

THE DYNAMICS OF FAITH: FROM HOPE TO KNOWLEDGE

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By its most widely held definition, knowledge is justified, true belief.¹ The justification that distinguishes known true beliefs from other true beliefs, takes the form of a *logos* or rational account that explains how or why a belief is true. My belief that a seven will come up on the next roll of the dice may turn out to be true, but that does not allow it to be considered something I knew because there is no *logos* or explanation to support the belief. By contrast, my belief that water is a composite of hydrogen and oxygen is not only a true belief, but one supported by a very extensive *logos* or rational account which entails the whole of atomic chemistry. Without such a *logos* or rational account, our true opinions might be no more than lucky guesses. Thus, the essential element which establishes a true belief as knowledge is this *logos* or rational account.

Of course, a very big question is how much of a *logos* is required to make a true belief stand as knowledge? How extensive does the account have to be, or how much warrant or evidence is required in order to turn a true belief into knowledge? The answer to this question seems to be that knowledge is not a fixed point as it had been when to know meant to be certain. If there is such a thing as probable knowledge, and some beliefs are more justified or have a greater degree of warrant or certainty than others as a greater probability accompanies them, so too there must be degrees concerning knowledge claims based upon how extensive and acceptable a *logos* or justification is.

At the other end of the scale, many beliefs are held without any supportive *logos* or justifying account. Much of what we came to believe as children was received unconsciously or at least unreflectively. Many people continue as adults to hold a large portion of their beliefs in a similar way. It is often said, that they accept such beliefs on faith. But beliefs held in faith are not beliefs that are casually held or with-

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out support. Beliefs held in faith are beliefs held in confidence because they do have support but that support is not in the form of a *logos* or rational account. Instead beliefs held in faith are supported and rooted in hope. Hope is not a belief about a state of affairs, the way faith is, but a desire that a certain possible state of affairs would be realized.

Of course, it is possible to have a confidence in the truth of a belief that is neither supported by a *logos* nor hope. A person may have a faith or confidence that a certain disaster will take place, but they hope that their belief will not be realized. In such cases the cause of their confidence is despair rather than hope.

So faith, or a confidence of belief, may exist without hope, and equally hope is not always accompanied by faith. We may have a hope that is little more than a wish with little prospect of it being realized. A wish need not involve the possibility that what is wished for is possible, while a hope does require that the thing hoped for is at least remotely possible. Faith, on the other hand, is much more than the belief that a state of affairs is remotely possible. It is a conscious confidence in the truth of a belief even when there is little or no apparent warrant or supporting *logos*. When faith, or a confidence of belief, is added to hope, the hope takes on a reality that it would otherwise not possess. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for (Heb. 11:1)."

Truth then is a necessary ingredient in both faith and knowledge. Beliefs we hold as knowledge will be abandoned if they lose the element of truth. The Ptolemaic notion of a geocentric universe no longer stands as knowledge in spite of its supporting *logos*, because that supporting *logos* lost the essential element of truth. With Copernicus and the alternative *logos* he provided, a choice had to be made. Only one of the competing accounts would be granted a claim to truth. When the Copernican account was chosen, the Ptolemaic account lost its claim to truth by the law of contradiction.

Equally, if I have faith in my baseball team and hold the belief that they will win the championship, I maintain the truth of that belief. If by the end of the season, however, the facts are contrary to my belief, I can no longer hold that belief in faith because its truth has been lost (for that season anyway).

But while truth is a necessary ingredient in knowledge and faith, what distinguishes faith from knowledge is that with knowledge the necessary truth element is supplied by a *logos* or rational account which serves as reasonable evidence for the truth of the belief. With faith, the truth element, at least initially, is supplied by hope, and no immediate explanation of why something is true needs to be given. Of course, our tendency is to want to add a *logos* or rational account in order to give our beliefs support from more than mere hope. All beliefs held in faith have a natural dynamic whereby they go from being initially supported in hope to being supported in some sort of rational justification. If the supporting *logos* or rational account becomes extensive enough, the hope, which initially supported the belief will disappear entirely. This often occurs in the sciences, and a belief held in faith today will be a belief held as knowledge tomorrow as we are able to add a *logos* and give a sufficient account which explains why our belief is true. When a scientist pursues a particular hypothesis rather than a host of others, his belief is supported by a faith, or a confidence that what he hopes for is true. It is, however, a temporary faith, for the scientist's ambition is that his belief would ultimately be supported entirely in a rational account, absent of the emotive support of hope.

But even when successful and a belief becomes entirely supported by a *logos* or rational account, its initial support was a faith or confidence that originated in hope. This is because our elementary beliefs out of which we form the beliefs which make up a *logos* and provide a justification for our beliefs, cannot themselves have a *logos* to support them. Being elementary, there cannot be a more elementary *logos* which might serve as their support (Plato, *Theaetetus*, 201e-202c).² Thus, initially our confidence in such beliefs must be rooted in hope.

Our belief in the possibility of knowledge is a prime example. Since human beings do not begin with knowledge, our initial confidence in the belief that knowledge is possible must be rooted in hope. Of course, we could say that we simply begin telling stories or offering myths that become ever more rational and eventually evolve into accounts that more resemble a science than a myth. But even if this were the case, there is still a cornerstone or foundational belief that finds its support not in a rational account but in hope and faith.

Many philosophers have come to this conclusion. Even among those who are generally considered to be the most rational, we see that they begin by establishing an initial belief in hope and faith. In the *Meno*, when Meno suggests to Socrates that learning is impossible because, as Socrates paraphrases,

He would not seek what he knows, for since he knows it there is no need of the inquiry, nor what he does not know, for in that case he does not even know what he is to look for. (Plato, *Meno*, 80E)

Socrates' immediate answer is the famous recollection myth in which he explains that the soul "is immortal and has been born many times, and has seen all things both here and in the other world (Plato, *Meno*, 81C)." Thus, learning is possible because it is in fact no more than mere recollection or remembering what we have forgotten. He then gives a demonstration in which he uses Meno's slave. In the demonstration Socrates claims that the slave, who had never learned any geometry in this life, is able to come to a knowledge of geometry through mere recollection or remembering the principles of geometry which he must have known at some point prior to this life.

Meno is impressed and takes the myth and its demonstration to prove that truth is in the soul and therefore knowledge is possible. Socrates, on the other hand, although he says that he too believes that truth is in the soul, indicates that he is not as sure as Meno. What he is certain of, however, is that we should act as if knowledge were possible.

Meno: Somehow or other I believe you are right.

Socrates: I think I am. I shouldn't like to take an oath on the whole story, but one thing I am ready to fight for as long as I can, in word and act—that is, that we shall be better, braver, and more active men if we believe it is right to look for what we don't know than if we believe there is no point in looking because what we don't know we can never discover. (Plato, *Meno*, 86B-C)

So it seems that Socrates' belief that knowledge is possible is not so much based upon a *logos* (i.e., the recollection myth and its demonstration with the slave boy) as it is a hope that such a belief will give us certain desired values (i.e., to be braver and better men). Of course, the other value that motivates our hope in such a belief is knowledge itself. We believe that knowledge is valuable or a good that will make life meaningful, so we put our faith in those elementary beliefs which we hope will lead to knowledge.

This seems to be the case with Descartes as well. In the *Discourse on Method*, Descartes explains his discovery of the method that led him to knowledge. Of course the discovery of a method that leads to knowledge cannot itself be knowledge or a part of knowledge. Existing prior to knowledge it must be something other than knowledge and that something looks very much like what we have been calling hope and faith.

Descartes tells us that his famous first principle "I think, therefore I am" was discovered simply by doubting everything until he came to this one truth that was completely beyond doubt. But this first piece of knowledge was preceded by a method which could not have been entered into in the knowledge that it would lead him to his desired end, but in the hope and faith that it would.

Additionally, in part three of the *Discourse on the Method* (Descartes famous "*cogito*" is presented in part four), Descartes sets forth a series of provisional maxims to be used until he can get knowledge. His second maxim, he says,

... was that of being as firm and resolute in my actions as I could be, and not to follow less faithfully opinions the most dubious, when my mind was once made up regarding them, than if these had been beyond doubt. (Descartes 96)

He then says this is a maxim "very true and very certain" (Descartes 96). But if it is a maxim "very true and very certain" that truth is not a truth that comes out of his philosophy, or follows from his first principle of the *cogito*, for indeed it precedes both. In fact, it is a belief, like the one that Socrates is willing to fight for, that precedes all knowledge and is based upon a hope and faith that such a belief will give us what we want. Socrates believes it will make us better by making us "braver, and more active men." Descartes believes something very close to that. He says such a maxim will

... deliver me from all the penitence and remorse which usually affect the mind and agitate the conscience of those weak and vacillating creatures... (Descartes 96)

Thus, for both Socrates and Descartes, the value or good they wish to pursue is knowledge and in both cases they see resolute action as a means to that good. Of course, a confidence in the belief that resolute action will lead to knowledge cannot be supported by knowledge, but it can be supported by a hope that such a belief is a means to knowledge. Our confidence in our initial beliefs are almost always supported entirely in hope.

This is true throughout all of philosophy and science. Every system or body of knowledge must begin with a step of faith in the hope that such a step will eventually lead to knowledge. Whether our first steps are in the direction of sense experience, or steps toward the *a priori* truths of logic and mathematics, our first steps must always be steps of

faith based upon hope. To get started on the path to knowledge, we need to take a step of faith, and put our confidence either in the belief that our senses are reliable and accurately inform us concerning reality, or in the belief that the laws of identity and contradiction are meaningful. At this elementary stage, the support for that confidence must be found largely in hope.

Of course, today's foundationalists maintain that a belief in sense data is a basic belief and needs no justification. Even if this is true, however, it is hard to imagine how our conceptual understanding of the world can be directly traced to sense data. True, sense data may be a basis for our perceptions, but our perceptions are also formed by our conceptual understanding of the world which is largely cultural and varies from one language community to another. "In short, perceptual recognition and identification involve the employment of concepts (Landesman 621)," and concepts are not the product of sense data but are largely cultural. Since even our most elementary and foundational beliefs are conceptual, and are not based solely in sense data, they are in need of justification. But what could be the justification for such foundational beliefs? It would seem that any confidence we place in them would have to rest in the hope that such beliefs would serve as a foundation that would allow for a body of empirical knowledge. Such beliefs are in fact suppositions in which we place our confidence because of our hope that they will provide a foundation for us to pursue the kind of knowledge we seek. The logical positivists' notion that we should accept nothing as meaningful unless it can be verified or falsified in observation is meaningless by its own criterion. If such a belief is to be meaningful it must be because of the hope that if we place our confidence or faith in such a supposition, it will lead us to the kind of knowledge we desire.

The same is true of the rationalist claim to knowledge based upon the laws of identity and contradiction. A equals A , and A does not equal not A . But why does A not equal not A ? To say that A does not equal not A , because of the laws of contradiction is to beg the question. We cannot use the law of contradiction to prove the law of contradiction. Any rational account begs the question and supposes the very principle of contradiction we are trying to establish. The only answer that does not beg the question is that our confidence in the laws of contradiction is supported by the hope that such a foundational belief will lead to a body of *a priori* knowledge. Believing that the certainty which *a priori* knowledge yields is good, and seeing that the laws of identity and contradiction are a necessary first step toward that good, we support such primary beliefs with faith or confidence that this thing in which we have placed our hope will lead us to what we desire. Thus, the rationalist, as well as the empiricist, must go outside of their own criterion and establish their initial beliefs in hope.

This fact that all beliefs are ultimately rooted in hope and faith should not be taken to mean that our beliefs are not based in some sort of reasoning. Merely because hope is the original root of our foundational beliefs does not mean that it is the only root. Good beliefs gain support from reasonable evidence, and a rational account begins to develop. Bad beliefs lack such additional roots and eventually wither, or must continue to be supported by pure tenacity. So to say that beliefs are ultimately rooted in hope is not to deny reasonable evidence as a basis for our beliefs. It is rather to say that beliefs have multiple roots. The original root may be one of hope but without additional rational roots that pro-

vide a body of evidence, hope alone is unable to sustain the belief for very long.

All justifiable beliefs are of this kind to one extent or another, and go from being supported almost exclusively in hope to being evermore supported in some type of rationality. Not all beliefs are capable of becoming so exclusively a matter of knowledge that they are supported entirely in reason and need no support from hope, but all beliefs move in that direction and gain rational support or they are abandoned. Thus, the basis of our faith, or confidence in our beliefs, is not singular, but dynamically moves from hope to reason.

When two people marry they may have faith in one another, but that faith is initially little more than a hope. In time that faith may become more than mere hope as one person proves faithful and gives reason for the other person to trust them. Our beliefs about the trustworthiness of people are always of this type. My belief that Harry will be trustworthy tomorrow in a certain situation will never be supported by the kind of conclusive *logos* that makes a belief stand purely as knowledge. It will always be a faith based to a large extent upon hope, but my faith does become more rational as the person in whom I place my faith gives me good reason to trust them.

In the ninth chapter of Mark's gospel a man asks Jesus to cast out an evil spirit from his son.

"But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" And Jesus said to him, "If You can! All things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the boy's father cried out and began saying, "I do believe; help my unbelief." (Mark 9:22-24)

It would seem that the belief or faith this man has is largely rooted in a desire or hope rather than any reasoned confidence in the proposition, "all things are possible to him who believes," because Jesus is the one saying it. We have no indication that the man is a follower of Jesus or even knows much about Him. By contrast, the disciples' faith or belief in that same situation is rooted more in reason than hope, since it is not their son who is seeking to be healed, and since the disciples had experienced multiple instances of Jesus' ability and willingness to heal and work miracles. Thus, the faith of the disciples is much more a matter of the disciples having good reason to believe in Jesus' ability to heal, while the faith of the boy's father is much less a matter of reason and more a matter of hope.

Thus, unlike my faith that a seven will be rolled with the next throw of the dice, which will forever be supported purely by hope,¹ my faith in a person is capable of gaining rational support and their trustworthiness is able to be known. Of course, the amount of evidence that supports my belief in another person varies with the person and my experiences of them, and it will never amount to that degree of certainty that would entirely eliminate hope from the equation. But still, the more evidence I have, the greater my claim to knowing that person.

Our belief in the faithfulness of God is certainly an instance of this kind of personal faith. It may begin as a confidence based in little more than hope, but in time, as God continues to demonstrate His faithfulness, our faith and confidence evermore finds its support in a knowledge of Him and His faithfulness.

Additionally, in the case of God, as with any person, there is a continual movement back toward hope as we find ourselves in new situations where we lack a knowledge of

His faithfulness in that particular situation. In time, if we give God opportunity in those situations, we do see His faithfulness and our confidence in Him becomes more a matter of knowledge than hope in those areas as well. Of course, another new situation in which we lack a knowledge of God and His faithfulness will cause our faith to fall back again upon hope. But in spite of this seemingly backward movement, there is an ongoing strengthening of our faith as evidence of God's faithfulness gives us additional reason to support our confidence in Him. Our faith truly is from God in that He gives us evermore reason to believe and trust in Him.

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This fact that faith is rooted both in hope and reason and has both emotive and cognitive origins should be quite obvious but it does encounter resistance in our thinking because it runs counter to an idea that is deeply entrenched in Western thought and has been strongly reinforced by both Aristotle and the Enlightenment. The idea is that a concept should ideally have a single origin. Aristotle sets forth the maxim that in order to have a clear concept of a species, we need to combine the genus of that species with its differentia (Metaphysics 1037b8-1038a35 & Post. Analytics 96b15- 97b39). To establish a clear concept of the species "man," we combine the genus "animal" and the differentia or that which distinguishes man from other animals, for example, that he is rational. Thus, the species "man" is defined as, "rational animal." On this model, a species is understood as belonging to a single genus, and although Aristotle did allow for the possibility of a species having two genres (Post. Analytics, 97b7-26), the ideal is always that of a single genus. Of course, it is true that our clearest concepts are those which proceed from a single genus, but a clarity of concept is not what we are after. If our desire is to better understand our human condition, and particularly to better understand the faith God is calling us to, a belief that concepts descend from a single genus does not seem to be a good place from which to begin. Indeed, many of our concepts, and not just that of faith, would be much better formulated if they were understood to have multiple origins.

In the *Symposium*, Socrates gives us a model for such concepts when he tells us that the species love (*eros*) does not originate from or belong to a single genus, but has a dual origin which he allegorizes with a story about the birth of *Eros*.

On the day of Aphrodite's birth the gods were making merry, and among them was Resource, son of Craft. And when they had supped, Need came begging at the door because there was good cheer inside. Now it happened that Resource, having drunk deeply of the heavenly nectar—for this was before the days of wine—wandered out into the garden of Zeus and sank into a heavy sleep, and Need, thinking that to get a child by Resource would mitigate her penury, lay down beside him and in time was brought to bed of Love. So Love became the follower and servant of Aphrodite because he was begotten on the same day that she was born. ...

Then again, as the son of Resource and Need, it has been his fate to be always needy; nor is he delicate and lovely as most of us believe, but harsh and arid, bare-

foot and homeless, sleeping on the naked earth, in doorways, or in the very streets beneath the stars of heaven, and always partaking of his mother's poverty. But secondly, he brings his father's resourcefulness to his designs upon the beautiful and good, for he is gallant, impetuous, and energetic, a mighty hunter, and a master of device and artifice. (Plato, Symposium 203b1-203d7)

Thus, love or *eros* is not a species of pure want and desire, but neither is it a species of satisfaction and contentment. Eros must be understood as somehow in the middle, having characteristics of both want and satisfaction.

Of course, Plato's conceptualization of *eros* is not typical of the way we conceptualize things. Western thought has very much sided with Aristotle on this point. In biology we classify and understand species under a single lineage whereby species of animals or plants belong to only one genus, one order, one class, one phylum, etc. Such ordering gives us neat and clear concepts and satisfies our desire to conceptualize things in as simple a way as possible. But the platypus does not seem to neatly fit into a single genus or more precisely into the class designated as "mammal." Likewise, many of our concepts seem to resist such classification, and much effort has been spent trying to make them fit. But perhaps it was wrong-headed to follow Aristotle in the pursuit of concepts which have a simple descent from a single genus.

But wrong as it may be, the Aristotelian model is entrenched in our thinking, and we find it difficult to imagine a species with more than a single genus. One reason for this seems to be that this way of thinking became reinforced by the Enlightenment and the model of the machine. In the 17th and 18th centuries many of the most influential figures including: Newton, Boyle, Descartes, Galileo, and Locke, just to mention a few, endorsed and propagated a mechanical view of the world. If the way we think about the universe follows the model of the machine, we have a model that does suggest linear and singular causal origins. With a machine the movement of a gear is not sometimes caused by one thing and at other times by another thing, unless there is such a regular pattern built into the machine. In almost all cases a machine's movements are regular, fixed, and linear. So if the world is mechanical it is quite natural to suppose a regular, fixed, and linear chain of causes or origins behind what we observe and conceptualize. But the truth seems to be quite the contrary, and our conceptualization of the world would be much better with another model than the one that Aristotle and the Enlightenment have provided.

There have long been those who realized this and resisted the temptation to follow this model. In the Seventeenth Century Leibniz stood in opposition to the mechanical view and its idea of singular causes.

There is an infinity of figures and movements, past and present, which contribute to the efficient cause of my presently writing this. And there is an infinity of minute inclinations and dispositions of my soul, which contribute to the final cause of my writing. (Leibniz 36)

In our day, Michel Foucault has argued against singular causal origins and has pointed

to the model of genealogy as an alternative. Unlike the model of the machine, whose causal chain is linear, a genealogical model acknowledges a multitude of causes or ancestors. If genealogy, rather than the machine, was the model for our thinking about causes, we would not be so quick to suppose single causal origins behind our concepts but would anticipate a descent from multiple sources.

This certainly seems to be the case with faith which has origins in both hope and reason, and more resemble Plato's concept of *eros* with its multiple roots or origins. Clearly, faith is legitimately rooted and justified both emotively and rationally, but there is a resistance to such thinking. Our tendency is to attempt to reduce legitimate beliefs to a single nature (either rational or emotive).

This is especially true of the faith and confidence we have in God. Some have argued that a faith in God is only legitimate if it is rational, while others have maintained that true religious faith is a passion and purely emotive, but the fact is that our faith in God is rooted in both hope and knowledge, and is both emotive and cognitive. It may begin emotively in the passion that is hope, but as we put our hope in God, His faithfulness provides the rational support we naturally seek. Thus, the Scripture rightly says that our faith rests both within our hope in Him (Ps. 43:5 & Ps. 78:7) and our knowledge of Him (Hos. 2:20 & Col. 1:10).

Having these two sources, faith will be somewhat different in everyone depending upon what is the major source of their faith at a particular time (i.e., whether more emotive or rational). One is not better than the other, and the only dangerous faith is either the one that is so intent upon the passion of hope that it does not desire increased rational support in the knowledge of God; or the one that is exclusively founded upon knowledge to the exclusion of hope — indeed, the demons may know that God is all powerful but their hope is that He is not. Ours, however, is a faith that is founded upon our hope in God and our desire to know Him evermore.

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NOTES

1. In 1963 Edmund Gettier's paper, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?," cast doubt on this definition by presenting counter examples in which justified, true beliefs are not knowledge. This began an ongoing search for additional conditions that would eliminate Gettier's counter examples. We will avoid this controversy and all the exceptional cases in which justified, true belief is not knowledge and instead deal with the vast majority of cases in which justified, true belief is knowledge.
2. The basic beliefs which foundationalists claim need no justification will be dealt with later in this paper.
3. Of course, it is possible for one to do a probability study in which case the roll of the dice would be more than mere hope.