The Perspective of Faith:
Its Nature and Epistemic Implications

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My task is to sketch a partial account of faith—specifically, faith in a person, project, institution, etc.—in both its religious and mundane forms. I use a recent account by Ryan West as a starting point.[1] West argues that to have faith in something is, in part, to have a *passion* for that thing—to possess a lasting, formative disposition to feel certain positive patterns of emotion towards the object of faith. I suggest that the intellectual dimensions of faith can be modeled in a parallel way. Faith involves taking a positive *perspective* towards its object, understood as an abiding disposition for things to seem a certain way. Putting these insights together, I conclude that having faith in something involves taking a passionate perspective towards the object of faith—in being disposed, both in heart and mind, to construe the world as if the object of faith is trustworthy, dependable, or good in relevant respects. If this account is correct, it has profound implications for how we think about the justification of religious belief. For if faith systematically changes the way one experiences the world, then it can dramatically alter what evidence one has and how one assesses that evidence.

What I need to do first, in §1, is to clarify precisely what kind of faith I am targeting. Once the objective is clear, I can begin developing my view. I introduce West's view of faith as a passion in §2, which allows me to formulate a parallel account of faith as a perspective in §3 and §4. I discuss the epistemic implications of this account in §5.

As we proceed, be aware that the account contained herein is partial in two ways. First, I will only be characterizing one side of faith's many-facets. I make no pretense that this account will exhaust every interesting dimension of faith. Second, I will not address every important issue related to this specific dimension of faith. It is not feasible to do so within the constraints of this forum. Regardless, there are other reasons for keeping the account trim. What I articulate here is a theoretical core that can be developed in multiple ways. As such, its appeal spans some of the more narrowly focused debates on the nature of faith.

§1 Objectual Faith

There are at least two basic kinds of faith. The kind that has received by far the most attention in recent work is propositional faith. This is the attitude picked out in paradigmatic utterances of, "S has faith *that* p." A subject with propositional faith stands in special relation to a proposition. The kind of faith I am interested in is objectual faith. This is the state picked out in paradigmatic utterances of, "S has faith *in* X." Objectual faith is placed in a (non-

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[1] Ryan West 2013. West is building off the interpretations of Søren Kierkegaard in Roberts 1997 and Westphal 2011. See also Karen Jones 1996 and Jonathan Kvanvig 2013 for similar accounts.

propositional) entity of some sort, usually a person.[2] Propositional and objectual faith are related in intimate ways—for instance, faith in an object will naturally give rise to faith that certain things concerning the object are true—but they are generally kept distinct.[3] Because I am characterizing objectual faith, my account can be viewed as complementary to many theories of propositional faith. For convenience, I will use "faith" to refer to objectual faith unless otherwise noted.

Most accounts of objectual faith agree that having faith in something involves placing trust in that object.[4] Trust is relative to a domain.[5] My students trust in me as a professor but not as a haircutter. Thus, one can have faith in a person without this faith governing every important aspect of one's life. Faith in Christ as Lord and Savior, when fully-realized, is an exception. Faith of this robust sort serves as the unifying principle of one's life: "an overall stance in matters that govern important aspects of human life," says Robert Audi.[6] John Bishop adds, "To make such a commitment, as with any religious commitment, is to adopt a certain foundational *overall* interpretation of, and associated practical orientation towards, reality."[7] Jonathan Kvanvig reiterates, "Religious faith thus aims at the full integration of a life in relation to an all-encompassing ideal."[8] Following Audi, I will call this sort of faith "global faith" and those that have it "persons of faith."[9]   My account of objectual faith will be designed to accommodate objectual faith in both its global and more restricted forms.[10]

In this I am treating global faith as just a special instance of objectual faith, an instance where one places faith in something as Lord—the ultimate authority in all matters. Dan Howard-Snyder thinks global faith is a third, basic kind of faith, irreducible to objectual faith.[11] His argument is that objectual faith can lack the "the sort of unification distinct of global faith." For instance, faith in Christ can be "so psychically compartmentalized that it does not govern most matters of importance."[12] Howard-Snyder's argument establishes that not all

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[2] William Alston 1996: 12-13, thinks that, strictly speaking, only persons are objects of objectual faith. When we speak of having faith in projects or institutions, we are personifying these entities.

[3] For instance, Dan Howard-Snyder 2013: 358; 2016: 144 argues that objectual faith involves relying on and entrusting one's well-being to the object of faith, while propositional faith carries no such requirement.

[4] E.g. Alston 1996: 13.

[5] Howard-Snyder 2013: 358.

[6] Robert Audi 2011: 58.

[7] John Bishop 2014: 170.

[8] Kvanvig 2013: 116.

[9] Audi 2011: 57-58.

[10] I do not mean to insinuate that religious faith is the only form of global faith. People can and do display the same kind of all-encompassing faith towards objects that are not religious in nature.

[11] Howard-Snyder 2016: 145.

[12] Howard-Snyder 2016: 145.

objectual faith is global faith. That I grant. Even faith in Christ must be allowed to mature and grow to its full extent before it becomes global in scope. Howard-Snyder's argument does not, however, give us any reason to doubt that global faith is just a special instance of objectual faith.

With the target in sight, I can now begin introducing my account of objectual faith.

§2 Faith as a Passion

In this section, I briefly articulate the view of faith as a passion.[13] A passion, in the sense that concerns us here, is not an emotion.[14] A passion is a deep, abiding, identity-forming concern that disposes one to feel certain patterns of emotion.[15] In this sense, we might say that Michael Jordan has a passion for winning. Jordan cares so deeply about winning that he will feel elation when he wins and disappointment when he loses, he will be desirous of things that improve his chances of winning and averse to things that diminish them, and so on. Winning, moreover, is not merely of passing or marginal interest to Jordan. A concern for winning is engrained in Jordan and an influential factor in his character, choices, and preference structure. Not all passions are as strong as Jordan's legendary passion for winning, but they are stronger and more resilient than casual concerns.

Faith is a species of passion, set apart from other passions by the particular pattern of emotions that it disposes one to feel. A better understanding of emotions is crucial for getting a firmer grip on the specific patterns of emotion related to faith. Emotions are not adequately understood as mere bodily sensations, as a fluttering in the stomach or a tightness in the chest.[16] Among other things, emotions have an evaluative dimension that makes them more complex. Feeling good about something is a way of evaluating that thing as good. For instance, when you feel good about a job interview, your emotions are indicating that the interview went well. This applies *mutatis mutandis* to negative emotions.

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[13] While I lean heavily on West in the initial stages, I extend the passional view of faith significantly. So, sadly, I cannot blame all of my errors on West.
[14] West 2013: 567, and Westphal 2011: 89, both note that, in ordinary language, 'a passion' can simply refer to an emotion, especially a volatile one. That is not how the term is used here.
[15] West 2013: 567. I will assume that a concern *just is* a disposition to feel certain patterns of emotions.
[16] See Prinz 2004 for a dissenting view.

There are disagreements about how the evaluative aspects of emotions should be understood.[17] I will lean here on a view defended by Robert Roberts and Bennett Helm.[18] According to Roberts and Helm, emotions have propositional content but are not full-fledged evaluative judgments. Rather, the way in which that content is evaluated is through the quasi-perceptual way in which it is presented to the subject. The distinctive phenomenology of the emotion is a way of *seeing* the object as good or bad. Roberts calls this kind of seeing-as a "construal".[19] Helm calls it a "felt evaluation". There are helpful analogies between sensory perceptions and construals. If you bathe a room in red light, a table in the room will be presented with a reddish phenomenal character—it will appear to the subject as red things appear. In a similar way, an emotion construes its object in a good or bad light. The object is presented to the subject with a goodish or baddish phenomenal character—it feels as though one is encountering something good or bad.

Emotions construe their objects as good or bad in a particular way. The specific kind of emotion one feels is determined by the precise way in which one construes the object. For instance, if you construe something as offensive, you feel anger. If you construe it as threatening, you feel fear or terror. The "characteristic evaluation" of an emotion type is the specific way of construing that defines that species of emotion.[20]

Faith will, at least, dispose one to construe things as if the object of faith is trustworthy in some regard. For example, if you have faith in your spouse to remain monogamous, then you will be disposed to construe things as though your spouse is worthy of being trusted in this respect. Not only will you feel of your spouse that he or she is trustworthy,[21] but you will also perceive his or her actions in this light. Part of this disposition is also to *resist* feeling suspicious of your spouse or feeling betrayed by his or her actions. In fact, faith is displayed most prominently in incriminating circumstances—those circumstances in which, without faith, one would tend to construe things as though the object of faith was untrustworthy. For example, say your spouse has been working late into the evening all month. You discover from a third-party that he or she has been working one-on-one with an attractive co-worker after everyone else has left. The normal reaction (absent faith) is to feel betrayed by these

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[17] There is a spectrum among those who ascribe an evaluative aspect to emotions. On one end, philosophers like Martha Nussbaum 2001 and Robert Solomon 1980 propose that emotions are evaluative judgments or beliefs. On the other, philosophers like Jenefer Robinson 2005 contend that the evaluative aspects of emotions are completely non-cognitive. The view adopted here occupies a middle position.

[18] Roberts 1988; 2003; 2009; 2013. Helm 2001; 2002; 2009.

[19] Roberts emphasizes that emotions are *concern-based* construals. In other words, the construal arises out of concern for the target of the emotion.

[20] This is Roberts' terminology. See Roberts 2003, 180-313, for a discussion of the characteristic evaluations of many common emotions.

[21] Unfortunately, there is no name for this type of emotion. We usually just say, "He feels trustworthy." Our language lacks names for many emotion types. This is part of why people struggle to articulate their emotions.

meetings—to start construing things as though your spouse is untrustworthy. Faith in your spouse disposes you to resist these feelings of distrust.

As a first pass, we can think of the level of one's faith (or of this specific aspect of one's faith) as being (at least partially) determined by how pervasive, strong, and resilient this disposition is.[22] *Pervasiveness* is a matter of how thoroughly faith has permeated one's emotional responses. For instance, I mentioned earlier that fully-realized faith in Christ will govern one's attitudes towards all matters of importance. This is a maximally pervasive instance of faith since it affects how one feels about all areas of life. Other instances of faith are more compartmentalized, and thus less pervasive. The *strength* of one's faith is determined by how liable one is to feel as though the object of faith is trustworthy (and to resist feeling as though they are untrustworthy). To draw an analogy, some fragile objects are more fragile than others—more liable to manifest their disposition to break. In the same way, the stronger one's faith, the more liable one is to manifest the disposition to feel as though the object of faith is trustworthy. In particular, the strength of one's faith is influenced by how incriminating the circumstances must be before one can no longer construe things as if the object of faith is trustworthy (and no longer resist construing things as if the object of faith is untrustworthy). I am not referring here to what it would take to lose the relevant disposition entirely—for someone to "lose her faith"—but rather how incriminating the circumstances must be before the disposition no longer manifests. Finally, *resilience* is a measure of how well the disposition is sustained over time, particularly after encountering incriminating circumstances. Resilience takes into account both how the pervasiveness and strength of the disposition change over time, as well as what it would take for the subject to lose the relevant disposition entirely. On these characterizations, incriminating circumstances reveal the level of one's faith. This is why individuals in such circumstances are said to be undergoing "tests of faith."

Much more could said, but we already have, for our purposes, a sufficient understanding of faith as a passion. We can now turn our attention to the idea of faith as a perspective.

§3 Seemings as Intellectual Construals

Just as a passion is a deep, abiding disposition to feel certain patterns of emotion, a "perspective" is a similarly strong and resilient disposition for things to seem a certain way. I submit that placing faith in something involves taking on a certain perspective, so understood. I will use the next few sections to articulate my view in greater detail. My first task is to clarify what it is for something to seem a certain way.

When something seems to be the case, the subject possesses a mental state known as a "seeming" or an "appearance." The most prominent and best supported view of seemings is

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[22] These criteria will apply *mutatis mutandis* to the perspectival aspects of faith mentioned below.

that they are a *sui generis* type of experience or propositional attitude.[23] Seemings have propositional content like other representational mental states, but their unique phenomenal character sets them apart. When something seems true, this mental state has "the feel of truth, the feel of a state whose content reveals how things really are."[24] We can isolate this phenomenal character by comparing mental states which possess and lack it, respectively. For instance, I'm currently entertaining the proposition that I live on Mars. This feels like nothing more than an idle musing. But if I entertain the proposition that I live on Earth, this feels real, authentic, revelatory. It feels like I'm not only describing the way things could be but the way they actually are. This phenomenal character is called "forcefulness".[25]

Forcefulness comes in two varieties. A proposition can feel false as well as true. If you consider the proposition that a square has more sides that a rectangle, this might immediately strike you as false. A seeming in which the content feels false can be called a "seeming-false".[26] A seeming in which the content feels true can be called a "seeming-true". For convenience, I will generally stick to talking about seemings-true (the term "seeming" will default to "seeming-true" if called for), but my assertions apply *mutatis mutandis* to seemings-false.

Seemings, understood in this way, are similar to emotions in a number of important respects. For one, seemings have a similar functional role to emotions. Emotions are paradigmatic motivators of action.[27] If you feel good about something, then you are motivated to act for it. Likewise, seemings are paradigmatic causes of belief. If something seems true, then it generally inclines you to believe it. Furthermore, many believe that emotions and seemings can provide practical and intellectual reasons for action or belief, respectively. The phenomenological similarities between seemings and emotions are even more striking. Both seeming and emotions have positive and negative affective tones. Both of them have propositional content and present that content in a positive or negative light.

These strong similarities suggest that seemings share a common structure with emotions. I recommend that we understand seemings as intellectual construals. When something seems to be the case, the subject is construing a proposition as true or false.

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[23] Tucker 2013 has a helpful way of structuring the debate. I defend the experience view of seemings in McAllister 2017.

[24] Tolhurst 1998: 298-99.

[25] Huemer 2001 coined the term "forcefulness". Tolhurst calls it "felt veridicality". Tucker 2010 calls it "assertiveness".

[26] Surprisingly, no proponents of the experiential view of seemings have acknowledged this second kind of appearance. I suspect this is because they think you can simply reduce a seeming-false that p to a seeming-true that $\sim p$. I don't think this will work. The phenomenology of each state feels completely different. Furthermore, it is usually clear that the propositional content of seeming-false is p rather than $\sim p$ (or vice versa).

[27] This is especially true on the quasi-perceptual theories of Roberts and Helm, since they allow desires to be understood as kinds of emotion. This goes hand in hand with the classical idea that desires are appearances of the good. On that, see Tenenbaum 2007.

Accordingly, seemings are one species of construal—intellectual construals—while emotions are a second species of construal—emotional construals. The main difference is that emotions construe their objects as good or bad while seemings construe them as true or false.

§4 Faith as a Perspective

On the premise that seemings and emotions are both species of construals, it becomes tempting to characterize the intellectual dimensions of faith in a manner that parallels its affective aspects. Just as faith involves a disposition to *emotionally* construe things as though the object of faith is trustworthy in some respect, so faith involves a disposition to *intellectually* construe things in the same way. You will not only *feel* as though the object of faith is trustworthy, it will also *seem* as though it is trustworthy. As before, I am thinking of the relevant disposition as being resilient and formative in one's noetic structure. Furthermore, the disposition represents a systematic way of viewing the world (or, at least, those parts of the world suitably related to the object of faith). So, for instance, the above-mentioned faith in your spouse will not only dispose you to have the appearance that your spouse can be trusted, but you will also be disposed to construe his or her actions in this light. For example, it may not seem to you that your spouse's late-night rendezvous are a betrayal when they otherwise would have. This sort of deep, abiding disposition to systematically construe the world in a certain way is what I am calling a "perspective." Faith, on my account, involves taking on a specific sort of perspective—in being disposed to construe things as though the object of faith is trustworthy.

In a moment, I will dive into the details of how the perspective of faith changes what seems to be the case. But before that, there is a pressing objection that must be attended to. The objection asks, if faith disposes one to see the object of faith as trustworthy, then what do we make of those who continue to act as though the object of faith is trustworthy despite the fact that it fails to seem so? Perhaps it even seems to someone that God has abandoned her, and yet she continues to serve him. Individuals like Mother Theresa arguably fall into this camp. Surely, such people have faith. Thankfully, my account need not deny that this is so. Having the perspective of faith does not entail that it will always seem to one that the object of faith is trustworthy whenever she considers the matter. For one, someone could manifest the perspective of faith simply by resisting the natural temptation to construe things as though the object of faith is untrustworthy. Furthermore, a disposition does not always manifest. A fragile object needn't break every time it is dropped. In similar fashion, one can be disposed to view (or resist viewing) the object of faith in a certain light but fail to do so in particularly incriminating circumstances.

There may also be other important aspects of faith that are better displayed by those individuals who continue to serve God when it seems that he is untrustworthy. To illustrate the point, compare the virtues of temperance and continence. If one is continent, then one is able to will what reason says is good when tempted by contrary desires. If one is temperate, then one's desires will not be contrary to the good in the first place. So understood, the presence of temperance largely occludes the activation of continence. Great displays of

continence require situations in which temperance has failed to manifest. Ideally, we want to be temperate—we want our desires to align with what reason says is good—yet this does not make displays of continence any less laudable. There is, I think, an analogy with faith here. You might think there are two different aspects of faith, one more like temperance and the other more like continence. The first is what I have been describing as the perspective of faith—a disposition to construe things as though the object of faith were trustworthy. The second is something different—a disposition to act as though the object of faith were trustworthy even when things seem otherwise. It is only when the perspective of faith fails to manifest that this second dimension of faith is given prominent display. In this way, the one who perseveres through doubts and the one who never doubts could both be exemplars of faith, just of different aspects of it. I would maintain, nonetheless, that manifesting the perspective of faith is the ideal. Just as a perfectly virtuous person would be perfectly temperate, and so have no occasion to display continence, so the person with perfect faith would always see the object of faith as trustworthy (at least when it concerns faith in Christ)[28] and so never be required to persevere when it seems that God has betrayed them. But again, this does not imply that displays of this second aspect of faith are any less laudable.

I will now go into more detail about how the perspective of faith changes what seems to be the case. At this point, the discussion is purely psychological, focused on how faith affects one's experiences of the world and not on what the epistemic implications of those changes might be. That will be the focus of the next section. I will use faith in Christ as my example, but the underlying principles can be generalized to other kinds of objectual faith.[29]

There are at least three main ways in which the perspective of faith can alter one's experiences. First, and most straightforwardly, when you place faith in Jesus as Lord, it will tend to seem to you that Jesus is worthy of being trusted as Lord—that he is supremely wise and benevolent.[30] Second, those with faith in Christ will be disposed to view other things in light of Jesus's wisdom and benevolence. The simplest example is that it will seem to you that if Jesus reveals something, it must be true. This "appearance of credibility," as Trent Dougherty calls it, will incline you to believe those teachings.[31] The effects of faith run deeper than that, however. By faith, the contents of divine revelation may start to seem increasingly

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[28] Faith, if it is to be virtuous, must be attuned to the actual trustworthiness of the object (or to the level of trustworthiness one has justification for ascribing to the object). Thus, when the object of faith is something less than perfectly trustworthy, then it will not be true that someone with virtuous faith will always see that object as trustworthy. The object of Christian faith is an exception since God, if he exists, is perfectly trustworthy.

[29] Since I am focused specifically on Christian faith, the name "God" will be taken to refer to the Christian God throughout the discussion.

[30] The perspective of faith only disposes one to construe things this way, it does not guarantee that one always will. To avoid clunky phrasing, I may not always mention this caveat.

[31] Trent Dougherty 2014a. This feature of my account (and Dougherty's) fits nicely with the traditional view of Aquinas and others that faith in God disposes one to accept revealed truth on the basis of God's testimony.

plausible in their own right. Take Jesus's assertion that we ought to love our enemies. At first, you might accept this on the weight of Jesus's credibility alone. You might say, "That doesn't seem right to me, but it seems that it must be true since Jesus said it." As faith grows, however, it may become intuitive, even obvious, that we are obligated to love our enemies. At the very least, this doctrine may cease to be as counterintuitive as it once was. Generally speaking, what seems to be the case aligns more closely with what Jesus says is the case.

As a result, the perspective of faith has the potential to extensively shape how one views the world. In addition to exclusively Christian doctrines like the Incarnation or the Trinity, the revelation of Jesus implies or makes probable a host of metaphysical, epistemological, and moral commitments—especially if you include the Bible as part of that revelation.[32] For instance, the following is a small taste of what follows if Jesus's testimony is true. To start, there is such a thing as objective truth and humans have the ability to know it (some of it, anyways). In particular, there are objective moral truths. Humans are morally responsible for violating their objective moral obligations, and so have free will sufficient for moral responsibility. Humans may well have immaterial souls that can exist after death. Humans did not arise from a completely random or unguided evolutionary process but were designed by God. Indeed, the existence of the universe as whole is not a brute fact but is explained by a creator God and imbued with purpose. There are dimensions of reality that the natural sciences cannot explain. Miracles can and do happen and can be rationally believed. The list goes on and on. All these views may come to seem more plausible to the person who has faith in Jesus. You see the world as Christianity portrays it.

Part of a Christian belief-system is an explanation of why the perspective of faith is to be privileged over others—of why taking on the perspective of faith is like the scales falling off one's eyes rather than having the wool pulled over them. The basic idea is that other perspectives are infected by the fallen state of the world, including the subject herself, and that faith is a grace given by God which allows us to see the world rightly. In short, the perspective faith vouches for itself—it makes itself seem uniquely positioned to reveal truth.

Faith also disposes you to resist construing the world in ways that are contrary to the revelation of Jesus. For instance, when one encounters suffering it is natural for one to construe the situation as though it is gratuitous and irredeemable, as though God could not allow it. It is this tendency that gives rise to what Dougherty calls the "common sense problem of evil."[33] Faith combats the common sense problem of evil by preventing, or at least discouraging, the production of such appearances (and may even make it seem as though the suffering will one day be defeated). A similar story can play out on a larger scale as well. The

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[32] I am well aware, of course, that there are controversies amongst those who claim to be followers of Christ about what exactly was revealed by Jesus, not to mention how these revelations are to be received (e.g. as literal truth or as inspirational fodder). I do not want to get mired down in those debates here. Assume, if you will, that I am discussing only a specific sort of traditional, orthodox Christian faith.

[33] Dougherty 2008 and manuscript.

effects of suffering, observed in oneself or others, can be far-reaching.[34] Encountering suffering can be a transformational experience that disposes one to systematically construe the world differently than before. For example, life may begin to seem pointless, random, devoid of objective moral truth. More generally, encountering suffering can invest the subject with a naturalistic or other anti-Christian perspective in which the world is construed as being radically different than Christianity portrays it. The tendency of suffering to generate this sort of perspective can be called the "perspectival problem of evil." As before, faith can combat the perspectival problem of evil by preventing the transition to an anti-Christian perspective.

There is a third way in which the perspective of faith might influence one's view of things. Whether we accept or reject a hypothesis depends, in part, on how well that hypothesis seems to explain the relevant data, or, alternatively, how likely the data seems given the hypothesis in question. Such assessments are not always straightforward. For example, what is the conditional probability that there be patterns of evil and suffering as observed in the world given that an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good God exists? How well does the theistic hypothesis explain these patterns of evil and suffering? These questions are at the heart of contemporary discussions of the problem of evil. Part of why those debates show no signs of abating is that people give vastly different answers to such questions (or insist that we are not in a position to answer them at all). One construes the evidence of evil as being vanishingly improbable given theism; another sees it as only mildly surprising; still another thinks that God would be more likely to create a world with this kind of evil than any other.[35] In explanatory terms, you will find those to whom it seems that theism does a vastly inferior, roughly comparable, or even slightly better job of explaining the patterns of evil and suffering in the world than naturalism. The perspective of faith can have an influence in such assessments. Since the Christian God, if he exists, has promised to redeem our suffering, someone with faith in God will be disposed to view suffering in light of that trust. That is, the patterns of evil and suffering we observe may not seem as unlikely given the Lordship of Christ as it otherwise would have absent faith. Or if you prefer, Christianity may seem to do a better job of explaining the data than it otherwise would have. Thus, faith changes not only our experiences but also what we make of those experiences.[36]

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[34] Michelle Panchuk is filling a much needed gap in the literature by exploring in greater detail some of the psychological effects of suffering and what the practical and epistemic implications of those effects might be. See Panchuk manuscript.

[35] The Felix Culpa line of thought in Plantinga 2004 might lead one to this conclusion. Dougherty 2014b makes the case that the level of evil and suffering we observe is in a goldilocks-region of sorts: there is enough evil to provide the opportunity for certain great goods but not so much that people are generally rendered impotent by mind-shattering evils.

[36] This part of my account is reminiscent of an idea in Pierre Rousselot 1990. Concerning reasons for believing in Christianity, Rousselot reminds us that "two conditions are necessarily required for their perception: the presentation of the object and the possession of a spiritual faculty capable of grasping it" (62). That is, you may encounter facts which logically support or even entail the truth of Christianity, but you do not perceive them *as reasons for believing* until

§5 Epistemic Implications of Faith

We can now discuss the epistemic implications of faith—specifically, how adopting the perspective of faith might affect one's justification for believing in the trustworthiness (and existence) of the Christian God. (Since God, if he exists, is essentially trustworthy, I take it that evidence of God's existence constitutes evidence of his trustworthiness and vice versa.) My main conclusion will be that, depending on whether one adopts an internalist or externalist theory of justification, it is either probable or plausible, respectively, that adopting the perspective of faith will bolster one's justification for believing in the trustworthiness of the object of faith. I begin the discussion from an internalist point of view and finish from an externalist one. There are obviously a wide variety of views that fall under the banner of "internalism" or "externalism," and we cannot work through them all here, so my comments must be kept general. As you will see, however, a recognizable picture emerges even whilst painting in broad strokes.

For internalists, one has justification for taking those doxastic stances that fit with or are permitted by the evidence located within one's subjective, first-person perspective. Evidence enters the subjective perspective through experience (broadly construed). Thus, if you systematically alter the way someone experiences the world, it is reasonable to assume that this will have a tremendous influence on what stances that person is justified in taking. Let us walk through a couple ways in which this is so.

I mentioned above that to someone with the perspective of faith, it will seem that Jesus is trustworthy. This seeming is an experience—one whose content feels representative of the way things actually are. It is not especially controversial among internalists (or externalists for that matter) that something's seeming to be true will often provide the subject with evidence that it is true. This is obviously the case given a view like phenomenal conservatism, which says that whenever it seems to S that p, S immediately gains some level of *prima facie* justification for believing p.[37] Though there are strong reasons for thinking that internalists should endorse phenomenal conservatism,[38] our discussion need not rely on so controversial a

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you perceive the connection between those facts and the relevant Christian doctrine. Faith, Rousselot maintains, is that which "accounts for our perceiving the connection" (28). My account contains something similar. It may be that Christianity is objectively probable given some data, or that Christianity is the best explanation of the data, but it is not recognized as such until one has adopted the perspective of faith.

[37] Phenomenal conservatism is first defended in Huemer 2001 (though it is an outgrowth of the common sense tradition tracing back through G.E. Moore to Thomas Reid). I defend phenomenal conservatism in McAllister forthcoming.

[38] See Huemer 2006 and 2007 as well as the aforementioned defenses.

principle. I maintain only that seemings *often*, in the regular course of human life, provide evidence for believing their contents, and I make no claim that such justification is immediate. An explanationist, for instance, can maintain that the fact that *p* seems to be true is, in many cases, best explained by the hypothesis that *p* is true, and so *p*'s seeming true will, in those cases, provide evidence that *p*. The upshot is that, given most forms of internalism, the fact that Jesus seems trustworthy may well provide the subject with evidence that he is trustworthy. This is the simplest, most direct way in which adopting the perspective of faith can increase support for the trustworthiness of God.

There are other ways the perspective of faith can generate such support which, though less direct, have the potential to be far more robust. I explained in the previous section how the perspective of faith can systematically alter how one perceives the world, bringing one's experiences and intuitions into line with the Christian worldview. All of the aforementioned positions—objective truth, non-skepticism, moral realism, metaphysical realism, free will, dualism, creationism, natural teleology, non-scientism, and many more besides—may start to seem true to the subject (or more so than before). I mean not only that, in moments of abstract philosophical reflection, it will seem to the subject, say, that there are objective moral truths. It will also seem to her as she proceeds through daily life that *this* action is objectively wrong or *that* state of affairs is objectively good. We are talking about a systematic reordering of one's intuitions.

Is it rational for the subject to trust these new experiences when things previously seemed so different? Well, as I mentioned above, the privileged position of this new perspective is one of the very things that will begin to seem true to the subject, other perspectives being tainted by the fallen state of things. So from the subject's perspective, such experiences will appear to be reliable. Through all of these many experiences, then, the subject is gaining additional evidence for the truth of the aforementioned positions. If the subject believes what seems to be the case, as she is naturally inclined to do, then she will be led to a fairly comprehensive Christian belief-system with God at its center. I will assume here that such a belief-system is coherent (though there are those who ardently disagree). A coherent belief-system is not only internally consistent, but also inferentially interconnected. The beliefs in a coherent system stand in mutually-reinforcing relationships to one another such that raising the probability of one ends up raising the probability of them all, including the belief in God which lies at its center. After all, the hypothesis that God exists does far better job at explaining a world of the sort described than naturalism. In this way, the perspective of faith can greatly increase the subject's justification for believing in the trustworthiness of God. More than that, the subject's justification is especially secure, being rooted in a comprehensive belief-system rather than a one-off experience or an argument from natural theology.

This whole process smacks of circularity. It is not explicitly circular in that the subject is not making an inference in which the conclusion appears amongst the premises. There is, however, some form of circularity in that those views which are supposed to confirm the trustworthiness of God only seem true, to the extent that they do, because the subject already trusts God. We might say that the subject is tacitly assuming the reliability of God's testimony

throughout the process. If the subject has no reason to suspect that her trust is casually generating the relevant seemings, then from an internalist point of view, the circular origins of those seemings will make no difference. But what if the subject becomes aware that her trust is affecting how she views the world? Does this circularity defeat whatever justification may come from those seemings? Since I cannot give this the lengthy response it deserves, I will simply say it is hardly obvious that such circularity is always problematic. If William Aston is right (and I tend to think he is), then all of our fundamental doxastic practices display the same sort of circularity.[39] After all, it is impossible to confirm the reliability of our fundamental faculties and doxastic practices without implementing those very faculties and practices in the investigation, in which case the entire endeavor proceeds on the tacit assumption that those faculties and practices are reliable. It seems we are forced, on pain of radical skepticism, to admit that circularity of this tacit sort is not inherently vicious. Indeed, such circular confirmation is apparently capable of justifying the resolute confidence we have in the reliability of our fundamental belief-forming practices.[40] I must, regrettably, take up a more complete defense against the charge of vicious circularity elsewhere.

If the concerns about circularity are resolved, I suspect most internalists will still be on board. There is, however, a third, more controversial way in which the perspective of faith might bolster justification for believing in the trustworthiness of its object. I will unpack this idea probabilistically, but the same idea could be developed in an explanationist framework. The problem of evil will serve as our example.

Given Bayesianism, whether the patterns of evil and suffering observed in the world constitute evidence against the existence of God comes down to the conditional probability of that suffering given theism and how it compares to the likelihood of that suffering given rival hypotheses. For Subjective Bayesians (in the normative sense) these conditional probabilities are, well, subjective, being ultimately derived from hypothetical priors in a particular individual's initial credence distribution. There are disagreements about what normative constraints govern a subject's initial credence distribution, but the idea common to Subjective Bayesians is that more than one set of hypothetical priors is rationally permissible. Hence, two individuals with the same evidence might reach different conclusions yet both be rational. Indeed, it may be that the patterns of suffering are strong evidence against theism for one individual but not another, depending on what their hypothetical priors are. I propose that how likely the data *seems to be* given a hypothesis can affect which hypothetical priors are rational for the subject to take.[41] For example, if it strongly seems to someone that God would

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[39] See William Alston 1991, Ch. 3.

[40] Of course, as Alston points out, there's circular justification and then there's circular justification. That is to say, there are more sophisticated forms of circular justification than simple track-record arguments. Alston discusses these in 1991, Ch. 4. Though I cannot make the case here, I see no reason why there could not be a Christian faith doxastic practice which enjoys these more substantial forms of circular support.

[41] I am not claiming that how likely the data seems given a hypothesis is the only relevant factor, just that it is one relevant factor.

never allow his creatures to suffer in ways we observe, then, in that subject's initial credence distribution, the conditional probability of that suffering given the existence of God should be low (at least, lower than it would be for someone who lacked this seeming). On the other hand, if it seems plausible that God would allow the sort of suffering we observe, then that hypothetical prior should be higher. If this is right, then whether or not the data of suffering constitutes evidence against Christian theism (and how strong that evidence is) will be influenced, perhaps quite significantly, by how likely the data seems given the existence of God. Since faith can change these "conditional seemings," as we might call them, we have a third way in which faith can support the trustworthiness of its object.[42]

Objective Bayesians will think all of this wrongheaded. On their view, hypothetical priors should be attuned to objective logical or evidential probabilities, meaning that only one set of hypothetical priors is permitted for all subjects. There is no room on this approach for seemings to have any normative influence on a subject's initial credence distribution and, hence, on what credences are rational for the subject in the here and now. Regardless, I think the ideas of the previous paragraph should be of interest even to Objective Bayesians. Bayesianism (of all varieties) is notorious for demanding too much of limited agents like ourselves. For example, if we are to be rational, our credences must conform to the probability axioms, which require that a maximal credence be placed in every logically necessary truth. But are we really being *irrational* if we fail to place a maximal credence in every mathematical theorem? Along these same lines, a logically omniscient agent in ideal conditions may be able to pinpoint the exact logical probability of suffering given Christian theism, but ordinary people are not logically omniscient nor are their conditions ideal. Are such ordinary reasoners truly irrational if their best efforts lead them to a different conclusion? That seems like too much to expect from non-ideal agents. Let us assume, however, that Objective Bayesians are right—our failure to perfectly mirror an ideal, logically omniscient agent is irrational in some objective epistemic sense. We might still find it useful to talk about a different, more subjective kind of epistemic rationality that more closely describes the kind of credences we would expect a fully conscientious agent with limited rational abilities to possess. I submit that probabilistic reasoning can still be of help to agents that are not logically omniscient, even though their credences do not perfectly align with the probability axioms, and that the apparent probability of the data given a certain hypothesis can influence what credences they should adopt after employing this probabilistic reasoning. In other words, conditional seemings can still affect what is *subjectively* rational for the subject to believe, even if they have no bearing on what is *objectively* rational.

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[42] With respect to the problem of evil, this ability is not being used to garner confirmation for the trustworthiness of God as much as to prevent (massive) disconfirmation, but it could manifest in the former way as well. For instance, in the fine-tuning argument for God's existence, it may seem more probable to those with faith that God would create a world suitable for life than it does to those who lack it, in which case the fine-tuning data might provide more evidence for God's existence to those with faith than those without it.

I conclude that, for internalists, faith is likely to have dramatic epistemic effects. What do externalists have to say about all of this? To start, externalists should welcome the possibility that some seemings provide rational support for their content. For instance, Michael Bergmann, a proper functionalist, has suggested that the human mind is designed to form beliefs on the basis of the way things seem (generally speaking), in which case those seemings serve as evidence for the properly-formed beliefs to which they give rise.[43] Similarly, there is no reason to doubt that forming beliefs on the basis of what seems to be the case will, in many instances, be sufficiently reliable, safe, etc., to produce justified beliefs. The question is just whether the seemings generated by faith are of the right sort. Are the beliefs formed on the basis of these seemings reliable, safe, the result of proper functioning? That's going to depend on how that faith initially came about and, ultimately, on whether the object of faith is actually trustworthy or not. In lieu of a length investigation, my only claim is that, if God exists, there is nothing to prevent beliefs formed by faith in God from meeting any and all externalist criteria. In fact, if God exists, then it seems likely that the beliefs produced by faith will meet those criteria. For if God exists and is trustworthy, then those with the perspective of faith really are coming to see the world rightly—their eyes are being opened to the truth— and God has endowed them with faith for just this purpose. Of course, if God does not exist, then matters are completely different. Perhaps we are led to a Plantinga-esque conclusion: If God exists, then faith will probably provide justification for believing in God, and if God does not exist, then faith probably won't.[44] Thus, without taking a stance on the existence of God, from an externalist point of view, I can only conclude that, plausibly, faith in God will provide justification for believing in his trustworthiness.

A lesson to take from our investigation is that discussions surrounding the justification of Christian belief will be sorely lacking if they fail to take account of the perspective of the subject at hand. Proponents of natural theology or atheology might point to arguments for and against the existence of God, but, as we have seen, the ability of those arguments to provide justification may be influenced by the subject's perspective. For instance, whether the existence of suffering constitutes decisive evidence against God's trustworthiness, and thus existence, will depend on the faith, or lack thereof, of the individual subject. According to reformed epistemologists, we can get non-inferential justification for believing that God exists, for instance, when it seems obvious that he does.[45] Fair enough, nevertheless we must also acknowledge that whatever justification this appearance provides will be bolstered or defeated depending on whether one's experiences in other areas of life align or conflict with God's existence. Something like the perspective of faith is therefore needed to secure justification for believing in God. Finally, if we are trying to assess the justification of ordinary Christians, I suspect that very few of them believe simply because it seems that God exists or because they have encountered a few arguments in natural theology. Rather, they are exposed to the

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[43] Bergmann 2013.

[44] Alvin Plantinga 2000 argues that if God exists, then belief in God is probably warranted, and if God does not exist, then it is probably unwarranted.

[45] See Tucker 2011 and McAllister and Dougherty manuscript.

Christian worldview and, for one reason or another, it clicks.[46] There is a paradigm shift. The Christian perspective becomes their own—the lens through which they view the world. This perspective then proceeds to generate rational support for believing in God in the ways mentioned above. Some of this support might come through the arguments of natural theology or non-inferentially through religious experiences, but underlying all of it is the perspective of faith.

§6 Conclusion

In this paper, I have sketched a partial account of faith. I have proposed that faith involves taking a passionate perspective towards its object—in construing the world, both emotionally and intellectually, as though the object of faith were trustworthy. In this way, faith serves as a lens through which we experience the world. I have also argued that, on this account of faith, whether one has faith or not may play a significant role in determining whether one is justified in believing that God is trustworthy or that he exists—a fact that should be taken into account when assessing the justification of theistic belief.

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[46] There is much I would like to say about how faith comes about. Sadly, I must leave that for another time. Suffice it to say that my account is compatible with all of the traditional elements that one might want to include here (e.g. faith only arising through grace, the activity of the Spirit, a role for the will, etc.).

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