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# FAITH, FAITHFULNESS, AND VIRTUE

Robert Audi

The concept of faith is central in the philosophy of religion, and the concept of virtue is central in ethics. Both can be clarified by exploring their relationships with each other and their connection with conduct, reasons for action, and the good. One important question is whether faith is a virtue. Answering this requires at least a partial account of what constitutes faith and of what makes a characteristic a virtue. The answer also depends on whether we are speaking of religious faith or of faith in general, and on what "content" the faith in question has. This paper approaches the question by contrasting faith with faithfulness, connecting both with trust, and exploring conditions under which each may count as a virtue.

For many people it is natural to think of faith as a good thing in human life. Even those who are not religious may think of religious faith as good; but both in and outside religion there is such a thing as blind faith, and religious faith may be marred by fanaticism. What of secular faith? Many people have faith in their families; some have faith in love as a positive force; and some have faith in institutions or communities: in democracy as a political structure, in the United Nations as an organization, in their country as a cultural leader. I am speaking of *attitudinal faith*, the kind commonly referred to by the phrase "faith in." Such faith may be a powerful element in a person's motivation, emotionality, and conduct, but it is not a trait of character. *Faithfulness*, by contrast, may be sufficiently rooted in a person to constitute a trait of character, though we may also use the term for certain instances of *keeping faith*, as where a person is steadfastly faithful to colleagues and students and deservedly commended for faithfulness to them. My main concern will be with the question whether faithfulness as a trait of character is a virtue and with the related questions of how that trait is related to attitudinal faith and how religious faith, even if not specifically a virtue of character, may be virtuous.

## 1. *Faithfulness as a Virtue of Character*

It may be uncontroversial that (as I assume here) a person's virtues, in what seems the primary sense of the term, constitute a species of traits of character. It may also be uncontroversial that virtues constitute praiseworthy elements in a person's psychology. More specifically, I suggest that to have a virtue of character is to have a praiseworthy character trait



that tends to ground conduct and to motivate its possessor to pursue the particular good or kind of good with respect to which the trait counts as a virtue.<sup>1</sup> Let us first take justice and beneficence as examples and then compare the trait of faithfulness to these.

Justice as a virtue of character might be viewed as deontic, in that the conduct-guiding good in question (a deontic good) concerns what is obligatory or permissible in the moral sense, as in the case of a fair distribution of benefits to employees. A just person will be strongly guided by standards of fairness, especially in distributive and retributive matters. By contrast, beneficence as a trait might be considered axiological, since the good that a beneficent person properly aims at is characteristically the enhancement of the well-being of other people. That aim can be understood largely in terms of such non-moral notions as relieving pain and enhancing pleasure.

Faithfulness as a trait of character is not intrinsically either deontic or axiological; it normally centers on allegiances to (above all) persons one cares about in a certain way. There is, however, great variety in the categories of persons or things that a faithful person must care about. Must even the category of persons figure essentially in understanding faithfulness? Imagine someone who is generally ethical but leads a mainly solitary life and does not enter into relations with others that call for being faithful to them. If we add that the person is faithful to animals (say, livestock), it is plausible to consider the person to be of a faithful kind. But such a person would not qualify as having the *trait* of faithfulness—as opposed to a faithful relation to the animals in question—apart from a suitably grounded, adequately strong disposition to be faithful to other people *if* they should come to have certain kinds of relations with the person. Possession of the trait, then, does not entail actually exhibiting faithfulness to persons, but the concept of such relations is essential for understanding the nature of the trait. In at least that implicit way, faithfulness as a trait of persons is apparently social. Moreover, that it at least concerns relations to *living* beings is plain, whatever the domain of the “social.”

If faithfulness as a trait of character is essentially connected with allegiance to persons and is not necessarily deontic or axiological, it is such that *if* it essentially includes (for instance) a sound moral code, it will thereby encompass both deontic and axiological elements. This conditional point

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<sup>1</sup>This characterization is quite generic and seems compatible with a number of conceptions of virtues of character. See, e.g., the detailed account given by Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), chap. 14 and pp. 218–220; and Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). She offers, as a widely shared conception of a virtue, “a good quality of character, more specifically a disposition to respond to, or acknowledge, items within its field or fields in an excellent or good enough way” (19). This paper addresses virtues of character in contrast to those of mind—intellectual virtues such as clarity of mind, insightfulness, and intellectual curiosity. Some intellectual virtues may meet the criteria I offer for virtues of character, but the differences between the two notions should not be important for this paper and cannot be pursued here.

holds for both kinds of faithfulness considered so far: faithfulness as a trait of character—*global faithfulness*—and *allegiant faith* (or faithfulness *to*), which is focal and constituted by being faithful *to* some person or non-personal entity such as an institution. Focal faithfulness (allegiance) may be to a person irrespective of whether the person is moral; to a way of life, such as an aesthetically grounded one that is not mainly moral if moral at all; or to an institution, such as an army, which might be amoral. Focal allegiances are central in typical instances of the trait of faithfulness, but even a diverse set of such focal allegiances does not entail having the character trait of faithfulness.<sup>2</sup> Someone could be faithful to just close friends and still lack the elements of loyalty necessary for being, overall, a faithful person.

It should also be stressed that even if a person's attitudinal faith (faith *in*) is highly comprehensive, as is faith in democratic institutions, the person might not have the character trait of faithfulness. This may not be widely realized because we so often speak of faith in the context of considering faith in God, and *that* kind of attitudinal faith is commonly presupposed to imply some degree of commitment to being faithful to what God, at least in the eyes of the person in question, commands or requires. Nonetheless, someone could have faith in God or great faith in other people, yet not be able to *keep* faith with them and thus lack faithfulness toward them. Having faith in others is mainly a matter of how we view them, and how we are disposed to respond to them, in terms of what we value. Being faithful to others is more a matter of how we act toward them in terms of what *they* value (though it is not wholly a matter of what they value, since people can be clearly mistaken about their own good).

One way to see this difference is by considering the relation of each kind of faith to trust. If I have faith *in* you, then I trust you, at least within a certain domain of conduct. If I am faithful *to* you, you may properly trust *me*; and if I am faithful to an ideal, I may, in the main, be trusted to live up to it. Neither case of trust implies the other. We can have faith in people, such as foreign heads of state, with whom we have either no relationship or one that does not call on us to keep faith. One way to put the contrast is this: faith is fulfilled when its object meets certain expectations—roughly, fulfills the trust—of the subject; faithfulness is fulfilled when the subject—the faithful person—meets certain expectations, or certain hypothetical expectations, of the object.<sup>3</sup>

None of this is to deny that attitudinal faith in a person often should and often does go with a certain kind of allegiant faith toward that person.

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<sup>2</sup>The claim is not that *no* combination of such allegiances entails having the trait of faithfulness, or indeed being a person of faith, but that a mere multiplicity of allegiances alone, apart from their content and other conditions, does not. More will be said below about the notions of a faithfulness simpliciter and that of being a person of faith.

<sup>3</sup>Hypothetical expectations must be mentioned here because one could be faithful to someone who either has no expectations toward one, as with celebrities who do not even know all their loyal fans, or has the wrong kind of expectations toward the faithful person, such as suspicions dominated by unfounded rumors.

But faith in a person that is not accompanied by faithfulness to either that person or any other, or even to certain standards, is conceivable. Nonetheless, faith in a person usually implies the appropriateness, and sometimes a *prima facie* obligation to maintain, allegiant faith as faithfulness to the standards or values—such as justice and honesty—with respect to which one has faith in the other. If I have faith in God’s forgiveness, it is at best inappropriate for me not to keep faith with some standard or practice of forgiveness myself. Neither faith in a person nor faith in a moral code, however, precludes weakness of will that leads to violation of the standards or values in question. One could also be quite cynical about people, having little faith *in* them, while keeping faith *with* them and living up to high moral standards oneself.

## 2. Two Kinds of Virtue of Character

There is much to learn from comparing faithfulness with the virtue of courage. I will consider both in the light of a distinction between two kinds of virtues of character that are important in ethics but rarely distinguished. I begin with the moral domain, since it is important to say enough about moral virtue to see whether we should regard faithfulness as an instance of it.

*Substantive moral virtues*, such as honesty, fairness, and beneficence, are traits that are *morally* good in themselves. One way to see this is to reflect on how having them implies a significant measure of success both in internalizing and in living up to sound moral standards. To have these traits requires (among other things) certain attitudes toward others, such as a kind of respect, certain kinds of intentions in interpersonal relations, a sensitivity to the difference between right and wrong, and a tendency to act toward others for an appropriate range of reasons, for instance out of a sense of obligation as opposed to self-interest. But there are other virtues, such as courage and one kind of conscientiousness—roughly, a thoroughness and steadfastness in doing what one is committed to—for which these points do not hold. Courage and the conscientiousness in question are not morally good in themselves, nor does their mere possession entail any commitment to moral standards. To be sure, the courageous must have the capacity to take pain in the service of what they value; but they need not have moral values. Courage and the kind of conscientiousness in question can exist in wholly unethical people, in cruel fanatics, and even in someone unmitigatedly diabolical. These would be people of whom it would be wrong to say that they have *any* morally good qualities, including traits of character. This does not hold for moral virtues.

Such non-moral traits as courage and conscientiousness can also contribute to the agent’s success in immoral projects in a way moral virtues typically do not. It is true that in special circumstances a person who is (say) honest but otherwise immoral might succeed better because of the virtue, say because of the confidence honesty can inspire. But this would require a great deal of luck. Asked the right questions about their conduct,

honest but otherwise immoral people could not lie about themselves to avoid being crippled in their immoral projects. Honest people *can* refuse to answer questions about their intentions, but the silence of a person who is honest but otherwise immoral might well reveal some nasty truth or put the questioner on guard. Courage, by contrast, is non-accidentally contributory to the success of almost any kind of substantial project, whether moral or not. One might think that, in a person of strong *conscience*, courage and other non-moral virtues would conduce to overall moral goodness. But conscience—understood generically and apart from some special theory of its function (as where it is, say, Kantian)—has no moral standards of its own. Conscience takes from elsewhere the standards it reinforces. Like a commanding officer, it can be misguided, bigoted, even corrupt.

In most people, however, and in all who are basically ethical, courage and conscientiousness tend to strengthen moral character. From the moral point of view, it is natural to call these traits of character *adjunctive virtues*.<sup>4</sup> Such virtues are important for achieving overall moral uprightness (as well as for prudence and for other non-moral traits that are not of direct concern here). In a *good* person, courage and conscientiousness are important elements in realizing good intentions. They may also be adjunctively virtuous in relation to non-moral virtues as well, including each other. Indeed, without courage and at least enough conscientiousness to remember one's plans and promises and to carry out cooperative projects, one could not be virtuous in an overall way at all and could be only as morally good as such weakness of character might permit. But this does not imply that these traits are moral virtues. A structure of bricks cannot be strong without cement, but cement is not a building block.

Now consider faithfulness. It is like courage in at least one way, and it also illustrates how courage is important to other virtues: if I lacked the courage to risk a financial setback, I could not be faithful to some of the people and ideals that faithfulness calls on me to defend. It is also true that faithfulness can have a positive effect on courage. Faithfulness is an important motivational basis for many kinds of courage or at least for many courageous actions. But faithfulness is like courage in not entailing that its possessor must adhere to any moral standard, probably not even one the person *deems* moral.

To be sure, where an instance of faithfulness qualifies as a *virtue*, it cannot be utterly blind and may have to be guided by some sense of what is good for its object. I cannot qualify as faithful to, for instance, friends if what I am disposed to do for them is not guided by some sense of what is good for them—though at the limit, this sense might be filtered through what, perhaps unwisely, they ask of me. My faithfulness to a friend might sometimes (and within limits) require me to view what is good for the friend, at least in my own relation to the person, as what the friend deeply

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<sup>4</sup>Here I draw on Robert Audi and Patrick E. Murphy, "The Many Faces of Integrity," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 16.1 (2006): 3–21.

and reflectively wants, though I myself consider it objectively undesirable. One way to explain this is by appeal to the value of personal autonomy.

But even where faithfulness is guided by a conception of what is good for its object—say, enhancement of one's friends' enjoyments in life—faithfulness alone does not entail being guided by any specifically moral standards. One might think that faithfulness as a *virtue* must be morally guided, but perhaps it need only be *normatively* guided in an appropriate way. Surely one could have a sufficiently rich sense of the good of a person or set of persons to qualify as virtuously faithful regarding them even if one is guided by a notion of their good that is mainly hedonic, aesthetic, and otherwise non-moral. We should distinguish, then, both between, on the one hand, faithfulness as a trait and faithfulness as an allegiance and, on the other hand, between instances of the former that are virtues simpliciter and instances of it that are morally constituted virtues.

Suppose that, from the moral point of view, faithfulness, like courage, is an adjunctive rather than a substantive virtue. This does not prevent its being, like courage, inherently good, hence good in itself, even if not morally good. In being inherently good, it might be considered normatively, though not morally, substantive. One might think that an adjunctive virtue is only instrumentally good. But even where courage and faithfulness are contributively good, they are not simply instrumental *means* to the inherent good to which they contribute. My faithfulness to my friends *befits* our relationship and tends to contribute to its flourishing; this good making-element in the relationship is not merely instrumental to that flourishing. It is integral to, and partly constitutive of, the value of the relationship. Granted it may *also* be an instrumental means of supporting my friends in their aims, but this need not attenuate its contributory, often integral, role in the friendship.

### 3. *The Prioritarian Character of Faithfulness to Persons*

If, as we have seen, the trait of faithfulness is not intrinsically moral, this does not imply that faithfulness is possible without the person's meeting certain normative and behavioral standards. As the association of faithfulness with courage suggests, a person counts as faithful only if certain failures to act or at least to have appropriate intentions—roughly, intentions directed toward the good of the person or object—are explainable by appeal to appropriate kinds of interferences. Consider, by contrast, being well-intentioned, say toward one's friends. A well-intentioned person may suffer fairly often from weakness of will and may sometimes simply forget what should be done for others. But faithfulness to persons requires a higher level of conformity between behavior and intention, as well as a higher standard of actual behavior: I am not faithful to you if, to save myself a loss in political capital, I sacrifice your good in an important matter.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Faithfulness to non-persons requires a somewhat different analysis but is also prioritarian in a similar way.

This last point illustrates how the notion of faithfulness to persons (like certain kinds of attitudinal faith) is what might be called a *prioritarian notion*: the mere possession of attitudes and desires with the right kind of content and sufficient strength to produce appropriate action toward the person(s) in question is not enough for faithfulness; the desires must, in a weighted range of cases, be strong enough so that they prevail over certain kinds of competing motivation, including one's self-interest and that of persons opposed to the object(s) of faithfulness. Granted, *any* virtue requires some of the agent's motives or objectives to be predominating over others, but only some virtues imply the kind of significant priority of the interests of certain *persons* over those of others, especially including oneself. Justice and honesty, for instance, do not imply this and indeed tend to be egalitarian in a way faithfulness is not. Faithfulness to persons implies a kind of relationship, a kind that, even where the relation lacks mutuality, forms part of its normative basis, whereas honesty, justice, beneficence, and many other virtues do not imply this.<sup>6</sup> If all virtues require observing certain priorities, faithfulness, in contrast to most others, is (in ways we have seen) both prioritarian in a way most other virtues are not and, in any case, *partialistic*.<sup>7</sup>

The prioritarian character of faithfulness does not imply that *nothing* a person of faithfulness does can be contrary to what the person takes to be required for the good of the object of allegiance, or that *everything* such a person does toward the other person (or non-personal object) must be partly motivated by an element underlying the faithfulness, say a love for the person. But faithfulness does imply that certain important things such a person does toward the object of faithfulness are at least chiefly motivated by some concern for it, and that when such concerns are major they are not easily outweighed by competing ones. The prioritarian character of faithfulness does not in the least imply, then, that no motivational elements other than those rooted in the motivational underpinnings of the faithfulness can move or be deeply respected by the person. Sheer love may cooperate with a faithfulness that is based on moral commitments. The cooperation may indeed be a case of motivational overdetermination, as where a deep love for one's friends *and* a religious devotion to helping those around one together lead to, and are each sufficiently motivating to explain, one's investing time and energy in helping friends find new jobs in difficult economic circumstances.

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<sup>6</sup>Other things equal, the stronger the faithfulness, the wider its prevalence in thought and action; but the priority need not be absolute, and there is no simple "proportion" between strength of faithfulness and the scope of its prevalence. An extremely strong faithfulness could be combined with a decisive resolve to separate its "directives" from decisions on certain matters, as where one adheres to certain behavioral standards rejected by those to whom one is faithful.

<sup>7</sup>Granted, a person to whom one is faithful could demand that one be egalitarian even in matters that involve choice between that person's interests and those of others. But the faithful person would still tend to give priority to this ideal over certain others.

One reaction to motivational overdetermination in expressions of faithfulness is to posit a restriction suggested by Kant's view that actions in conformity with duty have moral worth only if performed *from* duty.<sup>8</sup> One might, then, claim that *only* where an action appropriate to faithfulness is motivated solely by considerations, such as devotion, that may be elements in genuine faithfulness, does the action express the virtue of faithfulness, whereas, when collaterally motivated, the action is only in conformity with faithfulness. I grant that the former manifestations of faithfulness are more *purely* fiducial than are actions governed partly by collateral motives such as self-interest. But I cannot see that motivational purity in this sense is required for an action to express faithfulness. And if the collateral motivation is of the right kind, say beneficent desire, surely it need not result in action inherently inferior to similar action motivated only by faithfulness.

Once we appreciate that virtuous persons can at least indirectly affect what reasons they have for their actions and which of these reasons actually or predominantly motivates those actions, we can raise the question whether virtue implies a tendency to try to increase or even maximize the extent to which one's deeds appropriate to it are motivated *by* it. I suggest that, for mature, sophisticated agents, this tendency is commonly present; but its presence is not a condition for having virtues at all.

It is certainly true, however, that some kinds of acts are more praiseworthy if performed for certain reasons than if performed for others, and that certain kinds of reasons for acting—such as malicious ones—prevent the actions they motivate from being praiseworthy at all. With these points in mind, we might want to say of a kind of reason, such as a moral or religious one, that it has *paramountcy* (in a particular domain) if, given any other kind of reason for action (in that domain), acting for the former is, other things equal, more praiseworthy, and indeed inherently better, than acting for the latter. It might be thought (and arguably Kant at some points may have thought or presupposed) that moral reasons are paramount in the domain of actions toward other people.<sup>9</sup> On this view, keeping a burdensome promise from a sense of the duty to keep it would be better than keeping it from an affectionate desire to give support. It is important to see, however, that many people of religious faith (at least of monotheistic faith) tend to see fulfilling divine will as in some sense the best kind of reason for action, even if it is not (as it need not be) taken to exclude the cooperation of other reasons, such as moral or affectional ones. We need not here judge whether any specific kind of reason *is* paramount in the specified sense. Even if moral reasons are paramount in actions

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<sup>8</sup>See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), esp. 65–67.

<sup>9</sup>See, e.g., *Groundwork*, secs. 397–402 (64–69 in Paton's translation). Detailed discussion of Kant's view of moral worth in this work is provided in chap. 3 of my *Practical Reasoning and Ethical Decision* (Routledge, London and New York, 2006).

toward others, faithfulness as a virtue does not entail either acting, or even seeking to act, for specifically moral reasons.<sup>10</sup>

We have seen that faithfulness as a virtue does not entail narrow motivational restrictions, for instance that actions expressing it must be morally motivated. But this point does not imply that the prioritarian character of faithfulness has no distinctive motivational dimension. Even if I do not undertake to be motivated toward the objects of my faithfulness purely by elements underlying this trait, I should have a sense of some motives for action toward them being preferable to other motives, and I should tend to focus on the better ones when considering options in the field in which faithfulness operates. If, for example, I take it that being faithful to you by doing certain deeds will be to my advantage, then I should tend both to ask myself whether they really are best for you and, in any case, should try to keep in mind my fiduciary reasons for the deeds rather than the self-interested ones. Such self-monitoring and disciplined focus on appropriate motives and reasons does not guarantee the motivational purity or even the predominance, in grounding the relevant deeds, of the preferable motivation. But this monitoring and focus are often appropriate to virtue, and they can favorably influence actions that virtue calls for.

#### 4. *The Special Case of Religious Faithfulness*

That faithfulness simpliciter is not intrinsically moral does not imply that *religious* faithfulness is not intrinsically moral, or even that attitudinal religious faith, such as faith in God, is not. Once we realize, however, how broad the concept of the religious is, we can see that whether religious faithfulness in a particular person is intrinsically moral depends on the character of the person's guiding religious outlook. Similarly, if we do not indicate what conception of God is required for having faith in God, there is a similar indeterminacy for (attitudinal) religious faith in God. The constitution of attitudinal faith in a given instance depends heavily on how the person conceives the object of that faith (even if it should have only an intentional object). I propose to minimize the task of analysis by focusing on one major representative kind of case familiar in the literature on virtue and in much philosophical literature: Christian faith and faithfulness.

I will assume that the object of Christian faith and faithfulness is God and that here God is conceived, in the light of the Christian Bible, as the omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good, and loving creator of the physical universe (including its human inhabitants). The first three characteristics

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<sup>10</sup>What this means is indicated in some detail in my "Acting from Virtue," *Mind* 104 no. 415 (1995): 449–471. I should stress that the notion of a moral reason needs explication I cannot give it here. My point is in part that virtuous persons need not be guided by the *concept* of a moral reason nor seek to act for reasons under the description "moral" (or equivalent descriptions). The task of analysis here includes determining just what kind of motivation underlying interpersonal actions counts as moral. Much motivational variety lies between, for instance, the clearly moral motive of wanting to treat a student justly and, by contrast, the spontaneously affectional one of simply wanting to do something for the joy of delighting a friend.

might be so understood as to entail being loving, but I take this to be something more and it should in any case be made explicit.<sup>11</sup> I do not mean to imply that having Christian faith requires having an articulate understanding of these divine attributes. A rough understanding suffices for it.

If we are to understand Christian faithfulness, we also need to understand being loving, though again I must be very brief. Lovingness as a trait of character is among the virtues modeled by Jesus. I am also taking Christian faith to require a sense of what Jesus means in the love commandments: to love God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind, and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22: 37–39; cf. Mark 12: 29–31; Leviticus 19:18; and Deuteronomy 6:4). Thus, I am taking Christian faithfulness to imply keeping faith with God at least in the sense of maintaining, on the spiritual side, a sufficient theistic reverence and, on the interpersonal side, adequately loving conduct toward others. These elements are certainly not the whole of Christian faithfulness, but they are central and a good focus here.

If we are to understand the relation between Christian faithfulness and love, our first question might be motivational: What kinds of desires must we have toward those we love? Loving another surely entails caring (sufficiently strongly) about the other *for the other's sake*, not just instrumentally. This kind of caring implies a range of intrinsic (hence non-instrumental) desires. If one cares about others only as means, one can be beneficent toward them, but does not love them. We should also ask a behavioral question: How blind can a loving person be? Can love (and especially Christian love) be so blind or misguided that it leads us to harm those we love? This depends: if one is too far off the mark as to what will conduce to the other's good, one can only *try* to be loving and can perhaps lovingly (even tragically) fail to act lovingly. There is no determinate limit here, but love—and certainly Christian love—tolerates blindness only in limited ways. Christian love, moreover, must to some degree resemble the kinds portrayed by Jesus and often modeled, in the Gospels, by his example of loving conduct. There is latitude in the expression of love, but also limitation.

##### 5. *Religious Faith: Attitudinal Virtues and Virtues of Character*

If we assume that love requires a minimally adequate sense of the good of the other, that Christian faithfulness embodies Christian love, and that such faithfulness is, within limits, prioritarian, we find much of what is needed for a virtue of character, even apart from independent elements entailed by faithfulness as a trait of character. If we add the egalitarian element implicit in the second love commandment (which is plausibly taken to imply a kind of basic parity between different people), we find the core of a central moral requirement: justice. Christian faithfulness, then, is both a virtue of character given its anchoring in love and, in part,

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<sup>11</sup>For an indication of the importance of taking God to be loving, see Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

a moral virtue, given its egalitarian element. It implies keeping faith with others and, in a certain way, treating them equally.

Can we say that Christian attitudinal faith—the kind of faith *in* God sketched earlier—when it is strong and deeply rooted, is itself a virtue of character? The question is especially difficult because there is no sharp distinction between a trait of character and a strong, deeply rooted, behaviorally pivotal, cognitive-motivational-affective element. If a strong and deeply rooted Christian faith is not itself a virtue of character, it is (if predominantly guided by the love commandments) at least a virtuous attitude; and the more influential in conduct a virtuous attitude is, the closer it comes to dominating the fields in which virtue manifests itself and the closer it comes to constituting a virtue of character. We can, then, distinguish two kinds of virtues, or in any case two kinds of characteristic the term “virtue” may designate. If we are guided by the use of “virtue” most prominent in the literature of virtue ethics, we might use the term mainly for virtues in the full-blooded, *characterological sense*. But, as we have seen, there is also an *attitudinal sense* of “virtue,” illustrated where we use the term for a person’s belief in democracy, respect for learning, or deep conviction that everyone should have the benefit of the doubt. What are some of the differences?

Virtues of character must be traits of character, in a sense implying a certain rootedness. Attitudinal virtues—which may be constituted by any of a wide variety of propositional attitudes having the right stability, strength, and content—are different in at least three respects. They are, like faith in God, focal, being directed toward a single if multifaceted object in a way a character trait is not; they need not be rooted in the same way or as firmly; and apparently they are not uncommonly produced on a single occasion by powerful influences, such as religious conversion. Granted, it is not impossible that the rootedness of some attitudes exceed that of the minimally rooted traits. Still, the *firmness threshold* for character traits is higher than for attitudes. Traits must have a minimal firmness that attitudes need not achieve.

Granted, faithfulness as a trait can, like attitudinal faith, be *manifested* only in loyalty to a single person; but someone having the trait can retain it across change of object and would be expected to do so upon acquiring, say, new friends as objects of faithfulness, whereas attitudinal virtues are more closely tied to their objects. Faith in God, for instance, is clearly not the same attitudinal virtue as faith in forgiveness as a mitigator of hatred or even the same virtue as religiously inspired faith in the ideals that one takes God to require us to have. It is also true that brain manipulation, or, in principle, powerful psychological influences, might produce a trait with the right kind of rootedness, but the latter kind of genesis is a limiting case for traits of character yet only unusual for attitudinal traits.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>An implication of this point is that the notion of a virtue is not *historical*, in a sense implying a particular kind of genesis, as is suggested (but I think not entailed) by Aristotle’s view in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that virtues arise by habituation.

Quite apart from this contrast, however, Christian faith, like other kinds of faith, some religious and some not, can surely be an attitudinal virtue.

The appropriateness of calling attitudinal faith, in certain paradigmatic cases, a virtue is confirmed by the value of some of its major elements. It makes possible a kind of trust that can come only when one is not utterly certain of everything the person in whom one has faith will do. This trust invites, even if it often does not engender, a counterpart trust. When, as is usual, faith in a person is partly based on a sense of the person's good qualities, it expresses a positive attitude toward that person and, often, a kind of overall affirmation of the person's value; it also provides an important part of, or at least a basis for developing, a relationship in which the person of faith can be valued, supported, or otherwise positively affected.

There is a further step I propose we take. So far, we have spoken mainly of faithfulness as a character trait and of attitudinal faith as an important psychological element in anyone who has a kind of faith properly called religious. There is also a personal characteristic that, in at least one way, falls between these two: being a *person of faith*, where the faith is religious (as is usually intended when this term is applied to someone without qualification). This kind of faith I take to be a kind of overall *stance*: something more comprehensive and more influential in thought, feeling, and conduct than is typical for attitudinal faith, yet, though stable and typically both resolute and enduring, not necessarily a trait of character.<sup>13</sup> Being a person of faith—certainly of Christian faith—limits the kind and range of character traits one may have, but it need not constitute such a trait, even if there are instances of it that do. To concentrate again on the example of Christian faith, I do not think that one can count as a person of Christian faith without possessing *both* religious faith having content appropriate to Christianity and (focal) faithfulness to normative elements in Christianity that entail, for thought, feeling, and action, much of what is entailed by having the character trait of (global) faithfulness. That trait of character, however, does not entail specifically Christian beliefs or attitudes. With all this in mind, let us explore whether being a person of Christian faith constitutes having a virtue.

### 6. Christian Faith as a Virtue of Personality

A number of considerations support an affirmative answer. It is plain that, in having the attitudinal faith required for being a person of Christian faith, one would have at least one attitudinal virtue; but where one has the stance required for being a person of Christian faith I propose also to speak of *virtues of personality* and to maintain that being a person of Christian faith instantiates one of these virtues. (The same kind of point holds for other actual or possible religious faiths, and I hope this paper

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<sup>13</sup>It appears that the kind of stance I am calling a virtue here seems to fit the broad characterization of virtue given by Robert Merrihew Adams in *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006). He says, e.g., that “*being for x* must involve dispositions to favor *x* in action, desire, emotion, or feeling” (17).

encourages exploration of some of the important cases.) Let me explain this notion.

Here we should first note the kinds of elements important for understanding virtues of character, since those virtues are the kinds of traits with which we should compare virtues of personality. There are at least six conceptually important kinds of elements whose recognition helps in understanding faithfulness and other fiduciary notions.<sup>14</sup> The first element is the *field* (or domain) of a virtue, roughly the kind of human situation in which it characteristically governs conduct. The field of, for example, beneficence is open-ended, as is that of faithfulness, but situations of human need stand out for both. The second element is the characteristic “*targets*” the virtue leads the agent to aim at. In this aim, faithfulness as a character trait—global faithfulness—is similar to beneficence in having scope over an open-ended range of situations, say those in which the object of allegiance needs support. The third case is that of the *beneficiaries* of the virtue, above all (and perhaps solely) the person(s) who properly benefit from our realizing it: for veracity, interlocutors; for fidelity—hence for one kind of faithfulness—family, friends, or larger groups such as one’s community; and so on. The fourth case is the agent’s *understanding* of the field of the virtue, encompassing both its targets and the context calling for manifestation of the virtue; for instance, understanding criteria for benefiting others is crucial for beneficence. Fifth, there is the agent’s *motivation* to act in a way that befits the virtue. Faithfulness illustrates this: just as the veracious cannot be truthful simply to promote their own interests, so, where faithfulness is a virtue, it must embody sufficiently strong desires to be loyal to (or to protect or advance, and so forth) the person or object toward which it is directed. Sixth, there is the psychological *grounding* of the relevant action tendencies, roughly their rootedness in the agent. Desire to do (say) loyal deeds is one thing; doing them for the right kind of reason is another. Such grounding is important for distinguishing actions that are merely in conformity with virtue from those performed *from* it and hence truly virtuous, in the sense implying that they *bespeak* good character.

With these elements of virtue in mind, consider the characteristic instantiated by being a person of Christian faith. This is global faith. It entails focal attitudinal faith, such as faith in God’s love, but is not reducible to any set of such focal elements. Its field includes that of beneficence; and in its theological dimensions, this faith carries a commitment to forms of life that make admirable ideals central. Its “*target*,” then, is at least this: an integration of, on one side, a worldly commitment to human good and, on the other, a reverential theological devotion that supports both this commitment and also attitudes, ideals, and practices which provide wide scope for the development of human excellences. Regarding

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<sup>14</sup>This paragraph draws on ideas in my “Acting from Virtue,” cited above. Swanton makes much use of the metaphor of the target of a virtue and elaborates on other elements among the six I characterize; see, e.g., Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*, 231–239.

the beneficiaries of Christian faith as an element in personality, these are the same as the beneficiaries of the non-religious virtue of a loving beneficence, but, at least in the eyes of the faithful, they include getting or maintaining oneself in the right relation to God. The understanding by which a person of Christian faith is guided is essentially based on an understanding of scripture and, particularly, of the example of Jesus. This implies the kind of prioritarian, benevolent motivation characteristic of a strong beneficence. In some Christians, it may also imply—and a case can be made that for Christians it always should imply—taking the kinds of religiously enjoined motives in question to have paramouncy as reasons for action; but even apart from so conceiving such reasons, a person of Christian faith must take the kinds of beneficent and reverential considerations in question to be of high importance. In the light of all these points, where a person's stance in life is Christian faith, virtuous conduct and, given sufficient stability and rootedness in the faith, virtues of character are to be expected.

Such a stance is certainly a kind of virtue, and it might also correspond to one or more traits of character; but there is a rationale for the more qualified terminology I propose: personality is a wider notion than character, and traits of personality (the rough category in which I include being a person of Christian faith) need not count as traits of character. Consider, for instance, being sunny or, at the other end, phlegmatic, humorless, or dull. The contrast between character and personality may be sharpened by two further points.

First, having *good* character entails having all, or nearly all, the virtues (of character) to at least some significant degree, and it precludes having vices, to any significant degree, or virtually any other traits contrary to virtue. Someone who is not honest does not have good character; and even courage, which is not a moral virtue, and generosity, which is not a major virtue, must be possessed to some significant degree by a person of good character. Selfishness would be disqualifying, and only limited ungenerousness is consistent with beneficence.

Second, a world in which we are all alike in having good character would not imply that we are much alike in personality. Good character, and, related to it, virtues of character, are largely a matter of meeting certain normative standards, and a specific ideal of good character for all of us might be unobjectionable, whereas a specific ideal of good personality would be confining and undesirable.

By contrast with "good character," "good personality," if it has a clear use, designates not mainly aretaic elements but, roughly, elements that make a person good company. Our personalities are mainly—though not entirely—constellations of traits that tend to distinguish us from one another. Being a person of Christian faith has a kind of multiple realizability that tends to do this and certainly tends to do it more than simply having good character. It is, we might say, more individuating than a character trait that constitutes a virtue of character. Following the example of Jesus

requires more than living up to his precepts or any set of sound moral standards; and the more one internalizes his example, the more one's personality is shaped: there will be, for instance—though in different patterns and styles—patience, gentleness, forgivingness, humility in demeanor, a special affection for children, a reverence for persons and nature. A person of Christian faith, then, will tend to have good character but also to have certain attitudes towards others and indeed the universe, and certain interpersonal tendencies, that go *beyond* good character. Compare a sense of humor. Perhaps this is also a virtue of personality, but it carries no presumption of good character. As to good character, it does not require being a person of religious faith and even allows a kind of skepticism about God and humanity that would be a contrary of such faith.

The contrast between Christian faithfulness (being a person of Christian faith) as a virtue of personality and virtues of character does not diminish the importance of the former. The contrast implies nothing about how *good for* a person it might be to have Christian faith; the point distinguishes the aretaic from the theological, but implies no limit to the possible significance of the theological. Moreover, even apart from whether we distinguish between virtues of character and those of personality, much of what is important about virtue—especially the way in which it provides stable, often prioritarian, and wide-ranging tendencies to achieve the appropriate kind of good—is manifested by what I am calling virtues of personality and even by certain attitudinal virtues. All of them, moreover, are inherently good.

As some of our discussion suggests, the distinction between a trait of character and certain kinds of deeply entrenched attitudes that heavily influence conduct is not sharp, nor is the distinction between character and personality, or between a virtue of personality and one of character. All of these are at least largely constituted by cognitive and motivational elements in persons, and all play roles in producing and sustaining conduct. But each category contains some elements not belonging to any of the others, and clarity is enhanced by observing the indicated distinctions. Let me draw a further contrast that will clarify my view.

Very roughly, character traits are, in a certain sense, at least mainly *action-centered*: psychological elements appropriately developed, and manifested, by *doing* the right kinds of things for the right kinds of reasons. Global faith—as embodied in being a person of religious faith—is, comparatively, though by no means exclusively, *cognitively centered*: an element appropriately developed, and manifested, by *believing* (or otherwise cognizing, as in having faith toward) the right kinds of things on the right kinds of grounds. A second contrast between global faith, in the religious sense relevant here, and character traits, is this. That faith embodies attitudinal faith toward persons central in the religion in question, whereas traits of character do not have a comparably close relation to any similar (focal) attitude. These differences allow, as I have granted, for many important similarities, including much overlap in motivation and conduct.

To be sure, being a person of Christian faith is a major *characteristic* and, in those who have it, bears importantly on their character understood in a wide sense. But not every good characteristic bearing on character need be a virtue of character. Virtues of character by their very nature seem to be tied to ethics in a way faith is not. This may be in part why religious faith has been conceived as a theological virtue.

### 7. Conclusion

Virtues of character, I have suggested, are praiseworthy character traits that tend to ground conduct and to motivate their possessors to pursue the particular good or kind of good with respect to which the traits count as virtues. Virtues are by their nature inherently good as elements in character. Faithfulness as a virtue of character counts as, in some way, inherently good even if, like courage, it is not by its nature morally good. Despite the close association between faithfulness and faith, faithfulness as a trait does not imply faith as an attitude, nor does the latter imply the former. We can be faithful to those we do not have faith in, and we can have faith in a person to whom we are not faithful. Faithfulness, as entailing a positive stance toward its object, implies *meriting* a certain kind of trust; attitudinal faith implies *having* a certain kind of trust in its object. These properties are quite different, and neither entails the other. But where faithfulness is of a certain kind, as in the case of faithfulness to certain broad ideals or to a sound moral code, it may embody moral elements and may also have attitudinal faith as a distinctive constituent. Similarly, where attitudinal faith has an object that demands a kind of allegiance, as does Christian faith understood as I have very partially sketched it, then if the faith is sufficiently deep and adequately motivating, it may be a virtue at least in the sense of a merit, and it may yield much the same conduct as does faithfulness to its object. Being a person of faith, moreover, may constitute having a virtue of personality. Virtues of personality belong to a third category of virtues, lying between the characterological and the attitudinal. I have illustrated this with respect to Christian faith. Faith and faithfulness, apart from moral or religious elements that guide their influence on us, may be misplaced; but where they have the right kinds of objects and are guided by the kinds of good those objects of fidelity represent, they may be pervasive and incalculably valuable elements in human life.<sup>15</sup>

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