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Faith, Belief and Fictionalism[1]

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Abstract: Is propositional religious faith constituted by belief? Recent debate has focussed on whether faith may be constituted by a positive non-doxastic cognitive state, which can stand in place of belief. This paper sets out and defends the doxastic theory. We consider and reject three arguments commonly used in favour of non-doxastic theories of faith: (1) the argument from religious doubt; (2) the use of 'faith' in linguistic utterances; and (3) the possibility of pragmatic faith. We argue that belief is required to maintain a distinction between genuine faith, pretend faith, and fictionalist faith.

Is propositional religious faith partly constituted by beliefs?[2] This view has an impeccable historical pedigree and at least until recently has been the leading theory of faith.[3] To many it has seemed intuitively obvious that faith that *p* requires belief that *p*, and that someone who has faith that God exists is thereby committed to the belief that there is a God. Moreover, it is widely seen by both the faithful and sceptics alike that faith is epistemologically suspect if its propositional content is not believable. This has, of course, motivated a great deal of philosophy of religion and theology on both the truth of what the faithful say and epistemic obligations of faith. In recent years, however, this orthodox view has been challenged by a number of arguments purporting to show that faith can be non-doxastic. Instead of belief, faith may require the possession of only a non-doxastic cognitive attitude towards the object of faith, such as acceptance (Alston 2007), assent (Schellenberg 2005), assumption (Swinburne 2005), trust (Audi 2011), hope (McKaughan 2013; Pojman 1986, 2001), or acquiescence (Buchak 2012). According to those who advocate this view, non-doxastic states like assumption 'can stand in for the positive cognitive stance faith requires' (Howard-Snyder 2013, p. 363). We will refer to this position as *non-doxastic theory,* or *NDT*.[4]

The recent focus on non-doxastic attitudes is a valuable corrective to treatments of faith that effectively assimilate it with belief while paying only lip service to their

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[1] This is an uncorrected pre-print version. When citing please use the final journal version.

[2] Our focus in this paper is on faith *that p* rather than faith *in*. Faith *in* is sometimes seen as requiring propositional faith (see Buchak 2012, p. 226; Plantinga 1983, p. 18; Price 1965); however, although we find this view plausible, our arguments here do not rely on it.

[3] Some notable examples are Augustine (1999), Aquinas (1948, II.II), Locke (1924), Berkeley (1950), MacDonald (1993), Evans (1998), Plantinga (2000, chapters 8 and 9) and Swinburne (2005, pp. 138-148).

[4] See also recent non-doxastic accounts of faith such as Muyskens (1979), Cantwell Smith (1979), Golding (1990), Lad Sessions (1994), and Kvanvig (2013).

differences. It also highlights the rich variety of attitudes that form an important part of religious life. However, we will argue that the leading arguments for rejecting the doxastic theory of faith are unpersuasive and, moreover, that NDT weakens the account of faith to the extent that even religious fictionalists can be counted among the faithful. We will begin with a more exact statement of the two main theories of faith.

1. THEORIES OF FAITH

Orthodox accounts of faith take belief that p to be a constitutive condition of faith that p. It is not, however, a sufficient condition for faith. To some, it seems incongruous to talk of faith without there being a positive evaluation of its object. As Walter Kaufman notes, 'One cannot say, without doing violence to language: "I have faith that I have cancer"' (1958, p. 113). More substantively, as Aquinas and many others since have pointed out – taking a cue from the biblical passage 'You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe— and shudder!' (James 2:19) – demons believe that there is a God without the appropriate preferences and feelings needed for faith. Faith, for Aquinas, involves 'a certain affection for the good' even when faith is 'lifeless' (1948, 5.2). Alvin Plantinga elaborates: the person of faith

> not only believes the central claims of the Christian faith; she also (paradigmatically) finds the whole scheme of salvation enormously attractive, delightful, moving, a source of amazed wonderment. She is deeply grateful to the Lord for his great goodness and responds to his sacrificial love with love of her own. The difference between believer and devil, therefore, lies in the area of *affections*: of love and hate, attraction and repulsion, desire and detestation. (Plantinga 2000, p. 292)[5]

We can give a more general characterisation of the orthodox position, which we will call the *belief plus* (B+) theory,[6] as follows:

> B+: Faith that p requires (a) belief that p accompanied with (b) various non-doxastic attitudes towards the object of the belief, such as positive evaluations (i.e. approval), affections such as love, trust or gratitude, and conative states such as desires, preferences and plans.

The key point of difference between NDT and B+ is that the former replaces condition (a) with the condition that faith requires a 'positive' cognitive attitude towards p. This attitude is one of voluntarily agreeing or 'going along with' a proposition, or using it as the basis of decision making. This is instead of involuntarily taking or finding p to be true, that is, believing it. Here is a sample of the proposed characterisations:[7]

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[5] See also MacDonald (1993, p. 44).
[6] This useful expression is borrowed from McKaughan (2013).
[7] See also McKaughan (2013) on 'hope', Howard-Snyder (2013) on 'acceptance' and 'assumption', and Audi (2008; 2011) on 'trust'.

> What I have in mind [with assent] involves *deliberately going along with* the imagined state of affairs in relevant contexts… In exemplifying voluntary assent as part of faith that *p*, one is saying yes to that proposition. (Schellenberg 2005, pp. 134-136)

> To act on the assumption that *p* is to use *p* as a premiss in your practical inferences, whether or not you believe *p*. (Swinburne 2005, p. 143)

> The act of acceptance, unlike a state of belief, is the adoption, the *taking on* of a positive attitude toward a proposition. (Alston 2007, p. 132)[8]

> [Acquiescing] involves taking the proposition to be true, that is, 'going along with it', but not necessarily adopting an attitude we might describe as belief. (Buchak 2012, n. 1)

NDT is also usually taken to exclude *disbelief* that *p* or belief that *not-p*:

> If I believe that not-*p*, surely I cannot have faith that *p*, just as I cannot (at least normally) believe both that *p* and that not-*p*. I *can* have such faith compatibly with an absence of any feeling of confidence regarding *p*, and even with a belief that *p* is not highly probable. But if I disbelieve *p*, I do not have faith that it is so. (Audi 2011, p. 73)

> [T]he dispositional profiles of negative stances like disbelief are incongruent with faith. (Howard-Snyder 2013, p. 361).

In summary, NDT replaces condition (a) with: (a1) 'a positive attitude towards *p*', while still retaining (b).

Additionally, (a1) is usually taken to yield (a2) 'neither disbelieving *p* nor believing that not-*p*'. While no logical inconsistency results from having a positive attitude towards *p* and disbelieving it, some supporters of NDT (such as the two quoted above) take there to be some kind of incompatibility between the two. We will return to this later. Notably, (a2) is not needed in the formulation of B+ because believing *p* and believing not-*p* yields a logical inconsistency.

With this background in mind, we will now consider what we take to be the three most widely used arguments for rejecting B+ in favour of NDT.

2. THE ARGUMENT FROM DOUBT

The reality of *doubt* in the lived experience of those who are religiously committed is the basis of a widely-canvassed argument for NDT.[9] Louis Pojman argues that doubt, characterised as 'the absence of belief' (2001, p. 137), is compatible with faith. Howard-

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[8] Usages of 'acceptance' are often influenced by Cohen's definition: 'to accept that *p* is to have or adopt a policy of deeming, positing, or postulating that *p* – that is, of going along with *p* (either for the long term or for immediate purposes only) as a premiss in some or all contexts' (Cohen 1989, p. 368).

[9] The earliest example of this argument to our knowledge is from Pojman (1986). Versions of it also appear in Howard-Snyder (2013), McKaughan (2013), Audi (2008; 2011) and Schellenberg (2005).

Snyder summarises the position: 'unlike faith that p, belief that p *is* at odds with being in doubt about it' (2013, p. 361). This objection to B+ theories is simply stated: faith is compatible with doubt, belief is incompatible with doubt, so belief is not a requirement for faith.

We need to say more about what sort of doubt is in play to understand how this argument works. In some cases one doubts *p* by virtue of having grounds for thinking that *p* is untrue, or one loses confidence that *p* with or without such reasons. However, it is evident that one can recognise reasons for doubting that God exists – the problem of evil, for instance – while nonetheless believing that God exists. One may also be unsure about *p* whilst believing *p*, provided we allow that belief can come in degrees. Doubts of these sorts, therefore, are compatible with faith on the B+ account. Two other kinds of doubt, however, *do* seem incompatible with belief. To doubt that *p* is sometimes simply to disbelieve it: 'I doubt that there is a God' may express the belief that there is no God. This kind of doubt is also unhelpful to the argument from doubt. Since faith is incompatible with disbelief then, according to both B+ and NDT, doubt that amounts to disbelief will be a loss of faith. A third kind of doubt is not believing *p* without disbelieving *p*. To be *in doubt*, according to Howard-Snyder, 'is for one neither to believe nor disbelieve *p* as a result of one's grounds for *p* seeming to be roughly on a par with one's grounds for not-p' (p. 359). For clarity, we will distinguish between these three kinds of doubt by calling them *doubt$_1$*, *doubt$_2$*, and *doubt$_3$* respectively.[10]

Equipped with this distinction, we can construct a semi-formal version of the argument. Where 'D*p*', 'B*p*' and 'F*p*' stand for doubt, belief and faith towards a proposition *p*, and S is an agent with the attitudes specified in brackets, it follows from our account of *doubt$_3$* (D$_3$) that:

(1) S (D$_3$*p*) → S (~B*p* & ~B~*p*).

The B+ account of faith is committed to the following claim which NDT disputes:

(2) S (F*p*) → S (B*p*).

Now, the doubt argument posits someone who doubts$_3$ that *p* and has faith that *p*.

(3) S (D$_3$*p* & F*p*) → S (~B*p* & ~B~*p* & F*p*).

How does this present a problem for B+? Well, it is not entirely clear from the brief statement of the argument but we assume that it takes the form of a reductio ad absurdum. It follows from (2) and (3) that

(4) S (D$_3$*p* & F*p*) → S (~B*p* & ~B~*p* & B*p*).

Now, assume that S both doubts$_3$ that *p* and has faith that *p*:

(5) S (D$_3$*p* & F*p*).

It follows from (4) and (5) that:

(6) S (~Bp & Bp).

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[10] Moon (MS) considers types of doubt and the form they take in speech. Examples of doubt$_1$ are related to count nouns, doubt$_2$ to verbs and doubt$_3$ to mass nouns.

And this, we take it, the defender of the doubt argument regards as an absurd result: someone cannot both believe p and not believe p. So we must reject one of the two principal premises (2) or (5): either the faithful do not have doubt$_3$, or B+ is incorrect.

The problem with this argument is that the supporter of B+ can opt to reject (5): someone who is in a state of not believing that p does not have faith that p. That, after all, is precisely what B+ is committed to. To assume (5) is just question-begging in favour of NDT. Wheeling out the generic observation that people of faith undergo periods of 'doubt' is by itself ineffective against B+. What is needed is evidence of *doubt$_3$* (i.e. this specific variety of doubt) going along with faith.[11]

To see this problem more clearly, it is useful to consider an appeal to the doubt argument recently made by Daniel McKaughan:

> Faith is clearly not incompatible with a persistent sense of uncertainty, dark nights of the soul, or a pervasive sense of the hiddenness of God…If deep, sincere, and wholehearted faith coexists with doubt in the lived experience of many religiously committed persons and can do so in a relatively stable way despite fluctuating levels of confidence, surely this fact is one that any adequate account of faith ought to be able to accommodate. Belief-plus models define faith in such a way as to preclude significant doubt, yet faith appears to be compatible with doubt in a way or to an extent that belief is not. (McKaughan 2013, pp. 106-107)

We fully recognise the reality of the crises of faith referred to here. However, for these cases to present prima facie counterexamples to B+ we need a further argument for construing them as involving doubt$_3$ (and not a loss of faith) rather than an accumulation of doubts$_1$, which is compatible with B+. It is difficult to see how such an argument could be forthcoming. Crises of faith may cover a variety of different conditions, some of which involve doubts$_1$, which both B+ and NDT can recognise as compatible with faith, while others involve shifting in and out of faith. Should cases involving doubt$_3$ be understood as faith with doubt or as (at least for the duration of those doubts$_3$) a loss of faith? Your view on this will depend on whether you are already sympathetic to B+ or NDT. We don't see that the evidence of the faithful experiencing doubt offers support to one theory over another.

The contention that B+ cannot make way for 'significant' doubt is also entirely misplaced. For B+ the religious beliefs that form part of faith can go along with deep and on-going doubts$_1$ that are more serious and long-standing than could be sustained for beliefs that do not form part of faith. This is because of the agent's deep attachment to the beliefs that constitute faith: they are matters of ultimate importance to her and play a critical role in her thinking and decision-making about the world. This point is easy to overlook because B+ is sometimes treated as if it were a *belief only* theory about faith. However, according to B+, faith is constituted by various commitments and non-cognitive attitudes; these can make

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[11] A different response to the doubt argument we will not explore here is that people can be in two minds about a proposition. People can, in their practical daily lives believe that p is true but, in more critical contexts, think that p is untrue. If this is correct then (6) is not absurd and provides another reason for concluding that the argument from doubt is unsuccessful. Note that S(Bp & B$\sim p$) is distinct from S(B (p & $\sim p$)). Having inconsistent beliefs, rather than beliefs with inconsistent content, seems to us not only commonplace but plausibly what is going in in at least some crises of faith.

faithful people disinclined to give into doubt and jettison their beliefs. For example, consider a father who is devoted to his daughter and has invested a great deal of his life into her upbringing and her ongoing and future wellbeing. He treasures her and believes that she is a good person. However, he hears stories from reputable sources about her behaviour that cast doubt on the truth of this belief. This causes him a great deal of worry and he questions but does not lose his belief that she is a good person. If his belief concerned someone in whom he was less invested, he would be much more susceptible to the contrary evidence undermining his belief. Of course, there comes a point where to maintain belief against mounting contrary evidence becomes delusional. But we do not regard the father's holding fast as merely delusive; to the contrary it seems, at least up to a point, to be admirable.[12] Emotions and practical commitments can help us overcome crises of confidence and resist reasons to question what we believe.

Additionally, it seems to us to be odd to draw attention to crises of faith as reasons for supporting NDT over B+. The only 'crisis' that would lend support to NDT is where one has a loss of belief in p, retains a positive cognitive attitude towards p *and* does not lose one's faith that p. Consider, however, that according to NDT, belief is not in any case required for faith. So, by NDT's own lights, this can't be a crisis that challenges one's *faith*. In fact, to someone suffering from doubts$_3$, the supporter of NDT can offer the following advice: you aren't suffering from any kind of crisis of faith – keep up your practical commitments and don't worry about believing!

Some supporters of NDT might object that belief that p is not, as we have supposed, compatible with the recognition of serious doubt$_1$ about p if we think that belief comes in degrees. It might be argued on this basis that the appropriate response to doubts$_1$ that p (such as the problem of evil) is to significantly reduce one's confidence that p – enough, perhaps, for a positive cognitive attitude but insufficient for belief. We are uncertain whether supporters of NDT would embrace this approach. Here are two problems. First, there are widely canvassed difficulties in working out the relationship between 'qualitative' beliefs, in terms of which the debate about faith is usually couched, and 'quantitative' degrees of belief, as well as difficulties – such as the lottery paradox – with identifying a threshold for belief (see Huber 2009 for an overview). NDT would face the additional challenge of identifying two thresholds: the quantitative difference between belief and the non-doxastic positive cognitive attitude, and the quantitative difference between positive cognitive attitudes towards p and either disbelief that p or belief that not-p. Second, if we take as the minimal threshold for belief that p that one has more confidence in p than its negation, then belief that p will be straightforwardly compatible with serious doubts$_1$ that p. For instance, the father described above may have his confidence that his daughter has a good character very significantly weakened by contrary evidence. He could nonetheless continue to believe that

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[12] This is not to say that the father is thereby epistemically warranted in his belief. Nor is it to say, along with recent theories of 'pragmatic encroachment', that what constitutes knowledge may be in part be dependent on pragmatic circumstances. Rather, epistemic norms are not the only ones in play: the father has compelling moral and pragmatic reasons to retain his belief even though were he to put these considerations aside and to behave as a fully rational agent doing his epistemic duty, he would relinquish the belief.

she is a good person because he has little or no confidence in the proposition that she is not a good person. We expect that supporters of NDT would not agree with this minimal threshold for belief.[13] This underlines the fact that if NDT is to make use of degrees of belief in defending the doubt argument a higher threshold for belief will need to be defended that also escapes the difficulties referred to in the first problem.

3. THE ARGUMENT FROM LINGUISTIC DATA

Linguistic evidence about the use of 'faith' is used by some supporters of NDT to argue that faith need not involve belief. The basic strategy is to find cases in which we attribute to S faith that p without it being a truth condition of that utterance that S believes that p. We have reservations about whether such linguistic data could substantiate a theory about the nature of faith that we will turn to shortly. We will begin by reviewing the evidence.

Here is an example from Howard-Snyder:

> [I]magine that I disclosed to you in a heart-to-heart exchange: "I can't tell whether what I've got to go on favors the existence of God, but I have faith that God exists nonetheless." You wouldn't be perplexed, bewildered, or suspicious at all about what I said; at least you need not be. What I said wasn't weird, or infelicitous; there's nothing here that cries out for explanation. (2013, pp. 362-363)

Utterances of this sort seem linguistically unproblematic but how should we interpret them? Howard-Snyder takes the speaker to be expressing doubt₃ about the existence of God compatibly with having faith. However, on the face of it, the utterance is about the evidence available to the speaker for the existence of God and not belief in it. Believing that something is true while lacking compelling evidence for it is, of course, commonplace; it is also something that believers can recognise in themselves. I might say, for example, 'I believe Brazil will win the 2018 World Cup but I can't say that I have persuasive evidence that they will beat Germany'. If we can speak of *belief* without solid evidential support, then speaking of faith without evidential support is not a reason for thinking that faith is not partly constituted by belief.

Another example is provided by Lara Buchak (2012, n. 1):

(7) I don't know whether X – I have no idea whether I believe that X or not – but I have faith that X.

Buchak takes (7) to be linguistically felicitous, and thus to support the view that faith does not require belief. It is notable, however, that the claim about the speaker's belief in (7) is used to hedge a claim about the speaker's knowledge that X rather than straightforwardly expressing a lack of belief that X. If Buchak is right though, it should be easy to find

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[13] Notably, Alston quotes William Wainwright – 'My attitude is in many ways similar to T. S. Eliot's…When asked why he accepted Christianity, he said he did so because it was the least false of the options open to him' (1996, p. 19) – as an example of faith with non-doxastic acceptance. On the minimal threshold account of belief Wainwright could *believe* that Christianity is true even though his confidence in it is not very high, provided that his confidence that it is false is even lower.

examples of felicitous affirmations of faith that *X* along with unqualified *denials* of belief that *X*. For example:

(8) I don't remotely believe that God exists but I have faith that God exists nonetheless

While it is an unusual claim to make, (8) does not seem to us to involve a *linguistic* mistake. The same seems to be true of the following:

(9) It's clear that we're the underdogs. In fact, if I'm being honest, I believe that we are going to lose. But miracles can happen, and I still have faith that we are going to win.

While (9) seems to express an odd (and maybe inadvisable) mix of attitudes, it does not, as far as we can see, involve any linguistic blunder. We will say presently why we think that neither of these examples pose any difficulty for B+. For Buchak, however, along with other supporters of the linguistic argument, (9) is problematic because it appears to express faith with *disbelief*, which NDT rejects. Could they show that (8) is linguistically appropriate and (9) inappropriate? This looks like a tall order. Part of the problem is that our linguistic intuitions, for all but the most straightforward cases, are notoriously unreliable (as anybody who has attempted to elicit such judgements in philosophy seminars will appreciate). It is also a problem that one's judgements about linguistic felicity may be affected by one's philosophical views, making such judgements a shaky foundation on which to resolve substantive philosophical issues.

If the linguistic data argument has teeth then evidence that we sometimes say that S has faith that *p*, without it being a truth-condition of that utterance that S believes that *p*, should lend support to the conclusion that faith that *p* is possible without belief that *p*. There are, we think, two main obstacles in the way of this conclusion. The first is that the argument must contend with the widespread phenomenon of the *loose talk*. Consider the following utterances:

(10) The audience fell silent. [Said in reference to a rock concert]

(11) The fridge is empty. [Said in a discussion of what should be done for dinner]

(12) The lawn is square. [Reporting the shape of the speaker's garden]

In each of these cases what is meant by the speakers by 'silent', 'empty' and 'square' does not strictly accord with how these expressions might be defined. The speaker of (10) is not claiming that the audience is, strictly speaking, *silent*. They were certainly breathing; perhaps some of them were talking quietly. Similarly, the speaker of (11) is not proposing that the fridge contains no air or that the shelves are missing; there may even be some food in the fridge but not enough to make a satisfactory meal. The speaker of (12) is clearly not committed to the lawn having sides of precisely the same length or internal angles of precisely ninety degrees. So we can use expressions *loosely* to communicate something different from their standard lexical content. We do not need to settle the correct linguistic theory of loose talk to recognise that the phenomenon is a standard component of

communication.[14] Similarly, we can talk loosely of faith, belief or disbelief. Suppose that belief that *p* is one of the truth conditions of faith that *p*. We can say that we have faith that *p*, even if we don't believe that *p*, loosely to communicate (say) that we support *p* or are enthusiastic about *p*. For this reason, (8) does not show that we can have faith without belief any more than (12) shows that we can have squares that do not have sides of the same length. Both can be understood as loose talk. (7), (8) and (9) do not, therefore, provide linguistic evidence that clearly challenges B+; nor, for the same reason, does (9) constitute a worry for NDT.[15]

Might other linguistic evidence be provided that can help resolve the dispute in favour of NDT or B+? We are sceptical. Although some of the participants in this debate – notably Buchak – are concerned with the *meaning* of 'faith',[16] the matter at issue is the *nature* of faith. Assuming that we are realists about mental states, this is a fact about the nature of the psychology of those who have faith rather than a linguistic fact about the meaning of a particular expression. Why should we suppose that the meaning of 'faith' should track a philosophically worked out analysis of the nature faith? This problem also bears on J. L. Schellenberg's use of linguistic data to show 'that faith is a matter of action and is voluntary' (2005, p. 150), such as:

(13)   Just step out in faith, and God will provide.

(14)   You should take it on faith that what the Koran says is true.

If we take these utterances to lend support to a theory about the nature of faith, we must also contend with utterances such as

(15)   I had to make a choice what to believe, so I decided to believe that God must exist.

(16)   It's time for you to settle on what you believe on this matter.

(17)   You should not believe that the Holy Spirit is a person.

which seems to suggest that *belief* is voluntary. There's nothing clearly *linguistically* infelicitous about (15)-(17) but wide agreement on philosophical analysis tells us that beliefs are not directly within our control.

More generally, the argument from linguistic data seems to get matters the wrong way around. We can't read off a theory of faith from what people say about faith any more than we can read off a theory of the emotions from the usage of 'emotion' and expressions and reports of emotion. What we say about faith, as what we say about belief, consciousness, the emotions, goodness, possibility, etc., can be mistaken or confused or loosely stated. We need, therefore, other arguments to establish the correct account of the nature of faith.

4.   THE ARGUMENT FROM PRAGMATIC FAITH

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[14] See Carston (2002).

[15] We are, of course, similarly unpersuaded by the linguistic argument given by Kaufman in Section 1, which was used to favour of an evaluative component to propositional faith (and for this reason did not rely on it).

[16] See also William Lad Sessions (1994, p. 253).

This argument is inspired by pragmatist accounts of faith, notably from William James (1896), that endorse the epistemic respectability of adopting and acting on a religious viewpoint on the basis of considerations other than its truth. These considerations, which might include the moral, social or prudential benefits of the viewpoint, or, as James puts it, one's 'passional' needs, may make suspending judgement ill-advised even though one lacks sufficient evidence to form a view on the truth of the matter.[17] Faith could thereby be the upshot of pragmatic considerations that lead one to take a positive cognitive attitude towards a propositional content without believing it.[18]

The following example from William Alston is widely cited as an instance of pragmatically motivated acceptance without belief that is akin to religious faith:

> Consider an army general whose forces are facing enemy forces with a battle imminent. He needs to proceed on some assumption as to the disposition of those forces. His scouts give some information about this but not nearly enough to make any such assumption obviously true, or even overwhelmingly probably true. So what does he do? He accepts the hypothesis that seems to him the most likely of the alternatives, though he realizes that he is far from knowing that this or any other such hypothesis is true. He uses this as a basis for disposing his forces in the way that seems most likely to be effective, even though he is far from believing that this is the case. (Alston 2007, p. 133)

Crucially, for NDT, a positive cognitive attitude – in this case acceptance – stands in place of belief without compromising faith. Jonathan Kvanvig gives a similar example for a religious context:

> Consider Abram, who is told to leave Ur and go to a foreign land. He does so in commitment to a certain way of life, and it counts as an expression of saving faith. What propositional contents must he have believed in order for this story to make sense? Did he have to believe that God exists? I suppose he did so believe, but the same story could have been true if he had only been disposed to believe such, or disposed not to believe the denial, or if he had merely mentally assented to the claim and was determined to behave in accord with the assumption or presupposition that God exists. (Kvanvig 2013, p. 124)

Let's call purported cases of faith, where the agent accepts (or assumes, etc.) rather than believes a religious proposition *pragmatic faith*.[19]

A straightforward argument from pragmatic faith for NDT is as follows:

(18)   Pragmatic faith is faith.

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[17] See Jordan (2006).

[18] Golding (1990) gives a variant of this argument. See also Alston (2007), Schellenberg on o*perational faith* (2005, pp. 127-166) and Audi on a*ttitudinal faith* (2008; 2011).

[19] Richard Swinburne comments on the relationship between examples of pragmatic faith and NDT: 'it is natural to develop this…view of faith according to which the belief-that is irrelevant, the acting-as-if is what matters…if someone does those actions which a believer would do and for which he is to be esteemed, then that person should be esteemed whether or not he has the belief' (Swinburne 2005, pp. 147-148).

(19)   Pragmatic faith is not constituted by belief.

(20)   So, faith is not constituted by belief.

Unfortunately, since the nature of faith and its relationship with belief is the point at issue, premise (18) is question-begging. Supporters of B+ see pragmatic faith as insufficient for faith because it lacks belief. An argument that leads to trading intuitions about disputed examples of what should be considered genuine faith is unlikely to be fruitful.

     One way of supporting (18), suggested by Kvanvig's remarks, is to employ the 'duck test':

(21)   If someone behaves as if they have faith that *p*, then they probably have faith that *p*.

(22)   Agents with pragmatic faith that *p* talk and act as if they have faith that *p*.

(23)   So, pragmatic faith that *p* is probably faith that *p*.

It follows from this argument that B+ is probably wrong in proposing that belief is constitutive of faith. The duck argument is only effective, however, in contexts where there aren't duck impostors – animals that look and quack like ducks but are a different species. We have a comparable worry about pragmatic faith: without the belief condition, we are unable to adequately distinguish faith from *pretend faith*. Pretence has enough functional similarities to belief to generate the appearance of genuine faith. In pretending that there is a God, for instance, one enters into a positive cognitive stance towards the proposition that there is a God – it is something that one takes on board as if it were true – and acts as if the proposition is true by, for instance, forming plans as if there were a God, saying (without believing it) things like 'Yes, there is a God!', making practical decisions on the basis of there being a God, and so on. The pretence is pursued for reasons unrelated to its truth, which make it sufficiently desirable to keep up appearances or undesirable to stop. Perhaps social and family pressures lead the agent to pretend that there is a God to avoid the unpleasantness of leaving the religious community, or perhaps the agent pretends in order to secure the advantages of membership of the community.[20] While some (including fictionalists, who we will come to in Section 5) may welcome the inclusion of pretend faith as a variety of faith, it seems to us that pretend faith is no more faith than pretending to be in love with someone is to be in love with someone. We expect that many supporters of NDT will agree that a theory of faith that lacks the resources to distinguish faith from pretend faith incurs a significant theoretical cost. This, however, seems to be the problem facing NDT. Having admitted cases of pragmatic faith, on what grounds are cases of pretend faith excluded? B+, of course, has a very neat solution to this challenge: pretend faith is not faith because it does not involve religious belief.

     Supporters of NDT may argue that the positive cognitive attitude that they posit can be clearly distinguished from pretence. But how? According to Howard-Snyder, *assumption* is different: 'One can act as if p while disbelieving p, but one cannot assume p while disbelieving p. For when one assumes p, one has not settled on not-p; but when one disbelieves p, one has settled on not-p, even though one might dissemble and act as if p' (p.

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[20] This is not to say that the reasons for the pretence have to be thought through; nor need a pretender, immersed in the fiction, be aware that they are engaged in a pretence.

366). We can pretend that *p* either if we do not believe that *p* or if we disbelieve that *p*. If we cannot assume *p* while disbelieving *p*, this marks a clear difference between assumption and pretence. However, it seems that we commonly assume propositions that we believe or even know to be false without being misleading. For example, in explaining a reductio ad absurdum to someone we assume a premise that we already know from the argument is false. We also make non-deceitful assumptions that we believe to be false as a matter of pragmatic requirement. Suppose Alston's general knows that at least some of the reports he has been given are misinformation. However, he may assume the hypothesis – which he believes is false – because he has no acceptable way of selecting an alternative and standing still is not an option. He may put out of his mind all consideration of alternative hypotheses and his subsequent behaviour and apparent commitments will be the same as in the case that Alston describes. The relationship between assumption and disbelief does not, therefore, exclude pretence.

Is there a different non-doxastic cognitive state that could be posited in NDT that *is* incompatible with disbelief? Howard-Snyder argues as follows: 'if I disbelieve that my marriage will last, I'll tend to say it won't, when asked; I'll tend to feel it to be the case that it won't when I consider the matter; I'll tend to use the proposition as it won't as a premise in my practical reasoning...The incongruity of faith and disbelief suggests that faith requires a more *positive* cognitive stance towards its object precisely because the dispositional profiles of negative stances like disbelief are incongruent with faith' (p. 361). However, if I believe that my marriage will not last I may nevertheless – for the sake, let's say, of our children and my social status – pretend that it will. In this case, despite my disbelief that my marriage will last, I will not be disposed in any of the ways that Howard-Snyder suggests. My care for my children's wellbeing and concern about how I am perceived and treated by society at large will motivate me to talk and act as if my marriage will continue. I may also very strongly hope that the marriage continue and do my utmost to ensure that it does and pretend (or assume or accept) that it will do so; putting aside thoughts of marital failure may be crucial to this. More generally, disbelief and pretence seem compatible with ebullient and positive attitudes towards the subject of the engagement. The participants in a historical re-enactment of an American Civil War battle believe that they are not confederate troops but may be fully and enthusiastically engaged and 'go along with' or say 'yes' to the fiction that they are.

These considerations about the compatibility of positive attitudes with disbelief do not, of course, present a knock down argument against NDT. A supporter of the latter position could, for instance, propose that faith that *p* requires a positive cognitive attitude towards *p and neither disbelief that p nor belief that not-p*. However, it seems to us that the onus is on the supporter of NDT to justify this qualification. If treating a proposition that we do not believe as true on the basis of pragmatic considerations is sufficient for faith, why can't similar considerations lead us to have faith in a proposition that we disbelieve? One may desire that *p* is true, see the moral advantages of being for *p*, recognise the social merit in supporting *p*, and so on, while believing *p* to be untrue. The resulting positive cognitive attitude can still play a functional role that is similar to belief and the 'same story could have been true' about Abram. Once the belief condition is jettisoned and pragmatic considerations determine the positive cognitive attitudes we have towards various propositions, it is no longer clear why believing in the falsity of *p* is an obstacle to going along with it.

According to B+, a positive cognitive attitude combined with disbelief is not faith for the same reason that a positive cognitive attitude combined with non-belief is not faith: they both lack belief. Consider, for example, a citizen of North Korea who does not believe State propaganda but meticulously maintains the appearance of an enthusiastic supporter. If she does not *disbelieve* it, does she have genuine faith that Kim Jong-un is a great and noble leader? We think not, even though she may, for pressing life and death pragmatic reasons, accept or work on the assumption that he is. The fact that she doesn't believe rather than disbelieves does not seem to us to make her attitude a better candidate for faith. Moreover, it is her lack of faith that seems to us to mark an important distinction between her attitudes and the attitudes citizens who believe and act accordingly.

5.   NDT AND RELIGIOUS FICTIONALISM

We have considered arguments against B+ and found none of them persuasive. We also raised the concern in Section 4 that NDT lacks the resources to distinguish pretend faith from genuine faith. In this section we will consider a distinct but related argument against NDT.

Consider the following example. Suppose that someone interested in moral philosophy reads J. L. Mackie's *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. He is impressed by Mackie's arguments that categorical moral claims appear to posit epistemically and metaphysically queer properties and concludes that we should not believe them. He does not *disbelieve* such claims but takes Mackie to have shown that we should not believe them. He also recognises that to refrain from using categorical ethical claims in thinking and practical reasoning would have personally and socially undesirable results. However, he believes that treating such claims as true may secure the practical benefits of belief. For example, taking it as a categorical moral truth that torture is wrong, even if there are compelling reasons not to believe it, may have the desirable effect of stiffening one's resolve in opposition to it and lead one to put aside calculations about the benefits of torture. Accordingly, he changes his attitudes: he ceases to believe categorical ethical claims and instead endorses and positively supports them. As readers familiar with this debate in metaethics will be aware, the position that our inquirer has reached is *revolutionary fictionalism*.[21] Fictionalists defend the legitimacy of engaging in a discourse for pragmatic reasons, without believing the central claims of the discourse that they endorse.[22] Since fictionalists do not believe the sentences they appear to be asserting, they are sometimes said to 'quasi-assert', 'accept' or 'pretend to assert' these sentences. Quasi-assertion is a speech act superficially similar to assertion but which does not express the speaker's beliefs: according to the fictionalist one can quasi-assert *p*, not believing *p*, without thereby being deceitful. It is straightforward to find a religious analogue for ethical fictionalism by replacing the pragmatic arguments with suitable alternatives (substituting the book with Mackie's *The Miracle of Theism*, for instance). The

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[21] See Joyce (2001) for an elaboration of this view.

[22] Most fictionalists are motivated by disbelief rather than lack of belief in the sentences of the discourse in question. This is not, however, a requirement of the theory (Kalderon 2005, may be an example of a type of fictionalist who does think that ethical claims are false, just that belief in them is not conventionally conveyed in ethical discourse). See Liggins (2012) for an overview.

point we want to make here is that that the religious fictionalist appears to satisfy condition (a1), (b) (and even (a2)) thereby meeting the NDT criteria for faith.[23]

The suspicion that there is something 'fictionalist' about NDT has been raised, albeit briefly and indirectly.[24] This is not quite right though. Fictionalism is a theory about language (and language use), whereas NDT and B+ are theories about mental states. The problem is rather that NDT appears to allow religious fictionalists of the kind we have described, unquestioned membership into the community of the faithful. Consider the following statement of NDT given by J. L. Schellenberg. He says that the faithful person who assents to *p*

> is not pretending to believe that p, nor, insofar as she's honest, will she claim to believe that p. It may seem to be otherwise when you notice that to keep the relevant picture—the one reported by p—properly before one's mind, one sometimes needs to repeat to oneself sentences expressing the proposition in question. But this isn't any kind of self-deception or expression of belief. Rather it's just a way of ensuring that the relevant proposition can do its job, intellectually. (2014, p. 83)

This is exactly the position of the fictionalist. The religious fictionalist, immersed in a pragmatically useful narrative, is not guilty of self-deception since she realises (at least when considering the matter in a fully critical way) that she does not believe the religious propositions that she is endorsing. Nor is she expressing belief in the propositions in question but instead quasi-asserting them.[25]

This is not the place to get into the details of the huge literature on the merits and problems of fictionalism. We do not need to do this to find fictionalist faith suspect or, at least, significantly different from the faith of non-fictionalists. Consider instead some of the things that the fictionalist characteristically does: (a) treats as true propositions that she does not believe to be true, (b) endorses propositions that she does not really believe, (c) acts and reasons as if something were the case that she does not believe to be the case, (d) puts aside (at least during the uncritical engagement with religious discourse) doubts about the truth of what she is saying and thinking, (e) engages with the discourse as a means to achieve pragmatic ends rather than because it is true, (f) pretends to assert or quasi-assert rather than genuinely asserts religious claims. Perhaps fictionalist engagement in religion can be justified. However, this seems to us a substantive and contentious issue. By weakening the B+ account to accommodate pragmatic faith, NDT effectively allows that the religious

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[23] Note that (a1) or (a2) could be modified to say that *p* is taken *literally* (a suggestion recently made to us by John Schellenberg). However, this would not be sufficient to exclude religious fictionalists from non-doxastic faith. Fictionalism, as we have characterised the position here, involves a non-doxastic attitude towards religious propositions but a literal interpretation of their content.

[24] See Jay (2015) and Deng (2015).

[25] Since on Schellenberg's account, faith that *p* does not involve belief that *p*, this has the surprising upshot that the faithful are *already* fictionalists ('faith is positively *incompatible* with belief' (Schellenberg 2005, p.132)). This position is called *hermeneutic* fictionalism – the view that we do not, as a linguistic fact, believe what we say – as opposed to the 'revolutionary' alternative that defends the legitimacy of changing one's attitude to what one says so as not to believe it.

fictionalist has faith without providing the requisite arguments for the legitimacy of this position.

Our challenge to the supporters of NDT, therefore, is this: either recognise and defend the faithfulness of the religious fictionalist, or explain why fictionalism is not enough for faith. We contend that the latter will require the belief condition posited by B+.[26]

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