after the individual has evaluated the evidence she has and formed beliefs on its basis. Faith governs how the agent responds to the world in action. How, then, is faith to be evaluated, according to these views? I have already noted that an agent's practical response is generally sensitive to her beliefs: actions are only practically rational if the agent has certain beliefs that make them so. In other words, faith that p does not require belief that p (unless belief is itself a disposition to act), but the rationality of faith may rest on a belief. Thus, we can ask whether these beliefs really are rational in the case of the faith propositions. Finally, although this is beyond the scope of our discussion, a key question for these accounts that locate faith in the practical or moral realm is whether the attitudes they require are justified by our practical and moral norms.

Conclusion

One way of looking at the question of the nature of faith is to examine how the typical or ideal Christian arrives at her attitude towards the faith propositions, and to locate faith in this process. Looked at in this way, the central question in determining the nature of Christian faith is whether the evidence conclusively tells in favour of the faith propositions. If it does, then the defender of rational Christian faith will want to locate faith somewhere in the normal epistemic process of evaluating and responding to truth-directed reasons. If it does not, then the defender of rational Christian faith will want to locate faith either as the element that takes the individual from the (inconclusive) evidence to belief in the faith propositions, or as some other attitude that the Christian takes towards these propositions.

A difficulty with starting with a view about what the evidence says, and then trying to locate faith in the process, is that this method typically assumes that there are (or are not) cases of rational faith, and then tries to explain how that could be. But this does not mean that this method cannot help with the problem of faith and reason. For one, views arrived at through this method will be better to the extent that they fit the data we have about

Reason and Faith

faith—its uses in religious texts and in contemporary language, its function in religious and interpersonal settings, and so forth. For another, if the proponent of one of these views shows that there is *some* understanding of faith according to which Christian faith is rational, then she will have shown that there is *a* solution to the problem of faith and reason.

Another way of looking at the question of the nature of faith is to start with the data we have about faith and to try to come up with a hypothesis about what faith is that best captures this data. One then asks whether there are situations in which faith in that sense is rational or laudable, and whether Christian faith constitutes one of these situations.

(p. 61) A problem with this data-driven method is that there is potentially a lot of disagreement about what the data are. For example, if many actual Christians hold the view that faith is belief in the absence of evidence, but hold this view because their minister unreflectively transmitted it and they unreflectively adopted it, what should we make of their linguistic intuitions? Perhaps this poses no special problem beyond those already present in data interpretation. But one reason to worry in this case is that it is not clear whether there is one enduring concept of faith throughout time.

In any case, what is clear is that resolving the problem of faith and reason depends just as much on the correct analysis of faith as it does on figuring out where the evidence points in the matter of the faith propositions.

References

- Adams, Robert (1987a). 'The Virtue of Faith'. In *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 9–24.
- Adams, Robert (1987b). 'Kierkegaard's Arguments against Objective Reasoning in Religion'. In Robert Adams, *The Virtue of Faith*, New York: Oxford University Press, 25–41.
- Alston, William (1996). 'Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith'. In J. Jordan and D. Howard-Snyder (eds.), *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality: Philosophy of Religion Today*. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 3–27.
- Anscombe, G. E. M. (1979). 'What Is It to Believe Someone?' In C. F. Delaney (ed.) *Rationality and Religious Belief*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 141–51.
- Anscombe, G. E. M. (2008). 'Faith'. In Mary Geach and Luke Gormally (eds.), *Faith in a Hard Ground*. Exeter: Imprint Academic, 11–19.
- Aquinas, Thomas (1946 [1265–74]). *Summa Theologica*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benziger Brothers.
- Audi, Robert (2011). *Rationality and Religious Commitment*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Reason and Faith

Augustine of Hippo (1892 [391]). 'On the Profit of Believing'. In *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: St Athanasius: Select works and letters*, trans. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. New York: Christian Literature Company, 347–66.

Bishop, John (2007). *Believing by Faith*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Buchak, Lara (2012). 'Can It Be Rational to Have Faith?'. In Jake Chandler and Victoria S. Harrison (eds.), *Probability in the Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 225–47.

Buckareff, Andrei A. (2005). 'Can Faith Be a Doxastic Venture?' *Religious Studies* 41: 435–45.

Calvin, John (1995 [1536]). 'Faith'. In *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 42–67.

Clifford, W. K. (2005 [1877]). 'The Ethics of Belief'. In Joel Feinberg and Russ Shafer-Landau (eds.), *Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems of Philosophy*, 13th edn. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 102–5.

Cohen, Jonathan (1992). *An Essay on Belief and Acceptance*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Cross, Andrew (2003). 'Faith and the Suspension of the Ethical in *Fear and Trembling*'. *Inquiry* 46: 3–28.

Dewey, John (1934). *A Common Faith*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

(p. 62) Dougherty, Trent (2014). 'Faith, Trust, and Testimony'. In Laura Frances Callahan and Timothy O'Connor (eds.), *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 97–123.

van Fraassen, Bas C. (2002). 'Scientific Revolution/Conversion as a Philosophical Problem'. *The Empirical Stance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 64–110.

Golding, Joshua (1990). 'Toward a Pragmatic Conception of Religious Faith'. *Faith and Philosophy* 7(4): 486–503.

Howard-Snyder, Daniel (2013). 'Propositional Faith: What it is and what it is not'. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 50: 357–72.

Hume, David (1999 [1748]). 'Of Miracles'. In *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. T. L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

James, William (2005 [1896]). 'The Will to Believe'. In Joel Feinberg and Russ Shafer-Landau (eds.), *Reason and Responsibility*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson, 101–9.

Kierkegaard, Søren (1983 [1843]). *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Reason and Faith

- Kierkegaard, Søren (1992 [1846]). *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kuhn, Thomas S. (1970). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Kvanvig, Jonathan L. (2013). 'Affective Theism and People of Faith'. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 37: 109–28.
- Kvanvig, Jonathan L. (MS), 'Epistemic Fetishism and Deweyan Faith'.
- Lakatos, Imre (1970). 'Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes'. In Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (eds.), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 91–196.
- Locke, John (1996 [1689]). 'Of Faith and Reason, and their Distinct Provinces'. In Kenneth P. Winkler (ed.), *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, Book IV, chapter xviii, 323–8.
- Murphy, Nancey (1990), *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Pascal, Blaise (1910 [1660]). 'The Wager'. In *Pensées*, trans. W. F. Trotter. London: Dent.
- Plantinga, Alvin (1983). 'Reason and Belief in God'. In Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds.), *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Plantinga, Alvin (2000). *Warranted Christian Belief*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pojman, Louis (1986). 'Faith without Belief?' *Faith and Philosophy* 3: 157–76.
- Schellenberg, J. L. (2005). 'On Religious Faith'. In J. L. Schellenberg, *Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Religion*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 106–66.
- Schellenberg, J. L. (2014). 'How to Make Faith a Virtue'. In Callahan and O'Connor (eds.) (2014), 74–93.
- Stump, Eleanor (2003a). 'Freedom: Action, Intellect, and Will'. In Eleanor Stump, *Aquinas*. Oxford: Routledge, 277–306.
- Stump, Eleanor (2003b). 'Faith'. In Eleanor Stump, *Aquinas*. Oxford: Routledge, 361–88.
- Swinburne, Richard (1981). 'The Nature of Faith'. In Richard Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 104–24.

Reason and Faith

(p. 63) Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus (2012). 'Religious Authority'. In Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 181–203.

Suggested Reading

Aquinas, Thomas (1265–74). *Summa Theologica*.

Audi (2011).

Callahan and O'Connor (eds.) (2014).

Kierkegaard (1983).

Plantinga (2000).

Swinburne (1981).

Lara Buchak

Lara Buchak, Department of Philosophy, University of California, Berkeley