The Nature of Faith

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# 1. Faith vs. Belief-that

## 1.1 From the Oxford English Dictionary (OED)

belief (noun)

1. an affirmation that something is true
2. (belief in) trust, faith, or confidence in someone or something

believe (verb)

1. accept (something) as true
2. hold (something) as an opinion

faith (noun)

1. complete trust or confidence in someone or something
2. strong belief in God or in the doctrines of a religion

faith (v)

MISSING (faith is not an English verb)

## 1.2 Faith and Belief in Philosophy

Belief-that

a propositional attitude aimed at truth

corresponds to OED’s *belief* (n) definition 1

Faith (belief-in)

trust or confidence in someone or something

corresponds to OED’s *belief* (n) definition 2

Some Quotes Representing Different View of Faith:

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

   – Hebrews 11:1, NIV

There are those who scoff at the schoolboy, calling him frivolous and shallow. Yet it was the schoolboy who said, “Faith is believing what you know ain’t so.”

   – Mark Twain, *Pudd’nhead Wilson’s Calendar*

A casual stroll through the lunatic asylum shows that faith does not prove anything.

   – Paraphrase of Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*

## 1.3

Faith … is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted in spite of your changing moods.

   – CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

# 2. Swinburne’s Analysis of Faith in the Christian Tradition

## 2.1 Thomistic View of Faith: Two Kinds of Faith

* Non-Meritorious
* Meritorious

## 2.2 Thomistic View of Faith: Non-Meritorious Faith

* to have faith is to believe certain revealed propositions (the articles of faith)
* this belief-that cannot amount to scientific knowledge (*scientia*)
* Aquinas quotes Hugh of St Victor: “faith (*fides*) is a form of mental certitude about absent realities that is greater than opinion (*opinio*) and less than scientific knowledge (*scientia*)”
* demons and scoundrels can have this kind of faith

## 2.3 Thomistic View of Faith: Meritorious Faith

* voluntary
* formed by love

## 2.4 Lutheran View of Faith

Three parts

1. Understanding (*notitia*): involves knowing the content of faith (i.e., what propositions are to be believed)
2. Assent (*assensus*): intellectual assent or belief-that (i.e., actually believing those propositions)
3. Trust (*fiducia*): trust / belief in

## 2.5 Lutheran View of Faith: Fiducia

* to act on the assumption that person will do for you what knows that you want or need, even when the evidence gives some reason for supposing that may not and where there will be bad consequences if the assumption is false.
* Problem: Even a “perfect scoundrel” can act on the assumption that God will do for her what she wants or needs.
* Solution: Add that faith includes agreement with the purposes of the person being trusted

## 2.6 Pragmatic View

* Faith is a matter of acting-as-if some proposition/set of propositions/hypothesis were true
* Similar to the Lutheran view: Understanding (*notitia*) and trust (*fiducia*) without assent (*assensus*)

# 3. Aspects of Faith (in the Christian Tradition)

## 3.1 The Cognitive Aspect of Faith

* Faith is belief-entailing
* For example:
  + The Thomistic and Lutheran views require belief in specific articles of faith.
  + The Pragmatist view requires a belief that one’s purposes in life are best fulfilled by acting-as-if those articles of faith are true.

## 3.2 The Evaluative-Affective Aspect of Faith

* Consider James 2:19 “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder” (NRSV).
* What if we translated the verse “You have faith that God is one; you do well. Even the demons have faith—and shudder.”
* Faith requires a positive attitude toward the person or object of faith

## 3.3 The Practical Aspect of Faith

* Faith influences action
* “Complete readiness to do good works” (Swinburne 2005, 141)

## 3.4 The Interpersonal Aspect of Faith

* Faith between persons requires a personal relationship
* Christian faith requires a personal relationship with God
* Friendship with God

# 4. Explicit, Pragmatic, and Implicit Faith focusing the Christian Tradition

## 4.1 Explicit Faith

* *Notitia*: knowing or understanding the content of faith
* *Assensus*: assent / belief that . . .
* *Fiducia*: trust / belief in . . .

## 4.2 Pragmatic Faith

* Understanding (*notitia*) and trust (*fiducia*) without assent (*assensus*)
* Incorporates articles of faith into practical reasoning.
* Example of Pragmatic faith in God: Living As-If
  + I do not know whether God exists, but I make decisions and live my life as if God does exists.
  + There is no better way of achieving my purposes in life than by accepting God’s authority.
  + Furthermore, I am *for* (favorably disposed to) the existence of God. If God exists, I consider God’s existence and claims on my life a good thing.

## 4.3 Implicit Faith

* Trust (*fiducia*) without Understanding (*notitia*) or Assent (*assensus*)
* “Anonymous Christian” is term used by Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner that refers a person with implicit faith
* An unwitting, but positive response to divine communication.

Through the “exercise of implicit faith one becomes the kind of person who would exercise explicit Christian faith . . . if only one came to see that certain messages (most importantly, the message that reconciliation with God is possible by pleading Christ’s passion) do in fact come from God”

   – Kevin Kinghorn (2005, 178)

## 4.4 Relationship to Christian Views on the Afterlife

Exclusivism

Only those who have explicit (or possibly pragmatic) faith in Jesus during this life will enter heaven.

Inclusivism

Those with explicit, pragmatic, or implicit faith will enter heaven.

## References

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