

## Does hope morally vindicate faith?

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Received: 23 November 2016 / Accepted: 3 December 2016 / Published online: 20 December 2016  
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**Abstract** Much attention in philosophy of religion has been devoted to the question of whether faith is epistemically rational. But is it morally and practically permissible? This paper explores a response to a family of arguments that Christian faith is morally impermissible or practically irrational, even if epistemically justified. After articulating the arguments, I consider how they would fare if they took seriously the traditional notion that genuine faith is always accompanied by Christian hope. I show how the norms of hope regulate Christian faith in such a way that it does not involve, and certainly does not entail, the morally and practically problematic attitudes and behaviors with which it is associated.

**Keywords** Faith · Hope · Bigotry · Self-deception · Tolerance

Much of the philosophical discussion of Christian faith has focused on the question of whether faith is *epistemically* rational (Dougherty 2014; Howard-Snyder 2013; McKaughan 2013; Buchak 2014, 2017). Although many arguments for the epistemic rationality of Christian faith seem successful, it remains an open question whether having and sustaining faith is permissible by the standards of practical rationality and morality. This is an open question because an epistemic permission to have faith does not guarantee a moral or prudential permission. One *could* hold the view that epistemic and moral rationality never conflict, and so if it is epistemically rational to have some attitude it must be at least morally permissible Clifford (1879). But that view is controversial: some philosophers think beliefs with immoral content, or which are immorally acquired, may be bad to hold whether or

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not they are epistemically justified—for instance, discriminatory beliefs about race or gender.<sup>1</sup> In addition, because faith is at least partly composed of an affective mental state, pro-attitude, or commitment, faith might be able to pass the test of epistemic rationality while failing the test of moral or practical rationality on account of a defect in its non-cognitive component (Buchak 2012; Kvanvig 2015).

Even if one *could* answer the moral and practical charges against Christian faith by relying on arguments for its epistemic rationality and a principle bridging the different species of rationality, such a reply would be unsatisfying, dialectically. For objections to Christian faith often invoke particular, substantive moral values and practical norms. A defense of faith routed through a bridge principle, like “if it is epistemically rational to have a disposition then the disposition is pro tanto morally permissible” would fail to directly address the moral values or norms at issue. It simply preempts the question of whether the behaviors or attitudes involved in faith are morally permissible. Faith’s accuser can always reply that she is more certain that some attitude involved in faith is morally pernicious than she is that epistemic rationality gives rise to practical or moral permissions to have that attitude.

In this essay I’ll consider four popular moral and practical arguments against Christian faith, namely, the stable disposition to believe or accept Christian teaching which Christians consider a virtue. Each starts with a generalization about the nature of Christian faith as a trait of individuals, then presents a moral or practical requirement, and shows that faith, by its very nature, makes a person who has it unable to satisfy the relevant moral or practical requirement or that faith makes it probable that a person will fail to satisfy said requirement. Thus, it must be immoral or practically irrational to have and sustain genuine Christian faith.

These arguments operate by considering faith in isolation from other psychological traits its possessor might have. In the second half of the paper I argue that the Christian has reasons to call into question this method of evaluating faith because faith is conceptually connected to another theological virtue, namely, hope. And if one cannot have Christian faith without also having hope, then to properly evaluate faith we need to take into consideration how hope regulates and shapes faith. I show how the connection between hope and faith furnishes the Christian with compelling responses to each of the four moral and practical arguments against faith.

While I’ve chosen to focus on Christian, individual faith, the responses I offer may be available to defend faith of communities and faith of other religions. To appropriate my arguments, the religion or account of the social virtue would need to posit a connection between faith and hope at least such that possessing faith significantly raises the probability that the possessor has hope. Additionally, substantive objects of hope would need to be of the right sort to diffuse the practical and moral problems I consider.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion see Bashour (2013) and Chignell (2013).

<sup>2</sup> Although we can imagine that certain religions have the resources in their central doctrines to do just that, others may have more difficulty (if, for instance, the object of hope is that each woman will be subjugated to one man in polygamous marital relationships in heaven, this will hardly get rid of the moral worry about misogyny). Thus, considerations of space limit what I can say here about religious faith more generally.

## Degradation arguments

The first species of moral argument I want to consider is what I'll call the Degradation Argument. It begins with the assumption that proper esteem for human beings is morally required. Practices that denigrate human beings or inevitably cultivate low self-esteem are morally impermissible because they violate this requirement. But Christian faith is constituted by attitudes denying the worthiness of humans on account of sin and sustained by denigrating practices that reinforce those attitudes. So, Christian faith is morally impermissible.

The idea appears in philosophy early in the modern period in Hume's *Natural History of Religion*:

From the comparison of theism and idolatry, we may form some other observations, which will also confirm the vulgar observation that the corruption of the best things gives rise to the worst. Where the deity is represented as infinitely superior to mankind, this belief, though altogether just, is apt, when joined with superstitious terror, to sink the human mind into the lowest submission and abasement, and to represent the monkish virtues of mortification, penance, humility, and passive suffering, as the only qualities which are acceptable to him (Hume 2007).

Hume complains that, for monotheistic religions that treat God as sublime and to be feared, having faith leads one to err morally in two ways. The belief about the great chasm between human beings and the divine has the untoward consequence in such religions of creating an impermissibly low esteem of oneself and fellow human beings. And the forms of worship required for faith inevitably ossify attitudes of negative appraisal towards humankind. These worship practices thus violate a moral requirement to cultivate the true moral virtues such as “courage, magnanimity, love of liberty, and all the virtues which aggrandise a people,” (ibid).

Is Hume claiming that the practices of worship proper to religions like Christianity *constitute* moral wrongdoing, or that by cultivating faith in an infinitely higher being, religious believers *raise the probability* that they will engage in morally wrong attitudes and cultivate vices?

The latter version of the Degradation Argument is empirical: faith which disposes one to believe (or accept) that God is infinitely superior to human beings and to be feared *tends* to produce morally problematic attitudes, and the activities used to sustain this belief (or acceptance) also *tend* to keep us from cultivating virtues related to esteeming and loving fellow human beings. We might say that, according to Hume, having Christian faith raises the probability that one will fail to esteem oneself and others properly. Since we are morally required to esteem ourselves and others properly, Christian faith is probably pernicious to the moral life.<sup>3</sup> Call this the Probabilistic Degradation Argument.

<sup>3</sup> The probabilistic form of the argument is arguably closer to Hume's considered view. He later maintains that there could be a “true religion” which would not lead to moral corruption, but that this is not the religion that “has commonly been found in the world. See Hume (1947, pp. 220, 223). For interpretive issues see Streminger (1989).

Proponents of the Probabilistic Degradation Argument could support their view with studies showing a correlation between religious belief and practice and low self-esteem or treatment of others. One such study circulated by media in 2015 alleged to show that “religious children are meaner than their secular counterparts,” where roughly one half of the religious participants identify as Christians (Decety et al. 2015). The researchers conclude that “religiosity affects children’s punitive tendencies,” and that religious children “frequently appear to be more judgmental of others’ actions,” (ibid). If it could be shown that Christian faith raises the likelihood of violating a moral requirement to have self-respect and appropriate esteem of others, then a person who recognized this probability would have good moral reasons to avoid cultivating Christian faith. For foreseeing that, in all likelihood, if she sustains such faith she will end up violating a moral requirement, it seems that the morally rational thing to do would be to not attempt to sustain faith.

The Probabilistic Degradation Argument is only as strong as the evidence that faith in fact regularly produces the attitudes and habits inimical to the moral life. As long as the current social science is indecisive (which it seems to be) and the instruments being used to measure faith seem questionable, it will be difficult to support the argument’s conclusion.<sup>4</sup>

A more interesting question, perhaps, is whether genuine Christian faith—faith that meets its own normative standard—*entails* immoral attitudes or requires immoral practices. When trying to answer this question, empirical claims about what religious people, who may have defective faith or no faith at all, tend to do and think could be beside the point. A stronger version of the Degradation Argument purports to show that practices that are *necessary* for sustaining the genuine virtue of Christian faith leads to improperly low esteem of ourselves and other human beings. Since there is a moral imperative against thinking too little of others, and ourselves, rightly practiced Christian faith is bound to be morally harmful.

To support the controversial premise—that genuine Christian faith requires the practices with poor moral results—the advocate of the Conceptual Degradation Argument can exploit the Christian claim that faith must be lived out and sustained by deeds. There are two tenets of faith which, when adhered to and acted on, are supposed to lead to the immoral attitude of degradation. First, Christianity holds that human nature is so fallen that we can’t conduct ourselves morally without the help of God’s grace.<sup>5</sup> Second, the penalty for moral corruption is eternal death. Together these two claims provide grounds for us to think of ourselves and other human beings as unworthy, base, and deserving of eternal death. Because Christianity commands persons to have faith that culminates in action and to bolster faith through practice, these beliefs are not inconsequential in the practical life of the person with real faith. Hume is right in singling out worship as something required of the faithful. Consider the practice of repeating to ourselves and before each other in the liturgy that we are not worthy to receive the good of eternal life—not even to

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<sup>4</sup> Growing up in a household where parents count themselves religious can hardly be said to be an accurate measure of the character trait, faith. Yet that was the measure being used in the aforementioned study.

<sup>5</sup> Rejection of this amounts to committing the Pelagian heresy.

“gather up the crumbs from under [God’s] table.” The faithful are also called to grieve human sinfulness in the practice of regular confession of sins. To reinforce the idea that all human good deeds are but filthy rags before a holy God (as Isaiah 64 makes clear), boasting of any good deeds is prohibited. In combination, these practices do look like a perfect recipe for self-degradation and dangerously low esteem of our fellow human beings.

## Non-acceptance arguments

A second species of practical argument against Christian faith scrutinizes the effects of Christian faith on attitudes towards those with other beliefs or of rival faiths in particular. Call varieties of this complaint Non-Acceptance Arguments. There are at least two ways to get a Non-Acceptance Argument going: begin with the supposition that religious diversity is a social and moral good and show that, in its pure form, Christian faith precludes one from promoting it; or, less controversially, assume that tolerance of other religious beliefs and practices is morally and socially important and show that genuine Christian faith leads one to advocate intolerant policies and institutions. Both assumptions lead to the conclusion that there is a steep moral cost to having Christian faith.

Taking the first path, assume that diversity in religious beliefs is an important moral and social good. This view has wide support in the public sphere, but also a distinguished pedigree in political philosophy. In *On Liberty*, for instance, John Stuart Mill famously explains that the best kind of community is one that encourages “experiments in living.” Having diverse worldviews and lifestyles is a good necessary for “human happiness and quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress,” (Mill 1977, p. 262). Even if this allows bad ideologies into the mix, diversity of worldviews makes progress more probable than it is in a society with a homogenous set of customs and beliefs. Or one might think, along with Michael Walzer, that ideological differences displayed in religious diversity is “a necessary condition of human flourishing, one that offers to individual men and women the choices that make their autonomy *meaningful*,” (1997, p. 11). Holding up religious diversity as a value is the most straightforward way to motivate acceptance of beliefs and lifestyles different from one’s own. As Walzer argues, when we see religious diversity as having so great a value, the appropriate reactive attitude is “enthusiastic endorsement of difference,” (ibid, Jones 2006).

Christian faith removes motivation for accepting attitudes and behaviors. Christianity is an exclusivist religion, teaching that there is only one way to flourish and to be saved, and that is by submitting one’s life to Jesus Christ. A person of genuine Christian faith must have the habit of accepting, assuming, or having some pro-attitude towards this exclusivist claim. According to orthodox Christianity, non-believers and adherents to other religions miss out on the most significant good, salvation. So religious diversity is not a moral or social value; it is a tragic consequence of the fall. Moreover, Christianity commands the faithful to seek to reduce religious diversity through proselytization. Jesus’ renowned Great Commission features the imperative that Christians “go and make disciples of all

nations.” Far from enthusiastically endorsing religious difference, then, we have a command obligating persons of faith to try to get rid of the competing religious beliefs and practices of those around them through converting their neighbors.<sup>6</sup> So, the first Non-Acceptance Argument goes, if such diversity is necessary for human individual and societal flourishing, then Christian faith seems an impediment to human and societal flourishing insofar as it disposes one to not promote, and perhaps even undermine, religious diversity.

The second path to an argument against faith relies on the weaker claim that tolerance of a variety of viewpoints is of value.<sup>7</sup> Tolerance secures equal treatment for minorities who might otherwise be subject to discrimination; it helps to curb policies that are problematically discriminatory; and it’s necessary for combating structural injustice. As a rule of thumb, then, one ought to advocate for institutions and policies that are tolerant, rather than for institutions and policies that narrow the kinds of beliefs and lifestyles citizens can have.

Christian faith seems to dispose one to adopt political perfectionism, a view that notoriously struggles to respect the value of tolerance, let alone promote it. According to standard political perfectionism, “a sound account of political morality will be informed by sound ideals of human flourishing,” and “the state is presumptively justified in favoring these ideals,” (Vallier 2013). Perfectionism tells us we ought to favor policies and institutions that are *not* neutral with respect to a variety of religious ideologies, but which most effectively bring about the objective goods contained in the ideal of human flourishing endorsed.<sup>8</sup> Because Christianity purports to offer a singular account of the ideals of human flourishing and the Christian scriptures encourage persons of faith to be politically involved, it appears that a faithful Christian ought to take a perfectionist approach to politics. But a political perfectionist neither motivates nor justifies politics and institutions that are more tolerant than others.<sup>9</sup> Thus Christian faith sets one up for failure when it comes to advocating for and promoting the political value of tolerance.

## Bigotry arguments

A more frequent criticism of Christian faith is that it gives rise to bigotry. Bigotry Arguments can be found on the Twitter feeds of your average American, in the books of the New Atheists, and in the mouths of serious philosophical critics.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I owe this point to Aaron Cobb.

<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed argument for the value of tolerance, see Babic (2004). For a Hume-inspired argument on the limited value of tolerance, see Sabl (2009).

<sup>8</sup> For more comprehensive discussion of perfectionism which admits that autonomy has value, other things equal, see Steven Wall (1998), especially Pt. II.

<sup>9</sup> As Kevin Vallier has recently argued, pace Wall, “for any moral code that requires religious toleration, there exists an intolerant code that promotes the candidate goods more effectively,” (Vallier 2013, p. 650).

<sup>10</sup> For recent examples, see Human Rights Campaign Staff (2016), Dennett (2007), Harris and Nawaz (2015). Dennett lists bigotry among the “negative effects” of religion: “bigotry, murderous fanaticism, oppression, cruelty, and enforced ignorance, to cite the obvious” (Dennett 2007, p. 56; Ciarrochi and Heaven 2012).

These arguments take aim at the faith of Christians for requiring oppositional stances towards the practices and lifestyles of others, which appears to beget hostility towards the persons that engage in those practices and lifestyles.<sup>11</sup> Since it is immoral to be bigoted and to engage in practices that reinforce bigoted attitudes, having and sustaining Christian faith is immoral.

“Bigotry” names an immoral attitude of discrimination towards others. Although there is a live debate about what precisely demarcates an attitude as an instance of bigotry, it will not be worth digressing here to settle on a specific conception of bigotry; a general picture of the attitude and actions that plausibly fit the bill will do. In a recent article, William Ramsey argues persuasively that the negative moral dimension of bigoted attitudes has to do first, with the reasons for which the attitudes are formed and maintained (*ibid*). A bigoted person’s prejudicial attitudes do not have a proper basis. Second, bigotry targets people, not ideas. It involves hostility towards people.

A problem with Christian faith, according to the empirical version of the Bigotry Argument, is that it can easily generate disrespectful attitudes and behaviors towards those whose actions are viewed as sinful or morally degenerate. For example, Christians who believe that abortion is wrong can often be seen interfering with that practice directly, for instance, picketing Planned Parenthood facilities, or indirectly, writing and lobbying legislators or shaming medical professionals who participate in abortions. Richard Dawkins argues that “someone afflicted with the mental virus of faith...may find himself behaving intolerantly towards vectors of rival faiths” because he has been primed to do so by religious upbringing. Dawkins says that faith often manifests itself in hostility towards “other modes of thought that are potentially inimical to his faith,” and in extreme cases that hostility breeds physical violence—murder or suicide missions (1993). If faith does raise the probability of being a bigot, and bigotry ought to be avoided, then we have moral reasons against having and sustaining Christian faith.

Much like the Probabilistic Degradation Argument, the Empirical Bigotry Argument relies on a premise that may be difficult to verify, as it requires showing a causal connection—not merely a correlation—between faith and bigoted behavior and attitudes. What if the human tendency to discriminate improperly and engage in bigoted behavior against those unlike us can no more be traced back to religion than to secular ideologies, like fascism or imperialism? Someone’s being a Christian believer might not actually raise the probability of her being bigoted.

A better version of the Bigotry Argument carefully distinguishes between genuine and distorted faith. One reason for thinking genuine faith—faith which lives up to Christianity’s normative standards—would inevitably lead to bigotry is this: If one has faith in the God of Christianity, then one must oppose practices God opposes out of loyalty to God. The Israelites were regularly being commanded to detest the idol-worship of the nations around them. Suppose that Christian revelation teaches that God opposes practice P. And suppose some non-believers engage in P. Christian faith

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<sup>11</sup> For instance, Francis Collins was accused of holding bigoted attitudes towards atheism. William Ramsey argues that this way of speaking is misleading because bigoted attitudes cannot take beliefs as their objects; rather, they must take persons as their objects Ramsey (2013).

would then require taking up opposition to the practice of P by the non-believers. The problem is that, psychologically, it is exceedingly difficult and perhaps impossible for us to condemn the sin but not the sinner, as the saying goes. We tend not to show sympathy or favor towards people whose practices we condemn. Thus, hostility can result not from an overt choice to be hostile to a person, but rather from the decision to staunchly oppose her actions or way of life. What's worse, practitioners of P strongly identify as such, so an attack on their lifestyle is taken up as a direct attack on their identity. In these cases, it may not be possible to separate out hostility towards P and felt hostility on the part of the practitioners of P.

William Ramsey's recent discussion of bigotry offers helpful examples:

If, say, certain religions include the view that women are inferior to men, then the believers who embrace this view would certainly qualify as adopting a form of misogynistic bigotry...If these views actually stemmed from some religious doctrine, then on my view it would be appropriate to condemn both the religious doctrine and its promoters as bigoted (2013, p. 146).

What makes the misogyny an instance of bigotry is that the religious belief gives rise to "unfair animus" against a certain group. Another case Ramsey discusses is bigotry against those practicing homosexuality. The Christian scriptures, as they have been interpreted in many denominations of Christianity, indicate that God opposes homosexual activity.<sup>12</sup> Out of loyalty for God, then, persons of Christian faith are required to oppose homosexual activity. But many non-believers engage in or are defenders of the practice of homosexual activity. Not only this—but many of those practicing homosexual activity take this to be central to who they are. An attack on homosexual relationships, then, may feel equivalent to a personal attack. A religious parent who feels that she must refuse to attend her lesbian daughter's wedding seems to be expressing hostility towards her daughter and her daughter's partner. A Christian judge opposed to homosexual activity who turns away gay couples seeking to be married by her appears to be attacking the gay community by denying them something they take to be a genuine good. These cases illustrate a few of the harms resulting from taking up a stance of opposition to a practice based on the faith conviction that God opposes that practice which look like instances of bigotry.

## Self-deception arguments

What I will call the Self-Deception Arguments operate on the assumption that faith goes beyond or against the evidence.<sup>13</sup> These do not leave untouched questions about epistemic rationality, of course, but the problem identified is a moral or

<sup>12</sup> Of course, many Christian denominations deny that this is an object of faith; but members of denominations that do take it to be an object of faith, or that hold onto an interpretation of Scripture which would entail it, come under fire for being bigoted. So I think it is an important example to consider even if it only applies to a subset of Christians.

<sup>13</sup> For discussion of a slightly different construal of the argument, but one which similarly operates on the idea that there is something morally impermissible in forming a belief that doesn't conform to evidence, see Peels (2010).

practical one. Trading on the idea that there is a moral or prudential norm that one not deceive oneself (in addition to any epistemic prohibition on self-deception), the arguments show that having and sustaining faith requires violating that norm.<sup>14</sup> Thus faith is immoral or practically irrational.

One version of the Self-Deception Argument proposes that going beyond or against one's evidence, which is constitutive of faith, requires self-deception and that self-deception is which is "morally problematic and rationally suspect" because of the sorts of acts one has to engage into pull it off (Jordan 2013). Jeff Jordan articulates one rationale for this claim in his discussion of Pascalian and Jamesian wagering (2006, p. 45). Plausibly, we cannot form a belief directly by being made aware of the practical reasons for holding it. If we were to form a belief for practical reasons, then "some sort of belief-inducing technology will be necessary in order to facilitate the acquisition of a proposition that is pragmatically supported. Now it is true that the most readily available belief-inducing technologies—selectively using the evidence, for instance—all involve a degree of self-deception," (ibid). Jordan envisions "low-tech" mechanisms like hypnosis and indoctrination here. While we may not be able to bring our beliefs under manipulative control while in these situations, there is something practically irrational or immoral about willingly walking into such situations. It might be that putting oneself at the mercy of another through indoctrination violates a duty of self-respect. Or perhaps practical rationality requires that we do our best to avoid acquiring false beliefs about important matters, and choosing to engage in certain religious practices to reinforce belief or doxastic acceptance of claims we antecedently think may be false violates this requirement.

This Self-Deception Argument differs from arguments for the epistemic irrationality of faith because what is rationally problematic, in this case, is an action or practice that induces belief—not belief formation. The self-deceived person of faith ends up being blameworthy for the actions that allow her to form or maintain her belief. Like a detective who refuses to revisit the scene of the crime after getting a tip about some piece of evidence, the person of religious faith sustains her faith by choosing to avoid situations where her evidence might change her beliefs or acquires her belief by putting herself in situations or having experiences where she is likely to gain religious beliefs. Any blame we do attribute to this person is not epistemic since the initial problem is not a failure to respond to evidence with the correct *belief*; rather, it is a practical or perhaps even a moral failure to respond to a choice point with the right *action*.

A second version of the Self-Deception Argument points to a problem with maintaining faith in the face of apparent peer disagreement: Does this require a morally pernicious or practically irrational action? It seems to. Suppose a believer's unbelieving peer brings to light a potential defeater—that she has not had similar religious experiences and that her evidence suggests that no experience of a holy

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<sup>14</sup> Someone might stop me here because it sounds like I am assuming people can believe at will, and as Pamela Hieronymi aptly demonstrates in "Controlling Belief," it is not conceptually possible to believe at will. I am rather joining Hieronymi in saying that we can exercise managerial and evaluative control over what we intend to believe, and in doing so successfully we can actually form beliefs. But this is not an instance of believing at will.

spirit could be legitimate. In the case of apparent peer disagreement, the believer must tell herself that her religious convictions are correct even though this new evidence tells against their correctness. She must *demote* the other from the status of a peer to maintain her epistemic justification and persist in faith.<sup>15</sup> This looks like an immoral form of self-deception, even if it is epistemically permissible. For it requires thinking less charitably of the other, when the evidence leaves another option rationally available, namely, changing our own beliefs. If we ought, morally, to attempt to be as charitable as is epistemically permissible, then we ought, morally, to try to avoid demoting others from the status of peer as long as the evidence allows.<sup>16</sup> Sustaining faith in the face of apparent peer disagreement violates this norm and so is morally pernicious.

This challenge brings into focus the third version of the Self Deception Argument according to which the moral or prudential requirement violated by a person with Christian faith is the requirement to avoid credulity. Plausibly this principle can be supported by a consequentialist, since credulity produces bad outcomes; a deontologist, since credulity is a poor use of one's intellectual faculties or failure to cultivate one's talents, as Kant puts it; and a virtue ethicist who believes that to have the moral virtues, one also needs intellectual virtue, but credulity would be an intellectual vice. If Christian faith can only be sustained and supported by epistemic practices that lead to credulity, then so much the worse for the moral and prudential status of that faith.

### The connection between faith and hope

The practical and moral arguments considered above isolate Christian beliefs from other attitudes and mental states possessed by those who hold these beliefs. This is a mistake; for genuine faith is conceptually connected to other psychological habits—among them, hope (Niebuhr 1974). Since in order to have genuine faith, one must also have hope, we can't get an accurate picture of the attitudes and behaviors that belong to a person of Christian faith, and so of the moral and practical permissibility of having and sustaining faith, without also considering how hope will affect such a person.

The theological virtue of hope is the disposition to pursue union with God and eternal happiness, or beatitude, conceived of as difficult but attainable goods. The Christian tradition has long held that the virtues of faith and hope bear a strong relationship to one another. Both Aristotelian and Neoplatonic strands of the tradition hold a Reciprocity Thesis about the theological virtues, faith, hope, and love: in order to have any one of these virtues, one must also have the others (Pieper 1997).<sup>17</sup> On this view it is built into the concept of faith that the person who possesses faith also has a firm disposition to put hope in God and to hope for God to

<sup>15</sup> For discussions of how demotion can be epistemically rational see Bergmann and Kvanvig (2015, p. 26).

<sup>16</sup> Here I am borrowing from Samuel Baker's work on the principle of charity (in progress).

<sup>17</sup> For a Kierkegaardian take on the relationship between faith and hope, where faith is a ground for hope, see Bernier (2015, pp. 187–211).

give her eternal beatitude. The Christian can exploit this connection endorsed in the tradition to respond to the moral and practical arguments against her having and sustaining faith.

We need not just take the tradition's word for it. One reason to think that genuine faith presupposes hope is that we need to be able to differentiate *mere* belief or acceptance of the truths of the faith from the belief or acceptance that constitutes faith. The Christian Scriptures teach that even the demons accept that Jesus is the Son of God—but they do so and shudder. Yet demons do not have faith.<sup>18</sup> Since the cognitive profile we might typically associate with faith cannot be sufficient for having faith, given that the demons certainly lack faith but have the same cognitive states, some necessary condition on having faith must be having a stable disposition to represent certain claims positively or a disposition to have a pro-attitude regarding the claims or God himself.<sup>19</sup> But it is implausible that the relevant pro-attitudes must have *the same* objects as the objects of the cognitive stance involved in faith. For instance, nowhere in Christian doctrine do we see the idea that to have faith that there is a hell one must have a pro-attitude regarding the proposition that there is a hell. But the existence of a hell is a tenet of orthodoxy and an object of faith. So what we need is a discrete disposition, differentiated from faith by its discrete objects, which is a necessary condition on having faith. The best candidates for this disposition is hope, since (unlike the other theological virtue, love) hope can take propositions as objects and the propositions that a person of faith must have pro-attitudes towards are propositions apt for hope.

Another reason to think that having hope is necessary to have fully, properly formed faith is that hope provides the motivation to take steps needed to cultivate faith. Aquinas explains that the gloss on Psalm 36:3 handed down in the tradition, “hope is the entrance to faith,” expresses the idea that in order to begin to develop faith the possessor must be motivated to attend to the objects of faith.<sup>20</sup> Hope motivates the shift or sustaining of attention to objects of faith. In order to have the virtue of faith, one must have stable hope—that is, stable motivation to pursue a difficult good—to underwrite faith in periods of rational doubt and hardship.<sup>21</sup>

Since hope and faith plausibly bear this tight conceptual connection, we can't represent the attitudes and behaviors involved in and resultant from genuine faith in isolation from hope. Faith that lives up to the normative expectations of Christianity must be shaped and constrained by proper theological hope. In the next several sections I consider new responses to the moral and practical arguments against Christian faith afforded by recognition of this connection.

<sup>18</sup> Reliance will not suffice either, as presumably demons can use claims like “Jesus is the Son of God” in their practical reasoning like persons of faith do but for different ends, and so do not have faith.

<sup>19</sup> Most current accounts of faith acknowledge the need for a pro-attitude, but their proponents assume that the pro-attitude must be a constituent of faith rather than a necessary condition for it. I will claim that hopeful attitudes are at least a necessary condition.

<sup>20</sup> Aquinas, ST II-II q. 17, a. 7, ad. 1. For more discussion see Cooper (2003) and (2012).

<sup>21</sup> This case draws on a case Daniel Howard-Snyder uses to discuss propositional faith (2013).

## Hope against despair and degradation

Theological hope is a corrective for the kind of existential despair and degrading attitudes we would otherwise expect to arise from reflection on our sinful state. The person of faith places her hope in God, both for his help and in the proposition that he will fulfill his promise to redeem her and others. This provides an adequate response to the Conceptual Degradation Argument. And the Probabilistic Degradation Argument loses force when we realize that the practices fashioned to sustain hope and in doing so, support faith, can lower the probability of faith producing denigrating attitudes and actions.

The theological virtue of hope possessed by those with the theological virtue of faith functions as a curative for existential despair. Existential despair is despair about the value and meaning of one's life and the lives of other human beings. It captures well the morally pernicious habit Hume thinks Christian faith cultivates through orthopraxy—worship and regular admission of sins and faults of human beings. Hope combats existential despair first, through the hoper representing the future, difficult good of moral improvement of herself and others as achievable through God's help, which is offered indiscriminately to all human beings. Second, hope, by fixing the hoper's attention on the possibility of the desired good of improvement, keeps the person of faith from developing sloth, the disposition to inaction that comes about when one loses the belief that one's actions will be efficacious for one's end (in this case, moral improvement). Third, hope reinforces faith in revealed truths about humans' infinite value conferred by God. It does so in two ways: by continually placing hope in God as one who will help the hoper achieve the end of beatitude, the hoper comes to have more faith in God to act benevolently towards her; and this interpersonal faith furthered by hope has the effect of increasing the hoper's propositional faith concerning the revealed claims about the true worth of human beings, despite appearances to the contrary.

Since the Conceptual Degradation Argument relies on an assumption that is undermined by the connection between faith and hope. The assumption is that faith in tenets of Christian doctrine regarding our sin and depravity requires one to take a low view of human beings. However, hope forestalls conclusions about worth from facts about sinfulness or the chasm between God and human beings. In addition, the Christian tradition agrees with Hume in maintaining that such attitudes are vicious: they are the attitudes of the person with existential *despair*. Hope is a virtue precisely because it keeps us from sinking into the vice of despair.

This observation puts pressure on the Probabilistic Degradation Argument. As long as a believer is acting to sustain her faith, she must also be engaging in practices to solidify theological hope.<sup>22</sup> But hope keeps her from developing despairing attitudes and acting on them. Practices such as receiving forgiveness from sins immediately after confession and having to forgive those who have wronged us before receiving the Eucharist reinforce a believer's hope, such that faith regarding human sin does not

<sup>22</sup> Sometimes, she must rely on her religious community to help her practice hope. I am thinking here of the work of Aaron Cobb and Adam Green on the social virtue of hope and scaffolding of individual hope by the community.

actually lead to self-abasement or thinking ill of others in an all-things-considered way. Hope increases the likelihood of avoiding despair and degradation, so such critical attitudes and behaviors are not made more likely by a person's having genuine faith if it requires having hope.

## Hope, patience, and acceptance

Theological hope produces patience in waiting for God to bring his kingdom to earth and salvation to individuals in his own timing and ways, rather than an anxiety about eliminating religious diversity here and now through a perfectionist political regime. The charity to which all Christians are called also enables us to hope for salvation and redemption on behalf of non-believers. Hope also engenders solidarity, downplaying rather than magnifying divisions between other religions and humanists.

Responding to the Non-Acceptance Argument motivated by perfectionism, the defender of Christian faith should point to theological hope as strong reasons to not advocate perfectionist institutions and policies. First, hope sets the faithful person's sights on a future event—the second coming of Christ—brought about by God and through humans *with God's help*. Christian tradition and scriptures teach that the faithful are to wait for future, difficult goods with patient expectation while relying on God.<sup>23</sup> The Christian is supposed to put her hope in God, rather than in the current political system, to effect perfect justice and salvation in the eschaton.<sup>24</sup> Of course, she can strive for justice or evangelize here and now in pursuit of those goals. But it would be a failure of hope to use political coercion to fully achieve salvation for others through stamping out religious diversity. For one element of hope is the disposition to look to God for help in attaining hope's object. Additionally, hope removes anxiety about the need to complete the work of salvation in one's own timing through coercive political action. For hope is a mean between the extreme of anxious striving, on the one hand, and despairing paralysis, on the other.<sup>25</sup> There are no more reasons, then, for the Christian to reduce religious diversity than there are for the non-believer.

<sup>23</sup> For fuller treatment see Olivier (1963). Saint Paul writes, "If we hope for that which we do not see, we wait for it in patience," (Romans 8:25).

<sup>24</sup> The Christian's vision of justice can be largely shared by those of other religions or no religion; so her pursuit of justice doesn't give her any more reason to reduce religious diversity through coercive political action than it would give a secular person or person of another religion. I'm grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this point.

<sup>25</sup> I'm grateful to Robert Pasnau and Samuel Baker for the suggestion to consider this issue more carefully. The suggestion that Christians should put hope in God to bring his kingdom instead of intolerantly imposing it here and now is not merely an antiquated idea. Modern Catholic and Protestant theologians from Karl Barth to Jurgen Moltmann have been keen to argue that Christians ought not try to construct a utopia or theocratic political order to challenge secular ones here and now. An excellent survey of the theological history of Christian hope can be found in Hebblethwaite (2010). Hebblethwaite details how liberal Protestantism of the nineteenth century tended to equate the coming of God's kingdom—with progression towards a perfect ethical and political community on earth (123). It was in part a reaction against this account of the object of Christian hope that Barth et al. developed their views that deemphasized the human part in bringing about the kingdom and threw into focus hope set on God's accomplishment of that work, using Christian suffering and efforts for the bettering of their societies on earth in service of it.

Looking at teachings in the tradition and the scriptures, we see that the patience of the hopeful person, modeling her behavior on God's patient acceptance of us while still sinners, is supposed to be directed towards those whom the Christians regard as pagans, infidels, and heretics.<sup>26</sup> For instance, the second epistle of Saint Peter exhorts Christians to participate in the patience of God towards human beings by bearing with others, not only those whose behavior is acceptable to us.<sup>27</sup> And Saint Paul issues the command, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you," immediately after explaining that examples in Scripture of others enduring hardships are recorded so that, through "the encouragement they provide we might have hope."<sup>28</sup> Commenting on these two passages and Augustine's doctrine of tolerance, John Bowlin writes, "Here the hope is that God's gracious forbearance will be reproduced, with God's assistance, in Christian souls that will mediate their relations both within the Church and beyond," (Bowlin 2006, p. 12). Hope produces patience with others: if the believer really holds out hope for the life of the world to come and patiently waits for God's work in the lives of the unbelievers around her, then she has no need to be intolerant towards them. The choice to compel others is a sign of the loss of Christian hope.<sup>29</sup> Thus, there is ample motivation for tolerant behavior stemming from the virtue of hope.

Another defense of Christian faith against the charge of Non-Acceptance builds on insights from a recent philosophical account of the general virtue of hope. In his article, "The Virtue of Hope," Adam Kadlac argues that hope promotes solidarity with others (2015). According to Kadlac, hope disposes us to be inclined to go for something when we perceive some obstacle or challenge to getting it. When people share an experience of vulnerability about a future, difficult outcome, they have the opportunity to experience solidarity. Solidarity is a kind of unity with others that provides encouragement in the face of obstacles. Hoping together promotes solidarity, since those who hope together or for the same object will experience the same vulnerability to contingencies but also be able to encourage one another, acknowledging the real challenges faced.

Applying Kadlac's insight to the present discussion, we can imagine that Christian hope creates solidarity with believers of other religions who also hope for an afterlife and with non-believers whose salvation and happiness she hopes for as

<sup>26</sup> Both Chrysostom (1888) and Aquinas (in the *Summa Theologica* II.II q. 11 a. 3) make this point. Admittedly, Augustine looks to have changed his position on religious toleration after the Donatist schism, going on to argue that violence and compulsion were appropriate means of bringing people to right faith—a form of discipline. But the literature is divided on the extent of the shift, and on whether we should see Augustine as advocating religious intolerance in his letters regarding the Donatists. For a book-length treatment, see Lamirande (1975).

<sup>27</sup> See 2 Peter 3:15.

<sup>28</sup> See Romans 15:4.

<sup>29</sup> In laying out his position on whether heretics are to be tolerated, Aquinas's remarks show that excommunication and death are last resorts when there are no more grounds for hope. But, "On the part of the Church, however, there is mercy which looks to the conversion of the wanderer"—that is, hope for her conversion to right faith—"wherefore she condemns not at once but 'after the first and second admonition,' as the Apostle directs: after that, if he is yet stubborn, the Church *no longer hoping* for his conversion, looks to the salvation of others, by excommunicating him..." (*Summa Theologica* II-II q. 11 a. 3, emphasis mine).

part of the redemption of the world and establishment of the kingdom of God. Since many religions endorse the view that there is an afterlife, and Christian hope is paradigmatically a hope in such afterlife and union with God, persons of Christian faith can promote solidarity with other religious believers by acknowledging their vulnerability to the uncertainty of their survival after death.

### Bigotry versus hoping for the other's good

Against the Bigotry Arguments, the Christian can explain that hope drives a wedge between the faithful person's attitudes towards a practice and the attitudes towards practitioners of that practice. It keeps one from assuming that the other will never change her ways and that her engaging in acts prohibited by Christianity will not be redeemed for the good of herself and others. Since this is the assumption that fosters hostility towards non-believers, the hopeful person of faith will not be tempted to such hostility. Further, expressions of hope in another's welfare can mitigate the worry that disapprobation of her lifestyle is equivalent to a personal attack.

We learn from the tradition that when one loves another, this makes it possible to hope on her behalf. A person with the theological virtue of hope and with love for another will thus not only hope for her own happiness but also for the happiness of those she loves, recognizing that God is able to help them equally. Aquinas observes in the *Summa Theologica* II.II q. 17 a. 3 that we cannot ordinarily hope for someone else, just as we cannot ordinarily desire on behalf of someone else. But when a person unites herself to another person in love, she regards that person as a second self and seeks the person's own good directly. So love of one's neighbors opens the door to hoping for one's neighbors' good. Thus, conceptually, genuine faith will not result in hostile attitudes towards those who engage in practices prohibited by faith. Rather, having genuine Christian faith requires following a command to love others indiscriminately—regardless of whether they engage in the right lifestyles or practices or have the right beliefs—and the virtue of hope will lead such a person to hope on others' behalf for their good.

According to the Empirical Bigotry Argument, when we condemn a practice, it is extremely likely that we will end up condemning the persons who engage in it. But this claim about our psychology does not take into account how virtues other than faith, like hope, fight this unfortunate tendency.<sup>30</sup> The virtue of hope would provide psychological resistance to the formation of hostile attitudes towards others, especially since the faithful are commanded to love others and hope for their good. In addition, scripture provides examples of God leading people to radical conversion and reform that should further instill hope for the good of those whose practices are prohibited by the faith. Hope blocks the tendency of Christians to despair of another person during her lifetime.<sup>31</sup> And the person who has hope for the practitioner of P

<sup>30</sup> It also does not consider the value of hope as held in communities, which can combat the tendency of individuals who have aspiring but not genuine faith, who are part of religious communities, to hold bigoted attitudes. See Green and Cobb for more on shared hope (manuscript).

<sup>31</sup> This sermon of Augustine's—Sermo 21, 13—is quoted in Trabbic (2011).

has no reason to treat her as an enemy, since for all she knows, that person may change her lifestyle or may experience some great good as a result of the moral mistake of engaging in P.

What good is hope when the former attitude is taken up, understandably, as a personal attack because of the extent to which the practitioner identifies herself by the practice being condemned? Here, we should say that the disposition of hope alone cannot remedy the moral harm. The disposition must be exercised in such a way as to mitigate potential damage. In light of this concern I want to suggest that an expression of hope for the other's good might keep the disapprobation of the behavior from coming off as a personal attack. The Christian who hopes for others' good can sincerely tell her friend who is in a homosexual relationship that she wishes him the best, even if by her lights, his absolute best does not include such a relationship. For all she hopes, God may use the relationship to bring about her friend's good and the good of his partner. It is a simple failure of prudence to bring up the specific disapproval of behavior with someone who does not share the belief in, say, the authority of scripture that supports the believer's view that the behavior is not healthy. As the current Pope admonishes, Christians must always prioritize consideration of the person over consideration of a practice or activity.<sup>32</sup>

### Hope and the licensing stance

All four versions of the Self-Deception Argument admit of a response using hope. For having hope that *p* does not require adjusting one's credence in, or the probability one assigns to, *p*. But hope that *p* can make it practically rational to engage in plans, thoughts, and feelings on the basis of one's attraction to *p*, not just the probability of *p*'s truth. So hope can sustain and reinforce faith without practical irrationality. Here I want to draw on Adrienne Martin's excellent discussion of how hope can engender or sustain faith that *p* in a morally permissible and practically rational manner. Martin's idea is that hope in the full sense involves what she calls the "licensing stance": "an attitude toward the probability assigned to the hoped-for outcome [between and exclusive of 0 and 1] according to which it allows one's attraction to qualify as a reason to engage in hopeful plans, thoughts, and feelings," (2013, p. 44). A licensing stance permits the hoper to treat the probability of an outcome in ways that answer to practical and moral concerns.

The first two Self-Deception Arguments imagines that, to go beyond one's evidence in the way faith arguably requires, one must induce belief through morally problematic acts of self-deception: either put oneself in a position to be epistemically manipulated or demote those who disagree but appear to be epistemic peers. Hoping that *p*, however, requires no change in beliefs regarding the likelihood of *p*. And in the mundane non-religious case, the acts hope that *p* licenses are morally benign.

For example, if Sam assigns a subjective probability of .3 to the Mets winning the World Series but hopes that they will win, that hope makes it perfection practically

<sup>32</sup> Thanks to Aaron Cobb for pointing me to the Pope's recent express affirmation of this point.

rational to engage in activities consistent with that hope and that further other ends Sam has: buying tickets to the games, feeling excited about prospects of winning, talking positively with fellow New Yorkers about the upcoming games. And if Sam gains special or new evidence by chatting excitedly with fellow fans on the train about the series, and this evidence helps her form or sustain faith that the Mets will win, there is nothing morally or practically pernicious about her having decided to put herself in a position to get that evidence. And if Sam's friend Tom cheers for the Royals and gives Sam new evidence that the Royals will win, does Sam have to demote Tom to maintain faith? Presumably not. Sam may lower the subjective probability of the Mets winning while remaining hopeful—as hope does not require anything more than belief in a non-zero probability of the Mets winning—and continue to act in ways that may affect her evidence going forward. Her fellow Mets fans can give counter evidence in response to Tom's claims, for example. So if Sam does end up demoting Tom from the position of the peer, there is no moral mistake involved; the experiences Sam has because she maintains hope provide the justification for demotion.

In general, then, hope can license actions that will encourage or beget faith without moral or prudential mistake. And the case of Christian faith does not differ in any relevant respect. So a person could acquire or maintain faith appropriately by means of hope, without deceiving herself, as a hoper is still hostage to the evidence.<sup>33</sup> All of the work of the licensing stance of hope can be done without any rejection or ignoring of the evidence. When the Christian with genuine faith gets evidence (a new problem of evil) against the truth of her Christian belief (that God exists), hope permits her to downplay the importance of the low probability when it comes to pursuing certain prudential or moral goods.

The remarks above also allow a response to the version of the Self-Deception argument according to which being a person of faith involves becoming credulous. The hopeful person has the ability to act on acceptance of a proposition without changing the probability assignment to its truth. Hope is unique in precisely this way, as Martin's account emphasizes: it offers a route to action other than the normal decision-theoretic route of assessing the probability of outcomes, assigning values, and calculating which action has the most expected utility. Hope allows us to take on more risk than we would be willing to otherwise.<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusion

The moral permissibility and practical rationality of living a life of Christian faith depends largely on the way other virtues regulate the believer's expressions of faith. Whether the mental states thought to comprise the habit of faith consist in belief, acceptance, or merely in pro-attitudes towards the tenets of orthodoxy, these states in isolation can produce serious damage to others and to ourselves. I have attempted

<sup>33</sup> Martin writes, "Hope is answerable to the evidence for the outcome's probability," (2013, p. 62).

<sup>34</sup> In Bovens (1999), hope is depicted as helping us to accept more risk and thus take gambles that will prove beneficial in the long run.

to call into question accounts of faith that take such mental states to be sufficient for having the virtue of faith. For faith to be genuine, we might think, according to tradition and for independent philosophical reasons, these mental states must be shaped by the habit of hope.

Critics may be right, then, that mere belief in the Christian creeds or the assumption of certain faith practices can lead to degradation of ourselves and others, intolerance, bigotry, and self-deception; but such criticisms fall short of showing that having genuine Christian *faith* is morally and practically problematic. For such beliefs and assumptions on my view are just not going to be the outpourings of the virtue of faith.

Faith, to be genuine, must be tempered and directed by the other theological virtues such as hope. I have gestured at several ways the virtue of hope, as conceived in contemporary literature and tradition, combats potentially pernicious tendencies that could arise from faith if left on its own. In doing so I hope to have offered a partial account of the value of hope in the Christian life.

**Acknowledgements** I am grateful to Max Baker-Hytch, Matthew Benton, Michael Bergmann, Rebecca Chan, Dustin Crummet, Liz Jackson, Gideon Jeffrey, Jeff McDonough, Carl Mosser, Mark Murphy, Sam Newlands, Michael Rea, Allison Krile Thornton, and Ted Warfield for comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I also received valuable feedback from audiences at the Notre Dame Center for Philosophy of Religion Spring 2016 Workshop, Notre Dame's Food for Thought lecture, and the Hope and Optimism Midpoint Collaboratory Conference. I owe gratitude to the guest editors, Dan Howard-Snyder, Daniel McKaughan, and Rebecca Rice for organizing the publication of this special issue of the journal. This project was made possible through a generous Grant from the John Templeton Religious Trust; the views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the trust.

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