

The Skeptical Christian

Daniel Howard-Snyder
Western Washington University

Abstract. This essay is a detailed study of William P. Alston's view on the nature of Christian faith, which I assess in the context of three problems: the problem of the skeptical Christian, the problem of faith and reason, and the problem of the trajectory. Although Alston intended a view that would solve these problems, it does so only superficially. Fortunately, we can distinguish Alston's view, on the one hand, from his illustrations of his view, on the other hand. I argue that, although Alston's *view* only superficially solve these problems, his *illustrations* of his view suggest a substantive way to solve them, a way that I sketch briefly.

According to William P. Alston, "Christian faith essentially involves both cognitive and affective-attitudinal elements".¹ The cognitive element, he says, is typically taken to be propositional belief, for example, belief that "Jesus of Nazareth...was resurrected after being crucified and buried, and that he is alive today and in personal relationship with the faithful".² Many Christians believe firmly these and other propositions constitutive of the basic Christian story, with utmost assurance.

For them these are facts about which they have no more doubts than they do about their physical surroundings and the existence of their family and friends. Even if they can see how one *could* doubt or deny these doctrines, they are not themselves touched by this. Perhaps this has been part of their repertoire of constant belief for as long as they can remember, and nothing has come along to shake it.³

"But," Alston continues, "not all sincere, active, committed, devout Christians are like this, especially in these secular, scientific, intellectually unsettled times":

Many committed Christians do not find themselves with such assurance. A sense of the obvious truth of these articles of faith does not well up within them when they consider the matter. They *are* troubled by doubts; they ask themselves or others what reasons there are to believe that all this really happened. They take it as a live possibility that all or some of the central Christian doctrines are false.⁴

These "(quasi) skeptical Christians," as Alston calls them, "do not find themselves believing in, for example, a bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead in the distinctive sense of belief," not to mention other aspects of the basic Christian story.⁵

Here a puzzle begins to emerge. For if these skeptical Christians lack belief of the basic Christian story, one might well wonder how they can have Christian faith, as Alston says they do. After all, as he himself points out, Christian faith essentially involves a cognitive element; thus, since these skeptical Christians lack belief, it seems they cannot have Christian faith. We might put the puzzle in the form of an inconsistent triad, call it *the problem of the skeptical Christian*:

1. A person's Christian faith essentially involves a cognitive element.
2. The cognitive element of a person's Christian faith is belief of the basic Christian story.
3. Skeptical Christians have Christian faith but they lack belief of the basic Christian story.

The problem of the skeptical Christian is a merely theoretical problem: each claim seems initially plausible but they can't all be true.

There are two further related problems, neither of which is merely theoretical, one of which can be put in the form of an argument:

1. If your Christian faith is reasonable, then you believe the basic Christian story and your belief is reasonable.
2. Your belief of the basic Christian story is not reasonable.
3. So, your Christian faith is not reasonable.

(Let the notion of reasonableness be epistemic; and substitute whatever other term of epistemic appraisal you wish, e.g. justified, rational, warranted, up-to-intellectual-snuff, etc.) Many Christians don't give a fig whether the conclusion is true, but many others do. They will have to deny one of the premises since the argument is formally valid. We all know those who deny premise (2), but there is another sort of Christian, those who want to reject the conclusion but who concede that premise (2) accurately describes themselves—Alston's skeptical Christians, for example. They will find the argument difficult to resist, not least because it may well seem to them that they have Christian faith only if they believe the basic Christian story, and thus that their faith is reasonable only if their belief is too, in which case they can't deny premise (1). This is *the problem of faith and reason*, which is particularly acute for the skeptical Christian.

As for the third problem, social psychologists have begun to document what we already know by experience and anecdote, namely that Christians these days struggle more with doubt than their predecessors, especially those who pursue degrees in higher education. It's not uncommon for a young Christian to go off to college assured in his Christian beliefs, take his first philosophy or religion or literature or history or biology class, and meet for the first time powerful defenses of scientific naturalism or atheism from real-life naturalists and atheists, as well as powerful critiques of considerations in favor of theism in general and Christianity in particular. Such students are often thrown into doubt and they think to themselves something along these lines: "I've got to be honest: while the things I'm learning in my classes don't make me *disbelieve* (yet), they do make me wonder, even to the point of, well, . . . , it's hard to admit it, but, even to the point of being in doubt, serious doubt. But if I'm in doubt, I lack belief; and if I lack belief, then I don't have faith. And if I don't have faith, how can I keep praying, attending church, worshipping God, taking the sacraments, singing the hymns and songs, and so on? It seems I can't, unless I'm a hypocrite. So, in all honesty, I should just drop the whole thing and get out." Of course, our newly-skeptical university student is not alone. The just-displayed trajectory from doubt to getting out can be found elsewhere. What might we say to the trajectory-treading skeptical Christian?

Of course, many of us will say, *Get out!* But what about those of us who don't want to say that? I think the first thing we must do is affirm the way in which they take the life of the mind so seriously, as well as the integrity they display by aiming to live in accordance with their considered judgment. That's non-negotiable. We can also address the basis of their doubt. But even here, I suspect, it's unlikely that most of them will have the ability or time to conduct a fair and thorough appraisal of the objections and critiques, and it is unclear what the epistemology of experts would advise. Moreover, I wonder whether, even if they did conduct a fair and thorough appraisal, *belief* of the basic Christian story would be the most fitting cognitive response on their part. Be that as it may, the main point is that many of these people will retain a significant degree of doubt, significant enough to preclude belief of the basic Christian story. They have a problem, then: the line of thought indicated by our university student's speech, *the problem of the trajectory*.

Alston sees all this and makes two crucial points about it.

First, he insists that the Christian who lacks belief—the skeptical Christian—"is not necessarily inferior to the *believer*" when it comes to "commitment to the Christian life, or in the seriousness, faithfulness, or intensity with which she pursues it".⁶ She "may pray just as faithfully, worship God just as regularly, strive just as earnestly to follow the way of life enjoined on us by Christ, [and] look as pervasively on interpersonal relationships, vocation, and social issues through the lens of the Christian faith".⁷ As such, she can be "all in" when it comes to Christian practice, although "[s]he will undoubtedly receive less comfort and consolation," be "less assured of the life of the world to come," and when she does have experiences that she might be inclined to take as "interactions with God," "she will not be wholly free of nagging suspicions that it is all in her own mind".⁸

Second, while some people might propose to solve our three problems by denying that Christian faith essentially involves any cognitive element, Alston does no such thing. That's because, by his lights, although Christian faith essentially involves a cognitive element, belief is not the only way in which it can be realized. One can instead *accept* the basic Christian story, and one can accept it reasonably and act on that acceptance with integrity. This is the thrust of Alston's solution to our three problems.

Here's the plan for what follows. After I summarize Alston's views on the difference between belief and acceptance and on the significance of acceptance for Christian faith, I will do two things. First, I'll argue that the cases he uses to illustrate the difference between belief and acceptance, and the cases he uses to illustrate the significance of acceptance for Christian faith, fail to illustrate that difference and significance. As a result, what he has to say about belief, acceptance, and Christian faith only superficially

solves our three problems and cannot satisfy the skeptical Christian. Second, I'll argue that the cases he uses to illustrate the distinction between belief and acceptance, and the cases he uses to illustrate the significance of acceptance for Christian faith, in fact illustrate another way to realize the cognitive element of Christian faith, a way distinct from belief and acceptance, a way that can play the role Alston intended acceptance to play in his account of Christian faith, a way that substantively solves our three problems, a way that the skeptical Christian can find satisfying. But before I turn to these two tasks, some preliminary remarks are in order.

1. Preliminary remarks

First, a methodological point. When I aim to criticize someone's views, I try to assess what they have to say from the perspective of their theoretical framework, as far I can. Thus, although Alston's views of belief and acceptance are ripe for criticism—whose views aren't in this area?—I will for the most part leave them unquestioned. I'm theorizing from his point of view.

Nor will I question Alston's treatment of Christian faith as largely a matter of faith *in* and faith *that*,⁹ which leads to my second remark. We'll be in a better position to engage Alston if we are alert to how he thinks about faith *in*, faith *that*, and their relation.

Toward that end, according to Alston, faith *that*—i.e. *propositional faith*, as many call it—is like belief *that*, propositional belief, in that both involve “a positive attitude toward a proposition,” but the former differs from the latter in at least two ways. Propositional faith, unlike propositional belief, (i) “necessarily involves some pro-attitude toward its object,” looking on its truth “with favor,” and (ii) “has at least a strong suggestion of a weak epistemic position vis-à-vis the proposition in question”.¹⁰ Elsewhere, I have argued that it involves more—in particular, resilience to counter-evidence—and I have suggested that it does not imply a weak epistemic position but rather a suboptimal epistemic position.¹¹ Otherwise I am largely in agreement with Alston.

As for faith *in*—*objectual faith*, as I will call it—Alston says that “the crucial feature would seem to be *trust*, reliance on the person to carry out commitments, obligations, promises, or, more generally, to act in a way favorable to oneself”.¹² Trust may be crucial to objectual faith, but that can't be the whole story since the con-artist relies on his victims in just the way Alston describes but he does not have faith in them. What more is involved in objectual faith I leave for another occasion.

Regarding the relationship between objectual faith and propositional faith, Alston writes that

[o]bviously, faith in a person presupposes that one has some positive attitude toward the proposition that the person exists and that he or she has various characteristics that provide a basis for one's faith. But it is not obvious that this attitude has to be properly characterizable as a case of “faith that”.¹³

Alston's point seems to be that one can have faith in a person while being in a strong epistemic position vis-à-vis the relevant propositions. The positive attitude toward these propositions *need not be* propositional faith, which, by his lights, involves a weak epistemic position, but—and this is important—it *can be*. That is, one can have faith in a person only if one has some positive attitude toward the relevant propositions, and that positive attitude can be faith *that* they are so. Thus, according to Alston, objectual faith does not require propositional faith.

But, he says, propositional faith does require objectual faith:

It seems plausible that wherever it is clearly appropriate to attribute “faith that,” there is “faith in” in the background. If I have faith that Joe will get the job, I thereby have faith in Joe, of some sort. If I have faith that the church will rebound from recent setbacks, I thereby have faith in the church and its mission.¹⁴

Is it really true that S has faith that x is F only if S has faith in x? Presumably not. I have faith that Kirsten will beat her cancer but I don't thereby have faith in Kirsten; rather, I have faith in her doctors or treatment. Alston might reply that faith that x is F requires some objectual faith or other, as with my faith in Kirsten's doctors or treatment. I'm suspicious; but instead of pursuing the matter further, I turn to a third preliminary.

Alston focuses on the “cognitive element” of Christian faith, leaving the “affective-attitudinal” element aside. I will follow suit for the most part. Our focus, however, should not be taken to indicate that either of us thinks the former is more central to Christian faith than the latter. Not by a longshot.

Fourth, doubt will figure in what follows, as it has already in the expression of our three problems. Alston does not say how he is thinking about it. Here's how I will think about it. 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 more inclined to disbelieve p, or at least somewhat less inclined to believe p. For one to be *in doubt* about whether p is for one neither to believe p 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.¹⁵

2. Alston on belief, acceptance, and Christian faith

According to Alston, belief is something mental, specifically a mental state, as opposed to a mental act or process, and more specifically still, a dispositional state that manifests itself under certain conditions like those in the partial dispositional profile he 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 beliefs, S will tend to act in ways that would be appropriate if it were the case that p.¹⁶

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 item (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* or *spontaneity*, 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".¹⁷ Others, he observes, call the experience in question "consciously [or occurrently] believing p".¹⁸ Moreover, we cannot at will stop believing something we now believe, nor can we at will begin to believe something we do not now believe. Belief is not under our direct voluntary control.

As for acceptance, Alston says that, unlike belief, acceptance is, in the first instance, a mental act. One finds oneself with a belief, whereas to accept p is "to adopt" or "take on board" a positive attitude toward p.¹⁹ Moreover, one cannot believe something at will, but one can accept something at will.²⁰ Furthermore, the *act* of acceptance normally "engenders" a dispositional *state* much like belief, a state also labeled "acceptance".²¹ Alston's rationale for this is that "if acceptance were just a momentary act that left no residue, it would have no point". The "residue" is the dispositional state of acceptance. Contrasting the dispositional states of belief and acceptance with reference to the dispositional profile of the former, 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 the 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.²²

So, according to Alston, the *state* of acceptance differs from belief in three ways: its manifestations will tend to be less confident and more hesitating, its dispositional profile lacks a tendency to feel that p if the question of whether p arises, and it can be "engendered" at will.

I want to make two initial points about the way in which Alston distinguishes belief from the state of acceptance.

First, it's not at all clear that the state of acceptance differs from belief in that belief "involve[s] more confident, unhesitating manifestations" than acceptance. For, as Alston points out, one can have "beliefs of a weaker strength" and "[t]here the dispositions, including the dispositions to taking p as a basis for inferences and behavior, are themselves weaker," that is, they are less confident and more hesitating than "firm belief". Moreover, when Alston characterizes this particular difference between belief and the state of acceptance, he qualifies it with "at least firm belief" (that's what goes into the ellipsis in the quote above). This suggests that, by his lights, weak belief is no different from acceptance when it comes to the degree of confidence and hesitation of their manifestations. So, although the manifestations of the state of acceptance will tend to be less confident and more hesitant than firm belief, the state of acceptance will *not* tend to be less confident and more hesitant than weak belief. The upshot is that the first difference mentioned above—that the manifestations of the state of acceptance will tend to be less confident and more hesitating than belief—really isn't a difference between belief *per se* and acceptance.

Second, regarding the difference in dispositional profiles, we must add something to the profile of acceptance, something that is implicit in the text. Alston tells us that accepting that p involves "taking a stand on the truth value of p," specifically "regarding it as true," giving it one's "mental assent," mentally "affirming" it, and mentally "judging" that it is so.²³ What we have here, I submit, is another item on the dispositional profile of acceptance:

- 7a. If S accepts that p, then, if S considers whether it is the case that p, S will tend to take a stand on p's truth in this sense: S will tend to mentally assent to p, mentally affirm p, and mentally judge that p is so.

Oddly, there is no analogue to (7a) on the dispositional profile of belief. The only items that come close are (1) and (2), but (1) has to do with affirmative *verbal* response and (2) has to do with *feeling* p to be the case; neither has to do with the *mental acts* of assent, affirmation, or judgment. Even so, I expect that Alston would consider this an oversight and so I will impute the analogue to him, (7b), which replaces "accepts" with "believes".

So then, as I understand Alston, the difference between belief and the state of acceptance is that item (2), the tendency to feel it to be the case that p when one considers whether p, is on the profile for belief but not acceptance, and acceptance can be "engendered" at will but belief cannot.²⁴

And now we are in a position to see the difference, according to Alston, between Christian faith that involves acceptance, rather than belief, of the propositions constitutive of the basic Christian story. Alston writes:

To accept them is to perform a voluntary act of committing oneself to them, to *resolve* to use them as a basis for one's thought, attitude, and behavior. (And, of course, it involves being disposed to do so as a result of this voluntary acceptance.) Whereas to believe them, even if not with the fullest confidence, is to *find* oneself with that positive attitude toward them, to *feel* that, for example, Jesus of Nazareth died to reconcile us to God. That conviction, of whatever degree of strength, spontaneously wells up in one when one considers the matter. And so, at bottom, it is a difference between what one finds in oneself and what one has deliberately chosen to introduce in oneself.²⁵

Alston can't mean the last sentence here. For, on his own view, *what* one finds in oneself when one believes a proposition is something with an importantly different dispositional profile from *what* one introduces in oneself when one accepts it, a difference that looms large in his discussion, as we've already seen.

3. Alston's illustrations of acceptance and its significance for Christian faith

So far I have articulated Alston's views on belief, acceptance, and Christian faith. Those familiar with his work will know that two things have been absent from my discussion so far: Alston's illustrations of the distinction between belief and acceptance, and his illustrations of the significance of acceptance for Christian faith. I now bring them to the fore.

To illustrate acceptance, Alston gives three examples.²⁶ Each example is a case in which "it is not at all clear what is the case or what one should do, but the relevant considerations seem to favor one alternative over the others".²⁷

The defensive captain. As the captain of the defensive team I am trying to figure out what play the opposing quarterback will call next. From my experience of playing against him and his coach, and given the current situation, it seems most likely to me that he will call a plunge into the middle of the line by the fullback. Hence I accept that proposition and reason from it in aligning the defense. Do I *believe* that this is the play he will call, unqualifiedly believe it, as contrasted with thinking it likely? No. I don't find myself feeling sure that this is what he will do. Who can predict exactly what a quarterback will do in a given situation? My experience prevents me from any such assurance. Nevertheless I accept the proposition that he will call a fullback plunge and proceed on that basis.²⁸

The humble philosopher. I survey the reasons for and against different positions on the free will issue. Having considered them carefully, I conclude that they indicate most strongly an acceptance of libertarian free will. Do I flat-out believe that we have that kind of free will? There are people who do feel sure of this. But I am too impressed by the arguments against the position to be free of doubts; it doesn't seem clear to me that this is the real situation, as it seems clear to me that I am now sitting in front of a computer, that I live in Central New York, and that I teach at Syracuse University. Nevertheless, I accept the proposition that we have libertarian free will. I announce this as my position. I defend it against objections. I draw various consequences from it, and so on.²⁹

The army general. Consider an army general...facing enemy forces...He needs to proceed on some assumption as to the disposition of those forces. His scouts give some information about this but not nearly enough to make any such assumption obviously true...He accepts the hypothesis that seems to him the most likely....He uses this as a basis for disposing his forces in the way that seems most likely to be effective, even though he is far from believing that this is the case.³⁰

I want to make three points about these cases.

First, the protagonist in each case accepts one proposition from among *several credible contraries*. For example, in the case of the defensive football captain, there is a variety of options to the plunge (or dive) that call for different defensive alignments. There are sweeps, draws, counters, traps, end arounds, reverses, the bootleg, the option, and a variety of trick plays; and then there are all the passing options. Even if he is in a position to rule out some of these alternatives, he'll sensibly assign each of the multiple remaining ones a significant probability, driving down the likelihood of a plunge.

Second, the protagonist in each case accepts one proposition over its credible competitors because "it seems most likely" or because the reasons for and against the different positions "indicate most strongly" the one over each of the others. It is important to see here that a proposition can be the most likely among each of several contraries and still be no more likely than its negation. In this connection, notice Alston's slide in the football case from the captain thinking a fullback plunge is the "most likely" call to his "thinking it likely". The latter doesn't follow from the former, and it strains credulity to suppose that any defensive captain worth his paycheck would think it likely that a quarterback will call a plunge, even on fourth and goal at the one. Too many alternatives must be assigned a significant probability.

Third, in light of the first two points, it seems extremely implausible that the captain, the general, and the philosopher accept the relevant propositions, given Alston's account of acceptance. That's because, on his account, the dispositional profile for acceptance includes (1) and (7a), and—to focus just on the captain—he will have no tendency to *respond affirmatively* if someone asks him whether the quarterback will call a fullback plunge, and no tendency to *mentally assent* to that proposition or to *mentally affirm* or *judge* that it is so if he brings it to mind. Indeed, if you ask any of our protagonists whether the relevant proposition is true, you're going to hear all sorts of hedging and hemming-and-hawing. And the same goes for their purely mental responses; just as a "sense of the obvious truth" of the target proposition "does not well up within them when they consider the matter," so an affirmative mental response will not be forthcoming when they consider it.³¹ That's because, given their evidence, there are too many alternatives each of which eats up a significant region of the probability space, rendering the target proposition only "most likely" or "most strongly indicated". It is, therefore, difficult to see these as cases of acceptance, given Alston's account of acceptance.

I now turn to the significance for Christian faith that Alston ascribes to acceptance. He says that many of those who find themselves incapable of believing the basic Christian story might still have it within their power to accept it,³² and he elaborates on the significance of “the acceptance alternative for Christian faith” by illustrating it with three cases:

Just as the philosopher described previously accepted the thesis of libertarian free will, though she did not spontaneously feel it to be the case, so it is with (quasi) skeptical Christians. This can take several different forms. Perhaps such a person, having carefully considered the evidence and arguments pro and con, or as much of them as she is aware of, judges that there is a sufficient basis for accepting the doctrines, even though she does not find herself in a state of belief. Or perhaps she has been involved in the church from her early years, from a preskeptical time when she did fully believe, and she finds the involvement meeting deep needs and giving her life some meaning and structure. And so she is motivated to accept Christian doctrines as a basis for her thought about the world and for the way she leads her life. Or perhaps the person is drawn into the church from a condition of religious noninvolvement, and responds actively to the church’s message, finding in the Christian life something that is deeply satisfying, but without, as yet, spontaneously feeling the doctrines to be true. Such a person will again be moved to accept the doctrines as something on which she will build her thought and action.³³

I want to make two points about these three cases.

First, Alston calls the person in each case a “(quasi) skeptical Christian,” earlier referring to such people as “troubled by doubts”;³⁴ moreover, he likens them to the protagonists in the secular cases. Here we need to keep in mind not only that each of the protagonists in the secular cases fails to “spontaneously feel” the relevant proposition to be the case, but that each of them “accepts” it on the basis of its seeming to be “the most likely” or “most strongly indicated” from among several credible contraries, when “it is not at all clear what is the case”. This suggests that, for Alston, what counts as “a sufficient basis for accepting” the basic Christian story (in the first case) can be pretty thin soup, a suggestion that is confirmed when we see him count T.S. Eliot among the Christians he has in mind, who, despite displaying considerable “skepticism” about Christianity, reported that he “accepted” it “because it was the least false of the options open to him”.³⁵ One does not sincerely report such a thing unless, at best, one is in doubt about it. So my first point is that, through his cases, Alston invites us to think of at least some skeptical Christians along the lines I have just been emphasizing: as Christians who are in doubt about the basic Christian story, even if, by their lights, it’s “the most likely” or “most strongly indicated” or “least false” of the options they deem credible. In what follows I accept his invitation.

Second, when I transpose the frame of mind of Eliot, the captain, the general, and the humble philosopher back into the frame of mind of Alston’s three skeptical Christians, I don’t see how they could accept the basic Christian story, given Alston’s account of acceptance and a charitable construal of their intellectual virtue. Despite the attraction of the Christian story for each of them, if they really are as troubled by doubts as Alston says they are and if they really do regard the Christian story as simply the least false or most likely among the options they deem credible, will any of them be happy to hear of acceptance as an alternative to the belief that eludes them? I doubt it. That’s because when they learn that acceptance involves a tendency to respond affirmatively when asked whether the basic Christian story is true—to answer aloud and without qualification, “yes, it is true”—and a tendency to mentally assent to that proposition or to mentally affirm or judge that it is so when it is brought to mind—to answer inwardly and without qualification, “yes, it is so”—they will rightly think that acceptance will elude them every bit as much as belief. For although they look on the Christian story with favor and they are prepared to act in accordance with it, what they have to go on prepares them, at best, to verbally assert that it is the “most likely” or “least false” and to mentally assent to its being the “most strongly indicated”—all a far cry from asserting *it* or mentally assenting to *it*, both of which the profile of acceptance requires. And why would they want to introduce, at will, such tendencies in themselves anyway, even if they could? To do so would promote cognitive dissonance and violate their intellectual integrity.

This is a good place to consider an important question Alston raises about the epistemic status of belief and acceptance, the question of whether “belief and acceptance have different [epistemic] statuses vis-à-vis the need for evidence, reasons, [or] grounds”.³⁶ According to Alston, belief and acceptance differ in their mode of origin and dispositional profile, but neither difference seems relevant to any epistemic status related to evidence, reasons, or grounds. Suppose acceptance can be introduced into oneself at will

and belief cannot. What's that got to do with whether acceptance requires more or less in the way of evidence, reasons, or grounds than belief in order to satisfy, say, evidentialist or reliabilist standards or principles for epistemic justification? It seems wholly irrelevant. In that case, all the weight for an affirmative answer to our question lands on the difference in dispositional profile: the profile of belief that *p* includes a tendency to feel that *p* is the case when *p* comes to mind—a tendency to an immediate, spontaneous experience of being struck by (a sense of) *p* being how things are—while the profile of acceptance that *p* lacks that tendency. But again: what's that got to do with whether acceptance requires more or less in the way of evidence, reasons, or grounds than belief in order to satisfy, say, evidentialist or reliabilist standards or principles for epistemic justification? It seems wholly irrelevant. And therein lies the rub: there is no other difference between acceptance and belief, on Alston's view. Thus, on his view, belief and acceptance do *not* have different epistemic statuses vis-à-vis the need for evidence, reasons, and grounds. Whatever standards or principles there may be that relate evidence, reasons, and grounds to epistemic status, acceptance will satisfy them if and only if belief does. It's not surprising, then, that the skeptical Christian will be unimpressed by what Alston has to offer. For what she lacks with respect to belief, she also lacks with respect to acceptance: *sufficient* evidence, reasons, or grounds to believe—or accept.

The upshot is that the cases Alston uses to illustrate the difference between belief and acceptance fail to illustrate that difference, and the cases he uses to illustrate the significance of a Christian faith whose cognitive element is acceptance fail to illustrate that significance. As a consequence, what Alston has to say about that difference and significance provides only a superficial solution to our three problems, as I will now show.

Alston aims to solve the problem of the skeptical Christian by denying (2) of our inconsistent triad, the claim that the cognitive element of a person's Christian faith is belief of the basic Christian story. While a person's Christian faith requires a cognitive element alright, says Alston, it need not be belief; it can be acceptance. Thus, he continues, the skeptical Christian can have Christian faith without belief while still meeting the demand for a cognitive element. However: although strictly speaking, (2) is false on Alston's view, adding acceptance as an alternative does nothing for the skeptical Christian. That's because she won't accept the basic Christian story any more than she will believe it. We can put the point this way. Alston's solution is impotent against a slight variation on the problem:

1. A person's Christian faith essentially involves a cognitive element.
- 2'. The cognitive element of a person's Christian faith is belief or acceptance of the basic Christian story.
- 3'. Skeptical Christians have Christian faith but they neither believe nor accept the basic Christian story.

Nothing Alston says allows us to deny (2') and, given an accurate description of the state of mind of the skeptical Christian and a charitable assessment of her intellectual virtue, we cannot deny (3'). That leaves (1), which is non-negotiable for Alston. The problem of the skeptical Christian substantially remains.

As for the problem of faith and reason, Alston would sympathetically engage the perspective of the skeptical Christian by denying premise (1), the claim that, if your Christian faith is reasonable, then you believe that the basic Christian story is true and your belief is reasonable. "Your Christian faith can be reasonable," he would say, "even if you do not believe the basic Christian story and a belief of it would be unreasonable for you. That's because the cognitive element of your Christian faith can be acceptance and your acceptance can be reasonable." This solution is superficial as well. For, once again, although strictly speaking, (1) is false on Alston's view, adding acceptance as an alternative to belief does nothing for the skeptical Christian. That's because she's no more apt to accept it than to believe it; moreover, what she has to go on renders acceptance no more reasonable for her than belief, as a variation on the problem reveals:

- 1'. If your Christian faith is reasonable, then you either believe or accept the basic Christian story and your belief or acceptance is reasonable.
- 2'. Your belief or acceptance of the basic Christian story is not reasonable.
3. So, your Christian faith is not reasonable.

Nothing Alston says allows us to deny (1'), and we can't deny (2') on behalf of the skeptical Christian since what she has to go on makes it true. Therefore, (3) follows, for the skeptical Christian. The problem of faith and reason substantially remains.

As for the problem of the trajectory, Alston would address the line of thought exhibited by our skeptical university student as follows: "Although you are in doubt about the basic Christian story, and you lack belief, you can still have Christian faith. That's because you can accept the basic Christian story, and you can practice without hypocrisy on the basis of such acceptance." This too lacks substance. For although Alston is right that, on his view, a lack of belief does not imply a lack of faith, that does nothing to help our student. That's because she is in doubt about the basic Christian story, in which case she lacks those tendencies that the dispositional profile of acceptance brings with it; moreover, even if she could accept it, she could not accept it in good conscience, given items (1) and (7a) on that profile. Acceptance, therefore, does not stop the trajectory from doubt to getting out. The problem of the trajectory substantially remains.

I conclude that propositional acceptance, as understood by Alston, seems unfit to play the role in Christian faith that he envisioned. As a consequence, his view permits only a superficial solution to our three problems. Fortunately, there is an alternative.

4. An alternative positive cognitive stance for the skeptical Christian

To get in a better position to discern the alternative I have in mind, let's return to Alston's secular cases, the case of the defensive captain, the army general, and the humble philosopher.³⁷

First, we can easily imagine that none of them believes the relevant propositions. The captain has no tendency to feel it to be the case that the quarterback will call a fullback plunge, the general has no tendency to feel it to be the case that the enemy forces are disposed in such-and-such a position, and the humble philosopher has no tendency to feel it to be the case that libertarianism is true. No "conviction, of whatever degree of strength, spontaneously wells up in" them when they consider the matter.³⁸

Second, as indicated earlier, it is also extremely implausible to suppose that they accept the relevant propositions, given Alston's account of acceptance. In any case, we can easily imagine that they do not accept them. For example, we can easily imagine that the captain has no tendency to assert that the quarterback will call a plunge if asked or to mentally assent to that proposition if it is brought to mind (and that he has no tendency to be surprised upon learning that the quarterback made another call).

Third, we can easily imagine that each of our protagonists is in doubt about whether the target proposition is true. That's because each of them thinks that, given what he has to go on, the target proposition is only more likely or more strongly indicated or the least false among the credible options, which is compatible with it being no more likely than its negation. In that case, we might easily imagine that it appears to each of them that what he has to go on with respect to the truth of the target proposition is roughly on a par with what he has to go on with respect to its falsity and, as a result, neither believes nor disbelieves it and neither accepts nor rejects it.

Fourth, despite their lack of belief and acceptance, and despite their being in doubt, each of them acts on a certain assumption. The captain acts on the assumption that the quarterback called a fullback plunge, the general acts on the assumption that the enemy forces are situated thus-and-so, and the philosopher acts on the assumption that libertarianism is true. Take note: *there really is some cognitive stance that each of them acts on*. Each of them *assumes that* some proposition is true. Call this cognitive stance *propositional assuming*, or *assuming* for short.

Fifth, each protagonist acts on the basis of the assumption he makes, and he acts in ways you would expect him to act given his assumption. The captain assumes that the quarterback called a fullback plunge, and so he puts six men on the line. The general assumes that the enemy is situated thus-and-so, and so he disperses his troops for a pincer movement. The philosopher assumes that libertarianism is true, and so he holds himself morally responsible for things he was able to refrain from.

While the foregoing observations locate one way to understand the cognitive stance involved in Alston's protagonists, we might wish for a more general understanding of their stance. What is it, exactly? What is it to assume that *p*, *in those cases*? This is a difficult question. Propositional assuming of the sort on display in Alston's cases has not been the focus of much discussion, unlike propositional belief and propositional acceptance, both of which enjoy the attention, if not the affection, of many philosophers. Still, in what follows, I'll make several remarks that I hope will shed some light; at least they will indicate how I propose to think of the matter.

First, we use "assume" in different ways. We sometimes use it to refer to the cognitive stance that we are in when we take something for granted or to be obvious, as when we assume that the world is more

than five minutes old or that there are persons other than ourselves. I do not mean to use “assume” in this way because, so used, it refers to a stance too much like belief or acceptance—indeed, it just *is* belief, coupled with full assurance—and so does not fit Alston’s cases. On other occasions, we use it to refer to the cognitive stance that we are in when we introduce a proposition into our thought for the purpose of considering what follows from it, as when we assume for *reductio* that some times are earlier than themselves or we assume for conditional proof that God exists. I do not mean to use “assume” in this way either because, so used, it refers to a stance that is too little like belief or acceptance—indeed, it seems to be no more than a bit of mental what-if-ery in the indicative mood—and so likewise does not fit Alston’s cases.

Second remark: in the sense of “assume” that does fit Alston’s cases, one can assume that *p* without believing or accepting it, and while being in doubt about it, as indicated previously. Thus, assuming of the sort in question is not sufficient for belief and acceptance, and so it is distinct from each of them. Even so, assuming that *p* might be necessary for them. Let’s look into the matter briefly.

If assuming is distinct from belief and acceptance but necessary for each of them, then, whenever someone believes or accepts something, she assumes it too. Consider some such occasion. For example, suppose I have a dominant desire for banana bread and I believe that there’s some in my fridge. Naturally, I walk to the fridge. Whatever else might be relevant to explaining my behavior, it seems that my belief that there’s some banana bread in the fridge has some work to do. But if assuming that *p* is necessary for belief that *p*, then I not only believe that there’s banana bread in the fridge, I assume that there is as well. Here two options present themselves: either my belief and my assuming simultaneously explain my behavior or only one does. Since explanatory redundancy should be avoided when possible, we should pick only one option; and, since belief already has an extensive role to play in our folk psychological explanatory scheme, we should pick my banana bread belief over my banana bread assumption. I submit, therefore, that we should say that, in this case, my belief, rather than my assuming, explains my behavior. And what goes for this case goes for every case of belief co-existing with assumption, and acceptance too. The upshot is that, since assuming is explanatorily unnecessary when it is present with belief and acceptance, unless there is some good reason to think that it is necessary (and I know of none), the better part of theoretical wisdom suggests that it is unnecessary for belief and acceptance.

Third, if assuming of the sort displayed in Alston’s cases is distinct from belief and acceptance, compatible with being in doubt, and neither necessary nor sufficient for belief or acceptance, we might wonder how its dispositional profile differs from those of belief and acceptance. In this connection, recall that being in doubt about *p* is incompatible with belief and acceptance of *p* because of their dispositional profiles. When one is in doubt about whether *p*, one *lacks* a tendency to feel it to be the case that *p* upon considering whether *p*; one *lacks* a tendency to verbally affirm that *p* when asked whether *p*, one *lacks* a tendency to mentally assent to *p*, or to mentally affirm or judge that *p* is true; and one *lacks* a tendency to be surprised upon learning not-*p*. But now recall that being in doubt about *p* is compatible with assuming that *p*. It follows that the dispositional profile of assuming of the sort at issue—and this will be the last time I express that qualification—lacks these tendencies as well.

Fourth remark: even though propositional assuming differs from belief and acceptance in these ways, it functions similarly to them in reasoning and other behavior, as evidenced by the protagonists in Alston’s cases. Specifically, if one assumes that *p*, then, if one takes *q* to follow from *p*, one will tend to assume that *q* as well. And if one assumes that *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 that *p*, then, given one’s goals, aversions, and other cognitive stances, one will tend to act in appropriate ways.

Fifth, we must resist the temptation to identify propositional assuming with acting as if. One can act as if one believes that *p* while disbelieving or rejecting *p*, but one cannot assume that *p* while disbelieving or rejecting *p*. For when one assumes that *p*, one lacks the dispositional profile of disbelief; but when one disbelieves that *p*, one possesses it, even though one might dissemble and act as if one believes that *p*.

Sixth remark: perhaps the relation between acting as if and propositional assuming—or, more accurately, perhaps the relation between *a disposition* to act as if and propositional assuming—is that of genus to species. If it is, then acting as if need not involve pretense. For although some species of the disposition to act as if might involve pretense—for example, being disposed to act as if you believe you’re Hamlet when you lose yourself in the part—the assumings of our protagonists involve no pretense at all. The captain is not pretending when, acting on the assumption that the quarterback will call a plunge, he puts six men on the line. The general is not pretending when, acting on the assumption that the enemy is situated

thus-and-so, he disperses his troops for a pincer movement. The philosopher is not pretending when, acting on the assumption that libertarianism is true, he infers that he is morally responsible for certain failings.

Seventh, and relatedly, it seems that *if* propositional assuming is a species of a disposition to act as if, then belief and acceptance are species of that disposition as well. Think of it this way. There are various cognitive stances one can take or be in with respect to a proposition. For each of them, taking it or being in it involves, among other things, their owner's instantiating a complex of dispositions to act as if they take or are in that stance; this is its dispositional profile. The cognitive stances one can take or be in are propositional belief, propositional acceptance, and propositional assuming, among perhaps others.

With these observations and remarks in hand, let's return to Alston's skeptical Christian. In light of what has been said about propositional assuming, we are now in a better position to see how the required cognitive element of Christian faith need not pose a stumbling block to her. To keep what follows manageable, I will, like Alston, focus on Christian propositional faith and objectual faith, and I will focus on his second case, the woman who "has been involved in the church from her early years, from a preskeptical time when she did fully believe".³⁹ Alston doesn't say how she became "troubled by doubts," so imagine that her story unfolds as follows. After a decade of study and reflection that began as an undergraduate and continued throughout her twenties, she now finds herself deeply troubled by arguments for atheism that challenge the goodness and love of God, arguments posed by sincere, respectful, and admirable atheists. Moreover, she finds herself stunned by the failure of Christian theologians to articulate theories of the Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement that render them so much as marginally plausible. All this has left her in doubt about the basic Christian story, and therefore she is in no position to believe it or accept it. That's not to say that she fails to appreciate what can be said on behalf it. On the contrary. By her lights, it's the least false of the options she deems credible. At any rate, that's what she would say if you caught her on good day. On a bad day, she might be more inclined to say that, so far as she can tell, it's no more false than the best of the credible options. She vacillates between these skeptical poles. But despite her amphibious cognitive situation, she continues to find her involvement in the church "meeting deep needs and giving her life meaning and structure," and she finds the way of love modeled by Jesus and many of his followers supremely attractive, so much so that she is motivated to align her will with his as his disciple, and to assume and thereby use the basic Christian story "as a basis for her thought about the world and for the way she leads her life".⁴⁰ So, despite her doubt, she continues in the practices of devotional reading, meditation, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, charity, the sacraments, congregational participation, observing the holy days and holidays, singing the great hymns and songs, teaching her children how to live the story, etc., finding these and related activities and commitments not only satisfying, but activities and commitments around which the rest of her life is shaped. In short, our skeptical Christian intentionally opens herself to the presence of the Lord and the power of the Spirit—to no avail, so far as she can tell. But she doesn't let that take the wind out of her sails or the sap out of her bones; she doesn't let that dishearten or discourage her from following Christ.

Our protagonist has Christian faith—or so I say. She has faith *that* the basic Christian story is true, although she neither believes it nor accepts it. The cognitive element of her faith is propositional assuming; just as the defensive captain assumes that the quarterback will call a fullback plunge, she assumes the basic Christian story. She also has faith *in* the Lord, despite her doubt. The cognitive element of her faith in him is also propositional assuming; just as the general assumes that the enemy is positioned thus-and-so and consequently aligns his troops for a pincer movement, she assumes that the Lord will remain true to his commitments to those who, like herself, put their trust in him, and she assumes that he will act favorably on her behalf with respect to her salvation; consequently, she aligns her will and acts accordingly. Her faith in him—including her faith that despite her struggles with doubt, he will never leave her or forsake her—provides her with enough stability and hope to battle late stage breast cancer and its damnable effects, and gives her the impetus to tackle the more ordinary demons of a human life.

It should be clear that our skeptical Christian "is not necessarily inferior to the *believer*" when it comes to "commitment to the Christian life, or in the seriousness, faithfulness, or intensity with which she pursues it".⁴¹ In this connection, one of the more wacky objections I've heard to my thesis that propositional assuming can be the cognitive element of Christian faith—from fold-your-hands-to-pray Roman Catholics and rolling-in-the-aisle Pentacostals alike—is that, on my view, it's too easy to have Christian faith. Apparently, a suitably difficult way to have Christian faith requires belief of the basic Christian story, perhaps held "with certainty, without any hesitation or hanging back".⁴² That way, when your total evidence, reasons, grounds, and whatever else you have to go on changes in such a way that you ought no longer to believe, you have a magnificent opportunity to exhibit Christian virtue by embracing the

tension wholeheartedly, knuckling down, and believing all the same, with just the same confidence as before. That's true standing up for Jesus! I must leave an examination of this doxolatrous approach to Christian faith for another occasion.⁴³ As for the charge that my view makes it insufficiently difficult to have Christian faith, two points are relevant. First, in general, it is more difficult to act in accordance with the proposition that *p* if you merely assume that *p* than if you believe that *p*, all else being equal. Second, if you have any doubt about whether Christian faith with assumption rather than belief as its cognitive element is an exception to the rule, I say, try it out some time. Then you'll have a better idea how silly it is to suggest that it's easier to have a Christian faith well-lived without the benefit of belief.

It should also be clear how the fact that propositional assuming can be the cognitive element of Christian faith allows for a substantive solution to our three problems. As for the problem of the skeptical Christian, we can deny the claim that the cognitive element of Christian faith is belief or acceptance of the basic Christian story since one might well assume them, which, unlike Alston's solution, is at home with the cognitive situation of the skeptical Christian. As for the problem of faith and reason, we can deny the claim that if your Christian faith is reasonable, then you believe or accept the basic Christian story and your belief or acceptance is reasonable; for one might instead assume it, which, unlike Alston's solution, is consonant with the cognitive situation of the skeptical Christian and keeps her faith reasonable, at least in so far as its cognitive element is concerned. As for the problem of the trajectory, we can explain to our newly-skeptical university student how the trajectory from doubt to getting out can be broken since she might assume the basic Christian story and act with integrity on the basis of that assumption, which, unlike Alston's solution, allows her to continue practicing her faith with a clear conscience, although it's likely to be difficult, perhaps very difficult. But whoever said Christian faith would be easy?

5. An Alstonian objection to propositional assuming as the cognitive element of Christian faith

In a revealing passage, Alston contrasts accepting a proposition with acting on the assumption that it is true. Here it is in its entirety:

When the press of affairs requires us to act on one assumption or another, we cannot wait for more evidence. This is the situation of our defensive captain. He must dispose his [players] in one way rather than another, based on one or another assumption as to what the offense will do. But he still need not accept a particular hypothesis on that point. He can adopt an *assumption*, a *working hypothesis*, for the sake of action guidance without accepting it. Accepting *p* involves a more positive attitude toward that proposition than just making the assumption that *p* or hypothesizing that *p*. The difference could be put this way. To accept that *p* is to regard it as true, though one need not be explicitly deploying the concept of truth in order to do so. But one can *assume* or *hypothesize* that *p* for a particular limited purpose, as our captain might have done, without taking any stand on truth value. Again, one can assume or hypothesize that *p* for the sake of testing it, trying it out in practice, so as to help one decide whether to accept it.⁴⁴

Although Alston does not have in mind here the thesis that propositional assuming can be the cognitive element in Christian faith, his remarks suggest that he might not look too kindly on it.

We might put the objection like this. Christian faith essentially involves a cognitive element, some positive cognitive stance toward the basic Christian story.⁴⁵ However, when one merely assumes the basic Christian story, one does so just for the purpose of trying it out, to see what happens, perhaps as a field anthropologist might do with any eye toward immersing herself in the point of view of the people she's studying,⁴⁶ or perhaps, as Alston suggests, our defensive captain might have done. That cognitive stance, however, is not positive enough. The cognitive element of Christian faith requires one to take a stand on its truth, to believe it or accept it.

The central thought here targets the credentials of propositional assuming as a positive cognitive stance. The idea is that, unlike belief and acceptance, assuming really isn't a positive cognitive stance at all since it does not involve taking a stand on the truth of its propositional object. Of course, that raises the question of what taking a stand on the truth of a proposition requires. I suspect that those who are tempted by this idea will answer that in order for a cognitive stance toward *p* to involve taking a stand on the truth of *p*, its owner must have at least some tendency to assert *p* when asked, or at least some tendency to mentally assent to *p* when it comes to mind.

But it seems to me that, although the dispositional profile of assuming lacks these tendencies, it includes other tendencies that constitute taking a stand on the truth of what is assumed. For just as when

one believes or accepts that p, when one assumes that 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 cognitive stances. This is why we expect that, when the defensive captain assumes that the quarterback will call a plunge, he will stack six men on the line rather than four; this is why we expect that, when the general assumes that the enemy is situated thus-and-so, he will disperse his troops for a pincer movement rather than an all-out charge up the hill; this is why we expect that, when the humble philosopher assumes libertarianism, he will, for example, use it in his theodicy rather than neglect it for that purpose. This is why we expect that, when our skeptical Christian assumes the basic Christian story and the trustworthiness of the Lord, she confesses her sins, partakes of the sacraments, realigns her will regularly through prayerful self-examination, gives generously, and so on. *By performing these actions rather than certain others*, each of our protagonists manifests tendencies that constitute taking a stand on the truth of what is assumed, even though tendencies to assert verbally and assent mentally are absent.

Perhaps the worry lies elsewhere. Perhaps the worry is that, even if propositional assuming involves taking *some* sort of stand on the truth of what is assumed, it isn't enough of a stand. It's too much like just putting one's toes in the water, or just taking a sip, or just holding hands, or smoking pot without inhaling. It's too much like assuming just for the purpose of trying it out, just to see what happens, just to give it a whirl. It's too non-committal, too much like mere hypothesizing or conjecturing.

It is difficult to know what to say in reply. Does our skeptical Christian *look* like she's assuming the basic Christian story *just* for the purpose of trying it out, *just* to give it a test drive, *just* to see whether she wants to buy in? Of course not. She's bought in more fully than nearly all of the believing Christians I know. Moreover, she doesn't assume it *just* "for the sake of action guidance" or *just* "for a particular limited purpose," but rather because it seems to her the most likely, the most strongly indicated, or the least false of the options she deems credible. And, having assumed it, she structures her life around it, shaping her life into a meaningful, purposeful whole.⁴⁷

As for the suggestion that assuming, *on my understanding of it*, is too much like hypothesizing or conjecturing, three points are relevant. First, unlike assuming, hypothesizing and conjecturing *are* just for the sake of action guidance. Second, unlike assuming, one does *not* hypothesize or conjecture something because it seems to one the most likely of the credible options but rather because one wonders what follows from it; hypothesis and conjecture have a what-if-ery quality about them that assuming lacks. Third, unlike assuming, one does *not* hypothesize or conjecture a worldview and then structure one's entire life around it. We might put the point this way: in the passage quoted above, Alston has a sense of "assuming" in mind according to which to assume that p is merely to adopt it as a "working hypothesis," to make a conjecture. That's not the sense of "assume" I have in mind, nor is it the sense of "assume" on which it makes sense to say that the captain, the general, the philosopher, Eliot, or the skeptical Christian acts on the assumption that the target proposition is true. In this second sense of "assumes," to assume that p "involves a more positive attitude toward that proposition than just" hypothesizing or conjecturing that p.

Alston aimed to exhibit how the skeptical Christian could have Christian faith. In my judgment, he failed. However, by examining the ways in which he illustrated his views about belief, acceptance, and their relation to Christian faith, I hope to have shown how his goal can be achieved. We simply need to follow his lead a bit further and broaden our horizons with respect to the variety of ways in which "sincere, active, committed, devout Christians" might meet the cognitive demands of Christian faith.⁴⁸ In particular, we would do well to countenance propositional assuming, perhaps among other ways.^{49,50}

References

- Alston, William. 1996. "Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith," in eds. Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder, *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Alston, William. 2007. "Audi on Nondoxastic Faith," in eds. Mark Timmons, John Greco, and Alfred R. Mele, *Rationality and the Good: Critical Essays on the Ethics and Epistemology of Robert Audi*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Audi, Robert. 2011. *Rationality and Religious Commitment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dewey, John. 1934. *A Common Faith*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Howard-Snyder, Daniel. 2013. "Propositional Faith: What it is and What it is not," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 50: 357-372.
- Howard-Snyder, Daniel. Unpublished a. "Audi on Alston on Nondoxastic Propositional Faith".

- Howard-Snyder, Daniel. Unpublished b. "Does Faith that p Require Belief that p?"
- Kvanvig, Jonathan. 2013. "Affective Theism and People of Faith," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 37: 109-128.
- Kvanvig, Jonathan. Unpublished a. "Epistemic Fetishism and Deweyan Faith".
- Kvanvig, Jonathan. Unpublished b. "What is Fundamental to Faith?"
- Lee, Matthew. 2014. *Belief, Doubt, and Confidence: a Threshold Account*. Dissertation: University of Notre Dame.
- Luhrman, Tanya. 1989. *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: ritual magic in modern culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Luhrman, Tanya. 2012. *When God talks back: understanding the American evangelical relationship with God*. New York: Knopf.
- McKaughan, Daniel. 2013. "Authentic Faith and Acknowledged Risk: Dissolving the Problem of Faith and Reason," *Religious Studies* 49:101-124.
- McKaughan, Daniel. Unpublished. "Faith as Active Commitment".
- Moon, Andrew. Unpublished. "The Nature of Doubt and a New Puzzle about Belief, Doubt, and Confidence".
- Peels, Rik. Unpublished. "Doubt".
- Penelhum, Terence. 1995. *Reason and Religious Faith*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Pojman, Louis. 1986. *Religious Belief and the Will*. New York: Routledge.
- Roeber, Blake. Unpublished. "The Aim of Belief and the Rationality of Faith".
- Swinburne, Richard. 1981. *Faith and Reason*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schellenberg, J. L. 2005. *Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Religion*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Stump, Eleonore. 2003. *Aquinas*. New York: Routledge.
- Sullivan, Meghan. 2014. "Uneasy Grace," *First Things*. Accessed July 20, 2014, at <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2014/04/uneasy-grace>

¹ Alston 1996: 15. As of August 2014, this article is available free online by googling the title.

² *Ibid.*, 16.

³ *Op cit.*

⁴ *Op cit.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 17, 26.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 17 (his emphasis).

⁷ *Op cit.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

⁹ Alternatives include allegiant faith, and global or affective faith. On the former, see Audi 2011; on the latter, see Audi 2011 and Kvanvig 2013 and unpublished a.

¹⁰ Alston 1996: 12.

¹¹ Howard-Snyder: 367-368 and 369-370.

¹² Alston 1996: 13. Cf. Swinburne 1981: 110ff; Penelhum 1995: 72ff; Schellenberg 2005: 109ff.

¹³ Alston 1996: 13.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*

¹⁵ For a more thorough discussion of the nature of doubt, see Peels unpublished, Moon unpublished, and Lee 2014.

¹⁶ Alston 1996: 4, slightly altered for uniform readability.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 241, n4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9; the dispositional state is "a result of" the act of acceptance (17).

²² *Ibid.*, 9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 11, 15, 20.

²⁴ Audi 2011, 80-84, challenges the second difference. For reply, see Howard-Snyder unpublished a.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁷ *Op. cit.*

-
- ²⁸ *Op. cit.*
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 10-11.
- ³⁰ Alston 2007: 133.
- ³¹ Alston 1996: 15.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 25-26; cf. 243-44, n43.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 17.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 19, quoting William Wainwright.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.
- ³⁷ Here I expand on material from Howard-Snyder 2013: 365-367.
- ³⁸ Alston 1996: 17.
- ³⁹ *Op. cit.*
- ⁴⁰ *Op. cit.*
- ⁴¹ Alston 1996: 17 (his emphasis).
- ⁴² Stump 2003: 363; cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* IIaIIae.1.4 and IIaIIae.4.8.
- ⁴³ For a splendid contemporary example of this approach, see the “Way of Aporia,” which is better labeled the “Way of Dogmatism,” in Sullivan 2014.
- ⁴⁴ Alston 1996: 11, his emphasis.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.
- ⁴⁶ For what this might look like in the sociology of religion, see Luhrman 1989 and 2012.
- ⁴⁷ For more on faith unifying a life, see Kvanvig 2013 and unpublished a, and Dewey 1934, chapter 1.
- ⁴⁸ Alston 1996: 16.
- ⁴⁹ See, for example, Audi 2011, Kvanvig unpublished b, McKaughan 2013 and unpublished, Pojman 1986, Roeber unpublished, Schellenberg 2006, and Swinburne 1981.
- ⁵⁰ For their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper and the ideas contained herein, I would like to thank Andy Cullison, Keith DeRose, Trent Dougherty, Frances Howard-Snyder, Hud Hudson, Jon Jacobs, Jon Kvanvig, Mark Lance, Dan McKaughan, Paddy McShane, Meghan Page, Rik Peels, Ryan Preston-Roedder, Bradley Rettler, Lindsay Rettler, Blake Roeber, Tom Senior, Meghan Sullivan, Peter van Elswyk, and Dean Zimmerman. This publication was made possible through the support of a grant from the Templeton Religion Trust. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Templeton Religion Trust.