

# The Perspectival Account of Faith

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This paper articulates and defends an underexplored account of faith—the perspectival account of faith—according to which faith is a value-oriented perspective on the world toward which the subject has a pro-attitude. After describing this account of faith and outlining what it is to *have* faith on the perspectival account, I show that the perspectival account meets methodological criteria for an account of faith. I then show that this account of faith can be used to unify various faith locutions: having faith that p (propositional faith), having faith in something (attitudinal faith), being a person of faith (global faith), articles of faith (creedal faith), and acts of faith (practical faith). Finally, since the perspectival account of faith is a cognitive account of faith, I defend the perspectival view against objections to cognitive accounts of faith.

According to the perspectival account of faith, faith is a value-oriented perspective on the world toward which the subject has a pro-attitude.<sup>1</sup> Thus far, the faith literature does not contain an articulation of the perspectival account of faith, the methodology used to arrive at the account, or the way the account unifies various faith locutions. In this article, I fill that gap by describing the perspectival account, outlining what it means to have faith according to the perspectival account, showing that the perspectival account meets methodological criteria for an account of faith, then showing that the perspectival account can be used to unify various faith locutions such as having

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<sup>1</sup> Blake McAllister (2018) endorses the view that faith involves taking a perspective, as does Merold Westphal (2017). The aim of this paper is to develop a more general and more expansive account of faith and to show the work that such an account can do. This account is more general in that the account in McAllister (2018), according to which faith is a passion (a disposition to feel certain patterns of emotions), faith generates seemings (an experience whereby the subject feels the truth of a proposition), and the object of faith is taken by the subject to be trustworthy. This account does not (without additional theses) require that faith is a passion, any commitment to seemings, or that the object is taken to be trustworthy. This account is also more expansive than McAllister's in that McAllister (2018) is only concerned with objectual faith, whereas this general account, I argue, provides the foundation for multiple faith locutions. The account in McAllister (2018) can be taken to be a version of the account described here.

faith that p (propositional faith), having faith in something (attitudinal faith),<sup>2</sup> being a person of faith (global faith), articles of faith (creedal faith), and acts of faith (praxical faith).<sup>3</sup> Since the perspectival account is a cognitive account of faith (as I will show later), I then defend the perspectival view against objections to cognitive accounts of faith.

## **1. The perspectival account of faith**

According to the perspectival account of faith, faith is a kind of perspective. To understand what a perspective is, we should first focus on construals. A construal is what Wittgenstein calls “seeing as” or “aspect seeing,” such as when someone construes the same image at one time as a duck and another time as a rabbit.

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<sup>2</sup> Howard-Snyder (2016, 143) calls this kind of faith “Objectual faith”. Audi (2008), however, deliberately uses “objectual” as a modifier of an epistemic state to indicate when the subject has that attitude of an object that it has a property. An example of objectual belief is belief of someone that what they say is true. Objectual faith locutions in Audi’s sense are awkward if not nonexistent, but I have nonetheless chosen not to use the modifier “objectual” to avoid confusion.

<sup>3</sup> This term is coined in Kvanvig (2018), 46.

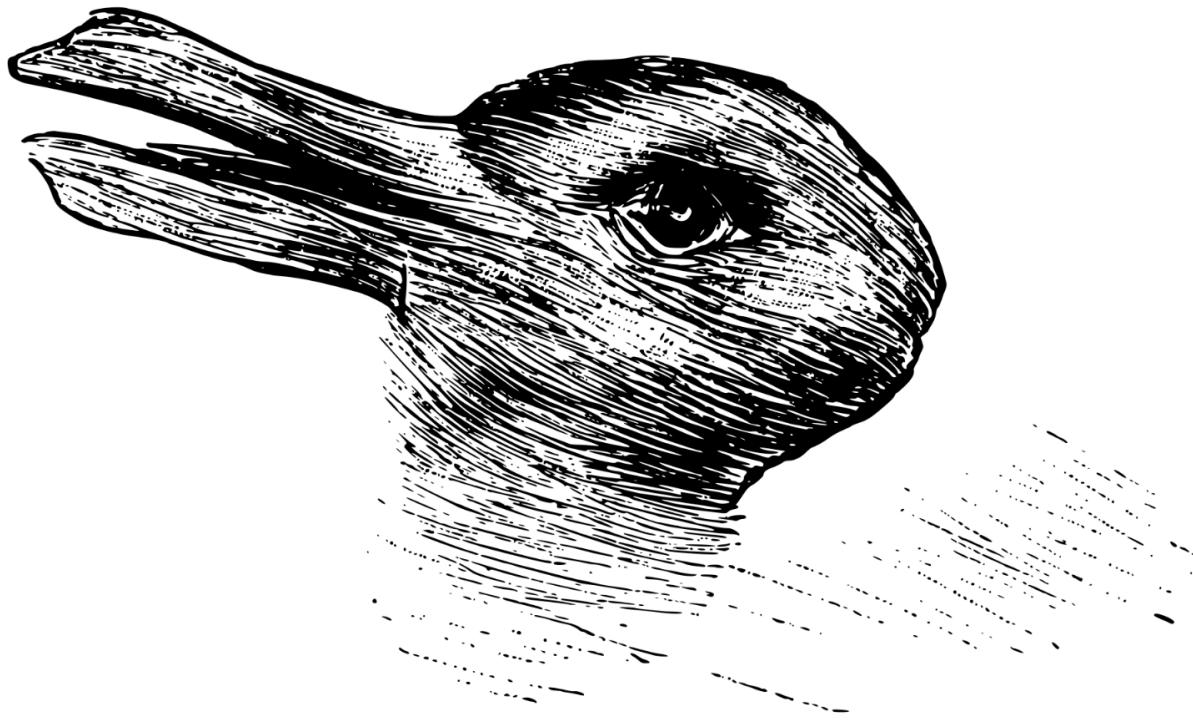


Figure 1. Duck-Rabbit<sup>4</sup>

When one looks at Wittgenstein’s duck-rabbit, one sees bits of ink as making up—or structured in such a way so as to form—a duck or a rabbit. One’s perspective involves construing—integrating particulars (bits of ink) into meaningful wholes in order to structure those particulars (e.g., into a picture of a duck)—which in turn gives meaning to the particulars (e.g., this bit of ink is part of a beak). In some cases, we might be able to shift back and forth between construals to create different gestalts, though we do not need to do so in order to see the image as, e.g., a duck. Such a construal need not be occurrent to one’s mind, but it can be; one can, for example, realize that one is seeing the image as a duck, and one might realize that such an image could be seen as a rabbit, but one need not realize any of this in order to see the image as a duck.

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<sup>4</sup> This is a portion of the image “Kaninchen und Ente” (“Rabbit and Duck”) from the October 23, 1892 issue of *Fliegende Blätter*.

A perspective involves a construal plus the ascription of importance to the construal.<sup>5</sup> For example, an army general might construe troop movements as dangerous to those troops and, seeing such movements as important, order the troops to move differently. As a contrast, one can see Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit as a duck without any ascription of importance to that construal.

We all have perspectives on the world. For example, one has a perspective on the world by construing the world as providentially guided, in which case particulars (e.g., unlikely events) might seem more important (e.g., as acts of God) than were one to construe the world as operating solely on the basis of impersonal forces. Alternatively, one could have a perspective on the world according to which nothing exists besides the materialistic universe, there is nothing to guide the universe, and in which personal choices are not meaningful. (There are also perspectives that are combinations of these two perspectives.) Someone with the former perspective and someone with the latter perspective might have all the same information about the world; they differ by how they construe that information and the importance that they assign to that construal. In both cases, a complex body of information is construed into a holistic structure that gives meaning or importance to the particular bits of information one has. It is worth noting that one can have a perspective on the world without being aware of such a perspective in much the same way one might act in ways that have been culturally influenced without being aware of the cultural influence on one's behavior.

Our perspectives are cognitive; they are aimed at representing the world in a particular way and so have a mind-to-world direction of fit. However, perspectives are not beliefs,

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<sup>5</sup> According to Elisabeth Camp (2017), (2019) a perspective is a disposition to characterize information. I have used the term differently here, which I believe better captures the idea of a perspective. This section's description of what perspectives do for the subject draws largely from work by Camp and David Holley (2010, 2011), though in that work Holley uses "perceptual frames" for what I here call "perspectives".

Note also that I use "construe" and "characterize" interchangeably, as the words are used in different areas of the literature to indicate the same phenomenon. Robert Roberts (2003), for example, uses "construe", whereas Camp uses "characterize".

assumptions, or acceptances; they do not have propositions as their objects, and perspectives, but not beliefs, assumptions, or acceptances, are ways of construing the world. To be sure, one might have a perspective according to which the world is providentially guided, and that subject might also believe that the world is providentially guided, but the cognitive states—one’s perspective and one’s belief—are nevertheless distinct. Perspectives are, in a way, more fundamental than one’s beliefs, providing the subject with reasons for their beliefs, as will be described below. Further, although perspectives are cognitive, one might be able to act in ways that affect one’s perspective, as will also be shown below. So, although perspectives are cognitive, they are not immune to (perhaps only indirect) volitional revision.

There are three features of perspectives relevant to faith worth mentioning here. First, faith perspectives are value-oriented. Faith perspectives are value-oriented if they structure particulars so as to indicate significant value in the particulars (where “significant” is here left vague, which accords with the fact that it is sometimes vague whether one’s perspective counts as faith). Arguably, duck-rabbit perspectives are not faith perspectives since there is not significant value to some bits of ink being a beak or ears, whereas a perspective according to which the world is providentially guided is a value-oriented perspective, since it is significantly valuable that particular events are divinely guided.

Second, faith perspectives can direct subjects’ motivation to act in particular ways. One’s perspective alone is insufficient to motivate a subject—cognitive states (like perspectives) alone do not motivate behavior; the subject also needs desires, cares, or concerns. The subject’s perspective directs and orients those desires, cares, or concerns so as to motivate the subject to act in particular ways. This motivational work is achieved by virtue of the fact that one’s faith perspective—a construal of the world in ways that are value-oriented and important—affects which values are salient to the subject and what the weights of those values are. Perspectives

“structure awareness of a kind of intelligible order which can serve as a guide to a way of life.”<sup>6</sup>

For example, those who construe the world as having value derived from God might be motivated to seek God when they are endeavoring to attain something valuable, whereas someone without such a perspective might not be so motivated.

Third, one’s perspectival faith affects one’s evidence, providing subjects with reasons for beliefs.<sup>7,8</sup> Perspectives do so in two ways. The first is direct, by making it so that things appear to subjects in certain ways. If things appear to one in certain ways, one thereby has a reason to believe that those things are the way in which they appear. Just as seeing an object as blue provides one with a reason for believing that the object is blue, the world’s appearing in a particular way due to one’s construal of it (one’s perspective) gives one evidence that provides one with a reason for believing the world is that way. For example, construing Wittgenstein’s duck-rabbit as a duck makes it so that the image appears to one as if it is a duck, and one thereby has a reason to believe that the image is of a duck. Similarly, someone who construes the world as guided by God is appeared to as if the world is guided by God and thereby has a reason to believe that the world is guided by God.

Faith also affects one’s evidence indirectly.<sup>9</sup> By affecting which values are salient to the subject and what the weights of those values are, a perspective makes it so that there is different evidence for a subject’s inferential belief to certain propositions than there would be were the subject to have a different perspective, one in which different values of the world would have

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<sup>6</sup> Holley (2011), 748.

<sup>7</sup> I am not hereby maintaining that faith entails belief. Rather, I am showing that if one believes by faith, one’s faith provides evidence for those beliefs.

<sup>8</sup> McAllister (2018) also argues that one’s faith perspective can change one’s total body of evidence or how one weighs that evidence, though McAllister does so by arguing that one’s perspective generates or alters the subject’s seemings, which I do not argue here.

<sup>9</sup> See also McAllister (2020), Sec. 2.2 for an excellent discussion of the various ways in which one’s perspective can indirectly affect one’s evidence.

appeared to the subject with different weights. For example, if a subject with the providential guidance perspective were to observe someone come to life after believing that the person had been dead for several hours, that subject might have strong reasons to believe that the event is an instance of miraculous divine action in the world, as evidenced in part by the world's appearing to the theist as being providentially guided. Someone without such a perspective might not have that reason for believing that the event was an instance of miraculous intervention. In fact, the subject without the providential guidance perspective might even have reason to believe that the appearance of resurrection was a hallucination.<sup>10</sup> Of course, even if one's perspective provides one with reason to believe p by influencing what counts as one's evidence, one might have additional reasons against p and/or doubt whether one's perspective is accurate. The fact that a subject has a perspective according to which p does not, then, *ultima facie* justify the subject in believing p.

For some examples of perspectives other than the providential guidance perspective, one could see the world as divinely created (or the result of solely materialistic forces), as broken (or operating as it should), as improving (or wasting away), part of a larger purpose (or all there is), or as redeemable (or hopeless). Several of these perspectives might convalesce into a more complex perspective, which one could call a "theistic perspective," which David Holley describes as "experiencing things in the world as creations, construing particular impressions as vehicles of divine guidance, and viewing significant personal choices as contributing to or interfering with God's redemptive purposes."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> C.S. Lewis gives a story of a person who thought they had seen a ghost but who wrote off the experience as a hallucination in the second chapter of *God in the Dock* (1972). Alternative construals of the appearance might be that one had been involved in a trick or that the rising was a physical anomaly not yet discovered scientifically.

<sup>11</sup> Holley (2011), 751-2. It is worth noting that from what I have said above religious commitment, as Robert Audi describes it, requires a certain kind of faith. "An overall religious commitment is a commitment to act in certain ways as well as to accept a certain outlook on the world..." Audi (2013), 313.

Each of the above examples of perspectives are value-oriented; they are ways of construing the world as valuable solely in itself or as having its value derived from God, as being more valuable now or being more valuable later, or as containing all value or as containing only some value in light of beings or events beyond this world.<sup>12</sup> These various perspectives can also direct motivation to pursue particular courses of action. Those who see the world as having value derived from God might be motivated to seek God when they are endeavoring to attain something valuable, whereas someone without such a perspective might not be so motivated. Those who see the world as being more valuable later might not be as concerned about what happens now than those who see the greatest value as being present, and those who see the world as having value only in light of beings or events beyond this world might be motivated to act for the sake of something outside this world rather than to act for the sake of something occurring here and now. Finally, such perspectives provide reasons for beliefs. Someone with the perspective that the world contains value only in light of beings or events beyond this world might have reasons to believe that fortuitous events are instances of divine intervention, whereas those who do not have such a perspective might not have such reasons, and those who see the world as being more valuable now might have reasons to think that we all should act to protect what we have in the world now, whereas someone without such a perspective might not have those reasons.

It is worth noting that although most of the examples above are about global perspectives, one's perspective can be more local, such that one sees a football game as one that will ultimately culminate in their team's win. This subject's perspective might motivate one to continue

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<sup>12</sup> It is worth mentioning that the above perspectives are not mutually exclusive in the same way a duck construal and a rabbit construal is not mutually exclusive, though it might be that subjects are cognitively limited in such a way that a subject cannot have both construals simultaneously.

watching and cheering louder and provide one with reasons for various beliefs: *there's still hope, the game is not yet over, it is worth staying to watch longer, I should cheer even louder.*

According to the perspectival account, faith comes in degrees on at least two scales. The first scale is how *central* one's perspective is. The centrality of a perspective is a matter of how influential the perspective is to the subject's psychology. A central perspective is more likely to influence the subject's behavior than a peripheral perspective. For subjects for whom a theistic perspective is central, those subjects characterize the world as created by God and as serving a larger purpose but can also, in a way less influential to the subject, characterize some parts of the world as a way to, e.g., advance one's career. The second scale is how *resistant* to co-option or dissolution one's perspective is.<sup>13</sup> Someone might have central faith that is overtaken easily by a competing perspective, in which case it has low resistance. Alternatively, someone could have non-central faith that is very resistant to being changed or overtaken, e.g., a resistant faith that one's favored political party will win the next election, even though that faith is not very influential to one's psychology and so is not central.

In order to be an instance of faith, the subject must have a pro-attitude toward the target of one's faith, as construed according to the subject's faith perspective. For the providential guidance perspective to be an instance of faith, then, the subject needs to have a pro-attitude toward the world as providentially guided. A subject cannot, for example, have faith that leads one to see the universe as pointless and resolving to ruin (unless the subject has a pro-attitude toward the world as seen that way), and one cannot have faith that leads one to see the world as involving frequent terrorism, even if one does see the world as involving increasing amounts of

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<sup>13</sup> The resistance of one's faith seems close to what McAllister (2018) calls "resilience" of one's faith.

terrorism, given that the subject does not have a pro-attitude toward the world as involving frequent terrorism.<sup>14</sup>

I have thus far described faith and its relevant upshots: faith is a value-oriented perspective on the world toward which the subject has a pro-attitude. Faith directs subjects' motivation to act in certain ways and provides subjects with reasons for beliefs (either by affecting whether the target proposition appears to the subject or whether the proposition can be inferred from what appears to the subject). Faith can be global or local and can be more or less central and resilient. In the following section, I describe what it is to have faith on the perspectival account.

## 2. What it is to have faith

Above I have described what faith perspectives are. In this section, I describe what it is to have a faith perspective. To *have* faith, I argue, is to *adopt* a faith perspective. Adoption is distinct from *consideration of* or the *trying on* of a perspective. To make this distinction, suppose two people have different and incompatible perspectives. One person, an atheist materialist, sees the universe as wholly material and all there is, and the other, a theist, sees the world as oriented toward divine fulfillment of a mission, just part of a larger picture that involves a powerful, immaterial God. The atheist can *consider* the other's perspective by examining it from the outside, as it were, offering criticisms, perhaps by showing the theist's perspective to contain internal inconsistencies or clashes with other perspectives and/or beliefs/credences that the theist should reasonably (in the mind of the atheist) endorse.

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<sup>14</sup> See Howard-Snyder (2016, 9) for this point.

Distinct from this external consideration is one's *trying on* the perspective. By trying on the perspective, the atheist attempts to see the world from the theist's perspective, even if the atheist never endorses that perspective nor incorporates that perspective into their life. Despite the atheist's lack of ownership of the perspective, the atheist might nevertheless be able to view the world as oriented toward divine fulfillment of a mission in order to understand how the theist views the world from the inside.<sup>15</sup> The atheist might even think fondly of such a perspective (so have a pro-attitude toward that perspective) but for other reasons cannot take oneself to endorse the perspective.

To *adopt* a perspective, however, is to own the perspective, to incorporate it into one's life, to endorse that perspective as one's own. To adopt the perspective is not merely to try on a perspective; it is to buy it. We can use an analogy involving clothes: to *consider* some clothes is to look at the clothes from the outside to think about whether the clothes would fit were they to be worn—perhaps the outfit is not the right size or unsuitable for one's wearing in a particular context. To *try on* the clothes is to wear the clothes to see if they fit. To *own* the clothes ("*adopt*" them) is to purchase them and to wear them as one's own. One might try on clothes that one might have a pro-attitude toward but decide, for some reason or other, not to make them one's own. To do so with a faith perspective is not to have that faith.

To have faith is to *adopt* a perspective. This is because part of the value of one's faith is the orientation and unity that such faith brings to one's life, and merely considering or trying on a perspective does not bring orientation or unity to one's life. To have faith thus satisfies a desideratum on what it takes to be a person of faith, as articulated by Daniel Howard-Snyder:

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<sup>15</sup> See Camp (2019), 23. Camp uses the language of adoption (used in the next paragraph) on p. 26.

To be a person of faith is to be a person who takes up or finds herself with an overall stance or orientation toward matters that govern important aspects of her life, one that structures those aspects into a unified whole, one that involves a disposition to retain that stance/orientation in the face of difficulties in living it out.”<sup>16</sup>

To try on a perspective without adopting it would not be to take up an overall stance toward matters that govern important aspects of the subject’s life, to unify or structure the subject’s life, or to dispose the subject to retain the perspective in the face of difficulties.

Lara Buchak states a weaker desideratum on having faith, that it requires that one is disposed to act on that faith:

[H]aving faith typically involves an action: a person’s having faith in something should make a difference to her behavior. However, this needn’t be an actual action. It would be enough for faith that if a person were to be put in a particular situation, she would then manifest the relevant behavior (assuming that there are no forces that would stop her).

Faith is thus linked to a disposition to act.<sup>17</sup>

Unification of one’s life and the disposition to act thus seem to be desiderata for one’s having faith, and one cannot achieve this kind of unification and integration by merely considering or trying on various perspectives. One achieves a unified life and a disposition to act by owning, or adopting, a perspective.

Given this account of having faith, we can describe how one can be taught to have a particular faith. Sometimes having a particular perspective requires learning, trusting others’

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<sup>16</sup> Howard-Snyder 2016, 4. Jonathan Kvanvig also endorses the desideratum that having faith unifies one’s life: “It is, I am claiming, in such unification [brought about by long-term projects, goals, and plans] that the notion of an ideal arises, that notion that will play a central role in understanding faith worth having. Ideals involved in [faith] are, first and foremost, forces for unification and integration in the life of a person displaying faith worth having.” (2018, 17)

<sup>17</sup> Buchak 2012, 226.

expertise, and a willingness to attend to what others point out as significant.<sup>18</sup> Of course, one can learn how to develop a construal by listening to others. For example, someone can point to the ears of the rabbit and say, “This makes up the beak of the duck.” This might help the learner undergo a gestalt shift, seeing the image as a duck for the first time. One can also learn how to develop a perspective by learning from an expert about what is *important*. A general can point to particular troop movement patterns in a video presentation, indicating that those movements are important, which leads the learner to see those movements as not only dangerous but *importantly* dangerous. Similarly, one can point several events in the world and say, “These are happening for the sake of a divine mission,” or “These actions have such-and-such potential,” or “This is an instance of the brokenness of the world.” By learning how to see bits of information from a perspective different from one’s own, one can thereby be in a better position to try on that perspective. By repetitiously trying on the perspective, one might learn how to make the perspective more central to one’s psychology (the perspective “grows on me” or “just starts to make sense” or “seems fitting”), and as a consequence one might come to adopt the perspective and thus have that faith.<sup>19</sup> Aside from pointing out what is important or significant, someone who is trying to lead another to have faith could tell a story, where the narrative indicates what is important about the world. One of the values of myths and learning from others’ narrated life experiences is that they orient us toward what matters and indicates what is valuable, inviting us to try on a perspective, which can in turn lead to the adoption of a new perspective.<sup>20</sup> Myths and narratives thus help us to have faith.

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<sup>18</sup> This point is made by Camp (2019, 23) and Holley (2011, 750).

<sup>19</sup> By adopting a different faith, one can also adjust one’s credences and/or beliefs in theistic propositions. For more on how this could be done, see Pittard (unpublished). Lindsay Rettler (2018) maintains that one has indirect voluntary control over one’s beliefs by reflecting on one’s reasons and evidence; I maintain here that one could instead aim to adopt a new perspective, which would in turn influence the reasons and evidence one can recognize.

<sup>20</sup> One application of this narration to the problem of suffering, see Stump (2012). The connection between narratives and perspective shifts in the context of the problem of suffering is made by McAllister (2020).

I have thus far described what faith is and what it is to have faith. Faith is a perspective that is value-oriented, directs motivation, and provides reasons for beliefs, where the subject has a pro-attitude toward the target of one's faith, as construed according to the subject's perspective. To have faith is to adopt a faith perspective rather than to merely consider or try on the perspective. In the following section, I show that the perspectival account of faith (with the accompanying account of having faith) meets methodological criteria for an account of faith. Then, in the following section, I show how the account can be used to unite and provide an account of various faith locutions.

### **3. Perspectival faith meets methodological criteria**

Jonathan Kvanvig explicitly argues for a methodology for developing an account of faith. He begins this argument by considering the method of linguistic analysis, in which we discover what faith is by tracking how people use the word 'faith'. Such a method, Kvanvig argues, is unsatisfactory:

We can engage philosophically in an analysis of anything in the dictionary, but we don't, and the reason we don't, when it is justifying of our practice, is because we presuppose the value or importance or significance of what we focus on in our philosophical explorations.<sup>21</sup>

Kvanvig's reason for not engaging in linguistic analysis is that the goal of philosophical theorizing is to discover what is valuable, and we do not have reason to think that linguistic use will track the value of what we aim to analyze. The same can be said for a method that aims to track the history of a concept to be analyzed: neither the history of thought about the concept nor the

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<sup>21</sup> Kvanvig 2018, 25.

history of the use of the term to denote the concept is itself sufficient for an understanding of the value of the concept itself. Although such a study might help one to discover some valuable features of the concept, such a method is insufficient for developing an account of a concept.

Kvanvig's positive proposal is that when one is developing an account of faith, one should aim to develop an account of faith worth having. This axiomatic approach is what makes philosophy worth doing, and it reveals what is valuable about what is being analyzed—faith, in this case. Of course, one cannot identify just any valuable concept with faith; one needs parameters to discover which of the myriad valuable concepts is faith. Here, Kvanvig assigns a role for the use of the term ‘faith’; he avers that when we are developing an account of faith, we need to look for a valuable state “in the neighborhood of things pointed to” by the word ‘faith’.<sup>22</sup> This method seems to be widely endorsed in the contemporary literature on faith. For example, although some people might use ‘faith’ to mean trust, many faith theorists nevertheless do not identify faith with trust, maintaining that faith is something else entirely, e.g., a belief of a certain

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<sup>22</sup> Kvanvig 2018, 7.

kind or formed in a certain way,<sup>23</sup> a commitment of some kind,<sup>24</sup> resilience,<sup>25</sup> pursuit of an ideal,<sup>26</sup> a passion,<sup>27</sup> or a complex attitude.<sup>28</sup>

I am adopting the same methodology in this paper. In the previous section, I have indicated a valuable state—having a value-oriented perspective—in the neighborhood of things pointed to by the word ‘faith’. Not only is having a value-oriented perspective a valuable state in the neighborhood of what is pointed to by ‘faith’; a perspective is also a valuable state in the neighborhood of what is pointed to by various faith locutions (various locutions in which ‘faith’ is used), which I show in the next section.

#### 4. Perspectival faith unifies faith locutions

Accounts of faith simpliciter and having faith have been given, but there are many other faith locutions. These locutions include having faith that p (propositional faith), having faith in something (attitudinal faith), being a person of faith (global faith), articles of faith (creedal faith), and acts of faith (practical faith). It is possible that there are many different accounts of faith,

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<sup>23</sup> This view is held by Aquinas (*Summa Theologica* II-II.2.9), Locke (*Essay* IV.17.24), C.S. Lewis (1952, Bk 3, Ch 11), and Cohen (1989), 387. Runzo (1990) holds that propositional faith “is basically equivalent to the cognitive state of belief,” (44) and Plantinga (2000) seems to identify faith with a belief (245) or knowledge (246) formed via the *sensus divinitatus*. John Bishop holds that faith is a “doxastic venture,” expressed by believing “beyond—or perhaps even against—what can be established rationally on the basis of evidence and argument.” (2002, 471-2) Ryan Byerly argues that religious faith is a disposition to believe; it is a “disposition to take certain doxastic attitudes toward propositions of religious significance upon entertaining certain mental states.” (2012, 109)

<sup>24</sup> Lara Buchak (2012) maintains that faith is expressed by an action when one commits to the action without examining further evidence. Buchak (2017) later indicates that this commitment must be maintained even in the face of counter-evidence. Daniel McKaughan (2016, 74) holds that what is most central to faith is “certain kinds of commitments and decisions to remain actively engaged in a long term relationship.”

<sup>25</sup> Matheson (2018) maintains that faith is passionate perseverance to obtain long term goals. Howard-Snyder (2017) argues that faith in the Gospel of Mark is “for one to be resilient in the face of challenges to living in light of one’s overall positive stance toward the object of faith.” (57, cf. 49) Buchak’s view of faith from the previous footnote is a kind of resilience—resilience in the face of counterevidence. Robert Audi (2019) argues that faith is a kind of stance toward its object, which explains resilience in the face of counterevidence.

<sup>26</sup> This is Jonathan Kvanvig’s account (2013, 2018).

<sup>27</sup> Ryan West (2013) argues that faith is a passion, which disposes the person of faith to certain emotional responses.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Howard-Snyder (2013) maintains that faith that p is a positive cognitive stance toward p, a positive conative orientation toward p, and a positive evaluation of p.

perhaps even one for each faith locution,<sup>29</sup> but the aim here is to show that the perspectival account of faith can unify all of these faith locutions. Although the perspectival account of faith could perhaps stand on its own merely as an account of faith simpliciter, a view is more powerful to the extent that it can do more work, and for the purpose of showing the power of the account, I will show how the account extends to other faith locutions.

In what follows, I will argue that the valuable state in the neighborhood of what is pointed to by the word ‘faith’—having a value-oriented perspective—is the same across various faith locutions. To show how the various faith locutions are united, I show that these locutions are focally connected in much the same way Aristotle holds that ‘a healthy body,’ ‘healthy food,’ and ‘a healthy heart rate’ are focally connected. According to Aristotle, health of a body is the core, or focal, use of ‘health’ (a kind of well-functioning), and other health locutions are defined in terms of it—e.g., broccoli is healthy insofar as it confers bodily health, and certain heart rates are healthy insofar as they express bodily health.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, as I describe below, propositional faith, attitudinal faith, global faith, articles of faith, and acts of faith are all defined in terms of perspectival faith.

### *Propositional Faith*

To have propositional faith is to have faith that p. For example, I might have faith that my team will win. Propositional faith can be defined in terms of perspectival faith: for S to have faith that p is for S to have a perspective according to which the world (or part thereof) is one in

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<sup>29</sup> Bradley Rettler (2018), for example, suggests a pluralism about faith, according to which there are many analyses of faith, based on the wide variety of faith locutions and answers to questions about which features faith possesses.

<sup>30</sup> For an elaboration of focal connection, see Shields (1999).

which p, where S has a pro-attitude toward p.<sup>31</sup> For example, for me to have faith that my team will win, I need to have a perspective on the game according to which my team will win and have a pro-attitude toward the proposition that my team will win. All of this is compatible with my team having the odds against them and their loss to be statistically likely.<sup>32</sup>

One might wonder whether the subject's construing the game as one in which the subject's team will win entails that the subject believes their team will win, whether it disposes the subject to believe their team will win, or whether it merely involves some kind of cognitive state or other, such as assumption or acceptance, that the subject's team will win. This is a question I hope to keep open for the purposes of this paper. The perspectival account can accommodate the view that faith requires belief, and it can accommodate the view that faith does not require belief.<sup>33</sup> There is a debate just like the one at the top of this paragraph about faith, where some hold that faith entails belief<sup>34</sup> and others hold that faith involves a weaker propositional attitude such as acceptance<sup>35</sup> or assumption.<sup>36</sup> The account of propositional faith above is also indeterminate about whether having such a perspective is compatible with doubt about whether

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<sup>31</sup> One might wonder whether the subject also needs to have a pro-attitude toward the world (or part thereof) as construed according to the subject's perspective, since the object of the pro-attitude in the definition of faith simpliciter in the first section is not a proposition but is instead the world as construed according to the subject's faith perspective. It might be true that this additional stipulation is needed, but I have eliminated it here for brevity, taking the subject's pro-attitude toward p to run proxy for the subject's pro-attitude toward the world (or part thereof) as construed according to the subject's perspective. To have a pro-attitude toward the proposition that my team wins the game is very similar to having a pro-attitude toward the game as won by my team.

<sup>32</sup> It is also compatible with my team's win being likely. That is, I can have faith that my team will win even if they are way ahead near the end of the game. To be sure, it is not always worth stating that I have this faith—it is easy to see and unnecessary to mention in sincerity to someone else that I have faith that my team will win when everyone already thinks that my team will, in fact, win—such an utterance violates the Gricean maxim of quantity: Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. (Grice 1975, 45) Of course, one might always modify the account given here such that S cannot have faith that p if S takes p to be likely.

<sup>33</sup> McAllister (2021) argues that his version of perspectival faith does not “mandate positive belief,” (39) nor does it “produce or mandate negative beliefs,” (40) but faith does incline the subject towards positive beliefs.

<sup>34</sup> See note 23.

<sup>35</sup> For this position, see Alston (1996).

<sup>36</sup> For this position, see Howard-Snyder (2013), (2016).

the team will win, which is yet another debate about faith. The perspectival view of faith, then, can make sense of current debates about propositional faith.

### *Attitudinal Faith*

To have attitudinal faith is to have faith in something. I might, for example, have faith in humanity or faith in my son. The locution ‘faith in x’, however, is incomplete, as noted by Daniel Howard-Snyder.<sup>37</sup> If I have faith in my son, for example, one might reasonably ask: you have faith in your son to what? One does not merely have faith in someone; one has faith in someone to x—e.g., achieve a particular goal, act as they have previously agreed, not betray one’s trust, live up to one’s ideal, and so on. I can, for example, have faith in my son to safely drive me somewhere but not to save a dying plant.

With this structure in place, we can initially define S’s having faith in someone or something A to x in terms of perspectival faith as described in the subsection on propositional faith: for S to have faith in A to x is to have a perspective according to which the world (or part thereof) is one in which A x’s, where S has a pro-attitude toward A’s x-ing. For example, if I have faith in my team to win, I have a perspective on the game according to which my team wins and I have a pro-attitude toward my team’s winning. For another example, if I have faith in my friend to pick up a package for me on her way home from work, I construe the world as one in which she picks up the package, and I have a pro-attitude toward her picking up the package.

There is a problem for this initial account of attitudinal faith: according to the accounts given thus far, attitudinal faith is identical with propositional faith whenever the proposition in which one has propositional faith is the proposition that A x’s. From what was said above, to

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<sup>37</sup> See Howard-Snyder (2016), 145.

have faith that p is to have a perspective according to which the world (or part thereof) is construed as one in which p, where the subject has a pro-attitude toward p. To have faith in A to x is to have a perspective according to which the world (or part thereof) is construed as one in which A x's, where S has a pro-attitude toward A's x-ing. Daniel Howard-Snyder objects to such an identification. According to Howard-Snyder, "faith in something requires more [than propositional faith], namely entrusting one's welfare to it in some way."<sup>38</sup> In a later work, Howard-Snyder says that "you can put your faith *in* someone, to do or be thus-and-so, only if you are disposed to rely on them to do or be it."<sup>39</sup> He gives an example: I have faith that Anne's baby will survive his impending hazardous birth, but I do not have faith in him [the baby], as anything, since I am not disposed to rely on him in any way at all."<sup>40</sup>

I object to the premise that attitudinal faith requires reliance or entrusting. I can have faith in Anne's baby to survive (*pace* Howard-Snyder), and as Howard-Snyder indicates, when I have such faith, I am not in any way relying on Anne's baby, nor am I entrusting my welfare to Anne's baby. Similarly, I can have faith in the team I am rooting for to win the game, but to do so is not to rely on the team any more than I would be relying on them were I to have faith *that* they will win.

Although neither entrusting nor reliance makes for the difference between propositional and attitudinal faith, there does seem to be a difference between the locutions: when I have faith *in* A to x, I have a perspective according to which something about A makes it so that A x's; the same is not necessarily true when I have faith *that* A x's. For example, suppose I have faith that my team will win the game. If my team flounders but the opposing team messes up so badly so as

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<sup>38</sup> Howard-Snyder (2013), 358.

<sup>39</sup> Howard-Snyder (2016), 144.

<sup>40</sup> Howard-Snyder (2016), 144.

to make it so that my team wins, my faith *that* my team will win is satisfied. My faith *in* my team to win, however, is not—there is nothing about my team that made it so that they won. Instead, it is only by virtue of external circumstances that they won. In that case, it makes sense to say, “I have lost faith in my team, but my faith that they would win has nevertheless been vindicated.” If this distinction is correct, when I have faith in someone, I have a perspective according to which there is something about that person that makes x happen; I do not have such a perspective merely by having faith *that* the person x’s. For S to have faith in A to x is thus for S to have a perspective according to which the world (or part thereof) is one in which A x’s and in which there is something about A that makes it so that A x’s, where S has a pro-attitude toward A’s x-ing.

### *Global Faith*

Global faith indicates what a person of faith has. Daniel Howard-Snyder describes what it is to be a person of faith:

To be a person of faith is to be a person who takes up or finds herself with an overall stance or orientation toward matters that govern important aspects of her life, one that structures those aspects into a unified whole, one that involves a disposition to retain that stance/orientation in the face of difficulties in living it out.<sup>41</sup>

The above description is of someone who has adopted a central, resilient, and global faith perspective on one’s life. Central, global perspectives unify the important aspects of the subject’s

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<sup>41</sup> Howard-Snyder 2016, 145. Robert Audi defines ‘global faith’ differently; he states that having global faith is “opposed both to lacking faith and to having a particular religious faith, which implies holding certain doctrines (usually, institutionally embodied.)” (2008, 93) This definition, however, seems to me to be false. A serious and reverent Catholic is accurately called a person of faith even if they hold a particular religious faith along with certain doctrines.

life, giving the subject an “overall stance or orientation toward matters that govern important aspects of her life, that structures those aspects into a unified whole.” Further, as described above, perspectives guide subjects, directing their motivation and affecting their beliefs. In addition, if the subject has a resilient faith, the subject will retain that perspective in the face of difficulties. For example, someone who has a resilient theistic perspective—according to which the world is created by God, God guides the universe, and our choices contribute to or interfere with God’s redemptive purposes—will tend to retain that perspective even when the subject finds it difficult to live according to God’s purposes. A central, resilient, and global faith perspective on one’s life, then, satisfies Howard-Snyder’s description of global faith.

### *Articles of Faith*

Articles of faith, as articulated by a particular religion, are propositional articulations of the main components of a perspective that is ideally had by members of that religion. Thus, when a body of Christian believers says, “We believe in One God, Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth,” they are articulating features of a perspective each of them ideally has adopted. Each person reciting the articles of faith, then, can be reminded to adjust their perspective such that they see the world as created by one almighty God and thus share the same faith. Recitation as a community is a way of learning or relearning what faith to have. Reinforced, consistent repetition facilitates making the perspective central by bringing it to the top of the reciter’s mind, and recitation as a group engenders social accountability that supports perspectival resilience.

### *Acts of Faith, Beliefs by Faith*

Acts of faith are simply ways of acting on the faith perspective one has taken. One act of faith, for example, is to pray for a healing—an action that is taken on the basis of one’s faith that

there is a God who cares enough to answer prayers and who has the power to heal. Acts of faith are just expressions of one's perspectival faith.

A similar account can be given for beliefs by faith; beliefs by faith are just beliefs that one has that fittingly result from one's perspectival faith. One might believe by faith that God raised Jesus from the dead, in which case one has a perspective on the world according to which God raised Jesus from the dead and one has the resulting fitting belief that God raised Jesus from the dead.

The perspectival account of faith thus unifies various prominent faith locutions. The unity is that of focal connection, where the core, or focal, faith is perspectival faith by virtue of the fact that other kinds of faith are defined in terms of perspectival faith. To have faith that p is to have a perspective according to which the world (or part thereof) is one in which p, where the subject has a pro-attitude toward p. To have faith in A to x is to have a perspective according to which the world (or part thereof) is one in which A x's and in which there is something about A that makes it so that A x's, where S has a pro-attitude toward A's x-ing. To be a person of faith is to adopt a central, resilient, and global faith perspective on one's life. Articles of faith are propositional articulations of the main components of a faith perspective that is ideally had by members of the respective religion. Acts of faith are ways of acting on the faith perspective one has taken, and beliefs by faith are beliefs that fittingly result from one's perspectival faith. By identifying the focal case of faith—perspectival faith—we have thus identified a valuable state in the neighborhood of both what we typically call 'faith' and various locutions in which 'faith' is used.

What has been said above is compatible with the fact that someone can have one kind of faith (e.g., propositional faith) but not another (e.g., acts of faith). Just as one can be healthy but

have an unhealthy complexion, one can have perspectival faith but not one of the manifestations because of other factors, e.g., one's weakness of will or blind spots. The unity involved in focal connection is a unity in terms of accounts of faith locutions rather than an entailment relationships between the possessing the concepts involved in those accounts. For example, one can have faith simpliciter even if one does not always perform acts of faith, and one can perform acts of faith even if one does not have faith simpliciter. Howard-Snyder gives an example of the failure to manifest one's faith: "I might have faith in Christ as my Savior, but my faith in him might be so psychologically compartmentalized that it neither governs nor unifies my life, as evidence by my failure to engage in Christian practices and Christian approaches to personal, moral, social, and political matters."<sup>42</sup> Howard-Snyder's example is one of non-central or local Christian faith. As non-central faith, that faith is overshadowed by other perspectives, such as the perspective according to which the purpose of life is to procure my own comfort or enjoyment. In that case, one's faith in Christ would not be life-governing; one's life would be instead governed by the perspective oriented toward their own comfort or enjoyment. Howard-Snyder's example could also be an example of local theistic faith, as when it is only in particular contexts (e.g., church contexts) that one sees oneself as saved by Christ. (Although non-central, local faith is still faith, it is not the kind of faith toward which religious adherents are typically exhorted; they are instead exhorted to have global, central religious faith.)

## **5. Perspectival faith escapes objections to cognitive accounts**

Although the perspectival account of faith is a cognitive account of faith, the perspectival account of faith escapes extant objections to cognitive accounts. Many objections to cognitive accounts of

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<sup>42</sup> Howard-Snyder (2017), 56.

faith target accounts according to which faith requires belief. However, faith, according to the perspectival account, is general enough to be compatible with the view that faith does not require belief (and it is compatible with the view that faith does require belief.) An argument would need to be made that perspectival faith does require belief. Daniel Howard-Snyder, arguably the most ardent advocate of the view that faith does not require belief, nevertheless maintains that faith requires some cognitive component, even if that component is assumption. To assume p is to represent the world as if p, which “functions similarly to belief in reasoning and other behavior.”<sup>43</sup> The description of assumption captures one aspect of a perspective—the subject represents the world as if p—but does not quite capture the notion of construal, along with its importance and value-orientation. Howard-Snyder arrives at the conclusion that faith does not require an epistemic state stronger than assumption by giving cases in which one has faith that p but one is in doubt about whether p, one would not tend to assert p if asked, and would not be surprised if p were not to obtain. All of this is compatible with the perspectival account of faith: one might have faith that one’s team will win (which is just to have a perspective according to which one’s team wins the game plus a pro-attitude toward that proposition) while being in doubt about whether one’s team will win, without tending to assert that one’s team will win when asked, and without being surprised were one’s team not to win. This is because perspectives are not always reflected upon, are not always accessible to those who have them, not always articulable by the subject, and can be weak, or non-resilient. Having a faith perspective in these ways might not be ideal, but it is having faith nonetheless. Having perspectival faith can thus meet Howard-Snyder’s criteria even though to have a faith perspective is not merely to make an assumption.

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<sup>43</sup> Howard-Snyder (2016), 150.

Jonathan Kvanvig also argues against doxastic accounts of faith. Kvanvig maintains that views according to which that faith is a belief or the disposition to believe truths supported by the evidence are false because “the importance of faith is disproportionate to the intellectual value and virtue of believing truths supported by evidence.”<sup>44</sup> In fact, Kvanvig says, there is no underlying cognitive attitude held by all people of faith; the exemplars of faith (and other people of faith) do not share any cognitive attitude. Kvanvig adds that rational attitudes are thoroughly perspectival, so we shouldn’t expect there to be a particular rational attitude that underlies faith: “[R]ationality is always and everywhere sensitive to change in first-person perspective.”<sup>45</sup>

The perspectival view of faith escapes Kvanvig’s objections to cognitive accounts of faith. Having a perspective that orients the subject toward what is valuable is itself valuable—more valuable than the beliefs or belief dispositions that might result from having the perspective. These perspectives direct the subject’s motivation; the perspective according to which God keeps promises is what directed Abraham’s motivation to obey God by leaving Mesopotamia, and a little leaguer’s perspective according to which he will improve so as never to give up a game-winning homerun again can direct the little leaguer’s motivation to keep practicing. Such perspectives orient and structure lives, which is surely valuable. In fact, the structuring and orienting function of faith is what leads Kvanvig to hold that his own account of affective faith is valuable.<sup>46</sup>

Kvanvig might be correct that no two people have the same rational attitude. The perspectival account is compatible with this view. For two people to have faith does not require that each one has the same perspective; it simply requires that each person has a perspective with

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<sup>44</sup> Kvanvig (2018), 11.

<sup>45</sup> Kvanvig (2018), 73.

<sup>46</sup> See Kvanvig (2018), 17.

the features described in the first section. In fact, according to Kvanvig, someone has faith if they are disposed to act in service of an ideal, but there is no requirement that the ideal be the same across those who have faith or that each person's faith is as central or resilient as another's. Nevertheless, two token perspectives might belong to the same perspective-type by virtue of satisfying an expression of the most important feature(s) of the perspectives. Both Abraham and Moses, for example, could have construed the world as one directed by God who rewards those who seek God,<sup>47</sup> thus making their faith of the same type.<sup>48</sup>

The perspectival account of faith thus escapes objections to cognitive accounts of faith given by Howard-Snyder and Kvanvig. Those objections are aimed at doxastic accounts by holding that such accounts are too strong for the requirements on faith in some cases (Howard-Snyder) and are not valuable enough (Kvanvig). However, the perspectival account of faith presents a valuable cognitive state that is possessed by someone with faith, and the valuable cognitive state has no belief requirement—at least not without additional argument.

## 6. Conclusion

I have argued that faith is a perspective that orients the subject toward what is valuable, where the subject has a pro-attitude toward the target of one's faith as construed according to the subject's faith perspective. These faith perspectives direct subjects' motivation to act and provide subjects with reasons for beliefs. They can be more or less global, more or less central to the subject's psychology, and more or less resilient to co-option or dissolution. To *have* faith is to adopt a perspective rather than merely considering or trying on the perspective. One can learn how to have faith by trusting experts and trying on learned perspectives. Perspectival faith is a

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<sup>47</sup> Hebrews 11:6

<sup>48</sup> For further responses to Kvanvig's objections to cognitive accounts of faith, see Rooney (2019).

valuable state in the neighborhood of what we typically call ‘faith’, and it is the core, or focal, concept that unifies various faith locutions, such as having faith that p (propositional faith), having faith in something (attitudinal faith), being a person of faith (global faith), articles of faith (creedal faith), and acts of faith (practical faith). Further, the perspectival account of faith escapes extant arguments against cognitive accounts of faith given by Howard-Snyder and Kvanvig. The perspectival account of faith thus provides a valuable and unified account of faith that does not succumb to extant objections to accounts of its kind.

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