



INTRODUCTION

Normative appraisals of faith in God

Daniel J. McKaughan^{1*}  and Daniel Howard-Snyder² 

¹Department of Philosophy, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA, USA and ²Department of Philosophy, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA, USA

*Corresponding author. Email: daniel.mckaughan@bc.edu

(Received 3 March 2023; revised 5 March 2023; accepted 6 March 2023)

Many theistic religions place a high value on faith in God and some traditions regard it as a virtue. However, philosophers commonly assign either very little value to faith in God or significant negative value, or even view it as a vice. Progress in assessing whether and when faith in God can be valuable or disvaluable, virtuous or vicious, rational or irrational, or otherwise apt or inapt requires understanding what faith in God is. This Special Issue on the normative appraisal of faith in God for *Religious Studies* includes nine articles, from a diverse range of perspectives, which explore issues related to the core questions ‘What is faith in God?’ and ‘What normative questions about faith in God need to be addressed?’ In this Introduction, we briefly introduce each article.

In his contribution, ‘Reasonable Faith and Reasonable Fideism’, John Bishop approaches the question ‘What is faith in God?’ by taking what he calls ‘Christian faith in God’ as a paradigm case of the phenomenon of interest. He aims to specify its ‘nature’, what’s ‘essential’ to it. The official formulation of his theory goes as follows:

[A] person, M, has Christian faith in God if and only if M takes the Christian worldview to be true in practice, where so doing does *in fact* involve acting and living from an overall stance that accepts the truth of that worldview in the absence of independent empirical rational endorsement of its truth.

On Bishop’s understanding, for someone to *take* the Christian worldview to be true in practice is for them to perform the action of committing, by an act of will, to using – and thereafter being disposed to use – the propositions constitutive of the Christian worldview as premises in practical reasoning. Moreover, the ‘overall stance’ from which a person who has Christian faith acts and lives consists in both a ‘positive [cognitive] propositional attitude’, which might be propositional belief instead of the propositional acceptance featured explicitly in his theory, as well as a ‘positive affective and/or evaluating state’. This practical commitment must be made, and the overall stance that undergirds it must be possessed, ‘while lacking adequate evidence-based justification for its truth’ – that is, in the absence of independent, publicly available, evidence that is sufficient for believing or accepting the propositions that constitute the Christian worldview in an ‘epistemically justified’ fashion.

Drawing inspiration from William James, Bishop argues that those who have epistemically reasonable and morally permissible Christian faith in God must normatively evaluate

the Christian worldview, to which they commit themselves to act on and live by, as good (and in conformity with correct morality) and as existentially vital. Moreover, as already indicated, adequate independent publicly available empirical evidence for its truth must be absent; indeed, Bishop insists that, in order for someone to *have* Christian faith in God – let alone morally permissible Christian faith in God – the independent publicly available empirical evidence ‘cannot in principle’ adequately support its truth or its falsity. In going beyond the shared available evidence, those of us who have epistemically reasonable and morally permissible Christian faith in God must not go ‘*against* what we reasonably take ourselves to have confirmed through empirical investigation’, and we must exercise our rational capacities well. We must also be motivated in the right way, that is, by a desire to align our thought and action with the Christian worldview, and we must believe or accept that the Christian worldview is true and that acting on it is worthwhile in pursuit of the goals of gaining truth and avoiding error. Finally, those who have Christian faith must be motivated by non-evidential considerations only insofar as these are morally acceptable and fit with their considered value judgements about what is good and how they ought to live. Along the way, Bishop explains why he thinks that his theory of Christian faith in God is *incompatible* with the epistemology widely called *Evidentialism*.¹

Daniel McKaughan and Daniel Howard-Snyder, in their ‘Theorizing about Christian Faith in God with John Bishop’, take issue with several allegedly ‘essential’ constituents of Christian faith in God posited by Bishop’s theory, some major and some minor. Among other things, they argue that Bishop unnecessarily restricts the cognitive and conative constituents of Christian faith in God, and misidentifies its characteristic act. Further, they argue that the Christian worldview can be ‘in principle’ adjudicated by publicly available evidence, and so, given Bishop’s claim that Christian faith in God is morally permissible only if it cannot be ‘in principle’ adjudicated by publicly available evidence, Christian faith can never be morally permissible. Thus, we must either reject Bishop’s claim or affirm that Christian faith can never be morally permissible. They recommend rejecting Bishop’s claim. However, they conclude by offering a modified version of Bishop’s theory which preserves some of its guiding thoughts while avoiding all of their concerns.

Allan Hazlett, in ‘Propositional Faith and Trustworthiness’, ably defends several claims about faith and its relationship to trust and trustworthiness. Hazlett uses ‘fitting’ in a descriptive (rather than prescriptive or evaluative) sense to specify necessary conditions for vindication of the attitude in question. For example, belief that *p* is fitting only if *p* is true. It is incoherent to believe *p* if you know that it is not the case that *p*. Similarly, Hazlett maintains, faith that *p* is fitting only if *p* is true and it would be good if *p* were true. It is incoherent to have faith that *p* if you know that it is not the case that *p* and it is incoherent to have faith that *p* if you know that it would not be good if it were the case that *p*. Nuances aside, his main argument can be summarized as follows: (1) For you to have faith that *p* is for you to have faith in someone to bring it about that *p*; (2) for you to have faith in someone to bring it about that *p* is fitting only if they are trustworthy to bring it about that *p*; so, (3) your faith that *p* is fitting only if the person in whom you have placed faith to bring it about that *p* is trustworthy to bring it about that *p*. Hazlett motivates the second premise by arguing that interpersonal faith is equivalent to interpersonal trust. If he’s right about that, since it is incoherent to trust someone to bring it about that *p* if you know that they are not trustworthy to bring it about that *p*, premise (2) also readily follows.

If correct, Hazlett’s view has some potentially surprising and substantive upshots for the philosophy of religion. Applied to faith in God, we can expect that knowing that God isn’t trustworthy to bring it about that *p* to extinguish faith in God to do so. If you combine Hazlett’s view with the view that God is not in any way personal, it also

follows that it isn't fitting to have faith in God to bring anything about. Questions about God's trustworthiness, as well as God's existence, also seem pressing for aspiring theists. Combined with certain widely held accounts of what trustworthiness requires, interpersonal faith in God won't be fitting unless God is appropriately motivated to bring it about that *p*. Moreover, it isn't clear that one can have faith that God exists on Hazlett's view, whether God's existence is contingent or necessary, since in either case it doesn't make sense to have faith in God – or in anyone else – to bring it about that God exists. At any rate, if God's existence is necessary, faith that God exists would require an account of propositional faith distinct from the one Hazlett provides.

Hazlett's arguments are set forth with admirable clarity and rigour. We expect that he is not alone in maintaining something like its primary thesis, and its contentious main premise (1), even if others might argue for both differently. However, if he is right that, necessarily, *S* has faith that *p* only if there is someone in whom they have faith to bring it about that *p*, then, in every actual case of *S* having faith that *p*, *S* will have faith in someone to bring it about that *p*. It's worth noting that this claim is more contentious than it might initially seem. Hazlett offers several considerations in favour of premise (1), the claim that for you to have faith that *p* is for you to have faith in someone to bring it about that *p*. Many cases of propositional faith are plausibly interpreted as cases of interpersonal faith in someone and, he argues, the hypothesis that propositional faith just is a species of interpersonal faith would explain both why faith is frequently associated with religion and why it makes sense to ask of someone who has propositional faith whom they have faith in. However, these considerations are not decisive and, as he acknowledges, there are more difficult cases for his view: when someone has faith that democracy will triumph, it is sometimes difficult to discern in whom, if anyone, they put their faith in to bring this about. Moreover, there are accounts of faith on offer in the literature on which the entailment does not hold.² In contrast to Hazlett's view, these accounts can readily explain why it makes sense to take someone to have faith that God exists, even if there isn't anyone in whom they have faith to bring it about that there is a God – not even God. Premise (2), the claim that interpersonal faith entails interpersonal trust, is perhaps less consequential, though here again whether the entailment holds depends on just what faith and trust are.³

It's often assumed that if God does not exist the right attitude is to not have faith and that, if God does exist, full-blown faith is the right attitude to have, and is always preferable to relevant alternatives. Sylwia Wilczewska, writing 'In Defence of Partial Faith', argues that partial faith can sometimes be the best option. According to Wilczewska, theistic faith 'consists of (a) a positive cognitive attitude towards the existence of God – for example, belief that God exists; (b) a positive conative attitude towards the existence of God – for example, desire for God to exist'.⁴ Intuitively, faith becomes partial when both of these aspects are present but one or both only to a low degree. How low or how high? The boundary between full-blown faith and partial faith is hard to specify precisely – as is the boundary between minimal faith and lack of faith. But Wilczewska allows that full-blown faith does not require maximal strength in each of these dimensions. One needn't, for example, be certain that God exists in order to have a full-blown belief that God exists. For the same reason, you could still have full-blown faith even if you desire a relationship with God with less than maximal intensity. With these definitions in hand, she argues that sometimes partial faith in God is the best overall option open to us – even if we assume with classical theism that an omnibenevolent (omnipotent, omniscient, etc.) God exists and that for creatures like us the best possible relationship with God is the greatest possible good. Because the evidence of God's existence is ambiguous and open to a range of legitimate interpretations, some people are simply unable to have full-blown faith. Moreover, the quality of a person's relationship with God is not simply a function of the

degree to which one has faith. In particular, Wilczewska argues that there are cases in which partial faith is best for a person's relationship with God even if full-blown faith in God is also an option for them. Partial faith owing, for example, to doubts about God's existence and goodness can deepen or enhance the integrity of a person's relationship with God. For some people, then, it is all-things-considered better for them to have only partial faith in God, either because full-blown faith is unavailable to them or because in their circumstances partial faith is more consistent with integrity. It's worth noting that readers might well agree with Wilczewska's central conclusion that partial faith is sometimes preferable to full-blown faith, and that the conditions under which this is so depend on context, even if they hold a different theory about the nature of faith and partial faith.

Samuel Lebens, in 'Amen to *daat*: On the Foundations of Jewish Epistemology', argues that the Hebrew Bible emphasizes relational faith rather than propositional faith and that, where faith that *p* is in view, it can be had without believing that *p*. In making his case, Lebens explains the meaning and function of 'amen', which shares its root with the Hebrew noun for faith, *emunah*. To have faith that *p* is to give one's 'amen' to the proposition in question, affirming that what has just been said is reliable, trustworthy, or firm. The act of giving your 'amen' to what has been said can serve (1) to commit yourself to it and to living in light of it, as when you bind yourself to it by taking an oath, (2) to accept its consequences upon yourself and others, even if some of these should involve hardship or risk, and/or (3) to express hope, which includes a heartfelt desire, that it turns out to be true, as in 'may it be so'. In liturgical settings, giving our 'amen' can involve some combination of each of these. As Lebens points out, 'No single element on this list, and no combination of them, approaches what we English speakers tend to mean by *belief*. To have propositional *emunah* that *p* is equivalent to saying, "Amen to *p*!" (4) In his view, 'The Hebrew Bible, it seems, would take the side of those philosophers today who argue that faith *can* be a propositional attitude, and that the attitude in question needn't include belief that the proposition is true'.

Given this understanding of faith, and biblical language expressive of faith, Lebens explores what implications it might have for epistemology and its associated norms from a Jewish perspective. How can we make sense of the lacuna of belief-talk, and of the claim that propositional faith doesn't require belief, when the Hebrew Bible speaks so freely of knowledge (*daat*) of God? In contrast to questions that focus on the relations between belief and knowledge (particularly propositional knowledge) that predominate in Western epistemology, Lebens explores the prospect for a different project, which he calls 'Jewish epistemology', focused on the relations between faith (*emunah*) and knowledge (*daat*) of a sort that allows for non-propositional objects (e.g. knowing another person, direct acquaintance with God). Among other things, such a project might lead epistemologists to attend more carefully to knowledge by acquaintance and other forms of experiential and relational knowing, as well as to the social context in which knowledge claims are embedded and justified. On Lebens's view, individuals and communities of faith (*emunah*) might do well to aspire to knowledge (*daat*) of God, understood as direct acquaintance with God, as an ideal or even as the highest good of epistemology. But the project of seeking ways of 'bridging the gap between faith and knowledge' can be undertaken in full recognition that such knowledge is not a necessary condition for sincere affirmations of faith.

Faith is often contrasted with intellectual doubt in ways that suggest that they are incompatible. For example, Aquinas famously asserted that, like knowledge (*scientia*), faith requires psychological certainty, and so no doubt, a view echoed by, among others, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, according to which 'doubt cannot coexist with faith . . .; faith and doubt are mutually exclusive', and John Calvin, according to whom faith involves 'a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence towards us'.⁵ Yet, it remains underexplored

the extent to which doubt is acknowledged and depicted among Christ's followers in early Christian writings.

Benjamin Schliesser, in 'Shades of Faith: The Phenomenon of Doubt in Early Christianity', explains that the concerns behind the Greek words often translated as 'doubt' in the New Testament and other early Christian writings – *dipsychos* (literally 'of two souls'), *diakrinesthai* (hesitate, waver), *distazein* (hesitate, waver) – centre primarily on religious and social identity. Schliesser distinguishes six basic types of doubt that are in view in various New Testament writings and in other ancient sources. This can, to be sure, involve cognitive wavering, hesitancy, and uncertainty of a sort that arises from perceived lack of evidence and gives rise to vacillation or distrust that stands in tension with faith's resilience. But it can also involve emotional and evaluative dimensions and it may or may not have a proposition as its object. Early Christians and those to whom they evangelized faced questions about the plausibility of claims, such as the proclamation that Jesus rose from the dead, and about how to adjudicate between rival worldviews. But they were also concerned about destabilizing, distanced, or rebellious attitudes that sow division, despair, or otherwise undermine and cause trouble within the community. Often what is in view is double-mindedness of a sort that distances itself from, or sows division within, the community and it is treated as a moral problem. Sometimes the concern has to do with divided loyalties that might undermine or destabilize faith and/or faithfulness. At other times, the concern has to do with rebelliousness that can lead to discord and dissonance in one's own identity as a Christ-follower or in relation to others. While the presence of doubt so understood is consistently seen as an obstacle to be overcome, doubt is also sometimes portrayed as an expected, even typical, accompaniment of faith. Perhaps surprisingly, among those who have not turned their backs on God, it can indicate the presence of faith in God, however weak.

In light of these complex forms of doubt, Schliesser turns to reflect on Christian strategies for coping with it. He identifies and characterizes eighteen (!) different 'coping strategies and patterns of resilience' in early Christian texts. Broadly speaking, we find attempts to extinguish doubt, to exclude doubt, and strategies of pastoral encouragement. Strategies for extinguishing doubt include attempts to convince the doubter (e.g. by offering evidence and arguments, by appeal to personal experiences or authoritative testimony, by rebukes such as chastisement, warnings, and threats or ethical correction, by polemics, or by appeal to divine help). Recognizing that doubt often proves difficult to extinguish, and indeed that it is a normal and expected accompaniment of faith, there are also a range of pastoral strategies that might ease its burden or help doubters to carry on in faith. These include maintaining relationships, expressions of empathy (e.g. assurance that doubt is typical, something experienced even by Jesus, his followers, and other exemplars of faith in God; such that its absence would be an exception), and encouragement to persevere (perhaps with renewed resolve). Of course, sometimes doubt might lead to a parting of ways, to a doubter turning their back on a community or to their being excluded from it. Strategies for excluding doubt, sometimes as a last resort, include attempts to force a choice (e.g. 'Are you for us or against us? In or out?') and the construction of in-group and out-group identities that potentially alienate doubters from the community. For example, confessional practices intended to unify a group around common purposes, claims, values, and practices can themselves occasion doubt, division within, and alienation from communities.

The propositions 'There is no god but God' and 'Muhammad is the messenger of God', set out in the *Shahada*, are fundamental to Islamic teaching and sincere recitation of the *Shahada* often functions as a membership criterion in orthodox Muslim communities. Is it possible, then, for someone who is in doubt about one or both of these propositions (or other propositions taken to be essential to the content of Islam) nevertheless also to be,

and thus to rightly identify as, a Muslim and to sustain sincere commitment to Islam? In 'The Sceptical Muslim', Imran Aijaz argues for an affirmative answer, denying that religious doubts automatically constitute a serious problem, perhaps even tantamount to apostasy, for those who identify as Muslims. His answer might be helpfully understood as a response to the following sort of argumentative challenge.

- (1) Sceptical Muslims are in belief-cancelling doubt about whether at least some of the propositions acknowledged to be essential tenets of Islam are true, neither believing nor disbelieving them.
- (2) Faith that *p* requires belief that *p*.
- (3) So, sceptical Muslims do not have faith that at least some of the propositions acknowledged to be essential tenets of Islam are true. (1, 2 logic)
- (4) Someone properly identifies as a Muslim only if they have faith (*iman*) that the essential tenets of Islam are true.
- (5) So, sceptical Muslims cannot properly identify as a Muslim. (3, 4 logic)

Aijaz rejects premise 2, pointing to the potential viability of acceptance, hope, or the adoption of Muslim teaching as a kind of interpretative framing principle as candidates for the cognitive component of *iman*. Someone who lacks certainty, knowledge, or belief of core tenets such as that *God exists* and that *Muhammad is God's prophet* might nevertheless accept or hope that they are true. Granted that doubt, like belief, can be heedless in a religiously problematic sense arising from indifference, vanity, rebelliousness, and the like, it can also arise from earnest and conscientious pursuit of the truth in religious matters and exercises of reason of a sort that the Qur'an itself enjoins. Conscientious doubt does not by itself entail *kufir* (i.e. antonym of *iman*) nor does it make someone *kafir* (an infidel; someone who disbelieves in or rejects the authority of Allah). Premise 4 is also arguably false, given the distinction – recognized both in the Qur'an and in hadith – between a Muslim (someone who submits to Allah by outwardly conforming to Islamic practice) and a *mu'min* (someone who has *iman* and so is also inwardly a person of Muslim faith). One might be practically committed, say, to the truth of the five pillars of Islam and its accompanying way of life, and hence properly belong to the Muslim community, despite not being *mu'min* and hence not having faith. So 3 and 5 are not supported by the line of reasoning at issue and, indeed, are both arguably false. Despite claims to the contrary, Aijaz argues, not only are there good reasons to think, from an Islamic perspective, that sceptical Muslims can both properly identify as Muslims and even have Islamic faith, there are also good reasons for Muslim communities to welcome such conclusions. Similar positions are arguably also available for other religious traditions.⁶

John Calvin takes faith to be 'a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence towards us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit' – a gift produced in some people by God that is part of the 'fruit of spiritual regeneration'.⁷ Katherine Dormandy, in 'Epistemic Phariseism', is highly critical of 'divine-help epistemology' – a label she applies to all views that say God has given people of faith some sort of epistemic advantage over 'non-believers' thought to be disadvantaged owing to sin. Her chief targets include views defended, more recently, by Plantinga (1993, 2000), Wainwright (1995), Moroney (1999), Moser (2008, 2010), and McAllister and Dougherty (2018).

Suppose a proponent of divine help epistemology – call him 'John' – believes something along the following lines. First, John believes that God designed humans with cognitive faculties that, when properly functioning, reliably produce true beliefs on religious matters. Second, John believes that these faculties have been severely

damaged by sin, one effect of which is to leave many people either lacking belief in God or disbelieving in God. Third, John believes that the Holy Spirit has repaired the cognitive damage due to sin in himself and in those brothers and sisters who make up his own religious tradition, restoring their natural knowledge of God and instigating in them warranted true belief of specific core Christian doctrines. Dormandy argues that, even if these beliefs are true, John – and anyone else who takes themselves to be the recipient of special God-given knowledge and noetic abilities – will be ‘especially prone’ to four vices, each of a specifically epistemic character. These vices are: (1) *self-righteousness* (systematic overestimation of one’s own epistemic abilities), (2) *closed-mindedness* (unreceptiveness, dismissiveness, and disdain for ‘non-believers’), (3) culpable *blindness* to one’s own cognitive failings, and (4) *cold-hearted* lack of concern about the epistemic aims of others. This unflattering collection of traits together constitute a kind of hypocrisy which she terms ‘epistemic phariseism’. The four traits Dormandy describes are indeed intellectual failings – worth reflecting on and which we would all do well to avoid. As W. K. Clifford recognized, exhibiting such epistemic vices also raises moral concerns, since they can be harmful to oneself and to others. To the extent that communities reinforce them, they will be culpable too.

The charge that John, or anyone else who endorses a form of divine help epistemology, is thereby *especially* prone to hypocrisy associated with these vices in virtue of what they believe is serious. How does the argument for it go? We might think of it, nuances aside, as working to establish the conclusion of a hypothetical syllogism. (1) If you endorse divine help epistemology, you are especially prone to exhibit the four epistemic vices that constitute epistemic phariseism. (2) If you are especially prone to exhibit the four epistemic vices that constitute epistemic phariseism, you are especially prone to hypocritical inconsistency. (3) So, if you endorse divine help epistemology, you are especially prone to hypocritical inconsistency.

Dormandy claims that each of the four vices exhibits hypocrisy, which she understands as a type of inconsistency which can take either of two forms. First, there might be a theoretical inconsistency between a proposition that John believes (e.g. that *my own beliefs on religious matters, and those of my community, are not susceptible to noetic fallenness*) and another proposition which is inconsistent with it but which John is in a position to know that he ought to endorse (e.g. that *my own beliefs on religious matters, and those of my community, are susceptible to noetic fallenness*). Second, even if John does not believe the first proposition, he might still be caught in a practical inconsistency between his belief that *my own beliefs on religious matters, and those of my community, are susceptible to noetic fallenness* and his failure to act accordingly. Grant, for the sake of argument, that John’s epistemological beliefs are true. Even so, it would be harmful both to John and to others, for example, if John’s beliefs lead him to give his own seemings *undue* weight in addressing objections, or to invite partiality, dogmatic entrenchment, and other vices, including a tendency to overestimate one’s own intellectual abilities and to systematically underestimate and dismiss those of people who disagree with them on religious matters. Whether or not John is guilty of a practical inconsistency will depend on what exactly he believes and on how he acts. John might defend himself against the charge of practical inconsistency, for example, by arguing that it’s widely accepted in epistemology that intellectual seemings can provide defeasible grounds for belief and suggest that the similar weight he assigns to them in religious matters is not undue. Or he might object that, despite his many failings, for all that’s been said he doesn’t see that he is *more* prone to these vices than the rest of us just in virtue of what he believes.

Dormandy paints for us, in broad strokes, a portrait of ‘how not to conduct one’s cognitive life’ – a picture of an epistemic anti-exemplar. But it’s a rare portrait that represents its target perfectly. In approaching the larger question of whether there is a

distinctive problem for any of the particular versions of divine help epistemology on offer today, we invite readers to reflect on three further questions. First, how well does her characterization fit the particular target in view? Second, is the case convincing for the claim that, just in virtue of holding a divine-help view, its proponents are thereby more prone to these vices than the rest of us? Third, is there good reason to think that if we endorse Dormandy's alternative proposal, which emphasizes 'common grace' and impartialist evidence as a counterbalance to partialist evidence, we will thereby be less prone to such failings?

Answers to the second and third questions are an empirical matter, hardly the sort of claims anyone should affirm without adequate sociological evidence to support them. Dormandy tells us that 'A full defence' of these claims 'would require empirical investigation' but that, nonetheless, they are 'highly plausible, indeed believable, on the basis of the moral-psychological and philosophy-of-religion considerations' she adduces in their favour (3). One has to wonder. After all, in the absence of well-designed, successfully repeated, sociological investigation, should *anyone* on the basis of armchair reflections such as Dormandy's agree that the wholly contingent correlations she asserts to hold *in fact* hold? Indeed, one may well wonder whether there might be a constellation of intellectual and moral vices characteristic of such armchair theorizing, especially when it issues in serious, public moral charges. Or so John and other friends of divine-help epistemology might say.

On the third question, we anticipate that many proponents of the views that she criticizes will agree that they need to give due weight to impartialist evidence, while disagreeing about whether they have failed to do so. Perhaps we can all agree that if, on inspection, we see a resemblance between the portrait and ourselves, we would do well to seek a path toward restoration.

Ryan Preston-Roedder, in 'Divine and Mortal Loves', offers an insightful discussion of how faith in God and faith in others might help people to address several problems associated with social and psychological estrangement. We tend to be affected by how others view us – including aspects of ourselves that may be closely tied to our social identity, such as race, sexual orientation, or physical appearance – in ways that can be difficult to bear. When others despise or condemn us, hold us in contempt, see us as compromised in some way, and the like, we may experience a painful sense of shame and humiliation that harms or diminishes us in ways that undermine our relationships, separate us from others, or affect our sense of self-worth and may even lead us to loathe ourselves. This might prompt us to lash out at or withdraw from the community which judges us, which might prompt them to lash out at us or withdraw from us. Drawing on the work of James Baldwin and Howard Thurman, both of whom speak to the struggle for racial justice in America, and on literary works such as *The Brothers Karamazov*, Preston-Roedder proposes that faith might have a positive role to play in helping people to face, cope with, begin to address, and perhaps even make some progress towards overcoming widely encountered problems of social life that have roots in social estrangement and humiliation of this kind.

How might faith, whether in God or in others, play a role in enabling us to cope with these problems associated with estrangement and do so in ways that might 'make us larger, freer, and more loving'? Preston-Roedder argues that our faith in a God who sees us as we are and yet who, despite our failings, nevertheless values us and loves us without reservation, might help to free us from 'the distorting lens of social prejudice', recognize our own worth, and make it easier to love and accept ourselves. Thurman and Baldwin point to generations of Black Americans who in the face of slavery, lynch mobs, Jim Crow, and many other forms of racial oppression have drawn strength from biblical teachings, spirituals, and church communities which affirm them as children of God in opposition to

forms of racism pervasive in White American society. Similarly, our faith in others who are close to us – perhaps our friends, family, mentors, and other mortals – to love us for who we are and to recognize our worth might better empower us to resist the distorting effects of a wider social gaze that repeatedly tells us otherwise. More challengingly, Baldwin calls on Black Americans and other oppressed groups to exhibit a love for their White compatriots and others who unjustly oppress us, by placing and maintaining faith in them – even ‘in the face of strong and obvious reasons for doubt’ – as fellow human beings who are capable of transformation for the better when confronted with harsh truths about themselves and society at large. Recipients of such love and faith might, in turn, be freed from some of their misperceptions and perhaps even put their faith in us. In these ways, Preston-Roedder challenges us, so to speak, to have faith in the potential of faith to help counteract significant social harms, to restore damaged relationships, and to create relationships in which mutual recognition of worth opens a path to a more just and inclusive community.

Preston-Roedder takes faith in someone to involve cognitive, volitional, and emotional aspects. We may well wonder, however, whether the faith to which he points is accurately described by him. In this connection, consider three points.

First, when we put our faith in someone, *must* its emotional element consist in ‘a form of *courage*’ (our emphasis)? After all, sometimes when we put our faith in others, the challenges to retaining our faith in them don’t involve threats or danger. To cover such cases as well as those that do involve threats and dangers, perhaps a broader characterization of this element would be advisable, one that allows for courage as a response to challenges that call for it, but one that also allows for other ways in which to be resilient in the face of challenges when courage is not called for.

Second, Preston-Roedder says that, ‘someone who has the relevant sort of faith in God is disposed to believe that God exists, and that God has certain favourable characteristics, even in the face of grounds for doubt’. This is an instance of a necessary condition on faith in someone that appears in all of Preston-Roedder’s writings on faith, although sometimes it seems that he thinks of it as a necessary condition on virtuous faith and not on simply having faith. Here it is put as a necessary condition on having faith. Put generally, it is this: you can’t have faith in someone unless you are disposed, *in some circumstances*, to judge or believe certain favourable things about them *even when your evidence does not support those things*. That is, you cannot have faith in someone *unless you are disposed to epistemic irrationality*, at least given an evidentialist epistemology.

Interestingly, in ‘Divine and Mortal Loves’, Preston-Roedder appears more sensitive than he has heretofore been to a variety of ways in which faith’s cognitive component might be realized. He writes:

in faith at its best, the person of faith remains sensitive to new, incoming evidence that bears on her beliefs about God. As grounds for doubt, say, about God’s existence grow quite strong, her degree of confidence that God exists may wane; she may come to believe not that God exists, but rather that God’s existence is, say, more likely than the alternative; or she might cease to believe that God exists and, instead, merely *accept* that God exists, where acceptance – unlike belief – is a voluntary decision to use some claim or set of claims, in certain contexts, as premises in one’s theoretical or practical reasoning. Finally, if the available evidence against God’s existence becomes overwhelming, she may reject altogether the view that God exists. In short, faith is compatible with a high degree of intellectual responsibility.

By our lights, this is a welcome addition to his theory of relational faith. We can’t help but wonder whether it provides the resources to avoid laying it down that you can’t have faith

in someone unless you are disposed, *in some circumstances*, to judge or believe certain favourable things about them *even when your evidence does not support those things*. After all, in the sorts of circumstances he envisions that call for this condition (Preston-Roedder (2013); *Idem* (2018)), the emotional and volitional components, with their behavioural upshots, can remain the same even as you adjust your cognitive stance downward, in an evidentialist-friendly fashion, from your initially favourable belief, given new counterevidence to it.

According to Preston-Roedder, someone who has faith in God, or faith in a community of people, who loves us and who recognizes our worth, is better able to cope with the problems of estrangement to the extent that they are able to recognize this perspective as authoritative and they come to see themselves in that way, in opposition to the perspective of their oppressors. This may well seem to be an important item of data that any theory of relational faith would do well to accommodate and explain. Naturally, Preston-Roedder thinks that his theory does a good job on that score. Other pistologists may well wonder whether their own favoured theory can accommodate and explain this item of faith-data as well as his theory does.

In conclusion, we want to express our gratitude to all those who contributed to this Special Issue of *Religious Studies*. We hope that readers will agree with us that, within these pages, we have publicly available evidence that contemporary pistology is alive and well, and that perhaps they too might contribute to this exciting new interdisciplinary research programme.

Acknowledgements. The opinions expressed in it are those of the author(s) and might not reflect the views of the John Templeton Foundation. We also thank Mark Wynn and Yujin Nagasawa for their support in our guest editing of this Special Issue.

Financial support. A grant from the John Templeton Foundation supported this publication.

Notes

1. For defence of a view of faith that is compatible with evidentialism, see Howard-Snyder and McKaughan ([in press](#)).
2. See, for example, the accounts of propositional faith proposed by Buchak (2012), Howard-Snyder and McKaughan ([in press](#)), and McKaughan and Howard-Snyder ([in press](#)), among others.
3. Cf. McKaughan and Howard-Snyder (2022).
4. Cf. Howard-Snyder (2016) and Howard-Snyder and McKaughan (2022).
5. Sharpe (1909); Calvin (1559/1960), III.ii.7, p. 551.
6. For discussion of a similar argument and its consequences for sceptical Christians, see Howard-Snyder (2017) and Howard-Snyder and McKaughan (2021).
7. Calvin (1559/1960), III.ii.7, p. 551, and Calvin (1553/1961), 19, on John 1:13.

References

- Buchak L (2012) Can it be rational to have faith? In Chandler J and Harrison VS (eds), *Probability in the Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 225–247.
- Calvin J (1553/1961) *The Gospel According to St. John 1–10* (Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, Vol 4). Torrance DW and Torrance TF (eds), and Parker THS (trans.). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Calvin J (1559/1960) *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. McNeill JT (ed.) and Battles FL (trans.). Philadelphia: Westminster.
- Howard-Snyder D (2016) Does faith entail belief? *Faith and Philosophy* 33, 142–162.
- Howard-Snyder D (2017) The sceptical Christian. In Kvanvig JL (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 8. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 142–167.
- Howard-Snyder D and McKaughan DJ (2021) The fellowship of the ninth hour: Christian reflections on the nature and value of faith. In Arcadi JM and Turner JT, Jr. (eds), *The T&T Clark Handbook of Analytic Theology*. London: Bloomsbury, pp. 69–82.

- Howard-Snyder D and McKaughan DJ (2022) Faith and resilience. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 91, 205–241.
- Howard-Snyder D and McKaughan DJ (in press) The problem of faith and reason. In Fuqua J, Greco J and McNabb T (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Epistemology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McAllister B and Dougherty T (2018) Reforming reformed epistemology: a new take on the *sensus divinitatis*. *Religious Studies* 55, 537–557.
- McKaughan DJ and Howard-Snyder D (2022) How does trust relate to faith? *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 52, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1017/can.2022.34>.
- McKaughan DJ and Howard-Snyder D (in press) Faith and faithfulness. *Faith and Philosophy*.
- Moroney SK (1999) *The Noetic Effects of Sin: An Historical and Contemporary Exploration of How Sin Affects Our Thinking*. New York: Lexington.
- Moser PK (2008) *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moser PK (2010) *The Evidence for God: Religious Knowledge Reexamined*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Plantinga A (1983) Reason and belief in god. In Plantinga A and Wolterstorff N (eds), *Faith and Rationality*. South Bend: Notre Dame University Press, pp. 16–93.
- Plantinga A (2000) *Warranted Christian Belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sharpe A (1909) Doubt. In Herbermann CG (ed.), *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 5. New York: Robert Appleton, pp. 141–143. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05141a.htm> (accessed 27 February 2023).
- Wainwright W (1995) *Reason and the Heart: A Prolegomenon to a Critique of Passional Reason*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.