Research Article

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No Faith Without Belief

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Abstract: According to a long tradition, one of the fundamental components of religious faith is religious belief. Recently, this tradition has been challenged by some scholars who have argued that faith does not require belief. In particular, William Alston and Daniel Howard-Snyder have introduced notions such as *acceptance* and *assuming*, which they claim are required by faith instead of belief. In this paper, we will demonstrate that the critiques of Alston and Howard-Snyder are based on a particularly strong notion of belief. However, if one considers that belief can exist in degrees and that weaker notions of belief are therefore possible, there is no reason to deny that belief is a fundamental component of faith.

Keywords: faith; belief; grades of belief; credence; acceptance; assuming

According to a long tradition, one of the fundamental components of religious faith is religious belief. In other terms, belief is traditionally regarded as a necessary cognitive condition for adherence to faith; without considering true the statements that constitute the doctrinal core of a religion, one cannot consider oneself a follower of that religion. Sometimes, the identification is even stronger, and belief is understood as a sufficient condition as well, thus resulting in the identification of belief with faith. A considerable recent body of literature has objected to this tradition and has expressed support for the thesis that one can have religious faith without believing the propositions that state the fundamental tenets of that religion. For example, one can have faith that God exists without necessarily believing that God exists.[1]

Before addressing the arguments of those who assert that it is possible to have faith without belief, some preliminary considerations about the concept of faith we shall adopt are necessary. In particular, the concept assumed here is that of propositional faith and not that of faith in someone or something. Therefore, we shall always focus on faith that *p* (for example, faith that God exists) and not on faith in *x* (for example, faith in God). One can obviously discuss the relationship between propositional faith and faith in someone or something. For example, one might assume that faith in something always presupposes propositional faith: one has, for instance, faith in God only if one has faith that God exists, that God is omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good, etc. But there could also be inverse relationships of dependence: for example, I might have faith that John will win the race precisely because I have faith in John. Whatever the relationships between faith that *p* and faith in *x* may be, here we shall deal exclusively with propositional faith.

Although the focus of this article is religious faith, we maintain that it is merely a species of a broader genus. We can have faith that God exists, but also faith that democracy will ultimately prevail over other political forms, or faith that my wife will not be unfaithful, or that my team will win the championship. We do not see substantial

1 See, for instance, Pojman, "Faith without belief?", Alston, "Belief, acceptance, and religious faith", "Audi on nondoxastic faith", Audi, "Faith, belief, and rationality", "Belief, faith, and acceptance", Howard-Snyder, "Propositional faith: What it is and what it is not", "Does faith entail belief?", "Three arguments to think that faith does not entail belief", Kvanvig, "Affective theism and people of faith", McKaughan, "Authentic faith and acknowledged risk: dissolving the problem of faith and reason".

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differences between these types of faith. In other terms, we can characterize the concept of faith in general, and we believe that this characterization is adequate for both religious and non-religious faith. This constitutes an advantage because it enables broader generalizations and because the field of examples upon which to base the theory is more extensive.

Although the kind of faith we will address here is propositional faith, it does not seem possible to have faith that *p* where *p* is any random proposition. For faith that *p* to be meaningful, the proposition in which one has faith must play a specific role in one's life. For instance, the authors of this article do not have faith that the tree at the entrance of their university has 50,789 leaves (nor do they have faith in the negation of this proposition). The truth or falsity of such propositions does not impact their lives: if they were to discover that these propositions were false, their behavior would not change.

We say, instead, that a proposition holds significance in a person's life if their behavior would change upon discovering it to be false (or, if they currently consider the proposition false, upon discovering it to be true). Moreover, the significance of a proposition increases in proportion to the degree to which one's behavior would change upon discovering its truth or falsity. Only propositions that hold a certain level of significance in our lives are candidates to become objects of faith. Naturally, which propositions are significant varies from person to person. For example, for someone who has bet all their possessions on the fact that a certain tree has a specific number of leaves, the proposition that the tree has 50,789 leaves would be of great significance.

Finally, only those propositions that we prefer to be true rather than false can qualify as candidates for faith. We can have faith that our spouse is not unfaithful, but not that our spouse is unfaithful. This is because we prefer the proposition that our spouse is not unfaithful to be true rather than false. Similarly, if we have faith that democracy will eventually become the form of government for all countries in the world, it is because we believe democracy to be good. This principle also applies to religious faith: if we have faith that God exists, then we prefer the proposition that God exists to be true rather than false.

There is one further issue, which will be the subject of this article. In order to have faith that *p*, must we be certain that *p*? And must we believe that *p*? Undoubtedly, many people who have faith are absolutely certain about the propositions in which they have faith and are firmly convinced of their truth. However, the question is whether certainty or belief are necessary conditions for faith. A growing number of scholars have argued that they are not necessary conditions. In the first section of this paper, we outline the views of two of the most representative figures among them. In Section 2, we present arguments against this perspective, asserting that a certain degree of belief is indeed necessary for faith. Section 3 concludes the paper.

1 Against Faith As Belief

Alston argues[2] that it is incorrect to assume that one can have faith that *p* only if one believes that *p*. Faith and belief differ in at least two respects:

1. Belief is involuntary, whereas faith involves a component of voluntarism.
2. Faith that *p* is not necessarily accompanied by certainty that *p* is true, whereas belief that *p* is.

Referring to Cohen, *An essay on belief and acceptance*, Alston contends that belief is not a mental state but rather a disposition to behave in certain ways. It is not a mental state because one can believe that New York is in the United States without actively thinking about the proposition that New York is in the United States. This proposition does not need to be constantly present in one's consciousness to be believed. However, if a subject believes that *p*, they will exhibit certain dispositions, such as:

1. responding affirmatively to the question of whether *p*,
2. feeling it to be the case that *p*,
3. believing the propositions that logically follow from *p*,
4. using *p* as a premise in their theoretical and practical reasoning,

2 Alston, "Belief, acceptance, and religious faith".

5. being surprised upon learning that not-*p*,
6. tending to act in ways that would be appropriate if *p* were the case, given the subject's goals, aversions, and other beliefs.

As an alternative to the concept of belief in interpreting faith, Alston proposes the concept of *acceptance*. According to Cohen, to accept that *p* is to adopt a policy of positing or postulating that *p*. For Alston, *acceptance* implies points 1 and 3–6, but not point 2: if one accepts that *p*, it does not follow that one *feels* it to be the case that *p*.

To illustrate the concept of *acceptance*, consider the following example. Suppose a general must position his troops to prevent an enemy attack. He does not know precisely where the enemy will concentrate its attack; there are several possible scenarios, and it is difficult to rule them out. However, after evaluating the various possibilities, he concludes that it is most likely the attack will concentrate on point *x*. Therefore, he decides to *accept* the proposition that the enemy will attack *x*. As a result, he positions his troops to defend point *x* against the attack.

Regarding such an example, Alston would argue that we cannot say the general *believes* that the enemy will attack at point *x*. The general does not *feel* it to be the case that *x* will be attacked. By *feeling*, Alston aims to characterize the immediacy that seems intrinsic to belief:

> I have used the term "feel" […] in order to convey the idea that it possesses a kind of *immediacy*, that it is something one *experiences* rather than something that one *thinks out*, that it is a matter of one's being *struck by* (a sense of) how things are rather than deciding how things are (ibid., 5)

Regarding the proposition that the enemy will attack *x*, the general does not have this sense of immediacy; it is not something he experiences. Rather, it is something he decides to adopt after considering all the factors. It is something he *thinks out*. Moreover, the general's *acceptance* of the proposition that the enemy will attack *x* results from a deliberate decision, whereas, as we have noted, belief is not typically something about which one deliberates: one does not decide to believe that New York is in the United States. Clearly, the two are connected: precisely because, when we believe that *p*, we are *struck by how things are*, we do not make any decision about it. *Acceptance*, however, is not an involuntary disposition to *feel how things are*, but rather a deliberation made at a specific moment in time.

Despite these differences, *acceptance* shares several similarities with belief. First, like belief, it constitutes what Alston calls a "positive attitude" toward a proposition.[3] This positive attitude manifests in many of the same dispositions that also characterize belief. For example, the general would adopt the proposition that the enemy will attack *x* as a premise in his practical and theoretical reasoning: he would position his troops based on this premise. Furthermore, he would accept all the propositions that follow from this one and would be surprised to learn that the enemy will attack a different location.[4] Alston also claims that the general would respond affirmatively to the question of whether the enemy will attack *x*. However, we are not entirely certain of this point. The general would probably respond that it is likely the enemy will attack *x*, or that it is probable, or that, although not certain, he believes the enemy will attack *x*. We will come back to this issue.

Alston argues that the concept of *acceptance* is sufficient for religious faith. He does not deny that many religious people firmly believe the propositions of their faith. However, he maintains that those who have merely *accepted* the propositions of their faith (where "accepted" is understood as outlined above) should not be excluded from the category of those who have faith in that religion. He defends this thesis using various arguments, both historical and doctrinal. In the New Testament, what is translated as "belief" is the Greek word *pistis*, which is more accurately rendered as "faith." Similarly, in the formulations of the Nicene and Apostle's Creeds, the expression "believe in" often appears rather than "believe that."

3 ibid., 8.

4 However, he would not be as surprised as he would be if he believed that the enemy would attack *x*. We will return to this point later when discussing Howard-Snyder's position.

In a series of articles, Daniel Howard-Snyder has further developed some of Alston's ideas and has also argued that faith does not imply belief.[5] Howard-Snyder holds that faith that *p* is incompatible with the belief that not-*p* (B(¬*p*)). For instance, it seems incoherent to state something like, "I have faith that God exists, but I believe that God does not exist." However, he argues that it is possible to have faith that *p* without believing that *p* (F(*p*) & ¬B(*p*)). He provides various arguments to support this claim, which partially overlap with Alston's:

1. It is possible to have faith that *p* while being in doubt about *p*, but it is not possible to believe that *p* while being in doubt about *p.*[6] For example, suppose that a person is talking about her investments and says: "I am in doubt about whether I will recover my losses, but I still have faith that I will." Or suppose that someone is confiding in a friend about their marital problems and says: "I do not know what to believe, whether she will stay with me or not, but I have faith that she will stay." Or imagine someone, reflecting on their existential situation, saying: "I cannot tell whether the evidence I have supports the existence of God, but I have faith that God exists nonetheless." All these statements seem coherent. However, it seems incoherent to claim that one is in doubt about *p* while also asserting belief that *p.* Being in doubt about whether *p* seems to imply not believing that *p* (¬B(*p*)).
2. It is possible to have faith that *p* and not be surprised if it turns out that ¬*p.* While one might be disappointed upon discovering that ¬*p*, they would not necessarily be surprised. However, if one believes that *p*, they would be surprised to find that ¬*p.* On this point, Howard-Snyder opposes Alston, who argues that if a subject accepts that *p*, they would be surprised to discover that ¬*p.*
3. It is possible to have faith that *p* without believing that *p*, but instead believing that *p* is merely likely or more probable than its alternatives.

Howard-Snyder holds that faith is not only compatible with the *acceptance* described by Alston but also with attitudes weaker than acceptance. Specifically, Howard-Snyder argues that faith is compatible with *assuming*. Although he does not explicitly define what assuming is, he distinguishes it from acceptance for three reasons:

1. Acceptance implies a tendency to answer affirmatively to the question of whether *p* (cf. point 1 in Alston), but one can assume that *p* without having this tendency.
2. Acceptance implies a tendency to be surprised upon discovering that ¬*p*, but as noted, faith does not imply this. Howard-Snyder claims that assuming also does not imply this: one can assume that *p* and, upon discovering that ¬*p*, not be surprised by this fact.
3. One cannot accept *p* if in doubt about *p*, but one can assume *p* while being in doubt about *p.*

However, points 3, 4, and 6 in Alston's framework still hold for Howard-Snyder. Thus, if one assumes that *p*, (i) they will tend to assume everything that logically follows from *p*; (ii) they will tend to use *p* as a premise in their theoretical and practical reasoning; (iii) they will tend to act in ways that would be appropriate if *p* were the case, given the goals, aversions, and other assumptions and beliefs of the subject.

Nevertheless, Howard-Snyder seeks to distinguish assuming from *acting as if*. He asserts that assuming is a kind of *acting as if* but requires more than what *acting as if* entails. Specifically, while *acting as if* is compatible with believing that ¬*p* (B(¬*p*)), as in cases where one merely pretends that *p*, assuming is not. Howard-Snyder argues that assuming that *p* entails a "positive cognitive stance toward *p*", which mere *acting as if* does not involve.

It is not entirely clear what Howard-Snyder means by a *positive cognitive stance toward a proposition*, as he never explicitly defines this concept. However, he provides examples of positive cognitive stances: "belief, assent, acceptance, acknowledgment, judgment, affirmation, decision, assumption, confidence, credence, trust, seeming".[7] These are all *truth-directed* attitudes: they aim, in some sense, at tracking the truth. While mere *pretence* is in no way truth-conducive, Howard-Snyder's concept of *assuming* is. Indeed, Howard-Snyder states

5 Howard-Snyder, "Propositional faith: What it is and what it is not", "Does faith entail belief?", "Three arguments to think that faith does not entail belief".

6 For Howard-Snyder, one is in doubt about *p* when one believes neither *p* nor not-*p* (¬B(p) & ¬B(¬p)).

7 Howard-Snyder, "Does faith entail belief?", 159.

that "a positive cognitive attitude toward *p* is how it ought to be only if *p* is true, and a negative cognitive attitude toward *p* is how it ought to be only if *p* is false".[8] Furthermore, "a cognitive attitude toward *p* is positive in that one who has it takes a stand on behalf of *p*'s truth, whereas a cognitive attitude toward *p* is negative in that one who has it takes a stand against *p*'s truth".[9] Finally, Howard-Snyder asserts that positive cognitive stances – like their negative counterparts – are *evidence-sensitive* and thus reflect, in some way, the "estimation of the truth or falsehood of *p*".[10] Howard-Snyder even goes so far as to claim that positive cognitive stances are "a sort of belief-like attitude".[11]

2 Belief

To evaluate the positions of Alston and Howard-Snyder, it is necessary to understand the concept of *belief* that they assume. Alston acknowledges that one can have different degrees of belief:

> Hence I will go along with the common view that beliefs come in all degrees of strength, from complete certainty at the top all the way to down to a mere inclination to suppose that *p*. Below a certain degree of felt sureness, practically everyone will withhold the (unqualified) term "believe" and say instead that the person "is inclined to think" or something of the sort. But I won't try to say just where that minimum requirement is to be located; I doubt that any sharp line can be drawn (Alston,"Belief, acceptance, and religious faith", 6).

However, he states that when we say "x believes p," without further specifications, this likely implies that *p* appears unquestionable to *x*. This excludes any doubt or uncertainty on *x*'s part regarding *p*. Alston further asserts that his "concern […] is with beliefs that exhibit a high degree of felt certainty".[12] This is the concept of *belief* that Alston argues is not necessary for faith. Regarding Alston's second condition, which states that one who believes that *p* "feels it to be the case that *p*," this feeling must be understood as certainty, thereby excluding any doubt about the possibility that things might not be so. It is thus clear why Alston maintains that belief is not necessary for faith: faith can coexist with and be compatible with doubt. However, belief, in this strong sense assumed by Alston, is incompatible with any doubt, as it allows no room for uncertainty.

Howard-Snyder also assumes a similar concept of *belief*, although he devotes less attention to the matter than Alston does:

> Folk psychology is right: there really are beliefs. Of course, there is much to be said in favor of trading in belief for graded confidence or credence, as many Bayesians do. So it would be wise to put what I have to say in terms of both views. To do that, however, would complicate the discussion too much. Therefore, with apologies, I'll stick with the folk psychological characterization of the relevant terrain. (Howard-Snyder, "Propositional faith: What it is and what it is not", 359)

> As for belief, I set aside graded belief and stick with folk psychology. (Howard-Snyder, "Three arguments to think that faith does not entail belief", 116.)

It is not entirely clear what Howard-Snyder means by *folk psychology* in this context, but he appears to assume that common sense holds that there are no degrees of belief, while the notion of such degrees seems confined to probability theory or certain interpretations of it. Thus, it is evident that Howard-Snyder also assumes a strong conception of *belief*, and it is this concept that he deems unnecessary for faith. Consequently, he also asserts that faith is compatible with being in doubt, whereas belief is not, because it does not consider belief as something that can admit degrees and assumes that belief is always accompanied by certainty. Similarly, one can have faith that *p* and yet not be surprised if it turns out that not-*p*, but this is not possible with belief: if one is certain that *p*, one

8 Howard-Snyder, "Three arguments to think that faith does not entail belief.", 121.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Alston,"Belief, acceptance, and religious faith", 6

would be surprised to discover that not-*p*. Finally, one can have faith that *p* even while believing that *p* is merely probable, whereas if one believes that *p*, one does not consider *p* merely probable but is instead certain that *p*.

The concept of graded belief, on the other hand, seems compatible with not being surprised upon discovering that not-*p*: if I believe that *p* only to a certain degree, the discovery that not-*p* would surprise me only to a certain extent. Furthermore, if I am not sure that *p* but believe it to a certain degree, I regard *p* as probable rather than certain.

The conception of *belief* assumed by Alston and Howard-Snyder aligns with the semantic interpretation often ascribed to the belief operator *B*. It is held that $B_x(p)$ is true when, in all the representations of the world compatible with *x*'s doxastic state, *p* is true. In other words, it excludes the possibility that among *x*'s representations of the world there exists even a single one in which not-*p* holds. This implies that *x* has no doubt regarding *p*, because if one has doubts about *p*, then one considers the possibility that *p* might not be true and thereby entertains a scenario in which not-*p* holds. According to this conception, there are only three fundamental doxastic attitudes toward a proposition: believing that *p*, believing that not-*p*, and suspending judgment about *p*. It is not possible to believe that *p* to a certain degree.

The thesis we defend here is the following: if one considers less idealized and less rigid conceptions of *belief*, it remains possible to argue that belief is a fundamental and necessary component of faith. Therefore, notions such as *acceptance* and *assuming* proposed by Alston and Howard-Snyder are not necessary.[13] Indeed, these attitudes are weak forms of *belief* and can therefore be reduced to such forms. In Section 2.1, we argue that the certainty of belief is often possible only because certain scenarios in which the believed proposition is false are ignored. In Section 2.2, we show that a certain degree of belief that *p* is compatible with having doubts about *p* and with not being surprised if it turns out that *p*. In Section 2.3, we defend the thesis that, in cases where evidence exists both for and against a proposition, one can, in a sense, decide whether to believe that proposition by assigning greater or lesser weight to certain pieces of evidence or by examining them more thoroughly.

2.1 Contextuality of Belief

Very often, we find ourselves in a state of certainty about a proposition precisely because we *choose* to ignore scenarios in which it is false. To take a well-known example, suppose that last night I came home from work and left my car in the garage.[14] This morning, I believe that the car is in the garage, and I have no doubts regarding the truth of this proposition. But is it not possible that the car is no longer there? Certainly, such a possibility exists. During the night, thieves might have broken into the garage and stolen the car. Or my son might have taken it without my knowledge and permission. There are also more "unusual" possibilities: it could have been struck by lightning, disappeared due to a quantum fluctuation, or been carried off by aliens.

Why, despite being unable to entirely rule out these epistemic possibilities with absolute certainty, do I believe that my car is in the garage and have no doubts about the truth of this proposition? Because, in everyday life, we tend to *ignore* certain epistemic possibilities and assume that they have not occurred, even though they could have. In other words, we take for granted that such events have not transpired. Of course, this bracketing of epistemic possibilities in which a proposition *p* is false depends on the context. In specific situations, we must adopt higher epistemic standards and consider some possibilities in which *p* is false. For instance, suppose the lives of many people depend on the car being in the garage – perhaps the car is needed for a rescue operation. In that case, the possibility of it being stolen or taken by my son without permission becomes relevant, and I would likely take measures to ensure such possibilities do not occur.[15]

Similarly, let us suppose I plan to leave for work in 10 min. Because I have this intention and believe I will not change my mind within the next 10 min, I also believe I will leave in 10 min. Even in this case, I am in a state of

13 A similar view is also stated, even if by means of different arguments from those we will use here, by Vahid, "Alston on belief and acceptance in religious faith".

14 For similar examples, cf. DeRose, "Assertion, knowledge, and context", "Knowledge, assertion and lotteries".

15 There are other possibilities that we might not even consider in this situation (for instance, that the car is taken away by aliens). However, we can imagine even more specific situations in which even such a possibility could become relevant.

certainty: I have no doubts that I will leave in 10 min. But I can be certain of this only because I have excluded a range of epistemic possibilities: that I will break my leg in the next 10 min, that I will receive a call from a relative in dire need of my help, or that an asteroid will block my front door within the next 10 min, and so on. Again, while we cannot entirely exclude these possibilities with complete certainty, we tend to ignore them, taking for granted that they will not occur. However, in specific contexts, such possibilities may become relevant.

The moral of these examples – and of many similar ones that could be presented – is that, even though the epistemic state of the subject aligns with the universalist semantics of *B* described above (i.e., *p* is true in all the epistemic possibilities considered by the subject), this does not exclude the following: (1) that such a state arises because certain possibilities in which *p* is false are intentionally ignored; and (2) that these possibilities may become salient in other contexts. Therefore, our state of belief is not entirely involuntary, as Alston and Howard-Snyder suggest. Our state of certainty results from the *intentional* decision to disregard certain epistemic possibilities.

Many of our everyday beliefs derive from the *assumption* that things are a certain way – for instance, assuming that my car has not been stolen or that I will not receive a call from a relative in distress within the next 10 min. These assumptions seem to resemble the kind described by Howard-Snyder: we exclude certain possibilities because we judge them to be unlikely or abnormal.

The picture is therefore less straightforward than Alston or Howard-Snyder suggest: it is not the case that belief is involuntary and faith voluntary. Even our most mundane beliefs are the result of decisions. One might object that, while beliefs are the result of decisions made automatically and almost unconsciously, faith is the product of a non-automatic and fully conscious decision. For example, a general makes a deliberate, non-automatic decision to accept that the enemy will attack at point *x*, whereas we do not appear to consciously and non-automatically decide to ignore the possibility that my car might have been taken by aliens.

We do not believe that this response is compelling. There are cases where we consciously decide to ignore certain epistemic possibilities and believe that *p* despite the possibility that *not-p*. For instance, I am fully aware that a trip by plane or car to location *x* entails a degree of risk. There is a possibility that I could have an accident and not reach the destination. Despite this awareness, I decide to disregard this possibility and believe with certainty that I will reach location *x* by plane or car. Conversely, faith does not always involve the deliberate decision to disregard the possibility that things are not as one has faith they are. Individuals raised in faith and possessing firm belief may never even consider the possibility that things could be otherwise than they have faith to be. They may never consciously or voluntarily decide to ignore this possibility. Of course, this may apply to only a subset (perhaps a small one) of those who have faith. What we aim to demonstrate is that faith does not always require a conscious and voluntary exclusion of the possibility that things are otherwise. Faith is therefore compatible with the absence of a conscious and voluntary exclusion of contrary possibilities. On the other hand, while it is true that, very often, when we believe that *p* we automatically and unconsciously exclude the possibilities in which *not-p*, it is not always the case that, when we believe that *p*, our decision to disregard certain epistemic possibilities is unconscious and automatic. The belief that *p* is compatible with the conscious exclusion of certain possibilities in which not-*p*. We therefore conclude that the automaticity of the decision to exclude certain epistemic possibilities is not a sufficient criterion for distinguishing between belief and faith.

2.2 Graded Belief

As we have seen at the beginning of Section 2, both Alston and Howard-Snyder explicitly limit their analysis to beliefs accompanied by certainty. They maintain that this concept of belief corresponds to the one commonly assumed[16] and that it belongs to what is often referred to as folk psychology.[17] Thus, they aim to demonstrate that such beliefs are not necessary for faith. However, both acknowledge that we can hold beliefs to varying degrees, but they choose not to take these weaker forms of belief into account and instead adopt a robust notion of belief,

16 Alston, "Belief, acceptance, and religious faith", 6.

17 Howard-Snyder, "Three arguments to think that faith does not entail belief", 116.

arguing that such a notion is not necessary for faith. Since they do not take these weaker forms of belief into account, they never address the thesis that it is necessary to hold at least a certain degree of belief that *p* if one has faith that *p*. In other words, they do not analyze the claim that, while it is true that certainty that *p* is not required to have faith that *p*, at least some degree of belief that *p* is necessary to have faith that *p*.

The fact that we can believe *p* more or less firmly is a common experience. I am firmly convinced that 2 + 2 = 4, but if, after watching the weather forecast, I form the belief that it will rain tomorrow, that belief is much less firm than the mathematical one. If the confidence level of the forecast predicting rain tomorrow is 90 %, I might adopt a corresponding degree of confidence. However, even without having a precise number in mind, I may consider weather forecasts generally reliable and therefore believe that it will rain tomorrow. Yet, since forecasts have occasionally been wrong in the past, and because weather phenomena have unpredictable aspects, I might believe with a certain degree of confidence that it will rain tomorrow but not as firmly as I believe that 2 + 2 = 4. In general, there are things we believe with certainty, others we believe with less certainty, and still others about which we remain undecided. A spectrum of intermediate possibilities exists between these extremes.

A certain degree of belief that *p* is compatible with some doubts about *p*. As Lindsay Rettler points out, belief is not compatible with *strong* forms of doubt: "The strongest form of doubt – namely, doubt that *p* – is much more robust than simply lacking full certainty about *p* or having a moment of uncertainty about its truth".[18] However, belief that *p* is entirely compatible with *weaker* forms of doubt about *p*. We can hold some doubts about *p* and still believe that *p*: "Any form of doubt that simply refers to lack of certainty is compatible with belief".[19] Of course, if my belief that *p* is accompanied by doubts about *p*, it will not have the maximum degree of certainty but only a certain level of confidence in *p*. I may have some doubts about the accuracy of the weather forecast and still believe with sufficient confidence that it will rain tomorrow.

The distinction between strong and weak forms of doubt is not sharp; there is likely a continuum ranging from mild and intermittent forms of doubt to increasingly stronger forms of doubt. But this does not seem problematic as long as one acknowledges that beliefs themselves come in degrees: the stronger the doubt, the weaker the belief. At some point, the doubt that *p* becomes so strong that it can no longer be said that the subject believes that *p*. We may also concede that the boundaries between belief and non-belief are not clear-cut and that, when doubts become very strong, it may not be possible to say whether the subject still believes that *p* (even in a weak form) or does not believe that *p*.[20]

The fact, noted by Alston and Howard-Snyder, that one can have faith that *p* while doubting that *p* excludes the necessity of certainty that *p* for faith but does not yet exclude the idea that having faith that *p* requires a certain degree of belief that *p*. This weaker thesis seems plausible. If we do not believe that our friend will not betray us, we cannot say that we trust they will not betray us. We might harbor doubts about this, but trust that they will not betray us seems to imply a certain degree of belief that they will not. Faith appears to be gradual, just like belief. And it seems that the more faith one has that *p*, the fewer doubts one has that *p*. As Rettler observes, "[a] common response to a friend with strong doubt might be to ask 'Why did you doubt me? You should have had faith that I would be there.' With respect to religious faith, phrases such as 'O ye of little faith, why did you doubt?' imply that to the extent that one has this doubt, one lacks faith".[21] Faith seems to go hand in hand with belief: the more one has faith that *p*, the more one believes that *p*. Conversely, the more doubts one has about *p*, the less faith one has that *p* and the less one believes that *p*.

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18 Rettler, "Faith, belief, and control", 99.

19 Ibid.

20 Malcolm and Scott. "Faith, belief and fictionalism", *A philosophy of faith: belief, truth and varieties of commitment,* Section 2.2, distinguish three types of doubt and argue that one of them is compatible with belief, while the other two are not. They claim that there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that faith is compatible with the other two types of doubt and therefore reject Alston and Howard-Snyder's argument concerning doubt. Here, rather than distinguishing various types of doubt, we prefer to distinguish degrees of doubt and assert that they are inversely proportional to degrees of belief. Malcolm and Scott, *A philosophy of faith: belief, truth and varieties of commitment*, Section 2.2.2 briefly consider the fact that both faith and belief can coexist with varying degrees of doubt, and that one of the decisive factors is the extent of the subject's attachment to their faith and their beliefs.

21 Rettler, "Faith, belief, and control", 99.

Alston and Howard-Snyder's thesis that one can have faith without belief stems from their exclusive consideration of the strongest forms of belief. When less strong forms of belief are considered – particularly the fact that we can believe a proposition more or less firmly – the thesis no longer appears tenable. At this point, two possibilities arise. The first possibility is to reject Alston's and Howard-Snyder's theses entirely: in analyzing faith, we could completely abandon the concepts of *acceptance* and *assuming* discussed by Alston and Howard-Snyder and simply state that faith implies at least weak forms of belief. The second possibility is to retain their analysis of faith in terms of the concepts of *acceptance* and *assuming*, maintain, however, that these concepts, in turn, can be interpreted as weak forms of belief. We believe that this second option is tenable. Indeed, we have already noted that both *acceptance* and *assuming*, according to Alston and Howard-Snyder, share many characteristics with belief. Of the six characteristics Alston identifies as defining belief, *acceptance* retains five. The only difference lies in the fact that, being compatible with doubt, *acceptance* is not characterized by the feeling that things are a certain way. As has been noted, "feeling" here should be understood as an immediate sense, akin to being struck by the way things are. However, the general who must deploy his troops on the battlefield considers all possibilities and ultimately chooses to place the bulk of his forces at point *x* because he deems it more likely that the enemy will attack there. Although the general does not firmly believe that the enemy will attack at *x*, he holds a weak belief that this will happen. He does not have immediate certainty that this is the case, but after reflection, he judges it likely to occur. All of this is compatible with a weak form of belief and thus with reducing *acceptance* to such a weak form.

Although Howard-Snyder's concept of *assuming* is weaker than *acceptance*, as noted, it can also be characterized by a *positive cognitive stance toward a proposition* that aims to *track the truth*. One should assume *p* only if *p* is true. As Howard-Snyder himself emphasizes, it is an evidence-sensitive attitude that reflects the estimation of the truth or falsehood of *p*. Here too, *assuming* can be interpreted as a weak form of belief, reflecting our degree of confidence in a proposition. Moreover, Howard-Snyder himself states that *assuming* is "a sort of belief-like attitude." As we mentioned earlier, while *assuming* is compatible with not being surprised if one discovers that not-*p* and with believing that *p* is merely probable and not certain, weak forms of belief are also compatible with these attitudes. Thus, the *assuming* described by Howard-Snyder is likewise reducible to a weak form of belief. Thus, when carefully analyzed, both Alston's concept of acceptance and Howard-Snyder's notion of assuming can be interpreted as weak forms of belief. In this way, we can continue to employ these concepts in our analysis of faith without excluding the possibility that they involve weak forms of belief.

2.3 Voluntary Belief?

Another point on which Alston and Howard-Snyder insist on differentiating faith and belief is the claim that faith can be the result of an act of will, whereas belief is always involuntary. Indeed, the fact that faith may be partially under the control of the subject is evidenced by certain attitudes we adopt toward people who have or lack faith. For example, one can urge others to have faith or encourage them to cultivate it. If faith were not at least partially under the subject's control, such exhortations or encouragements would make no sense. Moreover, individuals are often held accountable for having or not having faith. Having faith or maintaining it in difficult circumstances is frequently regarded as praiseworthy, both in religious and non-religious contexts. A person may be commended for trusting their partner or for preserving their religious faith despite a severe misfortune. Conversely, a person may also be criticized for placing faith in something unworthy of trust. These attitudes are difficult to explain unless we assume that faith is partially within the subject's control. By contrast, Alston and Howard-Snyder argue that belief is typically involuntary. Belief, after all, is supposed to correspond to the available evidence. The stronger the evidence we have regarding *p*, the stronger our belief in the truth of *p* should be. However, the evidence at our disposal is clearly not something we control, and therefore the level of belief in a given proposition should not depend on the subject's will.

We do not consider these arguments decisive. In fact, similar attitudes are held toward belief. We can attempt to urge or encourage others to believe something. For example, I might say to a friend: "Believe me, I did not betray you; you must trust me." If belief were entirely beyond our control, such exhortations would be

meaningless. Furthermore, since ancient times, humans have practiced the art of rhetoric – techniques aimed at persuading others to believe something. This art would be entirely futile if there were no possibility of control over our beliefs. Additionally, individuals can be criticized for their beliefs. We criticize flat-earthers or anti-vaxxers for believing propositions that should not be believed, as they lack any foundation. Once again, if belief were entirely beyond the subject's control, such criticisms would lose their significance.

In what sense, then, can belief be under the control of the subject holding the belief? Clearly, we do not have *direct* control over our beliefs: we cannot believe just anything at will. However, this also applies to faith: we cannot have faith in anything at will either. Both belief and faith are not directly subject to the control of our will, as, for instance, raising an arm is. Nevertheless, we believe that we can exercise *indirect* control over our beliefs in at least two ways. First, we can more carefully assess the evidence at our disposal and, if necessary, seek new evidence. Sometimes, we may have evaluated the evidence hastily and attributed more weight to it than it deserved. Conversely, we may have underestimated evidence that was instead significant. A better reflection on the available evidence can lead to a more accurate evaluation of the situation, potentially resulting in a change in our degree of beliefs – sometimes significantly, such that we shift from a state of disbelief to belief or vice versa. Second, we can *decide* to assign greater weight to certain pieces of evidence over others. Suppose, for instance, that John is uncertain whether to believe that his wife is faithful. In the past, he has had evidence of her faithfulness and has come to know her reliable character, which constitutes evidence in favor of her fidelity. Let us assume, however, that John is presented with evidence that might suggest his wife is unfaithful. What weight should he assign to this evidence? In this situation, John may decide not to give undue weight to the new evidence and continue to *believe* in his wife's faithfulness. Alternatively, he might make the opposite decision. Indeed, we often experience moments of indecision about whether to believe something but then make a decision to lean one way or the other. Such a decision may occur without the introduction of new evidence or without the existing evidence being defeated. Rather, it involves deciding what weight to assign to evidence in favor of or against a given proposition. This, moreover, is precisely what happens with faith. When we are in a situation where the evidence does not clearly support or oppose a proposition, and there are reasons supporting both the proposition and its negation, we can decide to have faith in the proposition rather than in its negation. The situations in which we make such decisions are usually those where we face conflicting evidence, and we must determine how much weight to assign to each piece of evidence.

Of course, there are highly sophisticated mathematical tools, such as Bayes' theorem, which guide us in evaluating new evidence and updating the probability of an event based on newly available information. However, these tools presuppose that we can assign highly precise probabilities to events and conditional probabilities to events given certain evidence. In everyday life, in most cases, we are unable to precisely quantify conditional probabilities – evidence may be of various types and therefore difficult to compare mathematically – and thus, we lack mathematical tools to determine the precise weight to assign to different pieces of evidence. We are therefore required to make choices.

We conclude that, when considering degrees of belief, faith and belief do not behave differently. We lack direct control over both faith and belief: we cannot decide at will to believe any proposition, nor can we decide at will to have faith in any proposition. Nevertheless, we can exert indirect control over both our faith and our beliefs by carefully evaluating the available evidence and deciding what weight to assign to each piece of evidence. Therefore, we do not believe that the voluntariness of faith is a sufficient argument to demonstrate that it does not presuppose some form, however weak, of belief.

3 Conclusions

In this article, we have demonstrated that Alston and Howard-Snyder's claim – that belief is not an essential condition of faith – is premature and stems from their deliberate focus on only strong forms of belief. When weaker forms of belief are considered, along with the fact that belief can exist in degrees and result from the deliberate exclusion of certain epistemic possibilities, it appears that belief is necessarily implicated in faith. If one does not believe to at least a certain degree that p, then one does not have faith that p.

There are complex issues concerning the relationship between the concept of certain belief, as considered by Alston and Howard-Snyder, and the concept of belief "by degrees," which we have discussed here. One might hypothesize that certain belief corresponds to the maximum degree of belief (or, in probabilistic terms, a credence of 1) or to belief above a certain threshold, usually assumed to be very high (e.g., 0.95). It could also be hypothesized that this threshold depends on the pragmatic context in which the subject finds themselves, which may require higher or lower standards of certainty.[22] However, for the purposes of this paper, we can avoid taking a stance on the precise relationship between these two types of belief. What matters here is that we have shown that, while faith does not necessarily imply one form of belief, it necessarily implies the other.

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22 On the relationships between credence and belief, cf. Buchak, "Rational Faith and Justified Belief", "Belief, credence, and norms".