

## Faith and Reason

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**Abstract:** What is faith? How is faith different than belief and hope? Is faith irrational? If not, how can faith go beyond the evidence? This chapter introduces the reader to philosophical questions involving faith and reason. First, we explore a four-part definition of faith. Then, we consider the question of how faith could be rational yet go beyond the evidence.

### What is Faith?

I have faith that my favorite basketball team will win their upcoming game. I have faith that I will accomplish my summer goals. I have faith in my spouse, faith in recycling, faith in myself, and faith in God. As these examples suggest, faith is an important part of our lives—faith is important not only to religion, but also to our interpersonal relationships, our commitments to groups (like sports teams) and ideals (like recycling), and our personal ambitions (like my summer goals). But what is faith? Also, it's traditionally thought that faith has a unique relationship with reason—faith seems to “go beyond the evidence.” What does this mean? Can faith go beyond the evidence but nonetheless be rational? These are the questions this chapter will explore.

There are many different kinds of faith, so it's worth clarifying the kind of faith we're focused on here. We'll consider both religious faith and non-religious faith. This chapter will primarily focus on faith *that* something is true, also known as *propositional faith*. Propositional faith is faith that a statement—or a *proposition*—is true. For example, faith *that* God exists, faith *that* my brother will get his dream job, faith *that* things will turn out okay. It's natural to

think that propositional faith is a type of mental state, similar to a belief or a desire. Near the end of the paper, we'll go beyond propositional faith and discuss *acts of faith*.

One of the main questions we'll address is how faith could be rational but "go beyond the evidence." But whether faith is rational depends on what faith *is*. So we'll turn to that question next, and discuss the four different components of faith. We'll also cover how faith is different than similar states, like belief and hope. Then, we'll turn to faith's rationality. We'll discuss three ways that faith might be epistemically rational but still "go beyond the evidence." Finally, we'll consider acts of faith, and discuss how rational acts of faith might go beyond the evidence as well.

### **The Components of Faith**

Our first task is to answer the question "What is faith?" Many philosophers think that propositional faith has several components. We'll divide these into four parts:

- (1) Faith has a belief-like component.
- (2) Faith has a desire-like component.
- (3) Faith involves a commitment.
- (4) Faith goes beyond the evidence.

Let's discuss these components in order. First, faith has a belief-like component. If you have faith that something is true, you have some confidence that it's true, e.g., you think it's likely or supported by the evidence. Some philosophers argue that this means faith always involves a belief. They contend that if I have faith that my team will win their game, I must believe they will win; if I have faith that God exists, I must believe that God exists. Other philosophers argue that faith doesn't always have to involve a belief. I could have faith that my team will win if, say, I think it's at least 50% likely that they will win, or if I think they will probably win; however, I don't have to *believe* they will win to have faith.

One reason to think faith always involves belief is that if I have faith but don't believe, it looks like I'm just faking it, or playing pretend. If I don't believe that God exists, some would say that I cannot have a genuine religious commitment—religious faith requires the belief that God exists.<sup>1</sup> But many philosophers disagree; we don't want to exclude those who experience doubts from having religious faith. In fact, they argue, one of the functions of faith is to help us keep our commitments in the face of doubts, even doubts that exclude belief.<sup>2</sup> We won't settle this debate here, but, thankfully, the way we've defined faith avoids this controversy. If faith involves a "belief-like" component, this might simply be a belief. But it could also be something else: thinking the statement is likely to be true, thinking it is more likely than not, or being confident it is true. Either way, faith is *not* compatible with thinking a statement is impossible or almost definitely false.

Second, faith has a desire-like component. To see this, consider some examples. Suppose I claim to have faith that your basketball team will win their upcoming game, but I really want them to lose. Or suppose I claim to have faith God exists, but I really hope that God doesn't exist. These examples don't make sense. This is because faith involves a *desire* for the statement in question to be true. If I have faith that God exists, I want God to exist and/or I think God's existence would be a good thing. If I have faith that your team will win their game, I want your team to win. So faith involves desire; faith that a proposition is true involves wanting that proposition to be true.

Third, faith involves *commitment*. Faith is a key part of what helps us keep our commitments over time. If I have faith that your team will win their upcoming game, I have

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<sup>1</sup> For an argument along these lines that faith always involves belief, see Malcolm, Finlay, and Michael Scott. (2016). "Faith, Belief, and Fictionalism." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 98(1): 257–274.

<sup>2</sup> For an argument that faith doesn't always involve belief, see Pojman, Louis. (1986). "Faith Without Belief?" *Faith and Philosophy* 3(2): 157-176.

some kind of commitment to your team. If I have faith that God exists, this involves a religious commitment. Consider various commitments one might make: a commitment to finishing a degree, a commitment to learning a new instrument, a marriage commitment, or a religious commitment. These commitments can be difficult to keep—we get discouraged, doubt ourselves or others, our desires and passions fade, and/or we get counterevidence that makes us wonder if we should have committed in the first place. Faith helps us overcome these obstacles and keep our commitments. In other words, faith is *resilient*.<sup>3</sup>

You might wonder if faith always involves a commitment. I have faith that my office chair will hold me. Am I really committed to my office chair? I believe the answer is yes, and I demonstrate this commitment by sitting on my chair every day (normally, without thinking twice about it). However, some of our commitments are more important than others. A marriage commitment or a religious commitment are more central to most people's lives than my commitment to my office chair. Similarly, the faith associated with religion and marriage is more significant and more resilient than my faith that my chair will hold me. Thus, not all faith commitments are created equal.

The final component of faith is that it goes beyond the evidence. This component is related to the third. Faith helps us maintain our commitments *because* it goes beyond the evidence. We might receive counterevidence that makes us question whether we should have committed in the first place. For example, you might commit to a particular subject for your university degree, but a few months in, you realize the required classes are quite difficult and demanding. You might wonder whether you're cut out for that field of study. Or you might

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the resilience of faith, see Jackson, Elizabeth. (forthcoming). "Belief, Faith, and Hope: On the Rationality of Long-Term Commitment." *Mind*. Also see Buchak, Lara. (2017). "Faith and steadfastness in the face of counter-evidence." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 81: 113–133.

have a religious commitment, but then encounter evidence that an all-good, all-loving God does not exist—such as the world’s serious and terrible evils. In either case, faith can help you continue in your commitment in light of this counterevidence. And if the evidence is misleading—so it turns out that you actually *are* cut out for the degree, or God actually *does* exist—then this is a very good thing. We’ll return to the idea that faith “goes beyond the evidence” in the next section.

Now that we have our four components of faith laid out, let’s consider how faith compares with two related states: belief and hope. We’ve discussed the debate about whether faith always involves belief. Even if faith always involves belief, however, this doesn’t mean faith and belief are the *same thing*. In fact, there’s good reason to think faith and belief don’t always go together. This is because belief does not always involve desire. You might believe that there’s a global pandemic or believe that your picnic was rained out, but you don’t have *faith* that those things are true. This is because faith requires a desire, but belief does not. Even the philosophers who think faith involves a belief agree with this point; just because faith always involves a belief doesn’t mean belief always involves faith. Put differently: belief might be *necessary* for faith, but that doesn’t mean it is *sufficient*.

Second, faith differs from hope. Of course, faith and hope have a lot in common. Faith and hope both involve desire—whether I have faith you will win your game or hope you will win your game, I want you to win your game. However, faith and hope aren’t the same thing. This is because, according to the first condition, faith requires a belief-like state; faith that a statement is true isn’t compatible with thinking the statement is false or almost definitely false. However, *hope* that a statement is true requires thinking that the statement is merely *possibly true*; it can be extremely unlikely. For example, let’s suppose I have a picnic planned for tomorrow. I checked the forecast a few days ago and even though there’s a 30% chance of rain tomorrow, I have faith that my picnic won’t be rained out. Suppose the forecast changes, and

there's now a 95% chance of rain. I can no longer have faith that my picnic won't be rained out, because that's extremely unlikely. At the very least, if I believe (or have a belief-like attitude, like high confidence) that it will be sunny tomorrow, then I'm being irrational. Faith requires some kind of minimum confidence level: it's not enough for a statement to be merely possible—it must be sufficiently likely. However, even if I don't meet this minimum confidence level, I can nonetheless still *hope* that it will be sunny tomorrow. It's very likely to rain, but not guaranteed, and the forecast is wrong sometimes. And I have a strong desire for it to be sunny. We can therefore hope that something is true when it's so unlikely that we cannot have faith.

To recap, we've discussed the four features of faith: faith involves a belief-like component, a desire-like component, a commitment, and going beyond the evidence. We've also discussed how faith differs from belief and hope. Next, we'll turn to the relationship between faith and rationality, and hone in on the fourth condition: what it means for faith to go beyond the evidence.

## **Faith and Rationality**

### **Faith's Rationality: Three Views**

There are three views about faith's rationality: faith is always rational, faith is always irrational, and faith is sometimes rational and sometimes irrational. Some might be tempted to the view that faith is always rational. After all, faith is an important part of our commitments, both religious and non-religious. If faith plays this essential role, maybe it's always rational.

However, this is too quick. If I have faith that my horoscope is the answer to all my problems, or faith that my magic 8 ball always speaks the truth, my faith is probably irrational.

The idea that faith is rational *no matter what* is too strong. Whether faith is rational depends on the object of faith.

Some swing the pendulum to the opposite extreme and insist that faith is always irrational. After all, if faith has a rocky relationship with evidence, and goes beyond the evidence, how could that be rational? Those that think faith is irrational fall into two main camps. The first camp thinks that faith is irrational and this is a bad thing; faith is harmful, and we should avoid having faith at all costs. The New Atheists, such as Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, have a view like this.<sup>4</sup> The New Atheists, however, often associate faith with *religious* faith, but fail to recognize that faith plays significant non-religious roles as well, in our interpersonal relationships and long-term commitments. Even if faith is sometimes irrational, we shouldn't throw out the baby with the bath water. Faith has a role to play, even for those who reject religion.

The second camp thinks that faith is irrational but that's actually a good thing. This view is known as *fideism*. Kierkegaard argued for this view and thought that faith is valuable *because* it is absurd: "The Absurd, or to act by virtue of the absurd, is to act upon faith."<sup>5</sup> The problem with fideism is that faith does not become better or more admirable as our evidence gets worse. For example, suppose I have faith that you will win your upcoming basketball game. You have to win this game to make the playoffs. I come to your game and watch your team get absolutely destroyed and lose by 40 points. My evidence is decisive: you cannot make the playoffs. It's impossible. Nonetheless, I ignore this evidence and continue to have faith that you'll make the playoffs. My faith is absurd and irrational. But it's hard to see how this is a good thing. If I show up to the playoff game covered in body paint ready to cheer for your

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<sup>4</sup> For a summary of what the New Atheists say about faith, and a response to their arguments, see Jackson, Elizabeth (2019). "The Nature and Rationality of Faith." (2020). *A New Theist Response to the New Atheists* (Joshua Rasmussen and Kevin Vallier, eds.), pp. 77–92. New York: Routledge.

<sup>5</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. (1849) *Journals* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

team, you wouldn't admire my great faith—you'd call me delusional. If I have faith that some proposition is true and then receive compelling proof that it is false, I shouldn't continue to have faith. Faith might go beyond the evidence, but rational faith doesn't go *against* the evidence. Absurdity makes faith worse, not better.

This leaves the third view: faith is sometimes rational, and sometimes irrational. This view of faith is most plausible. On this view, faith is similar to belief: our beliefs can be rational (e.g. my belief that  $1+1=2$ ) and our beliefs can be irrational (e.g. my belief you'll make playoffs). In the same way, sometimes faith is rational and sometimes faith is irrational.

### **Going Beyond the Evidence**

We have good reason to think that faith is, at least sometimes, rational. We also have good reason to think that faith goes beyond the evidence—as we discussed, this is part of how faith helps us keep our commitments over time, especially when we get counterevidence. But how do we make sense of this? Could “going beyond the evidence” ever be rational? We now turn to this question.

Before jumping in, let's clarify the kind of rationality we have in mind. Remember that we're concerned with propositional faith—faith that a statement or proposition is true. Because we're concerned with propositional faith—rather than acts of faith, which we'll discuss in the next section—it's natural to focus on what philosophers call *epistemic rationality*. Epistemic rationality is a kind of rationality associated with justified belief and knowledge. An epistemically rational belief has characteristics like being based on evidence, being reliably formed, being a candidate for knowledge, and being the result of a dependable process of inquiry. Paradigm examples of beliefs that are *not* epistemically rational are beliefs that are based on wishful thinking, hasty generalizations, or ones formed as the result of emotional attachment.



Thus, our question is: how can faith be *epistemically* rational and go beyond the evidence? We'll consider three answers that philosophers have discussed.

- (1) Faith is based on testimony.
- (2) Evidence changes how confident we are, but doesn't shake our faith.
- (3) Evidence is *permissive*, meaning we can rationally respond to it in multiple different ways, and we choose to take the faithful attitude.

We'll take each in turn.

### ***Faith and Testimony***

There are many types and sources of evidence. Augustine, Locke, Anscombe, and Zagzebski argue that faith is distinctive because it is based on a particular type of evidence: *testimony*.<sup>6</sup> Testimony is another's reporting that something is true. Religious faith might be based on God's testimony or the testimony of religious leaders. Interpersonal faith might be based on the testimony of our friends or family. This view explains the intuitive idea that faith and trust are closely connected. Suppose my husband promises to pick me up from the airport. I have faith that he will pick me up because I trust him; my faith is based on his testimony.

Having faith on the basis of testimony is not irrational. Testimony is a very important source of knowledge, and without it, we'd lose much of our geographical, scientific, and everyday knowledge. Most of our scientific beliefs aren't based on experiments we've done

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<sup>6</sup> For more on faith and testimony, see Augustine of Hippo (1892 [391]). 'On the Profit of Believing'. In *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: St Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, trans. P. Schaff and H. Wace. New York: Christian Literature Company, 347–66. See also Anscombe, G. E. M. (2008). 'Faith'. In M. Geach and L. Gormally (eds.), *Faith in a Hard Ground*. Exeter: Imprint Academic, 11–19. See finally Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus (2012). 'Religious Authority'. In L. T. Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 181–203.

ourselves—they are based on results reported by scientists. We trust their testimony. We believe geographical facts about the shape of the globe and things about other countries even though we've never traveled there ourselves—again, based on testimony. We ask people for directions on the street and believe our family and friends when they report things to us. Testimony is an extremely important source of evidence, and without it, we'd be in the dark about a lot of things.

Given how important testimony is to our knowledge, it's hard to see how, on this view, faith goes *beyond* the evidence. If testimony is evidence, and faith is based on testimony, isn't faith just based on evidence? Here, I think the best answer is that faith based on testimony goes beyond *certain sources* of evidence. In some cases, we *only* have testimony to go on. Maybe we don't have time to verify something ourselves, or evidence beyond testimony isn't available. Our evidence might be good but not great—we might even be torn about whether to trust someone. In cases like these, in choosing to take someone's word for something, we go beyond the evidence, at least in the sense that we don't require independent, verifying evidence to believe someone. For example, I choose to trust my husband's testimony that he'll pick me up, even if his promise isn't backed up by other evidence.

This isn't to say that we should *always* trust testimony. If we have good reason to think that someone is confused or lying, we shouldn't trust them or have faith that what they tell us is true. Nevertheless, if faith involves taking someone at their word, and we don't have a reason to distrust them, faith can be rational yet go beyond certain kinds of evidence.

### ***Faith and Confidence***

Rational faith might go beyond the evidence by remaining steadfast even when evidence changes our confidence levels. It is uncontroversial that this can happen with things we believe—we can continue to believe something, even when we receive evidence that changes

how confident we are. If I check the weather and see there's only a 5% chance of rain tomorrow, I will believe it will be sunny tomorrow and be 95% confident. However, if I check it again and now there's a 10% chance of rain, I'll still believe it will be sunny tomorrow—I'm now just a little less confident (90%).

Something similar might happen with faith. Consider two examples. Suppose you trust and love your brother very much, and you have faith that he would never commit a serious crime. However, he becomes the suspect of a murder, and the evidence is mounting against him. If the evidence against him is decent but inconclusive, you should be less confident that he is innocent, but you don't have to give up your faith that he is innocent. In this case, evidence changes your confidence, but not your faith.

Or suppose that Sarah has faith that a miracle occurred—maybe she thinks she witnessed it or bases her faith on historical testimony (e.g. she has faith that Jesus rose from the dead). However, Sarah might learn of an argument against miracles: given the laws of nature we regularly observe, a miracle occurring is very unlikely. This counterevidence might cause Sarah to be less confident that a miracle occurred, but she doesn't have to stop having faith that the miracle happened, especially if she initially had a good experiential or testimonial basis for her faith. The general idea is this: sometimes evidence chips away at our confidence. Even though our confidence gets lower, this evidence doesn't render our faith irrational.

Note that this doesn't mean that rational faith is consistent with *any* confidence level. Returning to an earlier example, if I get decisive evidence that your team will not go to playoffs, so I'm 100% sure you can't go, I should give up my faith. It's hard to say at what confidence level exactly you should give up your faith—this depends on things such as the relationship between faith and belief, and different people will probably draw the line at different places. In my view, you can rationally have faith that a statement is true if your confidence in that statement is around 50%. Either way, rational faith is consistent with changing levels of

confidence, and faith can rationally remain steadfast in light of counterevidence. This is a second way that rational faith goes beyond the evidence.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Faith and Permissivism***

Finally, let's consider the third idea: that if we find ourselves in a *permissive* case, we can demonstrate faith by choosing the faithful attitude that is consistent with our evidence. Permissivism is the idea that sometimes our evidence rationally allows for multiple different responses. Consider, for example, two jurors in the same courtroom, trying to decide if Smith is guilty. Both jurors might have the exact same evidence—they heard the same eyewitness testimony, know the same facts about fingerprints, the crime scene, etc.—but one might conclude that Smith is innocent and the other might conclude that Smith is guilty. This doesn't mean that one of them is irrational. It's just that sometimes the evidence is complex and difficult to evaluate, so there's more than one way to rationally respond to it.

Permissivism goes back to William James, who argues that there are cases where “reason cannot decide.” In those cases, James thinks we can rationally take a “leap of faith.” Here's the example James gives to illustrate this: consider a hiker who gets lost and finally finds her way back to civilization, but as she's walking, she encounters a deep and wide crevice in her path. Suppose that, to survive, she must jump this crevice, and it isn't obvious that she can make the jump. She estimates that she has about a 50/50 chance. However, she knows that if she has faith that she will successfully make the jump, she will develop more energy and zeal, which will make it more likely she will jump further and successfully land on the other

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<sup>7</sup> For more rational belief, faith, and confidence, see Jackson, Elizabeth. (2019). “Belief, Credence and Faith.” *Religious Studies* 55(2): 153–168.

side.<sup>8</sup> She has two choices: she can give up and likely die in the wilderness. Or she can have faith that she will make the jump, making it more likely she'll jump further and make it home. Her case is permissive: her current evidence is consistent with her making the jump or not making the jump; she could believe either and be rational. If she goes beyond the evidence by having faith, this makes it more likely she'll make the jump. Her faith creates its own evidence. Her faith is not irrational, but does require her to go beyond the evidence.

Permissivism doesn't always involve beliefs creating their own evidence. Consider a second example. Someone might find themselves in a permissive case in regards to the question of whether God exists. The evidence for God is complicated and difficult to assess, and there are good arguments on both sides. Suppose someone is in a permissive case, so they could be rational as a theist (who believes God exists), as an atheist (who believes God does not exist), or as an agnostic (who is undecided on whether God exists). Suppose they go out on a limb and decide to have faith that God exists. They are going beyond the evidence, but they are not irrational, since their evidence rationally permits them to be a theist. Again, this is a case where rational faith goes beyond the evidence.

To sum up, we've discussed three ways that faith could be epistemically rational but go beyond the evidence. One: faith is based on testimony. Two: evidence changes one's confidence but doesn't require one to give up their faith. Three: one is in a permissive case, and one chooses to take a faithful attitude that is permitted, but not required, by the evidence.

Some cases might involve several of these at the same time. Suppose, for example, I'm engaged and will be married soon. I have faith my fiancé and I are a great match and will continue in our commitment through thick and thin. A major reason for my faith is my fiancé's

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<sup>8</sup> James, William. (1987/2011) 'The Will to Believe', in J. Shook (ed.) *The Essential William James* (New York: Prometheus Books), 157–178. See also Bishop, John. (2002). "Faith as a Doxastic Venture." *Religious Studies* 38: 471–487.

testimony; I trust my fiancé, and he has promised to be faithful to me. Then, I gain counterevidence: I learn that 50% of marriages end in divorce. My confidence that my fiancé and I will make it goes down. The counterevidence might put me in a permissive case: given my evidence, it is rational for me to have faith that we'll make it, but my evidence doesn't rationally *require* that I have faith. If I choose to have faith that we will make it and commit to my fiancé, I've in some sense gone beyond the evidence in all three ways described above. My faith is based on testimony, it persists in light of my lower confidence, and I'm in a permissive case. But my faith isn't irrational. Thus, epistemically rational faith can go beyond the evidence.

### **Acts of Faith**

So far, we've focused on propositional faith: faith that some proposition is true. This kind of faith is a mental state—a thing in your head, similar to a belief or a desire (and as we've seen, propositional faith involves belief- and desire-like states). However, we haven't yet considered *acts of faith*—faith, not as a thing in your head, but as an action; as something you do.

Of course, propositional faith can lead to acts of faith. In fact, in most cases, it does—propositional faith that my chair will hold me will cause me to sit on it; propositional faith that my husband will pick me up at the airport will cause me to go outside and wait for him rather than order a taxi; propositional faith that God exists will cause me to pray, read Scriptures, participate in a religious community, and go to church.

However, acts of faith are worth considering in their own right. This is because what makes an action rational is different than what makes a mental state rational. Some have argued that faith involves what is called *acceptance*. Acceptance is a commitment to act as if something is true. While we normally accept what we believe and believe what we accept,

sometimes belief and acceptance come apart. In some cases, it can be rational to accept something even if our evidence shows it is very likely to be false.

Here are two examples. Suppose you are a judge in a court case, and the evidence is sufficient to legally establish that a particular suspect is guilty “beyond a reasonable doubt.” However, suppose you have other evidence that they are innocent, but it is personal, such that it cannot legally be used in a court of law. You might not be justified in *believing* they are guilty, but for legal reasons, you must *accept* that they are guilty and issue the “guilty” verdict. Consider a second example. Suppose you are visiting a frozen lake with your young children, and they want to go play on the ice. You may rationally believe the ice is thick and totally safe, but nonetheless refuse to let your children play, accepting that the ice will break, because of how bad it would be if they fell in.

In the same way that accepting some proposition might be rational even if believing it is not rational, taking an *act* of faith might be rational even if one has little evidence for the proposition they are accepting. For example, one might rationally accept that God exists, by practicing a religion, participating in prayer and liturgy, and joining a spiritual community, even if they have overwhelming evidence that atheism is true. This evidence means that propositional faith is *epistemically* irrational for them, but taking an act of faith could still be rational. Rational action depends on both our evidence and also what is at stake, and sometimes it can be rational to act as if something is true even if our evidence points the other way. The general lesson is that, *even if* propositional faith is epistemically irrational, acts of faith, or acceptance, may still be practically rational.

Given this, it’s not hard to see how acceptance-based acts of faith might go beyond the evidence. Since it can be rational to accept that something is true even if one has overwhelming evidence that it is false, acts of faith can rationally go beyond and even against the evidence,

depending on what is at stake. If one has a lot to gain if something is true, and little to lose if it's false, accepting it could be rational, even if it's quite unlikely to be true.

And in fact, Blaise Pascal argued that this is our situation regarding the question of whether God exists, in what's commonly known as "Pascal's Wager." If one commits to God, one has a lot to gain if God exists—heaven, a relationship with the all-good, all-powerful Creator of the universe—and one has little to lose if God does not exist. But if one does not commit to God, one has a lot to lose if God exists—potentially, eternal separation from God—and little to gain if God doesn't exist. Thus, even if one thinks it's unlikely God exists, it may still be rational to accept that God exists.<sup>9</sup>

While my goal here is not to defend Pascal's argument, it's interesting to consider the possibility that one might rationally commit to God, even if they're fairly confident God does not exist, because they have lots to gain and not much to lose. In this, accepting that God exists can be rational in a very large variety of evidential situations. Therefore, acts of faith might go beyond the evidence *even more* than propositional faith does.

### **Conclusion**

We discussed the four components of propositional faith: faith involves a belief-like component, a desire-like component, a commitment, and going beyond the evidence. We also discussed how faith differs from belief and hope—faith necessarily involves desire and belief does not, and faith requires more evidence or confidence than hope does. Then, we discussed three views of faith and rationality: faith is always irrational, faith is never irrational, and faith

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<sup>9</sup> Pascal, Blaise. (1958[1662]) *Pensées*, trans. William Trotter (New York: J. M. Dent Co.), fragments 233–241. See also the chapter in this book, "Evidentialism and Theistic Pragmatic Arguments" by Jeffrey Jordan.



is sometimes rational and sometimes irrational. We saw reasons to think that the third view is most plausible.

If faith is sometimes rational, how can it go beyond the evidence? We discussed three answers to this question. One: faith is based on testimony, and one chooses to trust another based on testimony alone, going beyond other sources of evidence. Two: evidence changes one's confidence, but doesn't require one to give up their faith. Three: one is in a permissive case, and one chooses to take a faithful attitude that is permitted, but not required, by the evidence. We've also seen that some cases of rational faith can go beyond the evidence in more than one way, and, sometimes, in all three ways.

Finally, we discussed acts of faith and how they differ from propositional faith. Importantly, we saw that even if propositional faith is irrational for someone, acts of faith may still be rational for them. I conclude that both propositional faith and acts of faith can be rational yet go beyond the evidence.<sup>10</sup>

### Further Reading

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<sup>10</sup> Thanks to Anders Ekren, Theo Chia, Chris Holley, Jackson Howard, William Keller, Ruben de Leeuw, and Brandon Whitaker for helpful comments on earlier drafts.

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