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PROPOSITIONAL FAITH: WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

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Super Bowl XLV. It's Super Bowl Sunday, 2011. Pittsburgh's down to Green Bay, 21–3; it's near the end of the second quarter. I'm taking in the game at my favorite dive, working on some nachos and a super-sized margarita. I'm a partisan of neither team. I just want to see a good game. The guy sitting next to me, however, is a loyal Pittsburgh fan, as indicated by the grim look on his face. The Packers have possession; they're moving steadily toward Steelers territory, again. During a break in the action, I strike up a conversation:

ME: I was hoping the game would be close. Oh well . . . another Super Bowl blowout. I think I'll head home at halftime.
FAN: Be patient; be patient. The Steelers'll win.
Me: You can't be serious. No team has ever overcome more than a 9-point deficit to win a Super Bowl. And look at the Packer's position: Pittsburgh's 47 with a first down.
Fan: I *am* serious. I have faith that they'll win.
Me: What? You *believe* they're going to win?
Fan: No, I *don't* believe they'll win; I said I have *faith* that they will.

My topic is faith. More accurately, my topic is propositional faith. What is propositional faith? At a first approximation, we might answer that it is the psychological attitude picked out by standard uses of the English locution "S has faith that p," where p takes declarative sentences as instances, as in "He has faith that they'll win." Although correct, this answer is not nearly as informative as we might like. Many people say that there is a more informative answer. They say that, at the very least, propositional faith requires propositional belief. More precisely, they say that faith that p requires belief that p or that it must be partly constituted by belief that p. This view is common enough; call it *the Common View*.

I have two main aims in this paper: (i) to exhibit the falsity of the Common View, and (ii) to sketch a more accurate and comprehensive account of what propositional faith is.

1. Clearing the Brush, Setting the Stage

There are many things labeled "faith" that are clearly not propositional faith. To avoid error and to circumscribe my topic, I begin by clearing them away.

In *The Epistle of Jude*, the author exhorts readers to "earnestly contend for *the faith*," that is, the propositions constitutive of the basic Christian story and ethic.[1] Propositional faith is not those propositions, or any others. It is an attitude that has a proposition as its object, or a state of affairs. Occasionally, one hears that faith is a process. For example, according to Alvin Plantinga, "the term 'faith' . . . denote[s] the whole tripartite process" of coming to believe the Gospel as a result of the Holy Spirit's instigating such belief upon

encountering the Gospel.[2] Propositional faith is not this process, or any other. Nor is it an adventure or journey, as when people sometimes speak of their "journey of faith." Like propositional fear and propositional hope, propositional faith is a propositional attitude.

Sometimes people speak of believing or taking something *on faith*. I believe on faith that Half-Mile's Pacific Crest Trail maps are accurate; Mark takes it on faith that devotion to Amitābha will result in enlightenment. That is, we believe or take these things on testimony or authority.[3] Propositional faith is not to be identified with believing or taking something on testimony or authority. Frances has faith that her young sons will live long and fulfilling lives, but she does not believe or take it on testimony or authority.

According to Martin Luther, faith is "confidence and *knowledge* of God's grace."[4] John Calvin concurs: faith is "a firm and sure *knowledge* of the divine favor toward us."[5] The *Catholic Encyclopedia* says faith is a "kind of *knowledge*."[6] Propositional faith, however, is not to be identified with knowledge. Hud can have faith that the president will lead us to victory without knowing she will. Knowledge is factive; propositional faith is not. (I leave it open whether faith is compatible with knowledge.)

According to Thomas Aquinas, says Eleonore Stump, faith is "assent [to a proposition] generated by the will's acting on the intellect," held "with certainty, without any hesitation or hanging back."[7] This is not propositional faith, for four reasons. First, if propositional faith is assent, then, since assent is a mental act and not even partly constituted by belief, propositional faith cannot be partly constituted by belief—but it can be. Second, if propositional faith is assent, then, since assent lasts about as long as a handshake, propositional faith is a fleeting affair—but it typically is not. Third, although propositional faith might have an act of will in its causal genesis, it need not. Fourth, propositional faith does not require "certainty, without any hesitation or hanging back." A wife might have faith that her marriage will survive a crisis, while harboring doubts about it. Indeed, propositional faith is precisely that attitude in virtue of which she might possess the inner stability and impetus that enables her to contribute to the realization of that state of affairs, despite her lack of certainty. Moreover, her faith might well involve some "hesitation or hanging back." We must take care not to identify what we might regard as an ideal instance of propositional faith—say, one that exhibits "certainty, without any hesitation or hanging back"—with a real instance of it. The real need not be the ideal.

We sometimes say things of the form "S has faith in x," where x takes as instances the name of a person or some other entity. So said, faith *in* something is relative to some domains but not others. I have faith in my hiking sticks—as stabilizers, not bear deterrents. I have faith in my wife—as a friend, wife, and lover, not as a horticulturalist. Some people say that propositional faith cannot be the attitude picked out by uses of "faith in x" since one can have faith *that* x is thus-and-so even if x does not exist, but one can no more have faith *in* x when x does not exist than one can jump in a lake when there are no lakes. Faith in x implies the existence of x; faith that x is thus-and-so does not.[8] I suspect these people are wrong. Just as faith-that is nonfactive, so faith-in lacks existential import. But even if they're right, we can still ask whether propositional faith is the attitude one would have if x existed and one had faith in x. Although, in that case, it might seem natural to identify faith in something, as thus-and-so, with faith that it is thus-and-so, faith *in* something requires more, namely entrusting one's welfare to it in some way. But one can have faith that something is thus-and-so without entrusting one's welfare to it in any way, as when I have faith that Emily will survive breast cancer but I do not entrust my well-being to her or her survival.

Propositional faith is not a proposition, state of affairs, process, or journey; it's an attitude, an attitude that is not to be identified with knowledge or assent; it need not be based on authority or testimony, and it need not involve certainty, eagerness, generation by an act of will, or entrusting one's welfare to someone. However, to say what something is not is not to say what it is. So our question remains: What is propositional faith? (Unless I indicate otherwise, I will hereafter use "faith" to mean propositional faith, faith *that*.)

To set the stage for assessing the Common View's answer, a word on belief and doubt is in order. What I have to say will be contentious and unconscionably brief.

Belief is something mental, specifically a mental state, not a mental occurrence like an act of mental assent or a process of deliberation. More specifically still, it is a dispositional state that manifests itself under certain conditions like those in the partial dispositional profile William Alston provides:

1. If S believes that p, then if someone asks S whether p, S will tend to respond affirmatively.
2. If S believes that p, then, if S considers whether it is the case that p, S will tend to feel it to be the case that p.
3. If S believes that p, then, if S takes q to follow from p, S will tend to believe q.
4. If S believes that p, then, if S engages in practical or theoretical reasoning, S will tend to use p as a premise when appropriate.
5. If S believes that p, then, if S learns that not-p, S will tend to be surprised.
6. If S believes that p, then, given S's goals, aversions, and other cognitive stances, S will tend to act in appropriate ways.[9]

Note that the consequent in each embedded conditional involves a tendency to a certain manifestation. That's because whether any such manifestation is forthcoming will depend on whether any psychological or other obstacles are present. Note also the term "feel" in (2). By it, Alston does *not* mean a sensation or emotion. Rather, he means to "convey the idea that [the manifestation in question] possesses a kind of *immediacy*, that it is something one *experiences* rather than something that one *thinks out*, that it is a matter of being *struck by* (a sense of) how things are rather than deciding how things are."[10] Others, he observes, call it "consciously [or occurrently] believing p."[11] Moreover, I cannot, just by an act of will, stop believing something I now believe, nor can I, just by an act of will, begin to believe something I do not now believe. Belief is not under our direct voluntary control. Finally, folk psychology is right: there really are beliefs. Of course, there is much to be said in favor of trading in belief for graded confidence or credence, as many Bayesians do. So it would be wise to put what I have to say in terms of both views. To do that, however, would complicate the discussion too much. Therefore, with apologies, I'll stick with the folk psychological characterization of the relevant terrain.

As for doubt, we must distinguish *having doubts* about whether p from *being in doubt* about whether p, and both of them from *doubting* that p. For one to *have doubts* about whether p—note the "s"—is for one to have what appear to one to be grounds to believe not-p and, as a result, for one to be at least somewhat inclined to disbelieve p. For one to be *in* doubt about whether p is for one neither to believe nor disbelieve p as a result of one's grounds for p seeming to be roughly on a par with one's grounds for not-p. One can have doubts without being in doubt, and one can be in doubt without having doubts. Having doubts and being in doubt are not to be identified with doubting that. If one *doubts* that something is so, one is at least strongly inclined to disbelieve it; having doubts and being in doubt lack that implication.

These remarks must suffice to indicate how I will be thinking of belief and doubt. I should add, though, that while some things I have to say in what follows depend on my

characterizations of belief and doubt, others do not. Notably, the structure of faith on offer by the end of the essay, and the basic thrust of the rationale for it, might be wed to other characterizations of belief and doubt.

2. The Common View

According to the Common View, faith that p requires belief that p, or it must be partially constituted by belief that p. I suspect that the Common View is mistaken. Before I explain why, it will prove useful to understand why belief that p is not sufficient for faith that p. There are at least two reasons, both of which shed light on what faith is.

First, one can believe something and not be *for* its truth, but one cannot have faith that something is so and not be for its truth. Alston illustrates the point well: "[If someone] is said to have faith that democracy will eventually be established everywhere, that implies . . . that [she] looks on this prospect with favor."[12] Robert Adams concurs: "To have faith is always to be *for* that in which one has faith. It is perfectly consistent to say you believe that Bill Clinton will win but you are still planning to vote for George Bush; but a genuine Bush supporter could hardly have faith that Clinton will win."[13] And Robert Audi too: "[I]f I do not have a favorable attitude toward something's happening, I cannot have faith that it will."[14] This is why we do not have faith that terrorism will occur frequently in the twenty-first century, although we believe it will. To be for the truth of a proposition minimally requires considering its truth to be good or desirable, and we do not consider the truth of that proposition to be good or worthy of desire.[15] (I'll have more to say about the being-for-it requirement later.)

Second, one can believe something even though one has no tendency at all to feel disappointment upon learning that it's not so, but one cannot have faith that something is so without at least some tendency to feel disappointment upon learning that it's not so. That's because one can have faith that something is so only if one cares that it is so; and one can care that something is so only if one has some tendency to feel disappointment upon learning that it's not so.

One might object: you can care that p without having any tendency to feel disappointment upon learning not-p. The farmer cares that the drought will continue, but she has no tendency to feel disappointment upon learning that it won't. In reply, we must distinguish caring *that* from caring *about*. One can care about whether p even though one has no tendency to feel disappointment upon learning it's not so, since caring about is compatible with negative valence toward its truth. Caring that p, however, requires positive valence toward its truth. So although the farmer cares *about* whether the drought will continue, she does not care *that* it will continue, given her negative valence toward its continuing. If you find this distinction specious, substitute "one can care-with-positive-valence that p only if one has some tendency to feel disappointment upon learning that it's not so" for the premise, and adjust the argument here and elsewhere when relevant.[16]

I conclude that belief is not sufficient for faith. One has faith that p only if one cares that p and one is for p's truth, at least in the sense that one considers p's truth to be good or desirable.

Of course, even if belief that p is insufficient for faith that p, it might nevertheless be necessary. This is the Common View. Four considerations jointly tell against it.

First, suppose we were talking about the sour economy and our retirement plans, and I said: "I am in doubt about whether I'll recover my losses, but I still have faith that I will." Or suppose I confided in you, my friend: "I don't know what to believe, whether she'll stay with me or not, but I have faith that she'll stay." Or imagine that I disclosed to you in a heart-to-heart exchange: "I can't tell whether what I've got to go on favors the existence of

God, but I have faith that God exists nonetheless." You wouldn't be perplexed, bewildered, or suspicious at all about what I said; at least you need not be. What I said wasn't weird, or infelicitous; there's nothing here that cries out for explanation. That's because, given the standard uses of "faith that" and "being in doubt about whether" in contemporary English, being in doubt about something *need not be* at odds with having faith that it is so. But in that case, our concept of propositional faith allows one to have faith that p without belief that p. For, unlike faith that p, belief that p *is* at odds with being in doubt about it, not least because if one is in doubt, one will lack tendencies that one has if one believes, for example, a tendency to assert p upon being asked whether p.[17]

Second, one can have faith that p but lack a tendency to be surprised upon learning it's not so; disappointment, yes, but not surprise. However, one cannot believe p while lacking a tendency to be surprised upon learning it's not so. Thus, one can have faith that p without belief that p.

Third, one can have faith that p even if one does not believe *p* but rather merely believes *p is likely*, or *p is twice as likely as not*, and so on. For example, Harvey might know that his colon cancer will get the best of him before the season's end; nevertheless, he might yet have faith that he will face death with grace and courage even if he only believes that he will probably succeed. In this respect, faith is like propositional hope and propositional fear: it allows probabilistic beliefs to stand in for the cognitive stance it requires.

A question naturally arises at this point: if faith that p does not require believing p, is it compatible with *dis*-believing p? I think not. For if you disbelieve p, you will have tendencies to behavior, feeling, and so on that are at odds with faith that p. For example, if I disbelieve that my marriage will last, I'll tend to say it won't, when asked; I'll tend to feel it to be the case that it won't when I consider the matter; I'll tend to use the proposition that it won't as a premise in my practical reasoning; and I'll tend to do things appropriate to its not lasting, for example, withdraw from intimacy, look for another place to live, and the like.

The incongruity of faith and disbelief suggests that faith requires a more *positive* cognitive stance toward its object precisely because the dispositional profiles of negative stances like disbelief are incongruent with faith. This opens the door to stances distinct from belief to stand in for the positive cognitive stance faith requires, provided that their dispositional profiles are congruent with faith. Are there any such stances?

One might think so; after all, notice the plethora of folk psychological terms for positive cognitive stances: "acceptance," "acknowledgment," "affirmation," "assent," "assumption," "belief," "confidence," "conviction," "credence," etc. Although it would be hasty to suppose that each term stands for a different stance, it would be equally hasty to suppose that every term stands for the same stance. Interestingly, many philosophers think some of them stand for different stances. For example, many think that belief differs from acceptance, although they disagree over the difference. This isn't the place to enter that dispute. Instead, I'll make my point on the assumption that there is a difference and that Alston's account of it is near enough true to serve my purpose.[18]

According to Alston, belief differs from acceptance in three ways. (i) Belief is a dispositional mental state while acceptance is a mental act. One finds oneself with a belief, whereas to accept p is "to adopt" or "take on" a positive attitude toward p. (ii) Belief is not under our direct voluntary control while acceptance is. (iii) The *act* of acceptance normally engenders a dispositional *state* much like belief, a state also labeled "acceptance," unfortunately. This state differs from belief. Recall Alston's partial dispositional profile

of belief, items (1)–(6) in section 1 above. Contrasting belief and the state of acceptance with reference to that list, he writes:

> Belief will involve more confident, unhesitating manifestations of these sorts than acceptance will. But in the main, the story on these components—specifically (1), (3), (4), (5), and (6)—will be same for acceptance. (In (3), substitute "tend to accept" for "tend to believe".) By far the largest difference is the absence of (2). The complex dispositional state engendered by accepting p will definitely *not* include a tendency to feel that p if the question of whether p arises.[19]

By way of illustration, Alston describes a field general who must dispose his forces for battle with information insufficient to believe any of several competing views about how he might best do so. What does he do? He adopts the view that seems most likely to succeed, takes a stand on its truth, and acts on that basis. In short, he accepts it, which engenders dispositions to appropriate troop dispersal, and the like.[20] Alston describes his stance on libertarian freedom similarly. He doesn't believe we have it; he takes objections much too seriously for that. Rather he adopts it, regards it as true, and draws inferences from it in his theoretical and practical reasoning.[21]

So, according to Alston, the state of acceptance differs from belief in two ways: its manifestations will tend to be less confident and more hesitating than those of belief, and its dispositional profile lacks a tendency to feel that p if the question of whether p arises.

Despite these differences, the profile of the state of acceptance is congruent with faith since, first of all, one instance of faith can be weaker than another because it is less confident and more hesitating—weak faith is faith nonetheless. Secondly, any concern due to the lack of a tendency to feel that p comes from the thought that faith requires a disposition to take a stand on the truth of its object, and only belief suffices for that. But one can be disposed to take a stand on the truth of a proposition in many ways, one of which is to have a tendency to assert it when asked whether it's so. One need not have in addition a tendency to feel that it's so. So, acceptance suffices for the positive cognitive stance faith requires.

We have, then, a fourth reason to think that the Common View is mistaken: acceptance is not belief, and it can stand in for the positive cognitive stance faith requires.

3. Faith and Desire

One can have faith that something is so only if one is for it, at least in the sense that one considers its truth to be good or desirable. The being-for-it requirement of faith requires more, however.

For consider this: You have faith that p only if you consider p's truth to be good or desirable, but you cannot do that unless you want it to be the case that p; so you have faith that p only if you want it to be the case that p. To be sure, you might have conflicting desires; indeed, you might only want it a little bit. Nevertheless, unless you want p to be the case, you cannot have faith that p.

Many will deny the premise that you cannot consider p's truth to be good or desirable unless you want it to be the case that p. This is an ancient dispute, one that I will sidestep. For, even if you *can* consider p's truth to be good or desirable without wanting it to be the case that p, three other considerations remain for thinking that faith that p requires at least something in the neighborhood of desire for the truth of p.

First: one has faith that p only if one cares that p, but one cares that p only if one has some desire for p to be true. After all, if I have no desire that you finish your novel or that our friendship continue, I am indifferent to these things; I don't care that they are so. Therefore, one has faith that p only if one has some desire for p to be true.

We might resist. Imagine a meth addict who has no desire whatsoever *to stop* but who,

upon coming to recognize how much better his life might be if he were to stop, *wants to* want to stop. In that case, if he's disposed to do something about changing his first-order desire and his behavior, say, by seeking therapy, then, even if he has so far failed, he is not indifferent to stopping; he cares at least somewhat that he stops.[22]

Notice that the first- and second-order desire cases share something in common: having a desire in virtue of which one cares that p. Might one have a desire in virtue of which one cares that p without having a first- or higher-order desire for p's truth? Maybe. Imagine a young mother battling a recurrence of breast cancer; she has no first- or higher-order desire to live due to the depression-inducing side-effects of the treatment. Nevertheless, she cares that she survives since she considers her survival desirable for the sake of her children, and she longs for them to flourish. She wants what her detestable life can bring, their flourishing; but she has no desire to live, first- or higher-order. If this is possible, one can have faith that something is so, while having no first- or higher-order desire for its truth. Nevertheless, one must have a desire in virtue of which one cares that it is so. This is what faith requires.

Here's a second argument. Like other complex propositional attitudes, for example, fear and hope, faith motivates behavior. In the case of fear, this is indicated by the fact that all you need to know to understand why the hiker is beating the grass as she walks through the meadow is that she fears that rattlesnakes lie nearby. In the case of hope, it's indicated by the fact that all you need to know to understand why the climber is waving toward the sky is that he hopes that he'll catch the eye of the search-and-rescue pilot. Fear and hope have built in to them what it takes to motivate behavior; that's why they explain it. The same goes for faith. All you need to know to understand why Yehuda continues to study Torah despite his doubts is that he has faith that the basic Jewish story is true. All you need to know to understand why a couple seeks marital counseling is that they have faith that they can work things out. Like fear and hope, faith motivates behavior; that's why it explains it. But cognition alone cannot motivate behavior; desire is required. Like propositional fear and hope, therefore, propositional faith has desire built into it.

Third: One can have faith that something is so only if one has a tendency to feel disappointment upon learning that it's false. But if one has a tendency to feel disappointment upon learning that it's false, then one cares that it's so. However, if one cares that it's so, one desires its truth, or at least has a desire in virtue of which one cares that it's so. So one can have faith that something is so only if one has a desire in virtue of which one cares that it's so.

If any of these considerations are on target, then, even if one can have faith that p without desire for the truth of p, one cannot have faith that p without a desire in virtue of which one cares that p. As we've just seen, different sorts of desires might satisfy that description; so let's gather them all under the rubric of a *positive conative orientation* and say that faith that p requires a positive conative orientation toward the truth of p.

4. Faith and Doubt

Belief and acceptance are distinct; nevertheless, each can stand in for the positive cognitive stance faith requires. However, each is at odds with being in doubt; if one believes or accepts something, one will have tendencies that one will lack if one is in doubt about it, for example, a tendency to assert it when asked whether it is so. Therefore, since faith need not be at odds with being in doubt, something else can stand in for the positive cognitive stance faith requires. What might it be?

To begin to see one answer to our question, consider the following three very short stories.

Northbound

It's May 6, 2010. I'm at the southern terminus of the Pacific Crest Trail, the Mexican border with California. After some goodbyes, I start to walk to Canada, 2,655 miles north. A lot can go wrong in 2,655 miles. Most nights, after two dozen up-and-down miles in the sun, I'm beat. Now, nearly four weeks and 500 miles later, I'm terribly homesick. Do I believe I *won't* make it to Canada? Not at all. I feel stronger every day; trail camaraderie is pleasurable, as is meeting demanding daily goals; and the beauty of the high desert in Spring is astounding. Moreover, my family is planning a rendezvous. Besides, what better way to express gratitude at midlife than a walk from Mexico to Canada? So then, do I believe I *will* make it? Not at all. A lot can go wrong in 2,155 miles. Indeed, given what I've got to go on, I can't even hazard a guess as to how likely it is that I will make it. Nevertheless, each morning I picture Monument 78 at the Canadian border just north of Hart's Pass with me standing next to it smiling, and I head north on the assumption that, come September, that picture will be reality.

Captain Morgan

On the trail, there's a saying about the relationship between a sleeping trailside rattlesnake and a group of hikers passing by: the first wakes it up, the second pisses it off, and the third gets bit. I was the third. Fortunately for me, this unseen rattler, coiled deep in the sand under some scrub, did not bite me. Captain Morgan was not so fortunate. It's dusk and, four paces behind me, he speaks of his new right hip and shoulder, replacements for the ones he lost to a roadside bomb in Iraq nine months earlier. He tells me how he aims to continue his recovery on his walk to Canada, when—all of a sudden—he stops and says matter-of-factly, "It bit me. It didn't even rattle," pointing to a 40-inch Mojave Green, silent and still. We inspect his wound. I dial 911; no reception. Twenty minutes later, at Tyler Horse Creek, he's calm with no symptoms. Rattlesnakes control envenomation, sometimes delivering "dry bites" to animals too large to eat; moreover, a snake's timing can be off so that it releases its venom before sinking its fangs. Maybe Captain got lucky. The next morning he says he feels fine, so the other hikers congregated at the creek move on. I stay. Thirty minutes later, he heaves up his breakfast and continues to wretch every two minutes or so; he quickly becomes weak and feverish, breathing with difficulty; signs of delirium appear.[23] He needs help . . . fast. But which way should he go? Should he backtrack 24 miles to Highway 138, or forge ahead 24 miles to Highway 58? Our maps give us no reason to prefer either route. Three miles ahead, there's a two-mile side-trail to a trailhead; might we find a vehicle to hotwire at midweek? Five miles back there's a dirt road into the hills; might it lead to a home? Maybe he should stay put at the creek, the only sure source of water in this 48-mile stretch; perhaps a hiker with a working phone will arrive and we can call in an airlift. Time is short; he needs to decide. He rules out staying put and decides that moving ahead is slightly better than going back. So he stumbles forward on the assumption that help lies ahead.

Eliotwright

In an insightful autobiographical essay, William Wainwright characterizes his stance toward God as one filtered through a "congenital skepticism" that renders it difficult for him "to embrace *any* controversial [proposition] without *some* hesitation."[24] Nevertheless, he writes, "classical theistic metaphysics" has come to seem "more reasonable to me, on the whole, than its alternatives" and it "survives criticism at least as well as, and probably better than, its competitors."[25] Moreover, sensitive to what he describes as the frailty of "human effort, thought, and ideals when

confronted by what [Paul] Tillich called the threat of death, meaninglessness, and sin," he has long been attracted to what the Christian story has to say about these matters. In light of these and other considerations, he says that "even if Christian theism isn't more probable than not, it is still reasonable to embrace it" since, by his lights, it best addresses the whole of human experience and the evidence favors it over its competitors.[26] He concludes the essay with this paragraph:

> My attitude is in many ways similar to T. S. Eliot's. Eliot appears to have combined a deeply serious faith with both irony and skepticism. (When asked why he accepted Christianity, he said he did so because it was the least false of the options open to him.) . . . I do not regard my stance as exemplary. If Christianity (or indeed any form of traditional theism) is true, a faith free from doubt is surely better. I suspect, however, that my religious life may be fairly representative of the lives of many intelligent, educated, and sincere Christians in the latter part of the twentieth century.[27]

In personal correspondence, Wainwright indicates that he himself thinks Christianity is more likely than not. Eliot, however, is a different story. He thinks Christianity is "the least false" of the credible options, which suggests that by his lights, it is more likely than each of the options but less likely than their disjunction. Imagine, then, someone with Wainwright's evaluative, conative, and behavioral orientation to Christianity but with Eliot's cognitive stance. Call him *Eliotwright*.

Five observations about our protagonists are relevant to our concerns.

First, it seems apt to say that each of them has faith. I have faith that I will make it to Canada; Captain Morgan has faith that help lies ahead; Eliotwright has faith that the basic Christian story is true.

Second, we neither believe nor accept these things. I have no tendency to feel it to be the case that I'll make it to Canada. Captain Morgan not only lacks that tendency, he lacks any tendency to assert that help lies ahead, and he lacks any tendency to be surprised upon learning that it doesn't. We can easily imagine that the same goes for Eliotwright.

Third, each of us is in doubt about the object of his faith. I think that what I've got to go on puts me in no position to say whether I'll make it to Canada, not even very roughly how likely it is. Captain Morgan thinks staying put has the least going for it, and that moving forward is slightly better than backtracking. Eliotwright thinks Christianity is the least false of the credible options, which suggests that he deems his evidence for Christianity to be no better than the evidence for the disjunction of the options.

Fourth, despite our lack of belief and acceptance and despite our doubt, each of us acts on a certain assumption. I act on the assumption that I will make it to Canada. Captain Morgan acts on the assumption that help lies ahead. Eliotwright acts on the assumption that the basic Christian story is true. Take note: *there really is something that each of us acts on*; it's called an *assumption*.

Fifth, in virtue of our assumptions, each of us tends to behave in expectable ways. I assume I will make it to Canada, and so I pick up camp each morning and head north, whittling away at the six million steps between borders, scheduling re-supplies, dreaming of family rendezvous along the way, and so on. Captain Morgan assumes help lies ahead, and so he rises from his knees, slings his pack onto his back, and staggers forward. Eliotwright assumes the basic Christian story is true, and so he makes confession, gives thanks, kneels to receive the Body of Christ, and so on.

It seems, therefore, that we have found something distinct from belief and acceptance—something that is at home with being in doubt, something that can stand in for the positive cognitive stance faith requires: assuming.

5. Faith and Assuming

What, exactly, is assuming? This is a very difficult question. Unlike belief and acceptance, assuming has received little attention. Still, perhaps half a dozen observations might not fall too far from the truth.

First, we use "assume" in different ways. We sometimes use it with reference to things we believe or accept; and we sometimes use it with reference to things we disbelieve and reject. But, as with our protagonists, we sometimes use it with reference to things we neither believe nor accept, and things we neither disbelieve nor reject: things we are in doubt about. I mean to employ that use of the word.

Second observation: We must not identify assuming with acting as if. One can act as if p while disbelieving p, but one cannot assume p while disbelieving p. For when one assumes p, one has not settled on not-p; but when one disbelieves p, one has settled on not-p, even though one might dissemble and act as if p.

Third, perhaps the relation between acting as if and assuming—or, more accurately, perhaps the relation between *a disposition* to act as if and assuming—is that of genus to species. If it is, then acting as if need not involve pretense. For although some species of acting as if might require pretense, for example, acting as if you're a frog while playing charades, the assumings of our protagonists involve no pretense at all. I am not pretending I will make it to Canada; Captain Morgan is not pretending that help lies ahead; and Eliotwright is not pretending that Christianity is true.

Fourth observation: Since assuming of the sort at issue is at home with being in doubt, its dispositional profile will differ from those of belief and acceptance. In particular, if S assumes p, she will *lack* a tendency to feel it to be the case that p upon considering whether p; she will *lack* a tendency to assert that p when asked whether p, unless it is clear to her that she will not be misunderstood for expressing a more positive cognitive stance; and she will *lack* a tendency to be surprised upon learning not-p.

Fifth, despite these differences, assuming functions similarly to belief and acceptance in reasoning and other behavior. Specifically, if one assumes p, then, if one takes q to follow from p, one will tend to assume q. And if one assumes p, then, if one engages in practical or theoretical reasoning, one will tend to use p as a premise when appropriate. And, in general, if one assumes p, then, given one's goals, aversions, and other cognitive stances, one will tend to act in appropriate ways.

Finally, although the dispositional profile of assuming differs from that of acceptance, it is nonetheless congruent with propositional faith. Three considerations jointly suggest this.

(i) Like the profiles of believing p and accepting p but unlike the profile of disbelieving p, the profile of assuming p *lacks* the tendencies to feel *not-p* is the case upon considering p, to affirm or assert *not-p* when asked whether p, and to be surprised upon learning *p*. In these respects, the profile of assuming p is congruent with faith that p.

(ii) One can be in doubt about something and still have faith that it's so. But one can be in doubt about something only if one lacks a tendency to be surprised upon learning it's not so and one lacks a tendency to assert it (absent some special motive to assert it, for example, to deceive someone). Thus, one can have faith while lacking both of these tendencies, in which case the difference between the profiles of acceptance and assuming do not render assuming incongruent with faith.

(iii) Although the profile of assuming lacks these two tendencies, it includes other tendencies that constitute a disposition to take a stand on the truth of what is assumed. For just as when one accepts p, when one as-

sumes p, one will tend to use p as a premise in practical and theoretical reasoning when appropriate, and one will, more generally, tend to act in ways befitting one's goals, aversions, and other mental states. This is why we expect that, when Eliotwright assumes the basic Christian story, he will have a tendency to infer that, in the end, all will be well, that he should confess his sins, and so on; this is why we expect that, when Captain Morgan assumes that help lies ahead and he wants to get help, he will walk forward. By performing these actions rather than others, they manifest their disposition to take a stand on the truth of their assumptions, albeit a weaker stand than that of acceptance (or belief).

6. Propositional Faith: What It Is

An account of propositional faith emerges from the foregoing reflections. Faith that p is a complex propositional attitude consisting of (i) a positive evaluation of p, that is, considering p to be good or worthy of desire; (ii) a positive conative orientation toward p; and (iii) a positive cognitive stance toward p. Although nothing can be faith without these constituents, different items can stand in for each. To clarify the proposal, consider Diagram 1:

A positive evaluation of *p*	
A positive conative orientation toward *p*	
A positive cognitive stance toward *p*	

Each box to the left is filled to convey the idea that nothing is propositional faith unless it answers to those descriptions. Each box to the right is empty to convey the idea that different things can answer to those descriptions. Nothing that fills in an empty box is a necessary constituent of faith; rather, some filling in or other that answers the description to its left is required.

Belief that p can stand in for the positive cognitive stance, and desire for p's truth can stand in for the positive conative orientation. Hence Diagram 2:

A positive evaluation of *p*	Considering *p*'s truth to be good or desirable
A positive conative orientation toward *p*	Wanting *p* to be the case
A positive cognitive stance toward *p*	Believing *p*

Acceptance and a second-order desire can stand in as well. Hence Diagram 3:

A positive evaluation of *p*	Considering *p*'s truth to be good or desirable
A positive conative orientation toward *p*	Wanting it to be the case that one wants *p*
A positive cognitive stance toward *p*	Accepting *p*

I have argued that assuming can stand in too, which is displayed in Diagram 4:

A positive evaluation of *p*	Considering *p*'s truth to be good or desirable
A positive conative orientation toward *p*	Wanting *p* to be the case
A positive cognitive stance toward *p*	Assuming that *p*

Although it has gone unmentioned, a variety of positive cognitive stances can stand in for "considering" p to be good or desirable, the positive evaluation of p. And there may be other items that can stand in for the required constituents of faith.

7. The Obama Objection

Suppose you believe that Barack Obama will win the election; moreover, you think that his winning would be a good thing, and you want him to win. If the account of propositional faith on offer is complete, then you have faith that Obama will win. The problem is that you don't. The account, therefore, is incomplete.

What's missing is resilience in the face of new contrary evidence. What if unemployment increased? What if it came out that Obama "pulled a Lewinsky"? What if his popularity ratings took a dive? Let your imagination rip! In the face of increasing counter-evidence, would you still think it a good thing that he won? "Of course," you say. Would you still want him to? "Absolutely," you reply. "After all, the economy is Bush's fault, and adultery isn't relevant to presidential leadership; moreover, consider the alternative." The crucial question, though, is this: Would you still *believe* that he'll win? "Yes!" you say. Then you have faith that he will. Nothing counts as faith unless one's cognitive stance—in this case, your belief—is resistant to what one regards as contrary evidence.

This line of thought is mistaken. For although I agree that what's missing is resilience in the face of what one regards as new contrary evidence, it is a mistake to understand that resilience *solely* in terms of the resistance of one's cognitive stance to what one regards as new counter-evidence. That's one way the resilience faith requires can be instantiated, but it is not the only way; nor is it necessary. For the resilience of one's faith can be manifested instead by one's being disposed to behave in certain ways upon discovering new counter-evidence.

To illustrate the point, consider a variation on the Obama story. As before, you believe he'll win the election, you think his winning is a good thing, and you want him to win. And, as before, if you were to discover new counter-evidence to his winning, you would still think his winning is a good thing and still want him to win. Unlike before, however, suppose that your cognitive stance, your belief that he'll win, is *not* resistant to new counter-evidence. If you were to recognize new evidence that led you to think that the election was going to be close, you would not dig in your cognitive heels and believe all the same; rather, you would properly adjust, perhaps going from belief to weak belief, or belief to belief that it's only slightly more likely than not, or belief to mere assuming, or what have you. Even so, you might yet have faith that he'll win. For it might be that, in relevant counterfactual situations like the one we are imagining, despite properly adjusting your positive cognitive stance, you would remain resolved—as you presently are, let's suppose—to spend an evening each week talking with undecided voters, to tithe your earnings to his campaign, and so on. Alternatively, it might be that you would resolve to make investments and plans that would most likely pay off only if Obama won, and the like. And there are plenty of other options as well. The point is that if you have faith that he'll win, new counter-evidence would not take the wind out of your sails; it would not deter you; it would not discourage you into inaction; it would not dishearten you. If something like *that* constitutes your present dispositional profile, then you have faith that Obama will win. You satisfy faith's demand for some measure of resilience and tenacity in the face of counter-evidence even though your cognitive stance is properly responsive to new counter-evidence.[28]

8. "By definition, faith is belief in the absence of evidence"

En route to pooh-poohing faith in *The Harvard Crimson*, linguist Steven Pinker writes that faith is "believing something *without good reasons to do so*."[29] Similarly, philosopher Alex Rosenberg began a recent debate ostensibly on the question of whether faith in God is reasonable by declaring that reasonable faith in God wasn't even possible since "by definition, faith is *belief in the absence of evidence*."[30] Not to be outdone by his fellow brights, biologist-rock-star Richard Dawkins goes one step further: "Faith is belief in spite of, *even perhaps because of*, the lack of evidence."[31] But no one goes as far as Mark Twain: faith is "believing what *you know*

ain't so"![32] Let's set aside the excesses of Dawkins and Twain and focus on Pinker and Rosenberg, according to whom one can have faith that something is so only if one has no good reason to believe it, no evidence at all. (I don't mean to suggest that only secularists take this line. They're just the shrillest.)

Of course, if the Pinker-Rosenberg line is right, then it is absolutely impossible for one to have faith that something is so while one has *some* good reason for believing it, *some* evidence for it. But surely one can. Maria can have faith that her new venture, Prairie Road Farm, will succeed even though she has some good reason for believing it, for example, an accurate estimation of her resolve and her partner's support in the endeavor.[33] Christian can have faith that he will find another with whom he can be close despite the fact that he has some evidence in the form of couples not so different from himself who are close to each other.

The Pinker-Rosenberg account can be moderated into something more plausible: one can have faith that something is so only if one has *insufficient* reason for believing it, *insufficient* evidence. This moderate line is more plausible; nevertheless, it is implausible. For if it is correct, then it is absolutely impossible for one to have faith that something is so while one has sufficient reason or evidence to believe it. But surely one can. Suppose I care that your marriage flourishes, but you confide that certain difficulties persist; I naturally express concern. You may well assure me that things are not so far gone that either you or your partner intend to split up but rather that you both anticipate happy results from the therapy you've begun. Your word is sufficient evidence for my faith that your marriage will survive despite the fact that it might also be sufficient evidence for me to believe the same. A child worried sick about her father's prostate cancer asks his oncologist whether he will live. He tells her that her father's prognosis is very favorable, so favorable that she should plan for him to walk her down the aisle some day if she wishes. Thus assured, she may well have faith that there will be such a day despite the fact that she has evidence sufficient for belief. Faith does not require insufficient evidence for belief.

I have deeper misgivings. First, Pinker and Rosenberg *identify* faith with believing something on insufficient reason or evidence; if they're right, one can have faith that p without either considering p's truth to be good or desirable or caring that p—but one cannot. Second, if they're right, faith *requires* belief—but it does not. For although one can have faith that p when one is in doubt about whether p, one cannot believe p in that case; moreover, although one can have faith that p when one lacks a tendency to be surprised upon learning not-p, one cannot believe p in that condition; furthermore, although one can have faith that p when one merely believes *p is likely*, or *p is twice as likely as not*, or *p is much more likely than its credible contraries*, one cannot believe that p while that is the case; finally, although one can have faith that p when one merely accepts p, or merely assents to p, or (belief-less-ly) assumes p, one cannot believe p in that condition.

Third, Pinker, Rosenberg, and company imply that faith is *necessarily* evidentially subpar. Every other complex propositional attitude can fit one's total evidence, for example, Dennis's hope that, while lost in the wilderness southeast of Lake Ann near Mt. Shuksan, Whatcom County Search and Rescue will find him, and his fear that they won't. So why do they single out faith as *necessarily* evidentially subpar, as *requiring* insufficient reasons and evidence?

Four reasons, I conjecture, but one of them isn't very nice to say, and so I will mention only three. First, Pinker, Rosenberg, et al. think of faith only with religious content, and every instance of it is evidentially subpar, by their lights. Second, they mistake the false "nothing is faith unless it is evidentially

sub-*par*" for the true "nothing is faith unless it is evidentially sub-*optimal*," a natural error. Third, they rightly discern that nothing counts as faith unless it is resilient to new counter-evidence, but they take a narrow view of the ways in which such resilience can be realized. If my conjecture is correct, Pinker, Rosenberg, and company would do well to reflect on instances of secular faith, recognize the import of the subpar-suboptimal distinction, and expand their view of the ways in which the resilience required by faith can be realized.

9. Conclusion

According to the account on offer here, faith that p is a complex propositional attitude consisting of (i) a positive evaluation of p, (ii) a positive conative orientation toward p, (iii) a positive cognitive stance toward p, and (iv) resilience to new counter-evidence to p. Importantly, assuming—assuming of the sort displayed above—can stand in for the positive cognitive stance faith requires. Since assuming is at home with being in doubt, being in doubt is no impediment to faith. Doubt is not faith's enemy; rather, the enemies of faith are misevaluation, indifference or hostility, and faintheartedness.

Naturally, many questions remain about the account on offer. For example, I characterized belief and acceptance in a particular way, the way in which Alston did. What might faith look like given different characterizations, or given their elimination altogether in exchange for graded confidence? In addition, there are more objections to consider. For example, haven't I simply confused faith and hope? Or, having packed so much into faith *that*, is there any room for faith *in*? Furthermore, alternative accounts of faith similarly at odds with the Common View have begun to sprout up. Why prefer the one on offer here? Finally, implications of theoretical and practical significance have gone unmentioned. For example, what does the account on offer imply for how we should go about evaluating the overall rationality or propriety of faith? What does it imply for our understanding of the virtue of faith? What does it imply for the age-old "problem of faith and reason" in the philosophy of religion? I aim to address these questions, objections, alternatives, and implications elsewhere.[34] Here, however, I must rest content with a first pass at saying what propositional faith is and what it is not.

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NOTES

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1. Jude 1:3, King James Version; emphasis added; cf. Acts 6:7; Philippians 1:27.

2. Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 252. Plantinga says that this isn't the only thing that "faith" denotes.

3. John Locke: faith is "assent to a proposition . . . upon the credit of the proposer." *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, IV, pp. xviii, 2. *Catholic Encyclopedia*: faith "rests on grave authority." http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=4554.

4. "An Introduction to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans," in Luther's German Bible of 1522. http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/luther-faith.txt, emphasis mine.

5. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, Book III, chap. 2, section 7. http://www.vor.org/rbdisk/html/institutes/3_02.htm; emphasis added.

6. http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05752c.htm.

7. Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 363; cf. *Summa Theologica* IIaIIae.1.4 and IIaIIae.4.8. *Catholic Encyclopedia*: "doubt cannot coexist with faith . . . in regard to any given subject; faith and doubt are mutually exclusive" [entry on "doubt"]. http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05141a.htm. According to Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (New International Version). The translation is inaccurate. See Rik Peels, "Doxastic Doubt, Fiducial Doubt, and Christian Faith," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, vol. 49, no. 2 (2007), pp. 183–198, for a more accurate translation and discussion of other biblical texts thought to suggest that faith implies certainty.

8. See, for example, William Lad Sessions, *The Concept of Faith* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 29–30.

9. William P. Alston, "Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith," in *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality*, ed. Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), p. 4; slightly altered for readability.

10. Ibid., pp. 3–4.

11. Ibid., p. 241n4.

12. Ibid., p. 12.

13. Robert Merrihew Adams, "Moral Faith," *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 92, no. 2 (1995), pp. 88–89.

14. Robert Audi, "Belief, Acceptance, and Faith," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 63, nos. 1–3 (2008), p. 97.

15. Cf. J. L. Schellenberg, *Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 128ff.

16. Thanks to Gerald Marsh here.

17. Cf. Lara Buchak, "Can It Be Rational to Have Faith?," in *Probability in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Jake Chandler and Victoria S. Harrison (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 225–248; manuscript, p. 2n1, see http://philosophy.berkeley.edu/file/490/Buchak_Can_it_be_Rational_to_have_Faith.pdf.

18. See Alston, "Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith"; and Alston, "Audi on Nondoxastic Faith," in *Rationality and the Good: Critical Essays on the Ethics and Epistemology of Robert Audi*, ed. Mark Timmons, John Greco, and Alfred Mele (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 123–139.

19. Alston, "Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith," p. 9; slightly altered for readability.

20. Alston, "Audi on Nondoxastic Faith."

21. Alston, "Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith," p. 10.

22. Thanks to John Schellenberg and Terence Cuneo here.

23. from *Wikipedia*:

> *C. scutulatus* is widely regarded as producing one of the most toxic snake venoms in the New World. . . . In people bitten by Venom A Mojave rattlesnakes (those outside the relatively small Venom B area in south-central Arizona), the onset of serious signs and symptoms can be delayed, sometimes leading to an initial underestimation of the severity of the bite. Significant envenomation . . . can produce vision abnormalities and difficulty swallowing and speaking. In severe cases, skeletal muscle weakness can lead to difficulty breathing and even respiratory failure.

24. William J. Wainwright, "Skepticism, Romanticism, and Faith," in *God and the Philosophers*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 78.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., p. 80.

27. Ibid., p. 87.

28. Thanks to Kenny Boyce, Frances Howard-Snyder, and, especially, Wes Morriston here.

29. Steven Pinker, "Less Faith, More Reason," *Harvard Crimson* (October 27, 2006); emphasis added; http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2006/10/27/less-faith-more-reason-there-is/.

30. Alex Rosenberg, "Is Faith in God Reasonable? Debate: Alex Rosenberg vs. William Lane Craig," Purdue University, February 1, 2013; emphasis added. For his own part, Craig never addressed the question of the debate, preferring instead to address the question of whether *belief* that God exists is reasonable. It's a sad day when even a Christian apologist can't tell the difference between faith in God and belief that God exists.

31. http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/r/richard_dawkins.html; emphasis added.

32. http://quotationsbook.com/quote/14040/; emphasis added.

33. http://www.facebook.com/PrairieRoadFarm; www.prairieroadfarm.com.

34. I begin some of this work in "Schellenberg on Propositional Faith," *Religious Studies* (forthcoming).