

Three Varieties of Faith

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ABSTRACT: Secular moral philosophy has devoted little attention to the nature and significance of faith. Perhaps this is unsurprising. The significance of faith is typically thought to depend on the truth of theism, and so it may seem that a careful study of faith has little to offer non-religious philosophy. But I argue that, whether or not theism holds, certain kinds of faith are centrally important virtues, that is, character traits that are morally admirable or admirable from some broader perspective of human flourishing. I discuss three varieties of faith that a virtuous person has in people: faith in herself, faith in people to whom she bears certain personal relationships, and faith in humanity. Coming to understand the nature of these forms of faith and the roles they play in human life promises to deepen our understanding of aspects of moral life and aspects of human flourishing that are poorly grasped. Beyond this, it makes valuable contributions to the literature on self-trust and the literature on epistemic partiality in friendship, and it helps us better understand the relation between our epistemic and practical ideals.

Secular moral philosophy has devoted little attention to the nature and significance of faith.¹ Perhaps this is unsurprising. The significance of faith is typically thought to depend on the truth of theism, and so it may seem that a careful study of faith has little to offer non-religious philosophy. Furthermore, in the absence of religious commitments that may lead one to value certain types of faith, philosophers may be, not just indifferent to faith, but hostile to it. After all, philosophers prize rationality, and so they may dismiss all forms of faith as objectionable forms of epistemic *irrationality*.

But, I argue, it would be a serious mistake for moral philosophers of any sort to dismiss faith altogether. Whether or not theism holds, certain types of faith are centrally important virtues, that is, character traits that are morally admirable, or admirable from some broader perspective of human flourishing. So thinking about faith and the roles that it plays in a good life promises to help us better understand aspects of moral life and aspects of human flourishing that are often overlooked. To that end, I will consider three varieties of faith that a virtuous person has in people, namely, faith in herself; faith in her friends, her children, and others to whom she bears certain personal relationships; and a limited form of faith in other people's moral decency, which I call faith in humanity. While this third type of faith is fundamentally a moral virtue, the first and second types are, fundamentally, both moral virtues and virtues in the broader sense. In Section 2, I will describe the underlying struc-

¹ For discussions of the non-religious, practical significance of faith, see John Dewey (1934) and Ronald Dworkin (2013), each of whom describes a form of faith in our basic values, and Mark Lance (unpublished manuscript), who describes the practical significance of expressions of faith in people. In Preston-Roedder (2013), I argue that having a form of faith in people's moral decency is itself a moral virtue, and Samantha Vice (2011) develops a related defense of the view that cynicism is a vice.

ture that these types of faith share. In Sections 3-5, I will characterize each type of faith in detail, and I will account for its significance by describing some of the main roles that it occupies in a good life. Roughly, these forms of faith, taken together, tend to prompt us, and people around us, to act in morally decent ways or to perform well in certain non-moral respects; and they *bind* us, in important respects, to our own projects and commitments, to the people who are closest to us, and to members of the moral community as a whole.

The project of characterizing these forms of faith and accounting for their significance, and thereby illuminating dimensions of moral life and human flourishing that have been largely neglected, is important in its own right; but it also serves other important aims. First, feminist work on self-trust and recent work on epistemic partiality toward people we care about include insightful discussions of aspects of the traits I will discuss.² But these discussions are substantially incomplete. By characterizing these traits as forms of *faith*, I draw attention to features of the traits that discussions in the literature overlook, features that help account for the traits' significance. Second, discussing these three varieties of faith together enables us to recognize limited, but important, respects in which, ideally, relations between members of the moral community mirror relations between members of certain personal relationships; and this recognition deepens our understanding of the nature and appeal of the sort of moral community to which we should aspire. Third, accounting for the significance of these forms of faith involves clarifying, to some extent, the relation between our epistemic and practical ideals. The examples I will discuss suggest that these forms of faith may sometimes prompt us to make judgments that are, to some degree, epistemically irra-

² For accounts of self-trust, see Govier (1993, 1998a, and 1998b), McLeod (2002), Goering (2009), and Jones (2012). For accounts of epistemic partiality toward people we care about, see Stroud (2006), Keller (2007), and Jollimore (2011).

tional, according to standard accounts of epistemic rationality. But I will argue in Section 6 that, even if one of the standard accounts is correct, the fact that faith in people may conflict, to some degree, with demands of epistemic rationality does not show that such faith cannot be a virtue. Rather, it makes salient important limits on the roles that epistemic, as opposed to practical, rationality should occupy in our ideals of how to live.

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The forms of faith I will discuss have a broad range of manifestations. Consider a first-generation college student – a child of Mexican immigrants – who discovers, upon entering college, that many of her classmates and teachers have rather dim views of Mexican-American students’ drive and intellectual ability. Such a student’s faith in the quality of her own character and the extent of her academic promise may help counteract her doubts about her ability to succeed in her courses. Or imagine a loving parent whose headstrong son has been credibly accused of some terrible crime, though the evidence against him is not clearly decisive. This parent’s faith may prompt her to cling, for a while, to her belief that her son is innocent, even if informed, but disinterested, observers are likely to conclude that he is guilty. Finally, imagine a civil rights activist who works to secure just treatment for an oppressed racial minority. The activist’s faith in the very political leaders and citizens who accept, or even support, oppressive institutions may prompt him to pursue a campaign of non-violent resistance, which seeks not only to eliminate injustice, but also to convert one’s oppressors and enter into community with them.³ But, even though these forms of faith have diverse manifestations, they share an underlying structure: each comprises characteristic cognitive, volitional, and emotional elements. I can best

³ For discussion of the aims, methods, and justification of non-violent resistance to oppression, see Gandhi (1961) and King (1986a and 1986b).

characterize these forms of faith if I first describe this structure.⁴

First, these forms of faith share a cognitive element.⁵ Someone who has faith in a person tends, even in the face of reasons for doubt, to make certain favorable judgments about that person. The content of these judgments may vary from one form of faith to the next. For example, someone who has faith in humanity stands ready to make favorable moral judgments about the quality of other people's actions and attitudes, while someone who has faith in herself is apt to make favorable judgments about her own ability to adopt and carry out worthwhile projects, whether these projects are morally significant or significant in other ways. Or, to take another example, a parent's faith in her child might influence her assessment of a vast range of the child's actions, attitudes, or projects; by contrast, a teacher's faith in her student might influence only a limited range of judgments concerning that student's academic performance. But in each case, someone who has faith in a person has a form of optimism about that person, a defeasible disposition to give him the benefit of the doubt. Her faith is an attitude, or stance, that she adopts toward this person; and when she encounters the person or attends to relevant aspects of his life, this attitude helps determine what she believes about him and how she interacts with him.

To be clear, having faith in people does not involve being blind to evidence that they merit relevant forms of disapproval, nor

⁴ My characterization of these structural features is indebted to Adams (1999: 380-389) and Tillich (1957: Ch. 2). In Preston-Roedder (2013: 666-671), I discuss two of these structural features – namely, the cognitive and volitional elements – but I do not adequately characterize or emphasize the emotional element.

⁵ For ease of expression, I will generally drop qualifications like “these forms of”, and simply use “faith” to refer to the three varieties of faith in people that I identified above.

does it involve being incapable of forming or expressing negative judgments about them. To the contrary, as I will explain, a virtuous person who has faith in people is sensitive, to a considerable degree, to evidence that the favorable judgments that she is disposed to make about these people are mistaken; and when such evidence is decisive, she may, without any failure of virtue, form negative judgments instead. Someone who has faith in people stands ready to make certain favorable judgments about them, and so, we might say, her faith does not involve blindness, but rather involves a tendency to view people with a “sympathetic eye.”⁶

It is possible to exhibit this stance in our judgments about people because people’s psychological lives, and aspects of their outward conduct, are, to a considerable degree, opaque to us; indeed, we are, to some degree, opaque to ourselves in these respects. For example, as Sarah Stroud points out, when we evaluate someone’s character, we are sensitive to some combination of the following factors: (1) what label, or category, her actions fall under, say, whether a colleague’s comment was brusque and inconsiderate or merely forthright (2) how the person’s conduct on some particular occasion fits into broader patterns of behavior, say, whether her behavior manifests her “spirit of adventure” or a “self-destructive streak” and (3) to what extent those traits or aims are central to her character as a whole (Stroud 2006: 506-510). Similarly, when we form beliefs about whether someone is capable, in certain conditions, of carrying out some demanding project, we generally rely on judgments concerning how her conduct on particular occasions manifests relevant skills, traits, or limitations; judgments concerning what this conduct reveals about the nature of her motives; and so on. Generally, evidence that bears on such matters is, at best, partial and ambiguous, and so responding to such evidence requires *interpretation* – we may form judgments that

⁶ See Jollimore (2011: 106).

cast available evidence in a more favorable or less favorable light.

Second, the forms of faith I will discuss share a volitional element. Someone who has faith in a person tends not only to make certain favorable judgments about that person, but also to be invested in the truth of those judgments; generally speaking, it matters to her that those judgments turn out to be true. For example, someone who has faith in other people's moral decency tends to care whether these people act rightly, even when her own private interests are not at stake, and she tends to exhibit certain behaviors, thoughts, or emotional responses that manifest this concern. She will, for example, be vulnerable to suffering disappointment when these people exhibit certain moral failings, and she may be disposed, in certain circumstances, to encourage them to do better.

There is also another respect in which having faith in a person can be a volitional matter. When someone has such faith, it may be important to her that she continue to have it, that she have it to a certain degree, or that she manifest it in certain ways, even in circumstances that are apt to undermine her faith. Of course, she cannot simply choose, through a bare act of will, to have faith in someone, but she may cling to her faith indirectly when she recognizes that it has been shaken, or that it is vulnerable.⁷ Imagine that someone who has some degree of faith in others' decency is cruelly exploited by an acquaintance that she cares about. She may respond by struggling to stave off cynicism. That is, she may cling to her faith – which may be fragile in the wake of the exploitation – by trying not to dwell on the wrong that she suffered, or by forcing herself to take a second look at people when she feels inclined to write them off.

Third, the forms of faith I will discuss share an emotional element, namely, a form of courage, which I can best describe if I first describe the relation between faith and risk. Someone who

⁷ See Adams's (1999: 384-388) discussion of clinging to faith.

has faith in a person, as opposed to simply being naïve, recognizes that the favorable judgments that manifest her faith may turn out to be mistaken, and that, as a result, acting on these judgments involves risk. Imagine a teacher whose faith in a disadvantaged student prompts her to judge that, with support and encouragement, the student can master his college coursework, despite getting off to a somewhat rocky start. Such a teacher is invested in the student's success, and so, at the very least, she risks suffering disappointment if the student performs poorly. And if this teacher's concern for the student prompts her to make personal sacrifices on his behalf, for example, devoting time and energy to addressing gaps in his academic background, then she takes on another sort of risk – the student's failure could, depending on how it occurred, render her efforts a waste of time. Or consider the activist I described above, who leads a campaign of nonviolent resistance to secure civil rights for an oppressed racial minority. The activist's work manifests his faith in his fellow citizens' capacity for moral reform, but it may turn out that these citizens are not as susceptible to reform as he believes. Indeed, it may turn out that his campaign merely enrages the community's leaders, prompting them to clamp down more harshly on members of the oppressed group. So, by acting on his faith, the activist risks bringing it about that he, and the very people he seeks to protect, suffer grave harm.⁸

A virtuous person who has faith in people tends to adopt certain measures that mitigate, to some degree, risks associated with her faith: when she deliberates about whether or how to act on judgments that manifest her faith, she is discriminating about which risks she takes; when she acts on such judgments in ways that render herself or others vulnerable to mistreatment, she takes on these risks incrementally, if possible; and in her interaction with people in whom she has faith, she remains

⁸ See Gandhi's (1961: Sec. 2) account of facing this risk during his campaign to secure civil rights for Indian immigrants in South Africa.

sensitive to new evidence concerning how the interaction will turn out, what will be gained if things go well, and what will be lost if things go badly. Adopting such measures is part of exhibiting appropriate concern for her own and others' welfare. But, to be clear, she does not – she *cannot* – entirely eliminate the risks associated with her faith. To begin with, someone who has faith in people refrains from eliminating, or substantially mitigating, the emotional risk associated with faith. Part of having faith in people is caring about whether these people's lives or projects succeed in certain respects; and caring involves rendering ourselves emotionally vulnerable to some degree. Beyond this, our faith in people disposes us to trust them in certain ways, but some of these people may turn out to be *un*-trustworthy, and whatever ill will or incompetence makes them untrustworthy may leave us, or people around us, worse off.

So having faith in people, and acting on the basis of that faith, involves risk. The emotional element that relevant forms of faith possess is a kind of courage to face this risk in the right way, in the right circumstances, and for the right reasons. Put another way, someone who has faith in people has sufficient humility to recognize that the favorable judgments she is disposed to make about these people may be mistaken, and so having faith in them involves a kind of danger. But – crucially – she is also disposed to feel sufficiently encouraged to face this danger, with due care and for the sake of worthwhile ends.

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Now that I have described the structure that these forms of faith share, I can discuss each form in detail. Together, these forms of faith comprise a vast range of phenomena, and I cannot provide a complete characterization of them here. Rather, I will describe some of their central manifestations and some of the main roles they play in a good life, with the aim of clarifying the nature and significance of these forms of faith and identifying important connections among them.

To begin with, a virtuous person has a kind of *faith in herself* – a limited form of optimism about her own capacity to adopt and carry out worthwhile projects, even in the face of obstacles. Someone who has such faith is disposed to judge, even in the face of reasons for doubt, that adopting and carrying out worthwhile projects is a live possibility for her. I can best describe such faith and account for its significance if I begin with some general remarks about a role that virtues play in a good life. On one widely accepted view, which traces to Aristotle, virtues correct for objectionable tendencies to which we are naturally tempted.⁹ For example, the virtue of benevolence corrects for a natural tendency to attach insufficient weight to others’ needs, while justice corrects for the tendency to make exceptions of ourselves when we determine how benefits or burdens get distributed.

It may seem, initially, that faith in oneself does not correct for any such tendency; indeed, it may seem that such faith is an aspect of an all-too-common *vice*, namely, conceit. But such faith does play the kind of corrective role I just described, and understanding this role is central to understanding why such faith is admirable. Roughly, a virtuous person’s faith in herself corrects for a tendency to harbor doubts, or to yield too readily to doubts, about one’s own capacities – doubts that might naturally arise when one adopts new projects or encounters obstacles to carrying out existing projects. So, to characterize this first form of faith in detail, one must consider some varieties of self-doubt.

Adapting a distinction from Trudy Govier (1993: 104-105), who discusses self-doubt in the course of characterizing self-trust, we can divide relevant instances of self-doubt into two categories: doubts concerning one’s own character and doubts concerning one’s own competence. First, when someone adopts new projects or encounters obstacles to pursuing existing projects, she

⁹ See Foot (2002: 8) for discussion of this view.

may come to doubt whether she possesses whatever character traits are required to choose well or to overcome the obstacles, or she may doubt that she possesses such traits to the requisite degree. For example, a newly-married man, who grew up in a broken home with an abusive and controlling father, may be plagued by doubts about his capacity to be a loving spouse or parent; and these doubts may discourage him from having children or constitute a barrier to intimacy. Or, to take a different sort of example, imagine a businessman who has embezzled money in order to avoid some personal financial hardship. Even if the businessman acknowledges, to himself, that he has acted wrongly and should confess his crime, he may doubt that he can bring himself to confess, or that he can bear the consequences of confession; and these doubts may drive him to commit additional wrongs to cover up his crime.¹⁰

Second, someone may doubt, not the quality of her character, but rather extent of her competence; that is, she may doubt, especially in the wake of some challenge to her competence, that she possesses whatever knowledge, skill, or talent is required to choose her projects well or to overcome obstacles to pursuing them. For example, a new parent who is suddenly confronted, upon coming home from the hospital, with the rigors of parenthood, may be stricken with doubts about her capacity to care for a newborn.¹¹

Occasions for both types of self-doubt are numerous. Many of the projects that contribute to our flourishing lie near the limits of what we can achieve, or at least, beyond what we *know* we can achieve; and when we pursue projects in the face of such uncertainty, there is room for doubt about whether we have the character or competence required to pursue them well.¹² Fur-

¹⁰ Fyodor Dostoevsky (1990: 301-312) and Woody Allen (1989) offer very helpful presentations of related cases.

¹¹ See Goering (2009) for discussion of self-trust in such cases.

¹² Erica Preston-Roedder made this point in discussion.

thermore, people who are members of oppressed groups, or who are mistreated in certain other ways, may be especially vulnerable to these forms of self-doubt.¹³ For example, a psychologically battered wife, whose husband relentlessly belittles her judgment, may develop stifling doubts about her ability to form her own reasonable views about pressing social issues, her children's moral education, or anything else that lies beyond some narrow sphere of domestic concerns.¹⁴ Or, returning to a case I described above, a student of color who recognizes that she is a target of certain negative stereotypes may develop grave doubts about her ability to succeed in her courses.

The fact that a virtuous person's faith in herself counteracts these types of self-doubt, or in some cases, prevents them from arising altogether, is significant in at least three respects. First, when we pursue difficult projects or decide whether to pursue them, self-doubt may prevent us from adopting the projects, lead us to abandon the projects, or distract and discourage us while we pursue them. So, when someone's faith in herself counteracts self-doubt or prevents such doubt from arising, it helps dismantle an obstacle to her pursuit of difficult, but worthwhile, aims.

Sometimes, of course, our self-doubt rightly indicates that we *cannot* carry out some project, or that the likelihood of success is so low that our efforts would be better spent elsewhere. So our faith in ourselves is associated with a characteristic type of risk, namely, the risk of getting in over our heads. A person's faith in herself makes her somewhat more likely to pursue projects that require some exceptional exhibition of virtue or competence, but if it turns out that she does not possess whatever characteristics are required to pursue those projects successfully, her faith may lead her to act in ways that only make matters worse. Put another way, a person's faith in herself makes

¹³ See McLeod (2002: 74-75).

¹⁴ Govier (1993: 108-109) discusses a related case.

her vulnerable to her own failures of virtue, failures of competence, or failures of self-knowledge. For example, imagine that someone feels emboldened to urge her friend, who has marked symptoms of depression, to see a therapist. If she fails to exhibit sufficient tact, she may end up wounding the friend's pride, leaving him less likely to seek whatever help he needs.

So it is important to recognize that a virtuous person mitigates such risks in ways I described above. To begin with, when she determines which projects to adopt and how to pursue them, she is judicious in deciding which risks to take. More precisely, she is sensitive to evidence concerning the quality of her character, the extent of her competence, the difficulty of the aims she wishes to pursue, and so on; and when the evidence supporting this judgment is clearly decisive, she may judge, without any failure of virtue, that she cannot carry out some worthwhile project. Furthermore, even when she judges that carrying out some difficult project is a live possibility, she may decide not to pursue it, say, because the consequences of failure are too dire or the goods at stake are too meager. Finally, if she pursues the project, she remains sensitive to new evidence concerning how it progresses. The person described above, who intervenes on behalf of a depressed friend, might adopt such measures, say, by assessing the benefits and burdens associated with *her* approaching the friend, as opposed to someone else's doing so; by reflecting on her attempts to broach sensitive subjects with this friend in the past; and, if she ends up encouraging the friend to seek therapy, by attending to the friend's reactions as the conversation proceeds.

The fact that faith in oneself opposes certain types of self-doubt is also significant in a second sense. Often, such doubts are, in part, manifestations of other, more fundamental attitudes that are objectionable in themselves. And when someone's faith in herself counteracts self-doubt or prevents self-doubt from arising in such cases, it thereby thwarts the expression of those underlying attitudes, or prevents her from adopting the attitudes altogether. Consider the businessman I described above,

who doubts that he can bring himself to confess his crime. We can plausibly imagine that this businessman's doubt is fueled by a desire to avoid, say, losing his wealth and social standing, becoming estranged from his loved ones, and other costs associated with confession – a desire that is not appropriately tempered by concern for others' interests. This desire might, say, focus his attention on the severity of the costs of confession, or on other grounds for judging that confession is not a live possibility; and it may turn his attention away from the importance – to him – of treating others decently, away from the possibility of reconciling with his loved ones, and away from other grounds for judging that he *can* confess. So, if the businessman summons sufficient faith in himself to counteract his doubt, he thereby thwarts, to some extent, the expression of this selfish desire.

To take another example, in which self-doubt is not just a product of an objectionable attitude, but rather an *aspect* of it, imagine someone who struggles, periodically, to overcome a drug addiction, but always ends up using drugs again. Suppose that, after reflecting on his failure to overcome his addiction, this person comes to doubt that he is *capable* of recovering, and this tempts him to abandon his project of recovery. We can plausibly imagine that this person's self-doubt is part of a failure of self-respect. It is, in other words, part of his sense that, in certain respects, he is not a fully functioning person at all, but rather a kind of slave to his addiction. So, if he retains sufficient faith in himself to counteract this doubt, he thereby mitigates, to some degree, this failure of self-respect.

Finally, the fact that a virtuous person's faith in herself opposes certain types of self-doubt is significant in a third sense: it means that such faith helps prevent her from becoming alienated from an important source of her life's meaning and value, namely, her own projects. Sometimes, when our deliberative capacities are called into question, we may come to doubt whether our projects merit the energy and attention that we devote to them. That is, we may come, not simply to doubt

that we possess certain characteristics needed to pursue our projects successfully, but rather to doubt whether our projects are worth pursuing at all. People who are, in virtue of their membership in oppressed groups, targets of negative stereotypes about their moral or intellectual capacities may be particularly susceptible to this form of doubt, as are people who are mistreated in certain other ways. For example, a member of a marginalized ethnic minority, whose members are targets of negative stereotypes regarding their intellectual sophistication, might, upon recognizing that she is a target of such stereotypes, come to doubt the worth of cultural practices around which she organizes her life. Or the psychologically battered wife that I described above, whose husband relentlessly belittles her judgment, may develop doubts about the worth of her career aspirations or political commitments. When someone harbors grave, persistent doubts of this sort, she is thereby alienated, in one sense, from her own projects – her attachment to those projects is less than wholehearted. So the fact that a virtuous person’s faith in herself tends to counteract such doubts, or prevent them from arising, means that her faith shields her, to some degree, from this form of alienation.

This account of faith in oneself enables us not only to identify the corrective role that such faith plays, but also to respond to the charge that such faith is a form of conceit – a disposition to make too high an appraisal of one’s own traits or accomplishments. Of course, someone who has faith in herself is disposed to make certain favorable self-regarding judgments. But faith in oneself differs from conceit, first, because the favorable judgments that such faith disposes a person to make are largely restricted to assessments of her *capacity* to behave or perform well. Someone who has such faith tends to judge that acting rightly or achieving some worthwhile aim is a live possibility for her, even when this is costly or difficult. But she may nevertheless recognize, say, that she is often weak-willed or that her success depends on others’ support. She might even judge that acting rightly would be more difficult for her than for most

other people in similar circumstances. In short, a person's faith in herself is compatible with considerable humility in her assessment of her traits and her prospects for behaving or performing well. A second, related difference is that faith in oneself lacks the element of self-absorption that characterizes conceit. When someone who has faith in herself judges that, despite the obstacles she faces, she can behave in some desired way, this is primarily a call to act and to steel herself for what lies ahead, not a prompt for self-congratulation.

Furthermore, as I said above, feminist work on self-trust provides illuminating discussions of an aspect of faith in oneself, namely, the cognitive aspect and its connection to action; but, by characterizing this attitude as a type of faith, my account draws attention to features of the attitude that these other discussions overlook or fail to emphasize, features that help us better grasp the attitude's significance. First, drawing attention to the volitional aspect of such faith helps us better understand some of the mechanisms by which this attitude counteracts self-doubt. Insofar as someone has such faith, she cares about being capable of adopting and pursuing worthwhile aims, even in the face of grave obstacles. This concern may lead her, say, to seek evidence that she has this capacity, to focus on such evidence when she acquires it, or to turn her attention away from grounds for doubt; and by focusing her attention in these characteristic ways, her concern may dispose her to judge that she has the desired capacity. Second, drawing attention to the emotional aspect of such faith, that is, to the fact that having this attitude involves having the courage to face certain risks for the sake of worthwhile ends, deepens our understanding of what is admirable about the attitude. Third, describing this attitude as a type of faith makes salient the fact that when someone has the attitude, she might, as a result, form judgments that go somewhat beyond what her evidence supports; and, as I will explain in Section 6, recognizing this fact, and trying to make sense of it, helps us clarify the relation between our epistemic and practical ideals.

A virtuous person also has a kind of faith in her friends, her spouse, her children, and others to whom she bears certain personal relationships; in short, she has faith in people who are close to her. I said above that, taken together, the three types of faith I am discussing have a vast range of manifestations. But, even if we restrict our attention to this second type, we must consider a broad range of phenomena: someone's faith in his friend, who is reading her poetry before an audience for the first time, might enable him to recognize subtle merits of the friend's performance¹⁵; a teacher's faith in her bright, engaged student may prompt her to judge that the student can succeed in some challenging required course, though his academic performance has been relatively weak so far; and a parent's faith in her wayward son may lead her to cling, for a while, to the belief that her son is innocent, though he has been credibly accused of some terrible crime. Nevertheless, these diverse phenomena share important characteristics, and they may be profitably viewed as instances of a single type of faith.

Someone who has faith in people who are close to her tends to view these people in a favorable light when she makes relevant evaluative judgments about their actions or attitudes. To be clear, it may be that what counts as a relevant judgment varies from one relationship to another. A good parent is deeply invested in many aspects of her child's life, and accordingly, her faith in her child is apt to influence an enormous range of judgments about her child's capacities to behave or perform well; about the quality of his actual behavior or attitudes; or about his capacity, during certain stages of life, to adopt and pursue worthwhile aims. By contrast, a good teacher may be deeply concerned with comparatively few aspects of her student's life, even if she has worked closely with him; and it may

¹⁵ For discussions of this case, see Keller (2007: 27-30) and Jollimore (2011: 52-59).

be that her faith in her student influences a relatively narrow range of judgments concerning his intellectual ability. More generally, when someone has faith in people who are close to her, she stands ready to give them the benefit of the doubt in certain respects that are salient, given the nature of her relationships with them.

A virtuous person's faith in people who are close to her may be distinguished from other types of faith I am discussing, not only by its objects, but also by other characteristics. First, the main judgments that manifest a person's faith in *herself* are, in a sense, forward-looking; that is, as I explained in Section 3, they concern her capacity to choose well when she adopts new projects, or to overcome obstacles to pursuing existing projects. Some of the main judgments that manifest a person's faith in those who are close to her are forward-looking in this sense – they concern her loved ones' capacities to adopt and pursue worthwhile aims, or to behave or perform well in certain respects, in the future. But other, similarly important manifestations of such faith focus instead on the present or past. Someone's faith in people who are close to her may yield these other manifestations when, say, her loved ones adopt behaviors, possess traits, or pursue projects that matter to them; and these behaviors, traits, or projects are subject to being evaluated – and therefore condemned, or even ridiculed – by others. Returning to a case I sketched above, and which I adapted from Simon Keller (2007: 27-30), imagine that Eric attends his friend's first poetry reading. Eric is deeply invested in his friend's success, and he has faith in her. So he is disposed to listen to the performance with a sympathetic ear; that is, his faith tends to make him sensitive to merits of the performance that other, more disinterested audience members are likely to overlook. Or, taking another example, imagine that, after making an infelicitous remark during a lively discussion at a party, Maria's spouse worries that his – the spouse's – comment was offensive. Maria loves her spouse and has faith in him, and so, looking back on the incident, she is apt to view her spouse's

remark, and his intentions, charitably. So someone's faith in her loved ones disposes her to make judgments, not only about these people's future prospects, but also about their past and present actions and attitudes.

Second, as I will explain in Section 5, the main judgments that manifest someone's faith in *humanity* are moral judgments about others' actions and attitudes. By contrast, as some earlier examples illustrate, central manifestations of someone's faith in people who are close to her might include moral judgments, like the parent's judgment that her son did not commit the grave crime of which he stands accused, or non-moral judgments, like the teacher's judgment that her struggling student can succeed in some demanding course.

At least three main considerations account for the significance of faith in those who are close to us. First, a virtuous person's faith in her spouse, friends, and so on tends to bolster her love for them, and so it plays an instrumental role in enabling her personal relationships to flourish. More precisely, in good instances of these relationships, members of the relationship are bound together by characteristic types of love or other forms of concern. These forms of concern, for example, the parent's love for her child, the teacher's dedication to her student, or the friends' commitment to each other, are apt to flourish when someone recognizes and appreciates what is admirable about the person she cares about, and vulnerable to decline when she fails to see or appreciate what is admirable about him. Part of having faith in people who are close to us is being disposed to view them in a favorable light in respects that are relevant, given the nature of the relationship. In other words, when someone has faith in her loved ones, she is apt to recognize certain of their admirable traits, including traits that others – who adopt a cynical or disinterested stance – are likely to miss. So

her faith bolsters her concern for these people, and thereby promotes the flourishing of her relationships with them.¹⁶

To be clear, my claim that seeing something admirable about our loved ones bolsters our concern for them, while failing to see anything admirable renders our concern vulnerable to decline, has important caveats. To begin with, our concern for people who are close to us need not depend on our seeing something especially *morally* admirable about them; to the contrary, two people might, say, find the basis of deep, lasting friendship in their shared aesthetic sensibility or love of college basketball, even if neither takes the other to be especially morally virtuous. Also, different forms of concern may be influenced in different ways and to different degrees by our evaluations of people we care about; for example, it may be that, in general, parental love is more resilient than other types of love in the face of negative judgments about the beloved. Finally, the relation of dependence between caring about people and seeing them in a favorable light runs in both directions; that is, our concern for our loved ones focuses our attention and shapes our behavior in ways that make us more apt to see what is admirable about them, and seeing what is admirable, in turn, reinforces our concern. Bearing these caveats in mind, my claim is that, in virtue of her faith in those who are close to her, a virtuous person tends to recognize what is admirable about these people; and her heightened perception of their admirable characteristics tends to bolster her concern for them.

A second consideration that helps explain why a virtuous person's faith in her loved ones is significant is that such faith tends to prompt her loved ones to adopt morally decent actions and attitudes, or to perform well in certain non-moral respects. More precisely, her faith in people who are close to her disposes her to make certain favorable judgments about them and to behave accordingly; and this behavior tends to prompt them to

¹⁶ Stroud (2006: 511) makes a related point.

respond in ways that confirm the favorable judgments. The fact that our beliefs about others – whether favorable or unfavorable – can encourage them, indirectly, to act in ways that confirm our beliefs is widely discussed by social psychologists and familiar from daily life. Imagine, for example, that a parent believes, in the face of reasons for doubt, that her son is capable of exhibiting some measure of tact and self-control in handling an emotionally fraught conflict with a classmate. If she communicates this belief to her son, he may respond by trying to live up to her expectations, or trying to avoid disappointing her. Our expressions of faith in our spouses, friends, students, and so on often encourage them, in just this way, to behave or perform well. But, moving beyond such cases, a vast body of work in social psychology identifies other routes by which our evaluative beliefs about other people encourage them to respond – without trying to do so, and often without realizing that they are doing so – in ways that confirm our beliefs. Such studies provide good reason to judge that someone’s faith in people who are close to her is apt to influence these people’s behavior, not only by prompting them to try to meet her expectations, but also in other, subtler ways.

In Preston-Roedder (2013: 677-678), I describe four of these subtler forms of influence that seem especially relevant to this discussion.

- (1) When someone’s friends, family members, or other members of her community view her in a certain way, whether favorable or unfavorable, she may begin to view herself in that way – or in other words, to internalize their view of her – and act accordingly.¹⁷
- (2) When peo-

¹⁷ One study showed that simply telling elementary school students to refrain from littering had only modest, short-lived effects. By contrast, teachers’ labeling the students as “neat and tidy people” had greater and longer lasting effects. See R.L. Miller, P. Brickman, and D. Bolen, “Attribution versus persuasion as a means of modifying

ple form expectations about someone's behavior, they may send subtle behavioral cues, and she may respond directly to these cues by adopting the very behaviors they expect.¹⁸ (3) When people expect someone to behave in a certain way, this may determine what opportunities they give her, or withhold from her, and her exposure to these opportunities, or lack of access to them, may result in her adopting the expected behaviors.¹⁹ (4) If someone realizes that people expect her to behave poorly, she may react in certain ways that shield her from the shame or disappointment of confirming their low expectations. For example, she may come to care less about how she behaves,²⁰ or she may create obsta-

behavior", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 31 (1975): 430-441.

¹⁸ In one classic study, C.O. Word, M.P. Zanna, and J. Cooper showed that if a white interviewer expects a black interviewee to perform poorly, the white interviewer will send negative, non-verbal cues – for example, she may sit relatively far away, make relatively little eye contact, and so on – and this may cause the interviewee to perform poorly ("The nonverbal mediation of self-fulfilling prophecies in interracial interaction", *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 10 [1974]: 109-120).

¹⁹ The following example comes from Robert Merton's essay "The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy", in which he coined that now ubiquitous phrase: In the late 1940's, some Northern whites supported policies that excluded blacks from their labor unions, on the grounds that black workers were more likely than whites to cross the picket line. But these union leaders failed to recognize that blacks who went to work for strike-bound employers often did so because they had been excluded from union jobs, and were therefore desperate for work. As more blacks gained admission to unions in the decades that followed, fewer crossed the picket line. See "The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy", *Antioch Review* 8 (1948): 196 and 197.

²⁰ This is one of the mechanisms by which stereotype threat undermines the performance of highly qualified women and minority college

cles to behaving well so that she can blame her poor behavior on the obstacles, rather than her character or capacities.²¹ But her reacting in these ways is likely to result in her behaving poorly, just as people predict.

A virtuous person's faith in people who are close to her tends to prompt these people, in one or more of these ways, to behave or perform well in certain respects; and it tends to prevent her from prompting them, inadvertently, to behave or perform poorly.

Of course, the influence that evaluative judgments about other people exert on those people's actions and attitudes is often complicated. There are, for example, cases where having faith in people who are close to us, and acting in accord with that faith, ends up facilitating these people's poor behavior – indeed, this is among the main risks associated with such faith – and there are cases where adopting a pessimistic view of people, and acting in accord with that pessimism, ends up goading them into behaving or performing well. But a virtuous person who has faith in those who are close to her adopts measures, which I described in Section 2, that mitigate her risk of facilitating her loved ones' poor behavior or performance; that is, she is discriminating when she determines which risky behaviors to adopt, she remains sensitive to new evidence concerning the likely consequences of her behavior, and so on.

Furthermore, we have good reason to judge that, because a virtuous person adopts such measures, her faith in people who are

students. For an accessible overview of stereotype threat and some of the studies used to identify it, see Claude M. Steele, "Thin Ice: Stereotype Threat and Black College Students", *The Atlantic Monthly* 284(2) (1999): 44-47 and 50-54.

²¹ See E.E. Jones and S. Berglas, "Control of attributions about the self through self-handicapping strategies: The appeal of alcohol and the role of underachievement", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 4 (1978): 200-206.

close to her will, in general, produce favorable effects – effects that a more pessimistic stance would not produce. Psychological studies like the ones I cited above identify very many cases in which, despite the complexity of the influence our evaluative judgments exert on others’ actions and attitudes, making *positive* judgments about the quality of other people’s character traits, habits, and capacities tends, on balance, to prompt these people behave or perform well.²² By contrast, studies concerning negative stereotyping of women and minorities identify a ubiquitous class of cases in which persistent, widely accepted *negative* judgments about other people’s capacities tend, on balance, to make it harder for these people to perform tasks that require the exercise of those capacities, and in some cases, make it harder for them to perform other tasks as well.²³ So it seems that that, in general, when a virtuous person has faith in those who are close to her, and exercises due care in determining how to communicate and act on that faith, her faith will encourage these people to behave or perform well.

A third consideration that helps explain the significance of a virtuous person’s faith in those who are close to her identifies a respect in which such faith, together with its central manifestations, is admirable in itself, quite apart from its results. When someone has faith in her friends, her children, and so on, she thereby stands in a kind of solidarity with them – a form of solidarity that is especially pronounced, and especially significant, when her faith yields its characteristic attitudes and behaviors. But when she fails, in certain circumstances, to have faith in people who are close to her, or to exhibit certain manifestations of that faith, she abandons these people in some sense; and such abandonment sometimes constitutes a grave form of betrayal. Return to the case of the parent whose son is accused of

²² In addition to the studies I cited above, see Kelly (1950); Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968); and Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady (1999).

²³ For an overview of such studies, see Steele (2010). See also Inzlicht and Kang (2010).

a terrible crime, and suppose that, although her son maintains his innocence and the evidence against him is not clearly decisive, the accusation is credible. Part of being a good parent in this case is having some measure of faith in the son, and so, being disposed, to some degree, to believe he is innocent; indeed, such a parent is apt to cling, for a while, to her belief in her son's innocence, even if other reasonable, informed, but disinterested observers are likely to conclude that he is guilty. Furthermore, if the parent believes instead that her son is guilty – or for that matter, if she is sufficiently *tempted* to believe this – then we might expect her to feel that she has betrayed her son, that she has let him down in some respect that matters to both of them. In fact, we might expect the doubting parent to feel this way, even if she manages to conceal her doubts from her son and to behave in an outwardly supportive way. What matters to a good parent in this case is not just that she be disposed to view her son favorably, or that she adopt outwardly supportive behavior, but also that she *believe* that her son is innocent, at least, until she encounters decisive evidence to the contrary; and this concern is apt to become especially urgent if other people in her son's life, say, neighbors or other family members, become persuaded by the evidence against him.

To fully appreciate this third consideration, one must attend not only to the cognitive dimension of faith, but also to its volitional and emotional dimensions. First, when someone has faith in her loved ones, she is not just disposed to make certain favorable judgments about them; she is also, as I explained in Section 2, invested in the truth of these judgments – it is important to her that the judgments turn out to be true. One might say that when someone has such faith, she *roots* for her loved ones to behave or perform well in certain respects, even in the face of reasons to doubt seriously that they will do so. Second, when someone has faith in her loved ones, she tends to feel encouraged to face certain risks associated with such faith. Because she cares whether people in whom she has faith behave

or perform well in certain respects, she tends to feel satisfaction when they behave or perform well, and she is vulnerable, at the very least, to feeling disappointment when they behave or perform poorly. Beyond this, acting in accord with her faith in people who are close to her may render her vulnerable to being exploited by them, or being mistreated in other ways. Nevertheless, part of having such faith is having the courage to express that faith in certain ways and in certain circumstances, despite the dangers involved. So, when someone has faith in people who are close to her, she thereby casts her lot with theirs – acquiring a stake, or increasing her stake, in the success of certain aspects of their lives or projects.

Once we understand why having faith in people who are close to us constitutes a way of standing in solidarity with them, we can recognize that viewing this attitude as a form of *faith* illuminates the role that the attitude occupies in a good life. There are some admirable recent discussions of the disposition to view our loved ones in a favorable light, that is, discussions of the cognitive aspect of faith in people we care about. Some of these discussions state that this disposition is admirable partly because it connects us in important ways to people we care about; in other words, the discussions raise something like the third consideration that I just described. For example, Sarah Stroud (2006: 511-512) argues that giving our friends the benefit of the doubt in certain respects is a way of being committed, to some degree, to the view that our friends are good people. To be a good friend to someone is, on her view, “to have cast your lot in with his and, indeed, with his good character” (Stroud 2006: 512). Simon Keller (2007: 36-39) claims that in good friendships, we give our friends the benefit of the doubt in certain respects, partly because we are open to being influenced by our friends’ favorable views of *their own* actions, capacities, and projects. So, when we view our friends in a favorable light, we thereby share in one important part of the friends’ lives and outlooks. Finally, Troy Jollimore (2011: Ch. 3) claims that in good personal relationships, we devote focused attention to as-

pects of our loved ones' lives, and this disposes us to see our loved ones in a favorable light. This disposition is admirable, on Jollimore's (2011: Ch. 7) view, because it enables us to pierce the veil of our own cynicism and prejudice, and see our loved ones as they are.

There are, to be sure, respects in which these accounts in the literature are mistaken. As I will explain in Section 6, Jollimore overstates the extent to which the attention that we devote to people we love leads us to see these people as they are, as opposed to overestimating what is admirable about them. And Keller overstates the extent to which our disposition to view friends in a favorable light is grounded in the friends' favorable views of their own actions, capacities, and projects; after all, many of the cases in which it is most important for us to believe, despite reasons for doubt, that our friends are capable of behaving or performing well are cases in which the friends fail to believe in *themselves*. But the important point, for my purposes, does not concern these accounts' errors, but rather, concerns their omissions. Stroud and Keller discuss the disposition to make favorable judgments about our friends – what Stroud (2006) calls “epistemic partiality” toward our friends – more or less in isolation, almost entirely overlooking the connection between this cognitive disposition and the volitional and emotional phenomena I described above. Even Jollimore, who treats epistemic partiality toward loved ones as an aspect of love for them, relies on an account of love, which he calls the “vision view”, that emphasizes judgments and belief-forming practices that we tend to adopt when we love people (Jollimore 2011: 26). Because these accounts neglect, to varying degrees, the connection between these cognitive dispositions and the volitional and emotional phenomena that I described, they cannot adequately characterize the sense in which having these cognitive dispositions is part of being connected, in significant ways, to people we care about. By contrast, my account views these cognitive dispositions as aspects of faith, and so it makes salient their connection to dispositions of will and emotion that draw

us, in ways I described, into important forms of solidarity with our loved ones. Put more broadly, once we view epistemic partiality toward people we care about as an aspect of faith in these people, we can better grasp the role that such partiality occupies in a good life.

5

Finally, a virtuous person has a limited form of faith in other people's moral decency, which I call faith in humanity. In contrast to a person's faith in herself and faith in those who are close to her, which are both moral virtues and virtues from a broader perspective of human flourishing, faith in humanity is fundamentally a moral virtue; and in contrast to these other types of faith, which dispose a person to make certain moral and non-moral judgments, faith in humanity mainly disposes her to make certain moral judgments. When someone who has faith in humanity makes judgments about other people's past or present actions or attitudes, she tends to be highly sensitive to evidence of these people's moral decency, including evidence that disinterested observers are likely to overlook. And when she forms expectations about other people's future actions or attitudes, she is disposed to judge, even in the face of reasons for doubt, that adopting morally decent actions or attitudes is a live possibility for them, provided that they receive certain kinds of support or encouragement. Social reformers, like Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and James Baldwin, exhibit some of the most striking manifestations of faith in humanity while resisting racial injustice and other social evils. For example, when Baldwin claims that – whether they realize it or not – black and white Americans are brothers and sisters, and he insists that “we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it”, he exhibits profound faith in black Americans' capacity for love, and in their white compatriots' capacity for moral reform (Baldwin 1995: 9). But someone might also manifest faith in humanity in the course of more low-key interactions with certain neighbors, coworkers, and so on who fall out-

side the sphere of her personal relationships. She might be disposed, say, to see a new coworker, whom others regard as obnoxious, as refreshingly direct, or she may be disposed to take a second look at people who, she believes, have slighted her, giving these people's actions, attitudes, and circumstances what Iris Murdoch describes as "careful and just attention" (Murdoch 2001: 17).

Despite the fact that faith in humanity has its own characteristic manifestations, it resembles, in important respects, faith in people who are close to us; and these similarities go beyond the structural similarities I described in Section 2. To begin with, both types of faith involve dispositions to trust other people who might end up behaving poorly, and so both are associated with similar risks, namely, the risk of being exploited or mistreated in some other way, the risk of failing to prevent third parties from being mistreated, and the risk of becoming somehow complicit in the wrongdoing of people we trust. Returning to an earlier example, imagine that an activist, who works to secure civil rights for an oppressed racial minority, has faith in the fundamental decency of officials and ordinary citizens who accept, or actively support, oppressive institutions in his community; and imagine that this activist's faith leads him to pursue a strategy of nonviolent resistance to injustice, a strategy guided and constrained by the aim of converting oppressors and drawing them into community with the oppressed. If it turns out that these officials and citizens are not as susceptible to reform as the activist believes, his campaign might end up subjecting vulnerable members of the minority population to further abuse. Or, taking a different example, imagine that someone's faith in her wayward brother, who struggles to overcome a drug addiction, leads her to support him financially, for some limited period, while he seeks treatment. If it turns out that the brother cannot, in his present circumstances, overcome his addiction, then the financial support may serve only to facilitate his drug use, or delay his falling into the kinds of dire circumstances that could, perhaps, prompt him to recover. Of course,

a virtuous person limits such risks by exercising due care in ways I described above, but she cannot eliminate them altogether.

Deeper similarities between faith in humanity and faith in people we care about emerge when we consider what makes these types of faith admirable. In Preston-Roedder (2013: 676-685), I discuss three considerations that help account for the significance of faith in humanity, and, although I will review all of these considerations here, I will focus on the third. First, a virtuous person's faith in humanity disposes her to adopt certain behaviors, and, through the operation of mechanisms like the ones I described in Section 4, these behaviors tend to prompt others to adopt morally decent actions or attitudes. Of course, as I said above, the influence that our evaluative judgments exert on others' actions and attitudes are often complicated, but, because a virtuous person limits the expression of her faith by exercising due care, her faith in others' decency is apt to produce a favorable influence on balance. Second, having faith in humanity, and so, being disposed to make certain favorable moral judgments about people, helps prevent a virtuous person from treating those people unjustly. More precisely, her faith discourages her from making certain negative judgments, which turn out to be false, about the quality of people's actions and attitudes, and from overlooking their morally admirable qualities. So it helps prevent her from acting on such negative judgments, say, by wrongfully excluding those people from her community, ruining their reputations, or subjecting them to other forms of unwarranted condemnation. I discuss these two considerations in detail in Preston-Roedder (2013: 676-683), and I have little to add to that discussion. So I will set them aside.

I will focus instead on the third consideration, which states that when someone has faith in humanity, she thereby stands in an important form of solidarity with others. Recall that, as I argued in Section 4, when someone has faith in people who are close to her, she roots for these people to behave or perform

well in certain moral or non-moral respects, and she thereby stands in a kind of solidarity with them. Similarly, when someone has faith in humanity, she tends to make certain favorable moral judgments about other people's actions and attitudes. Furthermore, she tends to be invested in the truth of those judgments and to feel encouraged to act in accord with them, despite the associated risks, for the sake of worthwhile ends. In short, when someone has faith in humanity, she roots for people to adopt morally decent actions and attitudes, and she thereby stands in a related form of solidarity with them. The main differences between these two cases concern the range of people in whom someone has faith and the aspects of these people's lives with which her faith is concerned; but in each case, having faith in others is a way of standing by them, a way of casting one's lot with theirs.

The moral significance of such solidarity – and so, one aspect of the moral significance of faith in humanity – is grounded in the following familiar characterization of one role that morality occupies in human life:

conforming to moral ideals enables a person to live in a kind of community with others, even though their interests and aims may differ considerably from her own. In other words, the world is teeming with people, and their various interests and aims can come into sharp conflict. On the one hand, each of these people devotes special attention to her own private aims, and ... it is appropriate for her to do so. But on the other hand, there is a sense in which each person is just one among others, and no one is any more or less significant than anyone else. These two judgments are deeply plausible and central to the living of our lives, and conforming to moral requirements enables a person to live in a way that gives expression to each. Roughly, a virtuous person may pursue her own private aims in some cases, but she limits her pursuit of these aims, adopts new aims, and adopts attitudes in ways that bring her into a kind of community,

or harmony, with everyone else (Preston-Roedder 2013: 684).

Having faith in other people's moral decency, and thereby standing in solidarity with them; taking on others' projects as her own in limited respects; and regulating her outward conduct in ways that, in some sense, leave room for others people to pursue their reasonable aims are all ways in which the morally virtuous person manages to escape her solitude and enter with others into the form of community I just described.

Attending to this third consideration enables us to recognize limited, but important, respects in which ideal relations between members of the moral community mirror ideal relations between members of certain personal relationships. Doing well in one's role as a moral agent, and doing well in one's role, say, as a friend or parent, both involve characteristic types of faith in other people; and in each case, having faith is associated with the same kinds of dangers, and it constitutes the same kind of good, namely, standing in an important form of solidarity with others. Recognizing these similarities matters, first of all, because it illuminates aspects of moral life that have been overlooked in recent moral philosophy, namely, respects in which living in a morally significant form of community with other people depends not only on our adopting certain outward behavior in our dealings with them, but also on our adopting certain attitudes toward them. Living in such community with others depends, in other words, on features of our inner, psychological lives.²⁴ But beyond this, understanding the respects in which, ideally, our relation to other members of the moral community parallels our relation to members of the personal relationships that help make our lives worthwhile helps us grasp the appeal of conforming to moral ideals and, more

²⁴ In Preston-Roedder (2017), I argue that living in this sort of community with people not only involves having a kind of faith in them, but also involves behaving in ways that make it appropriate for *them* to trust *us*.

broadly, making something like the Kingdom of Ends a concrete reality.

6

I will close by considering an objection to the view that the varieties of faith that I have described are virtues. One might argue that exercising virtue cannot be irrational, but a person's faith may lead her to make judgments that go beyond what her evidence supports. So, provided that a judgment is epistemically rational to the degree that it is supported by evidence of its truth, exhibiting faith *can* be irrational, on epistemic grounds. I grant that, as the cases presented above suggest, a person's faith may prompt her to make judgements that go somewhat beyond the available evidence; and I will assume, for argument's sake, that such judgments are epistemically *irrational* to some degree. But these claims do not show that the relevant types of faith cannot be virtues; rather, I argue, they help us recognize that a virtuous person's epistemic rationality may be tempered, in limited respects, by other traits that are morally important, or important from a broader perspective of human flourishing.

But, before I discuss this response in detail, I will describe two approaches to dissolving the apparent tension between having faith in people and being epistemically rational. First, one might reject the view known as *evidentialism*, which states that a judgment is epistemically rational to the degree that it is supported by evidence of its truth.²⁵ For example, Sarah Stroud (2006) argues that being a good friend involves being disposed to make certain favorable judgments about one's friend that go beyond what one's evidence supports, and she suggests, tentatively, that such biased judgments can be epistemically ration-

²⁵ Sarah Paul and Jennifer Morton develop a version of this approach when they argue that "there can be legitimate practical or ethical influences on the standards by which we reason about what to believe" (Paul and Morton 2018).

al, partly because of their contribution to the overall accuracy of the *community's* store of beliefs about the friend. Berislov Marušić (2012, 2013, and 2015) argues that taking one's own commitments seriously involves being disposed to make certain favorable judgments, which go beyond what one's evidence supports, about one's capacity to carry out those commitments. And he argues that such judgments can be epistemically rational because, when someone considers what she will do, the epistemic rationality of her judgments depends partly on practical considerations. Finally, Susanna Rinard (2015 and 2017) appeals to such cases to argue that the rationality of someone's judgments always depends, ultimately, on practical considerations, rather than evidential ones; indeed, it is not clear that Rinard's view leaves anything that can be intelligibly described as "epistemic rationality". I believe that this first approach is well worth pursuing, but I do not have space to discuss it in detail here. Furthermore, because evidentialism offers an intuitively plausible, widely accepted account of epistemic rationality, it is worth thinking about how faith and rationality are related, on the supposition that evidentialism holds. So I will set this first approach aside for now and assume, for argument's sake, that a judgment is epistemically rational to the degree that it is supported by evidence of its truth.

Second, one might try to dissolve this apparent tension by denying that properly functioning faith may prompt someone to make judgments that go beyond what her evidence supports. That is, one might argue that, when we properly characterize the cognitive biases that help constitute relevant types of faith, we can see that, in fact, these biases tend to align a person's judgments with the whole of her available evidence, thereby nudging her judgments closer to the truth. Troy Jollimore (2011: Ch. 3) develops a version of this approach in the course of articulating his account of love. Of course, Jollimore's discussion is most obviously relevant to the rationality of faith in people who are close to us, but it may be applied to other types of faith in people as well. Jollimore's account states that loving

our spouses, friends, and others to whom we bear certain personal relationships is largely a matter of devoting characteristic forms of focused attention to these people and handling, in characteristic ways, evidence that bears on our judgments about them. The lover devotes a kind and degree of attention to her beloved that, generally speaking, she cannot devote to strangers; and, in virtue of her distinctive ways of gathering and responding to evidence, she is disposed to make certain favorable judgments about her beloved, but not disposed to make such judgments about strangers. So, on this view, the lover exhibits a kind of cognitive bias, or in other words, epistemic partiality, toward her beloved.

But, Jollimore argues, the fact that the lover exhibits this bias does not, by itself, mean that the attitude that she adopts toward her beloved, or the judgments that are shaped by this attitude, are epistemically irrational. To be clear, Jollimore acknowledges that, even in instances of love at its best, adopting this attitude *might* lead the lover to make irrational, idealized judgments about her beloved; but he regards this possibility as marginal (Jollimore 2011: 52-53). The distinctive attitude that the lover adopts toward her loved ones tends, especially, to shape the manner in which she makes certain evaluative judgments about them, for example, judgments about the moral quality of their conduct or about the merit of their artistic performances. Often, when someone makes such judgments, whether about her beloved or about a stranger, “there can be meaningful disagreement regarding what counts” as an admirable behavior or performance; and failing to pay adequate attention may prevent her from recognizing “what is genuinely admirable” about the object of evaluation (Jollimore 2011: 58). And in such cases, an epistemically ideal evaluator makes a “significant and somewhat strenuous effort to pay close attention, to be open-minded”, and to recognize “what is there to be appreciated” (Jollimore 2011: 56). Jollimore claims that, although practical considerations, like limitations on our time and attention, generally prevent us from making judgments about

strangers in this way, the attitude that we adopt toward people we love, and which shapes our evaluative judgments about them, approximates this epistemic ideal. When we make judgments about the quality of our loved ones' actions, attitudes, or projects, our love disposes us to pay the kind of focused attention, and adopt the kind of open-mindedness, that renders us best suited to see our loved ones as they really are, and to make these judgments well.

So, on Jollimore's view, the lover's cognitive bias toward her beloved – what I describe as the cognitive aspect of a virtuous person's *faith* in her beloved – consists partly of attitudes that tend to promote, rather than undermine, the epistemic rationality of certain judgments about the beloved. This seems right. For that matter, a virtuous person also has other characteristics, which I described above, that limit the epistemic *irrationality* of the judgments she makes on the basis of her faith in her loved ones. For example, when her faith prompts her to make favorable judgments about her loved ones, despite reasons for doubt, she remains sensitive, to some degree, to new evidence that bears on the truth of those judgments; and she acts on those favorable judgments in a manner that tends to prompt her loved ones to respond in ways that confirm the judgments. Nevertheless, Jollimore overstates the extent to which the lover's cognitive bias aligns her evaluative judgments with her evidence, and with the truth; put another way, Jollimore *underestimates* the extent to which, even in instances of love at its best, the lover's cognitive bias may set her at odds with demands of epistemic rationality.

This becomes clear when we look more closely at how the lover's cognitive bias operates. Consider Simon Keller's case, which both Jollimore and I discuss, in which Eric attends his friend Rebecca's first poetry reading. Imagine that Eric, who has not yet heard Rebecca's poetry, is "a regular visitor to the café" at which she plans to read her work, and that, over time, he has "accumulated strong evidence" that poetry read at that café is "almost always mediocre" (Keller 2007: 28). Eric's con-

cern for Rebecca disposes him to devote special attention to her performance, and, as Jollimore points out, paying close attention is part of evaluating Rebecca's poetry in an epistemically ideal manner. But Eric's concern *also* disposes him to regard Rebecca's poetry with a special degree of sympathy – from start to finish, as it were – without prompting him, at any point, to regard her work with more critical, but similarly focused, attention. And, although this second disposition renders Eric more apt to appreciate the merits of his friend's poetry, it undermines his ability to fully grasp its flaws. Or, to take another example that both Jollimore and I describe, consider the parent whose son is accused of “an unspeakable crime” (Jollimore 2011: 49). The parent's love for her son disposes her to devote special attention to factors that bear on her son's guilt or innocence, or on the quality of his character; and, again, paying close attention is part of evaluating the son's conduct in an epistemically ideal way. But her love also disposes her, at almost all times, to interpret these factors in a favorable light, and so to cling, for a while, to the view that her son is innocent, or, if this view becomes untenable in light of available evidence, to cling to a favorable interpretation of the son's character. And, although this second disposition renders the parent more apt to recognize and appreciate evidence of her son's innocence, it renders her less apt to recognize, and grant appropriate weight to, evidence of his guilt.

In short, the lover's cognitive bias toward her beloved comprises both a disposition to devote special attention to the beloved and a disposition to adopt favorable interpretations of factors that bear on certain judgments about the beloved. While the former disposition is part of an epistemically ideal stance from which to make such evaluative judgments, the latter is not; to the contrary, in some cases – including the cases I just described, in which the lover's judgments concern the beloved's past actions or attitudes, which cannot be influenced by the lover's behavior – this latter disposition is apt to obscure, to some degree, the beloved's shortcomings. In such cases, the ep-

istemically ideal stance from which to make judgments about the quality of a person's actions, attitudes, or projects is not the stance that one adopts in virtue of loving that person, but rather, a stance that one adopts in virtue of having some *other* concern that prompts one to devote time and attention to understanding both favorable and *unfavorable* features of what one evaluates. For example, an ideal stance from which to evaluate Rebecca's poetry in the example above is not the stance of someone like Eric, who loves Rebecca, but rather, the stance of a critic who loves *poetry*, and cares about grasping the particular merits and deficiencies of Rebecca's work. Similarly, an ideal stance from which to evaluate the conduct of the accused teenager in the example above is not the stance of a loving parent, but rather that of, say, a journalist who becomes gripped by the case and cares about figuring out what happened.

So, this second approach to dissolving the tension between faith and epistemic rationality – namely, arguing that the cognitive biases that help constitute relevant types of faith tend to align a person's judgments with the whole of her evidence – is only partly successful. Given that judgments are epistemically rational to the degree that they are supported by evidence of their truth, we are stuck, to a somewhat greater extent than Jollimore imagines, with the tension between the lover's cognitive bias toward her beloved and the demands of epistemic rationality; we are, more generally, stuck, to a somewhat greater degree than Jollimore's discussion suggests, with the tension between these demands and the cognitive biases that help constitute a person's faith in herself, in her loved ones, and in humanity.

But this conclusion does not, by itself, show that these types of faith cannot be virtues; rather, it makes salient certain limits on the role that epistemic, as opposed to practical, rationality should occupy in our ideals of how to live.²⁶ When we try to

²⁶ This paragraph and the next derive from Preston-Roedder (2013: 685-687).

determine what a virtuous person is like, or, in other words, what kinds of people we should be, we are trying to settle a *practical* question. Epistemic rationality is, to be sure, one trait that a virtuous person possesses to some degree, but the ideal of being epistemically rational does not have absolute priority in determining the makeup of a virtuous person's character as a whole. Certainly, in other cases, traits that are morally admirable, or admirable from some broader perspective of human flourishing, may be tempered, in certain limited respects, by other virtues; for example, a virtuous person's kindness may be tempered by her commitment to fairness, or, to take a very different example, her good humor may be tempered by a kind of tenderness, or sensitivity to others' vulnerability.²⁷ Similarly, a virtuous person's epistemic rationality may be limited, to some degree, by the varieties of faith that I described.

The fact that a virtuous person's epistemic rationality may be tempered in this way is, we might say, a reflection of our own cognitive limitations, or of the epistemic limitations of our environment. Perhaps, if we lived in epistemically ideal circumstances, in which evidence sufficient to settle whatever question we considered was always unambiguous and readily available to us, we would have grounds for claiming that a virtuous person's judgments must always be fully epistemically rational. After all, what one should do depends partly on the facts, and, in such ideal circumstances, responding in a fully rational way to available evidence would always lead one directly to the relevant facts. But our actual circumstances fall far short of this ideal. In our actual circumstances, the evidence available to us – including, crucially, evidence that bears on the quality of people's actions, attitudes, and projects – is almost always partial, and often ambiguous or difficult to attain. And this opens up the possibility that a virtuous person's disposition to respond in a fully rational way to whatever evidence is available – however

²⁷ For a fascinating discussion of tenderness and its moral and political significance, see Clardy (2017).

meager it turns out to be – may conflict with her pursuit of other aims that help make her life morally good, or worthwhile in other ways. A virtuous person’s faith in people restricts her epistemic rationality to some degree, in ways that help secure certain of these aims, namely, the aim of bringing it about that she and people around her behave or perform well in certain significant respects, and the aim of binding her, in important respects, to her own projects and commitments, to the people who are close to her, and to members of the moral community.

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