Does Faith Require Belief?

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Abstract. Does faith require belief? If faith is identical with belief, then it does. But faith is not identical with belief any sort. Of course, even if faith is not identical with belief, faith might still be partly constituted by belief, or require it. In this essay, I assess seven reasons to think faith requires belief. Along the way, I discuss having faith in someone, having faith that something is the case, being a person of faith, believing by faith, and believing a person.

Key words: faith, belief, doubt, assumption, acting on an assumption

Alex Rosenberg began a recent debate with William Lane Craig on the question “Is Faith in God Reasonable?” by declaring that it was impossible for faith in God to be reasonable since “by definition, faith is belief in the absence of evidence”.¹ Steven Pinker agrees: faith, he wrote in the Harvard Crimson, is “believing something without good reasons to do so”.² Not to be outdone by his fellow “brights,” Richard Dawkins goes one step further: “Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence”.³ But no one goes as far as Mark Twain, according to whom faith is “believing what you know ain’t so”.⁴ These cultured despisers of religion share the idiosyncratic view that faith is, as a matter of necessity, epistemically defective.⁵ But they share another view that is far from idiosyncratic, the view that faith is propositional belief.

Some philosophers of religion agree with this second view. Take Eleonore Stump, for example. Commenting on Aquinas’s theory of the atonement, she writes:

To ally oneself with Christ’s making satisfaction involves, first of all, having faith in his passion. That is, it involves believing that the incarnate Christ suffered for the sake of humans and in their stead. But this belief by itself is not enough…. So, Aquinas says, for Christ’s passion to be applied to a person, that person must have both faith and charity. He must not only believe that Christ has
made satisfaction for his sin; he must also have the love of God and goodness which makes him glad of the fact....

In this passage, Stump identifies a person’s “faith in [Christ’s] passion” with her *believing that* he suffered for the sake of humans and in their stead, with her *believing that* he has made satisfaction for her sin. More accurately, Stump says that this is Aquinas’s view. Since she says nothing critical of it, and since she is a well-known disciple of the Angelic Doctor, I will take the liberty to attribute to her what she regards as his view.

A handful of Aquinas scholars have told me that Stump does not understand Aquinas, and several of her students have told me that she’s speaking imprecisely. That’s a bit brash, however. Professor Stump understands Aquinas as well as anyone. As for her graduate students, I’ll leave it to her to respond to them. I can only say that, in my experience, she strives to live up to the highest standards of precision; and, in my opinion, she succeeds at least as well as any other philosopher or theologian. More importantly, she is not alone in her understanding of Aquinas. Richard Swinburne, among others, tells us that “the Thomistic view of faith” “is the view that, with one addition, and two qualifications, to have faith in God is simply to have a belief-that, to believe that God exists.” The addition “is that to have faith in God, you have to believe not merely that there is a God, but certain other propositions as well,” “propositions about what God is like and what acts He has done, and you have to believe these latter propositions on the ground that God has revealed them”. The first qualification “is that the belief that is involved is a belief which does not amount to scientific knowledge (*scientia*)” and the second qualification is that faith is not, as such, “meritorious” since it is meritorious only if it is “voluntary” and “formed by love [*caritas*]”. But, as Swinburne himself notes, neither the addition nor the two qualifications undermine his claim that, for Aquinas, “faith by itself is a very intellectual thing,” “a matter of having certain beliefs,” a “theoretical conviction”. So Stump is not the only one to think that, according to Aquinas, faith—note well: faith, *not* faith “perfected and formed by charity” (ST II, II xxx)—is propositional belief. But whether Stump and Swinburne correctly understand Aquinas is not my main concern. My main concern is the view they attribute to him.

Notice that Stump, Aquinas, and Rosenberg speak of what I call *objectual faith*, the psychological attitude/state/stance picked out by paradigmatic uses of the locution “S has faith in x,” where x takes as instances an expression that refers to a person, or some activity of a person, as in “He has faith in God,” or “She has faith in Christ’s having made satisfaction for her sins”. And they identify objectual faith with propositional belief, as in “He
believes that God exists,” or “She believes that Christ has made satisfaction for her sins”. But not only do some
brights and Roman Catholics make this identity claim, so do some Protestants. For example, in the aforementioned
debate with Rosenberg on the question of whether faith in God is reasonable, Craig launched into a defense of the
proposition that belief that God exists is reasonable. Similarly, Biola Open’s introduction to an online recording of
that debate states that “the reasonableness of faith in God” is an “all important and pervasive question” and “[o]ne’s
answer to it will impact nearly all other beliefs one holds” (my emphases). It’s not too much of a stretch to say that,
according to many people, both secular and religious, objectual faith is identical with propositional belief.

The problem, however, is that this identification is false. We can begin to see why when we notice that an
instance of objectual faith is relative to some domains but not others. For example, I have faith in my sixteen year
old sons—as students, and even as drivers—but not as horticulturalists. With that in mind, notice that, in so far as
faith in someone is a lot like trust in them, you can have faith in someone, to do or be thus-and-so, only if you are
disposed to rely on them to do or be thus-and-so. But notice also that you can believe that they will do or be thus-
and-so without that disposition. That’s why, for example, you might believe that your neighbor is a dentist, but lack
faith in her, as a dentist—because you are not disposed to rely on her as a dentist.

But perhaps there is another identification in the neighborhood that would be useful for Stump, Aquinas,
Rosenberg, et al. For we not only say things of the form “S has faith in x,” we also say things of the form “S has
faith that p,” as when we say “She has faith that God will keep his promises” or “He has faith that the basic Jewish
story is true”. In such cases, a proposition is the object of the attitude in question, not a person. Call this
propositional faith.

What’s the relationship between objectual faith and propositional faith? Perhaps it’s identity. There is a
certain plausibility to this suggestion. After all, isn’t it quite natural to identify faith in something, as thus-and-so,
with faith that it is thus-and-so, or to wholly understand the former in terms of the latter? What difference could
there be between, say, having faith in God, to exercise providence, and having faith that God is providential? How
else could that be understood?

I tend to think there is a difference, that we should understand objectual faith as involving something more
than propositional faith. To be sure, this something more may well tend to be present in instances of both types, but
we can imagine otherwise, as when, for example, I have faith that Anne’s baby will survive his hazardous birth, but
I do not have faith in him, as anything, since I am not disposed to rely on him in any way. And the same goes for
having faith in God, to exercise providence. Such cases illustrate that propositional faith is distinct from objectual faith. Might Stump and likeminded pisteologists yet insist that propositional faith is identical with propositional belief? Perhaps so. At any rate, to my mind, it is more plausible to suppose that faith that Christ has made satisfaction is identical with believing that he has done so, that faith that Anne’s baby will survive his hazardous birth is identical with believing that he will, and, more generally, that faith that p is identical with belief that p. However, despite this increase in plausibility, this identification is also false, as can be seen by two reasons.

First, you can believe something and not be for its truth, you can believe something and not look on it with favor, but you cannot have faith that something is so and not be for its truth, you cannot have faith that something is so and not look on it with favor. This is why we do not have faith that terrorism will occur frequently in the 21st century, although we might well believe that it will. To be for the truth of a proposition minimally requires regarding its truth as good or desirable, and we do not regard the truth of that proposition as good or desirable.11

Second, you can believe something even though you have no tendency at all to feel disappointment upon learning that it’s not so, but you cannot have faith that something is so without at least some tendency to feel disappointment upon learning that it’s not so. That’s because you can have faith that something is so only if you care that it is so, with positive valence; and you can care that something is so, with positive valence, only if you have some tendency to feel disappointment upon learning that it’s not so.

One might well agree that neither objectual faith nor propositional faith can be identified with propositional belief. Even so, Stump and company might insist that they are partly constituted by propositional belief. Nothing I’ve said precludes that possibility. Moreover, it is much more plausible that, in general, faith in someone or someone’s having done something is partly constituted by belief that they exist or that they have done it, and it is much more plausible that, in general, faith that something is so is partly constituted by belief that it is so. In what follows, I’ll focus on the second of these theses. What I have to say about it will, mutatis mutandis, apply to the first. But before I turn to that task, however, five preliminary observations are in order.

First, in addition to objectual and propositional faith, there is the faith involved in being a person of faith, that is, being a person who takes up or finds herself with an overall stance or orientation toward matters that govern important aspects of her life, one that structures those aspects into a unified whole, one that involves a disposition to retain that stance/orientation in the face of difficulties in living it out.1 Although when we speak of a person of faith, we typically have something distinctively religious in mind, there are secular manifestations of this sort of faith as
well, as many Marxists and brights illustrate, to cite just two examples. Call this sort of faith global faith. Robert Audi suggests, in passing, that we might understand global faith wholly in terms of objectual and propositional faith. That’s a mistake, in my opinion. That’s because neither of them have the unification distinctive of global faith. For example, I might have faith that the basic Christian story is true or I might have faith in Christ, but my faith—that or faith—in might be so compartmentalized that it does not govern most matters of importance to me, as witnessed by my failure to engage deeply in Christian practices and Christian approaches to moral, social, and political matters. We all know people like this. So, it seems to me, global faith is not to be understood wholly in terms of objectual and propositional faith. We have, therefore, at least three basic sorts of faith: objectual faith, propositional faith, and global faith.

Second, sometimes we speak of believing on faith or believing by faith or taking on faith. Focus on the first for a moment, believing on faith, as illustrated by “She believes on faith that her son will be rescued”. We can understand this expression as attributing to her faith in someone who testifies to her son being rescued, and relying on their word to believe that to which they have testified. In other words, believing something on faith involves faith in someone or, alternatively, faith that they are trustworthy with respect to that to which they testify. Thus, believing something on faith does not involve any distinctive sort of faith in addition to the three basic sorts I have mentioned. The same goes for believing by faith and taking something on faith.

Third, sometimes we speak of believing x, where x is a person, as in “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). According to Elizabeth Anscombe, there was a time when “faith” was “used with just this meaning, believing someone”. This use of “faith,” she continues, involves “necessarily always also ‘believing that’,” and so, she says, in order to distinguish it from “believing in,” which is often distinguished from “believing that,” it is better expressed as “S believes x that p,” which she understands as “S ‘trusting [x] for the truth’ about p”.

Fourth, if x is partly constituted by y, then x requires y. For example, if water is partly constituted by oxygen, then water requires oxygen; and if knowledge is partly constituted by belief, then knowledge requires belief. Likewise, if faith that p is partly constituted by belief that p, then faith that p requires belief that p. But it is not the
case that, if x requires y, then x is partly constituted by y. Water requires gravity, but water is not partly constituted by gravity; and knowledge requires the existence of minds, but knowledge is not partly constituted by the existence of minds. Likewise, even if faith that p requires belief that p, it might be that faith that p is not partly constituted by belief that p. Upshot: the requirement relation is weaker than the partial constitution relation. Thus, the claim that faith that p requires belief that p is weaker than the claim that faith that p is partly constituted by belief that p. For the sake of charity, in what follows I will focus more narrowly on the weaker claim: faith that p requires belief that p. If it is false, then so is the claim that faith that p is partly constituted by belief that p.

Finally, someone might hear the denial of this claim as the claim that you can have faith that p even though you don’t believe p. That much would be correct, but people sometimes hear something else, namely the claim that you can have faith that p even though you disbelieve p. This last claim is incorrect, in my book. Rather, we should understand the claim that you can have faith that p even though you don’t believe that p as the claim that you can have faith that p even though you lack belief of p, which is not at all the same as disbelieving p.

So the view now under discussion is this:

**Faith Requires Belief.** S has faith that p only if S believes that p.

You cannot have faith that p without belief that p. Why suppose that’s true? I know of seven philosophical reasons.

**Reason 1.** Our first reason begins with the observation that there is an important connection between faith and the emotions. Robert Audi writes:

Even outside religious contexts, faith tends to eliminate or diminish fear and other negative emotions concerning the same object, such as anxiety, depression, and anger. This seems to be a manifestation of the sense in which faith that something is so is a kind of trusting that it is. Like hope, belief, even if it has the same content as hope, need not have this tendency, nor is belief required in an attitude that can have such an effect. Belief that I will go through surgery with minimal discomfort and ultimate success is compatible with anxiety about the envisaged events and may imply no significant tendency to be free of it; faith that I will achieve this tends to reduce such emotions and does not allow as much residual anxiety.14
And Lindsay Rettler observes that “[h]aving faith helps people feel peaceful, it makes them happier…. Further, Rettler writes:

When a person has faith that p, she has settled the matter in a way that is reflected in, or indicated by, her feelings and actions… For example, a person who has faith that she will do well on her piano performance tends to be very calm and collected prior to the performance…. [O]ne who has faith that p tends to experience various emotions made fitting by the truth of p: having faith that things will work out fosters contentment, having faith that God will take care of me fosters peace, having faith that my spouse will surprise me for my birthday fosters excitement, and so forth.15

In my opinion, the main point of these words from Audi and Rettler are true.

Now consider the following argument for Faith Requires Belief: someone who has faith that p tends to have more peace or serenity, or at least diminished fear and anxiety, in the presence of risk. But that’s not possible unless one believes that p. Thus, propositional faith requires belief of its object. By way of illustration, consider someone who is resolved to leap over a crevice to seek help for an injured friend but who is very anxious about the risk involved. His friend might enjoin her to “have faith” that she will clear it. His enjoinder to have faith is entirely appropriate, but it is appropriate only if her having faith diminishes significant anxiety; and, her faith can diminish significant anxiety only if she believes that she will clear the crevice. What goes for this illustrative case goes for every other one.16

Reply: What should we make of this argument and its illustration? Regarding the illustration, it seems false to me that, if she has faith that she can clear the crevice, then her faith can diminish her anxiety only if she believes that she will clear it. Belief that it is likely that she will clear it can diminish her anxiety too. Indeed, I would think that, so long as she regarded the attempt as well worth the risk, her faith that she will clear the crevice can diminish her anxiety even if her faith had as its positive cognitive stance the belief that it’s about as likely as not that she will clear the crevice. And this point generalizes to the argument itself. Even if faith that p necessarily brings with it a tendency to diminished anxiety, or increased peace and serenity, when there’s a perceived serious risk that not-p, it is possible for one to have the required tendency when one lacks belief that p.
Reason 2. Robert Adams offers a second reason for Faith Requires Belief when he focuses on a species of propositional faith he calls “moral faith” which, he says, is typified by faith that a terminally ill friend’s life is still worth living. It is characteristic of such faith, he says, that one recognize “the possibility of error,” that one “recognize that [one] could be tragically mistaken, mistaken in a way characteristic of false beliefs”. He continues:

We do give and entertain reasons for and against items of moral faith…. And the structure of giving and entertaining reasons for them is at least very similar to the structure of reasoning about other sorts of belief. In thinking about items of moral faith, one uses logic, one aims at consistency and at coherence with one's beliefs on other subjects, and one is responsive to one's sense of ‘plausibility,’ as we sometimes put it. All of that is grounds for classifying moral faith as a sort of belief.

Reply. I don’t see it. I don’t see why “[a]ll of that is grounds for classifying moral faith as a sort of belief,” nor do I see why it is grounds for thinking that propositional faith more generally is “a sort of belief”. It will take me a little while to explain.

Although propositional faith involves what I will call a “positive cognitive stance” toward its object—after all, you can’t have faith that p if you disbelieve p—something other than propositional belief can constitute that positive cognitive stance. There are several alternatives in the literature. To get at the one I have in mind, consider two cases.

The defensive captain. The captain of the defensive team is trying to figure out what play the opposing quarterback will call next. From his experience of playing against him and his coach, and given the current situation, it seems most likely to him that, of the credible options, he will call a plunge into the middle of the line by the fullback. Does the captain believe that this is the play he will call? No. Who can predict exactly what a quarterback will do in a given situation? The captain’s experience prevents him from believing any such thing. Nevertheless, he acts on the assumption that he will call a fullback plunge and he aligns his defense on that basis.

The army general. Consider an army general facing enemy forces. She needs to act. Her scouts give some information about the disposition of the enemy but not nearly enough to believe that they are situated one
way rather than another. So she assumes that they are situated in the way that seems to her the least false of the options she finds credible given the information she has. Then, acting on that assumption, she disposes her forces in the way that seems most likely to be effective.\textsuperscript{18}

I want to make six observations about these two cases.

First, we can easily imagine that neither of our protagonists believes the target proposition. The defensive captain does not believe that the quarterback will call a fullback plunge, as evidenced by the fact that he lacks the dispositional profile of belief: he has no tendency to assert that the quarterback will call a plunge if asked, no tendency to mentally assent to that proposition if it is brought to mind, and no tendency to be surprised upon suddenly learning that the quarterback made another call. The army general does not believe that the enemy forces are situated thus-and-so, as evidenced by the same fact: she has no tendency to assert that they are disposed thus-and-so if asked, no tendency to mentally assent to that proposition if it is brought to mind, and no tendency to be surprised upon suddenly learning that they are disposed otherwise. At any rate, it is easy for me to imagine them as fitting this description.

Second, we can easily imagine that each of our protagonists is in doubt about whether the target proposition is true. That’s because each of them thinks that, given what he or she has to go on, the target proposition is only most likely or the least false among the credible options, which is compatible with it being no more likely than its negation. In that case, we might easily imagine that it appears to each of them that what he or she has to go on with respect to the truth of the target proposition is roughly on a par with what he or she has to go on with respect to its falsity and, as a result, neither believes nor disbelieves it.

Third, despite their lack of belief, and despite their being in doubt, each of them acts on a certain assumption. The captain acts on the assumption that the quarterback will call a fullback plunge, the general acts on the assumption that the enemy forces are situated thus-and-so. Take note: there really is some cognitive stance that each of them acts on. Each of them assumes that some proposition is true. Call this stance “belief-less propositional assuming,” or simply “assuming” for short.

Fourth, each protagonist acts on the basis of him or her assuming something, and he or she acts in ways you would expect him or her to act given his or her assuming it, given his or her aims and the like. The captain assumes that the quarterback called a fullback plunge, so he puts six men on the line, given his aim to stop the offense. The
general assumes that the enemy is situated thus-and-so, so she disperses her troops for a pincer movement, given her aim to thwart the enemy.

Fifth, we use “assume” and its cognates in different ways. We sometimes use “assume” to refer to the cognitive stance that we are in when we take something for granted, as when we assume that the world is more than five minutes old. I do not mean to use “assume” in this way because, so used, it refers to a stance too much like belief—indeed, it just is belief, coupled with full assurance. On other occasions, we use “assume” to refer to the cognitive stance that we are in when we introduce a proposition into our thought for the purpose of considering what follows from it, as when we assume for reductio that some times are earlier than themselves. I do not mean to use “assume” in this way either because, so used, it refers to a stance that is too little like belief—indeed, it seems to be no more than a bit of mental what-if-ery. And our defensive captain and army general illustrate this point. Although each assumes the target proposition is true, neither of them believes it, with full assurance, and neither puts it forward as a mere supposition, conjecture, or hypothesis. In the sense of “assume” that I do have in mind, one can assume something without believing it and while being in doubt about it.

Sixth, since assuming of the sort in question is distinct from belief and compatible with being in doubt, we might wonder how it differs from belief and how it is similar to belief. As for difference, unlike belief that p, belief-less assuming that p is compatible with being in doubt about whether p, and since when one is in doubt about whether p, one lacks a tendency to mentally assent to p upon considering whether p, and one lacks a tendency to verbally affirm that p when asked whether p, and one lacks a tendency to be surprised upon suddenly learning not-p, it follows that the dispositional profile of belief-lessly assuming that p lacks these tendencies as well. As for similarities, like belief, belief-less assuming is a representational state with a mind-to-world direction of fit. If you assume that p, you represent that world as being such that p; and, if the world turns out not to be such that p, then your assumption is false. Moreover, like belief, belief-less assuming functions similarly to belief in reasoning and other behavior. Specifically, if one assumes that p, then, if one takes q to follow from p, one will tend to assume that q as well. And if one assumes that p, then, if one engages in practical or theoretical reasoning, one will tend to use p as a premise when appropriate. And, in general, if one assumes that p, then, given one’s goals, aversions, and other cognitive stances, one will tend to act in appropriate ways. So it is with our two protagonists. Although their assuming the target propositions lacks some dispositions definitive of belief, their assuming leads them, given their goals, to call out a particular defensive formation, or to order artillery fire, etc.
My claim, then, is this: faith that $p$ involves *some* positive cognitive stance or other toward $p$, but it does not require believing $p$; assuming $p$ can play that role.\(^{19}\)

Now let’s return to Adams. According to him, because moral faith, or perhaps propositional faith more generally, can be in error or mistaken, and because one can reflect on its plausibility, use logic, and aim for consistency and coherence with other items on which one takes a positive cognitive stance, such faith can be classified as “a sort of belief”. But, as we’ve seen, that’s not true. That’s because instances of non-doxastic assuming can be in error or mistaken; moreover, in thinking about what one has assumed, one can reflect on its plausibility, use logic, and aim for consistency and coherence with other items on which one takes a positive cognitive stance. Finally, assuming can play the role frequently assigned to belief in propositional faith. Hence, Adams’s basis for classifying moral faith, or propositional faith more generally, as a sort of belief does not support that classification.

Having said that, perhaps Adams meant to emphasize “sort of” in describing moral faith as “a sort of belief”. That is, perhaps he meant to say that there is something *akin* to belief that is required by moral faith. With this I am in full agreement. Propositional faith does seem to require a positive cognitive stance toward its object, and anything that plays that role must be *like* belief in the ways that Adams mentions. But the point remains: something other than propositional belief can play that role and, notably, non-doxastic assuming can do the job.

*Reason 3.* If you have faith that $p$, you will have a tendency to assert $p$ when asked whether $p$ (absent contravening influences). But you have that tendency only if you believe $p$. Thus, you have faith that $p$ only if you believe that $p$.\(^{20}\)

*Reply:* On my account, you can have faith that $p$ even though you lack a tendency to assert $p$ when asked whether $p$, since you can have faith that $p$ with non-doxastic assuming as its positive cognitive component, and when you assume that $p$, in the sense I have specified, you lack a tendency to assert $p$. Indeed, on my account, you can have faith that $p$ even when you only have a tendency to assert that $p$ is likely, or more likely than not, or that $p$ is the least false of the credible contrary options, and so on.

*Reason 4.* If you have faith that $p$, then you are disposed to believe $p$; and, since a disposition to believe $p$ *just is* believing $p$, you have faith that $p$ only if you believe $p$.

*Reply:* Suppose that faith that $p$ implies a disposition to believe *something*. Why can’t it be a disposition to believe that $p$ *is likely*, or *twice as likely as not*, and the like? Why does it have to be $p$? More importantly, the first premise seems false: there are positive cognitive stances other than belief that can fill in for the positive cognitive
stance required by propositional faith. For example, there is non-doxastic assuming. Finally, the second premise seems false: one can be disposed to believe p without believing p. ②¹

One might insist that, even if faith that p in general does not imply believing p, religious faith does. The next two reasons take this tack.

Reason 5. If you have religious faith that p, then you are totally committed in a practical way to p’s truth and to what you see to follow from it—even to the point of making fundamental sacrifices. But you can’t be totally committed in that way unless you believe p and what you see to follow from it. Therefore, you have religious faith that p only if you believe p. ②²

Reply: First, religious faith that p does not require a total practical commitment to p’s truth. Maybe at its best it does, but it does not as such. We must not mistake what is required by an ideal instance of a kind for what is required by a real instance of that kind. Second, religious faith that p at its best in some situations might not require a total practical commitment to p’s truth in those situations. Suppose that Abraham has serious doubts about whether following Torah will lead to a right relationship with God and God’s people, but his doubts are not so severe that he lacks faith that it will. In that case, if he were to dig in his heels and believe it with just the same degree of confidence he had before he had those doubts, he’d exhibit intellectual vice, perhaps pigheadedness or close-mindedness. In the circumstances in which he finds himself, Abraham would be an overall better person if he adopted some other positive cognitive stance that is more at home with his doubts and yet also at home with an active faith, in which case a degree of practical commitment more consonant with that stance and his doubts would be, all else being equal, more virtuous for him in his particular situation, a degree of practical commitment that falls short of “total”. Belief-less propositional assuming is such a positive cognitive stance.

Reason 6. Authentic religious faith involves a longing for God as the “all-dominating longing” of one’s life, one’s “master passion”. Belief-less religious faith would involve no such thing. It would at best involve a “longing to know whether or not God exists”. Religious faith that p, therefore, requires belief that p.

Reply: Authentic religious faith need not involve a longing for God that constitutes one’s master passion, one’s all-dominating longing. Perhaps at its best it does, but it need not as such. Again: we must not mistake the ideal for the real. Moreover, a longing for God central to one’s life can be wed to a faith that has something other than belief as its positive cognitive component; as such, a faith without belief can involve a longing for God—and not just a “longing to know whether or not God exists”—suitable to be one’s master passion.
Reason 7. A final argument for Faith Requires Belief begins by observing that people commonly think that the psychological attitude they pick out when they say things of the form “S has faith that p” requires belief that p. Just ask them! Likewise, they commonly intend to pick out something that involves belief that p when they use such talk. Furthermore, a vast rule-governed way of using faith-that talk has grown up around this thought and intention, a way of speaking that spans centuries and cultures. In that case, the way in which people commonly use “faith that p” must pick out something that requires belief that p, if it picks out anything at all. Therefore, faith that p requires belief that p.\textsuperscript{23}

Reply. Is it really true that there is a vast rule-governed way of using faith-that talk spanning centuries and cultures that has grown up around the thought that the psychological attitude those speakers pick out when they say things of the form “S has faith that p” requires belief that p, and that they intend to pick out something that requires belief that p when they use such talk? A thorough assessment of this argument would involve extensive empirical research into this question, research that has yet to be done, to my knowledge. Moreover, it would involve going into considerable detail into the nature of propositional belief, a matter on which the experts disagree sharply, as you might expect. Nevertheless, two remarks seem to be relevant.

First, suppose that the proponent of the argument means by “belief” a mental state or attitude as described by some philosopher of mind.\textsuperscript{24} Then the premise in the argument according to which people commonly think that faith requires belief seems dubious. That's because nearly every philosopher of mind understands propositional belief to be an involuntary mental state. No one can, just by an act of will, believe something that they do not already believe; and, no one can, just by an act of will, dispense with a belief that they already have. Propositional belief is evidence-sensitive in such a way that we cannot, just by an act of will, gain or lose beliefs. That's what philosophers of mind say, nearly unanimously. However, people do not—in my experience, at any rate—commonly think that the attitude they pick out with “faith that p” requires belief thought of in this way, i.e. thought of as an involuntary mental state. At least they allow that, sometimes, one can come to have faith that p by voluntarily taking up a positive cognitive stance toward p. Whether they are right or wrong on this matter is beside the point. The mere fact that they think that one can do it falsifies the premise that people commonly think that faith requires belief of its object, where “belief” is understood to mean an involuntary mental state, as described by nearly any philosopher of mind.
Second, suppose that the proponent of the argument means by “belief” a mental state or attitude not as described by philosophers of mind but rather as described by what I conjecture people commonly have in mind when they use “belief”, namely something they’d report as belief, assent, acceptance, acknowledgement, judgment, affirmation, decision, assumption, confidence, credence, trust, etc. for a long list of items that fall under the rubric of a positive cognitive stance toward a proposition. In that case, the conclusion of the argument must be modified. Instead of concluding that faith that p requires belief that p, the argument much more perspicuously concludes that faith that p requires a positive cognitive stance toward p. With this conclusion I am in complete agreement. But it does nothing to support Faith Requires Belief, at least if “belief” as it appears in that thesis is supposed to be distinguished from other positive cognitive stances one might take toward a proposition.

So, either the argument has a dubious premise or a conclusion that does not support Faith Requires Belief.

It is time to sum up. I have argued that neither objectual faith nor propositional faith is identical with propositional belief of their objects. Moreover, I have argued that all of the arguments that I know of for thinking that propositional faith is partly constituted by propositional belief of its object fail. So far as I can see, those arguments would also fail if they were changed so as to conclude that objectual faith is partly constituted by propositional belief of its object. What we need, therefore, is some better arguments for concluding that either objectual or propositional faith is partly constituted by propositional belief of its object. I look forward to seeing what those arguments might be.25

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**Endnotes**

1 Rosenberg and Craig 2013.

2 Pinker 2006.

3 [http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/r/richard_dawkins.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/r/richard_dawkins.html).


5 For criticism of the more modest view that one can have faith that something is so only if one has insufficient reason or evidence for believing it, see Howard-Snyder 2013, 368-370.


7 Swinburne 2005, 138.

8 *Op cit.* The idea that to have faith in someone involves believing something on the basis of his say-so is an old one. We find it, for example, in Augustine. It’s also puzzling. Why can’t a mother have faith in her son even though her faith does not involve believing anything about him on the basis of his say-so, or the say-so of anyone else, for that matter? After all, she doesn’t need any such thing; she knows him personally.

9 Ibid., 140-141.

10 Ibid., 141, 140, and 138.


12 Anschcombe 2008, 1.
Ibid., 2. Anscombe also distinguishes believing someone from believing in someone. To believe in x, in any sense that she’s willing to countenance, is just to believe that x exists. For a contrary view on this point, see Price 1965.

Audi 2011, 77.

Rettler 2015, 28, 17-18.

Thanks to John Pittard for bringing this line of thought to my attention. For an argument akin to Pittard’s, see Rettler 2015, chapter 3, “Control and Blame for Faith,” 17-18. For further discussion of the relationship between faith, peace, and anxiety, see Penelhum 1995, 72-74, Schellenberg 2005, 111-120, and Audi 2011, 77.

See Howard-Snyder 2013, 361.

Here I tweak Alston 1996, 10, and Alston 2007, 133.


This and the next argument appear in Audi 1991.


This and the next reason appear in Gutting 1982, 105ff.

Thanks to Frances Howard-Snyder for impressing upon me the need to address this argument.

For the sorts of accounts I have in mind, see the items listed in the bibliography of Schwitzgebel 2014.

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