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# FAITH WITHOUT BELIEF?

Louis Pojman

For many religious people there is a problem of doubting various credal statements contained in their religions. Often propositional beliefs are looked upon as necessary conditions for salvation. This causes great anxiety in doubters and raises the question of the importance of belief in religion and in life in general. It is a question that has been neglected in philosophy of religion and theology. In this paper I shall explore the question of the importance of belief as a religious attitude and suggest that there is at least one other attitude which may be adequate for religious faith even in the absence of belief.

It is worth noting, by way of conclusion, that the mature believer, the mature theist, does not typically accept belief in God tentatively, or hypothetically, or until something better comes along. Nor, I think, does he accept it as a conclusion from other things he believes; he accepts it as basic, as a part of the foundations of his noetic structure. The mature theist *commits* himself to belief in God; this means that he accepts belief in God as basic (Alvin Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Rational?").<sup>1</sup>

Entombed in a secure prison, thinking our situation quite hopeless, we may find unutterable joy in the information that there is, after all, the slimmest possibility of escape. Hope provides comfort, and hope does not always require probability. But we must believe that what we hope for is at least possible (Gretchen Weirob in John Perry's *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*).<sup>2</sup>

For many religious people there is a problem of doubting various credal statements contained in their religions. Often propositional beliefs are looked upon as a necessary, though not sufficient condition, for salvation. This causes great anxiety in doubters and raises the question of the importance of belief in religion and in life in general. It is a question that has been neglected in philosophy of religion and Christian theology. In this paper I shall explore the question of the importance of belief as a religious attitude and suggest that there is at least one other attitude which may be adequate for religious faith even in the absence of belief, that attitude being hope. I shall develop a concept of faith as hope as



an alternative to the usual notion that makes propositional belief that God exists a necessary condition for faith, as Plantinga implies in the quotation above. Finally, I shall deal with objections to this position as set forth by Gary Gutting in his recent book, *Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism*. For simplicity's sake I shall concentrate on the most important proposition in Western religious creeds, that which states that God exists (defined broadly as a benevolent, supreme Being, who is responsible for the creation of the universe), but the analysis could be applied *mutatis mutandis* to many other important propositions in religion (e.g., the Incarnation and the doctrine of the Trinity).

Many reflective religious people find themselves at one time or another doubting God's existence. If they have studied the alleged proofs for God's existence, they may become convinced that these "proofs" do not work as probative but, at best, simply point to the possibility of an intelligent force that influences the universe. For many of these people God's existence is not self-evident, nor is it properly basic for them. They are troubled by the lack of evidence for God's existence and believe that the move made by some philosophers to set it into the foundations of one's noetic structure is not acceptable for them. Their prayer is, "God, if you exist, show me better evidence." Although they would like to believe with confidence that God exists and are tempted to take the Pascalian-Jamesian line of acquiring this belief by getting themselves into a context where viewing selective evidence will cause belief, they resist this temptation as unethical. They adhere to an ethics of belief that prevents them from manipulating their noetic structure in such ways as to cause a belief that the evidence alone does not warrant. Such a maneuver would constitute a breach in their concern for having the best justified beliefs, a concern that puts a high premium on impartial regard for evidence. They also have the prudential concern of worrying about the possible bad effect such belief manipulations might have on their belief-forming mechanisms. It may even be that some of these doubters have tried but failed to get themselves to believe by using auto-suggestion or getting themselves into a favorable context as Pascal suggests.

### I. *The Importance of Belief*

Being unable to believe either because of the lack of evidence or because of moral compunctions against acquiring beliefs through volitional means, these people have the unwelcome prospect of being denied the benefits of religious faith altogether or, at least, of being designated "immature theists," since faith with belief is generally regarded by orthodoxy as the sole manner of being a genuine believer with the benefits of salvation. The question immediately arises, What is so important about believing anyway? May there not be other propositional attitudes that are equally as effective as believing or, at least, adequate

for the essential benefits of religion?

The traditional virtues of the attitude of belief have been (1) its ability to give intellectual and emotional surcease to the pain and insecurity of doubt and (2) its action-guiding function. Both of these virtues are ably discussed in C. S. Peirce's essay "The Fixation of Belief." According to Peirce, doubt is a type of pain, which, as such, is necessary as a warning mechanism to make us aware of the need for evidence. It is, like all pain, undesirable in itself, and a state from which we seek release. "Doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief; while the latter is a calm and satisfying state which we do not wish to avoid, or to change to a belief in anything else. On the contrary, we cling tenaciously, not merely to believing, but to believing just what we [already] believe."<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, argues Peirce, beliefs are action guides, directing our desires and shaping our actions. It is important to arrive at beliefs, because unless we do so, we cannot act. Beliefs are necessary conditions for actions. Let us look a little closer at these two theses.

Turning to the first thesis, why is belief restful or relief-ful, whereas doubt is anxiety ridden and stressful? Perhaps it is because in many cases, unless we have a conviction, we cannot act with abandon and singlemindedness. If we doubt our course, the doubt may deflect us from our goal. The runner who believes the prize to be uncertain may flag in his zeal. Furthermore, there may seem to be something unstable and unreliable about a doubter. The doubter, who wavers in his beliefs, "is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed...A double minded man is unstable in all his ways" (Epistle of James 1:6, 8). One cannot imagine, the objection continues, a lover who doubts the beloved, a guerrilla fighter who doubts his cause, a successful businessman who doubts the free enterprise system, a skillful gambler who doubts his luck or a successful musician who wonders about her talent while performing. Doubt is the hobgoblin against every successful venture.

Contrast the doubter with the "mature believer," who confidently asserts, "I know whom I have believeth," or "The testimony of the Spirit is superior to all reason.... [It] is an undeniable truth, that they who have been inwardly taught by the Spirit feel an entire acquiescence in the Scripture, and that it is self-authenticating, carrying with it its own evidence, and ought not to be made the subject of demonstration and argument from reason...We feel the firmest conviction that we hold an invincible truth."<sup>4</sup> Such absolute confidence certainly does offer a pleasant feeling of security, as well as a sense of rest from the further search for truth on this issue.

But, while doubt may be painful, it may be a wholesome suffering that causes us to recheck our propositional states, which may lead to greater accuracy and approximation of the truth. It is true that the runner who doubts may flag in

zeal, but it is equally true that doubt may deflect him from the wrong course. In any case, we can learn to live gracefully with necessary pain, and it may be necessary for many religious people to learn to live gracefully with doubt, using it to probe deeper into ultimate questions. The suffering of doubt may be a cross that a disciple must learn to bear.

Turning to Peirce's second reason for having beliefs, i.e., that they are action-guiding, we can agree that this is an important aspect of fixing a belief. However, we need not agree with him that a belief is a necessary condition for action; at least it is not necessary to believe that a proposition is true in order to act on it. For many actions belief that the state of affairs in question will occur is not a necessary condition. I may act on the mere possibility of something being the case without actually believing that it will be the case. I can believe that a hypothesis is the best among a series of weak hypotheses and worth following through without believing that it is true. I can believe that it is worthwhile to bet on a horse that is underrated at 10 to 1 odds, when I have only \$10 and need \$100 soon and have no other way of getting it. I can bet on the horse, risk everything on it and still not believe that it will win. I only need to believe that it is a worthwhile action to bet in this way, given my overall set of goals and beliefs about reaching these goals. Likewise, I can attempt to swim five miles to shore after my ship has sunk, in hope of reaching the shore, without believing that I can or will reach the shore safely. Finally, Columbus' sailors need not have believed that the earth was round in order to have embarked from Spain to sail to the New World. They simply had to believe that the risk was worth taking.

When the evidence is perceived as weak, too weak to produce belief in the veracious person, and where the ethics of belief forbids mind manipulations or acquiring beliefs volitionally, but where the consequences are great, the best a person can do is live belief-lessly according to the hypothesis in question. That is, we may be justified in doing a cost-benefit analysis in order to determine whether the proposition is worth following for the possible consequences. For example, I may have two incompatible goals at some moment and need to decide which one to aim at. Suppose that I determine that goal A has a probability index of 0.4, whereas goal B has one of 0.6, making it positively probable. Although B has a better chance of being reached than A, I might still be justified in aiming at goal A rather than B. I would be justified in doing so just in case I desired A sufficiently more than B—if, for example, I give A a preference value of 0.7 and B only a value of 0.4. Of course, we usually do not give exact quantified indices and preference values to possible courses of action, but we do make rough approximations of this type very often. When a graduate student accepts a challenging job with a questionable future over a more secure job with less challenge, a decision process has often gone on which has weighed subjective

probabilities and strengths of desires. If I believe that there is only slight chance that there is a bomb in the briefcase on the other side of the room, I do not need to make a formal cost-benefit assessment of the matter in order to act swiftly. I leave the room because the stakes are very high, even though I may not be convinced that there really is a bomb in the briefcase. It seems that our sub-conscious is constantly making rough cost-benefit assessments in the various situations in which we find ourselves, maximizing expected utility.<sup>5</sup>

If my analysis is correct, positively believing in the existence of objects in question may not be as important as we have sometimes been led to suppose. We may be guided by weak probabilities, and the distressing doubt that we feel may often be redemptive, causing us to check our evidence, justify our beliefs, and obtain more accurate beliefs.

## II. *Faith as Hope*

We have argued that it is not necessary to believe that a proposition is positively probable in order to act on it. The perception of its possibility is often sufficient to incite activity. One such alternative propositional attitude to belief is hope (or, negatively, fear). In the next section (A) I shall examine the concept of hope. In Section B I shall compare it with its close relatives: 'belief-in,' 'trust,' 'living-as-if' and 'optimism.' Then, in Part III of this paper I shall apply the analysis of hope to religious faith, showing that faith need not be belief-ful, but may be an expression of hope.<sup>6</sup>

### A. *An Analysis of Hope*

Let us begin with some examples of expressions of hope.

1. Mary hopes to get an A in her History course.
2. John hopes that Mary will marry him.
3. Mary hopes that Happy Dancer will win the Kentucky Derby next week.
4. John hopes that the Yankees won their game yesterday.
5. Mary hopes that the sun is shining in Dallas today for her sister's wedding.
6. Although John desires a cigarette, he hopes that he will not give in to his desire.

If we look closely at these examples of hoping, we can pick out certain necessary features of the concept of hope. First of all, hope involves belief in the possibility of a state of affairs obtaining. We cannot hope for what we believe to be impossible. If Mary hopes to get an A in History, she must believe that it is possible that she get one in that course, and if she hopes that Happy Dancer will win the Kentucky Derby, we must believe that it is possible that he will win. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'hope' as an 'expectation of something

desired,' but this seems too strong. Expectation implies belief that something will occur, but we may hope even when we do not expect the object of desire to obtain, as when John hopes that Mary will marry him but realizes that the odds are greatly against it or when Mary hopes that Happy Dancer will win the Kentucky Derby although she accepts the official odds against it. I may likewise hope to win a lottery but not expect to do so. Belief that the object of desire will obtain is not necessary for hope. It is enough that the hoper believe that the proposition in question is not impossible. What separates hope from belief is that in believing one necessarily believes that the proposition is true (has a subjective probability index of greater than .5), whereas in hoping this is not necessary.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, hope precludes certainty. John will not be certain that Mary will marry him or that the Yankees won the game yesterday. There must be an apparent possibility of the states of affairs not obtaining. We would think it odd to say, "John knows that the Yankees won the game yesterday, for he was at the game, but he still hopes that the Yankees won the game yesterday. "For hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for" (Epistle to the Romans 8:24). Hope entails uncertainty, a subjective probability index greater than 0 but less than 1.

Thirdly, hope entails desire for the state of affairs in question to obtain or the proposition to be true. In all of the above cases a propositional content can be seen as the object of desire. The state of affairs envisaged evokes a pro-attitude. The subject wants some proposition  $p$  to be true. It matters not whether the state of affairs is past (case 4), present (cases 5 and 6) or future (cases 1-3), though it generally turns out—because of the role hope plays in goal orientation—that the state of affairs will be a future situation.

Hope is to be distinguished from its near relatives, other pro-attitudes, especially from wishing. In wishing for something one need not even believe that it is possible. Mary can wish that she had never been born but she cannot hope this. I may wish I were smarter than I am, but I cannot now hope that. After John discovers that the Yankees lost the game yesterday, he may wish that his favorite team had won, but he can no longer hope for it. Furthermore, we can wish for possible things which we are not ready to do anything about because the cost benefit analysis shows that the possible benefit is not worth the risk involved. I might wish to make an extra \$100 this week, but I may conclude that the loss of my free time in working overtime is not worth the extra money. Here I cannot be said to hope to make the extra \$100, though I might wish that it were somehow possible to have the requisite extra time to do so.

This brings us to our fourth characteristic of hope. If one hopes for  $p$ , one will be disposed to do what one can to bring  $p$  about, if there is anything that one can do to bring it about. In hoping, unlike wishing, there will be a tendency

to try to bring about the state of affairs if there is anything that can be done to bring it about. In the examples above cases 1, 2 and 6 are situations where the hoper can make a difference, whereas there is nothing he or she can do to bring about the desired result in cases 3 through 5. In this, hoping seems more reflective than wishing or merely having a desire. It is closer to having a want-on-balance, having considered the alternatives, as in case 6, where John has three desires but only one hope. (1) He wants to smoke. (2) He wants to stop smoking, and (3) he has a second order desire, in that he wants his second desire to win out over his first. He will try to bring it about that he will be successful in this. In this case it would be odd for John to speak of two hopes, that of having a cigarette and that of not smoking. John's full-blooded hope is to lick the habit, beginning by refraining from taking the cigarette.

In this sense hoping (where something can be done to bring about the state of affairs) is similar to intending where the agent desires that some state of affairs obtain and will try to bring it about. The difference between this dimension of hope and intending is that in intending to do action *A* one must believe that one will succeed, whereas no such requirement is necessary in hoping. If I intend to get an *A* in History, I must believe that I will, but I may hope to get an *A* without believing that I will be successful.<sup>8</sup> hope stands mid way between wishing and intending. In the former category, I may not believe that *p* is possible and in the latter, I must believe that I will probably bring it about. In hope I must believe that it is possible, but I need not believe that I will be able to bring it about.

A more difficult question is whether one can have incompatible hopes. Muyskens, in his important study *The Sufficiency of Hope*, follows Aquinas in denying that we can have conflicting preferences on balance. We may have conflicting wishes but not hopes.

If *S* hopes for *p*, either *S* prefers *p* on balance or *S* believes that he does not prefer anything that opposes his desire for *p*. The following formulation of this necessary condition is most perspicuous: It is not the case that *p* is not preferred by *S* on balance, or that *S* believes that *q*, which he prefers on balance, is incompatible with *p* (p. 18).

But why can't we have incompatible hopes, even as we have incompatible desires? It may not be rational to have them, but we are not talking about justified hopes, simply about having hopes. Can I not hope to travel to Greece this summer and also hope to finish my manuscript, which I can only do if I stay home from Greece? Perhaps the full analysis of this state is something like the following. I desire both to go to Greece and to finish my manuscript, but since there are many other contingencies that may prevent either of these from happening (e.g., I may have to teach summer school in order to earn some money or go in for an operation, either of which will prevent me from realizing either of my desires



about going to Greece or finishing my manuscript) or prevent one of these from happening (e.g., I may not have enough money to go to Greece, or I may have my contract cancelled and so lose my motivation for writing my manuscript), I may be said to have a disjunctive hope: I hope either to go to Greece this summer or write my manuscript. It would be odd to say, under these circumstances, "I hope both to write the manuscript and go to Greece this summer, but I know that I cannot do both."

There may be a tendency to emphasize the desiderative aspect of hope and maintain that incompatible hopes are possible, as incompatible desires are. Hoping does not entail belief, but a mere pro-attitude. I cannot believe that  $p$  and  $q$  where they are incompatible (and I realize it), but I can desire both. Because hope does not necessitate belief, it may seem that we cannot rule out the possibility of incompatible hopes. However, the key phrase here is 'desiring on balance,' which connotes a more reflective or intentional stance. If hope is closely allied to intention, as I have argued, it would seem to rule out incompatible hopes in the sense that if someone realizes that he hopes for two separate states of affairs, he must give up one in order to try to bring about the other. It seems to me that this attitude carries over to situations where one is powerless to affect the outcome. Mary may unreflectively hope that Happy Dancer wins the race and that Slippery Heels wins the same race, but when she realizes that these horses are running in the same race, she must give up one of her hopes or at least hope something like the following: that either Happy Dancer or Slippery Heels will win, or, if Happy Dancer does not win, that Slippery Heels will.

It may be objected that we can have incompatible hopes but that they are vain, ill-advised, foolish or whatever. This seems to call for a normative notion of hoping, separating rational hopes from irrational ones; where hopes are incompatible at least one hope is irrational. Mary may believe that she hopes to get an A in History but also hope to go to a party on the two nights preceding the exam. We want to say that such hope is irrational or imprudent. Mary should realize that it is virtually impossible for her to get an A in history without studying the two nights before the exam. If Mary were more rational, she would reflect on her incompatible hopes and decide on one of these hopes to the exclusion of the other. If hope is made up of a desiderative and an estimative factor, we may call hope unjustified or irrational just in case we can call either of its components unjustified or irrational. If John hopes to square the circle, we want to say that since the belief in question is irrational, the hope is also. If Mary hopes to party instead of studying, but has long term goals which entail good grades, which in turn entail studying instead of partying, then we can speak of Mary having irrational hopes.

It may be countered that what is irrational about Mary is not her hoping but her believing that there is a chance of getting an A without studying. Or we may

say that Mary really doesn't hope to get an A. She is self-deceived about her attitude and really only wishes to get the A. If hope has the intentional dimension that I have argued for, either of these redescriptions of Mary's state seem preferable to saying that Mary has consciously incompatible, though irrational, hopes. The issue is difficult, but I am inclined to hold to the irrational/rational distinction regarding hoping. Since hoping has an estimative (doxastic) and desiderative component, if one of these is irrational, the whole (i.e., the hope itself) may be irrational. At the very least we can say that a hope is irrational if the agent should know that the object in question is either certain or impossible. If John hopes he is God or Mary hopes to be forgiven by John after John has made it clear that he has freely forgiven her, their hopes are irrational. There is also the phenomenon of something being so close to impossible or certain that hoping may be irrational, as when an average person hopes to live to 200 or an average high school football player with no great promise hopes to make the pros and gives up all else in order to do this.<sup>9</sup>

If we can apply the rational-irrational distinction to hopes, can we also speak of morally unjustified and justified hopes? Are there moral constraints to hoping? Day denies, but Muyskens affirms, that there are such.<sup>10</sup> We may have morally unacceptable hopes in a way that we cannot have immoral beliefs. This is because hope statements involve desire in a way that beliefs do not. Consider the difference between:

1. I believe that the US and the USSR will annihilate the world in a nuclear war.

and

2. I hope that the US and the USSR will annihilate the world in a nuclear war.

Beliefs may be formed through a culpable lack of attention and thus have a moral dimension, but the belief itself cannot be judged moral or immoral. Hopes can. Having certain hopes, like having certain desires, shows bad character in a more fundamental way than belief acquisition does. But the most important difference is that the belief may be evidential and justified while the affective state of hoping is still inappropriate. We ought not allow ourselves to give in to such malicious desires.

### B. *Hope and Other Propositional Attitudes*

We have argued that hoping need not involve a subject's actually believing a proposition, but only that the proposition could be or could become true. In believing a proposition, the doxastic state has a subjective probability index of greater than 0.5, but in hoping that *p* is true, one need not believe that the proposition has that high an index.<sup>11</sup> John need not believe that Mary will marry

him in order to hope that she will, nor need he believe that the Yankees have won the baseball game in order to hope that they have.

But if hoping does not entail belief-that so-and-so is the case, does it, at least, entail belief-in, a relationship of trust? Believing-in or trusting is a relational attitude. 'S trusts X' or 'S trusts in X' or 'S believes in X' indicates a sense of dependency and willingness to run a risk (however small) because of the positive valuation on the object in question. Some instances of hope do entail believing-in the object of hope. Consider case 3 (Mary hopes that Happy Dancer will win the Kentucky Derby next week). What would it mean to say that Mary believed-in Happy Dancer in this context? She must act or be disposed to act in some way as to manifest trust in Happy Dancer. She may bet on Happy Dancer without believing that he will win the race, but she cannot hope that Happy Dancer will win the race without being inclined to take some action in appropriate circumstances. The most likely action would be to bet on Happy Dancer, if she is able to do so, and the degree to which she hopes in Happy Dancer may be to some degree measured by how much she would bet on Happy Dancer. Of course, she may not bet on Happy Dancer, just in case her desire is sufficiently weak, or she has compunctions against gambling, or her estimation of Happy Dancer's chances are too low to warrant a risk. We can weakly hope (all things considered) without acting when there are countervailing desires (e.g., the desire not to risk one's hard earned money on a long shot). There is a fine line where our desire for something ceases to be a weak hope (with some inclination to act) and becomes a mere wish.

Although because of the desiderative nature of hope, there will be some inclination or tendency for the subject to believe-in or trust the object of hope, but there are cases where there is nothing one can do (e.g., when I hope that the Yankees won their game yesterday or that the sun will shine in Dallas today for my sister's wedding) or where the hope is so weak that it is easily overridden by other considerations (e.g., when I hedge my bet, when I hope the sun will shine but take an umbrella or hope to live a long life but take out an expensive life insurance policy or hope that the enemy will not attack but keep my powder dry).

Here we need to make a distinction between ordinary hope or weak hope and a deep hope. Consider Mary's situation as she hopes in Happy Dancer. She may only believe that Happy Dancer has a 1 in 10 chance of winning the Kentucky Derby, but she may judge this to be significantly better than the official odds of 100 to 1 against him. Suppose that she has only \$10 but wants desperately to enter a special professional training program next week which will cost \$1000. She has no hope of getting the money elsewhere but sees that if she wins on Happy Dancer, she will get the required amount. Since she believes that the real odds are better than the official odds and that winning will enable her to get into

the training program, she bets her \$10 on the horse. She both hopes and trusts in Happy Dancer, though she never really believes that he will win. We might call these cases where one is disposed to risk something significant on the possibility of the proposition's being or becoming true 'deep' or 'profound hope' and cases where the person hopes against belief, against the available evidence and is even ready to risk something significant 'desperate hope.' Desperate hope is a species of deep or profound hope. In all cases of profound hope hoping entails trusting in the object of hope. There are rational and irrational, moral and immoral profound hopes. A morally acceptable, rational, profound, desperate hope is exemplified by a version of William James's classical mountain climber, who cannot believe but only hopes that he will be successful in jumping across the gorge.<sup>12</sup>

Sometimes it is thought that belief-in statements entail existential belief-that statements. That is, belief-in some object *x* presupposes that one believe-that *x* exists or will exist.<sup>13</sup> But this seems to be incorrect. The object need not be realizable, nor need the subject believe that he will realize it. All that is necessary is that the individual believe that there is some possibility of realizing it. A scientist may risk his reputation and spend enormous time and energy on a hypothesis that involves the possible existence of an entity which may not exist or which is far different from his tentative description of it.

If belief-in, or trusting, can be analyzed in terms of commitment to a course of action or a disposition to act, then it seems that we do not need to believe-that *x* exists in order to believe-in or deeply hope in the existence of *x*. We can live in profound hope, trusting in the object of hope. In ordinary hope we may not act according to the proposition in question, but may hedge our bet, as I have indicated above. But in profound hope (and especially in desperate hope) the desire for the object is so great that the subject is ready to act even in the light of very little evidence or subjective probability that the object in question will be realized. In such hope enormous risk is warranted by the strength of the desire and the felt need. The person lives *as if* the proposition were true or would become so. Columbus' sailors live on the hypothesis that the world is round, even though they doubt it. The explorer hopes to find the Fountain of Youth, even though he has doubts that such a fountain exists. A seriously sick woman can act in desperation, writing to an unknown person (who may not exist) for a wonder drug which in fact does not exist, but which she has heard about from misinformed friends.

We can imagine a situation where Mary has merely heard a rumor about some horse running in the Kentucky Derby at ridiculously low odds. She isn't sure that she has the name right, but in despair she goes to the local bookmaker in order to place her bet on Happy Dancer. She may doubt whether Happy Dancer exists and doubts the ill-reputed bookmaker who assures her that there is such

a horse (suppose that she has good grounds for her suspicions). We may, nevertheless, say that she trusts that there is, that she lives *as if* there is such a horse. She lives in profound, desperate hope.

Genuinely living *as if* must be distinguished from pretending. You can pretend and act as though you love your neighbors, for you may believe that it is good policy to give this impression; but in genuinely profound hope the intentional state is different from that of pretending.

Finally, we should examine the relationship between hoping and optimism. If John hopes to marry Mary, must he be optimistic about this possibility? Can we imagine John hopeful with regard to marrying her and still pessimistic about its occurrence? We can imagine him hoping desperately, against hope, as it were, and we can imagine an alternative between hope and despair (distinguishing desperation from despair by the fact that despair tends to paralyze or cause inaction, whereas desperation tends to cause action). If we mean by pessimistic 'a low estimation of the chances of realizing the state of affairs,' then we certainly can be hopeful and pessimistic, but if we mean 'a psychological state of resigning or despairing of realizing the state of affairs,' then we cannot be hopeful and pessimistic. Resignation, despairing and fearing, as Day has shown, are all contraries to hope. I think, in fact, the terms 'optimistic' and 'pessimistic' are ambiguous in this way, so that we may be able to conjoin pessimistic with hopeful if we are emphasizing the estimative aspect of pessimism or optimism. It is possible, then, to be a hopeful pessimist, while living *as if* a proposition were true. Indeed, one can live *as if* a proposition were true without hope, in a desperate way, trusting, but not deeming the outcome significantly possible. Profound hope, then, is a species of faith, but it is not identical with it. Normally, however, the profound hoper will tend to envision the best outcome, even while realizing the objective factors that count against it. He won't be dominated by the objectively low probabilities of success.

We conclude, then, that hoping is distinguished from believing in that it involves a strong volitional or affective aspect in a way believing does not and that, as such, it is subject to moral assessment in a way that believing is not. Hoping is desiderative, but is more inclined to action than mere wishing. Profound hope is distinguished from ordinary hope by the intensity of the desire and willingness to take great risk towards obtaining one's goal, and desperate hope is a type of profound hope where the estimative aspect is low. Hope is not identical with optimism, if optimism is defined as estimative. A hoper may see that the odds are objectively against him and yet profoundly try to realize a state of affairs. Nevertheless, in spite of the intensity of desire, the moral hoper will continue to keep his mind open to fresh argument and evidence which could either incline him towards beliefful hope or abandoning one hope for another.

III. *Profound Hope and Religious Faith*

Can we apply this analysis of profound hope to religious faith without loss? Can we have religious faith in a religion like Christianity without believing that the object of faith exists? Let me tell a story in order to have some data for our analysis. Suppose Aaron and Moses both have an obligation to defend Israel from the Canaanites, who are seen as a present danger. The question is whether or not Israel should launch a preemptive strike against the neighboring tribe or whether there is still room for negotiations. One morning Moses sincerely reports that he has been appeared to by God, who has commanded him to annihilate the Canaanites because of their wickedness and idolatry. He has no doubts about the reality of the revelation, claims that it was self-authenticating, and tries to convince Aaron to help him prepare for war. Aaron must make a decision whether or not to support Moses, for he doubts whether God exists, let alone whether he has revealed himself to his brother. However, he doubts these things only weakly, deeming it possible that Yahweh exists and has so revealed himself to Moses. He wonders at the clouds by day and the fire in the distance by night which Moses claims are God's means of leading his people to their destination. Aaron is agnostic about both the existence of Yahweh and the revelation to Moses. Since he would like it to be the case that a benevolent guide for Israel exists, he might be tempted to take William James's advice and get himself to believe the requisite propositions by willing to believe them; but we may suppose that he does not believe that volitional believing is possible for him or morally acceptable. His only option is to live *as if* the proposition in question were true. He assists Moses in every way in carrying out the campaign against the Canaanites. He proclaims the need for his people to fight against the enemy, and if he sounds more convinced than he really is, he judges this deception to be justified. True, he may not act out of spontaneous abandon as Moses does. On the other hand, his scrupulous doubt may help him to notice problems and evidence which might otherwise be neglected, to which the true believer is impervious. This awareness may signal danger which may be avoided, thus saving the tribe from disaster. Doubt may have as many virtues as belief, though they may be different ones.

Moses and Aaron do not act out of entirely different noetic structures.

Moses entirely believes what Aaron only hopes for. Moses acts because he believes that  $p$  and that it is a good thing that  $p$ . Aaron acts because he believes that it would be a good thing if  $p$ , that  $p$  is possible and that it is rational and morally permissible to hope that  $p$ . He exemplifies what we have called living *as if* God exists and has revealed himself to Israel. He lives in profound hope (and if he estimates the chances of God's existing to be very low, he also lives in desperate hope). He identifies an ideal state of affairs, believes it to be possible,

though not probable, and being a hopeful person, plumps for the better scenario, rather than the worse. He lives experimentally with theism, in an experimental faith in which he continues to keep his mind open to, and to search for, new evidence which would either confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis on which his hopeful faith is based. While the hoper may live in a deep or even desperate hope, his eye, if he holds to an ethics of hope, is always on the evidence, so that there may come a time when the available evidence (or his subjective probability estimate) becomes too low to sustain faith.

My analysis suggests that the difference between faith and belief is more radical than has usually been supposed. Usually, it is assumed that faith is a special type of belief, one in which, in addition to belief in the existence of the religious object, one trusts in it and allows its influence to dominate one's life. To have faith in God is to believe that he exists and to commit one's life to him. This seems to have New Testament backing, especially in the Epistle to the Hebrews (chapter 11), where we read that unless we believe that God exists, we can neither come to God nor please him. However, as prominent as this view has been in Western thought (note its presence in the quotation by Plantinga at the beginning of this paper), I suggest that it is an illicit entailment and that the writer of the letter to the Hebrews either had an overly behavioral interpretation of belief or was engaging in religious rhetoric, for I see no good reason to exclude the possibility of coming to God in hope rather than belief. On my analysis one may alter the passage "Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief" to read: "Lord, I hope in you; if you exist, please give me better evidence." To believe that God exists is to believe that there is a being with certain necessary properties such as omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence and being the maker of heaven and earth. But to believe-in God implies only that one regards such a being as possibly existing and that one is committed to live *as if* such a being does exist. Whether it is rational to commit oneself in this way depends on the outcome of an analysis of comparative values in relationship to probable outcomes. It is the sort of assessment that goes on in any cost-benefit analysis.

It may usually be the case that those who believe *in* God also believe *that* God exists, but there is no entailment between the two states. One might believe that God exists without believing in God, and one might believe in God without believing that God exists, either as an atheist (who finds the proposition 'God exists' as genuinely possible and decides to live by it) or as an agnostic (who finds the God-hypothesis worth living in accordance with). Often, it has been supposed that there can be no hypothetical element in religious commitment and that to treat God's existence as such is to violate the very essence of religious faith.<sup>14</sup> Supposedly, the hypothetical stance is inadequate to produce the requisite commitment and unreserved worship which religion demands. But if this is true of traditional religious beliefs, I see no need to accept it as the only valid type

of faith. An *experimental faith* that is open to new evidence is also an option. In this regard, my analysis has in common with William James the notion of theism being a live option (an hypothesis that is momentous and which the subject sees as calling for a decision). It agrees with James that it would be a good thing if theism and Christianity were true and can accept James's own rejection of the necessity of sufficient evidence for the proposition that Christianity is true before we can have faith. "If religion be true and the evidence for it be still insufficient, I do not wish, by putting [the rationalist's] extinguisher upon my nature...to forfeit my sole chance in life of getting upon the winning side."<sup>15</sup> I would also agree with James against Pascal that there is a psychological aspect to the decision of choosing religion which must supplement the merely calculative. While an atheist (who does not rule out the possibility of God's existence) may be persuaded of the logic of Pascal's Wager, he might not be moved by it. James is right when he says that the hypothesis in question must be a psychologically "live hypothesis." My analysis differs from James's in that I don't think it is necessary to get oneself to believe that the hypothesis is true in order to choose it in a profound way. One can have faith in God and Christianity without belief. Aaron is just as much in faith as Moses. There are different types of faith.

Belief-that may be overrated in regard to explanatory hypotheses that involve world views such as religions, political theories, and metaphysical systems. It is important to come as close as possible to a fit between the best objective evidence and the degree with which one believes propositions, but, admittedly, this is a person-relative experience. My analysis presupposes that it makes sense to speak of proportioning the strength of one's belief (which I separate from the value of one's belief to the individual, the depth of ingress of the belief) to the evidence, but it accepts intuitive beliefs as themselves *prima facie* evidence for themselves and their entailments. Ultimately, if someone counts her intuitions as evidence more than we do, all we can do is try to get her to see that she really has counter-evidence or intuitions which should lessen the strength of her apparent intuitive beliefs. There may be a more objective notion of proportioning one's beliefs to the evidence, but my analysis is content with this weaker thesis. It is possible that the belief that God exists is properly basic for some people, but, by the same standard, it may be that the belief that the Devil is really God is properly basic for others, given their noetic structure. For many of us neither are properly basic.

If my analysis is correct, agnosticism and even an interested type of atheism are possible religious positions. Doubt about God's existence, immortality, the Incarnation, or the Trinity, though agonizing in the extreme at times, may be necessary for some intellectually honest people. If there is an obligation to seek to have true or justified beliefs, then what God desires is not sycophantic struggling to get oneself to manipulate one's mind to believe what seems implaus-



ible on a clear look at the evidence, but a doxastic morality that allows the mind to be impartially shaped by the evidence.

If this is the case, then an interesting implication follows. Sometimes, as in the Athanasian Creed or Evangelical theologies and sermons, religious people have asserted that a belief that certain propositions are true is a necessary condition for eternal salvation. We will be judged by whether or not we have believed these propositions (e.g., those contained in the doctrine of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and so forth). Pascal and others believed this so strongly that they advocated that you should “pretend you believe” in order to get yourself to believe what you don’t believe by an impartial look at the evidence. But if we have ethical duties to have the best justified beliefs possible in important matters, and if those duties include a duty to acquire beliefs through impartial investigation of the evidence, then it would seem that we cannot be judged unrighteous for not believing in these propositions, if we justifiably find the evidence inadequate. It would follow that there is a moral basis even to religious believing, so that a moral God could not judge us merely on the basis of the beliefs we have. What we can be judged for is how well we have responded to criticism of our beliefs, including our religious beliefs, how faithful we have been to the truth as we have seen it. On this basis it might well be the case that in heaven (or purgatory) Calvin, Barth, Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell may have to be rehabilitated by taking catechism lessons in the ethics of belief from such archangels as David Hume and Bertrand Russell.

#### *IV. Is Experimental Faith Adequate for Religious Belief?*

In philosophical literature I know of only one serious set of objections to the position that I have set forth. It has to do with the alleged inadequacy of any sort of tentativeness or non-tenacity in religious believing. Experimental faith lacks the ultimate commitment that is necessary for an adequate religious faith. This objection is given its best expression by Gary Gutting in his incisive work *Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism*, in which he distinguishes between “interim assent” and “decisive assent.” Decisive assent terminates the process of inquiry into the truth of the core propositions, whereas interim assent keeps the inquiry going.<sup>16</sup> In decisive assent one ends the search for justifying reasons and becomes wholly concerned with understanding the implications of what one believes. In interim assent one accepts the propositions in question without terminating the search for their truth. While there may be a difference between Gutting’s notion of interim assent and what I have been calling experimental faith or hopeful commitment,—the former but not the latter presupposing, at least, weak belief—much of his attack on interim assent is applicable to my account. On Gutting’s account such faith is inadequate for religious life.

Essentially, interim assent is inadequate for genuine religious belief because of the way religious belief functions in the life of the believer. Gutting gives three reasons for thinking that religious faith demands decisive assent and prohibits interim assent. (1) Religious belief is a (relative) end of a quest for “emotional and intellectual satisfaction.” “Any religious belief worthy of the name must surely call for and legitimate a longing for God as the all-dominative longing of the believer’s life, the believer’s ‘master passion.’ By contrast, the life of a believer who gave only interim assent to God’s reality...could be rightly dominated not by the longing for God but, at best, only by the longing to know whether or not God exists.”<sup>17</sup> (2) Religious belief requires total commitment to the implications of what is believed and this is incompatible with continuing reflection on its truth. Believers must often make fundamental sacrifices, which only decisive assent would allow. (3) Merely interim assent is inconsistent with the typically religious attitude toward nonbelief, which sees nonbelief as intrinsically bad. Interim assent has not the singlemindedness of decisive assent and cannot “proclaim the ideal of its belief as ‘the one thing needful.’”<sup>18</sup>

My first reaction to Gutting’s insistence that decisive faith is a necessary condition for adequate religious belief is to say that perhaps there is something morally repugnant about “adequate” religious belief, since it seems to demand a premature closure of inquiry. If there were good objective grounds for theism, the mandate might be understandable. Since there doesn’t seem to be that kind of requisite evidence, the closure seems unwarranted. Even if experimental faith failed to give what Gutting deems the necessary conditions for adequate religious belief, this doesn’t mean that experimental faith is a less valid position. It might mean that traditional religious belief is not the only meaningful possibility for intelligent persons. Perhaps traditionally necessary conditions are not the necessary conditions that we would want to use to define an adequate faith for today. It might be the case, for example, that traditional religions have under-emphasized the role of an ethics of belief and assumed that a rigid set of beliefs was necessary for genuine faith. If my analysis is correct, too much emphasis may have been placed on credal affirmation in the past.

Gutting’s analysis of the inferiority of interim assent has other problems. Regarding his first point that “any religious belief worthy of the name must surely call for and legitimate a longing for God as the all dominating longing of the believer’s life” and that interim assent fails here, we may demur at two points. (a) Not every religion makes this longing the dominant passion. Buddhism doesn’t. Neither does Sikhism or Quakerism. On what independent grounds does Gutting exclude these religions as “worthy religious beliefs,” except by begging the question? (b) Even if Gutting is right, however, I see no reason for concluding that the person who hopes in God cannot be dominated by this passion, even while questing for truth. To have faith in God, in the sense I have described, is

to long for God passionately, to live *as if* God exists. But why is this incompatible with seeking the best evidence on the matter, of admitting that one only weakly believes this (or is agnostic on the matter)? Doesn't the believing Biblical scholar have to inquire impartially into the evidence for important events upon which faith is based? I think that it is a rather narrow notion of "passionate longing" which rules out impartial inquiry. The hoper in God worships with passion and commitment; only he or she acknowledges and is committed to doxastic integrity, to continuing the dialogue with those who differ, and regards engaging in the dialogue as one aspect of worship. Otherwise, how is it possible for the person of faith to find honest "intellectual satisfaction," which Gutting acknowledges as a necessary condition for adequate religion?

Gutting's second criticism of interim assent is that it precludes the sort of unconditional commitment necessary for decisive action and fundamental sacrifices. It is true, as our discussion of Peirce and our parable of Aaron and Moses show, that the doubter's steps are tripped by obstacles over which the true believer hurdles with the greatest of ease. The question is whether this sort of commitment is of the essence of genuine religion. The same imperviousness to difficulty has led to some of the greatest intolerance and fanaticism the world has known. We can rightly spot it as evil in fanatical Nazis or Shiite Moslems following the Ayatolah Khoumeni, but we sometimes miss it in ourselves. Gutting may have in mind the martyrs who are willing to die for belief in the Incarnation or the existence of God, and perhaps the hoper in God will not be as willing to die as the believer. But the hoper in God may, nevertheless, be willing to live and die for the moral principles with he sees tied up with the essence of the religious faith and which express much of the importance of believing in God in the first place. The hoper in God may question whether we have any reason to believe that a morally adequate religion or God's will demands that people give their lives for the proposition that God exists. If God is all-powerful and benevolent, surely, he could insure that the witness to his existence is not lost.

The third criticism that Gutting makes of interim assent is that it does not allow for the deep conviction that belief in God is the "one thing needful," that it is an unspeakably sad thing not to believe that God exists. Gutting is saying that it is the relationship with God, trust in Him, that is needful, but he implies that this entails believing that God exists. "For the believer, the world would be a better place if everyone could see his way to accepting the believer's faith," but interim assent must allow "equal value" to opposing beliefs, an essential element in continuing discussion. But this objection misses the point that the *manner* of holding a belief may be as important as the belief itself. If everyone in the world came to believe that God existed by manipulating their minds, it might well turn out that these belief states were disconnected from the rest of their noetic structure and represented a deep character flaw. It is not clear that

honest doubt is less a state of reverence for God than fearful prohibition of doubt.

Gutting and I agree that belief in God can make a profound difference in the way we live and that theism, which is at the basis of Judaism and Christianity, is greatly inspiring and can motivate to high moral action. My point is that one need not be a full-fledged believer *that* God exists in order to draw inspiration from this insight. One can live imaginatively in hope, letting the thought of the possibility of a benevolent Being motivate one to a more dedicated and worshipful moral life.<sup>19</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Alvin Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Rational?" in *Rationality and Religious Belief*, ed. C. F. Delaney, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979, p. 27.
2. John Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1978, p. 2.
3. C. S. Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief" in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, volume V, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, Cambridge: Belnap Press of Harvard University, 1962.
4. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960, Book I, ch. 7, pp. 79, 80.
5. Jon Elster, *Ulysses and the Sirens*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, chapters 1 and 2 contain a vigorous defense of this point.
6. Much of the analysis of hope in this and the following part of my paper has been influenced by James Muyskens' excellent study, *The Sufficiency of Hope*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979.
7. Cf. J. P. Day, "The Anatomy of Hope and Fear," in *Mind*, vol. LXXIX (July 1970).
8. Cf. Robert Audi, "Intending" in the *Journal of Philosophy* (LXX, 13, 1973) for a good discussion of this point.
9. The comments by William Alston and an anonymous reader of an earlier version of this paper caused me to rethink and alter my position on this point.
10. J. P. Day, *op. cit.* and James Muyskens, *op. cit.*, p. 44f.
11. While it is controversial whether 'belief that' statements involve probability estimates, I think a plausible case for this can be made based on the fact that we believe propositions to various degrees. If we can set numbers from 0 to 1, indicating absolute disbelief and absolute conviction, with 0.5 as withholding belief or suspending judgment, we can roughly fix the degree of other belief-states on a continuum between these points. All that is needed is an arbitrary measure and the notion of 'believing that *p* to a greater degree than that *q*.' Muyskens' counter-example that a gambler can believe that the odds are 100:1 against his winning and yet believe that he will win can be accommodated by making a distinction between objective inductive evidence and subjective probability, which is simply a function of a belief state. Cf. Muyskens, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

12. William James, "The Sentiment of Rationality," in *Essays in Pragmatism*, ed., Alburey Castell. New York: Hafners Publishing Company, 1948.

13. Cf. for example, Swinburne, *Faith and Reason*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979, p. 105. Nicholas Wolterstorff in the Introduction to *Faith and Rationality*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983, p. 14, writes: "One *cannot*, for example, trust God if one does not even believe that God exists." Plantinga in his article, "Reason and Belief in God" in the same book, p. 18, writes, "Nor can one trust in God and commit oneself to him without believing that he exists; as the author of Hebrews says, "He who would come to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him." (Heb. 11:6)."

14. Cf. Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations*, Berkeley: University of California, 1966, for an example of this point of view.

15. William James, *The Will to Believe*, New York: Dover, 1897; p. 19.

16. Gary Gutting, *Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982, p. 105. In correspondence Gutting says that he has sympathy for my approach and that "I am merely pointing out the incompatibility of interim assent with faith as it has been traditionally regarded." Letter dated October 6, 1983.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

19. Work for this paper was begun during the N.E.H. Summer Seminar for College Teachers in Philosophy ("Reasons, Justification, and Knowledge") at the University of Nebraska/Lincoln under the direction of Robert Audi. Comments on a previous draft by William Alston and an anonymous reader were very helpful in writing the present version.