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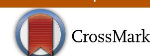
Int J Philos Relig (2017) 81:1–6
DOI 10.1007/s11153-016-9610-1



EDITORIAL

Special (double) issue: approaches to faith

Guest editorial preface

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Published online: 29 December 2016
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We find in contemporary culture starkly contrasting estimates of the value of faith. On the one hand, for many people, faith is a virtue or positive human value, something associated with understanding, hope, and love, something to be inculcated, maintained, and cherished. On the other hand, for many people, faith is a vice, something associated with dogmatism, arrogance, and close-mindedness, something to be avoided at all costs. The papers included in this special (double) issue on approaches to faith explore questions about faith in a variety of settings through a diverse range of examples, both secular and religious. The attempt to deepen our understanding of faith in the context of ordinary human relationships (e.g., between parents and children, friends, generals and their armies, business partners, citizens and the state), a commitment to ideals, or the pursuit of significant goals is clearly of general philosophical interest, as is the examination of potential connections between faith and topics such as trust or reliance. Discussion of the specific role that faith plays in religious contexts is also a matter of general social concern. Interest in religious faith, at least in the English-speaking world, has been amplified in recent years, not least in response to ongoing acts of religiously motivated violence such as the terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001. The question “Would the world be better off without

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religious faith?" is looming larger in public consciousness than ever before. One line of thought now prevalent in the New Atheist literature maintains that religious faith provides a social backdrop for extremism. Christopher Hitchens (2007) argues that it "poisons everything" while Richard Dawkins suggests that it is the "root of all evil" (2006) and implicates it in "most, if not all, of the violent enmities in the world today" (Dawkins 2003, 161).

Of course, whether or not faith is of value depends on what it is. According to Dawkins and other self-identifying "brights," faith is *believing* fantastic, but allegedly divinely revealed, propositions on insufficient evidence. But can it really be that *this* is what early religious communities took God or other deities to desire of humans? Might there be a more satisfying understanding of why Jews, Christians, and others in the ancient world thought that God would care about faith? What roles did faith play in their lives and discourse? Are at least some of these roles worth hanging on to, both in religious and secular life? Perhaps the stark cultural disagreement over the value of faith and its place in human life is due to faith's champions and critics focusing on different phenomena. What if both parties tend to mischaracterize the nature of faith and, as a result, mischaracterize its value? Might the clamor around faith in religious contexts lead us to overlook its role in ordinary secular human relationships? Might attention to faith's role in ordinary secular human relationships shed light on how faith should be understood in religious contexts?

These questions—and many, many others—are at the heart of pistology, the interdisciplinary study of the nature, value, and rationality of faith, where faith is thought of as a psychological attitude, state, or trait. Pistology is of considerable social importance today, not least because how issues about faith get framed and resolved today will likely affect how generations to come think about those issues. In response to this perceived social need, the present special volume—*Approaches to Faith*—aims to facilitate discussion about what faith is and when it is of recognizable value and rationality. Whether or not the arguments of contributors to this volume are successful, together they advance this larger overall aim by better positioning pistologists to contribute to the conversation from a more philosophically, historically, and culturally informed perspective.

In what follows, we briefly highlight each contribution. It's tempting to group them, although any grouping will be somewhat arbitrary. Even so, perhaps we can think of the first four contributions as focusing on faith as it is thought of in certain historical traditions (Greco-Roman culture, the early churches, Rabbinic Judaism, and Eastern Orthodoxy), the second four contributions as addressing faith as it appears in secular personal human relationships, and the third four contributions as addressing specific concerns related to faith in philosophical theology.

Daniel McKaughan kicks things off with a reminder that Greco-Roman culture in the early Roman principate thought of faith as a good without which no society could flourish (See Morgan 2015). So understood, faith was the glue that cemented a wide variety of personal human relationships, as well as relationships between humans and the gods. So understood, faith was a combination of trust and commitment, and its value consisted in the stability, security, and resilience that it provided such relationships. And the same goes for contemporaneous Jewish and

early Christian understandings of faith, with this difference: the trust and commitment that bound humans binds humans to God. McKaughan observes that faith, so understood, was designed, so to speak, to keep people together in marriage, friendship, business, and so on even when crises of various sorts arose to threaten the relationship, including fear and doubt. He contends that faith could not play that role in a relationship, while retaining its value, if belief of the relevant propositions is required; he uses Saint Teresa of Calcutta as a model to underscore the point.

The view that faith is a kind of belief or that faith requires belief has been and remains widely held. One motivation for this view is the claim that certain religious texts demand such an understanding of faith. Daniel Howard-Snyder considers whether *The Gospel of Mark* demands such an understanding. Based on a close reading informed by current scholarship on the Greek notion of *pistis* (faith) among both Greco-Roman classicists and among biblical scholars, Howard-Snyder rejects the claim that Mark's understanding of faith has it that faith is a kind of belief or requires belief of the relevant propositions. Instead, he offers an account of Markan faith according to which what is most central to faith is resilience in the face of challenges to living in light of the positive overall stance one takes to the object of faith, and belief of the relevant propositions is optional.

We often hear that humans are to have faith in God. But what about God? Is God to have faith in humans? That's a question you don't hear too often! Rabbi Samuel Lebens argues that the Hebrew Bible allows for it and that Rabbinic reflection endorses it. However, some prickly philosophical thorns surround the idea. Rabbi Lebens attempts to prune them, but what he is chiefly concerned to cultivate is the idea that just as humans can be people of faith, thereby unifying all manner of things they regard as important under a grand narrative, a worldview, an ideal, and the like, so God can be a person of faith unifying all manner of things God regards as important under the ideal of creation. As such, God is like an artist who expresses what he values—God puts the brush to the canvas, God breaks through various internal and external barriers, and God commits to stick with the result. *That*, suggests Rabbi Lebens in "The Life of Faith as a Work of Art," is putting—and expressing—great faith in creation.

While the Abrahamic faiths underscore the importance of personal faith in God, there are other ways, argues Terence Cuneo, in which someone might be related to faith in God without having personal faith in God. In "Aligning with Lives of Faith," Cuneo takes his cue from reflection on the role that Eastern Orthodox liturgies give to the saints, e.g. St. Jacob of Alaska, the patron saint of Cuneo's own parish. The liturgical activities that constitute honoring St. Jacob are intended for parishioners to engage St. Jacob's life, but such engagement need not be emulating or identifying with him, or even admiring or appreciating him and his work. Rather, the engagement that the liturgy calls for is aligning oneself with—or, being aligned with—the life of St. Jacob. To be so aligned consists in investing oneself in the history of St. Jacob's life of faith and allowing his life to shape one's sensibilities, thinking and loyalties, through liturgical acts, and allowing or authorizing St. Jacob to fully represent one. Interestingly, one can align oneself with a saint's faith in God even if one does not have personal faith in God. The upshot is that it matters who or what one aligns oneself with, and not just having personal faith in God.

It is a deaf ear that cannot hear the role of faith in personal human relationships. One of the things that we care about in our most cherished relationships is the support we receive—and give—to our friends, spouses, lovers, etc. In "Supporting Intimates on Faith," George Tsai identifies a demanding virtue of being supportive of one's intimates, explains what it is, and argues that one cannot have it unless one has faith in the self-expressive pursuits of one's intimates. Among other things, Tsai describes how such intimate-supportive faith enables one's intimates to more meaningfully explore and express themselves, and how it also deepens the emotional bonds of the relationship.

Lara Buchak, in "Faith and Steadfastness in the Face of Counterevidence," extends her prior work in pistology to demonstrate how faith provides for a certain sort of personal integrity over time that would otherwise be elusive. On Buchak's view, faith requires that one commits to risky acts before examining further evidence. But faith also requires recalcitrance in the face of new evidence that goes against what one has put one's faith in. As such, faith seems neither rational nor admirable. By distinguishing synchronic and diachronic aspects of faith, and by appealing to a variety of theses in formal epistemology—having to do with credences, utilities, and risk-attitudes—Buchak explains how it is that, although at a particular time, one's total evidence might make it seem irrational for one to have faith that something is the case and to act on it, one's total evidence might yet make it rational for one to retain faith and continue to act over the long term. Faith thus makes it possible for us to keep our commitments, especially to enduring projects, despite counterevidence, and provides integrity in our lives.

One can have a lot of faith or trust in a person or just a little. Faith in a person is the sort of thing that can grow, deepen, and develop over time or waver, diminish, regress, fail, or be broken or abandoned. But how should we characterize the idea that faith admits of degree, given that some minimal conditions are satisfied in order to qualify as having faith at all? In "The Strength of Faith and Trust," Michael Pace argues that faith can be psychologically strong or weak in two distinct senses. Other things being equal, if my degree of confidence as measured by my willingness to take risks on a person's doing such and such increases, my faith in that person to do such and such increases. Similarly, other things being equal, the more resistant I am to revising my confidence in the face of counterevidence, the stronger my faith.

It is becoming increasingly common for philosophers to use fiction as a medium for exploring philosophical questions. In her contribution to the volume, Frances Howard-Snyder uses fiction to explore the nature and value of faith. "The Pearl of Great Price" problematizes the idea that faith is unqualifiedly good or valuable. The main character, Janet, is a well-intentioned single mom and breakfast diner waitress whose noble desire to provide a better life for her daughter leads her to get caught up in a pyramid sales scheme. Discerning readers will discover layers of insight and complexity in this short and carefully crafted piece. But one point not to be lost is that Janet displays many of the features of faith under discussion in the current literature—including belief of or trust in salient propositions, committing to live in light of something one sees as valuable, and tenaciously sticking with that commitment through difficulties—and yet vividly illustrates, in a variety of ways, how it is bad to have such faith.

While some Christians think Jesus lacked any sort of faith at all, others, like Beth Rath, think that Jesus had faith that, among other things, God loved him. Now, on the cross, Jesus reportedly cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?,” thereby making manifest the fact that Jesus no longer enjoyed closeness with God, so much so that Jesus was in doubt about whether God loved him. Thus, Jesus lost his faith that God loved him. But Jesus’ behavior and attitudes immediately prior to and after the cry indicate that he retained faith that God loved him; moreover, it’s difficult to see how Jesus could model faith in the darkest times if he lost his faith that God loved him while he was on the cross. Thus, Jesus did not lose his faith that God loved him. We have a contradiction. In “Christ’s Faith, Doubt, and the Cry of Dereliction,” Rath draws on Facundo Alonso’s work on propositional reliance to interrogate the hidden premise in the puzzle of the cry of dereliction: that Jesus’ faith that God loved him was incompatible with his being in doubt about the matter.

In “Jesus as an Exemplar of Faith in the New Testament,” Dale Tuggy carefully presents five independent lines of evidence for thinking that, in the New Testament, Jesus was not only a man of faith in God, but a paragon of faith in God, someone worthy of our imitation. But here a surprising result arguably emerges. After all, as Aquinas argued, no fully divine being could have faith in God. For a fully divine being would be omniscient, and omniscience is incompatible with faith. It follows that Jesus was not fully divine, which hardly sits well with the dominant Chalcedonian Christian tradition. Tuggy considers several responses to this argument and finds each of them wanting, recommending in the end that a return to the NT text might well be a long overdue corrective to the excesses of Chalcedon, not to mention Nicea, Constantinople, and beyond.

Anne Jeffery observes that the question of the epistemic rationality of theistic faith has swamped the literature in the last fifty years. However, as Jeffery points out in “Does hope morally vindicate faith?” even if such faith is epistemically rational, it might nevertheless be morally and pragmatically irrational, and so fully deserving of our rejection. Jeffery finds four arguments for the moral and pragmatic *ir*rationality of faith and argues that *unless faith is coupled with hope* these four arguments constitute powerful reason to reject faith. The upshot is that faith doesn’t have a prayer without hope.

It is customary to distinguish epistemic and pragmatic rationality, and the considerations that are relevant to each. Evidence is relevant to the former; existential fulfillment is relevant to the latter. Thus, in comparing two worldviews, or two religions, the evidence is relevant to the epistemic rationality of putting your faith in one over the other, and existential fulfillment is relevant to the pragmatic rationality of putting your faith in one over the other. Or so we might have thought. Brian Ballard, in “The Rationality of Faith and the Benefits of Religion,” argues that the existential resources of a worldview or religion—its resources for dealing with basic human problems, such as the need for meaning, love, identity, and personal growth—is not only relevant to the pragmatic rationality of faith in it, but also the epistemic rationality of one’s faith in it. If this is right, then philosophers have much too easily dismissed the existential resources of a worldview or religion in their assessment of the epistemic rationality of faith in it. New territory of assessment is ripe for the exploring.

While no collection of fresh essays in pistology can do justice to this exciting, new field of inquiry, we hope that the essays contained in this volume will at least contribute to a deeper understanding of the nature, value, and rationality of faith, and pistology's relevance to traditional areas such as philosophy of religion and philosophical theology.

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