

Know How and Acts of Faith

1. Introduction

My topic in this paper is the nature of faith. Much of the discussion concerning the nature of faith proceeds by focussing on the relationship between faith and belief. In this paper, I explore a different approach. I suggest that we approach the question of what faith involves by focussing on the relationship between faith and action.¹ When we have faith, we generally manifest it in how we act; we perform acts of faith: we share our secrets, rely on other's judgment, refrain from going through our partner's emails, let our children prepare for an important exam without our interference. Religious faith, too is manifested in acts of faith: attending worship, singing the liturgy, fasting, embarking on a pilgrimage.

I argue that approaching faith by way of acts of faith, reveals that faith is a complex mental state whose elements go beyond doxastic states towards particular propositions. It also involves conative states and – perhaps more surprisingly – know how. This has consequences for the epistemology of faith: the role of testimony and experts, the importance of practices, and what we should make of Pascal's advice for how to acquire faith.

Here is how this chapter will proceed. I start with some preliminary clarifications. Next, I motivate my strategy of approaching the nature of faith via acts of faith by drawing a parallel to the connection between virtuous actions and the nature of virtue. I then consider what makes an action an act of faith, arguing that it involves both a conative element as well as practical knowledge. I argue that consequently, we should take these elements to be partly constitutive of faith itself. Finally, I draw out some implications for the epistemology of faith.

2. Some Preliminaries

Let me start by setting out some clarifications. I take faith to be the attitude that we attribute in sentences like the following:

She has faith in her abilities.

He has faith that his partner is not cheating on him.

She has faith in her friend.

He has faith in God.

She has faith that God is benevolent.

He has faith in humanity.

I am interested in the nature of this state. The starting point for my discussion will be our ordinary way of thinking about faith both secular and religious – as expressed in our contemporary, popular usage of the term “faith” in the sentences above. And while I am interested in religious faith, too, I will not approach it from the vantage point of any particular religious tradition. In this respect my approach here differs from that taken by some philosophers both contemporary and historical.

As the sentences above make clear, faith attributions generally come in two kinds: faith *that* and faith *in*. In what follows, I will assume that

¹ A notable exception is Buchak [2012], who also focusses on the connection between faith and acts of faith. I will critically discuss her account below. But it's worth noting that our motivations are different. Buchak is interested in the question whether faith can be rational, while I'm interested in what kind of mental state faith is.

nevertheless faith is a unified mental state. Thus, we are attributing the same kind of mental state when we attribute faith *in* someone as we do when we attribute faith *that* something will happen. In particular, I will assume that both faith in someone and faith that something is the case involve an attitude towards a proposition.² This seems straightforward enough for the case of faith that p but perhaps more controversial for case of faith *in* someone. But it's hard to see how one could have faith *in* someone without having faith *that* they can, or will, or won't do certain things. Thus, when I have faith in your abilities, I may have faith that you can succeed at the task at hand, or that you will rise to the challenge, or that you won't give up. Someone who has faith in God may have faith that God is good, that God will answer her prayers, that God created the universe.

When it comes to the nature of faith, one important question concerns the nature of the propositional attitude involved. The candidate that first comes to mind is belief. But there are good reasons for thinking that it's possible to have faith without belief; in particular, that it's possible to have faith that p without believing that p.³ After all, it seems that I can have faith that my partner is not cheating on me even if I do not full-out believe that he is not having an affair. (I may, for example, merely believe that he is *probably* not having an affair.) Perhaps a more promising alternative is to think of this propositional attitude along the lines of degrees of belief, i.e. credences. Thus, it seems plausible that when I have faith that my partner is not cheating on me, I do generally, have *some* degree of confidence that he is not having an affair. Perhaps I'm not maximally confident – but to have faith that he's not cheating in me, I cannot be maximally confident that he *is* having an affair.

While this is an important issue, we shall set it aside for the remainder of the paper. This is because, while the relevant propositional attitude clearly is an important element of faith, there is more to faith than just the relevant propositional attitude. The focus of this paper is not on what kind of propositional attitude is involved in faith but rather what *more* is involved.

3. Motivating the Strategy: A Parallel in Moral Psychology

With these clarifications on the table, let's turn to the actual task. My strategy will be to look at *acts of faith*. The central idea here is that we can learn about what faith involves by looking at the kinds of actions that a faithful person performs. This strategy needs some explanation: how could looking at an agent's action be helpful? One way to motivate it is by looking at another area of philosophy where it is fruitful.⁴

² This is not to insist that it is reducible to a propositional attitude; as we will see below.

³ Buchak [2012] notes this point. Some maintain that faith that p is incompatible with belief that p; for example, see Schellenberg [2005].

⁴ My strategy here is to develop an analogy between the psychology of virtue and the psychology of faith. In religious contexts it is sometimes suggested that faith is itself a moral virtue. If you agree, the fact that virtue and faith have an analogous structure will not come as a surprise. But it will still be fruitful to draw out what this analogy tells us about the psychology of faith. For the purpose of this paper, I take no stand on whether religious faith is itself a moral virtue. As for non-religious faith, it clearly depends: having faith in humanity is a reasonable candidate. (See Preston-Roedder [2013].) Having faith in a corrupt inhumane immigration policy is not.

Consider moral virtue. Just like having faith, being virtuous seems to be closely connected to acting in characteristic ways. In particular, virtue is closely tied to morally admirable action. For one, morally admirable actions are a central way in which the agent manifests her moral virtue.⁵ Second, agents can be more or less virtuous; virtue is something that comes in degrees. Acts of virtue play a crucial role in spelling out what degrees of virtue consist in. Think about some specific virtue, like kindness. What distinguishes someone who has this virtue to a higher degree is that she has a greater ability to perform acts of kindness. She is in a position to perform acts of kindness even in situations in which others find this very difficult – for example, when she is very busy or under great strain. Similarly, someone who has the virtue of justice to a great degree is capable of performing just acts even in circumstances in which others would not be able to do so: when dealing with very complicated situations, or when being just requires a substantive sacrifice on their part.

What makes some particular action an act of virtue? Generally, in order to be an act of virtue, an action needs to conform with what is in fact the right thing to do. But it also needs to be motivated in the right way. An act of virtue is one that is done for the right reasons. And this, in turn, is partly a matter of being motivated by conative states – desires or intentions – with the right content and of the right kind. With regard to the former, they need to be desires with moral content, such as a desire to do what’s right, or fair, or just.⁶ With regard to the latter, they need to be intrinsic as opposed to instrumental. Thus, consider the Kantian shopkeeper who gives his customers the right change because he thinks that such a policy is the best way to keep his business profitable.⁷ Giving others the right change is the right thing to do. But the shopkeeper’s action is not an act of virtue. The problem is that the shopkeeper is motivated by the wrong kind of desire. His concern is with running a profitable business, as opposed to treating his customers fairly for its own sake. Insofar as he cares about treating his customers fairly, this concern is purely instrumental.

Having the right kind of desires is important for morally admirable actions; but it’s not the only thing that matters. Thus, suppose that the shopkeeper does genuinely desire to do what’s right and for its own sake but that he is extremely unreliable in figuring out what this is; he’s as likely to give money to charity as he is to give to the KKK. There may be various reasons for his unreliability. He may be attracted to strange moral principles. Or, even if there is nothing wrong with the moral principles that he adheres to, he may be using a very unreliable decision-procedure when he’s engaging in moral deliberations (maybe, for example, he completely lacks confidence in his own moral deliberation and so defers to a friend who has terrible moral judgment). However this may be, suppose that, while he is often led astray, on this particular occasion, he gets it right. Is his right action an act of

⁵ I will be using the terms “morally admirable action” and “act of virtue” interchangeably.

⁶ My claim that morally worthy actions need to be motivated by a desire with moral content, such as a desire to do what’s morally right, or fair, or just, is controversial in the literature on moral worth. A number of authors – most notably Arpaly [2003] and Markovits [2010] – have argued that morally worthy actions are motivated by desires for the right-making reasons *de re*, for example, the desire to relieve someone’s pain. I defend the claim assumed here and criticize the alternatives in my [2015].

⁷ For the original case, see Kant [1997] (4:390).

virtue? It seems clear that it is not. The problem is that the shopkeeper's right action was, in an important sense, only a lucky fluke. He did the right thing but he could have easily gotten it wrong. Thus, the right kinds of desires are not enough to make a right action an act of virtue; the agent also needs to be guided by knowledge how to do the right thing. Acts of virtue thus require practical knowledge: knowledge how to do the right, fair, just, or kind thing.⁸

At this point, we can draw some preliminary conclusions about virtue. Acts of virtue are motivated by both the right kind of desire and moral knowledge. And since virtue is partly constituted by the ability to perform acts of virtue, it follows that these desires – the desire to do what's right, fair, just – and practical moral knowledge – knowledge how to do what's right, fair, just – are *partly constitutive* of virtue itself.⁹ This, of course, is not to say that these are the only constituents of virtue. For example, virtue may well involve important emotional dispositions and patterns of attention.¹⁰ Nevertheless the relevant desires and practical knowledge are necessary: they underpin the virtuous agent's ability to do the right thing for the right reasons.

Applying the Strategy: What is an Act of Faith?

We can apply the same strategy to faith: we can get clear on what is involved in faith by looking at what makes an action an act of faith. There are typical ways of acting that express one's faith. If I have faith in my friend's abilities, then I might trust her with a particularly difficult task. If I have faith that my brother will repay me, I may lend him money. But clearly not any instance of such an action is an act of faith. Suppose that John lends his estranged brother some money but does so because it gives him a sense of superiority; he considers his brother to be a waste of space and he does not have the slightest hope that he will ever repay him – nor does he care about being repaid. But giving him money reminds John of the fact how much more successful he's been in life than his brother – a feeling, he relishes immensely. Or suppose that Ahmed goes on a hajj but solely because he knows that it will secure his reputation as a devout Muslim, which will benefit his business. While lending someone money and undertaking a pilgrimage can be and often are acts of faith, they are not acts of faith in the case of John and Ahmed. This is because being an act of faith

⁸ I am sympathetic to the Stanley & Williamson [2001] line on know how, on which know how is a kind of propositional knowledge. But I do not think that my argument depends on accepting intellectualism.

⁹ In her [2001], Julia Driver argues that moral knowledge is not a requirement of virtue. But Driver's arguments target primarily a very intellectualized theoretical knowledge – knowledge that one's action is right or fair – and so we can set her criticism aside for the purposes of this paper. I argue against her view in more detail in my [2015]. See also Brennan [2007].

¹⁰ Bommarito [2013]. And these two elements may also be crucial to the virtuous agent's ability to perform acts of virtue. (The fact that one is upset by injustice may make one more likely to notice it and hence more likely to know what to do and thereby perform the relevant act of virtue.) But they may also be important for virtue for its own sake. Thus, it's plausible to think that the virtuous agent performs acts of virtue joyfully, with a sense of purpose and satisfaction. My point here really is to highlight that once we pay attention to acts of virtue, knowledge – knowledge how to perform the just, honest, kind thing – emerges as one central ingredient in virtue.

is not only about what is being done but about how it's motivated. John and Ahmed's actions are not done for the right reasons.

As with acts of virtue, one central ingredient are the right kinds of conative states or desires. This is one crucial respect in which both John's and Ahmed's actions seem lacking; both agents are ultimately motivated by selfish desires. John's lending his brother money is not motivated by concern for his brother. It is motivated by a desire to feel good about himself. Similarly, Ahmed's decision to undertake a hajj is motivated by a desire to benefit his business; it is not motivated by a desire to fulfill his religious duty as a muslim.

Thus, whether an action is an act of faith is, in part, a matter of the desire that motivates the agent. For an action to express faith in that particular person or cause (or faith that p , where p is a proposition that concerns that person or cause), it needs to be motivated by concern for that person or cause. Moreover, this concern cannot be instrumental.¹¹ Thus, if John lends his brother money because he regards his brother as a means to some further good (because he wants his brother to help him in some substantive way in return), then his action is not an act of faith. Similarly, if Ahmed embarks on the hajj out of a desire to fulfill Allah's command but he cares about Allah's command only because he wants to be seen as a devout muslim, then his action is not an act of faith.

Desires are important for whether an action counts as an act of faith. But just as in the case of morally worthy actions, they are not the only thing that matters. Thus, imagine that Kate and Samira are collaborating on a big and difficult project. They divide the tasks between them and agree who will do what. Samira ends up with a very tricky and challenging task. She works away at it, while Kate stays out of her way. Let's also suppose that Kate genuinely wants Samira to do well and to be successful. Is this enough to make her agreement that Samira should do this part of the work and her subsequent lack of interference acts of faith? Do they express Kate's faith in Samira's abilities? I do not think that this is clear. From the description that I have given, it is very likely that these are acts of faith. But it depends on the details. To know for sure, we need to know more about Kate.

Suppose we fill in the details as follows: Kate generally means well but she is a hopeless micromanager. Whenever she is supposed to collaborate with her colleagues, she constantly monitors their progress, butts in with unsolicited advice, offers "help", and sometimes even does part of the others' work herself. This is not malicious. Kate claims that she trusts her colleagues and when she "helps" or does part of the work herself, contrary to what they had agreed on, she always does it from good intentions – "it will be quicker if I do it myself" or "I'll just get on with it, since I have a spare moment anyway." Now, in this particular case, Kate does not meddle with Samira's work. But it's not because she has seen the error of her ways; she was just dealing with some personal problems that distracted her.

¹¹ Does the concern need to be *intrinsic*? Perhaps not. Consider casting a vote in support of a politician. This may well constitute an act of faith (expressing your faith in that politician's abilities to lead the country). This is so even if you may not care about the politician or her abilities for their own sake. You care about them in virtue of caring about what's good for your country. But even in this case, I do not think that your concern is purely instrumental. Rather it's extrinsic. You care about the politician and her abilities because you care about what's good for your country not as a means to some further end. See Langton [2007] for a discussion of the distinction between intrinsic/extrinsic and instrumental value.

If we fill in the details of the case in this way, it seems clear that while Kate's lack of interference may look like an act of faith, it is not an act of faith. The problem here does is not one of having the wrong kinds of desires motivating Kate. Rather, what seems to be amiss is a particular kind of know how. In fact, it seems tempting to describe Kate's shortcoming as a matter of her *not knowing how to have faith* in others or in their abilities. Let's hone in a bit more on what kind of know how Kate is lacking. The relevant know how has to do with how we relate to other people; it's interpersonal knowledge. This includes knowledge how to trust someone, how to rely on them, how to be helpful, how and when to offer advice, how to treat them respectfully. Thus, the problem seems to be that Kate does not know how to leave others alone, how to be supportive without being intrusive, how to keep an eye out for how they're doing without imposing on them. To be an act of faith, an action must be guided by such knowledge. And since Kate is missing this know how her actions are not acts of faith.

Kate's illustrates one way in which agents can lack the know how that's important for acts of faith. But agents can lack the relevant know how in a different way, too. Imagine Pawel, who is the very opposite of Kate: he is trusting to the extreme and completely indiscriminate in who he relies on. He is readily willing to put his life and wellbeing and those of others in the hands of complete strangers. He always believes what others tell him and never second-guesses anyone's motivations. He seems to be completely oblivious to obvious signs that someone is trying to take advantage of him. And he has such high opinion of others, including of his students, and is so confident that they will succeed in what they set out to do, that it catches him by surprise when they fail. Suppose that Pawel trusts his student with a particularly challenging and important task. Is his action an act of faith? Just as in Kate's case, it seems to me that it is not. Rather than being expressions of faith, they look like expressions of imprudence and naïveté. Again, the culprit here does not seem to be a wrong desire. Rather, what's amiss is a discriminatory ability, it's knowledge how to rely on others, how to keep an eye on what they are doing, how to recognize whether someone is trustworthy.

The same is true for religious cases. Consider the Christian fundamentalist, who believes that a way to glorify God is to harangue women who are entering Planned Parenthood clinics. While we may grant that the Christian fundamentalist herself may describe her action as an act of faith, we would hesitate to call it so ourselves (at least not without putting it in parenthesis). The explanation for this is precisely that to say that something was a religious act of faith is to say that it manifested knowledge how to engage God. But, I take it, we think that the Christian fundamentalist is misguided about how to engage God. One does not glorify God by committing hateful acts.

Perhaps you agree that neither Kate's nor Pawel's actions constitute acts of faith. But you might still be skeptical whether their failing is best thought of as a lack of *knowledge*. Here is a reason for thinking that this is what it is: both are insensitive, albeit in different ways, to a particular class of evidence. This is evidence that concerns others' abilities, their motives, their commitments, whether they need help or advice and what kind of help or advice they would benefit from. As Ryan Preston-Roedders rightly notes in his discussion of faith of humanity, such faith involves a sensitivity to a particular kind of evidence about others:

When someone who has such faith does take on the risks associated, say, with relying on someone or trying to reform him, despite reasonable doubts about his reliability or capacity for reform, she does not take on these risks all at once or irrevocably, at least, not when she can help it. In other words, when she comes to believe that some one is morally decent in some respect, she does not simply charge ahead blindly in her dealings with him. Rather, in her ongoing interaction with him, she remains sensitive to new evidence concerning the quality of his character and the badness of the results that will occur if he turns out to be base. And if it becomes clear to her, say, that these results are too bad or the likelihood of their occurrence too high, she may try to end her reliance on him, or abandon her attempt to reform him.¹²

As it's this sensitivity that is lacking in Kate and Pawel, it seems right to describe their failing as a lack of knowledge. They lack knowledge how to engage with others and relate to them appropriately. This precludes them from performing the relevant act of faith.

To bring out the importance of both the right kinds of desires and knowledge to acts of faith, I want to contrast my proposal with an alternative account suggested by Buchak. As already noted, Buchak also approaches the nature of faith by way of acts of faith. Her idea is that having faith that p involves a disposition to take certain risks. These risks are a matter of acting on the assumption that p , rather than looking for more evidence concerning p 's truth. When you have faith that John can succeed, you act on the assumption that he can succeed, even if your evidence regarding John's abilities is inconclusive. Importantly, what makes your reliance an act of faith is that you forgo searching for further evidence concerning John's abilities. Buchak takes this idea to motivate the following as an analysis of faith:

A person has faith that X , expressed by A , *if and only if* that person performs act A when there is some alternative act B such that he strictly prefers $A \& X$ to $B \& X$ and he strictly prefers $B \& \sim X$ to $A \& \sim X$, and the person prefers {to commit to A before he examines additional evidence} rather than {to postpone his decision about A until he examines additional evidence}.¹³

I do think that Buchak is right that the connection between acts of faith and forgoing the search for further evidence is important. But Buchak offers her account as also giving sufficient conditions for an action to constitute an act of faith and this is less plausible. Thinking of acts of faith merely in terms of preferences has some strange results.

Thus, suppose I have the habit of doodling during boring talks. In particular, I like to write people's names in loopy letters and draw balloons and puppies around them when they are nice and fists and thunders when they are nasty. I never show my doodles to anyone but it does give me a sense of satisfaction to sort people correctly, and my preferences exhibit the

¹² Preston-Roedder [2013], p. 675

¹³ Buchak [2012], p. ?

structure Buchak requires.¹⁴ Beyoncé's name pops into my head. Since I'm stuck in a talk, looking for more evidence is not an option and, as I'm bored, I prefer to get on with my doodling. I go for the balloons and puppies.

This action then meets all of Buchak's conditions for an act of faith. But it seems very strange to call it that. There are two reasons for this. While, my preferences may have the right content and structure, they are not of the right kind. I don't really care about Beyoncé or whether she is nice. My doodling is just a way to make time pass more quickly. While I do prefer to decorate someone's name with balloons and puppies only if they are nice, this is not because I care about this person's character in particular. I just take satisfaction in getting it right. I'm playing a game with myself.

But even if the question whether Beyoncé was nice was genuinely important to me and something I really care about for its own sake, it would still be very odd to call my doodling an act of faith. I think the explanation for this has to do with practical knowledge that's interpersonal. Recall, we said that acts of faith manifest knowledge of how to have faith in others. This knowledge includes knowledge how to rely on others, how to trust them, how to be supportive. My doodling does not manifest any such knowledge because my doodling is an entirely solitary and self-centered activity; it does not engage Beyoncé in any way. Buchak's account thus may well capture a necessary condition for an action to constitute an act of faith. But it does not capture all there is to acts of faith. The full story will have to include the nature of the desires motivating the agent and her practical knowledge.

Acts of faith thus have a structure that's very similar to acts of virtue. Both require the kinds of desires as well as practical knowledge. This is not entirely surprising. Acts of moral virtue follow what Aristotle called the doctrine of the mean: they straddle the mean between two moral vices of excess. Performing an act of virtue requires an agent to competently navigate between those two poles of excess. This requires know how. Thus, when the agent gets it right, when she acts kindly or justly, this is not by accident but because she was sensitive to the relevant evidential considerations. Acts of faith fit a similar pattern: they straddle the mean between gullibility and distrust. In performing an act of faith, an agent generally takes a risk. This could be material risk – if Samira does not pull through on her end of the project, this might jeopardize Kate's promotion. Or it could be emotional risk – perhaps Pawel will be deeply disappointed if his student does not manage to overcome the challenge. And for the action to constitute an act of faith, this risk must be taken clear-sightedly, guided by know how.

4. From Acts of Faith to the Nature of Faith

I have argued that acts of faith require the right kinds of desires as well as practical knowledge. Let us now turn from acts of faith to faith itself: faith in someone's abilities, faith that one's partner is not cheating, faith that God exists. For this, we need a better grip on the relationship between faith and actions: between having faith and performing acts of faith.

Agents who have faith tend to act in characteristic ways. But to say that they tend to act in these ways is not to say that they will do so. I may

¹⁴ I strictly prefer that *X is nice* & *I draw balloons and puppies* to *X is nice* & *I draw fists and thunders*, and I strictly prefer *X is not nice* & *I draw fists and thunders* to *X is not nice* & *I draw balloons and puppies*.

have faith in your abilities but no opportunity to act on it or express it. Or I may have a strong incentive to be discrete about this fact. Nevertheless, plausibly, faith involves the disposition to act in certain ways. Having faith is, in part, a matter of being disposed to perform acts of faith. In fact, we can say something stronger: to the extent that I have faith – for example, faith in your ability – I have the ability to perform acts of faith.

We can move from our discussion of acts of faith to conclusions about faith itself. Faith is, in part, a matter of having the ability to perform acts of faith. Acts of faith require the right kinds of desires along with the relevant know how. And so, this suggests that having faith is, in part, a matter of having the right kinds of desires along with the right kind of know how. It's partly constituted by these desires and the know how in question. If having faith involves particular kinds of desires as well as particular practical knowledge, then it's not surprising that it involves a disposition to act. For one, desires and dispositions are closely connected – depending on allegiances in the philosophy of mind, having a particular desire just is a matter of being disposed to act in certain ways or it's the categorical basis of these dispositions. Second, a person who has faith is disposed to act in characteristic ways because she has the *ability* to perform those acts. And she has that ability in virtue of having the relevant practical knowledge.

What about religious faith? My discussion so far has, for the most part, focussed on examples of secular faith. Secular faith, I have argued, require interpersonal know how. But I think the considerations that support this requirement in the secular case straightforwardly carry over to the religious case, too. Religious faith differs from secular faith not in what of kind mental state it is but rather in its object. Acts of secular faith concern other people. Acts of religious faith (often) concern God. Insofar as it is plausible that acts of secular faith need to be guided by knowledge how to relate to and engage with others, it seems plausible that acts of religious faith require knowledge how to relate and engage with God. Religious faith, too, then involves a particular kind of practical knowledge.

One advantage of the present account is that this gives us an attractive way of spelling out what *degrees of faith* consist in. Faith comes in different strengths. I can have more or less faith in your abilities. I can have more or less faith that my partner is not cheating on me. I can have more or less faith in God. A plausible account of the nature of faith should shed light on this feature.

If we take faith to be primarily a matter of belief, then it's very tempting to spell out degrees of faith directly in terms of the strength of one's convictions. A person's faith is stronger, the stronger she believes in the relevant proposition – the higher her level of certainty. But this simply does not ring true. Two agents may have exactly the same level of confidence in the proposition that John will succeed at a difficult task without thereby having the same degrees of faith that he will succeed or the same degree of faith in his abilities. For suppose that the first, while being fairly confident of John's success, nevertheless constantly watches over his progress and double-checks every step. The second agent, on the other hand, simply lets John get on with his work, making it clear that they are available to help if needed but won't otherwise interfere. It seems clear that the latter has significantly more faith that John will succeed as well having significantly more faith in John's abilities. Their having greater faith is a matter of what they are willing and able to do; it's a matter of which acts of faith they are in a position to

perform. Sharing a trivial bit of office gossip as an act of faith requires little faith in my friend's trustworthiness. Sharing my deepest and darkest secret requires considerably stronger faith. Similarly, it takes only little faith to attend a prayer meeting; it takes a lot more to give away all of one's earthly possessions and join a convent.

This fits naturally with the present account. After all, which acts of faith an agent is in a position to perform is not simply a function of their degree of belief in the relevant proposition. It also depends on their desires as well as on what they know how to do; these elements partly constitute faith. Faith emerges as a rich and complex psychological state, which involves doxastic elements, conative states, as well as practical knowledge. All these elements admit of degrees, and so an agent's degree of faith is partly determined by the strength of her desires and on her degree of know how. And the strength of one's desires and the extend of one's know how bears directly on which actions one is in a position to perform.

The conclusion that faith constitutively involves know how may seem surprising. After all, you might think that we can distinguish between having faith on the one hand and knowing how to express it on the other. But I do not think that such a distinction withstands closer scrutiny. Take the parents who care about their child and profess that they have faith in their child's good judgment. Nevertheless, they constantly hover over their child, offering unsolicited advice, and shielding them from any mildly risky adventure. It doesn't seem right to say that they really do have faith in their child but don't know how to show it. It seems much more plausible to say that they are self-deceived about whether they have faith in their child. Similarly, it seems very odd to say that the suicide bomber has great faith, she was just mistaken about how to express it. Insofar as the suicide bomber is deeply misguided about how to engage God and what her religious commitment requires of her, she just does not have faith – she merely thinks that she does.

If this is right, then there is an important externalist element to faith. Propositional knowledge is factive: knowing that *p* entails that *p*. And plausibly, practical knowledge is in important respects factive, too.¹⁵ No one knows how to catch a unicorn. For good reason: none exist. This seems to carry over to the case of the interpersonal knowledge involved in faith. If there is no Queen of France, you cannot know how to engage her and so you cannot have faith in her. And if there is no God, you cannot know how to engage Him either. If faith is partly constituted by know how, then faith inherits this factivity.¹⁶ Is this strange? Upon reflection it strikes me as right. When it's entirely clear and uncontroversial that a particular entity does not exist (or is merely fictional), we tend to attribute (false) belief rather than faith. Thus, we don't say that the child has faith in the tooth fairy – we say

¹⁵ I seems to me that whether or not we take know how to be factive in this way is plausible no matter whether are intellectualists or not. But if, following Williamson & Stanley [2001], we do accept intellectualism, then it's especially clear that it must be so. You know how to encourage your brother only if you know that *W* is a way to encourage your brother. And this assumes that you do have a brother. I'm grateful to an anonymous referee for prompting me to think through these issues.

¹⁶ Of course, there is an important way in which it is not factive: my having faith that John will win the election is compatible with his ultimately losing it. But it does entail that John exists.

that they believe in her. Similarly, atheists do not describe themselves as lacking faith in God – they describe themselves as lacking belief in God. And they tend to refer to those who do subscribe to a particular religion as believers, not as the faithful.¹⁷

You may worry that faith being factive will have some strange results. Would it not license those of religious faith to infer that God exists? After all, if faith necessarily involves the relevant interpersonal know how and this know how entails that its object exists, then knowing that one has faith would straightforwardly enable one to draw this inference. But herein lies the snag. Having faith is not enough to draw the inference, you need to know you have it. But on the picture presented here, faith will not be transparent because know how is not transparent. We can be mistaken about what we know how to do. (Just think of the overconfident student in your intro class.) And in the case of interpersonal know how, there is another source of uncertainty: you may not be in a position to know whether you have the relevant know how because you may not be in a position to know whether the relevant party exists. Agents thus do not have ultimate authority over whether they have faith, nor – think again of the suicide bomber – whether their action constitutes an act of faith.¹⁸

I have been arguing that since the desires of a particular kind and practical knowledge are required for acts of faith, we should take them to be partly constitutive of faith itself. Thus, for example, to have faith in your abilities is partly constituted by intrinsic desires concerning you – such as a desire that you perform well in the task, that you do it without my interference, that you get credit for it – as well as practical knowledge how to engage with you – how to support you in your endeavor without interfering and being intrusive, how and when to offer advice, etc. As we have seen in the beginning, in addition, faith also involves a doxastic attitude: to have faith in your abilities, I need to have at least some confidence that, for example, you will succeed in the task at hand. At the very least then, faith involves three distinct elements: doxastic states, desires, practical knowledge. Are these enough for a complete analysis of faith?

I suspect not. Unfortunately, a complete analysis of faith is beyond the scope of this paper; but let me point towards two further elements that seem important. The first concerns emotional states and reactive attitudes. When I have faith in your abilities, I am likely to take pleasure in your success. I am likely to feel proud of you when you meet my expectations and disappointed when you fail to live up to them. When we put our faith in someone, we are likely to feel betrayed when they let us down. Religious faith also typically involves emotional and reactive attitudes – just think about the emotional range expressed in the Psalms of the Old Testament.

¹⁷ This is not to say that there cannot be conversational contexts, in which an atheist can describe someone who is religious as having faith. A conversation is a cooperative enterprise and sometimes the proposition that there may be a God can be part of the common ground. But what is common ground need not be believed. See Stalnaker [1978] and Lewis [1979].

¹⁸ See Benton [ms.] for a detailed version of this argument. Benton's focus is on knowing another person rather than on interpersonal know how but the arguments carry over.

They range from disappointment and sadness to gratitude and awe.¹⁹ Second, it seems plausible that faith involves taking an attitude towards our own attitudes. When I have faith in your abilities, I do not merely have a desire and some level of confidence regarding your success; I generally also take a particular stance towards this desire and level of confidence. In particular, I take my confidence and my desire to license my acting and feeling in characteristic ways, to *justify* my act of faith.²⁰

5. The Epistemology of Faith

So far, my focus has been on unpacking the complex attitude of faith. I have argued that attending to what makes an action an act of faith draws our attention to two crucial components: desire and, more surprisingly, know how. Faith may involve going beyond the evidence in ways that are incompatible with theoretical knowledge; but it requires doing so in a skillful way, guided by practical knowledge. My aim in this section is to draw out some epistemic consequences of this. I will start out with general observations about the epistemology of faith; I will then focus on religious faith, in particular.

Testimony, Expertise, and Faith

The first consequence is the social dimension of acquiring faith. We acquire many of our beliefs from other people. We share what we know with others, by giving them testimony. We rely on their knowledge by deferring to experts. Just as much of our knowledge is shared knowledge, so it seems that many kinds of faith are shared. Faith, it seems, can be transmitted from one person to the next.

Of course, insofar as faith involves a doxastic element, there is room for testimony to play an important role in the transmission of faith. My faith in your abilities may be based in part on my friend's testimony about your skillfulness and reliability. Mark's faith in God may be partly based on his reading of the bible. And so it's perhaps not surprising that the contributions of social epistemology to the epistemology of faith in general and religious faith in particular have revolved around testimony (and it's unruly sibling, disagreement).²¹ This topic is undoubtedly important. But if the account of faith that I have defended here is correct, then testimony is not the only epistemic phenomenon that matters in the transmission of faith. I have suggested that faith involves practical knowledge; it is partly constituted by know how. And just like belief, practical knowledge, too, is something we often acquire from others.

¹⁹ See also Platinga [2000], who argues that faith involves the right kinds of "affectations": the person of faith "finds the whole scheme of salvation enormously attractive, delightful, moving, a source of amazed wonderment." (p. 292) For the particular significance of awe in religious faith and experience, see Wettstein [2012], p. 38. Wettstein also stresses the importance of ritual and know how in faith and suggests that one may have religious faith in the absence of religious belief. I do think that faith involves a doxastic element but discussing its precise nature is beyond the scope of this essay.

²⁰ This line of thought is developed in more detail by Martin [2013], chapter 1. While Martin's focus there is an analysis of hope, the considerations seem to carry over the the case of faith. (Indeed, Martin later argues that faith is a particular kind of hope.)

²¹ For example, in Callahan & O'Connor [2014] the focus is very much on the epistemology of testimony and disagreement.

How is know how transmitted? We often acquire beliefs by relying on what others *tell* us. Similarly, we often acquire know how by relying on what others *show* us; by relying on their demonstrations of what to do and how to act. Showing is the practical analogue of assertion. In particular, showing seems to be governed by the same kind of epistemic norms as telling. Just as there are good reasons for thinking that assertion is governed by the knowledge norm, so there are good reasons for thinking that the act of showing is governed by a knowledge norm, too.²²

This means that when it comes to faith there is room for reliance on two kinds of experts: experts who can tell you about the proposition relevant to your faith and experts who can transmit the know how that's relevant to performing acts of faith. In the case of secular faith – such as faith that my friend will complete her assignment on time or faith in my partner – much of this practical knowledge is so mundane that we don't give it much thought. But in other cases acquiring faith does require seeking out mentors and experts that we consciously try to emulate and learn from. Thus, a set of imagine over-anxious and over-protective parents who are both aware of their overprotective tendencies and of the fact that they need to leave their teenage children room to grow and to make mistakes. These parents might resolve to have faith in their children and they might try to acquire the relevant know how – know how to support their children without doing the work for them, how to develop the right kind of relationship with them – by looking at what those whose parenting style they aspire to, do.

In the religious case, it means that religious expertise is not exhausted being able to give authoritative testimony on religious matters. There is room for religious expertise that consists in religious know how.

The Role and Importance of Religious Practices

Religious know how is closely related to religious practices. Being a Catholic involves *doing* things: attending mass, going to confession, taking communion, praying. Being a Muslim involves declaring one's faith, saying prayer, fasting, giving to charity, going to Mecca. (In fact, the five pillars of Islam all concern actions.) And so, a plausible account of religious faith: it should shed light on the connection between religious faith and religious practices and it should explain their significance.

One virtue of the present account of faith is that it gives us a natural way to accommodate and explain the importance of religious practices. On the present picture, having faith is, in part, a matter of having the ability to perform acts of faith. The ability to perform acts of faith requires practical knowledge. We have seen that for acts of faith that concern other people, this practical knowledge crucially involves inter-personal knowledge: knowledge how to engage with the other person, how to rely on them, how to trust someone, etc. Acts of faith in the context of religious faith, generally concern God. To see that this is plausible, note that those who perform characteristic acts of faith generally understand these acts in particular ways. They attend worship because they take this to be a way of giving thanks to God. They pray because they take this to be a way to give thanks and to petition God. Catholics go to confession because they understand this to be a way to ask God's forgiveness. Various denomination follow dietary rules

²² See Moore [1959], Williamson [2000], Benton [2011] for cases in support of the former, and Buckwalter & Turring [2014] for a case in support of the latter.

and rules of personal appearance because they take these to be ways to honor God or show respect. In other words, they perform these characteristic acts because they take them to be ways of engaging God. Consequently, it seems plausible that they require knowledge how to engage God.

This suggests that religious practices are important because engaging in them is a way to acquire the relevant know how. That religious practices can be the source of such knowledge has been recently defended by Terrence Cuneo. He calls this practical knowledge ritual knowledge. His discussion focussed on the significance of the Christian-Orthodox liturgy, arguing that it both provides an opportunity to acquire ritual knowledge as well as to manifest it. Thus, he argues:

the liturgy provides the materials for not only engaging but also knowing how to engage God. Or more precisely: the liturgy provides the materials by which a person can acquire such knowledge and a context in which she can exercise or enact it. For if one grasps these ways of acting in such a way that one understands them to be ways of blessing, petitioning, and thanking God, then one knows how to engage God by performing actions such as blessing, petitioning, and thanking God. Or more precisely yet: to the extent that one grasps and sufficiently understands these ways of acting, one knows how to bless, petition, and thank God in their ritualized forms. One has ritual knowledge."²³

Cuneo's point straightforwardly generalizes to other religious practices and to other religious traditions. Practical knowledge is acquired by doing. Again, here the structure of faith echoes the structure of moral virtue. As Aristotle noted with respect to the latter, we become virtuous by doing virtuous deeds: "we become just by doing just actions, temperate by temperate actions, and courageous by courageous actions." Similarly, since faith is partly a matter of know how, acquiring faith is a matter of performing acts of faith. It also follows that acquiring faith is something that happens over time. A conversion experience may set one on the path to acquire faith. But it is not, itself, sufficient for acquiring faith and it may not be necessary either.

Making sense of Pascal's Advice

Recall Pascal's advice for what to do in order to acquire religious faith:

You would like to attain faith, and do not know the way; you would like to cure yourself of unbelief, and ask the remedy for it. Learn of those who have been bound like you, and who now stake all their possessions. [...] Follow the way by which they began; by acting as if they believed, taking the holy water, having masses said, etc. ...²⁴

Pascal's advice has generally been read as advice on how to acquire particular religious beliefs. As such it has been subject to a sleuth of criticism and rightly so. Read in this way, it is triply suspect. It's psychologically suspect: can you really acquire a belief that p simply by pretending to belief that p? And it's epistemically suspect: even if you can, it seems that doing so would be epistemically irrational since your belief would be based on prudential considerations, rather than on evidence. Finally, even if you manage to

²³ Cuneo [2014], p. 383.

²⁴ Pascal [1670] as cited in Hayek [2012].

induce in yourself the relevant belief, it seems surprising that this should be enough for acquiring religious faith. It seems too easy.

Faith's being partly constituted by know how makes available an alternative take on Pascal's advice – particularly in light of our previous discussion of how know how can be transmitted between agents and the role of religious practices in the know how relevant to religious faith. And read in this way, Pascal's advice seems perfectly sound. We can motivate this alternative reading by considering a parallel with the moral case again. Suppose I want to become virtuous. It does not matter why; perhaps, I really desire to become good for its own sake or perhaps I desire it because it will confer some other benefit on me (I want to impress someone or I have read a psychological study according to which virtuous people tend to be happier.) How should I go about this? Consider the moral analogue of Pascal's advice: follow the ways of those whose virtue you are hoping to emulate, give to charity, volunteer in homeless shelters, tend to the sick and needy. This seems like perfectly sound advice – despite the fact that virtue has a doxastic component. After all, it's plausible to think that being virtuous involves having certain beliefs – such as the belief that suffering is a bad thing, that you should jump into a pond to save a drowning child, that there is no moral difference between different sexes, races, and nationalities, etc. If the aim of the advice was to induce these beliefs, then we should view it with suspicion. Insofar as we don't, this is because we take the advice to target other elements of virtue. In particular, following this advice seems like a good way to acquire the relevant practical knowledge: knowledge how to help, how to respond to suffering, how to do good. Of course, merely imitating others is probably not sufficient to become virtuous.²⁵ Nevertheless, there are good reasons to think that some imitation is necessary. This is why it's good advice in the moral case.

I suggest that we can read Pascal's original advice in the same spirit. On this reading, the advice is not (primarily) concerned with the doxastic element of faith but rather with the relevant know how. Participating in religious practices is a way to acquire what Cuneo calls ritual knowledge; one can come to know “how to bless, petition, and thank God in their ritualized forms” and thereby come to know how to engage God.²⁶ Of course, this practical knowledge alone is not sufficient for having religious faith. Nevertheless, it's a necessary component. And so, following this advice, we can come to acquire a component that's a necessary condition for having religious faith.

6. Conclusion

Faith and action are closely connected. Those who have faith generally perform acts of faith. Consequently, I have argued, we can approach questions about the nature of the former by way of the latter. That is, we can get clear on what faith is by thinking about what it takes for an action to be an act of faith. This approach is fruitful because it widens our perspective on what faith involves.

This doxastic element – question whether it's a belief or some other state, questions about the norms that govern its rationality – has received

²⁵ See Annas [2011].

²⁶ Cuneo [2014], p. 383

plenty of discussion in the literature, these other elements have received a lot less attention. But just as an account of moral virtue which puts too much emphasis on what the virtuous person believes threatens to miss out on some central elements of virtue, so an account of faith that puts too much emphasis on what the person of faith believes (or has confidence in) runs the risk of missing out some central elements of faith.

My aim in this paper has been to take some steps towards remedying this imbalance. I have argued that faith involves certain conative states as well as know how and that these elements are crucial to performing acts of faith. I have then drawn out some consequences of this for the epistemology of faith: the role that testimony and expertise play in acquiring and transmitting faith, the epistemic role of religious practices, as well as Pascal's advice on how to acquire faith.²⁷

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