

## Evidentialism and Faith

I will argue for a conception of faith which is compatible with fundamental tenets of an evidentialist position on epistemic justification. It is a position which entails both a “will to believe” which goes beyond the standard evidentialist principles governing the appropriate doxastic attitude towards a proposition, but nonetheless satisfies epistemic principles at the basis of an evidentialist position on justification.<sup>1</sup> If my argument is successful, a proponent of a conception of religious faith may be able to have her cake and eat it too: namely, she may be able to fundamentally accept both the evidentialist demand that epistemically rational belief fit, or be supported by evidence as well as the position that rational faith is willing belief beyond what one’s evidence strictly demands.

My cue for the position offered here is taken from Augustine’s *Epistula*, where he states:

The true reasoning by means of which we understand what we believe is to be preferred to false reasoning, but that very faith in things not yet understood is undoubtedly to be preferred too, since it is better to believe in what is true but not yet seen than to think that you see something true which is really false (*Epistula* CXX ii 8; 711.11-16).<sup>2</sup>

My aim here is not textual analysis, but rather, the construction of a reasonable conception of the relation between faith and reason compatible with the quoted passage regardless of whether or not it is an accurate interpretation of Augustine’s own position

on the issue. Given that *caveat*, I take the following to be a plausible derivation from the above quote from Augustine. Although the notion would be foreign to him, I will assume that we may take Augustine to be recommending a position on epistemic justification for faith and so will couch my derivation within that context.

What does such a position derived from Augustine (I'll henceforth refer to it as the "DA" position) entail and what is the argument for such a position? I will assume that the rational aim of belief is knowledge and that epistemic justification of a belief or a proposition is justification which is based solely and intrinsically on the aim of acquiring knowledge. Even granting that premise, the evidentialist will argue that one ought always to base one's beliefs merely on one's evidence, and this is what being epistemically rational entails.<sup>3</sup> The evidentialist can admit other sorts of rationality; say pragmatic or moral, but *epistemic* rationality is a property which always supervenes on evidence that is available to a person (ES 101).<sup>4</sup> Hence, whenever one chooses to believe contrary to or in the absence of what his evidence supports, he is being epistemically irrational. And in the absence of sufficient evidence, one ought to withhold belief.

In order to find a common ground between DA and evidentialism, I will assume that DA is compatible with evidentialism to this extent: evidentialism is the default position regarding the appropriate doxastic attitude regarding a belief or a proposition. However, following what I take the passage from Augustine to be clearly implying, DA does not imply that evidence ought to be the *only* determinant of belief: there is room for the will to exercise some aspect of control over belief which goes beyond the mere consideration of evidence.

Here, then, is DA in a nutshell. The epistemic end of belief is knowledge and this implies at least that it is epistemically better to know what is true than it is to believe what is false or not know what is true. According to DA, what should be one's cognitive posture if there is sufficient evidence for a proposition? Well, just what constitutes "sufficient" evidence may be vague, so let's consider *conclusive* evidence, for conclusive evidence would surely be sufficient. Evidence for a proposition is evidence for the truth of that proposition, and where there is then conclusive evidence for the truth of the proposition, one ought to believe it. However, if the evidence for a proposition, say not- $p$ , is inconclusive, then not- $p$  may very well be false. If not- $p$  fits the evidence that I have better than  $p$ , but the evidence for not- $p$  is inconclusive and if not- $p$  is *in fact* false, then in certain cases, it is epistemically better for me to believe  $p$  than it is for me either to believe not- $p$  or not believe  $p$ . Since it is epistemically better for me to know the truth than it is to believe what is false or not know the truth, when the evidence for not- $p$  is inconclusive and  $p$  is in fact true, my believing  $p$  rather than either believing not- $p$  or withholding belief in not- $p$  in certain cases puts me in the best position to come to know the truth. Hence, in such cases it is epistemically better for me to believe  $p$ . Whatever it is epistemically better for an agent to believe is what it is epistemically justified or rational for an agent to believe. Hence, even if not- $p$  fits the evidence I have better than  $p$  does, then as long as the evidence for not- $p$  is inconclusive, then if I will to believe  $p$  and  $p$  is in fact true and puts me in a better position to know the truth, I am epistemically rational in believing  $p$  rather than not- $p$  or withholding belief in  $p$ . The non-controversial truth of evidentialism is that if I will to believe  $p$ , even if  $p$  is in fact true, if I then encounter *conclusive* evidence for not- $p$ , I ought to reject  $p$  and believe not- $p$ .

However, if  $p$  is in fact true, then I will never encounter evidence which is conclusive for the truth of not- $p$ ; and if  $p$  is true, and if I am persistent and evidentially conscientious, I will encounter mounting evidence for  $p$  and shrinking evidence for not- $p$ .

This is the outline of the position which I wish to defend here, but how is this position consistent with a fundamentally evidentialist position on justification? In order to answer this question, I will examine and critique the position in light of the evidentialist position of Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, the current authoritative expositors and defenders of evidentialism. As they conceive it, evidentialism entails the following principle concerning epistemic justification.

EC.            Believing is the justified attitude when the person's evidence on balance supports a proposition, disbelieving is the justified attitude when the person's evidence on balance supports the negation of a proposition, and suspension of judgment is the justified attitude when the person's evidence on balance supports neither a proposition nor its negation.<sup>5</sup>  
(102).

EC is clearly inconsistent with DA. What is clearly objectionable to the evidentialist in DA is that according to EC, believing a proposition is epistemically justified for a person only if it fits or is supported by the evidence the person has; and as I have inferred from the quote from Augustine, a belief may be justified *even if its negation "fits the evidence" better*. Given EC, it would be bad enough if DA entailed that faith can be rationally justified "when the person's evidence on balance supports neither a proposition nor its negation" (EC 102). If that were the position, it would still conflict with evidentialism, but not because DA and evidentialism would

imply *contrary* beliefs, for in this case EC would just imply a suspension of belief either way. But if DA goes as far as I think it does, it implies that belief in a proposition can be rationally justified in conditions under which evidentialism implies that the only rational attitude is believing the negation of that proposition.

So it is clear: DA contradicts the demands of evidentialist principle EC. According to this evidentialist principle, epistemic justification supervenes solely upon evidential conditions, but DA implies that faith beliefs can be justified in the absence of such evidential conditions. The discrepancy between the implications of DA and evidentialism could easily be resolved if the sort of justification by faith implied by DA was not *epistemic* justification but rather another sort of justification, say prudential, moral, or religious justification abstracted from considerations of epistemic justification.<sup>6</sup> This however is not an option; for epistemic justification is characterized by its aim of the acquisition of knowledge, and that's precisely what I am arguing that the justification for belief in position DA has as its aim. So the conflict between DA and the evidentialist position cannot be resolved by appealing to distinct sorts of justification.

So how is the conflict to be resolved? I think that the way to the resolution of the problem can be found by starting with Earl Conee's discussion in "The Truth Connection". In that discussion, Conee confirms what we have already discovered by a different route, namely that:

...in rational inquiry we do seek to believe the truth. But not for its own sake.

It is sought as a constituent of our goal---the goal of knowing the truth.<sup>7</sup>

And he continues by tying the epistemic aim of knowing the truth to the demands of evidentialism:

Any plausible view accommodates the fact that ordinarily the rational way to believe in pursuit of knowledge is to believe in accordance with one's evidence as to the truth of the matter. If one's epistemic goal is to know whether or not a given proposition is true, ordinarily it is rational to believe the proposition just when one's evidence supports the proposition sufficiently strongly to provide the justification needed for knowledge of the proposition. If one's epistemic goal is to maximize one's total stock of knowledge, then again it is ordinarily rational to pursue this goal by believing exactly those propositions that are sufficiently supported by one's evidence. These considerations suggest a certain hypothesis concerning the nature of the truth connection. Believing a proposition is epistemically justified exactly when the person's evidence sufficiently supports the truth of the proposition.<sup>8</sup>

This is exactly what one would expect from an evidentialist position: evidence is that which provides the truth connection necessary for knowledge. Nonetheless, as Conee shows, this is only "ordinarily" so, and that "(t)here are unusual circumstances which refute the hypothesis" (249). He constructs the following case as a counterargument to the hypothesis.

To illustrate this sort of possibility, suppose that you know that Mr. Jones possesses the only conclusive evidence concerning whether or not Smith

committed a certain murder, though you do not know what the evidence is or which way it points. You also know that Jones is unwilling to reveal his decisive evidence, except to those who pass his highly reliable lie detector test for having the belief that Smith is innocent. Suppose that these facts about Jones are evident to you as you seek to find out whether or not Smith committed the murder. You possess no evidence that either incriminates or exonerates Smith. In this situation, what you know about Jones gives you epistemic justification for believing that Smith is innocent. Given Jones's evidence, his known dispositions concerning to whom he will reveal it, and your complete lack of other leads, it is rational for you to believe that Smith is innocent in pursuit of knowledge of whether or not Smith is innocent. It is clear to you that in this situation having this belief is the only way for you to get the evidence you need in order to know. Believing that Smith is innocent is thus epistemically justified for you at the time, even though you do not have evidence that Smith is innocent.<sup>9</sup>

What the case shows is that evidential support is not a necessary condition for epistemic justification or rationality. If epistemic justification is that which serves the aim of acquiring knowledge, then here we have a clear case where the aim is best satisfied by adopting belief in the absence of *any* evidential support. It also shows that even if evidence is what provides the truth connection necessary for knowledge, and hence adequate evidential support is a necessary constituent of knowledge, there are going to be cases where in order to acquire the necessary evidence, a person will be epistemically justified or rational only if she violates evidential

principle of justification EC. This in itself may be taken to imply that evidentialism is an inadequate theory of epistemic justification, but that is not what I am taking it to imply (and, of course, neither does Conee). In this unusual case, what is crucial is that the reason why the evidentialist principle EC is to be set aside in the short haul is that this is the only way to satisfy the aim of the principle in the long haul. Principle EC is the default principle of epistemic justification, but satisfaction of principles of justification does not guarantee satisfaction of the aim of such principles; and in cases where this is so, it will be justified to set aside such principles. In such a position, evidence is still that which provides the truth connection necessary for knowledge, and as such, the fundamental insight of evidentialism can still be salvaged.

Conee also goes on to construct a hypothetical case which shows that having conclusive evidence for a proposition is not sufficient for believing that proposition, but this case is not relevant to the position DA, and so I will bypass consideration of it. However what is important for the case of DA is that Conee concludes that the fundamental tenets of evidentialism can be salvaged even in the face of such cases where strict evidential implications are not necessary for the epistemic justification for believing a proposition.

This shows that the epistemic sort of justification that believing can have does not consist entirely in evidence that the belief is true. Epistemic justification for believing therefore does not have the hypothesized connection to truth. It is not a kind of justification which is provided only by evidence for the truth of the belief.<sup>10</sup>

But if Conee concedes that being epistemically justified in believing a proposition “does not consist entirely in evidence that the belief is true”, how then can he salvage evidentialism? He salvages evidentialism by distinguishing the epistemic justification for *believing* a proposition from the epistemic justification for a *proposition*.

What must be epistemically justified in order to know is not “the belief” in the sense of: the believing of the proposition. It is “the belief” in the sense of: the proposition believed. What gets justified by the answer to the question--- How do you know?---is the known proposition, not believing it. This is the justification that is the topic of the truth connection. Hence, it is the propositional sort of epistemic justification that enters into the truth connection.<sup>11</sup>

The distinction between epistemic justification for belief and epistemic justification for a proposition, according to Conee, is that it is only epistemic justification for a proposition which is evidence for the truth of a proposition, and it is the relation of evidential support which provides epistemic justification with its truth connection. This relation is necessary for epistemic justification for a proposition, but not for epistemic justification for *believing* a proposition. In the case of Smith and Jones above, there is epistemic justification for believing that Smith is innocent even in the absence of any evidential support. Hence believing a proposition can be epistemically justified, because it serves the aim of acquiring knowledge, even in cases where the proper evidentialist truth connection is not present.

That there is no necessary truth connection between believing a proposition for the sake of acquiring knowledge can be seen by considering Conee's genie examples in "The Truth Connection". He hypothesizes about one genie who will cause you to have a true belief concerning X if and only if you believe X now. X is however false, and so if you believe X now, the genie will then cause you to have an accurate belief about X, namely, the genie will cause you to believe that X is false. Conee offers a 2nd genie example which apparently shows that it is not the case that "positive epistemic value is possessed by all and only instances of having an attitude toward a proposition that is supported by one's evidence at the time" (257). In this case there is a genie who will prevent you from ever having a supported view again unless you have an unsupported attitude now, and if you do have an unsupported attitude now, you will have many supported attitudes later. In this case, it seems that one's evidential support is not necessary for positive epistemic value.

In defending the evidentialist position against the genie cases, Conee introduces the notion of "maximal intrinsic epistemic value". He claims that with this notion, an evidentialist position regarding positive epistemic value can be salvaged. That premise, with "rational attitude" interpreted evidentially, is V3\*.

V3\*. When adopting (or maintaining) an attitude toward a proposition, *p*, a person has an attitude that constitutes a state of affairs having maximal intrinsic epistemic value by adopting (or maintaining) a rational attitude toward *p*.<sup>12</sup>

Conee holds that V3\* is not subject to examples such as his Smith and Jones or genie examples. This is so because in such cases, although the effects of the belief contribute to the

total epistemic value that the belief produces, since it does not have a constitutive role in yielding epistemic value, it does not have *intrinsic* epistemic value. This is *not* the case for beliefs which are supported by one's evidence, and hence Conee contends that it is plausible that only beliefs which have adequate evidential support are the sorts of beliefs which have maximal intrinsic epistemic value.

It is not entirely clear to me just how, in general, to distinguish between beliefs which have a constitutive role in yielding epistemic value from ones which do not have such a role. But if we examine the Smith/Jones case and the genie cases we may be able to better understand how to draw the necessary distinction between such cases and cases where evidence is the determinate factor constituting belief. What seems clear in the Smith/Jones cases and the genie cases is that, in each case, the belief is merely instrumental in producing maximal epistemic value. In each case, there is no intrinsic epistemic value accruing to the belief adopted, it is that the situations are engineered in such a way that the belief adopted is extrinsic to the resultant epistemic value produced by adopting the belief. What we need to consider now is whether faith beliefs in the DA position are more comparable to the beliefs in Conee's Smith/Jones and genie examples, or more comparable to beliefs which are adequately supported by evidence. Perhaps then we will be able to determine whether or not faith beliefs of the sort defended in the DA position have maximal intrinsic epistemic value or not; and furthermore even if not, whether or not they should be considered epistemically rational.

First off, in the position derived from Augustine, the presumption is that, necessarily, the faith beliefs in question are true.<sup>13</sup> DA is a plausible position only given that presumption. The position DA will *not* justify faith beliefs which are false---only faith beliefs which are true can be justified. If one asks, "Well, how do we *know* that these beliefs are true?" the response

would be that, if it is a matter of faith, you are putting the cart before the horse. This implies, of course, that if someone adopts what *appears* to her to be a faith belief, she may, in fact, be dead wrong; and if she *is* wrong, all bets are off! Not only that, but also, if someone adopts what appears to her to be a faith belief and it is true, but it is only true by lucky happenstance, this also does not constitute the kind of faith belief necessary for the plausibility of DA.

Augustine's slogan taken from Isaiah 7:9, *credo ut intelligam*, suggests that he himself does not see mere faith or belief in the truth as sufficient in itself: faith is justified when it leads one to knowledge or understanding. In other words, in certain cases, faith (in the absence of sufficient evidential support) is necessary as a means of coming to knowledge. In order for DA to be plausible, this condition must be a constituent of the position.

Some views on the justification of faith beliefs may entail that false faith beliefs may be justified, analogous to the way ordinary beliefs which are well supported by evidence but in fact are false are justified. But this is not an option in DA; and the basis for this is that if DA is a position derived from Augustine, then only true faith beliefs can be justified.

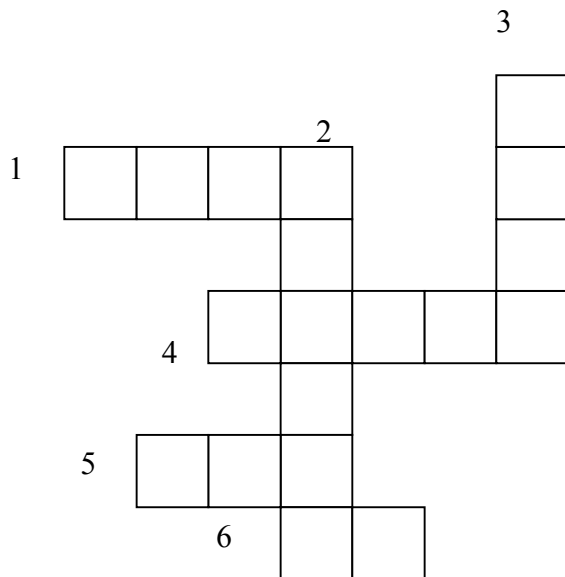
The fact that DA implies that in order to be epistemically justified, the faith belief must be true, distinguishes a faith belief from the belief adopted in Conee's 1<sup>st</sup> genie case. In that case, the genie will produce an accurate belief concerning X only if one believes that X is true. But in this case, what is in fact the case is that X is false. This cannot be so in DA: in DA a justified faith belief entails the belief's being true. So the belief in Conee's 1<sup>st</sup> genie example is not comparable to a faith belief in DA.

Conee's 2<sup>nd</sup> genie case is however much closer to a faith belief adopted according to the conditions for an epistemically justified belief entailed by DA. Recall that in this case there is a genie who will prevent you from ever having a supported view again unless you have an

unsupported attitude now, and if you do have an unsupported attitude now, you will have many supported attitudes later. Conee does not say whether or not the belief which is unsupported in this 2<sup>nd</sup> genie case must be true, but let's say that it is a true belief. This now does seem to be a case which is very close to the kind of faith belief justified according to DA. However, the fact that the unsupported belief is true is not sufficient if the positive epistemic value which results from the belief (i.e., the support of many beliefs later) is connected merely instrumentally or by mere happenstance. In DA, a faith belief is not merely instrumental or connected by mere happenstance to the resultant epistemic value; the resultant epistemic value must be connected *intrinsically* to the adopted faith belief. This also distinguishes the faith belief adopted in DA from the belief adopted in Conee's Smith/Jones case. Just as in my modified example of Conee's 2<sup>nd</sup> genie case, the belief adopted in the Smith/Jones case is merely instrumental and thereby extrinsic to the resultant epistemic value; it is not intrinsic to the belief.

But how can a faith belief be of *intrinsic* epistemic value? In order to answer that question, I will adopt an analogy from Susan Haack's *Evidence and Inquiry*.<sup>14</sup> Haack's picture of epistemic justification is what she calls "foundherentist". She calls it such because in such a position, there is no clear distinction between a foundationally justified belief and a belief justified by its coherence with other beliefs. She illustrates the relation of justification in a foundherentist position with the use of a crossword puzzle analogy. I think that Haack's foundherentist view of justification best captures the position of justification in a position derived from Augustine; in fact I think it best captures the merits of a position wherein which the rationality of faith is based upon the *credo ut intelligam* dictum.<sup>15</sup> So in what follows, I will modify Haack's analogy to accommodate a doxastic system which includes faith beliefs. As in Haack's use of the metaphor, the clues are the pieces of evidence, and in this case the

given clues as the evidence (whatever you think that that is) which we appeal to in any inquiry which reason can discover in its natural deployment without reliance upon faith. Think of the entire crossword puzzle as the whole of knowledge, and this section of the puzzle to be a section where some of the answers (beliefs) from reason butts-up against some of the answers (beliefs) of the faith. The answers in this section of the puzzle will represent our non-theological knowledge, and to the extent that the answers are the same will be the extent to which there is a common body of knowledge accessible without the aid of faith. Here then, is the puzzle.



**Across:**

- 1.
4. The skeleton of the head
5. A writing instrument or a small enclosure for animals
6. The opposite of stop

**Down:**

2. A good form of outdoor exercise for cardiovascular health and strength of the legs
3. Who hath said in his heart that there is no God

As can be seen, there is a clue missing from the puzzle; and because of that, there is no determinate solution to the puzzle; and in particular, no determinate solution for #2 down: it is indeterminate whether *hiking* or *biking* should be the entry. The missing clue

is not accessible to all and is available only to those who have faith; but if you have faith, this part of the puzzle is then determinately resolvable. The missing clue is:

A cartoon image of a good idea is a light \_\_\_\_\_.

With the addition of this clue, the puzzle is determinately resolvable: the entry for #1 across is *bulb* and therefore #2 down is clearly *biking*, not *hiking*.

If we use the analogy of this crossword puzzle for the relation between faith and reason, we get that both faith and reason---or what one can know on the basis of what evidence is available in the absence of faith---are insufficient sources of knowledge. Not only is it the case that neither faith nor reason are sufficient sources of knowledge, but faith and reason are complementary. Faith perfects reason and reason perfects faith. Reason is autonomous in the sense that it considers distinctive evidence (has its own clues). The same should be said of faith. However, neither faith nor reason can constitute a complete science or body of knowledge (crossword puzzle) and there are no clear boundaries as to where reason ends and faith begins. There is also no clear distinction between empirical, scientific, or philosophical propositions and propositions based upon faith (which entries are solely dependent on faith versus which entries are solely dependent upon reason). Another feature of note of the analogy regarding the relation between faith and reason is that a clue (evidence) is given for faith, *not* a dictated answer; and hence the believer or community of believers, using other evidence and beliefs from faith and reason, must figure out or interpret the meaning of the evidence

provided by faith. What Scripture and the Tradition entail itself requires the use of unrestricted reason.

From my adaptation of Haack's crossword puzzle analogy, we get a view of the relation between faith and reason and a conception of justified belief which has the kinds of features which I think we are looking for in a position derived from Augustine. Such a view is coherentist in the sense that the entirety of knowledge, including that from both faith and reason, is viewed as a network of beliefs. No belief is wholly justified on its own, but is in some respects justified because of its relations to other beliefs. For example, part of the justification of my answer (belief) that #4 across is *skull* is its relation to my answer (belief) for #2 down, which of course in turn depends on my answers for #1 and #5 across. Even for #1 across, which represents a faith belief, although its clue (evidence) is unique in being from a source distinct from reason and common beliefs, or the data of ordinary experience, part of its justification will depend upon its relation to my other beliefs. The coherentist aspects of the picture of justification capture nicely the implications of the dictum *credo ut intelligam* as I conceive of it in DA. As I noted above, in the DA position, the dictum implies that faith is justified because it is a means to knowledge or understanding. If we project this in the way suggested by the crossword puzzle analogy, faith is a means to acquiring and enhancing knowledge not just for propositions of the faith, but for one's entire network of beliefs or body of knowledge.

However, the view is not strictly coherentist because it provides for the kind of input from outside of our network of beliefs as evidence as well as the network of beliefs. Each of the answers (beliefs) has some clue (evidence) from outside of the network of

beliefs (other answers in the puzzle). As Haack has noted, the advantage of a foundationalist view over a coherentist view of justification is that it allows for non-propositional evidence (27). And non-propositional evidence may be of many different sorts. DA implies no theory about the general criteria for evidence. There is room for the evidence of the senses, introspective evidence, testimonial evidence, and even the evidence of mystical experience. Obviously, in DA, the evidence of faith (i.e., the clue for #1 across) is something distinctive from the more common modes of evidence, such as evidence from the senses, introspective evidence, or human testimonial evidence. Some of the plausible candidates for viewing the clue or the evidence for #1 across are divine testimony or mystical experience. The reason why the clue for #1 is not included with the other clues however is that the evidence of divine testimony and mystical experience, even granted that there are such types of evidence, is *not* the sort of evidence which all have access to, and in fact perhaps just a few have access to. And why would this be so? Why is it that not all have the evidence of the faith? Well this is just where the will to believe implied by DA comes into the picture.

As I expressed it in my outline of DA, there are certain cases where even if not- $p$  fits the evidence that I have better than  $p$ , it is epistemically better for me to believe  $p$ . Since it is better for me to know the truth than it is to believe what is false or not know the truth, when the evidence for not- $p$  is inconclusive (and  $p$  is in fact true) my believing  $p$  rather than either believing not- $p$  or withholding belief in not- $p$  in certain cases puts me in the best position to come to know the truth. And in such cases it is epistemically better for me to believe  $p$ . The case of faith is just such a case.

Viewed strictly from the point of view of the evidentialist principle EC, the clue for #1 across does *not* meet the standards of evidence. In other words, higher-level epistemic questions can be raised about just what one's evidence is.<sup>16</sup> One can ask whether or not believing that *X* is part of my evidence is something for which I have sufficient evidence. In the crossword puzzle analogy, *if* the clue for #1 across is considered part of my evidence for the solution of the puzzle, then my evidence *does sufficiently justify* my belief that the answer for #1 across is *bulb*. But since there is not sufficient evidence for the clue for #1 across being considered part of my stock of evidence, it requires an act of faith on my part in order for me to take the clue for #1 across as evidence. So the situation is something like this. Prior to making an act of faith in accepting the clue for #1 across as part of my evidence, that clue is not part of my evidence; and so there is no entry for #1 across. So my accepting the clue for #1 across as evidence is a belief which is not supported by my evidence. And so prior to accepting the clue for #1 across, that *biking* is the correct entry for #2 down is *not* adequately supported by my evidence. However, if I will to accept the clue for #1 across as evidence without supporting evidence for its being such, the evidence from the clue for #1 across then supports the entry for #1 across being *bulb*, which in turn supports the entry for #2 down being *biking*. This is very much like Conee's 2<sup>nd</sup> genie case, wherein which if, but only if, you have an unsupported belief now, you will have many supported beliefs later on down the road.

But does this picture adequately capture the relation between faith and reason, and more specifically between faith and evidence? Is it plausible to conceive of an act of faith being something that involves what amounts to a second order volition to believe?<sup>17</sup>

What I mean by a second order volition to believe is that it is an attitude structurally similar to Frankfurt's second order volitions. A first order volition is an effective will to *do X*, whereas a second order desire or volition is the desire or effective will to *desire or will to do X*. As I am conceiving of it, an act of faith involves a second order volition to believe that something constitutes revelatory evidence. Since DA is a position derived from Augustine, an appropriate source to consider is Augustine's own account of his conversion in the *Confessions*. Augustine is struggling with his inability to completely commit himself to Christ and forsake his "unclean" desires. He prays and pleads that he will be released and cleansed now! And this is his account of what follows.

29. I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when suddenly I heard the voice of a boy or a girl I know not which--coming from the neighboring house, chanting over and over again, "Pick it up, read it; pick it up, read it."[\[260\]](#) Immediately I ceased weeping and began most earnestly to think whether it was usual for children in some kind of game to sing such a song, but I could not remember ever having heard the like. So, damming the torrent of my tears, I got to my feet, for I could not but think that this was a divine command to open the Bible and read the first passage I should light upon. For I had heard[\[261\]](#) how Anthony, accidentally coming into church while the gospel was being read, received the admonition as if what was read had been addressed to him: "Go and sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you shall

have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me." [262] By such an oracle he was forthwith converted to thee.

So I quickly returned to the bench where Alypius was sitting, for there I had put down the apostle's book when I had left there. I snatched it up, opened it, and in silence read the paragraph on which my eyes first fell: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof." [263] I wanted to read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away. [264]<sup>18</sup>

What are the salient features of this conversion for the purpose of understanding its epistemically relevant properties? First, Augustine is praying and pleading for a way to conquer his lust---he has a desire to be saved, but is too weak to effect it. Second, he is distraught and weeping, but he then hears an unknown child's voice commanding "Pick it up; read it." Third, and most critically, he takes this as a divine command. As he says: "I could not but think that this was a divine command." Fourth, recalling the account that he had heard of Anthony's conversion being effected by an accident of his hearing of a gospel, Augustine interprets the command to pick up and read to mean that he is to arbitrarily take the first text he sees as the answer to his prayer. And last, but not least, he takes the text he encounters to so perfectly answer his prayer that he is infused with "something like the light of pure certainty."

The third stage of Augustine's conversion process, i.e. his taking the voice of the child to be the expression of a divine command, functions analogously to the way in which the clue for #1 across functions in the crossword puzzle. Unlike the other clues, it is not a given that the clue for #1 across is evidence. The clue functions as evidence only for those who choose to accept it as such; and that it is to be taken as such is not itself something which is sufficiently supported by the evidence. Augustine does not point to any evidence (except perhaps just the impulsion to believe) that supports his taking the child's voice saying "Pick it up, read it" as a divine revelation, and I can't imagine what kind of evidence *would* sufficiently support his taking it as such. But similarly, as with the person solving the crossword puzzle who chooses to accept the clue for #1 across, once Augustine accepts the child's voice to be divine revelation, this leads him to knowledge or understanding. However, this is all just hooey if what Augustine heard was *not* a divine revelation. The plausibility of DA rests crucially upon the premise that whatever is accepted as evidence of divine revelation is *in fact* divinely revealed.

Augustine's conversion is an extraordinary passage of faith. Nonetheless, more ordinary passages of faith seem to share with Augustine's conversion a point, or more commonly points, when the person accepts something as evidence for a divine revelation. What is it for someone to accept Scripture as divinely revealed, or to accept that the Magisterium of the Church is the authentic interpreter of Scripture? Can this be plausibly construed as a person's consideration of whether or not this is the case by an application of an evidentialist standard like EC? I don't see how. It seems to me much more plausible to consider the act of faith to be a decision or choice or acceptance to take the bible as divinely revealed in the absence of sufficient support by one's body of

evidence. The same could be said for taking some event as miraculous. Although he didn't get the picture entirely correct, there is something fundamentally right about Hume's attack on the rationality of belief in miracles---and what he has right is that it is implausible to think that taking something as a miraculous event is something that "fits the evidence" or "on balance is supported by the evidence."

But then, what distinguishes this sort of act of faith from mere wishful thinking? The key is found in a full appreciation of Augustine's *credo ut intelligam*. First, the act of faith is an act which has as an intrinsic result: understanding or knowledge. Second, and most simply, an act of faith is necessarily belief in what is true. Third, wishful thinking is belief aimed at some end or other, like peace of mind, or hope; but not at the epistemic end---the acquisition of knowledge. And finally, and perhaps most importantly, according to DA, the knowledge and understanding which proceeds from an act of faith is persistent and conscientious in searching for and assessing evidence---in fact, this evidential sensitivity is itself a large part of what constitutes the resultant understanding. It is true that a strong faith belief may more doggedly resist defeaters, and superficially, this may appear to another as mere wishful thinking. But the epistemic principle justifying stronger resistance to defeaters when an act of faith is at stake, is perfectly rational.<sup>19</sup> If the faith belief *is* true, then there is no more certain basis for belief; for if the faith belief is true, it is either directly or indirectly revealed by God, the author of all truth, and therefore is less likely to be mistaken. There is, of course, the danger of a stubborn and inflexible dogmatism, but only if the believer presumes an infallibility regarding his belief. But that would amount to presuming one's infallibility

regarding the interpretation of the clue or evidence which prompts the belief. There is no presumption of such infallibility in DA.

It seems clear that if faith has the epistemic properties entailed by DA, then it is rationally justified. But the subsequent question is whether faith's epistemic justification is merely what Conee considers to be epistemic justification for *believing* a proposition or, rather, might it be epistemic justification for a *proposition* itself. Well, it surely satisfies the conditions for epistemic justification for belief; and whether it satisfies the conditions for epistemic justification for a proposition will depend upon whether the belief itself is constitutive of knowledge. Looking back once more to the crossword puzzle analogy, what we have is that if one makes an act of faith in accepting the clue for #1 across as evidence, then the clue justifies the proposition itself, i.e. that *A cartoon image of a good idea is a light bulb*, for it is constitutive, and not merely instrumental, in producing knowledge. So the act of faith has two epistemic tiers: the second or higher order tier which is the acceptance, without sufficient evidence, of something's constituting considerable evidence. At this tier, there is just epistemic justification *for belief*. But the first order tier, which involves the interpretation and assessment of the evidence provided by the clue for #1 across, we have epistemic justification for the *proposition*. If that is the case, then it is reasonable to believe that the kind of truth connection which is necessary for knowledge is attributable to acts of faith as well.

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<sup>1</sup> James F. Ross has defended the position of cognitive voluntarism in many articles. See, e.g., his “Cognitive Finality” in Linda Zagzebski, ed. *Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, (1993), 226-255. See also John Zeis, “Volitionalism and the Virtue of Faith” in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. LXVIII, No. 1, (1994), 57-71.

Whether cognitive voluntarism is a viable position is an issue that is beyond the scope of the discussion in this paper. Nonetheless, it is clear that a position on faith which is derived from Augustine, which is the sort of position which I attempt to articulate here, must be one which includes a cognitive voluntarist perspective. See Eugene TeSelle’s entry on “Faith” in the *Encyclopedia on Augustine*, pp. 347-350.

<sup>2</sup> Translated by Norman Kretzmann in, “Faith Seeks, Understanding Finds,” *Christian Philosophy*, ed. Thomas P. Flint (Notre Dame: ND Press, 1990), p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> See Richard Feldman, “The Ethics of Belief,” in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* May 2000, 60 (3), 667-695.

<sup>4</sup> Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, “Evidentialism” in *Evidentialism* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), p. 101.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 102. EC is the revised version of principle EJ (p. 83), which is that a “Doxastic attitude *D* toward proposition *p* is epistemically justified for *S* at *t* if and only if having *D* at *t* toward *p* fits the evidence that *S* has at *t*.” Feldman and Conee revised EJ to the notion of “fit” in EJ. They claim that this is the sort of justification which is characteristically epistemic and basic to an evidentialist epistemology (254).

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<sup>6</sup> Conee distinguishes between epistemic justification and on other sorts of justification, e.g., moral or prudential, on the basis that epistemic justification always has some bearing on the truth of the belief. See “The Truth Connection,” in *Evidentialism*, p. 243.

<sup>7</sup> Conee, “The Truth Connection,” p. 248.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 249.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 250.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 252.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 258.

<sup>13</sup> As TeSelle puts it in *op. cit.*, for Augustine “...belief is without error or ignorance.” p. 348. It is clear that TeSelle uses “belief” here as a synonym for “faith”.

<sup>14</sup> Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry* (Oxford UK and Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1993), 19. Since Haack introduced foundherentism, other philosophers have followed her lead in taking a middle way through the standard dichotomies of foundationalism/coherentism and internalism/externalism. In fact, Earl Conee himself is sympathetic to this view. See his “The Basic Nature of Epistemic Justification,” *The Monist* 71, 389-404 (1988).

<sup>15</sup> I think that my modification of Haack’s foundherentist position clearly incorporates the implications which Augustine draws from the *credo ut intelligam* dictum. These implications are the following: (1) the attempt to gain knowledge or understanding without faith is futile. (2) Faith is a stage on the way to knowledge. Faith is not yet understanding, but it seeks understanding. (3) the quest for knowledge

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prompted by faith is not only legitimate, but gains an independent validity and moves beyond mere faith. See TeSelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 347-348.

<sup>16</sup> William P. Alston, "Epistemic Desiderata," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 53, no.3 (September 1993): 527-51. In this article, Alston identifies "higher level requirements" as one of four prominent candidates of "putatively necessary conditions of justification" (528-29).

<sup>17</sup> The distinction between first and second order desires and volitions is developed by Harry Frankfurt in his "The Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy*, lxxviii, no. 1 (Jan. 1971): 5-20.

<sup>18</sup> *Confessions* Book 8, Chapter 12.

<sup>19</sup> In his "Heeding Misleading Evidence" in *Evidentialism*, p. 267, Conee argues that "...any alleged knowledge that could survive the acquisition of defeating contrary evidence against its basis would have the tenacity of dogma, not knowledge." The distinction between the position which I argue for here and Conee's position in this article is, I think, this. If someone assents to a proposition on the basis of what he takes to be faith, he would have to take such a basis to be true and well-founded. However, since one can be *wrong* about it being actually grounded in faith, the mere fact that *if* it is grounded by faith it must be true does not justify his dismissing all defeating contrary evidence and resorting to blind dogmatic adherence. I think such an attitude would be contrary to the faith which seeks understanding. Nonetheless, if he does take his belief to be grounded in faith, the fact that if it is then it must be true will justify a more critical

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attitude toward defeating contrary evidence than if he takes his belief to be grounded by some source other than faith.