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In this paper I argue that moral virtue is sometimes causally necessary both for theistic belief and for nonbelief. I then argue for some further connections between these results and the Calvinist view, recently revived in the philosophy of religion, according to which theistic belief is typically warranted and all those who dissent from such belief persist in their nonbelief because of sin. Specifically, I maintain that the virtue of belief militates against its being warranted, and that the virtue of nonbelief renders the Calvinist generalization concerning nonbelief and sin implausible.

Though often treated in isolation, the notions of moral virtue, epistemological warrant, theistic belief, and theistic nonbelief are bound together in an interesting complex of relations. In this paper I seek to clarify some of these connections and also, thereby, to contribute to the warming of relations between actual believers and nonbelievers. In its first section I argue that moral virtue is sometimes causally necessary both for theistic belief and for nonbelief.[1] In section II I use the results of the preceding discussion to question a Calvinist construal of theistic belief and nonbelief that is gaining considerable exposure (and some popularity) these days in the philosophy of religion. According to that construal, theistic belief is typically an entirely appropriate response to the *sensus divinitatis* and warranted (thus constituting knowledge); and all those who dissent from such belief are in an unfortunate position, persisting in their nonbelief because of sin.[2] Our findings with regard to the virtue of belief and of nonbelief, I argue, require us to resist both parts of this claim. More specifically, the virtue of belief is such that warrant for belief is often inhibited or removed by it, and the virtue of nonbelief is such that the negative generalization concerning that stance many defenders of theistic warrant seem inclined to accept must instead be rejected – especially by Christians wishing to reflect in their intellectual work the teachings and example of Jesus of Nazareth.[3]

I

As already suggested, a central focus of the paper is the state of believing that God (the God of classical theism) exists. In this first part of the paper I argue that virtue is causally necessary for the presence (or continuing presence) of this state in some, and that virtue can in the same manner be

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linked to the absence (or continuing absence) of this state in others.

Let me begin by offering a few additional clarifications of these claims. Notice first that although what I am saying here may seem compatible with a different view, I mean to speak of the believer's and of the nonbeliever's own virtue: their own virtue – or so I claim – is sometimes reflected in their believing or failing to believe as they do. In speaking of such virtue I will normally be referring, more specifically, to the actions that express or display its presence. So my claims as thus far developed amount to this: that actions expressing an admirable character trait (or traits) of the believer are sometimes causally necessary for the onset or continuation of her belief in God, and that the same holds for nonbelief. Now the claims I have just expressed would be true if individuals came to possess or else retained the relevant states in part because of virtuous qualities exhibited in nondoxastic contexts (by which latter term I mean to refer, roughly, to contexts which can be fully described without reference to the formation or preservation, the loss or continuing absence, of belief). But the obtaining of this condition is not sufficient for the truth of what I mean to assert. What is typically meant, for example, by the Christian who says that an individual must develop good character in and through the temptations and vicissitudes of life-in-general if she wishes to find belief in God (either as something obviously staring her in the face once moral obstacles have been removed, or as the reward or gift of God) is not an instance of what I will be talking about. So a further clarification is needed. We may provide it if we emphasize that it is precisely virtue displayed in *doxastic* contexts – more precisely still, in what I will call *theism-related* doxastic contexts, contexts which cannot be fully described without reference to how we form or fail to form, lose or fail to lose, theistic belief – that I am concerned to show to be the possession of both believers and nonbelievers.

Now for my defense of these claims. I begin with belief. Contrary to what some skeptics are inclined to assert, it seems that virtue is often exhibited by Christians and other believers in theism-related doxastic contexts. Even where belief in God is firm – amounting, indeed, to conviction – it seems to me that virtue may sometimes be causally involved. What sorts of virtue? First of all, *loyalty*.

Let's take a moment to consider this notion more closely. Loyalty paradigmatically has as its object a person, real or imaginary, with whom one considers oneself to have entered into relationship and to whom one has freely made certain commitments. It consists, I will say, in a disposition to continue to value (for his or her own sake) as well as to defend the object of loyalty, and to fulfil the (non-overridden) commitments of the relationship, even when there is reason to be in doubt about whether all of this is owed or required and when one receives little in return. These properties, of course, do not prevent loyalty from being occasionally misguided and manifested in activities that have less commendable properties as well (some possible examples will emerge from our discussion below). It may also at times be hard to distinguish loyalty as I have described it from unhealthy attachment of a sort that is, at bottom, self-interested. But in itself and where it truly exists, loyalty seems admirable. Why? Perhaps in part because of the resistance of self-centredness it appears to require,

which rightly wins both moral and religious appreciation. Also important is the fulfilment of commitments we are supposing it to involve: it seems evident that where such commitments are not overridden, where there is no (all-things-considered) moral obligation not to act on commitments one has freely entered into, the fulfilment of those commitments is morally good and – especially where difficult – praiseworthy.[4] Related to this is a point hard to express clearly: present in loyalty of the sort we are considering is a kind of self-respect, an honoring of one's past, of what has been important to one in one's life journey thus far, that we would not rightly put on a par, value-wise, with the actions of one who quickly throws overboard what has been important to her – what has helped to define the shape of her life, but is now cast into question.

Perhaps it will be objected that loyalty as I have described it is not in all cases virtuous, that loyalty is not virtuous unless the loyal one has good reason to believe (is epistemically justified in believing) that the object of her loyalty is actually worthy of such devotion; and that this will not always be the case. But this objection overlooks the fact that it is precisely when what is conventionally taken as 'worthiness' is cast into question that the virtue of loyalty comes into its own. Consider the woman who hears stories alleging that her partner of ten years, away, as she supposes, on a relief mission in Africa and unreachable, is really an imposter, out to take her for all she's worth; stories alleging, in effect, that the man she thought she knew does not really exist. Suppose that the stories are ones she has some reason to believe are reliable, indeed, that were she to consider them in the manner epistemic justification requires (whatever that is), they would put her into a state of doubt with respect to her partner's identity. Suppose, further, that her friends and family are convinced by them and, pointing to her partner's frequent absences and other difficulties of the relationship, encourage her to end it. Now worthiness, as usually understood, is clearly suspect here: if her partner really is an imposter, then he is not worthy of her loyalty, so it would commonly be said; and she is no longer epistemically justified in believing that her partner is who he says he is. Hence, if the objector is correct, it should follow that loyalty shown under these circumstances is not a virtue. But it doesn't. If the woman we are imagining continues, though with some difficulty, to fulfil her commitments to her partner, continues to value him for his own sake and to trust him and defend him, shoring up her faltering belief with thoughts of experiences shared together and loving past actions of her partner seemingly (though from an epistemic point of view, question-beggingly) confirming his identity as the one she always took him to be – if she does all this, instead of giving in to doubt and acting on that instead (perhaps by attempting an impartial investigation), it seems clear that she is to be admired and her actions and dispositions are to be praised as virtuous (and this even if we think her mistaken, and even if – perhaps especially if – we consider her to be under no moral obligation to continue in the relationship). Because of the sorts of pressures to give in she faces, she is required to heroically resist self-interest – the demands of the ego – in persevering as she does. Assuming that she recognizes no moral obligation to give up her commitments (and there is no reason to suppose that she must

see or that there must be such obligations), she rightly wins our admiration for continuing to fulfil them. Honoring her past, the decisions and goals and experiences that have shaped her life thus far, she evinces a healthy self-respect. (Now all of this may of course change, in one way or another, with the introduction of new and weightier information or events, but granting this gives nothing away to the objection.)[5]

Suppose, then, that loyalty of the sort in question is indeed a virtue. How is that relevant to theistic belief? Well, I see such loyalty in the belief of Christian students of mine sometimes (and there is considerable evidence of a similar phenomenon in the Christian community generally, and indeed in other theistic religious communities). I am thinking of persons who are emotionally healthy and display, in other contexts, the marks of Christian character and commitment, and who are now confronted with the challenge of 'arguments against religious belief'. The question for them is whether their belief in God will survive consideration of such arguments. This can be a dark period for these individuals, but they emerge with belief intact; and loyalty seems often to be involved in the explanation of this fact. Certainly the discovery of intellectual answers is not always a (or the only) factor: they frequently cannot point to arguments that have been decisive for them. And a reference to their Christian commitment is often implicit or explicit in communications from them. The 'loyalty' explanation seems rather plausible when you think about it. These are, after all, persons of character, who take themselves to be in a personal relationship with God – a relationship more important than any other. Is not continuing belief just what one would expect, given these facts? If they are loyal in other relationships, would we not expect them to be loyal in this one?

It may be objected that one cannot be loyal to a being about whose very existence one is in doubt. But this misreads the situation and underestimates its complexity. There is a difference between doubt and doubts. What I see seems usually to be the latter. While belief is in such cases faltering, wavering, fluctuating, as a result of the struggle with questions, it seems rarely to be absent altogether, as is required for one to be in doubt about a proposition (neither believing nor disbelieving it). So long as it is present, these individuals do still feel themselves to be in the relationship, and doubt is to varying degrees viewed by them as a kind of betrayal, as a kind of 'going over to the enemy' (note the pejorative connotation, in religious contexts, of the expression 'giving in to doubt'). To respond to this sense by resisting what one's doubts suggest is true is to show loyalty to God.

The resistance can take many forms. One might of course extend the investigation, continuing in the face of doubts to look for satisfying answers and eventually finding them. But what if (as seems commonly to be the case among the students I have mentioned) no satisfying answers are forthcoming? One might then relive past moments of joy and certainty in the relationship, or remind oneself of the claims of the relationship and of how it is bound to be tested, viewing the objections to belief in that light, or surround oneself with believing supporters and read or listen to religious authorities, or tell oneself that the arguments against theism must have answers, even if one cannot oneself find them, or simply continue to carry out the tasks one sees as commitments of the relationship, finding

that the storm lifts on its own after a time. In an ultimate act of loyalty, one might 'give it all over to God' – a psychological act as familiar among believers as it is hard to describe. Since what we have here is not an exclusive disjunction, one might do all of these things (and of course more). It seems clear that loyalty like this is often required to sustain belief (without it belief would be lost). In other words, the exercise of loyalty is often causally necessary for theistic belief to be preserved.[6]

Similar stories can be told about the virtues of courage, honesty and humility, though I haven't the space to tell them in any detail. Courage – which is at least the disposition to resist the inclination to turn tail and run from what threatens us – is often needed to *be* loyal. And it may be more directly involved in the preservation of belief too. The sketch of an argument for this claim might run as follows. Quite independently of any merits it may possess, or of apparently forceful arguments in its support of the sort previously mentioned, religious skepticism does at times pose a temptation for believers, for reasons perhaps better tackled by sociology than by philosophy. And sometimes people do give in to it too easily. Where individuals resist the temptation to do so, responding instead, even if with some difficulty, to the claims of truth (not – or at any rate, not now – to the claims of what they take to be their relationship with God), and so extending their investigation, courage can be cited as one of the necessary conditions of belief's preservation.

Honesty (exhibited, let us say, when one speaks what one holds to be the truth both to oneself and others even when this is difficult, and objects to any unjustified failure to do so) and humility (seen in those who seek to think of themselves as they ought, who cultivate an appropriate self-conception) can sometimes be observed in the onset of belief (and perhaps also in its continuation, though I will not develop that here). Take, for example, the case of one who is inclined to believe but so far prevented by an array of specious objections unconsciously designed to ward off this apparent threat to her autonomy. Honesty may well be what brings her to recognize their inadequacy, and to see and admit that nothing of true value can be threatened by relationship with God. (Or it may be that humility causes her to question her motives, and to recognize the claim a God would have on her life.) If so, and if she comes to believe, then – given that by its exercise an important obstacle has been removed – honesty (or, as the case may be, humility) is a necessary condition of her belief. Reports of such cases – of behavior instantiating the virtues mentioned in the circumstances in question – are, I suppose, common and reliable enough to provide further support for my claim.

Now it will, I hope, be clear that in thus defending the virtue of theistic belief, in some of the circumstances of its formation or continuation, I am not conceding the truth of the proposition believed. Nor am I suggesting that the path of virtue could not under any circumstances lead elsewhere. If I did that, I could hardly move on, as I wish now to do, to discuss the virtue of nonbelief!

But before I do, we need to consider the wide range of possibilities here. When one says, 'I am now going to talk about nonbelievers', one has really got hold of a rather large conjunction: nonbelief is instantiated in many dif-

ferent ways; there are many ways in which one might fail to believe in God. Most obviously, we have the distinction between disbelief (atheism) and the stance of the agnostic (perhaps the 'purest' form of *non*belief, since it involves neither the belief that God exists nor the belief that God does not exist). The defining characteristics of these positions or states are, I suppose, familiar enough. "Do they together represent *un*belief?", it may now be asked. Where the notion of unbelief fits, I'm not sure. I suspect, given common usage, that 'unbeliever' is a disparaging term whose meaning should be cashed out as 'one who fails to believe in God while seeing perfectly well, in her heart of hearts, that God exists', or 'one who has in an act of self-will turned against God and now nurtures the absence of belief for self-interested reasons', or something else along those lines. Which brings us to some more important distinctions. For while I am happy to admit that something like the unworthy forms of nonbelief mentioned here may well exist, that all nonbelievers are unbelievers (in the relevant sense) seems clearly false. We also have the agnostic who would love to believe in God, who thinks that the existence of God would be a wonderful thing, from an ethical and a metaphysical and perhaps an aesthetic point of view, and who treats religious questions with respect, ascribing great importance to their resolution. Though their existence often goes unnoticed, some people in this category even adopt (or despite the loss of belief retain) a deeply religious form of life: though lacking any degree of belief, these individuals (commonly on moral grounds) undertake to act on the assumption that theism is true – for example, by expressing gratitude towards, or requesting forgiveness from, any God there may be. (I call them religious nonbelievers.) We have, further, atheists (and perhaps some agnostics) who fail to believe in God because, often through no fault of their own, they confuse God with some lesser being, perhaps some exclusively male god, or some deity otherwise challenged, whom no one who is not seeing through a glass *very* darkly would believe in or worship. And then there are members of nontheistic religious communities, who qualify as 'nonbelievers' by having religious beliefs incompatible with theism. And the list goes on. The important point here is that when considering nonbelievers, we need to think carefully about which nonbelievers we mean to discuss, and be aware of the difficulties likely to attend any attribution purportedly applicable to the whole class.

Returning now to the main thread of the discussion: it seems to me that a fair and evenhanded investigation leads to the conclusion that *some* nonbelievers exhibit, by their very nonbelief, virtues as laudatory as any a Christian may claim. I am, as might be expected, thinking of the legendary (and real!) 'honest agnostic' here; but I am also thinking of loyal, courageous, and humble agnostics (and atheists). As proper investigation will show, the four virtues we have attributed to some believers in their doxastic dealings apply equally to some of those in whom belief is absent.

Let us begin, again, with loyalty. Though loyalty is paradigmatically exhibited in relationships with persons, it would be unreasonably inflexible to withhold the term (or our evaluation of what it names) when considering certain attitudes and dispositions having nonpersonal objects – such as truth, or 'the way things are'. (These are distinct notions but obviously

related and intertwined in the loyalty I will be speaking about. I will ignore these complexities and refer primarily to truth. Note also that I do mean *truth*, a property, let's say, had by propositions that correctly depict the way things are, not *the* truth, the set of all propositions having this property, talk of which can very quickly and subtly be converted to talk of one's *understanding* of the way things are: the latter is definitely not what I am concerned with here, and is indeed sometimes lacking or partial or fluctuating in those to whom I will refer.) Many nonbelievers consider themselves to be, and some are, loyal to truth, and – or so familiarity with them will reveal – some lack theistic belief at least in part for this very reason.

We can develop this point in stages. Notice, first, that many of the individuals in question deeply want, for its own sake, to be cognitively and affectively aligned with the way things are, and in particular, for their beliefs to be correctly related to the way things are. That there are nonbelievers who in this sense *love* truth seems as obvious as that there are believers who love God. (Anyone who denies it should carefully consider whether the sample of nonbelievers she is working with is a representative one.) That some are *loyal* to truth also seems clear. (Think of those, for example, who argue passionately against fashionable denials of the relevant forms of realism.) Loyalty here would, I suppose, consist in a disposition to resist whatever would seem to divert or distract one from the goal of recognizing what is true – in particular, anything that might 'water down' its austere demands, or suggest that truth, understood objectively, does not exist or cannot ever be found. (Love and loyalty so understood tend to go hand in hand here.) And the connection between such loyalty and the absence of theistic belief? I find it in those who (whether their view is objectively correct or not) sincerely think that it would require a betrayal of truth – some form of self-deception – for them to respond to theistic arguments or to experiences that could be of God in a manner that might lead to (or might preserve) theistic belief. These are, indeed, often individuals who because of doubts raised on both sides of the debate – by theistic arguments and arguments countering theistic arguments, by religious experience and considerations that seem to undermine its epistemic credentials – and by virtue of their own self-scrutiny feel themselves presently unable to believe, or come to feel what belief they once had slipping away. This, precisely, is the assessment of the evidence to which their investigation has led, and though they could perhaps do something to help them 'hang on' to belief or to add to the likelihood of its eventual onset despite the obstacles that now stand in its way, their situation is by definition one in which the only processes they might initiate to one of these ends are not truth-oriented processes. In fact, they are processes that require covering up what seems true. Seeking the truth has *kept* them from belief; to acquire it or retain it they would have to go against the truth. This can seem very clear and obvious, and for the one loyal to truth, only one response seems possible.

But is my talk of a 'betrayal of truth', as might now be objected, not merely an excuse, a rationalization, a cover for selfish ambition of the sort more easily pursued in the absence of belief? Would these individuals really believe in the absence of the evidential difficulties of which they

complain? Well, perhaps such an emphasis on questionable motives and self-deception of another sort is sometimes appropriate, but many times it is not. Indeed, some of the individuals in question seem as clearsighted and as free of selfish ambition and dedicated in the service of humankind as the most devoted of Christians. More to the point (though this is often ignored), these individuals frequently wish to believe, considering the benefits of belief to be very great, and feel that their commitment to truth for its own sake is being tested by this very inclination. (Believers, it seems to me, suffer sometimes from a notable lack of empathy in this regard: influenced by doctrine or their own experience to think that most people want to get away from God, they just can't perceive that some people's overriding concern is to get *close* to any God there may be.[7]) If such individuals nonetheless fail to believe, then it is the fact that they have successfully passed this test, instead of selfish ambition, that we should appeal to in explaining their condition. Finally, what are we to make of the (again often hidden or ignored) phenomenon of 'religious nonbelievers', mentioned above? That nonbelievers should seek to fulfil religious obligations is, to say the least, more surprising than that believers should. With the demands of such a commitment we seem, indeed, to have arrived at a state that is about as opposed to the present objection as one could imagine.

Now it is only a short step from here to the recognition that courage is sometimes causally involved in nonbelief's persistence. Suppose a nonbeliever of the sort we have just been talking about is a former believer who, after pursuing investigations into the justification for her belief, has arrived at agnosticism – a common enough phenomenon. What is to prevent her from giving in to social pressure from her former religious community to conform to its beliefs, or to her own desire to once again be part of it? What it takes under such circumstances for the individual newly divested of belief to resist watering down the objections, to continue in nonbelief, and thus to accept the distance inevitably created between herself and believers who may well misinterpret and misunderstand, is courage.

Consider honesty as well (which, I take it, may be entailed by loyalty to truth but is not equivalent to it – the latter being a more sophisticated, or as we might say, philosophical, disposition than the former). The deep self-scrutiny already mentioned, which may lead an individual to recognize the operation of lesser motives in producing her desire to believe in God, requires honesty. But — to choose one interesting sort of case — honesty may also be exemplified in connection with nonbelief in circumstances which, in other cases (as earlier outlined), provide an occasion for loyalty to God. For the wavering believer may have resolved to live unhappily in integrity rather than to deceive herself, and — for example — in a moment when the force of the argument from evil seems especially strong, feel that it is just true that God's existence is incompatible with some of the horrible suffering this world contains. I suppose it will not be contested that such things occur and are sometimes causally involved in the production or maintenance of nonbelief. It is equally clear that to look what is apparently true in the eye under such circumstances and to identify it as such (whether one's view is objectively correct or not) is to exhibit honesty.

Consider, finally, humility. This often goes hand in hand with the other

virtues mentioned, but seems at least sometimes to be operative on its own. Again, one or two examples will have to do. Someone may after a prolonged investigation that has only landed her in nonbelief be inclined to doubt her intellectual capacities and sincerely to say to herself: "As a finite human being with such limited abilities I should not have expected to reach a justified belief as to whether there is a God or not. I see experienced and competent thinkers on both sides of this debate, and I would be a fool to suppose that somehow I could break this tie. I just don't know what to believe here, and I guess I might as well admit it, instead of wasting more time chasing after certainty." Or she may remain a seeker, saying to herself: "In view of our social and moral and intellectual immaturity, human beings may yet have a long way to go in the pursuit of justified religious belief, and the best I can do is to keep investigating, contributing my bit to the overcoming of such obstacles, hoping that conditions more conducive to justified belief may someday emerge." Reports of ruminations like this are, I suppose, as common and as reliable as those we accepted as such in the case of the believer. If an individual's state of nonbelief is prolonged in part because of them, as apparently it sometimes is, then again we may say that virtue is causally involved in nonbelief – for they reflect humility.

II

I have argued that the exercise of virtue in theism-related doxastic contexts is often causally necessary both for belief and for nonbelief. But how is that related to the recent flurry of discussion on warrant and religious belief? In at least two ways.

To see the first, we must notice that where virtues of belief such as loyalty to God (perhaps buttressed by courage) are most clearly present in theism-related doxastic contexts, objections to belief often remain unanswered, or – from an epistemic point of view concerned with warrant (which I shall for present purposes, following Plantinga, understand as whatever turns true belief into knowledge[8]) – unsatisfactorily answered. It is because objections are found difficult to answer that loyalty is enabled to play a role at all; and it is when they remain so that it is most severely tested. The case of the students earlier discussed is again instructive. Where their loyalty is exercised in response to objections that remain unanswered (and the doubts they engender), the feeling of forcefulness attaching to the objections is over time, by one nonintellectual means or another, got rid of, expelled from consciousness. Whatever their apparent appeal and attractiveness, the objections must be mistaken. (And notice that in making such a choice to stand by God, one is committed to treating future objections as mistaken too.) Even where intellectual means are employed – where some reply or other, perhaps from the literature on the philosophy of religion, is used to seek to neutralize an objection – it is precisely *as* a means to an end that it is selected, which makes this sort of investigation quite different from what one sees where an investigator is seeking truth for its own sake: the believer needs to show that the objection is mistaken, and will thus find almost any argument concluding that it is so attractive, and be in danger of

failing to notice its possible defects. So just when it may seem that she needs to seek a more neutral perspective, to begin paying more careful attention to objections (she is, after all, beginning to find them persuasive, and honesty would normally dictate that one sit up and take notice at such a point), the loyal believer is motivated to adopt an adversarial, perhaps dismissive, approach to them instead. (She may, as suggested, seek to pay proper attention to them, and even think that she does, so perhaps preserving honesty; but from within the relationship, the stronger the objections appear, the more they must be treated as an assault, as the slings and arrows of an enemy — and how can an assault be repelled while one is seeking neutrality?) Since all of this is quite contrary to the sort of careful and truth-oriented attention to objections and defeaters epistemologists (including Plantinga[9]) are inclined to say is required for warrant, the latter property will be absent in such cases. And since, further, most believers who have thought about the content of their belief encounter such objections and defeaters, and those among them who retain belief have often exercised loyalty of the sort in question, the claim that theistic belief is *typically* warranted is false.

What I am suggesting is that loyalty, while not necessarily blind in its partiality, does tend towards blindness of a sort. One thinks here of analogous cases like that of an individual loyal to a spouse, or the loyalty many feel to their country. Suppose the spouse is accused of some crime, or the country of breaking a treaty. Suppose evidence that seems initially persuasive is brought forward. How will one who is loyal in the relevant way respond? While he may feel a need to look into the matter more carefully, he is — so long as he is loyal – likely to beg the question by, for example, placing a disproportionate amount of weight on what the accused says really happened. (In some cases, loyalty might be manifested by a determination to stand by the accused even if the accusations are true and recognized as true, but such cases are not analogous to the religious case we are considering.) The one loyal to his spouse may ask her what happened and believe her, and her countrymen and women may without much criticism trust the word of the president as she defends their country's actions on TV. Just so, the loyal Christian whose belief is under attack commonly relies on evidence of experience or argument that has been called into question when dealing with the attack, or 'gives it all over to God' when the existence of God is precisely what is at issue. Thus, on the assumption that something more is required for warrant, she will lack it. We may say this, notice, even while assuming that her belief is true. Even if the husband's continuing belief, in the face of hardship, that his wife is innocent is true, he may lack *knowledge*, and, intuitively, does lack knowledge because of his inability to take the objections very seriously. And even if the patriot's country is as guiltless as she supposes, her belief may lack warrant for the same reason. Similarly, even if the believer is in the intensely personal relationship with God we have discussed, she may not always *know* that she is. Not knowing may, indeed, be one of the costs of being in the relationship and sustaining it as she does.

Let me briefly consider several objections.

(1) 'The believer who is loyal to God can be loyal to truth as well, and

thus willing to give up belief if that is required, and motivated to take objections with full seriousness.' *Answer*: This is indeed possible and may sometimes occur, but the odds are against it, for the reasons given above. But we can also look at this in a slightly different way: while the believer may be loyal to truth, she thinks she has *found* it in her relationship with God; and it is her response to this apparent awareness, and in particular, the loyalty now directed to God, that sets in motion a process making it ever more difficult to view the claims of new objections as serious candidates for truth.

(2) 'You are assuming that neutrality in the investigation of ultimate questions like this one is possible, but it is not. So we cannot be obligated to exhibit it in order to have knowledge of God.' *Answer*: The proper inference here might instead be that we therefore cannot have knowledge of God, but let that pass. It is clear that there is a kind of neutrality that is possible for, say, the agnostic, or one who 'brackets' her belief for a time, that is not possible for one who has declared allegiance to God. Though the husband of the example above cannot, just like that, throw off all prejudices and quirks that might skew his perspective, he is certainly more neutral (even if less loyal), and in a way that at the same time makes it more likely that he will get at the truth, if he leaves his wife and adopts, so far as he is able, the stance of an impartial reporter, interviewing everyone, including himself and his wife, in turn; soliciting and mulling over the opinions of as many uninvolved experts on such situations as possible, and so on. The application to the objection is obvious.

(3) 'Neutrality of the only sort required is not, as you suggest, incompatible with adopting a 'dark' view of the objections, supposing them to have their source in an 'enemy', either within or without, and to be ultimately mistaken. For one may be loyal to God, and see the objections as an assault, and yet resist the assault in an intellectually responsible and rigorous fashion, perhaps motivated by the knowledge that *God* loves truth.' *Answer*: That may well be true. Again, I wouldn't want to argue for an incompatibility. But this needn't prevent us from noticing that many loyal believers who find themselves in the circumstances in question do not *actually* do the objections justice. Human nature being what it is, probably most of us would not do them justice in such circumstances. One who is loyal to God has, by definition, and whether consciously or unconsciously, an agenda in a situation like this, which dictates (so long as loyalty persists) that conclusions reached will be theistic ones. It is difficult, given this fact, for the believer not to skew things in the direction of theism, perhaps unknowingly, or to fail to notice considerations favorable to a different view (or give them less weight than they ought to be given), even while apparently reasoning at her best. And, ironically, the more clever and skillful she is, the more vulnerable she will be to this sort of thing. (It's not hard to see what is likely to happen with a clever prosecution lawyer and a jury ready to convict; and we have their analogues combined in the case of clever believers who are loyal to God.) Now it would perhaps be a partial antidote to this if the believer were to seriously subject her results to the scrutiny of both other believers and nonbelievers, ascribing equal importance to the deliberations of each, but she will often be disinclined to do this, either just because

of the loyalty, or more specifically, because she thinks that nonbelievers' intuitions and reasoning are skewed on account of sin. (More on this issue later.) Because of such problems, I would say that those among believers who find or remember themselves exercising loyalty to God of the sort at issue here, and who consider themselves to have dealt in a careful and rigorous fashion with the objections, ought still – whatever they say about justified belief – to refrain from claiming knowledge.

(4) 'If theism is true, then belief in it very likely possesses warrant. (For God would intend that we be able to access this truth, and so the cognitive processes that in fact produce and sustain belief are likely intended by God to do so, and are functioning properly according to a design plan successfully aimed, not just at loyalty, but at truth — which is to say that belief is warranted.) But if so, then any objection to the warrant of theistic belief must take the form of an objection to its truth. Now, presumably, you do not wish to take on the formidably large task of developing an objection of the latter sort. Hence, you cannot successfully produce one of the former sort either.'[10] *Answer*: Perhaps God wishes to facilitate theistic loyalty of the sort we have described. And perhaps a deep form of such loyalty, as suggested above, is in the nature of the case something that militates against conditions necessary for warrant. If so, then even if God facilitates belief (and thus grants us a certain kind of access to the truth on this matter), it may, contrary to the objection, sometimes not be warranted. Or if it is warranted to begin with, it may cease to be warranted. (In light of this, a proper functionalist should presumably say that our belief-sustaining faculties are not necessarily functioning properly, from the perspective of warrant, even where what they sustain are true beliefs.) Further, the objection wrongly assumes that if God intends us to *be able* to have knowledge of the truth of theism, then the way theistic belief *actually* arises or is sustained is reflective of design and warrant-conferring. Perhaps God leaves us to some extent free with respect to how we arrive at belief or continue in it, in which case (supposing, with the objector, that God has the relevant intention) there might be various paths leading to belief, including the one of proper function preferred by God. And perhaps sometimes we arrive at it or continue in it in a way that is epistemically unsatisfactory or incomplete instead, so that it lacks warrant. Finally, given the objection's assumptions, any argument against theistic warrant is indeed an argument against theism itself. But from this I would be more inclined to infer that I already have produced an argument against theism than that I have yet to do so.

(5) 'Most of your comments about what is bound up with the virtue of belief can be rewritten and applied to the virtue of nonbelief. The nonbeliever, as much as the believer, always starts thinking from what he takes to be true, and has a stake in defending this – which leaves him with just as much of a tendency toward blindness and a lack of neutrality in the way he perseveres in nonbelief as you have attributed to the believer.' *Answer*: I have argued that the believer's loyalty to God may often prevent her from giving epistemically adequate attention to objections to her belief, and thus can undermine any knowledge claim she might make on its behalf. In order for the parallel suggested here to hold, it would have to be the case that the nonbeliever's loyalty to *truth* prevents her from giving epistemical-

ly adequate attention to objections to *nonbelief*, and thus undermines some knowledge claim she makes relevant to that. But this is not the case: perhaps one could argue that passionate loyalty to truth might make one unwilling to consider objections to there *being* such a property as truth, but how we get from there to theistic nonbelief I fail to see; and of course, the nonbeliever need not, and usually does not, make any knowledge claim relevant to her nonbelief – for example, she does not usually claim to know that there is no God; quite commonly, indeed, she denies knowing anything at all here. Now perhaps the objector will say that the nonbeliever is not only loyal to truth, but, in an extended sense, to the particular beliefs she arrives at in the course of her investigation of theism. But it is not at all clear that this is so. The nonbeliever, unlike the believer, often has no stake in continuing in her attitude towards theism. Often, indeed, as pointed out above, she wishes to be rid of her nonbelief. Whence, then, a loyalty to her stance (or to the beliefs generating it) of a sort analogous to the believer's? Suppose, however, that (contrary to what seems likely) the objector's claim can be made out here. My final point in response is that it is irrelevant to the argument I have been making. Be the nonbeliever ever so blind, this will not diminish any blindness attaching to the believer one whit. A *tu quoque* argument, here as elsewhere, is fallacious.

So much for how the virtue of belief must often inhibit or preclude warrant for belief and (perhaps in conjunction with other virtues) rightly move many believers to refrain from claiming warrant for their belief.[11] I promised a second connection between my earlier discussion and the topic of warrant as well. It's time to provide it. We are, if my claims with regard to the virtue of nonbelief are true, in a position forcibly to question not only (what we may call) the positive side, but also the negative side of the Calvinist construal of theistic warrant mentioned at the beginning of this paper. According to that construal, it will be recalled, theistic belief is typically an entirely appropriate response to the *sensus divinitatis* and warranted; and all those who dissent from such belief are in an unfortunate position, persisting in their nonbelief at least in part because of sin.[12] Our findings with regard to the virtue of nonbelief require us to question the second half of this claim, just as our findings with regard to the virtue of belief required us to question the first.[13] It is important to note that we may again carry out our task without importing into the discussion assumptions alien to theism; indeed, we may assume its truth. Here it may even be assumed that it is sometimes or often warranted. Suppose that theistic belief often is warranted. Even so, I argue, the aforementioned view with respect to nonbelief does not belong in any adequate understanding or interpretation of that warrant.

To see why, we need to examine just what it would be for 'sin' to be operative in this connection. Guided by what is said and suggested in Calvinist writings,[14] we might well be led to interpret this idea in terms of some moral vice, the desire to continue in which leads to a disinclination to believe in a holy God, or laziness in inspecting the reliability of one's information on things religious, or a presumptuous and prideful disposition to protect one's autonomy which provokes resentment at the idea of a sovereign God, or, more generally, a self-centred disposition to carry on in one's own ways and achieve glory and gain of a sort which theistic belief would

challenge, or some combination from among these and other, similar, failings. But it should not be hard to see that dispositions of these sorts and their effects do not exactly go together naturally with virtues of the sort some nonbelievers exhibit. Notice that we are not confronted simply with nonbelievers who may here and there, in a manner disconnected from their nonbelief, exhibit virtue of this or that kind, but with a situation in which virtues of loyalty or courage or honesty or humility *actively militating against just such dispositions as have been mentioned* causally contribute to the formation or continuation of nonbelief. In light of these facts it is unreasonable to think that the sin Calvinists emphasize is causally involved in every case of nonbelief.

Now we are likely to be warned at this point against an unsophisticated understanding of how sin operates in doxastic contexts: the Calvinist may say that the operation of sin need not be construed in terms of specific immoral actions of the nonbeliever directly involved in the formation or continuation of her nonbelief (which construal might well be hard to reconcile with the simultaneous exercise of virtues like those in question), but may be interpreted instead in terms of the cognitively dulling and morally disordering effects on the nonbeliever of such failings earlier in her life or in the lives of others – perhaps many others over many generations.[15] (Sin may be operative indirectly instead of directly.) Call this the *sophisticated* Calvinist position. Applying her distinction, the Calvinist may argue that even if the unsophisticated view faces problems in accommodating itself to what I have said about the virtue of nonbelief, the sophisticated does not. For, twisting and distorting human cognitive and affective dispositions (perhaps over part of a lifetime, perhaps over generations), sin can produce a *misguided* exercise of virtue: *thinking* it true that God could not allow horrific suffering, the honest individual of my story above, for example, continues in nonbelief, but she wouldn't think that way if it weren't for sin (her own earlier sin or others' sin) clouding her mind. Sin provides the fertile ground in which even virtuous forms of nonbelief may grow.

What should we say about this argument? Well, the idea it introduces may not be as new as it seems given that the factors mentioned by the sophisticated Calvinist are said to have the effect of producing *cognitive dullness and moral disorder* in the life of the nonbeliever *at the time the relevant virtues are exercised*: these effects of things past, were they to obtain in the present in this way, would presumably amount to something rather like what is being described by the unsophisticated Calvinist; and so even the sophisticated Calvinist's claim would be subject to counterexample. Perhaps it will be said that, given the connection to the past, these dispositions are sometimes manifested without culpability. But this won't help, since cognitive dullness, whether culpably or inculpably manifested, would have to involve something like a lack of thoroughness or penetration in investigation; and moral disorder, whether culpably or inculpably manifested, would have to involve something like carelessness and distraction by self-centred motives. And so it is still the case that certain undesirable qualities must invariably be present in the lives of nonbelievers at critical moments bound up with the formation or continuation of their nonbelief if the sophisticated version of the Calvinist claim is true. Are they? It seems not. For there are still those

stubborn counterexamples, drawn from what we have discovered about the virtue of nonbelief. Notice very carefully that no one is saying that there are nonbelievers who are morally perfect. But to get the 'sin' argument going here, the sophisticated Calvinist needs to show the reasonableness of supposing that cognitive and/or affective inadequacies *inhibiting theistic belief* are *always operative where persons fail to possess such belief*, and to this more particular claim there are indeed counterexamples. Although a situation of self-centred persons living self-centred lives could create a climate in which many individuals hardly even think of God, dismissing the notion of God's existence or experiences that might be of God on those rare occasions when they become conscious of them (and perhaps in some parts of our society it has), we have already seen that many nonbelievers do *not* dismiss the idea of God or such religious experiences as they may have had, but instead engage in intense and detailed investigations of these things. We can also point out that some nonbelievers are persons who have by all the rigorous standards prevalent in theistic religious communities sought to come to grips with self-centredness: the virtue attaching to their nonbelief is itself evidence of this. It may indeed be empathy and sensitivity of the very sort that theistic religious communities seek to engender that makes the argument from horrific suffering so troubling for them. At the deepest level they share the believer's moral standards, and seek to act upon them; and so they are only 'morally disordered' if believers are — no distinction of the relevant sort between them and believers will hold up to scrutiny. Moreover, they often display a steadfast wish to believe, with no conflicting wishes in evidence. Some even submit to the demands of a religious life without belief. In this class are some who retain a theistic form of life though with propositional attitudes falling short of belief, and others who have left theism for a nontheistic religious life at least as morally and intellectually rigorous as what they once knew — I think here of certain western members of Buddhist communities. In light of all this counterevidence, the Calvinist's negative and general claim must be deemed unjustified.

On account of the difficulties here enumerated, and in particular, because of how the virtues we have discussed themselves oppose (instantiate the opposite of) the dispositions a Calvinist is required to emphasize, it seems clear that the one who wishes to affirm the view that sin is always causally involved in nonbelief must ultimately be led to *deny* that it is sometimes virtuous in the ways I have suggested.[16] And so we have the result that was to be shown. But, of course, recognizing this result, a resolute Calvinist is likely only to find the denial in question more tempting (and thus to find tempting a return to what I have called the unsophisticated form of the Calvinist position on sin and nonbelief). Two basic problems exist here, sufficient, I think, to put such a denial intellectually out of reach even for the Calvinist; and with these I close.

(1) The first has already been indicated: it is simply that one who denies the virtue of nonbelief must arbitrarily deny powerful empirical evidence in its favor, some of which is outlined in the first part of this paper. Now perhaps the Calvinist will be inclined to insist here that he is in a position to maintain that every nonbeliever's nonbelief is due, in part, to sinful blindness operative at the time of nonbelief because of his own experience

of such blindness: 'Once I was blind but now I see' is a popular refrain. And the blindness in question is usually cashed out in terms of such moral failings as were mentioned above. Unfortunately, however, a Calvinist referring to such things succeeds only in proving that his own former nonbelief was not virtuous. We have, so far forth, no reason to believe – indeed, as we have seen, there is good reason to disbelieve – that all nonbelievers suffer from some relevantly similar form of blindness.[17]

(2) Even – and I think especially – if this claim is now resisted on the grounds that a Calvinist may take her own view of this evidence, guided by the norms of her own community, we have a problem. For the deepest of such norms, rightly held to constrain the selection of intellectual positions in any Christian community, are those deriving from the Christian's calling to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. (Loyalties to Calvin, if such there be, are presumably capable of being overridden by a commitment to Christ when the two conflict.) Consider the 'attitude that was in Christ': an attitude of humility and unconventional — that is, universal — love. The emphasis in the New Testament on such qualities might be expected to lead the Calvinist not to resist but rather to find attractive evidence of goodness in others when it becomes available to him, even if those others happen to fall into the category of 'nonbelievers'; to be open to the change or reformulation of even longstanding views when the evidence is against them; and to (at the very least) suspend judgment on the moral and spiritual condition of nonbelievers with whom he shares no close personal relationship (and that will always be a very large number indeed). Love, in particular, resists disparaging others wherever possible and for as long as possible, and seeks to err only on the side of generosity. (This seems to be implied, for example, by the panegyric on love in 1 Corinthians 13.) And if this goes against treasured religious or philosophical doctrine, then so much the worse for that doctrine. We need an openness to the love of God instead of stolid conformity to tradition. (Come to think of it, here too Jesus of Nazareth can be called as witness.)

Now to this it may be replied that Jesus himself was fairly strong in his judgment of those who opposed him – why should Christians be any different? But even if the sentiments in question, recorded in the New Testament, do go back to Jesus, we have no reason on this basis to infer that Jesus would put his name behind the unsophisticated Calvinist *generalization* concerning nonbelief, given an awareness of the evidence against it, and the active influence of those virtues we are asked to believe he possessed to a superlative degree. Sometimes, indeed, the influence of wrong behavior is obvious, and needs to be called what it is. But where it is not – and where, indeed, we have reason to deny it – we should be happy to refrain from accusations.[18]

Of course, if there were no alternative view compatible with the deepest things of the gospel, a Christian might be forced reluctantly to go along with the unsophisticated Calvinist position. But there is. For she may say, as Calvinist philosophers are inclined to do in other contexts (consider, for example, their well-known work on the problem of evil), that there are reasons – perhaps reasons unknown to us – for God to tolerate the intractable item in question, for God *not* to view all nonbelief as such an unfortunate

thing. Perhaps there are great goods that can only be achieved this way. We must be careful here not to display the very presumption – presumption now as to the ways God can work – of which the Calvinist often accuses nonbelievers. Perhaps there are reasons (other than ones bound up with the nonbeliever's sin) for God to permit nonbelief to occur. If a Christian actually comes to know many nonbelievers from different walks of life and different parts of the world and observes genuine goodness in many of them (even in the way their nonbelief is formed or maintained), and no sign of the influence of wrongful behavior on the formation or preservation of their nonbelief, is she not more reasonable – and more *Christian* – in developing some such view than in following the uncompromising denials of Calvin?

I myself see no alternative for the reasonable Christian but to move beyond such denials. Many pathways, narrow and easy to miss but more religiously and intellectually sensitive than ones chalking it all up to sin, ought to be explored here. Nonbelievers, as we have seen, are often loyal to truth. Perhaps in the face of truth the face of God is hidden. Perhaps the existence of conscientious nonbelief serves only to test the *Christian's* commitment to breaking down the walls that divide us from one another, that so easily spring up and prevent us from gazing with true appreciation upon one another's souls. (Almost from the beginning of the Christian tradition, more attention has been devoted to their construction.) Whatever the case, it seems evident that followers of Jesus owe such possibilities a much more serious form of attention than is feasible within the constraints of an unreformed Calvinism.

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NOTES

1. Virtue may also be sufficient for the production of these states (I believe it often is), but I will not argue that here.

2. The most prominent defender of such a view is Alvin Plantinga. See his *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). But he is not alone. See, for example, Mark R. Talbot, 'Is It Natural to Believe in God?' *Faith and Philosophy*, 6 (1989), 155-171. More recent contributors to this journal who take a similar line are Douglas V. Henry, 'Does Reasonable Nonbelief Exist?' *Faith and Philosophy*, 18 (2001), 75-94 and Robert T. Lehe, 'A Response to the Argument from the Reasonableness of Nonbelief', *Faith and Philosophy*, forthcoming at the time of this writing. (In the background, of course, are large tracts of evangelical Christianity, whose perspective these writers seek to defend.) The latter two papers are replies to the argument of my *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), and so it might be thought that the present piece was written, in part, as a response to them. But this is not the case – my paper had been through several drafts by the time theirs appeared. A more direct and detailed response to Henry and Lehe, which takes account of points not immediately answered by the present piece, is therefore in order, and will be forthcoming in this journal.

3. I am grateful to Mark Talbot and other participants in the Wheaton College Philosophy Conference at which an ancestor of this paper was present-

ed for their comments, some of which have been incorporated as objections in the present piece.

4. It may not always be morally obligatory. For example, where there is reason enough to be in doubt about whether conditions cancelling the commitment obtain (and the object of one's loyalty not existing in the actual world would presumably count as such a condition!), it would be supererogatory.

5. Suppose, as some will claim, that in a case of this sort the lack of epistemic justification for believing that the object of one's loyalty is worthy entails a moral obligation not to believe this proposition. We may not on this basis infer that there is a moral obligation not to honor one's commitments, for doing so may not require the belief in question. Even if in some circumstances – say, because of someone's particular psychological makeup – it does, it is arguable that (especially in the absence of epistemic justification for believing that the object of one's loyalty is *un*worthy) the loyal one could legitimately infer that the importance of her commitments outweighs that of the aforementioned moral obligation.

6. A fuller treatment would take into account the way in which believers in such circumstances are often also expressing loyalty toward their religious community, but there is not room for that here. Suffice it to say that reflection on this added dimension is likely only to add to the support for what I say about the consequences of religious loyalty in the sequel.

7. The latter inclination is interestingly illustrated in Winnifred Galagher, *Working on God* (New York: Random House, 2000), and also by the author herself.

8. Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), v

9. Ibid, pp. 40-42. See also his discussion of proper function and internal rationality in *Warranted Christian Belief*, Chapter 9.

10. This is a specific application to the view here defended of an argument suggested more than once in Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief*. See, for example, pp. 498-499.

11. Some time after developing the preceding arguments, I encountered the following interesting passage in Plantinga's *Warrant and Proper Function*: "What confers warrant is one's cognitive faculties working properly, or working according to the design plan insofar as that segment of the design plan is aimed at producing true beliefs. But someone whose holding a certain belief is a result of an aspect of our cognitive design that is aimed not at truth but at something else won't be such that the belief has warrant for him; he won't properly be said to know the proposition in question, even if it turns out to be true." (p.16) And a few lines earlier, as an example of this 'something else', he mentions "the possibility of loyalty." I think I was reading this passage for the first time, but if not, I may owe my arguments, in part, to Plantinga.

12. I have here weakened the typical Calvinist claim slightly by saying 'at least in part': to be charitable, let us suppose that the Calvinist wishes to assert no more than that sin is a necessary condition of all nonbelief.

13. Staying with the first half of the Calvinist claim a moment longer, an objector may point out that I have said nothing about the *sensus divinitatis*, which it mentions. But that first half, as a moment's inspection reveals, is itself a conjunction, and is therefore shown to be false or seriously questionable even if all that is shown is that its second conjunct – that theistic belief is typically warranted – is false or seriously questionable. If the truth of my claims is compatible with the operation of the *sensus*, then nothing I have said so far affects the latter; if not, then my arguments are also arguments against its operating as Calvinists suppose. (In the arguments that follow, it may be noted, there is

some material relevant to the *sensus*: if there is nonbelief that is not causally connected to sin of any kind, then presumably the *sensus* does not operate – at least not as it is usually thought to do. So if the remaining arguments succeed, perhaps we have independent support for the denial of the *first* conjunct of the first half of the Calvinist claim, in which case the doubtfulness of the first half of that claim is even more apparent.)

14. These are legion. But I take the book by Plantinga and the article by Talbot, both mentioned in n. 2, as representative.

15. See Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief*, Chapter 8.

16. Of course one could in the face of the evidence insist that the minds of virtuous nonbelievers are somehow always clouded by sin in a manner linked to their nonbelief; but without anything to back it up, such a universal claim betrays its ideological nature rather clearly, and becomes self-defeating. For if we may suffer from cognitive dullness and moral disorder even when the evidence suggests otherwise, and if it is reasonable to apply this to nonbelievers, then what is to prevent us from applying it to belief, and more particularly, to the claim in question, regardless of the evidence? (In the cited situation of stubborn insistence, which I hope is counterfactual, we could of course go further. For we could claim that there is *evidence* – deriving from her very ideological intransigence, and its connection to moral insensitivity – that *actively supports* turning the believer's claim back on itself.)

17. It may be wondered why I here resist a 'blindness' claim applied to nonbelievers when I earlier defended one applied to believers who are influenced by loyalty. Shouldn't I allow believers to make a move I indulge in myself? But, of course, while there is a superficial resemblance between the two claims (they both involve reference to not seeing the force of certain arguments), mine, unlike the Calvinist's, does not depend on a negative moral evaluation (indeed, it entails a positive one). That negative moral evaluation, I am suggesting, is unsupported by the evidence – and in fact refuted by it. If I am right, the Calvinist's claim must be given up, and for reasons that have no effect on my (superficially similar) claim.

18. Some will reply here that there are other passages in the Bible affirming or entailing the generalization in question. The apostle Paul, for example, speaks of the minds of unbelievers as having been "blinded" (2 Cor. 4:4) and of those who do not believe in God as "without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). But it is for the one who appeals to the authority of Scripture to iron out the tensions in its teachings, and it is not obvious that the generalization in question will emerge intact from such hermeneutical activity. One might say, for example, that opinions reflecting limited information or that do not reflect the mind of Jesus are unauthorized (in this connection it may be noted that these are not the only places within Scripture or without where disciples of Jesus have failed in their own views to reflect his character), or that Paul need not be taken as referring to nonbelievers in every time and place.