

Section 5. Regional studies

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IS FAITH ANYTHING OTHER THAN UNCERTAIN BELIEF ON INCOMPLETE EVIDENCE?

Abstract. This essay shall attempt to navigate through this ambiguous argument of faith's veracity, from both a theological standpoint, by naming and analyzing faith based on a model of incomplete evidence, complemented with a more secular account. Furthermore, this essay will strive to demonstrate that Faith can be both something more and less of incomplete evidence: in the believer's eyes, any evidence could stand as sufficient or incomplete.

Keywords: faith, religion, humanity, Atheism, theology, Christianity.

The idea of faith has existed in one way or another throughout the history of human culture. Dating back to the dawn of humanity, faith is a universal feature that appears in daily life and religious systems. However, faith's nature has been consistently questioned. From a universal standpoint, faith comes from memory and previous experience. Nevertheless, where does faith come from religiously?

The notion of religious faith being a requirement in order to find favor in His eyes and enter the Promised Land on the day of the Last Judgment has been repeatedly accentuated throughout the Holy Bible. The Bible's definition of Faith can be found in Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." [1] This excerpt of the Bible identifies faith as an ethereal concept, one that is "not seen." Consequently, this raises much controversy in the atheist's eyes. The atheist argues that with faith's qualities of invisibility and prospectiveness being such a salient notion in the Bible, it can be deemed that the fundamentals of the faith are misleading, and it is built upon insufficient evidence. The arguments made to invalidate faith's nature are as follows:

1. The grounds of faith come from the holy texts.
2. Some gospels & texts have been excised from the original text centuries ago.
3. The contemporaneous version of the Bible do not convey the original concepts due to incomplete texts.
4. Faith is supported by incomplete evidence.

This essay shall attempt to navigate through this ambiguous argument of faith's veracity, from both a theological standpoint, by naming and analyzing faith based on a model of incomplete evidence, complemented with a more secular account. Furthermore, this essay will strive to demonstrate that Faith can be both something more and less of incomplete evidence: in the believer's eyes, any evidence could stand as sufficient or incomplete.

I. Theology

Considering the question from a theological standpoint, it may be worthwhile to determine the model of faith [2] in which the question casts doubt. After deliberation, one may ascertain that the model which best fits the question is the doxastic venture, defined as "*faith as practical commitment beyond the*

evidence to one's belief that God exists" [2]. To illustrate this concept, consider the following excerpt of the Bible: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" [3]. God promises ultimate and eternal life and safety, yet it may be exigent for one to invest in the promise of God when there is no factual evidence that the receiver of faith exists. In this case, the believer may autonomously venture to find reasons beyond existing evidence to press them into faithfully believing that such a God exists and can be relied on.

The aforementioned model of faith allows for theologians to glean and conjecture that although these self-envisioned "evidence" substantiate God's existence and justify faith in the believer's eyes, no concrete contribution is made to the validation of His existence. Nevertheless, there can be one singular working proof of God's existence for every singular believer of God: one may draw upon the holy texts and reference the destruction of cities and the tower of Babel to demonstrate God's existence and divinity, legitimizing their faith, yet receiving a critique that no conclusive proof shows such events happened in history; others may draw on commonplace "miracles" that are happening to elucidate their faith, viz. the holy texts surviving a fire that incinerated the church which treasured it, despite being ridiculed due to the excellent fire prevention done to the church. For each follower of God, there is one remarkable proof that explains their faith.

The holy texts demand faith from the acolytes of their religion, yet do not offer them the necessary evidence to support their faith, even to his most loyal subordinate, Moses. After Moses pleads Him to "show...glory," God simply responds with "...when my glory passes by, I will... cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away, and you will see My back; but My face must not be seen" [4, Exodus 33:22]. As a celebrity blocking the camera pointing to His face, He refuses to show His face to even his most unwavering prophet. Yahweh

recognizes this act as Him showing glory to Moses and presumes that Moses acknowledges this as evidence that he and his people "found favor" in His eyes. Nevertheless, in many other instances, such as Jeremiah 18:17, He refers to the sight of his back as disastrous: "I will show them My back and not My face in the day of their calamity." [4, Jer. 18:17] When Moses, one of the most faithful mortals at the time, could only behold the back of God which may insinuate divine retribution, it can be deduced that those who are less prominent or have not "found favor" in His eyes perceive even less evidence that supports the deity's divinity. Aside from God (if He truly exists)'s bashful attitude apropos of His disciples, the cogency of biblical events has also been of criticism.

The tale of the Decalogue, for instance, have various versions and interpretations for different Abrahamic Religions. Nevertheless, when considering the Ten Commandments from an atheist perspective, alternative explanations can be projected to interpret Moses' actions. After glimpsing the golden calf that broke the commandment, "...his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain" [4, Ex. 32:19]. This passage of Moses filling in the role of an iconoclast could hold a sundry of meanings, nonetheless, the indisputable fact presented is that the original covenant is lost. For conspiracists, incertitude can be cast on Moses' actions: since no one else bore witness to the original contents of the Decalogue, Moses could have easily altered the gist of the tablet to change its meaning altogether. As such, the credibility of the Bible is largely questioned. Nevertheless, even if the credibility is questionable to some, is it the same for others? For a zealot of the religion, does this "controversial" evidence hold the same weight as it does for a scholar? Perhaps not. The individuality of faith allows for different levels of significance for different believers. Although for the conspiracists this is but a piece of incredible evidence, for others this may be the cornerstone of their faith.

II. Atheism and Secular Concepts of Faith

An atheist would often argue that creationism is an irrational story, and draw upon the big bang theory, Naturalism and Darwinism as part of the reasoning. The atheist would argue that archeological evidence shows that the lives on earth right now remain and prosper through random choices of nature and natural selection, along with evolutions that happened across centuries. According to atheism, this would subsequently prove creationism as erroneous and ludicrous; some atheists would even go as far as describing faith as “an assertion of unreasonable conviction against all reason” [5]. Albeit this statement represents a radical side of atheism, the core of the statement is not illogical. “Let your faith supplant reason. Abraham mastered reason by faith in the Word of God” [6]. This quote in Rev. Martin Luther’s commentary states that faith and reason have no correlation to each other and are utterly incompatible. In both quotes, faith and reason see each other as a great scourge and seek to oust one another. Nevertheless, a counterargument can be offered on whether Darwinism is genuinely rational or not.

“Atheism is an arbitrary and irrational blind faith (i.e., without evidence) all the while dressed up as being reasonable” [7]. The thought process which drives this counterargument is the philosophy of Naturalism itself. “Our brains were shaped for fitness, not for truth,” [8, 305]: If humans were simply made from random evolutions, and the human brain is composed of a series of random chemicals, then how are we to trust our brains in terms of the information that it provides when the brain gives us the knowledge to survive, not reason? Albeit this argument may sound coherent at first glance, there is a fundamental flaw in its philosophy: in metaphysical naturalism, nature only operates on physics, and can be explained by science that is accepted by the scientific community. Naturalism does not only encapsulate atheism, it also includes agnosticism. There may be nuances between different approaches to the philosophy of Naturalism, but the primordial rules

are congruent: all supernaturals (including God) are either not real or cannot be known. Nonetheless, another argument of sophistry can be made, arguing that the paradox of the brain aforementioned remains unsolved. As a rejoinder, the evolution of the brain is an undisputed theory backed by evidence from anthropology and archeology, and the evolution of the brain and our body is a part of nature’s operations through space and time. Thus, as defined by the laws of Naturalism that the counterargument builds on, the questioning of the brain is out of the question.

Apart from religious faith, another layer of definition of Faith is the day-to-day faith. As defined by Merriam-Webster, “something that is believed especially with strong conviction.” What molds these quotidian convictions? Under the influence of previous events and empirical experience, quotidian faith is formed. For illustration, consider a favorite coffee shop. From the experiences of visiting the coffee shop every day, confidence is built: the coffee shop will open at eight in the morning, despite not explicitly writing its opening hours on the door. The piece of evidence that the faith revolves around is the key difference between religious faith and secular faith. Secular faith is a strong conviction due to evidence and experience seen and felt. This secular faith provides a sense of reassurance for future actions, such as stopping at the coffee shop the next day at eight expecting it to be open. Nevertheless, is seeing the coffee shop open at eight for one day enough evidence to herald that the coffee shop will be open at eight the next? For some, seeing the coffee shop open at eight once would be incomplete evidence, but for others, it is more than enough evidence for them to come back the next day at eight assured that the shop is open. Essentially, the amount of evidence that is needed is different, and there is no “insufficient” evidence; there is simply the presence of evidence and the absence of evidence.

Intrinsically, secular faith is a prediction of the expected, what we recognize as “should happen.”

From the perspective of neuroscience, faith is simply a way for the brain to reduce energy usage by taking a shortcut in the thought process. From this, the brain jumps to a familiar conclusion that is in the brain's memory, rather than an unfamiliar one that was not experienced [9]. Take the aforementioned coffee shop as an example: when extrapolating when will the opening hours of the coffee shop be for tomorrow, the brain generally jumps to the conclusion of eight in the morning, a familiar outcome that was experienced, but not at midnight, a situation that was not experienced. Our faith comes from our memories that serve as evidence.

III. Conclusion

In sum, the best answer to the question is simply both. Just as there is no single piece of evidence that could satisfy and validate every believer's faith, there is also no "incomplete" evidence for faith; there is only existent and non-existent evidence for faith. Although there may be a multitude of definitions for faith, offering "previous belief on incomplete evidence" as one of the definitions is inaccurate from both a theological and secular approach. The faith is in the believer's eyes, not in the theologians, the theists, or the atheists'.

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