

persecuted and oppressed).

- 1 *Vérité et histoire: la théologie dans la modernité. Ernst Käsemann*, by Pierre Gisel. Editions Beauchesne, Paris, 1977. pp 675 £11.65
- 2 *New Testament Questions of Today*, by Ernst Käsemann (1969), chapter VII
- 3 *Jesus means Freedom: a polemical survey of the New Testament* (1969), chapter 6
- 4 *New Testament Questions*, chapter IV
- 5 *Jesus means Freedom*, chapter 6
- 6 A fair amount of Käsemann's work is available in good translations. Besides the commentary on Romans and the two books listed above there are three others: *Essays on New Testament Themes* (1964), *The Testament of Jesus: a study of the Gospel of John in the light of Chapter 17* (1968), and *Perspectives on Paul* (1971) all of which seem at present to be out of print.

A Simple Argument for Faith

Requiring Reasons

Geoffrey Scarre

A view very commonly encountered in contemporary philosophy of religion is that it is a mistake to expect that faith¹ should be capable of rational defence. The roots of the conception of faith as lacking rational defensibility lie far back in the history of the Church (see for instance St Paul's remarks on faith as foolishness in I Cor 1), but it is only in the last two centuries that deep pessimism has set in about the prospects of finding really convincing *a priori* or *a posteriori* arguments in support of faith. This slide from conviction that faith is rationally warranted has not, of course, been a wholly or even mainly negative phenomenon, for it has stimulated an awareness of commissive and emotional aspects of faith which is proving very valuable in the life of the Church. The importance and profundity of much recent writing about faith is something I have no wish to dispute; yet I want to argue that it is a mistake to represent faith as requiring no support from reason, and I shall urge we are only entitled to that faith we can defend.

My argument is basically a very simple one – so simple indeed that many people will undoubtedly think that it cannot do justice to the complexity of the subject under discussion. The short response to those people is to say that they should not disregard the argument but refute it. To make the argument fully convincing, however, I shall discuss in some detail the theoretical basis which underlies it, and attempt to disarm various strategies for opposing or evading it. Finally, I shall describe a positive approach to the problem of finding reasons for faith.

In its most skeletal form the argument can be stated: faith is, or essentially involves, propositional belief; propositional belief requires reasons; therefore faith requires reasons. This clearly stands in need of some fleshing out. The qualification in the first premise is to allow that faith may be regarded as essentially involving other elements besides a belief element, for instance, elements of a commissive or emotional sort. Whether we could speak of faith in the absence of these further elements is not of significance to the present argument; what matters is that whatever else it essentially involves, faith essentially involves propositional belief. Now to believe the proposition that *p* is to believe that *p* is true, and one is entitled to have that belief in *p*'s truth only if one is in possession of grounds which make that truth highly probable. The status of this entitlement condition is crucial to the argument. I claim that it is not a condition applying only to certain categories of belief, but that it is a perfectly general condition which applies to anything which can properly be called belief. Moreover, it is not a merely contingent but rather a *necessary* feature of beliefs that this condition holds of them. It follows that it cannot be said of religious beliefs that one could be entitled to hold them even though one lacked grounds which made their truth highly probable; this cannot be said because where the condition of entitlement fails to hold it is inadmissible to speak of *belief* at all. The strategy of the argument, then, is to hold that faith has an essential belief component, and that having this component it is subject to the requirements which standardly hold of belief, including the requirement that belief must be backed by reasons.

Various features of this argument merit some clarification. The first premise was that faith is, or essentially involves, propositional belief. To say that belief is propositional is simply to say that believing is believing *that* something is the case. 'Proposition' is something of a term of art, but it is unnecessary to become concerned here with its precise definition (readers who would like to follow the matter up could consult, e.g. Appendix I to Bernard Williams' *Descartes*²). A more serious question concerns the claim that a propositional belief component is essential to faith (in the sense

that faith would not be faith without it). Some people, following Tillich, may prefer to lay emphasis on a concept of faith as ultimate concern. But wherever one lays the emphasis, it is hard to deny that a person with Christian faith *believes propositions*, e.g. that there is a God, that God so loved the world that he sent His Son on a mission of redemption, that Jesus rose from the dead, that there will be a Final Judgment, and so on. There exists some disagreement among Christians about just which propositions are to be believed, and about the precise interpretation of some of these, but it is implausible to suppose that anyone could be attributed Christian faith who did not believe a fair number of propositions of this type.

Belief has truth as its objective: to believe that *p* is to believe that *p* is true. A belief which is false, while still a belief, is a belief which has missed its mark; falsity is an imperfection of beliefs. The objects of certain other propositional attitudes can be false without the attitudes being imperfect in this way. I might allow myself to imagine that I am now lying on the sun-kissed strand of Paradise Island, the noise of the breeze in the palm trees behind me and an iced drink at my elbow. This is all certainly false and I know it is, but it is not an imperfection of my imagining that I am not at Paradise Island but instead am sitting in a room in England with autumn rains and mists outside. Someone who says of my imagining 'But that's false' misses the point that it is only imagining, but someone who claims my beliefs are false lays a charge to be answered, for he affirms their failure to achieve their proper objective of representing the world as it is. Beliefs can intelligibly be ascribed only to those who have grasped that believing possesses this objective. Not only is it paradoxical (as G. E. Moore observed) to say 'I believe that *p*, but *p* is not true': it is also paradoxical to say 'I believe that *p*, but very possibly not *p*', or 'I believe that *p*, but I lack grounds which make it likely that *p*'. Someone who made remarks like these would show that he had not understood the truth-objective of belief, and thus that he had not understood the concept of belief (for it is not a contingent fact about belief that it possesses that objective).

To grasp that belief has truth as its objective requires that one grasp something of the nature of truth, though by this is meant not that one should be able to produce or order a theory of truth (this is something which philosophy has not yet provided in a fully satisfactory form), but that one should display a fair measure of ability to distinguish in one's practice between procedures likely to lead to truth and procedures not likely to lead there. It would be absurd to attribute an understanding of the concept of truth to someone who showed no capacity to separate sound from un-

sound methods of determining which propositions are true. (We could not, for instance, ascribe an understanding of the concept of truth to a person who thought that any proposition which floated into his head was true.) It follows from these considerations that a person cannot be ascribed beliefs unless he displays an awareness of the role of reasons and evidence in determining what is true.

But does this mean that a person has to have reasons for *every* belief he possesses (*every* belief of *every* category)? May there not be some propositions (e.g. the propositions of faith) which we in our position in the world are simply not capable of finding adequate reasons for holding to be true? There may indeed be such propositions, but any such propositions we have no right to believe. This is not a merely prejudiced response to the issue; it is based on recognition that it makes nonsense of the truth-objective of belief to suppose we could be entitled to believe propositions (of any sort whatever) if we lacked substantial grounds for holding them to be true. Not all grounds people have for their beliefs are good ones, of course, but no one can be *content* to believe on what he recognises as inadequate or irrelevant grounds, because he would not be able to reconcile this with his understanding of the truth-objective of belief – that understanding which he is required to have if he is to be ascribed belief at all. Adapting a famous form of words from Pater we may say, with complete generality, that all belief aspires to the condition of rational belief.

This completes the exposition of the argument that faith, being or essentially involving belief, requires reasons as all beliefs do. Some people may think the argument can be opposed or circumvented in some way. I do not think it can be, but some of the dissenting views are worth examination.

Someone might say: I admit that beliefs, including the beliefs of faith, require a backing of reasons, else it makes no sense to regard them as *beliefs*. But if the backing of reasons were inconclusive, would it not then be permissible to *choose* to believe what we have only inconclusive reason for, providing we do not actually believe *against* the evidence? This suggestion, which was famously put forward by William James,³ is completely unsatisfactory. John Hick hinted at the problem when he called the proposal 'an unrestricted license for wishful thinking'.⁴ The Jamesian suggestion fails to accommodate the fact that truth is not determined by our wishes. We cannot compensate for a shortfall of evidence by an act of choice of what to believe, because there is no ground at all for supposing that choice affords a suitable method for bringing us to truth. The truth-objective of belief precludes the use of the Jamesian strategy, and the only correct response in a situation where one takes the evidence to be inadequate to support belief is

to remain agnostic. (This holds good quite irrespective of the importance of the subject matter at issue, *Contra* James' contention that when the subject matter is of great personal significance we have a right to decide what to believe in the absence of conclusive evidence.)

A different response to the argument I have defended takes issue with the understanding of belief which underpins it. This response does not seek to show that faith does not need a backing of reasons – which is the chief claim I have defended – but it questions the justification for holding that it is a condition of entitlement to believe a proposition that one be in possession of grounds which make that proposition *highly probable*. This condition can seem unrealistically strong when it is observed that in practice we do sometimes speak of believing propositions whose truth we are not wholly convinced of. There is nothing strained or irrational about saying something like 'I believe the Battle of Waterloo was fought in 1815, but I'm not absolutely certain of that – it could just possibly have been 1814'. If we can speak like this when the subject matter of the belief is secular, why should we not claim a right to have beliefs about religious subject matters even when we lack grounds which put those beliefs beyond doubt?

There are two objections to this line of thought. The first is that it is doubtful whether it is really correct to treat a propositional attitude as a belief if it is tempered by uncertainty. If I say that I believe, but am not quite sure, that the Battle of Waterloo was fought in 1815, it may be that my utterance is an elliptical way of saying that I *incline to believe* it – what evidence I have (memories of books read, history lessons attended, and so forth) appears to point to a date of 1815 rather than any other date for the battle, but the evidence is not quite strong enough for me to be sure. If one objects that this account does violence to the facts of linguistic usage (though it is far from clear that it does so), it can still be argued that unconvinced belief is not belief in the same sense as convinced belief. A way of seeing this is to consider the observation of Keith Lehrer: 'When . . . conviction is lacking, then a man may sincerely deny that he believes . . . that p, and there will be good reason for agreeing with him. If there is also good reason for saying that he does believe . . . that p in such a case, as there may well be, then there will be good reason for each of the contradictory conclusions, i.e. that he believes that p [and that] he does not'.⁵ If this contradiction is to be removed, it is necessary to distinguish two senses of 'believe'.

Even if one prefers to accept that unconvinced 'belief' is still a genuine form of belief – albeit of a diminished sort – rather than a mere inclination to believe, this does not offer much support for

the contention that religious belief can be respectable even if it lacks any substantial backing of reasons. The central point to grasp here is that there can be no back-door way of introducing reasonableness to religious belief without introducing reasons. Even if one does not want to deny that unconvinced 'belief' is a genuine variety of belief (and not merely inclination to believe), one cannot use this denial to justify any degree of believing which outruns the evidence. In so far as we can claim a right to believe religious propositions where we consider our evidence less than conclusive, all we can justify is the sort of believing which will receive its natural expression in such verbal forms as 'I believe there's a God, but I could be quite wrong', 'I believe Jesus rose from the dead, but I'm not certain about it'. These are not typical utterances of persons who lay claim to religious faith; and to the extent that the faithful claim to believe with conviction, they are called upon to hold grounds which make their beliefs highly probable.

A very different type of view which has obtained some favour in recent years is the view that the truth of religious beliefs is somehow independent of the truth of other beliefs about the natural world. This approach to the question of the justification of faith is of considerable interest in that it combines an insistence that religious beliefs cannot be defended by reason in the same way as can ordinary beliefs about the world with an admission that religious beliefs are still required to measure up to certain standards of acceptability, though these standards have the unusual feature that their applicability is limited to the system of religious belief alone. Religious beliefs, on this picture, aspire to be rational beliefs, but the standards of rationality they have to meet are not identical with those for non-religious belief.

Wittgenstein has been the main influence behind views of this type, and like all other aspects of his philosophy his theory of religious belief has received considerable discussion in the years since his death. The difficulties with 'Wittgensteinian fideism', as it is sometimes called, have often been pointed out, and I shall mention them quite briefly here. First, it is very obscure how the notion of an autonomous realm of religious truth is to be understood. Worse, there is an air of *legerdemain* about the introduction of this species of truth to serve as the objective of beliefs which (it is considered) are only dubiously successful in achieving the objective of being true in the normal sense. So far no clear and convincing account has been given of what an autonomous realm of religious truth could be, and that failure has been intimately associated with a failure to clarify the nature of the special standards of assessment alleged appropriate in the case of beliefs having religious truth as their objective. Secondly, the theory makes very obscure

the relationship of religious beliefs to other beliefs we have, and this has the unfortunate effect of making it difficult to see how religious concerns can be related to other concerns in life. If religious beliefs are not true in the sense that our non-religious beliefs are, they cannot be 'about' the natural world in the same way as the latter are – and that means it is difficult to see how they are 'about' the natural world at all. Religious belief fails to bear on our conception of the natural world we inhabit. But, thirdly, the fideist position is in any case quite wrong in claiming that religious beliefs do not aspire to be true in the way that other of our beliefs are true. Many religious beliefs quite clearly do make claims about the natural world, and there is no reason whatever to suppose they have as their objective some non-standard sort of truth. To say that God created the world, or that Jesus had a divine as well as a human nature, was born of a virgin and healed the sick, or that the souls of the righteous will live with God after the death of the body, is to make claims which may be true or may be false, but which are not true or false in some sense special to religious claims.

Wittgensteinian fideism fails, then, to establish that religious beliefs can be excused from satisfying the same standards of acceptability as non-religious beliefs. At this juncture it is appropriate to pose the question: why have so many philosophers and theologians wanted to resist the notion that faith requires backing by reason in the same way that other types of belief do? There is no single answer which does for all. Four important motivations have been the following:

- a) a wish to explain faith in terms of emotional commitment rather than in terms of intellectual search;
- b) a wish to represent faith not as the fruit of human intellectual endeavour but as a gift of God;
- c) a fear that holding the beliefs of faith require reasons just as other beliefs do impugns their status as very special and important beliefs;
- d) a fear that it is not possible to discover an adequate stock of good reasons for the beliefs of faith.

Of these four, a) and c) are misguided, while b) and d) raise serious issues.

a) rests on an incorrect notion that emotional commitment and intellectual search are exclusive of each other, so that if faith is either of these it cannot be the other. Now it is true that beliefs and feelings are not the same kind of thing, but there is no good reason to suppose that faith cannot involve components of both kinds. Moreover, these components may (and in my opinion should) be linked in this way: rationally supported beliefs provide

the *reasons* for the emotional commitment. It is simply not true that the more worked out one's beliefs, the less intense one's emotional commitment is going to be; if anything, there is a *positive* correlation between strength of relevant belief and intensity of commitment (the stronger the belief, the *more* reason there is for having that commitment).

Regarding c), it is perfectly possible to represent my beliefs as having widely different degrees of importance for me without claiming that they have different truth-objectives or are unequally demanding of evidential support. (There is perhaps a confusion here with the idea that I may justifiably be more concerned to establish firm grounds for believing propositions which matter enormously to me than for propositions which are of little or no practical significance.) Why is my belief that God made the world more important for me than my belief that Ford made my car? Because it plays a much greater role in my intellectual and emotional experience, my way of thinking and feeling about the world. There is simply no need to attempt to buttress the judgment of relative importance by alleging that the former cannot be justified by reason in the way the latter can.

This leaves motivations b) and d) for resisting the view that faith requires reasons. The first of these – a wish to represent faith as a fruit of God's grace rather than as a product of human intellectual activity – stems from another mistaken conception of faith, but this time the mistake is a subtle one. It will be most convenient to return to the subject of grace and the nature of the mistake behind b) in the course of saying something about motivation d) – the fear that it is not possible to provide a rational defence of faith. On the surface of it, there is much to justify this fear. God cannot be seen, there are no experiments we can perform to test for his existence, and the old *a priori* and *a posteriori* 'proofs' alleged to demonstrate that he exists have long since failed to command the allegiance of reputable philosophers and theologians. Yet if the argument of this paper is correct, it has to be possible to produce some sort of reasoned defence of faith or else we have no choice but to relinquish it.

Is there truly a shortage of reasons to justify faith? This might depend on how we construe reasons here. It could be argued that there is no shortage of reasons at all – but that those reasons are not of a sort which everyone can be brought to agree put the truth of faith beyond doubt. Recall G. M. Hopkins' *God's Grandeur* sonnet, which begins 'The world is charged with the grandeur of God'. Hopkins testifies in that poem and in others that for him the whole of the natural world is evidence for the existence of God. There is incredulity in his question 'Why do men then now not reckon his

rod?' – it is difficult for him to understand why many people fail to arrive at his own interpretation of nature. And if a sceptic were to enquire of Hopkins or of someone similarly minded whether he did not have any more 'definite' evidence that God existed, the answer likely to be returned would be 'What, isn't this enough?'

The sceptic will make the obvious objection that not everyone is disposed to 'read' nature the way Hopkins is. For many people the world is devoid of signs of God. The 'evidence' does not seem to them to lead to an ineluctable conclusion that there is a God. It is difficult to disagree with these observations of the sceptic. But it is not clear that they constitute an indictment fatal to a Hopkins-type defence of religious belief. It would, of course, be wrong to hold that the beauty and grandeur of nature could be evidence for one person and not for another; there is a publicity requirement on evidence which prevents such a relativising of evidence to persons. But it is quite coherent to propose that the facts of nature either are or are not sound evidence for the existence of God, without any relativising to individuals, but that people can disagree on whether they are good evidence or bad or neither. Admittedly, the situation is very different to that of justifying hypotheses in scientific contexts, where there is not usually much disagreement about what counts as sound evidence for or against an hypothesis. But it is quite implausible to suppose that something only counts as genuine evidence if people incline to agree about its significance.

None of this answers the question: how can the facts of nature be held to provide genuinely rational evidence for the existence of God? One approach is to hold that the hypothesis of God's existence imparts a certain kind of order and system to nature, enabling the totality of disparate natural phenomena to be represented as a manifestation of a unified and powerful will. But why do some people find this plausible and others not? An analogy may provide some slight clarification. Consider a music lover and a 'philistine' listening to some great musical work, say one of the late Beethoven quartets. The music lover is deeply moved: there seems to be a kind of truth expressed in the work, one difficult to put into words but which he is sure is no illusion. The philistine, on the other hand, sees nothing but combinations of musical notes, and resists the idea that there is any deeper significance to the work. There is nothing the music lover can say to the philistine to change his attitude. He cannot deny that all that is physically present are combinations of notes, and he has to confess that he cannot point to what he takes the philistine to be missing when he listens. In the same way, aesthetic experience of nature may lead one person to believe there is a God, while another person,

whose experience furnishes the same sights, sounds, smells and so on as the former person's does, remains completely disinclined to make any such interpretation. This musical analogy is designed only to indicate a possible structure of the dispute between believers and unbelievers; it would be tendentious to suggest that the music lover is a clear parallel for the believer and the philistine for the unbeliever. But the analogy serves to indicate how different interpretations of experience can legitimately arise even where the gross physical content of the experience is the same. It *could* be a kind of philistinism to be blind to the presence of God in nature, but the analogy certainly does not allow us to assert that it is so. Many people who claim to be no philistines before the beauties of nature firmly resist the religious hypothesis, believing it crudely anthropomorphic. (In this connection note that the sophisticated music lover avoids putting into words the truth which he feels is embodied in great music; this reticence is not paralleled in the case of the person whose experience of nature leads him to affirm the existence of God.)

Is belief in God a matter, after all, of feeling rather than of intellect? — It might, I think, be a matter of both, the feeling element and the intellectual element playing different and complementary roles in the whole. On a Hopkins-type justification of religious belief, a proposition is taken to be supported by other propositions — propositions, namely, descriptive of various features of the natural world. The support relations involved are in principle identical to those involved in the justification of any other proposition: they claim rational credibility, and are not immune from criticism. Yet the inference at issue is one of exceptional subtlety and complexity, and there fails to be general agreement about its validity. What does it take to 'see' the validity of the inference? The suggestion I am floating is that a special sensitivity is involved here, a sensitivity which can best be explained as an aesthetic or quasi-aesthetic disposition. (Another faint analogy here might be the aesthetic feelings for elegant theories or proofs which may occasionally move a mathematician or scientist to incline towards a particular theory or proof whose correctness is not yet established beyond possibility of dispute.) It must be emphasised that such a disposition in no sense renders superfluous the fulfilment of the requirement that faith must be backed by reasons: it is not a disposition to be convinced in the absence of reason, but a disposition to see certain reasons as valid ones.

This account of faith, sketchy though it is, should have a special appeal to those who are sympathetic to motivation b) for denying the rational defensibility of faith, that is, the wish to represent faith as a gift of God rather than as a product of human in-

tellectual striving. I have argued that there is no tenable theory of faith which tries to represent it as not in need of rational support; nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the notion of faith as a gift of God has always played a very prominent role in thinking about faith, and an ideal theory of faith would be one which combined a thesis of the rationality of faith with another of its origin in grace. These two theses are *prima facie* difficult to associate, because one tends to think of a God-given faith as a set of beliefs and commitments without an underpinning in the reason. (This is why motivation b) involves the idea of an antithesis between faith as rational and faith as God's gift.) But if the discussion of this paper is correct, it is possible to see a means of resolving the conflict. I have argued that while faith has to be backed by reasons, a special sensitivity akin, perhaps, to aesthetic sensitivities may be required to see the force of the extraordinarily subtle and complex inference from the features of the world we encounter in experience to the existence of God. What is the origin of this special sensitivity? It makes theological sense to suggest that this is the place to bring God's grace into the story. We might do this either by explaining the sensitivity as a gift selectively bestowed by God, or by supposing that everyone possesses the basic psychological machinery it involves but that God awakens it into activity in some cases and not in others. Obviously, these explanations will only appeal to those who are already disposed to believe in a gracious God, but my purpose in introducing them is not to urge that they are correct but simply to remove a substantial theological point of objection to the claim that faith requires reasons.

This essay has so far been silent about revelation. The reason is that revelation can only occupy an intermediate station in the justification of faith, a belief in revelation being itself in need of justification. If the belief in God's existence is itself justifiable on grounds making no reference to revelation and sacred authority, it may next be plausible to suppose that the Bible, declarations by Church Fathers and Councils, etc. are reasonably to be trusted as clarifying the intentions which such a God might have for the world. It would clearly be unreasonable to suppose we could come up with any independent criterion of the trustworthiness of these sources of doctrine sufficiently fine-grained to provide a check on the truth of individual doctrines. A slightly more realistic hope is that independent grounds for believing in a God might somehow embrace grounds for supposing that such a God would want to reveal Himself to human beings in the general ways many people take it that He has done. That is, it *may* be possible to discover a *general* rationale for trusting revelation and Church authority in the form we have them. But whether there is a genuine possibility

here or not lies beyond the scope of the present essay.

- 1 The concept of faith has a use outside religious contexts, but my concern in this essay is solely with Christian religious faith.
- 2 Bernard Williams *Descartes* (Harmondsworth, 1978).
- 3 William James, 'The Will to Believe', reprinted in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York, 1956).
- 4 John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1963), p 66.
- 5 Keith Lehrer, *Knowledge* (Oxford, 1974), p 63.

Grace and Persecution

Sheila Cassidy

This essay is an attempt to illustrate the idea that the way in which God's grace works in man is more obvious in a situation of persecution than in one of so-called peace, for in the former the contrast between good and evil, the graced and the graceless, is sharper and therefore easier to see.

St Thomas Aquinas, the great thirteenth century theologian, defines that mysterious entity "grace" as a "share in the Divine nature". Having read this we recognize that he has said both everything and nothing. In this life we perceive God only as "a dim reflection as in a mirror" (1Cor. 13:12) and we can therefore know nothing of his nature, so we cannot catch hold of Grace and say "it is this", or "it is that". Granted the impossibility of talking about God, of finding words adequate to discuss his nature, we can nevertheless attempt to understand what happens to a man when he deliberately lays himself open to God's action.

"Christ is the image of the unseen God" (Col. 1:17).

"He who has seen me has seen the Father".

Scripture tells us that Christ is the revelation of God and so we must look to the man Jesus if we are to understand what happens to a creature when he partakes of the Divine Nature. The Jesus revealed in the gospels is not the glorious conqueror long awaited by the Jews but a humble carpenter who becomes an itinerant preacher destined for an ignominious death. It is this Jesus who is