Faith as a Mustard Seed

Dale Jacquette

Abstract This investigation of the concept of faith is divided into two parts. Part One evaluates a topical philosophical interpretation of faith as irreducibly disjunctive, collecting the best fragmented ideas as to what constitutes faith in a recent family resemblance exposition as an objective for an adequate essentialist analysis of the concept of faith to achieve. Part Two offers a more extended essentialist analysis of the concept of faith as unconditional patience in the eventuality of a positive future state, and a detailed reduction of six supposedly disparate family resemblance senses of faith to this single definition. Criteria for a satisfactory analysis of faithfulness are considered and defended. In contrast with what has become a standard doxastic-epistemic interpretation of faith as persistent unjustified or even unjustifiable belief, a concept of faith is advanced that appears to satisfy the necessary and sufficient criteria identified. Systematic comparison with a variety of usages of the word "faith" suggests that the analysis agrees with many and arguably most applications of this sometimes loosely understood term. Implications of the analysis of the concept of faith are considered and defended against anticipated objections. Pascal's wager is critically examined in relation to matters of religious faith, along with positivist meaningfulness requirements that seem to conflict especially with epistemically ungrounded belief, the power of faith, and the metaphorical size of mustard seeds. The inquiry concludes with a synthesis of five aspects of six supposedly distinct senses of faith under the single essentialist reductive umbrella of unconditional patience in the eventuality of a positive future state.

Keywords essentialist analysis; family resemblance; faith; Pascal, Blaise; Sessions, William Lad; Wittgenstein, Ludwig

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✍ Universität Bern, Institut für Philosophie, Abteilung Logik und theoretische Philosophie, Unitobler, Länggassstraße 49a, Bern 9 CH-3000, Switzerland ✉ dale.jacquette@philo.unibe.ch

> And Jesus said unto them, [You could not cast out unclean spirits] Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.
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> —Matthew 17:20

PART ONE: ESSENTIALISM AND ITS DOUBLE

1. CONCEPTS OF FAITH

The word "faith" has many meanings. Faith is most often contrasted with knowledge in the sense of justified true belief. The doxastic-epistemic concept of faith interprets faith as a belief for which there need be no justification, or for which at least the faithful in moments of faith may lack adequate justification. We believe a proposition generally when we accept it as true, and we believe a proposition on faith when we believe in its truth despite not being able to justify the belief by means of sound reasoning or adequate empirical evidence.[1]

The faithful sometimes report feeling no need for further justification of an accepted belief than their inner sense of psychological assurance in its truth. Perhaps such inexplicable and admittedly independently unjustifiable beliefs are interpreted as a divine voice speaking directly within the faithful's thoughts, as is sometimes proposed. There can be a psychological comfort for the less fanatic in holding beliefs, especially about our place in the world and our individual and cultural destiny, for which there is no obligation to furnish proof or establish truth, as we do in science and practical affairs. Otherwise, whatever the belief is, on the doxastic conception, it is not accepted purely and entirely on faith. The fact that a belief is sometimes freighted with unaccountable emotional conviction in the absence of good reasoning can further be taken as evidence that the belief comes from another higher source, and must therefore be true. Faith, doxastically interpreted, is always a species of belief; although certainly not all beliefs of the faithful are accepted as articles of faith. Nor is it clear why the existence of faith should itself count as evidence of anything related to the origin or truth conditions of the faithful belief, when beliefs accepted

1. I use the pronoun "we" in referring only to the linguistic community in which the word "faith" is descriptively attributed to certain doxastic-epistemic states. Consequently, when I use such phrases as "If we have faith in X," I do not necessarily mean thereby to include myself among persons of any identifiable, let alone religious, faith.

on faith according to the doxastic account are supposed to be evidence-free. Moreover, persons of different faiths by definition, sometimes with significant overlap, have differing mutually conflicting beliefs. If conflicting beliefs are accepted by the followers of different faiths, then obviously the truth is not to be found in the faithful proponents' degree of belief state intensity.

Religious faith (not the only kind) on the doxastic interpretation (among others) often takes the form of believing that God or a god or pantheon of gods exists having certain properties revealed to human believers that are otherwise unsupported by or may even be contrary to scientifically accepted facts. The 2nd–3rd century AD Church father (Quintus Septimus Florens) Tertullian (of Carthage) in his polemical work, *De carne Christi*, is frequently misquoted as having said: "Credo quia absurdum"—"I believe, because it is absurd." Tertullian, to his credit, nowhere commits quite this cognitive outrage; although, in the passage standardly cited, he *does* say of Christ: "Et sepultus resurrexit; certum est, quia impossibile"—"And having been buried he was resurrected; which is certain, because it is impossible."[2]

While most believers do not accept propositions as articles of faith merely or purely on the grounds that they are logically inconsistent, logically or causally impossible, which indeed they sometimes are, in matters of faith the faithful are not always too particular in observing the ordinary hallmarks of sound epistemic judgment. Their faith in extreme cases prevails over all. If what they believe appears especially to cynics to be inconsistent with itself or with known facts, then so much the worse for facts, or what the unfaithful take to be facts, logical consistency, and every other source of anti-religious cynicism. It is important to recognize that faithful belief can also be bolstered and supplemented discursively by empirical evidence and logical argument, occasionally strengthening the degree of conviction of a belief that is accepted in the first instance on faith, and beyond the extent to which it might otherwise be supported doxastically and epistemically by an act of faith alone.

Faith as such, of varying degrees of strength, whatever value it may have in the lives of the faithful, nevertheless makes a poor epistemic substitute for knowledge as any type of independently justified true belief. To express faith can sometimes be understood as admitting that we do not *know* the

2. Tertullian, *De carne Christi* 5 (Migne PL 2, 761a). Text and translation quoted from the edition Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation: Q. Septimii Florentis Tertulliani De carne Christi liber*, edited and translated by Ernest Evans, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1956). See John N. Williams, "Believing the Self-Contradictory," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 19 (1982).

truth of that which we believe. This is presumably meant in the sense of having empirical or other justification for its content, under circumstances in which we believe the proposition anyway, as we sometimes hear, by means or as an article of faith. An objective outsider, not sharing the same belief on faith, can afford to be more skeptical, disregarding psychological commitment or degree of belief state intensity on the part of the faithful as any sort of justification. We need not disparage doxastically-epistemically interpreted faith as inferior to knowledge upheld by scientific justification. The point is to understand the difference, and thematize precisely how and why they are different.

Faith takes a variety of extra-doxastic forms, from resigned passive acceptance of events that appear to be out of one's control, to the most energetic activity in the service of an ideal, with every grade of possibility in the modal spectrum between these extremes. The philosophical question is, what, if anything, do many or most of these diverse senses of faith have in common? What is faith? What do we mean by the word? What is the concept or concepts of faith, even for the unfaithful? Is there a common core of meaning within the plurality of concepts of faith that underwrites the meaningful use of the word? If so, how may we understand what is meant lexically and discursively by the language of faith? To broach these questions, we distinguish key elements in descriptions of faith and acts of faith that seem to generalize over several prominent religious traditions, resonating with a broad cross-section of ordinary usage of the word "faith" and its cognates. What is wanted is an analysis of the concept of faith, even if it must finally be disjunctive in logical form, allowing for many different kinds of mutually irreducible senses of faith. There are basically two categories of analysis for a concept like faith, essentialist and family resemblance. An essentialist analysis of the concept of faith as *unconditional patience in the eventuality of a positive future state* is then proposed, after considering the strengths and weaknesses of an otherwise appealing representative alternative family resemblance model.

2. Sessions' Wittgensteinian Family Resemblance Analysis of Faith

The analysis is backgrounded by a preliminary critical study of another noteworthy competing recent effort to offer a detailed philosophical definition of the concept of faith, in an anti-essentialist family resemblance analysis by William Lad Sessions in his 1994 book, *The Concept of Faith: A Philosophical Investigation*. Sessions' philosophical study is targeted here

because it typifies the purported later Wittgensteinian point of view concerning family resemblance predicates applied to the concept of faith. I argue against Sessions' Wittgensteinian rejection of a common essence by emphasizing what I take to be the core concept of religious faith that is supplemented and customized in a variety of applications, and distinguished along the way from analogous and metaphorical concepts, that may be related to, but on reflection are not the same as, the concept of faith.

Like Wittgenstein and Sessions, I believe it is important to understand the intended meanings of distinct usages of the word "faith" in praxeologically grounded language games, and in terms of the linguistic-pragmatic point and purpose of relevant language game rules. Wittgenstein, however, nowhere disallows that some predicate concepts are essentialist, merely urging by example against expecting them all to be. Unlike Sessions' projection of a supposedly Wittgensteinian family resemblance relation onto the multiple instances of faith irreducible to any single universally shared essence, it is suggested that there is after all a unified essentialist reductive analysis of the concept of faith, by which faith is equated with the concept of unconditional patience, appropriately interpreted for each specific nuance of faithful belief, especially as it appears in religion and in a faithful person's religious life.

My main complaint against the too hasty attribution of family resemblance on a diverse set of cases is that I think we must first distinguish the practice from what the later Wittgenstein requires in a philosophical investigation specifically of the philosophical grammar of practical usages of the word "faith." That is, I think that while Sessions correctly represents the structure of a family resemblance relation on his choice of different kinds of faith, he does not try to establish a good reason to suppose that the cases he considers have only a family resemblance rather than a common essence, as Wittgenstein does originally with respect to the concept of a game, and hence of a language game. My impression is that, in lieu of a *Wittgensteinian* investigation into the philosophical grammar of "faith," it is premature to maintain as a *Wittgensteinian* conclusion that the predicates "(being) faithful," "(being) faithless," and the like, associated with practical uses of the word "faith," are family resemblance predicates. They may appear to be that, in any case, especially to casual inquiry, but are they *only* that?

Without independent support, Sessions' "Wittgensteinian" family resemblance approach to the concept of faith is refuted by the existence of a coherent essentialist analysis of a core concept of faith underlying all

the usages he considers and of precisely the sort that Sessions in affirming their irreducible family resemblance implies cannot succeed. The essentialist analysis is shown first and foremost to subsume all six of Sessions' disparate family resemblance related meanings of "faith," with additional general remarks indicating the definition's wider application to many of the kinds of things that are reasonably said about faith, beyond the kinds Sessions identifies. Since we are mostly working with and only extending slightly the range of Sessions' own family resemblance related meanings of "faith," it remains possible that there are other meanings of faith that would not fall under the proposed essentialist analysis of the core meaning of all types of faith as unconditional patience in the eventuality of a positive future state. Speaking only hypothetically, it is irresponsible to deny the possibility. Until a counterexample surfaces, however, which in the end may never happen, the essentialist analysis expresses a logically contingent truth about the existence of meanings surrounding the word "faith." It is the analysis of a concept as it seems to be actually in play, and conditional upon whatever usages prevail. Nor is it the fault of conceptual analysis if the word "faith" has acquired many apparently disparate meanings in colloquial language, which we might choose to reorganize.

Worth emphasizing, though hopefully needless to say, there are many more conceptions of faith than I shall try to consider in this essay. There remains a corresponding wealth of theological and philosophical ways of understanding faith that must be overlooked for the sake of making a start in the desired direction. An *essentialist* analysis of the concept of faith need not exhaustively consider all available meanings of the term. First, it is conceivable that an essentialist analysis comprehends all meanings of the word "faith" reflecting the essential core concept of faith, even if there is no way to prove that absolutely all have been considered. Without an argument to the contrary, we can proceed as in exploring any contingent truth, conditionally upon the available evidence. Second, an essentialist analysis of faith at a higher level of abstraction, with respect to any core concept of faith, appears unavoidable. Even a family resemblance cluster must have enough identifiable essence to distinguish it from other family resemblances of entirely different albeit overlapping kinds, or when one subsumes the other. Third, an essentialist analysis seems sufficiently adaptable to cover at least any of the kinds of cases of doxastic faith that might be imagined to arise. The argument is that a family resemblance approach to the concept of faith is inadequately motivated and wrongly applied in Sessions' discussion. Sessions, nevertheless, has so many of the essentials of the family resemblance approach exactly right that a certain kind of

criticism of his project in particular can instructively show what is failing more generally in any nonreductive anti-essentialist family resemblance understanding of the concept of faith.

Sessions is on the right track in identifying different concepts and different kinds of faith. He concludes correctly in almost every instance for each application as to what kinds of things ought to be included in and excluded from the extension of the predicate "faith." Many of the types of faith Sessions describes can be independently supported. The difficulty is rather in how the elements are supposed to be related. Sessions thinks that they are so diverse that they can at most be family resemblance related, whereas it is argued here that they can have a shared common essence to be explicated in a defensible essentialist analysis of the concept of faith. The essentialist analysis of faith as unconditional patience in the eventuality of a positive future state is presented as the core concept capable of reducing the types and dimensions of faith that Sessions himself identifies as different accidental manifestations of the proposed underlying essential core concept of faith. Different kinds of faith are then interpreted as different kinds of unconditional patience, unconditional patience being exemplified in different ways and with respect to different kinds of objects, persons and events.

The family resemblance analysis of faith lends itself to an unreflective unwillingness to seriously and rigorously investigate the possibility of an essentialist definition of the concept. If we are persuaded from the outset that the predicate "faithful" and cognates are family resemblance related, then why should we go through the bother (and it is rather a lot of effort) trying to work out an essentialist analysis? Doesn't faith just seem intuitively to be a family resemblance rather than essentialist kind of concept? I think the better argument is probably that if there is no convincing positive evidence to indicate that a family resemblance obtains, then a family resemblance analysis is favored only on the strength of the opponent's reason for supposing that no essentialist analysis can succeed. What reason could be offered to overturn what appears *a priori* to be a perfectly respectable logical possibility that there exists a correct essentialist analysis of the concept of faith? We must not disappoint Socrates, and give up too easily on the possibility that we are simply overlooking an elusive essentialist analysis of faith that subsumes all supposedly merely family resemblance related distinct kinds of faith in a combination of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions. Does such an essentialist analysis exist? The fact that we can entertain the question alone shows that the family resemblance alternative is not on logically firm ground.

A methodology that turns to the family resemblance category before thoroughly considering and refuting the most obvious essentialist analyses cannot be relied upon for the truth of its conclusions. The family resemblance category, with nothing more positive to say in its behalf than that faith seems more family resemblance than essentialist, depends for its logical support on there being no adequate essentialist analysis of the concept, without which an essentialist can freely trade contrary intuitions with the family resemblance theorist all day. Whether or not a satisfactory essentialist analysis is forthcoming is always something that empirically speaking remains to be seen. Sound empirical methodology in the flight from essentialism requires advancing the family resemblance analysis of the concept of faith only conditionally and provisionally. A family resemblance analysis must leave open the possibility of all biological family members finally being subsumed in something essential to them all, such as their DNA linkages, something in common in the analogy that lies at the core of each kind or Sessions "model" of faith. As such, they can be understood as providing only a preparatory stage leading to a final essentialist analysis. Similarly, an essentialist analysis must leave open the possibility that if there is no satisfactory essential characterization of all family members, then essentialism fails and analysis is driven instead toward a family resemblance alternative. An essentialist analysis takes a greater risk of exposure to counterexample than a family resemblance approach, but the advantage of a successful essentialist analysis is that it tells us something about the concept that we could not come to know in the case of an irreducibly disjunctive family resemblance relation, merely by being told that it is such.

As in the case of the members of a real biological family, the essential common core of the concept of faith is meant to provide the equivalent of DNA as the deciding factor in determining whether or not similar-looking individuals are or are not actually biological family members. A brother or sister might look more exactly like a total stranger with no DNA connection in another part of the world than they do like each other or anyone else in their immediate family, just as certain mental states may have much in common with doxastic faith, although they are actually something very different. If we can independently justify the common core of all kinds of faith in an essentialist analysis, then we can apply it in these instances also to discriminate more carefully among beliefs accepted on faith as distinct from similar mental states.

3. Sessions' Non-Categorical Approach

In *The Concept of Faith*, Sessions rejects the possibility of offering an exhaustive analysis of the concept of faith. He finds proper usage of the term "faith" too diverse to permit any universal reductive or essentialist "categorical" concept of what it means to possess or exercise faith. Instead, he investigates six distinct quasi-Wittgensteinian "family resemblance" properties of the concept. As his inquiry concludes, he allows this network of related ideas about the nature of faith to stand as the closest we can hope to approach a complete understanding of what is generally meant by faith.[3]

Sessions begins by considering six theoretical models. His Wittgensteinian family resemblance approach to the meaning of these disjoint concepts is opposed to reductively unifying these diverse concepts essentialistically into a single idea or over-arching archetype of faith as the product of conventional philosophical analysis.[4] He does not try to identify necessary and sufficient conditions for an integrated concept of faith, on the grounds that the concept is inherently fragmentary, and as such resistant to any logical reduction of its distinct multiple meanings. Sessions introduces these several models of faith:

1. The Personal Relationship Model:
   S has faithP in A only if S is in a personal relationship with A, S trusts A, S believes certain propositions about A, and S's coming to be in that relationship with A is (at least partially) caused by A.
2. The Belief Model:
   S has faithB that p only if S believes that p, S is (firmly) convinced that p, S has inadequate evidence for p, and S's belief that p is nonevidentially based.
3. The Attitude Model:
   S has faithA toward X only if S's attitude toward X partially but radically constitutes a self-world horizon that is prepropositional, fundamental, totalizing, and significant (bestowing as well as embracing significance).
4. The Confidence Model:
   S has faithC (or faithsC) only if S is in a nonrelational conscious state that realizes S's deeper self, that is characterized by a profound feeling

3. William Lad Sessions, *The Concept of Faith: A Philosophical Investigation*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 5–6.

4. Ibid., 7. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations: The German Text with a Revised English Translation*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, third ed. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell; New York: Macmillan, 1989), §§66–71 (hereafter cited in text as *PI*).

of (self-) confidence (serenity, tranquility, calm, peace), and that is conditionally imperturbable.

5. The Devotion Model:
   S has faithD in W only if W is a way of life open to S, which S voluntarily chooses, to which S is committed wholeheartedly and lastingly, and in which S perseveres.
6. The Hope Model:
   S has faithH in G only if G is a supreme, future, apparent good that S greatly desires and confidently awaits, anticipates, and expects, despite G's improbability.[5]

A quick examination of these models reveals some surprising features. Sessions' characterizations of the six models are logically formulated in each case merely as "only if" conditionals. *If* subject S has faithP through faithH, *then*, equipped with these characterizations, we can say what must be true of S and those concepts related to that particular model of the concept of faith.

What we cannot validly infer is that subject S has a certain kind of faith according to any of the six models *if* or *when* the relevant conditions are satisfied. Rather, the logic of Sessions' conditional characterizations requires that we know already in advance whether and what particular kind of faith a subject has, supposing it to fall under one of the six models, in order to draw any further inferences about what is true of S and how S is related to the description of each respective type of faith. This is somewhat unusual analytic philosophical practice, leaving us not only without definitions in the expected sense, but even without material equivalence or coextensionality, in regard to each type of faith. We are limited by Sessions' exposition only to concluding negatively, *modus tollendo tollens*, that a subject does *not* have a particular type of faith when the conditions he prescribes for the appropriate category are *not* satisfied.

Nor are these only or necessarily the most serious drawbacks in Sessions' characterizations of these six models of faith. It is generally unclear what Sessions means by the distinguishing concepts contained in the consequents of each conditional characterization. What, exactly, should be understood by a "self-world horizon" in Model 3? What is a "profound feeling of (self-) confidence," referred to in Model 4? What is meant by such a feeling's being "profound"? Why should such a feeling be relevant to the concept of faith? What if a sense of profound confidence is solidly

5. Sessions, *The Concept of Faith*, 9 (Table 1).

based on empirical evidence, or if, to consider a related case, a subject has profound confidence in the truth of a mathematical theorem as a result of exercising *a priori* judgment in approving a proof's logical form and propositional content? Where do some of these models come from, anyway? If we do not already know what these terms and phrases mean, then we will not be in a position to fully and properly understand or apply Sessions' categories. Looking even superficially at Model 6, one wonders why hope-related type-H faith is supposed to be directed toward a "supreme" apparent good. Can no one have a hope-related faith merely that a lottery ticket will win, or that a loved one will return from war, neither of which is in any obvious sense "supreme"? Why, finally, should these kinds of objects of hope-related faith necessarily be improbable? Many religious believers would flatly deny that their faithful belief in the existence of God or the gods is improbable. They might insist, on the contrary, on the highly probable or even independently epistemically certain truth of what their faith compels them to believe, or, more accurately perhaps, what they are compelled to believe on faith.[6]

Despite these criticisms, serious as they are, the present inquiry focuses instead on a more positive aspect of Sessions' inquiry. In several of his models, Sessions is clearly attuned to salient features of some of the variety of different senses in which laypersons, theologians, and philosophers alike are inclined to speak about faith. What we propose to undertake is the counterpart of something that many readers of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* are often tempted to do upon encountering his challenge to devise a satisfactory essentialist definition of the concept of "game." We shall not attempt to fully meet this ambitious goal in defining the concept of faith. Instead, we offer a contribution toward that goal, highlighting a feature of faith that seems essential as a core concept of all its instances, and including something essential to Sessions' six models. Although we want to avoid the risk of a one-sided diet of examples, of which Wittgenstein in another context (*PI* §593) complains, we take our point of departure from Sessions' characterization of six models of faith, acknowledging that they are highly comprehensive in their suggestive coverage of the theological and colloquial language by which faith is often described. The proposed essentialist analysis of the core concept of faith is seen not only as doing justice to Sessions' six paradigm models, but to many more besides.

In the course of explaining and defending an essentialist analysis of faith as unconditional patience, we identify five distinctive features of faith, in-

6. Ibid., 23–24.

cluding: (1) independence from reasoning and ordinary or scientific facts and evidence; (2) positive orientation; (3) future-directedness; (4) psychological power in motivating action; and (5) steadfastness. All five aspects of faith are exemplified by at least one of Sessions' six models of faith, and each is related in a unified essentialist analysis of the concept of faith that, as previously signaled, is equated with the concept of unconditional patience. The conditions by which faith as unconditional patience in the eventuality of a positive future state is tempted can in principle be any logically contingent facts that might otherwise cause a person to lose patience in the future occurrence of something awaited and initially desired.

We lose faith in something precisely when we lose patience, and to sustain patience is precisely to keep faith. Are there not also other states of mind that consist of unconditional patience, but are not matters of doxastic faith? What about love? Is not love also a matter of unconditional patience, at least about certain kinds of things, about the fulfillment of certain expectations by the beloved? I think that love does in fact involve faith of a certain kind, and that this faithfulness can be understood as the unconditional patience of a certain type and with a certain object that is frequently an essential proper part of love, although there is also obviously more to love than faith. Faith in a beloved is sometimes characterized as *trust* in a person, and it is certainly true that you must trust and be trustworthy toward another person in order to truly love them. This condition implies on the proposed analysis having faith in and being faithful to the person loved. Love is nevertheless a more complex emotion, involving more than just faith and faithfulness. It is not an epistemic state of mind like faith, but is emotional and emotionally action-motivating in other ways than faith as a characteristically distinct passion of the soul rather than doxastic cognitive category of belief.[7]

4. Independence from Epistemic Justification

We combine several knowledge-related features of faith that Sessions distinguishes in his six models. The belief, confidence, and hope models characterize an attitude toward belief that is at least independent of known facts and accepted modes of epistemic justification. We do not go as far as Sessions in saying that a subject need have *inadequate* evidence for accep-

7. Alternative models of faith are discussed by Bertram James Kellenberger, *Religious Discovery, Faith, and Knowledge* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972). Kellenberger, "Problems of Faith," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 6 (1976). Kellenberger, "Three Models of Faith," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 12 (1981).

tance of a certain proposition, nor that the proposition or expected state of affairs taken on faith need be *improbable*. We argue instead that a subject can also compatibly have faith in the truth of a proposition that is strongly supported on ordinary epistemic grounds, while in another way faithfully maintaining belief in the proposition's truth.

The concept of faith as Sessions presents it, and as it sometimes appears in theology and ordinary discourse, appears materially inadequate. It is subject at least in its most straightforward form to uncomplicated counterexamples. Without further qualification, it seems mistaken to interpret faith as any belief unsupported by evidence, since there are many instances of persons believing one thing or another without warrant that we would be hard pressed to consider instances of faith. A subject in the absence of good grounds might believe that a friend will die in the next fifteen minutes, but would ordinarily not be said to have faith that this will occur. Similarly, many persons who would appear to be properly described as believing in the existence of God as a matter of faith need not be altogether lacking in evidence for their belief. We find Saint Anselm of Canterbury in the *Proslogium*, among other devout believers of philosophical bent, distinguishing in his extended prayer between two different foundations of belief. One, involving faith, is independently supported by the other, involving reason. Theists have often considered their faith-based belief to be reinforced by such evidence as the apparent well-orderedness of the universe, or the unlikelihood that a holy text as remarkable as the Bible could have been written by mortal scribes in lieu of divine inspiration.[8]

Whether or not such evidence is strong or decisive is beside the point. All that matters in criticizing Sessions' account of faith in this article is that the definition is contradicted by persons in some instances believing

8. Saint Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogium*. Text cited below according to the edition Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion*, ed. Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, in *S. Anselmi Cantuarensis archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, vol. 1 (Seckau: Ex officina abbatiae seccoviensis, 1938, reprint, Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1946; Stuttgart; Bad Cannstatt: F. Fromann Verlag, 1968). Translations provided in this note are drawn from the edition Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogium*, trans. Sidney Norton Deane, in *Proslogium; Monologium; an appendix, In behalf of the fool, by Gaunilon; and Cur Deus homo* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1903, reprint, 1926). See for instance Proem. (Schmitt I.94.6–7).: "I accordingly gave each [of my writings] a title, that the first might be known as, *An Example of Meditation on the Grounds of Faith*, and its sequel as, *Faith Seeking Understanding*." Ch. 1 (Schmitt I.100.15–19): "I do not endeavor, O Lord, to penetrate your sublimity, for in no wise do I compare my understanding with that; but I long to understand in some degree your truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand. For this also I believe, — that unless I believed, I should not understand."

in something by faith who also believe in it as a result of (typically defeasible, not necessarily conclusive or convincing) evidence or reasoning. To describe faith as merely believing in something without evidence is thereby contradicted by these among other possibilities. If we try to repair the situation by imposing a level, degree or kind of evidence threshold, below which or in light of which belief in a proposition's truth is still compatible with belief by faith, while belief above the level or degree or without which entirely is incompatible with belief by faith, then we assume a difficult burden of trying to establish a demarcation point that is not bound to seem arbitrary. Such ambiguity still does not immediately imply that faith is a family resemblance predicate. The proper analogy is rather one in which there is only vagueness as to whether family member M1 does or does not have a family resemblance with respect to such features as the shape of nose or ears of family member M2. Such family resemblance of properties in turn seems supervenient, ontically dependent or conceptually parasitic on a relatively unambiguous concept of how the predicates "shape," "nose" and "ears" function in relevant language games. We have to know whether or not a particular thing is a face, and whether or not a feature of a face is a nose, in order to posit a family resemblance between the noses of different family members.

Contrary to Sessions, the analysis of faith as unconditional patience does not imply or even suggest that faith is *irrational*. To be irrational, a belief accepted on faith would need to be actually believed because or in spite of its acknowledged logical inconsistency. Such incoherence is certainly not involved in the concept of faith as unconditional patience. It is compatible with the analysis that the content of a belief accepted on faith as unconditional patience can also be supported independently by reasoning and evidence. Moreover, the fact that a belief accepted on faith in the proposed sense is *independent* of reasoning and evidence does not imply that it is therefore *at odds with* all justification grounds. The proposed analysis is actually neutral on this score, leaving it open as to whether or not there can be irrational articles of faith.

We are to imagine a religiously faithful person in the ordinary case as a normally functioning cognitive subject, perfectly rational in all other aspects of thought and practical conduct, capable of matching means to ends in the exercise of practical reasoning to support whatever actions the subject is prepared to undertake for the sake of securing certain values, and ideally capable of careful, critical, logically circumspect reasoning. We should nevertheless think of someone who accepts the truth of given propositions on faith even when they are unsupported by good reasoning.

The faithful believer might even be challenged concerning, not only an accepted proposition's truth or justification, but even its intelligibility, for which a person of faith may sincerely think there is no need for further proof beyond the fact of having faith. Such an attitude is obviously not irrational, though it is arguably not a sound epistemic strategy to give up justification for belief in the pursuit of truths about complex and apparently logically contingent propositions pertaining to such momentous matters as the soul's relation to the body, the mind's mortality or immortality, the soul's destiny after the body's death, if any, a selection of what purport to be historical facts, and an interpretation of justice and goodness, as among the values to be pursued by a person trying to lead a religious life. If it is such things concerning which we must have religious faith, rather than following the best arguments open-mindedly to see wherever they might lead, then the faithful have nothing more solid than psychological conviction in whatever they believe as a standard of truth. The situation is further complicated by the fact that different faithful believers often accept logically contrary, even conjointly contradictory propositions as articles of their mutually incompatible faiths.

It may be preferable to say that faith is a-rational, in the sense that beliefs accepted on faith are judged true independently of any further independent reasoning or consideration of evidence. The loss of faith as unconditional patience can then be interpreted criteriologically by definition as the loss of patience under prevailing conditions. We can judge the limits of faith when someone's faith breaks down and no longer has patience as a result of impinging conditions. Whereas until that point we generally give someone who seems to be faithful the benefit of the doubt, measuring the degree or intensity of their faith by how firmly they hold onto it in the face of setbacks, obstacles and diversions, to which they either finally surrender, or against which they hold steadfast as their patience remains firm in the object of their faith.

Part Two: Faith as Unconditional Patience

5. Positive Orientation of Faith

That faith is generally in or about something *positive* is seen not only in religion but in secular fideistic practice. There can be non-theistic and even atheistic faith, including atheistic religious faith that there is no god or God. We can have faith without religious belief in the government, in ourselves, in a life partner, a new untested miracle drug, a fortune teller, that our

nation in conflict will ultimately prevail, or in a spiritual afterlife that may or may not have anything to do with religion, in keeping with some or in lieu of any theistic foundation. The fact that faith is commonly associated with theism as religious faith does not imply that faith is inherently a theistic concept. If the analytic task is to clarify the most general idea of faith, even with the purpose of understanding its role in theism, then we must also be prepared to recognize a number of ways in which the concept of faith functions outside of theistic applications.[9]

When these opposed categories of faith are inspected, one thing that conspicuously emerges is that faith is seldom directed toward something perceived to be negative. We do not usually have faith, theistic or otherwise, that something bad will happen. It might well be a matter of religious faith to believe in the existence of heaven and hell, where the possibility of spending time in hell is presumably something negative. Often, however, the faithful consider a place of punishment to be reserved only for those who fall outside of grace, and hence as not applying to them, sustaining faith in their own salvation from the abyss. If we believe without reason or empirical evidence that we are doomed to endure eternity in hell, then our state of mind might be better described as one of unsubstantiated *despair* rather than faith as a light guiding our lives. The religiously and politically misguided terrorists who planned and carried out the 11 September 2001 hijacking attacks against the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in Manhattan may have had faith that the airplanes involved in the plot would crash. But this makes sense only if, from their perspective, crashing the planes into the buildings was seen by them as a good or positive thing. If I am flying a commercial airliner to a holiday destination, then I might fear or dread that the plane will crash, but, no matter how firm my belief, I would not ordinarily be said to have faith that such an accident will occur—unless, again, I perversely regard the plane's crashing as something positive. It is in this same positive sense that we may have faith that God exists, that what a holy book says is true, that a difficult surgery will succeed, that a nation at war will triumph over its adversaries, that a savior will arrive to bring peace and justice to the world, that one's bad luck at the Baccarat table will change for the better, that things generally will

9. The proposed analysis of faith as unconditional patience is designed to bridge a standard grammatical distinction, with some overlap and the possibility of conceptual reducibility, between having *faith in* (persons, including God, events, promises, or the truth of propositions) versus *faith that* (a belief or proposition is true). A related type of distinction is considered in an essay by Henry Habberley Price, "Belief 'In' and Belief 'That'," *Religious Studies* 1, no. 1 (1965), doi:10.1017/S0034412500002304.

eventually turn out for the good, that we will be rescued sooner or later, or unlimitedly many other positive outcomes of future events in which the faithful may have an optimistic interest.

6. Future-Directedness of Faith

The *future-directedness* of many instances of faith suggests that the general concept of faith is by definition future-oriented. Unfortunately, the picture is immediately complicated by apparent exceptions. We might accept as an article of faith, among other things, that any of the events represented in our favorite holy book are true, which can of course include historically past occurrences. Equally, we can faithfully believe that we are at this very moment and not only in the future among God's chosen people, or forgiven now at least for all our past sins, none of which seems future-directed or future-oriented.

A Christian theist might have faith that Christ of Nazareth was crucified in order to redeem all faithful sinners from eternal damnation. We may also be inclined, rightly or wrongly, to observe that what is believed on the basis of faith, if faith has any epistemic as opposed to psychological basis, is characteristically positive for the faithful, but not necessarily and frequently not so for others affected by the event. The same Christians who believe on faith that Christ died for their sins may also believe, even if with pity and regret, that God's divine justice unheeded by heathen unbelievers will result in their everlasting perdition. There is amusing testimony to this naive attitude of faith in the prayers associated with votive dedications to Saint Florian, patron saint of firefighters. A Roman soldier who converted to Christianity, Florian is canonically shown in conventional hagiography wearing an antique military uniform in armor and helmet, holding a wooden bucket of water and sometimes an axe, pouring water onto a miniature building in flames. The noble saint is beseeched by worshippers in Austria where he is especially popular, explicitly in these terms: "Protect my house from fire, beloved Saint Florian, and let my neighbor's house burn instead!"

There is occasionally an after-the-fact confirmation of some of the things believed by faith. Although it still falls far short of epistemic warrant, persons believing in or acting on faith may find it comforting if and when it happens—accidentally, so to speak, as the skeptic would say—for an occurrence anticipated through faith actually to take place in the short term. The gambler betting on faith that a longstanding losing streak will soon turn around might be rewarded by precisely such a change in good

fortune at the gaming table, and come to believe as a result that his show of continued faith exercised in optimistic persistence is thereby vindicated, that it may even have been causally involved in the events that engineered his reversal of luck, if only through supernatural agency. For many items of faith, particularly in the religious sphere, projected events may be so far in the future, or concern as they often do occurrences supposed to follow death in what the faithful may believe to transpire in an afterlife, that there can be no practical confirmation or disconfirmation of their content.

These facts about what are arguably some of the most personally important items of faith have several interesting implications. (a) The dilemma described above concerning faith in the existence of God and an afterlife provides a foundation for reasoning very similar to Pascal's wager, in Blaise Pascal's 1670 posthumous work, the *Pensées* (fr. 233 Brunschvicg). (b) Simultaneously, the dilemma seems equally to support the objections of logical positivists to all matters of faith and religious dogma. Positivism rejects as literally nonsensical whatever is neither true nor false by definition, or as an analytic truth or falsehood, and neither confirmable nor disconfirmable in principle by a logically possible perception. The so-called verificationist criterion of meaning appears to exclude all items of faith as unverifiable, in deference to objective scientific knowledge. It might nevertheless be thought that a future state in an afterlife which some persons of faith accept could provide an answer to positivism's rejection of the meaningfulness of many articles of religious faith, if consciousness, personal identity and memory survive death. (c) Finally, the unverifiability and generally positive direction of most of what is believed on faith is characterizable, again from a skeptical or cynical standpoint, as mere wishful thinking. These topics for the future-directedness of faith are each addressed in turn.

(a) The outstanding feature of Pascal's wager is that it appears to require belief in God and the afterlife to be *voluntary*, a matter of *choice*. This is a highly questionable assumption, but to the extent that it arises in connection with articles of faith it further illuminates the concept. The way in which Pascal's wager is generally presented strongly suggests that upon weighing the two parts of the dilemma the thinker is led by reason to adopt or not adopt a certain religious stance. However, if our previous characterization of faith is on the right track, then this conclusion is contrary to the analysis of faith as independent of reasoning and evidence.

Leaving aside the problem of whether faith itself is voluntaristic,

subject to conscious deliberate decision, if Pascal accepts the existence of God and an afterlife on the grounds of a wager, and if, in the first place, this is the proper interpretation of the pertinent passages in the *Pensées*, then Pascal is clearly not exercising faith in affirming these religious beliefs. As we have interpreted the wager, if Pascal accepts the conclusion of the dilemma as justification for believing in the existence of God and an afterlife, then his belief is not independent of reason and evidence, and as such does not qualify as religious faith. Such a consequence naturally leaves it open that Pascal or another adherent of the wager might also independently believe in God and the afterlife as an article of faith. The wager could then serve as a kind of supplemental reinforcement to what is believed on faith independently of the reasoning represented by the wager dilemma.[10]

(b) We have proceeded cautiously in considering this implication of Pascal's wager, indicating only that the dilemma seems to run afoul of the *positivist criterion of literal meaningfulness*. If there is an afterlife, and if the soul survives the body's death, experiences psychological continuity of some sort before and after death, and is enlightened thereafter with something like direct evidence of the existence of God, then perhaps we can speak of a logically possible experiential confirmation, and hence of confirmability in principle, of faith-grounded theism.

The trouble is that the positivist verifiability criterion has not typically been construed as admitting post-mortem confirmation or disconfirmation of putative propositions in any category. The presupposition on the part of positivism is that *verifiability* means verifiability this side of the grave, there being no other epistemically relevant justification that can empirically be considered as available to knowing subjects. In that case, even to hold out the prospect as a logical possibility that the faithful might find the content of their faith, though independent of validating evidence here in this life, confirmable in principle by some sort of imaginable "quasi-empirical" experience in

10. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. Alban John Krailsheimer, Rev. ed., Penguin Classics (London; New York: Penguin, 1995). See Nicholas Rescher, *Pascal's Wager: A Study of Practical Reasoning in Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985); Leslie Armour, "*Infini Rien": Pascal's Wager and the Human Paradox*, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* Monograph Series (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993); Jeff Jordan, ed., *Gambling on God: Essays on Pascal's Wager* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994); Jordan, *Pascal's Wager: Pragmatic Arguments and Belief In God* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

an afterlife, and hence as meeting the requirements of the positivist verifiability criterion of meaningfulness. Nor should we consider theory generally bound by a criterion of meaningfulness that according to its own verifiability condition is itself meaningless in any application. Solutions to such problems there may be, but in lieu of their being articulated and meeting the usual critical tests, we need not be concerned that the concept of traditional religious faith is bound by a literal verifiability criterion of meaningfulness.

If here and now in this vale of tears we have no way in principle of verifying that there might be an afterlife in which we could "experience" having survived death and attaining a kind of perceptual knowledge of the existence of God, perhaps entering into God's presence, then as positivists we cannot intelligibly appeal to such a possibility as satisfying the verifiability criterion here and now with respect to matters of religious faith. After all, it is in the here and now that the problem of the meaningfulness of the challenge for the faithful that we have been considering arises. The question of whether the verifiability criterion of meaning ought to be accepted is obviously another issue altogether, and there are numerous objections to positivism that apply in this situation as in other efforts to undermine the meaningfulness of sentences that fall outside its domain.

(c) Faithful belief as *wishful thinking* represents another dimension of some, perhaps many or even most, of the most important kinds of beliefs that are accepted on faith. It is comforting for many persons to believe even in the absence of any objective scientific evidence or sound philosophical reasoning that we are watched over by a fatherly or motherly benevolent spirit who can come to our rescue in times of danger or duress, that the soul may survive the body's death and destruction in a heavenly afterlife of eternal bliss, and many other things, or that through our own benevolent actions in this life we can eventually escape the cycle of birth-death-and-rebirth-or-reincarnation.

The question whether it is plausible to accept such beliefs recalls once more the doxastic-epistemic dimension of faith and the attractions especially of many types of religious faith as satisfying an emotional need. Faith on such a conception takes over in a person's worldview precisely where commonsense judgment and objective scientific knowledge give out, leaving the imagination with no guide to the great unknowns of life and death. We have faith, as we have already suggested, where reason, knowledge, evidence, and justification seem

> most distressingly to fail us, often concerning matters of an uncertain future. Faith in this sense grades off insensibly into hope. Although popularly distinguished in the supposed virtues of faith, hope, and charity, it is hard to distinguish between faith and hope when faith in and of itself is construed as epistemically baseless wishful thinking in the eventuality of a positive future state that in one way or another we shall not be able while yet living to verify or disconfirm by perceptual experience.

Betting on the outcome of a future state in an afterlife accepted on grounds of faith in the manner of Pascal's wager does not provide a satisfactory reply to positivism's doubts about the intelligibility of beliefs held exclusively on grounds of faith. The point of bringing Pascal's wager to bear in connection with the future-directedness of faith is precisely this. Confirmation and disconfirmation go hand-in-hand. If we are proposing to take positivism's challenge seriously, answering it in terms of the fact that many items of faith are future-directed, then we cannot merely consider the possibility of confirmation in isolation from the possibility of disconfirmation. Positivism demands that we satisfy the requirement of a single possible empirical experience that would either confirm or disconfirm the content of a belief. The losing side of Pascal's wager describes a future-directed article of faith in an afterlife as false, in which case the faithful do not survive death to experience anything that would disconfirm the belief. The faithful can only have a confirming "experience," if that is the right word, that their future-directed faith in an afterlife was truth indicating after all, *if and only if* it turns out to be true. This may suffice to satisfy many persons of faith, but the tautology does not constitute an adequate reply to the positivist charge of meaninglessness by unverifiability. The effort to address positivist skepticism about religious faith in general by appealing to what might later transpire in an afterlife nevertheless reinforces the future-directedness of many matters of religious faith.

7. Power of Faith

Faith, because it can motivate the faithful to extraordinary feats, is also often considered to be a source of *power*. This is reflected in the famous mustard seed epigram chosen from scripture in Matthew 17:19–20, where Jesus explains to his disciplines why they were unable to cast out the "demon" from an epileptic. It is supposedly because they lacked even so much faith as would correspond figuratively in physical

dimension to that of a mustard seed that they could not prevail against demonic possession.

A similar passage appears in Luke 17:6, where we read somewhat less dramatically that: "And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine [mulberry] tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you." We are alerted thereby that the author's intent is at least somewhat metaphorical by the consideration that we do not suppose that faith literally comes in any physical sizes, whether as a mustard or avocado seed. Nor are mustard seeds, generally thought to be seeds of the mustard or peelu tree (*Salvadora persica*) necessarily the smallest of seeds, when compared with much smaller virtually invisible orchid seeds.[11]

At one time it was, and is perhaps still so today, a popular charm bracelet bobble for adolescent Christian girls to wear, featuring a clear glass or lucite bead with a tiny yellow-white mustard seed embedded inside. The object is supposed to serve as a focus for faith, a humbling reminder of how small one's faith truly is, presumably, since none of us has much verbal authority over the movement of mountains or mulberry trees, or, even, for that matter, of mustard seeds. Faith of even the smallest imaginable proportion can *do* things. It can *accomplish* deeds; or, rather, the faithful can do things with, through, or by the aid of faith. So it is said. The assertion, again, is marvelously unverifiable and unfalsifiable in an interesting and somewhat unusual way. Nevertheless, faith is often conceived as a force or power in our lives. If there is a power in faith, wherein does its power consist? Does it confer a special confidence in the ultimate good outcome of every challenge such that adversity can be faced with a kind of courage lacking in the infidel? If our individual faith is not powerful enough to move mountains and transplant mulberry trees, then at least it

11. Similar passages appear in Matthew 13:30–32: "And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." Mark 4:31–32: "It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it." Luke 13:18–19: "Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it." I am grateful to the editor, Marcin Podbielski, for precise Mideastern horticultural information.

may suffice to brave a tenure review committee or ask someone out on a date, to charge into battle or strap on a vest full of plastic explosives and go strolling through the market or into a disco, detonator in hand.

With faith we can at least do the things within our physical ability that we otherwise might hesitate to do or from which we might otherwise demure. These without faith we carry out only faintheartedly, and hence less competently, if not altogether incompetently. An act undertaken in faith, psychologically certain of a positive outcome, can sometimes be more likely to succeed, at least in terms of the action's immediate objective. And in this, it must be said, there is a definite advantage for the faithful agent, and therewith a definite power. To be faithful in this sense is to be inwardly strong and brave, secure in the belief, rightly or wrongly, that what one thinks and does is proper, perhaps because it is approved of or even commanded from on high. Whether the actions of the faithful are morally right or wrong, even whether or not they are actually condoned or imposed as duty by the believer's god, if indeed the believer's god exists, is always another question that faith alone does not adequately resolve, even if the faithful themselves are unwilling or psychologically incapable of entertaining the slightest possibility of doubt. The faithful can be better guided in the exercise and preservation of their faith by understanding what it means to have faith or to be faithful, supposing this to be unconditional patience. When faith is attacked, it can be useful also to reflect on what is required of faithfulness, maintaining patience that the truth of what is believed by faith will eventually be known or made manifest in the world, despite very difficult conditions, such as political oppositions, ridicule, violence, and a general conflict with the prevailing culture. The power and strength of faith is, we might also say, the greater, which is to say, the more unquestioning, the greater the extent to which we may consider the attitude in question to be, in the familiar but not necessarily laudatory phrase, an instance of *blind faith*.[12]

12. On the psychological and transcendental power of faith, see, in particular: William Ralph Inge, *Faith and its Psychology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910); Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, trans. Norman P. Goldhawk (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951); Robert M. Adams, *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). A skeptical attitude based on a psychoanalytic interpretation of theistic faith is famously defended by Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1980).

8. Five Aspects of Faith Synthesized

If we take stock of the concept of faith in its dimensions thus far illuminated, there are noteworthy elements that we might imagine to enter into any complete analysis. There is, first of all, the idea of accepting belief independently and often in the complete absence of adequate epistemic justification, and even on occasion in the face of overwhelming counter-evidence (faith as independent of reason and evidentiary knowledge); second and third, the mostly though not exclusively future-directedness of many articles of faith toward a positive outcome for the faithful (faith as wishful thinking); finally, fourth, the resources of faith as a basis of power (faith to move mountains, be it no greater than a mustard seed).

A complete theory of faith should make provision at least for all of these aspects of the concept that can be traced to ordinary usage and common ways of thinking and speaking about matters of faith, and as we find them in perceptive writers like Sessions. Even so, we have certainly not yet fully exhausted the topic, nor identified all of the nuances of the term. There is minimally also a fifth ingredient. To be faithful is also to be steadfast, loyal, and unwavering in thought and deed. A spouse who commits adultery is unfaithful, while those who honor their marriage vows keep faith even through temptation. Disciples who do not fulfill a duty or abandon a post, who let themselves fall asleep when they are supposed to be on watch, who turn away from a belief or ritual when challenged by hostilities, are admonished as being "Oh ye of little faith." Similarly, those who, not always in the absence of any substantiating evidence, are willing to stand by a person in whom they have placed their trust "through thick and thin," are said to have faith in the individual, or, by extension for some optimistic personalities, such faith can include all human beings, the species as a whole, or by and large all persons as fundamentally good and capable of morally right action. These manifestations, too, are signs of a kind or category of faith to be included in a fifth requirement, of *steadfastness*. This is a sense of faith implying loyalty and trust, optimistic expectation and commitment to principle or persons even under distress and after numerous or severe trials; of being true, holding steady and fast, and not giving up when it appears more profitable to do so, or against contrary popular opinion.

These may not yet be all the factors relevant to an analysis that ideally does full justice to the concept of faith. If, however, we keep at least these five aspects of faith in focus, there is a reduction to be advanced that puts all five of these dimensions of faith in perspective. An analysis is available

within the framework of a unified essentialist account of faith, presented as previously mentioned, in the definition of faith as unconditional patience in the eventuality of a positive future state. The proposal, if it meets requirements as a correct understanding of at least certain seldom emphasized aspects of the concept of faith, will then seem to fit the psychological facts in exactly the right way, theoretically and practically satisfying as appropriate to the things we have so far reviewed as pertaining to the many secondary meanings of faith.

To proceed, here is a quick overview of the five senses of faith reduced to unconditional patience in the eventuality of a positive future state. It will be necessary immediately hereafter to elaborate on these sketches and examine their consequences. When we say that faith is sometimes epistemically unjustified or even unjustifiable belief, and in any case independent of reason and evidence, we do not mean this description to hold with respect to any and every belief. If someone simply believes without any rhyme or reason that he or she is the Monarch of Spain, that would ordinarily not qualify as faith. If the individual is challenged as to this belief, and continues to hold it, expecting eventually to be acknowledged as heir to the Bourbon throne, then, but only then, the belief might be judged as representing an article of (secular) faith. It is only with respect to certain kinds of beliefs held independently of the usual types of justification under certain circumstances that we speak of faith. If we believe that Jesus will return and bring the Kingdom of God to rule on Earth, that Allah disapproves of alcohol, gambling, and religious images of persons, and will eventually reward the faithful in a paradise of fountains and greenery, or if we simply believe without sound argument or other epistemic warrant that God exists, that our libeled father, accused of wrongdoing, will ultimately be vindicated, that a career in art will finally start to pay off, or that justice will prevail in the prosecution of those who have traitorously betrayed the cause, then we should be unconditionally patient in waiting for these results, expecting them to occur without possessing any solid reason to which we might point beyond our faith itself in anticipating that this is how things will ultimately turn out. We can then enjoy calm resignation, secure in our faith. Through all uncertain circumstances we will not lose patience in the events surrounding our life, believing that the outcome accepted on faith will sooner or later, even if not in our lifetime, eventually come to pass.

If we think of faith as *unconditional* patience, moreover, then the first aspect of faith identified in the proposed analysis is clearly satisfied. It follows immediately in that case that one's patience must be independent

of reason and epistemic evidence. Faith must be insulated and protected from ordinary standards of judgment. Hence, the faithful, while or insofar as they remain faithful, will not be swayed by contravening opinions or any other doxastic challenges to the content of their faith. The same should be true regardless of whether one's faith is theistic or atheistic, pertaining to religious or non-religious beliefs. The second aspect of faith, involving its generally positive orientation, sometimes akin to mere wishful thinking, is also readily accommodated within the proposed definition. Patience, conditional or unconditional, is generally directed toward something positive. We might be patient and long-suffering when enduring an affliction, whether political, psychological or pathological. This state of mind translates immediately into our enduring the pain in expectation of relief, even if it comes only with death, which, in patiently awaiting its arrival, we may come to see as something positive, a departure from a pattern of misery. We do not ordinarily speak of patiently awaiting pestilence, a tax audit, or dismissal from work, unless we either see these things as somehow intrinsically positive, or unless we regard it as positive to have the suspense lifted as to whether and what is finally going to happen, as when the result has plainly become inevitable. We are generally patient in awaiting something good. Where something bad or negative is concerned, we may be uncomplaining, even serene, despite adversity, but patience seems to be a rather different state of mind. We are patient when we want something to happen and its slow arrival becomes a trial that we endure without complaining as we wait to experience the expected benefits. The less patient among us under such circumstances may wonder whether the event will ever occur, which of course it may not. Those with strong faith in the sense of unconditional patience do not experience moments of doubt, but wait in the psychologically certain expectation that the positive outcome anticipated will either take place in due course or is indefinitely delayed for a very good reason that is beyond our knowing and control, and that does not dilute the faithful's persistence, fortitude, and staying power. This unifying aspect of faith as unconditional patience corresponds to Sessions' Personal Relationship, Belief, Attitude and Confidence Models.

Patience is also generally future-directed, as we have remarked concerning the concept of faith. We can have faith that the events described in a holy book are true, or that a friend has not betrayed us at some time in the past; yet these applications of the concept are also plausibly construable as future-directed. Typically what we mean when we say that we have faith that, say, the Biblical account of Genesis is true, is that nothing will ever occur to falsify its testimony, or that it will someday be validated. When

we maintain in like fashion that we have faith in a friend's not having betrayed us in the past, our belief is similarly interpretable as meaning that we will never come to learn at any point in the future that such a betrayal ever took place. To the extent that explanations in this category seem incredible, strained, or far-fetched, to that extent we are equally entitled to question whether patience is generally future-directed. We may suppose this to be true in the ordinary sense of the word and in everyday reasoning about faith and patience, but where there are clearcut exceptions, there appears to be no justification to distinguish between faith and unconditional patience on the grounds that one is and the other is not future-directed. To whatever extent we consider faith to be future-directed, we can interpret any instance of faith as unconditional patience without doing violence to intuitive meaning. If, to hedge our bets, we encounter cases of faith that are irreducibly past-directed, we still need not abandon the analysis of faith as unconditional patience, provided we can appropriately adjust the concept of patience to include patience toward the past as well as future. If I can intelligibly say that I have *faith*, as opposed merely to unsubstantiated belief (with which faith, as we have noted, is sometimes confused), for example, that Jesus walked on the Sea of Galilee without pontoons and raised Lazarus from the dead, then I can similarly have unconditional patience that nothing will ever occur to make me renounce these beliefs. Faith in what is to happen to us, our loved ones and the world at large, seems generally intended as unconditional patience in the occurrence of a future positive outcome. As such, faith in both the theistic and atheistic sense is unconditional patience concerning what will happen at some time in the future. This aspect of faith as unconditional patience corresponds to Sessions' Attitude, Confidence, and Hope Models, and, somewhat less directly also, to his Devotion Model.[13]

Faith, we have further said, can be a powerful force in a person's life. There is a body of anecdotal evidence to this effect that should not be ignored philosophically in working out the concept's meaning. We are properly skeptical about the claims that faith can literally move mountains, except through the ordinary cause and effect mechanisms involving potentially faith-inspired motivations of will to mobilize such mundane instruments of mountain-moving as dynamite and bull-dozers. What we learn about the ability of faith to move mountains is that its power finally boils down to a strength enabling the faithful, who might not otherwise

13. See J. Robert Ross, "Historical Knowledge as Basis for Faith," *Zygon* 13, no. 3 (1978), doi:10.1111/j.1467-9744.1978.tb00335.x.

undertake a particular course of action, to do what other less powerfully motivated people with the appropriate equipment are also physically capable of doing. Attributing any further or greater power to faith is unsupported by the empirical facts. The force of motivation and strength of faith-driven will-power should nevertheless not be downplayed. Faith can be a dynamic contributor to the process of difficult decision-making in the face of life's challenges, channeling an individual's energies toward the accomplishment of goals that those lacking faith might, practically speaking, never be capable of achieving, as well as to enduring even the most extreme unpleasantness with calm acceptance.

If we inquire after the source of faith's power, we can undoubtedly find it in the fact that faith aims at an unconditionally patient expectation of a positive eventuality occurring in a future state. Psychologically, believing independently of all contrary evidence and in the absence of reason in certain extreme forms of doxastic-epistemic faith that a given set of events must eventually come about, possibly as the result of divine will or supernatural agency, can provide a strong incentive to work cooperatively toward that end. What defeats us in failed endeavors is often the lack of conviction that we can or will succeed. If we truly believe that a particular purpose is guaranteed to triumph, then we can with virtually infinite patience continue to pour our efforts into trying to bring it about. If patience in an outcome is fully unconditional, then what appear to be setbacks and impediments will not matter in the slightest to the faithful. Unconditional patience in the eventuality of a given occurrence, such as victory in battle or the return of a savior to earth, can admit of degree, corresponding to different degrees of faith. Peter's faith might be rock solid, while Thomas's faith might require epistemic support from direct sense experience, a finger thrust into the nail-hole driven into a crucified man's palm, or a healed lance wound between the ribs. Many persons might fall somewhere in between these extremes. Unconditional patience as an analysis of the concept of faith is an ideal. As with all ideals, the real world seldom measures up to its exacting standards, although outstanding examples of near approximation occasionally come to light. We can have faith as tiny, analogically speaking, as a mustard seed, or as big as a coconut. We are told in holy scripture that faith no greater than a mustard seed is all that we need in order to accomplish great things. For, like a seed, no matter how small, faith takes root and sends forth shoots and branches, and can bear surprising fruit.

The power of faith is often demonstrated in collisions between cultures representing different faiths. We see this in historical and contemporary

confrontations between Islam and Christianity. The two sides are often equally faithful, albeit to different conceptions of the divine, or to different political principles, an alternative science and technology, moral or cultural preference or sense of superiority, or other distinct objects of faith. In all such contests, a total lack of faith can prove a significant disadvantage, if, as interpreted here, it entails the absence of conviction we have analyzed as unconditional patience in the eventuality of a positive future state. It is the firm belief in such a result that can motivate and empower the faithful in ways that persons without such support must try if they can and to the best of their abilities to succeed in lieu of faith's psychological support. This aspect of faith as unconditional patience is related in obvious ways to Sessions' Attitude, Confidence, Devotion and Hope Models.

Finally, fifth, we consider faith as steadfastness. Here it is axiomatic that to be steadfast is to possess patience. The degree of steadfastness associated with faith is naturally understood as unconditional. If we are steadfast, then we will not waver even when assaulted by contrary opinions, difficult circumstances, or threats to our personal well-being. We may think of the martyrs of great world religions, whose faithfulness is tested to the extreme by trials in which they remained steadfast. Martyrs are steadfast when they are patient to such a degree that they are able to endure persecution and physical suffering for the sake of their beliefs. What martyrs are waiting for under such circumstances, on the present interpretation, is release from pain, possibly for justice, and often for the truth of their religious beliefs to be recognized and put into practice, even if they believe that they must wait for these benefits until the end of life or unfolding of an afterlife. As a feature also of its psychological power, some persons of faith may even seek out opportunities for martyrdom as an opportunity to demonstrate their unwavering patience in the face of severe adversity. They may have endless unconditional fortitude under duress, because they expect to be rewarded in another way, and because they are not impatient for what they consider to be a more valuable reward in comparison with the transitory kinds of recompense available to the less faithful who choose a path of pleasure and compromise. This final aspect of faith as unconditional patience is related to Sessions' Personal Relationship, Attitude, and Devotion Models.[14]

14. Clive Staples Lewis remarks on a related aspect of faith in "On Obstinacy in Belief," in *The World's Last Night and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960; reprint from *The Sewanee Review* 63, no. 4 (Oct.–Dec.1955): 525–38). Compare the account of steadfastness in Donald D. Evans, *Faith, Authenticity, and Morality* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

9. Implications of Faith as Unconditional Patience

Faith is a real phenomenon with real psychological effects, even when its objects are illusory. The same is true of other kinds of intentional psychological states, including but not limited to belief, doubt, fear, love, hate, dread, anticipation, disappointment. The psychological fact that I am disappointed in having lost my lucky silver dollar might lead me to do any number of things, even if it is not a fact that I have lost but merely misplaced my lucky silver dollar. Similarly, a nation's collective fear concerning an international communist (or capitalist, etc.) conspiracy might cause the individuals and institutions that comprise a society to do many extraordinary things, even if there is in fact no international communist (capitalist) conspiracy.[15]

Faith, in and of itself, regardless of size, strength, level or degree of conviction, interpreted as unconditional patience in the truth of beliefs or outcome of events, is an intentional psychological phenomenon. As such, faith provides no evidence in support of theism, and reflective theists, whether or not their belief in God is held as an article of faith or as a conclusion of reasoning (say, following Anselm's, René Descartes's or G.W. Leibniz's version of the ontological proof), or inference from empirical evidence (as in William Paley's argument from design), should not expect faith by itself to provide further validation. Faith, in contrast, can be supplemented by reasoning and evidence, but it is not even a faulty substitute for the epistemic values that reasoning and evidence confer in justifying belief. Rather, faith, if our efforts at analysis are pointing in the right direction, is a state of mind that the faithful maintain independently of and often despite contrary facts and inference.

If we try to say that the existence of faith is itself a kind of proof that the contents of a proposition taken on faith is true, that faith would not exist were there not something more substantial behind it, then we are in the first place appealing to the existence of a psychological fact and from what can be inferred from it in order to reach a conclusion by a method of thinking to which faith itself must be indifferent. We thereby encounter the difficulty of trying to explain how it is that persons of distinct but often equally ardent faiths can so often believe diametrically opposed logically incom-

15. Among other sources, see Donald M. MacKinnon, "Does Faith Create its Own Objects?," *Religious Studies* 26, no. 4 (1990), doi:10.1017/S0034412500020643; Jerry S. Clegg, "Faith," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1979), doi:10.2307/20009762. A book-length discussion of the epistemic value of faith in light of skeptical challenges is offered by Gary Gutting, *Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982).

patible propositions. We might look for commonalities among the objects of faith, suggesting that many cultures in different ways have recognized the existence of a supreme being or beings, however dimly glimpsed. The suggestion might then be made that the low probability of large numbers of individuals historically, some of whom are not interconnected by ties of cultural diffusion, arriving at such similar beliefs, strongly suggests that there must exist something objective corresponding to the articles of faith to which faithful persons in these societies are somehow disjointly attuned.

Efforts of this kind to attach epistemic significance to faith are also inconclusive. First, it is important not to underestimate the differences between various kinds of beliefs accepted as articles of faith. Not all faithful persons have been theists, and not all theists have accepted even remotely similar beliefs. Faith as a phenomenon is much more diverse than this effort to salvage epistemic import for the objects of faith begins to indicate. Persons of ability can even have faith in themselves, in opposition to naysayers, which at some time might be rewarded through hard work and luck, and which in other instances may turn out to be entirely misplaced. The deeper epistemic question is whether faith as a state of mind maintained independently of reason and evidence could possibly have any positive implications in matters of reason or evidence.[16]

Faith itself is sometimes a powerful psychological phenomenon. It is another question altogether whether the fact that someone has faith implies anything whatsoever about the truth of what is believed by faith. If faith, as we have argued, is independent of reason and evidence, then it is hard to see how the fact that someone or any number of persons have theistic faith could possibly lend epistemic support to the truth of theism. There may be interesting anthropological, psychological and sociological factors

16. Important discussions of these frequently discussed topics are provided by John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge: A Modern Introduction to the Problem of Religious Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957); Carl Michalson, *The Rationality of Faith: An Historical Critique of the Theological Reason* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963); Donald F. Henze, "Faith, Evidence, and Coercion," *Philosophy* 42, no. 159 (1967), doi:10.1017/S0031819100000887; Steven Matthysse, "Faith and Evidence," *Religious Studies* 4, no. 2 (1969), doi:10.1017/S0034412500003644; Donald R. Duff-Forbes, "Faith, Evidence, Coercion," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 47, no. 2 (1969), doi:10.1080/00048406912341211; Stephen T. Davis, *Faith, Skepticism, and Evidence: An Essay in Religious Epistemology* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1978); Anthony Kenny, *Faith and Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Richard Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 1981); Ronald H. Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1988). See also the papers collected by Cornelius F. Delaney, ed., *Rationality and Religious Belief* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

at work in the statistical concurrence of certain types of faith, but as to the existence of a divine being, the mere fact that many people accept theism in any of the large number of forms belief in gods or God has taken does not contribute anything at all toward the credibility of this widespread article of faith. It would be possible and, in the absence of a standard against which to measure the probability of the thing, by no means improbable, for every human being to have faith in the same or roughly the same theistic beliefs without those beliefs being true. If this is correct, as certainly seems to be the case, then faith is not only independent of and hence unsupported by reason and evidence in run-of-the-mill epistemic justification contexts, but the fact of faith, by virtue of its epistemic independence, equally provides no basis for the truth of what is believed as itself an act of faith.[17]

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