To appear in Timothy O'Connor and Laura Goins, eds., *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

How to Make Faith a Virtue

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A young Muslim woman grows up in a context of trust, interpersonally and religiously. Quite naturally, without any worry or hesitation or questioning, she trusts her caring and seemingly wise parents to guide her aright and consequently believes what they say when they tell her that the Holy Qur'an reveals the best way to live. She likewise trusts her imam, the most widely respected member of the community, believing what he tells her about Allah. She hears of the ummah, the worldwide community of devoted Muslims who behave and think similarly, and feels an even deeper confidence and security in believing all these things. She furthermore – and in part because of the foregoing trusting attitudes and beliefs – believes that by following, as best she can, the Five Pillars she is making room for the ongoing presence of Allah in her life. And she places her trust in Allah to guide her thoughts and actions and keep her safe in times of trouble.

It might strike this young woman as odd if a critic of her religious faith – should she encounter one – criticized her for lacking *evidence* that any of the religious claims or propositions she believes is true. And philosophers who think the relevance of trust to our intellectual lives has been too little emphasized in religious epistemology will presumably be ready to applaud her reaction. They will think there is something *to* this sense of 'oddness' – something giving it a certain rational robustness – and that we ought to become more open to this view rather than unthinkingly following what in some quarters has become *philosophical* doctrine: that nothing other than good evidence to support religious beliefs should satisfy any intellectually virtuous

human being interested in matters religious.

After all, we are, every one of us, reliant on trusting relationships with others for what it takes to successfully negotiate our way through life physically, socially, emotionally, and in other ways. And everyone agrees that we can be virtuous in forming many related beliefs – beliefs about things and states of affairs in the physical, social, emotional, and other dimensions of life – in response to what we hear from the most trustworthy members of our communities. Perhaps, then, we can also properly rely on trustworthy members of our communities when it comes to determining our beliefs about the *religious* dimension of life. Perhaps for this reason our young Muslim woman should be praised rather than denigrated when a request for evidence provokes a surprised or irritated look on her face.

In the present essay I show why this approach to the epistemology of religious belief, though interesting, is unsuccessful. But that is just stage 1. For the idea that religious *faith* can be intellectually virtuous without proof or probabilifying evidence and that nonreligious contexts of trust cast light on why this is so is still, in my view, importantly right. To see what's right about it, though, we need to come at things from a radically different direction, thinking about trust when it is difficult instead of easy, and when it involves an intellectual attitude of imagination rather than belief. And it will be helpful to consider both interpersonal and *other* nonreligious contexts of trust. This is what I do in stage 2 of the paper (its last two sections). There I show that, in intellectually alert and reflective adult human beings, a virtuous nonreligious trust will often be imaginative rather than believing where evidence is in short supply. Furthermore, a religious trust analogous to such trust is possible and can *likewise* be intellectually virtuous at the early stage of evolutionary development in which we humans presently find ourselves. However,

as will be shown, such evolutionarily grounded virtue is present only when the propositional content of imaginative religious faith, that is, what it imagines to be so about the world, is much more *general* than is typical of religious faith as we see it in the world today.

I.

To ensure that we're all on the same page in this inquiry, conceptually speaking, some broad definitional or explicational points may be helpful. Let's start with the concept of trust itself. Though I will generally be using the word 'trust', I might have used the word 'faith' instead: trust-in is very close, conceptually, to faith-in. Indeed, the two notions are arguably coextensive (Schellenberg, 2005). Trust can take a variety of forms, but all seem to involve a disposition to *behave* in a certain way in relation to the person or other thing that is trusted (yes, it could be something other than a person, as when I trust a rickety-looking chair to hold my weight) – a way that involves acting on the notion that the thing in question will be or do for me what I need or want, when there is, objectively or to all appearances, at least some probability, great or small, that this will turn out not to be the case (Schellenberg, 2005; Swinburne, 2005). Trust can be *implicit*, which is to say spontaneous, unquestioning, and relatively easy, or *explicit*, which is to say reflective, deliberate, and perhaps also troubled and difficult (Penelhum, 1995; Schellenberg 2005).

What about the concept of belief? William James pithily called belief "the sense of reality" (James, [1890] 1981: 913). Other philosophers have wanted to add other features, such as a disposition to act in accordance with what one senses as real. All I want to insist on here is what most of these accounts – and also, I suspect, ordinary non-philosophical understandings of

believing – will have in common: that believing something at least *includes* James's 'sense of reality.' A bit more precisely and accurately: it includes and indeed entails a disposition or tendency to involuntarily have an experience of the Jamesian sort – an experience of its seeming that something is the case when that something (a proposition or claim about the world) comes to mind.

Let's call beliefs that are caused by trust in other people *trusting beliefs*.1 Notice that although trust, as we've described it, involves a disposition to act in certain ways, it doesn't follow from the fact that there are trusting beliefs that – contrary to our characterization of belief – *believing* is an action. It's just that the behavioural disposition involved in trust opens up the intellectually relaxed mental space needed for belief involuntarily to be formed when the trusting one is interacting with the people she trusts and comes to learn what they think about the matter in question.

A word or two about the concept of doubt and some related notions may also be in order. When I say of someone that she is *in* doubt about a certain proposition or claim, I mean to emphasize that she is *not* in a state of belief: she believes neither that claim nor its denial. *Uncertainty* is here understood similarly: one who is uncertain about a proposition in my sense of

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1.Pamela Hieronymi is led by her different project to speak of trusting belief differently, defining it as "a belief that is grounded in...the reasons of trust" ("The Reasons of Trust," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 86 [2008], 215). She also understands trust differently and in my view (a view defended later on in this paper) too narrowly, apparently thinking of anything other than what I call implicit trust as unworthy of the name.

the term doesn't hold a belief either way but instead is in doubt about that proposition. (It is important to distinguish this state from simply being *less than certain* about a proposition, which is compatible with being quite confident that it is true and indeed with believing it.) Relatedly, when someone using the terms as I do says that a proposition *may* or *might* be true, or could *possibly* be true, she implies not only that its falsehood is less than certain (which would be compatible with still believing the proposition false) but also, more strongly, that it is not properly believed false.

What about intellectual virtue? Keeping to a broad and irenic understanding, let's say the following. Intellectual virtue is manifested by a trusting belief (or any other belief or similarly positive intellectual attitude) in the circumstances in which it is held just in case the dispositions involved in the formation or maintenance of such a belief or intellectual attitude in those circumstances are, when assessed from the perspective of a love of truth and understanding, properly regarded as (i) admirable or desirable or both, and (ii) as appropriately cultivated by human beings.[2] Furthermore, let's restrict our attention, when thinking of trusting believers and the manifesting of intellectual virtue, to adults who have at least average intellectual capacities and are at least somewhat reflective. Everyone knows that it can often be a good thing for children to trust implicitly and form associated beliefs, but if the conclusions of the approach to

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2.Some of the dispositions widely regarded as intellectually virtuous have conventional names, such as 'openmindedness' or 'intellectual courage,' but we shouldn't expect that all intellectual virtue will conveniently conform to our naming practices. The most fundamental notion is that of admirability or desirability from an intellectual point of view, and any disposition achieving this is intellectually virtuous, whether we have a name for it or not.

religious epistemology I am about to criticize are to be seen as having a wide application (and I assume its advocates regard it thus), then if it works, it will have to work for adults too.

There are, I suggest, certain *necessary conditions* on the intellectual virtue of trusting beliefs for human adults fitting the above description. Here is a (quite possibly incomplete) set of such conditions:

(1) the range of competence and trustworthiness found in the trusted one is plausibly seen as extending to the relevant subject;

(2) the trusted one shows no evidence of dogmatism on the matter in question (where by 'dogmatism' is meant a deep-seated resistance to the idea that one might be mistaken);

(3) no *non*-trust-related positive property in the trusted one is illegitimately being conflated with a property making appropriate the relevant trusting belief;

(4) the inquirer is aware of no one else who has a similar claim to trustworthiness but who disagrees with the trusted one;

(5) it is not the case that the inquirer should be developing self-reliance on the subject in question, determining for *herself* what to believe in conversation with a variety of others and with the rest of her beliefs instead of forming a belief from trust in others;

(6) it is not the case that BOTH of the following are true: belief on the matter in question

> can without difficulty or harm be avoided or replaced by a nondoxastic attitude, and for all the believer knows or justifiedly believes, at least one of conditions (1) through (5) fails to be satisfied.

(1)'s necessity is, I take it, obvious. And this condition won't always be satisfied. Even a generally trustworthy individual doesn't know everything; there are subjects to which his knowledge does not extend. There are plenty of examples, but here's one: a young woman who regards her father as generally trustworthy may still go to her mother or to some other woman to get advice on some sensitive relational problem or the proper care of her infant child. Indeed, it's what we learn in part *by* trusting others about how the world works and how people behave that should prevent us from *undiscriminatingly* trusting others without regard to their areas of competence, if we care about the truth. Such a lack of discrimination can make for a lack of intellectual virtue in a trusting belief.

(2) likewise seems obviously necessary: even if a dogmatic person sometimes gets things right – indeed, even if she's quite competent in the area in question – you shouldn't *trust* her to get things right if you know of the dogmatism. Doing so would be intellectually careless or foolhardy, since, given her dogmatism, grounds for thinking otherwise than she does, should they exist, would have a hard time getting through to her. Thus a person competent in physics who is dogmatically in favour of string theory does not deserve your trust when she tells you that the discovery of the Higgs boson in some way is confirmatory of string theory. If you trust her anyway, your belief will lack intellectual virtue.

(3) appears on the list because of the possibility of a failure of discrimination different from that mentioned under (1) but just as much at odds with intellectual virtue. One may

correctly assess a person as deserving some positive response while incorrectly supposing the deserved response to be that of *trust on what to believe*. Impressed with someone's charm and sincerity and speaking skill you may take their word when they say you should vote for a certain candidate, yet this episode would surely not display intellectual virtue.

(4) may seem less obviously necessary, perhaps because of the current debate in epistemology over the epistemic (or knowledge-related) significance of disagreement. Philosophers notoriously are in disagreement about this! But notice that here the question is not about a disagreement between *yourself* and another, but rather about disagreement between *two others* who appear *similarly trustworthy* which leaves you with the question of whom to trust. Some will think that in cases of reasonable disagreement between yourself and another who appears equally competent you are rationally permitted to favour your own view. After all, you have a strong 'seeming' in your own case that is not available to you from the other's: you can't in(tro)spect his mind to see whether he's speaking truly about his appearances (and other asymmetries too might be suggested). I make no judgment on this issue. But clearly no similar issue arises in the case at hand. For example, two doctors to all appearances equally competent may deliver contrary verdicts as to the cause of your illness. Allowing yourself to be influenced to form a belief one way rather than the other in *such* a case seems intellectually arbitrary. Certainly we shouldn't think of such behaviour as manifesting intellectual *virtue*.

(5) reminds us that people may be trusting others to tell them the truth on some matter when they have arrived at a point in their lives where, at least on the subject in question, intellectual virtue demands moving beyond reliance on others. Perhaps more *self*-trust, and a corresponding diminishment of intellectual dependency, is called for. Take, for example, your caring, devoted, and widely knowledgeable mother whom you trust nostalgically after leaving for

college on the matter of how to answer your professor's study questions, when this is something you should be figuring out for yourself and absorbing into the larger body of your growing understanding of the world.

Finally, with (6) we are told that trusting beliefs are not admirable or desirable from the perspective of a love of truth and understanding in intellectually capable and reflective adults if there is reason to be in doubt about whether *all* of the previous five conditions are satisfied AND such doubt is psychologically possible in the circumstances while nothing of intellectual importance will be lost by acquiescing in it – perhaps because belief can be replaced with a functionally equivalent nonbelieving state such as acceptance (which involves *voluntarily* taking a proposition mentally on board, and forming and following a policy of acting in ways that would be appropriate if that proposition were true.) Suppose, for example, that you're lost in a cave with an opinionated spelunker. You're doubtful, when he tells you that a certain tunnel will lead out, about whether he's really relevantly competent, or whether you're just being dazzled by his smooth talking, while aware of nothing that will cause you to believe one way or another regardless of whether you withhold your trust from him. Moreover, you're aware that you could nonbelievingly *accept* that the tunnel to which he gestures will lead out *instead* of believing this, retaining the same likelihood of getting out by doing so. Intellectual virtue seems to be poorly served if, in this condition, you nonetheless allow yourself to fall into a state of belief that what he tells you is true.

What I want now to suggest, as you may have guessed, is that conditions (1) through (6) are not all satisfied in cases where trusting beliefs are *religious*. Since each of those conditions is a *necessary* condition of intellectual virtue in this connection, it follows that religious belief is not intellectually virtuous in the manner claimed by the view we are examining.

Think again of our young Muslim woman, whom I shall assume to be of at least average intelligence and at least somewhat reflective. Serious questions can be raised for her concerning each of the conditions. Her parents and her imam may seem generally trustworthy individuals. But are they experts on matters religious and philosophical? Does what they know about extend *that* far? Here we can discuss both conditions (1) and (3) at once. Perhaps her fondness for her parents and respect for her imam, though quite appropriate and well deserved, has led this young woman *also* to treat them as trustworthy on matters religious, when this is a distinct matter and she should become more discriminating. Does she have good reason to assume that as well as deserving love and respect for their important roles in the community they should be trusted on scriptural interpretation and whether there is a God? The latter matters, when one gives them a moment's thought, can be seen to be rather profound and complex – certainly more so than other matters on which she has, apparently to her benefit, formed trusting beliefs in response to what these people say, such as how to fix a hole in her wall, or who is currently the Prime Minister, or how to resolve a conflict at school.

As for condition (2): I suspect that not only our young woman but pretty much anyone who holds trusting religious beliefs and satisfies our description referring to adulthood and intelligence will be able to see that parents and teachers and other members of our religious communities (locally and worldwide) are often somewhat dogmatic about their own religious views. Even when it comes to their differences, in matters of religious belief, from others in a *shared* religious tradition, parents and religious teachers are frequently passionately defensive and dismissive. As for *other* religions – well, we are still very much in the early days of friendly inter-religious discussion, and people of diverse religious traditions clearly have a long way to go when it comes to getting to know each other in a manner free from the onesidedness and

prejudice of dogmatism. In most parts of the world, children grow into adults in religious communities Islamic or Christian or Buddhist or Hindu (and so on) without hearing much if anything about other religious options – and certainly without hearing those other options carefully laid out and reflectively considered, with all due efforts at intellectual fairness and honesty.

It is also – and for related reasons – clear that condition (4) will fail to be satisfied in the relevant circumstances. Religious believers who form trusting religious beliefs in response to what the wise of their communities have to say will, if minimally capable and reflective in the relevant ways, know that the wise of *other* traditions, who have successfully nurtured their own young, sharply disagree with the content of those beliefs. Interestingly, they will also know that the wise of other traditions often *agree* with their own authorities on a wide variety of important *non*-religious matters, such as how to take care of oneself, profitably interact with others, and the deepest moral values. This leaves open the possibility of trusting perceived wisdom in some contexts while modestly admitting that there are other matters on which even the most admirable human wisdom may falter. Now where one finds disagreement of the sort at issue here and thinks the dispute needs to be resolved, one is of course naturally inclined to trust the wise men and women of one's *own* community and reject the word of others. But approaching things from the perspective of a love for truth and understanding will surely lead one to see the intellectual arbitrariness of such predilections. After all, there is plenty of reason to suppose that qualities inclining one to trust other people in one's own community – such things as intelligence, fairmindedness, and love of truth – appear also in other people from at least some communities not one's own.

And what about condition (5)? Even if it was natural and not inappropriate for our young

Muslim woman to be led into religious belief by the word of her elders, doesn't a deep love of truth and understanding call us all to seek to become elders *ourselves* – in the sense of wisdom and not just of age? Perhaps it will be thought that one could answer this call while remaining within the bounds of one's own religious community, whose resident set of elders one may someday join. But intellectual *virtue* – and not just Enlightenment prejudice or an unthinking evidentialism – is more demanding than this. A person of intellectual virtue will realize that, at least on matters most deeply profound, our most fundamental community is the *human* community. Limited as we are, we must, when seeking truth and understanding about *such* things, do what we can to draw on the best that human thought and feeling have so far unearthed, wherever that may take us. And although we may, after seeking to be true to such virtuous impulses, find ourselves with the same religious beliefs held by respected others in our community of origin, these beliefs must inevitably betray more than *their* influence alone.

Now someone may say that precisely *because* of the depth and profundity of religious matters one exhibits intellectual virtue (appropriate humility) if one leaves a determination of the truth about such matters to others in one's community who have devoted more time and effort to relevant matters. This, it may be said, is no more than what one sees in science, where one finds a division of labour based on specialized expertise. But even if we were to accept that trust in better informed others is in principle appropriate here, a point very similar to that of the previous paragraph would still apply – and the analogy with science only helps to make this more clear. The experts we trust on matters most profound, if we do, should be ones who have sought to learn from the best that human thought and feeling have so far unearthed, wherever that might take them. The parochial 'experts' of parochial religious traditions do not meet this standard. Here notice how the results of science are confirmed and shared worldwide. One does not find

narrow parochialism among genuine experts of science. If one were to take science as a model, one would, at the very most, trust religious experts where they are agreed worldwide, which would prevent most if not all of the specific and detailed beliefs of the world's religious traditions from counting as intellectually virtuous when held as trusting beliefs. On the matter of whether the detailed propositions that distinguish her community's religious views from those of others are legitimately believed, our young Muslim woman would accordingly do well to learn to think for herself.

And so we come to condition (6), discussion of which can of course make use of the doubt sown by my previous comments concerning other conditions. I myself think that all or most of conditions (1) through (5) fail to be satisfied for religious trusting beliefs, but even if you think only that one should be in *doubt* about whether *all* of these conditions are satisfied, you will be in a position to be led by condition (6) to conclude that religious trusting beliefs are not virtuous. Indeed, this will be the case even if you think one ought to take a *stand*, religiously, and that the stand one should take is that dominant in one's community. For one can take such a stand by means of the alternative attitude of nonbelieving acceptance; *one does not need to believe*. The differences between belief and acceptance have been becoming more and more obvious in recent years through the work of such philosophers as L. Jonathan Cohen and William P. Alston, though the application of this and similar distinctions is only beginning.3 And for reasons

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3.See L. Jonathan Cohen, *An Essay on Belief and Acceptance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) and William P. Alston, "Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith," in *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality*, ed. Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996). It may be thought that acceptance will naturally slide into belief over time. But there is no

suggested earlier, no more than nonbelieving acceptance (or some similarly available and functionally equivalent nondoxastic state) could ever be sanctioned by intellectual virtue where one is in doubt over the matters addressed by our first five conditions.

It follows from these reflections that the approach to religious epistemology we have been examining is unsuccessful.[4]

II.

If one assumed that being religious entails holding detailed religious beliefs, one might conclude, after the arguments of the previous section, that there is no hope for a trust-oriented defence of

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reason to suppose this is inevitable; indeed, there is good reason to suppose it is not. For given the involuntariness of belief, such a 'slide' would require self-deception as to the quality of one's evidence, and such self-deception will be avoided by the intellectually virtuous.

4.Perhaps it will be said that a more modest stance of the same kind can still be supported: namely, one claiming only that trust in one's religious community and/or certain of its members can suffice to make virtuous the *preservation* of a religious belief *weakened* by an examination of evidence – a belief which evidential considerations alone will not sustain (either psychologically or epistemically). Here it is important to remember that we are thinking about whether an attribution of *intellectual virtue*, and not something weaker such as rational permissibility, is warranted. With that in mind, my own view is that at least conditions (1) through (4) and condition (6) can still powerfully be brought to bear, preventing even the more modest stance from succeeding. But I have no space to develop this point, and will place my trust in the reader's abilities to discern how the argument should go.

the intellectual component of any religious commitment, and leave things there. This paper might be gratifyingly short! But those negative arguments represent only the first stage of the discussion we need to have; the second awaits. We do need to see that the trusting belief model isn't going to facilitate justification for the detailed religious beliefs of typical Muslims, Christians, and others if we are to see the importance of any suggested alternative or seriously to pursue it. That, in part, is why I developed those arguments. But, having done so, we can now proceed more constructively.

Notice that in doing so we are thinking only about how *trust* can be put to work in the epistemology of religion; it is compatible with my results that some other approach – perhaps an evidential one – should make for the justification of traditional religious beliefs (though I do not myself hold out much hope for such an approach). And thus it is compatible with my results that traditional religious believers convinced by the arguments of section I should justifiedly turn elsewhere in their continuing reflection on the legitimacy of faith than to my arguments in the remainder of this paper. I am not here arguing that persons such as the young Muslim woman encountered in section I should adjust their trusting stance to conform to the religious possibility I shall now go on to sketch, only that there is another religious trusting stance that may succeed, intellectually, even if that one fails.

Now the idea that there *might* be a relevant trust-based alternative is already supported by what I've said about nonbelieving acceptance. And, indeed, at least one prominent philosopher of religion has recently followed that path, linking acceptance and faith in God (Alston, 1996). If only to widen the range of options, I want to take a different path. I will be contrasting belief and *imagination*, arguing that there are several different nonreligious contexts of activity in which the imaginative stance involved in a certain kind of nonbelieving trust is or can be intellectually

virtuous for alert and reflective adult human beings, even when evidence is weak or unavailable. And then, in the following section, I will show how we can extrapolate from what we see in these contexts to some positive religious conclusions.[5]

But before getting to that, let me explain how in my view imagination can be a way of having faith in the first place. As already suggested, there are others who have defended the idea of a nonbelieving – or, as it's sometimes called, a *nondoxastic* – propositional faith. In common with all of them, I would say that to have faith without belief your circumstances must be ones in which, although you don't believe the relevant proposition (call it p), it is the case that (1) you think it would be *good* for p to be true – here's what philosophers call a "pro-attitude." And in

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5.Some may think that imaginative propositional faith is the same as a nonbelieving acceptance. But this is not so. Acceptance involves in some fashion taking a proposition mentally on board *and also* being disposed to act on it, not just mentally but more generally, whereas here, as we'll see, only the mental or cognitive or thinking side of things is at issue. Now imaginative propositional faith, when it is faith that someone or something will be or do for one what one needs or wants, can be turned into trust by adding to it a disposition to – quite generally – behave accordingly. And one might think that when this happens, we've got acceptance. The two complex dispositional states being compared here are indeed very similar, but it's interesting to note that the former is in fact *more* than acceptance, and that this must always be the case when one's propositional attitude is one of propositional faith. For you could accept something – say, a scientific hypothesis you're studying at school – even if you don't have any pro-attitude towards the idea that it's true, whereas propositional faith entails a pro-attitude: the idea of having *faith* that something *bad* will happen is incoherent.

common with at any rate most of them, I would suggest that you have faith that p without belief that p only if (2) you don't believe that *not*-p either. Faith is indeed compatible with doubt or skepticism and weak evidence, but disbelief and strongly negative evidence would be hard to reconcile with it, psychologically or rationally (Schellenberg, 2005). And now let's add to those two necessary conditions, on which most philosophers involved in the discussion would be agreed, three more: in that skeptical or doubting state, although you're not being involuntarily represented-*to* in the way of belief, (3) you deliberately represent or picture the world *to yourself* through the power of the imagination as including the truth of p. Moreover (4), you form the intention to be mentally guided by this picture on an ongoing basis, that is, to think accordingly and as a matter of policy, and (5) you follow through on this policy. (The policy may have a longer or shorter duration depending on the nature of p and the nature of the reasons to which you respond.) Notice that everything described here is still purely intellectual, concerning how you will *think*; we haven't yet got to the distinct matter of how, more generally, your behaviour may be adjusted accordingly (but we will in a moment).

Now someone who thinks in this way is not pretending to believe that p, nor, insofar as she's honest, will she claim to believe that p. It may seem to be otherwise when you notice that to keep the relevant picture – the one reported by p – properly before one's mind, one sometimes needs to repeat to oneself sentences expressing the proposition in question. But this isn't any kind of self-deception or expression of belief. Rather it's just a way of ensuring that the relevant proposition can do its job, intellectually. This can be seen in the example of a runner having a tough time in a marathon, unsure if he can reach the finish line. When he keeps going in imaginative faith, repeatedly thinking to himself "Yes, I will make it! Yes, I will make it!," he

isn't rightly seen as making some kind of inner *claim* suggesting belief or else an attempt to incite belief. No. Rather the inner declarative sentences amount to a *method* of keeping the picture of himself completing the race before his mind. They also express an intention to ongoingly direct his mind accordingly.

I want to consider now some other cases of imaginative faith, cases where one is having faith that someone or something will be or do for one what one needs or wants, and where by cultivating a disposition to act on this faith, one has turned it into a full-fledged case of *explicit trust*. And I want to argue that intellectual virtue is or can be present in each case. There are many dimensions of human life, apart from the religious, that afford circumstances of the relevant sort, but I only have space to briefly consider three: the epistemic, the personal, and the social. Earlier we noted how when growing up one often forms implicit trusting beliefs about what to do and how to think in various such dimensions of life. Occasions for *explicit* trust arise when such beliefs fail. Now some may think that intellectual virtue requires preventing such a thing: squelching doubts and doing what is needed *not* to lose belief. But what this idea ignores is that beings like us will sometimes simply find belief psychologically impossible.[6] Furthermore, it conflates active and passive doubting. Virtuous faith, because it involves commitment, requires

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6.It also ignores that, given my understanding of virtue, there is room for more than one type of condition to count as intellectually virtuous. Perhaps a certain sort of believing faith would sometimes be valuable in its own way, without preventing nonbelieving faith from being approvable in another. But can nondoxastic faith be approvable in circumstances where it would be *better* for faith to be believing? Suppose not. All this means is that I need to argue that often nondoxastic faith is not thus outclassed by doxastic. This I am happy to do.

that *active* skepticism – searching out or dwelling on objections – be set aside. But the passive skepticism of simply *being in* doubt – feeling uncertain about a proposition p, believing neither p nor not-p – is another matter (Schellenberg, 2005). And this, being largely involuntary, cannot simply be set aside; it may be that no matter what one does, no matter how heroic one's resistance, a belief-removing doubt descends upon one. Are we inclined to say that virtuous faith is impossible in such cases? Then both our conception of faith and our conception of virtue are unrealistic. What we need is a conception of virtue *for us*, not for the angels.

With this attempt at preemptive disqualification out of the way, let's turn to our cases.

(1) ***The epistemic dimension***. We generally assume that, even at one or more removes from the truisms of everyday life or the truths accessible through rational intuition, knowledge and understanding are attainable goals for beings like us, with our intellectual capacities and methods. But *are* they attainable? It is a truism of philosophy that skepticism can overwhelm one here, and sometimes our taken-for-granted belief in the attainability of knowledge and real understanding, whether by the species in the long run or by we ourselves in some personal intellectual effort, is tripped up by skeptical questioning in a way that is quite unavoidable, rationally speaking. Evidence for such belief seems simply unavailable. In these circumstances, a form of imaginative nondoxastic faith is highly desirable – and it is so for clearly intellectual reasons. Without being able to imagine and mentally ally ourselves with brighter epistemic possibilities, we may give up and crumble under the force of skepticism, and inquiry may be slowed or in some areas cease altogether. Many intellectual pursuits that could well prove useful may come to an end, and the bright light of human intellectual passion may be dimmed. If we want to avoid such calamities, it must be thought desirable to cultivate a stiff intellectual backbone. So suppose one shows such backbone by *adopting* imaginative faith that truth and

understanding in inquiry are attainable and that the methods available to us will get us there. And suppose one in all relevant respects behaves accordingly, turning imaginative faith into explicit trust – trust, in effect, in the domain of reality one is investigating, and also in one's methods. By instantiating intellectual perseverance in this way and in these circumstances, doesn't one's imaginative faith achieve intellectual admirability?[7]

(2) ***The personal dimension***. In this case I have in mind circumstances of the sort that are very often cited in connection with faith, circumstances in which the threads of one's life are in some way coming undone or growing frayed. Perhaps I suffer from a debilitating physical or mental illness, or have experienced deep tragedy, or am in the grip of an addiction. In such circumstances, an implicit trust in myself may simply be out of reach. I may well find myself without the belief that I 'have it in me' to recover or to survive, and this even where – as in the case of depression – I at some level recognize that the truth of such belief is objectively supported by evidence and have heroically attempted subjectively to appropriate this fact in the way of belief. The depressed individual may simply be unable to *feel* the evidence or to believe that she can ever see the sun again. If in such circumstances, whether on her own accord or at the urging of a therapist, she cultivates imaginative faith that she will make it through this dark night of the soul and acts accordingly, turning her condition into one of explicit trust in herself (and

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7.There is some overlap between what I say here and what can be found in Foley (2001) and Lehrer (1997). These epistemic circumstances involving a grappling with skepticism, so it may be said, are ones that we should not expect non-philosophers to encounter. Suppose so. Wouldn't it be interesting if, in future, *philosophers* were regarded as the ones most in need of faith, and in the best position to display its virtue!

perhaps in her therapist, too), she certainly deserves our admiration – and this not just at non-intellectual levels. By summoning the imaginative athleticism required to trust in herself, she makes it more likely that she will one day see clearly the truth about herself and her potential. Thus we have reason to admire her from the perspective of a love of truth and understanding, and to consider what we behold in her as a manifestation of intellectual virtue.

(3) ***The social dimension***. Now we come to situations involving interpersonal interaction, the focus of the approach critiqued in the previous section. Such circumstances, as everyone knows, include some of life's deepest joys but also endlessly varying possibilities of stress and distress – and with them, numerous situations in which imaginative faith may be needed. It is interesting to note that William James uses social examples to support his notorious 'will to believe' (at least part of which would, I think, better be described as a will to *imagine*).[8] He speaks of needing to have faith that someone you desire as a friend will like you, or that others will cooperate with you in an attempt to prevent disaster, when this seems questionable. And here we also have the distinctively Jamesian point that by doing so and acting accordingly, thus showing explicit trust in other persons, you may in an important sense *bring truth into existence* – may make it the case that the other person *does* like you or that others *do* cooperate with you and a disaster is averted. Thus even from the perspective of truth and understanding concerning our social lives, the intellectual virtue of faith can be displayed! And since in such situations (though James himself doesn't make this point very clearly) believing may be impossible, and imagination may take its place, imaginative faith is, once again, in a position to display

8.See James [1897](1957). I reinterpret James as a supporter of – or at least a precursor of – an emphasis on imaginative instead of believing faith in chap. 11 of Schellenberg (2009).

intellectual virtue.

Some readers may still be wondering whether what I've called 'imaginative propositional faith' really counts as *faith*, given that it is not belief. This may sound to them like a misuse of language. In concluding the present section of the paper, I want to show how we can use another example of social or interpersonal explicit trust to answer this worry. (There are other ways; see Schellenberg, 2005.) Your daughter, sweet child, can do no wrong, and so when she asks to borrow the car, you have no qualms and give her the keys immediately. You thereby manifest implicit trust in – and thus *faith* in – your daughter. Now suppose that over a three year period she falls into heavy drug use and lets you down in a whole variety of ways. Fast forward to a year further on, when she's halfway through a recovery program. Suppose she now once again asks you for the keys to the car – asks you to *trust her* with the car. If you're a typical parent, this time saying yes and handing over the keys won't manifest implicit trust. If your actions manifest trust at all (instead of, say, a fearful hoping for the best) this trust will be *explicit* trust. Importantly, though, it *can* still be trust – whether wisely or foolishly, and though in all probability with some difficulty, you can still *put your trust in* and so *have faith in* your daughter by giving her those keys.

Notice that if you do, you are evincing some sort of positive attitude allying you with the proposition 'My daughter will take good care of the car and not get into any trouble tonight.' But what is that attitude? Unless you're a very unusual human being, it's not going to be belief! Does it follow that you no longer have faith with respect to that proposition? It would be very odd to say so. Here you are, with a propositional attitude voluntarily taken on despite difficulty that is *part* of a larger faith stance, and functioning much as your belief did before, and we're not supposed to call it faith-that? The obvious and much more plausible alternative is to say that you

not only have *explicit faith-in* but also a matching *explicit faith-that* – an explicit faith-that or trust-that[9] paralleling your explicit faith-in or trust-in whose peculiar pattern of reflective and difficult deliberate actions and action dispositions (those actions and action dispositions included in the five features of faith listed above) presupposes the absence of belief. A slightly different argument would ask what *else* you will call this propositional attitude. It must surely be either belief or faith or both. The first and third options having been eliminated, we are left with the second. We may conclude, therefore, that the imaginative propositional attitude I have been describing does deserve to be called faith.

III.

The arguments of the previous section show that there can indeed be such a thing as nondoxastic and imaginative propositional faith and also that such faith, when embedded in explicit trust, can in various nonreligious contexts be intellectually virtuous – and this without much in the way of evidence to support it. How might we use this information to open up new possibilities in religious epistemology? Well, this information at least suggests that the centuries-long effort of religious thinkers to justify religious *belief* and a form of religious commitment grounded therein

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9.Some philosophers, for example Robert Audi (2008), have argued that just speaking of a nonbelieving *trust* that p is already illuminating when it comes to the question as to precisely what a nondoxastic propositional faith amounts to. I still haven't seen the light. Speaking of trust-that, as suggested here, seems just another way of talking about faith-that (much as speaking about trust-in is just another way of speaking of faith-in); all the hard work of analysis remains to be done when we have noted this equivalence.

may presuppose an unjustified assumption: that only a doxastic form of religious commitment is authentic and *worth* defending. Why should we accept this when in more than one *other* dimension of human life a nonbelieving trust and faith is often the most seriously admirable response one can make in the circumstances, and when the religious dimension may, for all we know, include conditions sufficiently analogous to those that make it so? Pretty swiftly we may think of how to make this point less equivocally. For in the epistemic, personal, and social contexts we have considered, reflective adults often find belief psychologically difficult or impossible and mentally stand by the relevant proposition(s) anyway because of the value, intellectual and other, that may only thus be secured. And that is how intellectual virtue is won. But reflective adults have often found *religious* propositions at least as difficult to believe, and isn't intellectual value at stake here too – perhaps even more rich or more widely ramifying value than in the other cases?

Let's consider now how this idea might best be developed and defended. My proposal may at first seem a bit radical, but I will seek to show that it is instead quite realistic. It involves three things: (1) an emphasis on our place in evolutionary time; (2) much more general propositional content for imaginative religious faith than one commonly finds emphasized today, which will however find a rationale given (1); and (3) a sense of the depth of intellectual value to which imaginative religious trust may afford us access, given both (1) and (2). Let's take these in turn.

(1) ***Our place in time***. Humans are getting used to the deep past, but the deep future is still widely ignored. And so although we have experienced one half of a temporal revolution – the one that came with discovery of the deep past – the other half is yet to be. In particular, most of us have not yet noticed the fact that we exist at an extremely *early stage* in the possible history

of intelligence on our planet. Transitioning more fully from human to scientific timescales will allow us to see this, for it will allow us to see that although humans have been engaged in some sort of thinking about science, philosophy, and religion or their precursors for perhaps 50,000 years, which to our human ears sounds very impressive, this may represent no more than the first few lines (even if important ones) in the book of knowledge eventually produced by inquiry on our planet. In scientific terms we have just got started: our species is still quite young, as hominid species go, and fully a billion years – a period *twenty thousand times as long* as that impressive-sounding 50,000 years – remain for life on our planet to develop further and perhaps in new directions (Klein, 1999; Schroeder and Smith, 2008).

Call the position calling attention to these facts and their cultural importance *scientific temporalism*, or temporalism for short. Temporalism fundamentally counsels us to look at our problems – including problems concerning religion – from a perspective that includes full awareness of our place in scientific time. A main example of its *religious* consequences concerns traditional theism (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim belief in the existence of a personal God) and metaphysical naturalism (the idea that concrete reality is a single system structured entirely by natural laws of the sort science has begun to expose). These two – certainly in the west – are often treated as the only relevant options in debates over religion. But temporalism calls both into question while at the same time opening up the possibility of many new (and perhaps more interesting and convincing) ways of understanding a Divine reality – ones that a few thousand years of inquiry may not have come anywhere close to revealing (Schellenberg, 2013).

Of course, we are here considering only what *may* be the case. And if we have decided to follow our love of truth and understanding into systematic inquiry, we will think it very important to avoid both undue confidence and undue skepticism when reflecting on our place in

time. Certainly we will be moved to think hard about when to draw a conclusion and when to wait for more evidence but always on the assumption that *both* questions may, in the right circumstances, legitimately receive an affirmative answer. Even at this early stage of investigation we should draw conclusions where we can, to help keep inquiry moving, but be very careful not to foreclose inquiry where we shouldn't. (Just how to strike a balance here is of course a difficult matter; I have begun to address it in Schellenberg, 2013.)

But having said all that, we must still also admit that for a youthful species, the power of "may" should, intellectually, be very great. And there are associated consequences for intellectual virtue. Intellectual modesty and humility are evidently in order for us, and are so in new ways, given the Great Disparity between the time already devoted to inquiry on our planet and the time that may yet be devoted to it, perhaps much more constructively, in the future. It seems to me, as I have argued elsewhere (Schellenberg, 2007; 2013), that the path of virtue, in light of these facts, is a path away from belief of the hugely ambitious propositions of religion. But at the same time hope in new, unexpected, seemingly impossible intellectual results will be allowed to infuse religious orientations of life, making new intellectual ambitions in connection with religion seem ones it would be admirably openminded or courageous or farsighted or flexible or selfless or balanced to adopt. And all this will come without disregarding – and indeed by emphasizing in a new way – critical rationality and scientific progress. What we have arrived at, though it may seem radical, is therefore in scientific terms quite realistic!

(2) ***The content of faith***. The beliefs held by typical religious believers of today have very specific and detailed propositional content. And the possibility of manifesting intellectual virtue by *believing* such *details* may for some seem quite unrealizable given what we've just seen concerning our place in time, and what we know about the inadequacies of past religious inquiry,

including inquiry into revelation claims (as compared with inquiry in science, which has made huge strides in the last few centuries). But it may now occur to us that a *less* detailed religious picture, one embraced in *imagination* instead of belief and – given our temporalist reorientation – without the expectation of convincing evidence, may not be similarly disqualified.

Elsewhere (Schellenberg, 2005) I have developed a distinction between a basic religious proposition I call ultimism, and the many detailed ways of filling it out. Ultimism may provide the less detailed religious picture that is appropriate to our place in time. It says only that there is a reality *triply ultimate*: metaphysically, axiologically, and soteriologically. How are these three ultimacies to be understood? Well, something is metaphysically ultimate in the relevant sense just in case its existence is the ultimate or most fundamental fact about the nature of things, in terms of which any other fact about what things exist and how they exist can be explained. Something is axiologically ultimate just in case it is ultimate in value – the greatest possible reality. And a reality is soteriologically ultimate just in case in relation to it an ultimate good can be attained. The first of these three ultimacies could be accepted by a metaphysical naturalist. But all three could not. It is by adding the second and third to the first that one moves decisively into religious territory. In part for this reason I regard ultimism as a basic or fundamental religious claim. The other reason is that ultimism is much more *general* than most religious claims we are familiar with in the religious traditions of the world while arguably entailed by them all.

Ultimism, as can be seen, is actually logically equivalent to a large *disjunction* of propositions (a disjunction is an 'either-or' proposition of the form 'p or q') – all those more detailed religious claims that entail ultimism are its disjuncts. Theism would be thought to entail ultimism, and the same goes for various other detailed religious ideas. But ultimism entails none of these propositions; it only entails their disjunction. By imagining that ultimism is true one

imagines that there is *some* Divine reality while leaving open just what would be needed to accurately describe its nature in any detail. And this seems a realistic and reasonable stance for religion at a very early stage of evolution to adopt. At what may be a great temporal 'distance' from the maturity and sensitivity needed for profound religious insight, we should be happy if we have marked out the general object of our quest, recognizing, admitting, perhaps even exulting in the many alternative detailed conceptions of it that our species may hardly yet have begun to explore. Perhaps by scaling back its propositional content in some such fashion an imaginative form of religion can become intellectually virtuous even at so early a stage of evolutionary development as our own.

(3) ***Faith and intellectual virtue at the dawn of intelligence***. That last sentence started with 'perhaps.' How might we show that religious imagination directed to a content-lite religious proposition such as ultimism *can be* intellectually virtuous when embedded in a corresponding explicit trust in the Ultimate (a consciously and deliberately cultivated disposition to act on the idea that an ultimate divine reality will be for us what we need or want, intellectually and in other ways)? Well, a broad hint appeared a few paragraphs back, where I suggested that temporalist religion would display "intellectual modesty and humility," and that when we learn what temporalism has to teach us, "new intellectual ambitions" may arise in connection with religion that it would be "admirably openminded or courageous or farsighted or flexible or selfless or balanced to adopt." But we need to put some flesh on these bones.

We can begin to do so by noticing that ultimism, when imaginatively appropriated with a sensitivity to deep time, provides an excellent framework and also motivation for a *new* and -- because of openness to the deep future -- *potentially much enlarged* program of religious

investigation. Someone who loves truth will find the idea of *religious* truths particularly attractive because they would bring many other truths with them. Now if this possibility of religious truth were not a live one, even a lover of truth would not need to concern herself with it. But given that in the short history of our species many significant intellectual changes have occurred and are continuing to occur in relevant subjects that may have a bearing on religion and are presently receiving much attention (such as physics and psychology), and given also the difficult profundity of what we face when thinking about religion, surely it would be rash to deny that a proposition like ultimism represents a live possibility. An awareness of our place in time and of the deep future, and also of what we've done, as a species, with the time for inquiry *we've had*, informs us that much may be waiting to be intellectually apprehended and understood especially in matters of religion, where new possibilities tend to be greeted much less eagerly than in science. In particular, there may be innumerable disjuncts in that big disjunction to which ultimism is logically equivalent that have not yet been discovered. Might some of them prove to be superior, intellectually and spiritually, to religious ideas already uncovered? Ardent inquirers will discover in themselves an openness to this thought – and this even if they regard scientific inquiries 'closer to home' and less parochially pursued as having already provided a rough outline of physical reality.

Someone who enters an imaginative ultimistic commitment motivated, in part, by awareness of all these things and the desire to expand our religious understanding has, I want to suggest, a state of mind manifesting intellectual virtue. What we see here, among other things, is intellectual openmindedness: far more propositions may come to represent live possibilities for her than will for most of us. There is also intellectual courage, as well as farsightedness and a

kind of intellectual selflessness, since, moved by the long view afforded by temporalism, she is undertaking with others a long hard investigative slog, mostly for the benefit of future generations. And if, out of deference to the future, she is 'going general' with ultimism rather than plumping for some detailed religious proposition of today, then she also displays the aforementioned intellectual modesty and humility. Notice that by the same token she avoids such things as dogmatism, arrogance, divisiveness and other, similar vices whose intellectual forms are often present in conventional religion. Notice also that given the sober science behind temporalism, the enlarged possibilities of investigation she is taking seriously, and preparing to understand more fully and pursue, cannot reasonably be dismissed as involving an unrealistic intellectual optimism or naivete.

A further point that can be made here concerns intellectual flexibility or adaptability: the conventional religious believer who takes the temporalist point and transitions to an imaginative ultimistic faith will certainly display it! There is, moreover, a keenly balanced intellectual judgment in the one who chooses to exercise religious imagination at least in part because she realizes, in the wake of a new temporalist sensibility, that inquiry on matters religious has in an important sense been skewed against religious insight. Naturalistic options have been dominant in (at any rate western) thinking over several centuries now – their trajectory has tended to parallel that of modern science – and before that, rather *parochial* religious concerns held sway. So an intensified program of research into a wide range of religious options both old and new is needed to *rectify* this intellectual imbalance. One who sees this and acts on it displays the balanced judgment in question.

One final point. In philosophy and science today there is disagreement over whether the *most comprehensive* possible understanding, in which science is brought into harmony with what

we sense from experience but still do not fully understand about such things as consciousness, value, and will, is worth pursuing.[10] But there is wide agreement that such an understanding has not *yet* been achieved. With the advent of temporalism, perhaps a new optimism about eventual success in such a venture may be seeded. And one way of trying to do better, if we think that old religious understandings are lacking in one way or another, is to look for new and improved religious understandings. Thus if they love understanding, even religious skeptics might see the point of encouraging (whether in themselves or others) an ultimistic religious trust. Such a trust allows one to imagine that the richest possible understanding, in which fact and value most robustly construed are united, is in fact true. And it could be that only by working over long periods of time, in the context of a new and more generous religious commitment, to see how the various discordant elements of our experience might be brought into harmony under such a conception will our species eventually realize a fuller intellectual vision. (Of course I'm not saying that such a religious vision will in fact take root and flourish over the long haul; when proposing a new approach, one is not committed to giving evidence that it will be accepted and implemented!) One reason for thinking that such extended religious effort may be necessary here is that a religious life has not only the requisite framework ideas but also the extra sources of inner fortitude that may be needed to keep the human research program going indefinitely. In any case, one who is motivated, in her religious commitment, by the concerns of this paragraph can add to the list of her intellectual virtues a certain intellectual broadmindedness and also intellectual integrity (in the sense of a concern for overall unity and harmony in the various aspects of one's intellectual life).

10.For an example of opposed views on this question, see Nagel (2012) and Rosenberg (2011).

In this paper I have focused only on *intellectual* goals and on the ways in which an imaginative religious commitment may realize *intellectual* virtue by being appropriately related to those goals. There may be – and I think there are – many other reasons that support such a religious commitment and many other motives for undertaking it, drawn from other areas of human life (Schellenberg, 2009; 2013). Imaginative religious faith may be virtuous in many different ways. But it is surely interesting to discover that whereas conventional religion struggles with the requirements of intellectual virtue, and with a frequently alleged shortage of evidence matching its 'sense of reality,' the new way of being religious brought into focus by temporalism does not face any similar problem. Explicit religious trust in an imaginative and ultimistic mode needs no more evidence than is required to be doubting rather than disbelieving. It represents a way of realizing intellectual virtue in abundance (and this even if it should turn out that there are other ways – perhaps even conventional religious ways focused on evidence -- of achieving the same or similar virtues). Anyone, therefore, who, perhaps because of considerations like those emphasized in section I, denies that there is any way to constructively unite thinking about trust, religious commitment, and intellectual virtue will be forced to think again.[11]

11.Two qualifications and a word of thanks. First, I have not directly addressed the difference between 'desirable' (or 'admirable') and '*all things considered* desirable' (or 'all things considered admirable'). Second, I have not directly addressed the objection which claims that imaginative faith loses intellectual virtue by instantiating wishful thinking. I have no space here to address these matters. They are however addressed elsewhere in my work (see Schellenberg, 2009, 2013). For very helpful comments, I am thankful to the editors of this volume.

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