

## THE LEAP OF FAITH

Not everything presented as faith or that looks like faith is faith. If your faith is produced by how you were conditioned as a child then that is not faith. Conditioning is not faith. Habit is easily mistaken for faith. Cognitive dissonance is when a person seems to believe x is true and also that it is untrue. The trouble with a person of faith, they cannot expect us to agree or disagree that they really are a person of faith. It would seem that a faith that is too bizarre in doctrine and morals and which blocks the person from wanting to see truth (and such a person by default is a wall between others and the truth as well) is not faith but addiction or just old fashioned arrogant stubbornness. A person can be supposed to have faith but faith is really faiths. For example, faith in Catholicism is a broad word for faith in the sinfulness of contraception, faith in the priest having powers to turn bread into God and faith in the Church to compile a collection of books that are exclusively God's word.

For the purpose of argument, let us assume that we do know people of faith as people of faith.

### *Commitment*

We all know people of rigid faith who seem to be suffering from OCD. If they witnessed somebody taking Jesus out of the tomb and then saying he rose they would still assert that they believe that Jesus really rose from the dead.

Not all believers are that rigid whether they believe in religion or politics or whatever.

A person can moderate their beliefs at times. For example, Jesus may have held back on the religious aggression during synagogue services and felt it was more appropriate to unleash it in the Temple.

Jesus had doubts but they did not make his commitment to dying on the cross waver.

Faith can be harmful. But if faith is not that rigid or deranged, it can still lead to a person being committed to it to the extreme that they would die or kill for it. The person has doubts and is still deeply principled.

People whose faith weakens will reason that it will get strong again like it will have done a million times before which is why they can still be extremist.

Lacking faith does not necessarily mean that extremism will recede. If faith is dangerous when it is strong it can still be as dangerous if it gets a few blows.

So if a person of faith does great harm in the name of religion and relishes it, the faith could be one problem and his commitment could be another.

### *Faith and Doubt are not Bedfellows*

Some say that faith and doubt do not necessarily oppose one another and to have faith means to have some doubt as well.

For example, you answer a quiz sheet. You believe that all the answers are right. But then when you hand the sheet in to the person running the quiz you start to ask yourself concerning what if you are wrong to think you got them all correct?

The more important it is to win the worse your anxiety will be. Indeed, the greater will be the force with which you suffer it.

But notice that the argument mistakes faith in the answers for faith in yourself. The two are not the same. So the argument for faith and doubting that same faith without diminishing it is wrong.

The argument insists that the religious believer who doubts is not facing a lack of belief. The argument is redefining doubt not as lack of belief but as seeking some confirmation that her beliefs are in fact true. This would imply that the very religious person will endure doubt more than the disinterested believer.

But knowing something is true does not mean you will not or should not seek confirmation. Knowing you locked the front door does not mean you must not reinforce that knowing by looking again.

Doubt is genuine evidence that the person has a problem with believing or having faith. Real doubt is based on evidence not feelings or irrational notions. It is possible to irrationally question what you know is true.

### *The virtue of doubt*

Today, many forms of spirituality argue that if you have a lot of doubt that is a sign that you need go no further - doubt is the goal of spirituality for it is humble. They think that claiming to be right is somehow intolerant or at least implicitly oppressive. Against that it is argued that it is not good to doubt a child's right to life even if you are in a community that is okay with infanticide.

But if you are right then it is oppressive to water that down! Allowing evil things to happen on the basis that nobody really knows if they are evil is hardly a good advert for tolerance!

### *The Big Leap*

Faith is trust in a person and includes at least some degree of positive and warm feeling.

Faith depends on belief. You cannot have faith in a woman to make her your wife unless you believe enough good things about her.

Many religions speak of the leap of faith. What happens is that you decide that what the religion teaches could be true. Even if it seems stupid, you blame your failure or inability to understand its mystery. Then you take a leap in order to believe. You make the leap of faith. The leap can only happen if the evidence for a religion is poor or non-existent or unconvincing.

The leap is dangerous for the Mormon does it and so does the Catholic. Pagans and Satanists sometimes do it too. It does not help in the search for truth. It blocks it. As good as the leap is, we must remember that the good is often the enemy of the best.

If there is a God, it is not right to condone him letting so much evil and horror happen. Some say it is okay if you see God working through others to make them abnormally good and virtuous. Belief in God should be more than just belief but the very presence of God working in others. So you should see God in people and then work out if he exists. But there are atheists who are exceptionally good people. Religious people seem to be no better than non-religious people. So saying God is right to stand by and let so much evil happen is really a callous theory. It cannot be anything but a theory. The doctrine of God demands that you make this theory your own and that you take a leap of faith that risks not only being led astray but condoning innocent suffering and being less sensitive to innocent suffering than you should be.

The leap of faith can be dangerous as the following examples will show.

"I will ignore the evidence that the Bible is a bad silly book and not the word of God. I take a leap of faith and believe all the criticisms are wrong and it is indeed God's perfect word."

"I will take a chance and bomb the plane for God."

Both are still faith. They are equally faith - it just happens the results are different. One leads to a bombed plane. The other leads to obscurantism and corruption.

### *The Rationale*

The rationale for a leap of faith is that we do not know and cannot prove everything so sometimes we have to take a chance. But that does not excuse just jumping into any faith. It justifies the simplest possible faith. Nothing complicated!

Faith involves belief and any practice or anything that supports a relationship with a higher and supernatural power. Faith is supposed to be at its best when you faithfully do and face the things that scare you half to death and when you do it for what you hope is the right reasons. Faith assumes that things will turn out the best way though it may not be the way you want or like. It is supposed to involve relinquishing the need to control others. So you trust in your hope for the best. You trust in God's providence. It is easy to see how such a doctrine can be dangerous. Maximilian Kolbe gave his life for another man. That is praised. But it is only praised because out of the outcome. Neither man had any way of being sure the right thing was being done. The problem is that it thinks too highly of how people assess situations. Nobody really knows their own situation fully. Each one of us is a cog in a gigantic clock. Why would it be okay for you to risk your life and give it away over faith and not right to oppress others because of faith? A double-standard is really not about faith but about self-

delusion.

Another rationale for leaps of faith is that you can believe what you want to believe and not need evidence. Plantinga taught that but only in relation to the existence of God. He argued that belief in God does not need justification. Nobody sane thinks you can believe anything at all and not need evidence.

But believing in God because you want to is really all about the wanting and the end result is not belief in God but a simulated belief that is all about you. It is using God as a mask for what you want. To say you believe in God because you want to is making your wants the real God. A real God would be believed in for it is the truth. It is arrogant to believe in God for you feel a need to. Plantinga argued that we need to believe in God and it is not just about wanting to believe. But if so then how much of it is about wanting to believe, is it 60% or 90% or 10%? He said we need to believe in God so that we can trust our reason and our senses for he, the God of truth, gave them to us. That implies, "If you want to be happy with your head and heart and senses then you must believe." That is blackmail and against the claim that God freely wants us to believe.

"Believe what you want and know you don't need evidence" is putting belief above evidence. To say you know evidence is unimportant is to blatantly oppose truth. Knowing is not about what you want knowing to be. You either know something or you do not. Knowing is about the truth and the truth is the truth whether you want it to be or not.

Believing what you want is not the same as believing what you think you want to believe. Believing what you think you want to believe because you think it is a clear recipe for chaos.

If you want to believe in a God like being for the sake of grounding truth then why not a God-like tooth fairy? Surely it would not matter what kind of God then!

### *Leap into Magic*

Miracle believers take a leap of faith. They see a remarkable coincidence and describe it as a miracle. For example, suppose a community is turning away from devotion to the Virgin Mary. A statue of her bleeds and no explanation is found for this and it is possibly a miracle calling us back to devotion to Mary. It is possibly supernatural. It is arrogant to assume that it is possibly a miracle. You need evidence that miracles can happen but such evidence is impossible. You cannot know all the causes behind anything.

It is not the possibility that it is a miracle that leads them to believe. If a tree was bleeding they would pay no attention. It is the coincidence. But coincidence is insufficient. Coincidence happens all the time.

Acceptance of a miracle report as true would be a necessary evil for a leap of faith is a necessary evil. Creation is a miracle so it is it a necessary evil too? Some would answer - "No for it was needed for us to exist." But the point is not our need. The creator had no need to create. It is about why God would make us when he had no need to.

Faith in God or religion is seen as a supernatural gift from God. God inspires you to believe and through his provident care helps you to believe he is there and what he has revealed. This makes faith itself a miracle indeed the only miracle that matters!

### *A Leap towards Idolatry*

A leap of faith risks you making a God out of your imagination. The Muslim doctrine that God is a mystery so that whatever you imagine him to be is wrong as in plain wrong or inadequate. That is the main reason Islam forbids images of God. They say that you understand that God exists but not what he is or even who he is. Those who make the leap of faith are really idolaters.

### *Does the Leap help Comfort us?*

There is less fear in facing the uncertain than there is in telling yourself that you are certain. Facing the uncertain implies confidence while telling yourself that you are certain of the good future indicates a denial of the truth. You cannot be certain. It indicates that you sense you are too weak to cope so you tell yourself it will be okay. That is a disastrous and dangerous strategy.

The atheist leap of faith involves holding that he will cope with all the terrible things life can throw at him and can be happy to accept death for he sees it as his body and life going away to make way for somebody else's.

The atheist says the believer in God cannot give sufficient evidence for the existence of God any more than he can give

sufficient evidence for a spiritual teapot circling Jupiter. I'd change that

### *The vicious circle*

A leap of faith may be based on circular reasoning. Christians engage in circular reasoning. The supernatural exists therefore the Lord Jesus rose again supernaturally from the dead and this proves the supernatural. The atheist version of the circular argument could be that only the natural exists so there is a natural explanation as to why some claimed Jesus rose from the dead so the resurrection story is evidence that people cannot be trusted with reports of the supernatural. It is said by some that both supernaturalism and naturalism are internally consistent. So what you do is follow what seems to describe reality the best. Which one seems real? Just as you cannot assume magic every time you see something strange so you cannot assume the supernatural. So the atheist is the one with the most rational form of circular reasoning. Circular reasoning is irrational but not all circular reasoning is equally irrational.

### *Leap of feeling*

A leap of faith and a leap of feeling are different things. Many confuse the two. However you can do both at the one time. But what if a leap of feeling is mistaken for a leap of faith? The only way to tell the difference is to assess how well the person lives out the faith. For example, if a person takes a leap of faith that Jesus' teaching is all true and is regularly drunk or sleeping around and blaspheming you can see that he has barely any faith if any.

### *Finally*

A leap of faith is fine as long as it is occult free and magic free and God free and if it is a short leap! All leaps of faith are not the same length. If the atheist has to leap one foot to have faith that there is no God then the believer has to leap ten to have faith that there is.

