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The Ethics of Belief

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Morality is commonly supposed to be a matter of action, not of tastes or beliefs. If a man neglects to pay his rent, or borrows books and keeps them, or helps himself to a collar-button at a store counter, he is regarded, and rightly, as behaving immorally. On the other hand, if he prefers a banjo to a string quartet or the comic strips to Mr. Eliot, his choice may cause some raising of eyebrows, but no one would suggest a defect in his morals. Similarly as to belief. The man who believes that Shakespeare was Bacon, that the earth is flat, or that the universe began in 4004 B.C. may provoke comments on his knowledge or intelligence, but to infer that his character was questionable would seem to most people mere confusion.

Yet this attitude is not held consistently. There is one field, namely religion, where people do very commonly take belief to be a matter of moral concern. They would regard with equanimity the belief of a son of theirs that Shakespeare was Bacon. But if they were Catholics whose creed that son had exchanged for Methodism, or Methodists whose belief he had abandoned for atheism, they would regard the change as a moral lapse.

How is one to avoid such inconsistency? One way is to say that belief is never a moral matter, even in religion. Another way is to say that belief always has a moral complexion, even in secular affairs. It is the latter line that I am going to take. I am inclined to think that there is an ethics of thought as well as of practice, and that this ethics is the same outside religion as within it.

There are two obvious objections to this view that had best be dealt with at once. One is that belief and disbelief are beyond our control, and that it is never a duty to do what we cannot do. The other is that only what affects others for better or worse is a matter of duty, and that our beliefs affect only ourselves.

The first objection has some force. It is absurd to blame a person for what he cannot help. If a man comes to work sneezing and coughing with a violent cold, we may avoid him or condole with him, but we should hardly blame him. But if we find that he caught his cold by going to an ice show in summer clothes, we tend to lose patience with him and say that if he had taken a little pains, he need not have made himself a nuisance to others and to himself. Now many beliefs are like coughs and sneezes. We may be unable to control them directly, but we can do much to control them indirectly. They are partly the result of our habits of attention, of reflectiveness, of definiteness in thought, of self-criticism — habits that may be achieved by effort. And they are partly the result of the evidence we take into account, and we can do much to determine that. A man who does not like the idea that he evolved from sub-human forms of life can concentrate on the evidence against it, together with its degrading aspects; he can attend to the crassness of those who have supported it and the nobility of those who have opposed it, until he finds himself doing battle against it with full conviction. For a belief so gained he is at least indirectly responsible.
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The second objection to an ethics of belief is that our beliefs are private affairs, which concern nobody but ourselves. Once they are translated into action, they do affect others and we are responsible, but surely we may think what we please in the privacy of our own minds. But the matter is not so simple. For, first, beliefs are sources of action. We do not say that Hitler had a perfect right to believe it permissible to exterminate the Jews, and that the offense began only when he acted on it; we condemn both the action and the belief that issued in it. Again, the level of a culture depends on the habits of belief of its members. Intellectually, an Eskimo village lives in a different world from the London Athenaeum or the French Academy, and much of the difference lies in this, that whereas among primitive people the fabric of belief and custom is so rigid as to keep the individual mind fixed like a fly in amber, in a group that is more advanced the medium is kept from solidifying by the constant beating of small individual wings. In the maintenance of an atmosphere of freedom, in the promotion of general vigor of thought, we all count. What we believe is less important than the mental habit out of which it arises. Edward Caird used to tell his students that it was important that a belief should be true, and important that it be reasoned, but it was more important that it be reasoned than that it be true. A belief that springs from reflection has in its source, even when it is false, the means for its own amendment.

But if belief does have an ethics, what rule does that ethics lay down for us? The issue is a live one because two of the great disciplines of western culture, science and religion, have given opposing answers to it. The answer of science is the simpler. It was formulated by T. H. Huxley as follows: "It is wrong for a man to say that he is certain of the objective truth of any proposition unless he can produce evidence which logically justifies that certainty." It has been put by Bertrand Russell in the form: "Give to any hypothesis which is worth your while to consider just that degree of credence which the evidence warrants." It was put even more uncompromisingly by another eminent scientist, W. K. Clifford, "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything on insufficient evidence." The scientist is trained to skepticism. In his own province he ties his self-respect to his power to tell the difference between an unfounded conjecture, a reasonable hypothesis, an accepted theory, and an established fact, and to give to each the credence that it merits. A young scientist is secretly rather pleased if he is regarded as so hard-headed that, like Charles Lamb in one of his whimsical moods, he would refuse to admit that two and two were four until he knew what use you proposed to put it to. But a virtue in excess may be a vice. The ideal of science generally is to believe no more, but also no less, than what the evidence warrants.

When we compare this attitude of antiseptic caution with the attitude approved and indeed exacted by the religious teaching of the west, we find a startling difference. Professor D. M. Baillie has pointed out that faith, comprising a double attitude of belief and trust, occupies a place in the Hebrew-Christian tradition that is unique among the religions of the world. (3) What is insisted on is not the withholding of belief till the evidence warrants, but, on the contrary, the embracing of belief, whether intelligence is satisfied or not. In the eighth century before Christ we find Isaiah saying to King Ahaz when Judah was threatened with destruction by the Assyrians, 'If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.' This
particular note, sounded then for the first time in the Biblical word, was struck thereafter loudly and insistently; indeed if the fortunes of the people went awry, it was commonly laid to their want of belief; 'they believed not his word, but murmured in their tents ...'; 'they believed not in God and trusted not in his salvation.\(^6\)

The two attitudes mentioned here, of belief and trust, were not usually distinguished; thinking, as a purely theoretical activity with ends and standards of its own, had none of the attraction for the Jews that it had for the Greeks; what was demanded was the complex attitude later described as faith, in which intellectual assent was blended with other attitudes, notably the trust a child feels in a father, a spirit of obedience, and the courage and hopefulness that comes with unquestioning trust.

The duty of unquestioning acceptance is stressed even more strongly in the New Testament. The teaching of Jesus himself on this head is less than certain. To be sure, some very unqualified statements about it are attributed to him. 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.'\(^6\) Again, when Thomas doubted and asked for palpable evidence that it was his Master who was before him, he was rebuked for his unbelief and told, 'Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.' But it has been pointed out that neither of these passages is certainly authentic. The first occurs in a section at the end of Mark which is plainly an addition from another hand, and the second occurs only in the latest of the accounts, and the least reliable historically, the Gospel of John. There is no doubt, however, that Jesus stressed the importance of belief: he healed the centurion's servant, saying 'as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee';\(^7\) to a man who brought a son troubled with a demon he said, 'If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth', and when the father replied, 'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief', he cast the demon out.\(^8\) Repeatedly he said to those whom he healed, 'Thy faith hath made thee whole.'\(^9\) It seems clear that in such passages Jesus was not referring to mere intellectual assent; he was thinking of faith and belief much as the prophets did, as something exercised by the whole man, in which the belief accorded by intellect, the trust accorded by feeling, and the obedience accorded by will, were not distinguished. We can only believe that Jesus was not greatly concerned with, or interested in, those processes of observation, analysis, and inference that now pass under the names of science and philosophy, a fact that is the more noteworthy because the Greek language, presumably carrying with it intimations of the theoretical interest so characteristic of the Greeks, must have flowed round him rather freely. How much we should give for some recorded conversation between him and a Greek like Socrates! To be sure, there is something incongruous in picturing him as engaged in dialectical passages-at-arms with speculative opponents; his emphasis on childlike trust suggests rather the prophet and poet than the argumentative rationalist. Still, what he would have said about the intellectual pursuits of an Einstein or a Frazer, or the intellectual scruples of a Huxley or a Clifford, we do not know.

But we do know pretty clearly the attitude of St. Paul, and in this particular province it was the teaching of Paul rather than that of Christ himself that proved decisive in the thought of the West. There are two distinct strains of doctrine running through Christian history, one coming from the synoptic gospels and
stressing salvation by goodness, the other coming from Paul and stressing salvation by faith. Neither emphasis means to be exclusive, though their difference is important. Paul was a man of some learning who, though a Jew, wrote in Greek and probably read his Old Testament in Greek. His city, Tarsus, had a University in which Hellenistic philosophy flourished. He knew the Greek passion for speculation and argument. And knowing it as few others of the early Christians did, he explicitly repudiated it. The wisdom he stressed was sharply contrasted with 'the wisdom of this world'. 'Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.'

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 'We walk by faith, not by sight.' The road to belief for Paul lay not through the thickets of theological disputation but around them, by a path open to 'babes and sucklings'.

Little by little, in the hands of imperfectly enlightened writers, this doctrine was developed into a bard requirement that no matter what the evidence one might suppose one had, assent must be given to certain tenets of the creed as a condition of salvation. 'In the third century', says Canon Raven, 'truth was something to be sought; in the fourth something to be understood; in the fifth something to be accepted.' Augustine described heresy as not only blasphemy but murder, the murder of souls, and therefore deserving of the death penalty. 'What is more deadly to the soul', he asked, 'than the liberty of error?'

Unfortunately Augustine's view of what Christianity asks of the intellect became, under his vast influence, the official view of the Catholic church, and it remains so. Pope Gregory XVI, repeating in a bull of 1832 the words of Augustine we have just quoted about heresy as the murder of souls, took occasion to denounce what he described as a 'most pestilential error', 'that absurd and erroneous opinion, or rather that form of madness, which declares that liberty of conscience should be asserted and maintained for everyone.' Protestantism has granted a greater latitude to thought and conscience than Catholicism, as one would expect of a movement that made so much of private judgment, but its record is most inconsistent. The early reformers were anything but tolerant. 'If, outside of Christ, you wish by your own thoughts to know your relation to God', said Luther, 'you will break your neck. Thunder strikes him who examines.' When Calvin sent Servetus to the stake for his wrong views about the Trinity, he had the cordial approval of Melanchton and most other Protestant leaders; and John Knox argued that those who allowed active disbelievers to remain alive were themselves incurring the divine wrath. 'In the seventeenth century the Scotch clergy taught that food or shelter must on no occasion by given to a starving man unless his opinions were orthodox.'

It is needless for our purpose to go into historical detail; what we are interested in is the view of the ethics of religious belief that has prevailed in the West during the greater part of its history. Regarding this we cannot perhaps do better than to quote the sentences in which Lecky, in his great work on the rise of rationalism,
summarizes a long discussion:

'Until the seventeenth century, every mental disposition which philosophy pronounces to be essential to a legitimate research was almost uniformly branded as a sin, and a large proportion of the most deadly intellectual vices were deliberately inculcated as virtues. It was a sin to doubt the opinions that had been instilled in childhood before they were examined. It was a virtue to hold them with unwavering, unreasoning credulity. It was a sin to notice and develop to its full consequences every objection to those opinions, it was a virtue to stifle every objection as a suggestion of the devil. It was sinful to study with equal attention and with an indifferent mind the writings on both sides, sinful to resolve to follow the light of evidence wherever it might lead, sinful to remain poised in doubt between conflicting opinions. Sinful to give only a qualified assent to indecisive arguments, sinful even to recognise the moral or intellectual excellence of opponents. In a word, there is scarcely a disposition that marks the love of abstract truth; and scarcely a rule which reason teaches as essential to its attainment, that theologians did not for centuries stigmatise as offensive to the Almighty.

What broke the hold of this system was the birth of a conviction that there was such a thing as an ethics of the intellect, and that those who followed it should be encouraged, not chastised. This was implicit in the arguments of the reformers, however reluctant they were to recognize it; for unless a man was justified in following such inward light as he had, Protestantism had no ground to stand on. Little by little, and with painful struggle, the principle won its way that when one's own considered insight conflicted with the authority of a great institution or of common belief, one had a right and even a duty to respect that insight. Modern thought began with an insistence on this principle by Descartes, who in his *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, laid down as the justification of belief, not authority, but one's own 'clear and distinct perception'. Descartes was a Catholic, and tried to remain in the good graces of the church, but his works were put on the Index; M. Maritain regards him as the chief architect of intellectual disaster.

His independence was re-enacted by two great Englishmen, an earlier and a later contemporary of his own. For Bacon, who was even more suspicious than Descartes of older traditions, 'the very contemplation of things as they are, without superstition or imposture, without error or confusion, is in itself more worthy than all the produce of discoveries.' And the plodding, honest John Locke, gave it as his opinion that 'to love truth for truth's sake is the principal part of human perfection in this world, and the seed-plot of all other virtues.' These writers also found their place on the Index. The eminent Papal apologist De Maistre described Bacon as 'a charlatan' and wrote that 'in the study of philosophy, the contempt of Locke is the beginning of wisdom.' One may scorn Locke's conclusions if one wishes, but one scorns his spirit at one's peril. His great book is not only a classic of philosophy; it is in a sense a moral classic, by reason of the transparent disinterestedness of his sober and honest mind. It captivated Voltaire, and through his demonic energy helped the French revolutionists to pry up the lid of Pandora's box. Many repellent forms fluttered out of that box. But it was found when they had settled that the hold of authority was conclusively broken.
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As one looks back over this long struggle of intelligence for freedom, it is hard to deny that there has been a real conflict of principle, that while the scientific mind has on the whole, though with many lapses, held it wrong to exceed the evidence before it, the religious mind has held that there is one great exception, and that in this exceptional case it is not only a right but a duty to give one's belief a freer rein. The question before us is whether this is true. Ought we to believe where we do not see? There are a great many persons who would answer Yes, and would add that their answer is the one required unambiguously by Christianity. Since this answer is clearly in conflict with the rule of science, let us ask how those who accept it would justify it. There have been various ways, and it would be idle to try to look at them all. So let us take for closer scrutiny the view of a distinguished thinker who felt with equal force the claims of science and religion, and tried hard to do justice to them both, William James.

James was a scientist himself; he knew the rules laid down by Huxley and Clifford to guide the belief of scientists, and he deliberately rejected them. This was partly because, in the light of what he knew of psychology, which was certainly considerable, he thought their rules naive. They assumed that beliefs are far more largely a matter of reason and far less a function of wish, will, impulse, hope and fear, than they are or can be. In recent years we have perhaps had a surfeit of this doctrine, and the readiness with which some amateur psychoanalysts would now reduce all speculative beliefs to rationalizations would not improbably horrify James. However that may be, he thought the high talk of the intellectualists about the sin of allowing one's belief to be affected by one's desires was unconscious cant. Such talk itself, he thought, was an example of the very thing it protested against. If we look behind 'the snarling logicality' of such men as 'that delicious enfant terrible, Clifford, and his insistence, 'with somewhat too much of robustious pathos in the voice,' that we commit ourselves to no belief of any sort that the universe does not extort from us by irresistible evidence, do we really find the delicate balance of judicial impartiality? Do rationalists hold the beliefs they do about religion because an impartial standard requires them, or are they insisting on a certain standard because that would justify their beliefs? James thought it was the latter. 'When the Cliffords tell us how sinful it is to be Christians on such "insufficient evidence", insufficiency is really the last thing they have in mind. For them the evidence is absolutely sufficient, only it makes the other way.' Now I have no doubt that a psychoanalysis of Clifford or Bertrand Russell would reveal much of interest. But the question is not as to the rationalist's motives, but whether his contention about belief is right. Is it true that even in religion, beliefs should be accepted only on logically relevant evidence?

This James denies. That is the point of his famous essay on The Will to Believe; evidence is not the only thing that justifies belief. Regarding most problems he would agree that we should suspend belief till the evidence comes in, and in many cases we could quite well suspend it permanently. There would be no sense in laboring for a decision as between sub-and supra-lapsarianism, because neither position is to-day a live or plausible hypothesis; nor would there be any sense in entertaining a conviction about the number of hairs on one's head, for that is not worth finding out; nor would there be any point in rushing to an opinion about the
nebular hypothesis: that can wait.

All this is obvious enough. But now suppose you are confronting an option, that
unlike the first is a live option, that unlike the second is momentous, and unlike the
third is forced. Suppose, to take James’ example, you are confronted with the
option whether to believe in God or not? Then what should you do? People around
you draw you both ways; the issue is clearly a live one. It is momentous because, at
the least, it means much to your happiness. And it is forced, for you can hardly
dodge it; you have to take some attitude; you have to act either as if God existed or
he did not: even to decline the choice is to commit yourself, since it is in effect to
act as if he did not. What are you to do? You try to look at the evidence, with the
result that your head begins to go round; you were not born to be a philosopher.
You read a bit of C. S. Lewis and a bit of Bertrand Russell, and find that arguments
which to the first are demonstrative are to the second preposterous. Your thought
is confused; the evidence conflicts; the doctors disagree. If, in this predicament,
you went to James for advice, it is pretty clear what he would do. In his en­
thusiastic, generous, affectionate way, he would put his hand on your shoulder and
say, ‘My dear fellow, forget your scruples. Life is more important than certainty,
and action than knowledge. Don’t be a lily-livered intellectual. Go ahead and
believe.’

He would support this advice as follows. If you insist on not exceeding the
evidence, you will avoid being taken in, and that, to be sure, is something; but by
such a policy you make your life cautious, unadventurous, negative, and thin. On
the other hand, if you commit yourself, you do run the risk of error, but you gain all
the advantages — the assurance, the hopefulness, the serenity, the in­
domitableness, the fundamental freedom from care — of the man who is convinced
that ‘God’s in his heaven and all’s right with the world.’ James felt that the ad­
vantage of the man with such a belief is enormous, and for my part I should agree.
His point is that to govern your belief in an issue like this by considerations of
evidence is to fail to see the problem in perspective; it is to make too much of trUth
in comparison with the other values of life; it is to fail to see that such a choice of
belief is really an investment in which we should be governed by the largest
prospective return.

There is something extraordinarily persuasive about this view, particularly as
urged with James’ infectious warmth. And yet even before we have examined it,
probably most of us feel in it too much of the siren’s song. To put it baldly, is not
James telling us that we should believe something, that is, accept it as true, on the
totally irrelevant ground that it will be to our advantage to do so? And is not that
telling us that self-deception is at times a right and a duty? For surely we should be
deceiving ourselves if we believed on that ground, as is plain in coarser cases. If a
man justified his belief that he had an I.Q. of 160, or that his motor car was the
fastest in the country, on the ground that it gave him the greatest satisfaction to
think so, we should suspect a twist in his mind. These beliefs might be true, but we
should regard it as fantastic self-deception to believe them for the reasons given.
The personal advantage or disadvantage of believing something, we say, has simply
nothing to do with its truth. And when we are told to act as if it had, we inevitably
shrink back.
James might ask, 'Just why should you shrink back? To be deceived is bad; admitted. But in the first place, there is a chance that you may not be deceived; you do not know that your belief is false, and it may turn out true. And in the second place, the personal gains, whether it is true or not, are so enormous as to outweigh the evil of any possible error.' Neither point leaves one content. Even if the belief we accepted on these grounds did turn out to be true, we should still have deceived ourselves, for we told ourselves that we might justifiably take it as true, whereas on the evidence before us, we could not.

No doubt James would here fall back on the second contention. The rationalist, he would say, is forgetting that reason is only one of life's activities, and its good only one among many goods. You cannot order the whole of life with reference to just one of its activities, and sacrifice the good of the whole man to the particular good of man as thinker. What you would be doing if you did that would be to make your special rule of intellectual ethics violate your rule for ethics generally; you would exalt a narrower and smaller good over a wider and larger good.

James is here on strong ground. It is right for the artist to pursue beauty; but the artist is also a man, and his duty as a man takes precedence over his duty as an artist; to purchase artistic distinction at the price of moral degeneracy, as Verlaine and Gauguin did, is not to make a good bargain. It is right to pursue truth, but we know that when duties to family or country conflict with it, we should sometimes give up that pursuit. At times it would seem to be a duty to leave ignorance and error undisturbed. If an old man or woman is happy in a faith one thinks illusory, it is certainly the kinder and probably the better course to hold one's peace. The sensitive moralist just quoted, Henry Sidgwick, when he was no longer able to accept Christian theology, used to withhold his negations from his students unless expressly asked about them, since he thought acceptance of it would probably contribute more to their happiness and indeed their goodness than such grey tidings as he had to tell. The values of the intellect, of truth and reasonableness, are great goods, but it is possible to over-rate them.

Granting this, I think that James was under-rating them; and this for three reasons. (1) The first is that happiness bought at the price of illusion is 'a goodly apple rotten at the heart.' That we set a higher value on truth than perhaps we know may be made clear in an imaginary case. Suppose we had to choose between two futures, in one of which we should be very happy, but our happiness, unknown to ourselves, was based on a set of false views about the nature of things; and suppose the alternative was a future in which we were somewhat less happy, but lived in a world of sober belief that we knew to be true. Which would we elect? I do not think it a foregone conclusion that people generally would choose the world of happiness and illusion. Many would say, I suspect, and perhaps to their own surprise, that happiness bought by delusion was not worth the price.

(2) James thinks we may legitimately be moved to believe by thought of the advantages of belief. But is this psychologically possible? Certainly a man cannot say to himself, 'I know that the evidence for this belief is inadequate, and that it may therefore be false, but because the advantages of believing are so great, I hereby resolve to believe; and when the course is thus baldly described, it is hard to suppose that James would think it either possible or desirable. Yet he is saying
something painfully like it, and whatever precisely he meant, it will repay us to consider this view.

We have seen that it is possible to control belief in some measure if it is done indirectly and over a period of time. Many persons, when they have become aware that they were moving toward an abyss of skepticism, have met the danger not by going forward and exploring it, but by retreating into a tent where the thought of it was taboo: and they have found that if they stayed long enough in that close atmosphere, the stirrings of conscious questioning gradually ceased. It is dangerous to cite cases, because one is raising questions here of ultimate sincerity on which no one but the man himself, and probably not even he, can speak with certainty. But in reading Newman's account of his religious development, one can hardly miss his sense of how hard it is to achieve rational certainty of anything, how terrible it would be if his belief should crumble, how important it was to guard against influences that might undermine it. One feels the presence in him, as Mill did in F.D. Maurice, of 'that timidity of conscience, combined with original sensitiveness of temperament, which has so often driven highly gifted men into Romanism from the need of a firmer support than they can find in the independent conclusions of their own judgment.' He seems to have acted in accordance with the advice that his friend John Keble gave to Thomas Arnold when Arnold was troubled with doubts about the Trinity, to 'put down the objections by main force whenever they arise'. In a day when French and German scholars were transforming Christian history and criticism, Newman chose to remain in almost total ignorance of their work and to dwell instead on the controversies of Arius and Athanasius. And he apparently did succeed in putting his conscious doubts behind his back.

Thirdly, James' doctrine of the will to believe — which ought, as he recognized, to have been called the right to believe — is an uneasy halting-place: one must withdraw from it or go beyond it. What James said in the famous essay was that consequences might be appealed to when logical evidence failed, on the ground that though one might thereby miss truth, one would gain other and greater advantages; on the ground of these advantages we were justified in taking the belief as true. Now the only evidence that is relevant to the truth of a belief is evidence that is logically relevant, and critics were not slow in pointing out that the advantages of a belief, as opposed to its implications, were not logically relevant. James was thus left in the uneasy position of saying that we were justified morally in accepting what we were clearly not justified in accepting logically: I say uneasy because if we know that we are not logically justified, to say that we are morally justified is to warrant an attempt at self-deception. James could escape from this position either by retreating or by going forward. If he retreated, and held that we should equate our assent to the evidence, the point of his essay was lost. If he went on and held that the advantages of the belief were really relevant to its truth, he was embracing a full-fledged pragmatism. What he in fact did was to choose the latter.

We have looked at only one proposal for justifying a belief that goes beyond the evidence, but I think we should find the others similarly wanting. The natural conclusion from this line of argument is that belief is the same thing everywhere, and does not have one set of conditions in physics and chemistry and a different set in religion, that the ethics of belief, the meaning of intellectual honesty, is
everywhere the same. This, I suggest, is the unavoidable conclusion. Belief should follow the evidence, neither stubbornly denying what it establishes, nor impulsively running ahead of it and embracing as true what it does not warrant. When put in this way, probably most religious persons would accept the conclusion. They would, at any rate, draw back from the suggestion that the religious conscience is a coarser and less scrupulous organ than the scientific.

Yet it must be admitted that in the practical difficulties that arise the two fields are hardly comparable. There is little talk in scientific circles of an ethics of belief. Most of the issues of science offer small temptation to our feelings to believe in one way rather than another. Of course when a man is offering a new theory to which he has tied his professional hopes, he is only too likely to overrate the evidence in hand and ignore what makes against his theory. It is said that Newton, as he approached the end of his calculations about gravitation and saw the great law coming nearer, could not trust himself in his excitement and turned over the final calculations to another hand. But here was a theory with tremendous implications, in which he as its discoverer had a personal stake. Most scientific problems might be settled in any one of many ways so far as most of us are concerned; we should find it difficult to work up any sort of passion for or against the binomial theorem or Ohm's law.

But the situation as regards religion is different. Whether the world is governed or not by love and wisdom, is an issue of large concern to us; whether we shall live again after death is an issue to which no one who loves life and cares for others can be indifferent. The achievement of a positive belief on these points alone may alter the complexion of our world and give us a fresh infusion of buoyancy and hope. It is entirely intelligible that persons who have such beliefs should look with something like moral loathing on those who would introduce into these all-important matters the detachment, the cool appraisal of evidence, the reservations and doubts and hesitancies, of the rationalistic mind.

Even for those with the talent and leisure for inquiry such objectivity is difficult. And for the rest of us, the reply will come; it is out of the question. You cannot ask the plain man to sickly his whole life over with the pale cast of thought. He has not time for these ultimate speculations; he must get on with his work; and what he needs from the philosophers and the theologians is an outlook that will enable him to do that work with a heart and a will. Refinements about going beyond the evidence are all very well for the philosopher who can afford such luxuries, but they are lost on men who barely know what evidence means.

Every person of common sense must feel the force of this. It seems to present us with an unwelcome dilemma: we must give up either serenity or intellectual honesty, either the peace that goes with confident beliefs on ultimate things or else that saving salt of skepticism that is needed for integrity of mind. Is there any way out?

We should be merely deceiving ourselves if we thought that there was any wholly satisfactory way out. Something valuable must go. St. Francis was a great and happy man; so was Socrates; and in giving up the hope either of the childlike faith of St. Francis or the questioning spirit of Socrates, we should be losing much. But it is idle to say that we can have them both. Plant Socrates' mind in the soul of St.
Francis, and the pearly gates and jasper towers would come tumbling down in irreparable ruin. Plant the soul of St. Francis in the mind of Socrates, and the world of essence and implication and logical distinction would seem insupportably grey and inhuman. A man may try to be either Francis or Socrates, but if he tries to be both, he will assuredly be neither. Their tendency is to cancel each other out.

In reply there is one thing that must be said unequivocally. To think is to try to get at the truth, and the person who professes to be doing that will be a dupe if he consciously allows any thought of his own or other people's advantage to affect his conclusions. He will be worse if he does this as a professional philosopher, a person maintained and paid to think as straight as he can on problems of difficulty and to communicate his results to those less privileged than he is. Everyone has been repelled by the parlor atheist whose spirit of contradiction is obviously belted to a noisy little dynamo of self-importance within, or the lover of paradox who would rather coin a new epigram than see a new truth; 'an ethical sympathy in an artist', said Oscar Wilde, 'is an unpardonable mannerism.' We are not convinced. Neither are we by those books on apologetics or Christian evidences in which the overwhelming importance of reaching the right and edifying conclusion held the writer's mind in a strait jacket. In my youth I thought Mark Hopkins' *Evidences of Christianity* a great book. When I return to it now I see that Mark Hopkins was so good a man, if one may say so, that it is idle to go to him for the truth; when the ark of salvation was as stake, he could afford to treat the evidence cavalierly, because he knew beforehand what it proved, and had to prove. I agree that a man is on a higher level if his intellectual compass habitually veers toward human good than if it veers to party or self-esteem. But as a *thinker*, he has no business to let it veer toward any pole but one. Truth lost through noble motives is just as truly lost as if one were deceived by some malicious demon.

It may be said that this somewhat self-righteous line may do for a philosopher, but that before he sows his doubts abroad, he may well think what they involve for the great majority of people who lack the way and the will to become philosophers. The whole-hearted acceptance of religious conclusions means much, both emotionally and morally, to numberless people; doubt of these conclusions, to say nothing of their rejection, robs them of their efficacy. 'You destroy what is precious, at least to them, and give them nothing in its place.' There are philosophers to-day who look down on all such objections from a great height. I do not belong to their party. Agreeing that knowledge is a great good, I think that hope and peace and happiness are great goods also, and I can conceive a situation in which it would be better for mankind to remain in permanent error on some matter of belief if this was the price of happiness than to know the truth and be unhappy. Pedantic and cavilling intellectualists in these matters are, as James thought, bores. But several things need to be said.

First the notion that either men's morality or their happiness is bound up with any set of dogmas about ultimate things seems to me untrue. It is unquestionable that religious belief may affect their motives for right doing in various and potent ways, but to say that apart from such beliefs we should have no ground for discriminating good from evil, right from wrong, is irresponsible. Our knowledge that love is better than hatred, happiness than misery, enlightenment than ignorance, is not an in-
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ference from theological premises, but an independent insight which may be had with equal clearness by Christian, Buddhist, and secularist. It may be replied that this may be correct in theory, but that practical morality is so entwined with belief that the two stand or fall together. But practical morality does not rest on so tremulous a base that in order to keep it standing we must surround it with a veil of illusion as to what it really stands on. No doubt if people have supposed their morals to rest on their theology, they will go through a period of bewilderment when that theology totters. But if they are reflective they will soon see that morality has a much firmer base than any of the speculative dogmas on which it is supposed to be built. If they are not reflective, they may fly about aimlessly, but thoughtful persons can hardly be asked to keep their candle under a bushel for fear that some human butterflies should singe their wings at it.

There is a somewhat similar connection between belief and happiness. Religious dogmas may contribute to happiness; indeed, as McTaggart said, they may 'change the whole aspect of heaven and earth for those who believe in them.' Nevertheless they do not seem to be essential to happiness. People of all faiths have been happy; people of all faiths have been unhappy; it is probable that such things as health and temperament have more to do with happiness than any theological belief. The general presumption must surely be that one's happiness is more secure if it is accompanied by a true apprehension of the nature of things. These premises are perhaps enough for us to go on. If no dogma is essential to happiness, and happiness is more likely with the truth than without it, inquiry into truth need not be inhibited by worry about the consequences of what it may uncover.

It may be held, again, that if religious beliefs are regarded as justifiable only on evidence, we are asking plain men to settle for themselves questions which the experts have found baffling. This would certainly be unreasonable. Tired farmers and preoccupied business men cannot be saddled with the ultimate problems of the universe. But of course we would not urge that they should. When they are confronted with problems that are too hard for them in science, or criticism, or politics, they appeal to authority for guidance, and everyone agrees that this is a legitimate course. It is also legitimate in religion. The responsibility of the plain man will then be, not to settle ultimate problems by his own unpractised wit, but to appraise the relative weight of authorities. There is no escaping this responsibility in any field. In science it is carried easily enough, since the first scientist one goes to will probably speak for most or all of his colleagues. In politics it is far more onerous, since among experienced men in public life unanimity is so conspicuously lacking. Still, the acceptance of responsibility for choosing one's leaders is the very heart of democracy, and unless men can do at least this with some discrimination, the democratic process may as well be abandoned. The acceptance of such responsibility in religion is the point of intersection between democracy and Protestantism. The democratic view in religion, as in politics, is that only if plain men are given the privilege of choosing their guides can they come to choose either their guides or their beliefs responsibly. They have made dreadful mistakes. They will no doubt continue to make them, since in religion as in politics the doctors so notoriously disagree. But freedom comes at no cheaper price.
I realize how dreary and negative all this must sound to those whose belief is unquestioning, exuberant, and joyful. To go on questioning to the end! To live on hypotheses and probabilities! What sort of answers are these to people who want a creed to live by? Dusty answers, to be sure. And in cases of great suffering or great loss, they may seem dusty beyond all tolerance. To many, belief tied to evidence seems nothing but a fair-weather craft, and they look with an expectant curiosity to see what happens to it when storms blow up. Sometimes it sinks, and the observers say, 'I told you so.' But what exactly does this show? It shows that some people's belief is more rocklike and immovable than others. It does not prove that these people are more sensitive than others, or nobler than others, or that the beliefs they have found so comforting are the more likely to be true.

One's respect, indeed, is greater for those who do not break because they realized beforehand that fact does not order itself with reference to our desires, that recognition of it and resignation to it are the true part for a man. When T. H. Huxley lost his eldest son, he was numb with grief, and a friend whose faith was serene and confident wrote to him wondering how his ethics of belief was faring under the blow. He replied: 'My business is to teach my aspirations to conform themselves with fact, not to try and make facts harmonise with my aspirations. Science seems to me to teach in the highest and strongest manner the great truth which is embodied in the Christian surrender to the will of God. Sit down before fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and to whatever abysses nature leads, or you shall learn nothing. A confident belief is a great good if one comes by it honorably. If one cannot have it, so also is this sort of honesty and courage.'

FOOTNOTES
1. SCIENCE AND CHRISTIAN TRADITION, 310.
2. LECTURES AND ESSAYS, 11, 186.
3. FAITH IN GOD, 10 ff.
5. Psalms, 106, 24; 78, 22.
6. Mark, 16, 16.
8. Mark, 9, 17 ff.
10. I Cor. 8: 18, 19.
11. I Cor. 1: 19, 20.
12. II Cor. 3, 7.
14. Quoted by Lecky, RISE AND INFLUENCE OF RATIONALISM IN EUROPE, 11, 76.
15. Westermarck, ETHICAL RELATIVITY, 203.
16. Lecky, OP. CIT., 11, 93 ff.
17. VIGE HIS THE VISION OF DESCARTES.
18. From the French passages cited in Lecky, OP. CIT., 1, 445.
19. Cf. Sidgwick on a similar proposal: 'I am so far from feeling bound to believe for purposes of practice what I see ground for holding as a speculative truth, that I cannot even conceive the state of mind which these words seem to describe, except as a momentary half-willful irrationality, committed in a violent access of philosophic despair.' METHODS OF ETHICS, 507.
20. Cf. Santayana on James: 'To be boosted by an illusion is not to live better than to live in harmony with the truth; it is not nearly so safe, not nearly so sweet, and not nearly so fruitful. These refusals to part with a decayed illusion are really an infection to the mind. Believe, certainly; we cannot help believing; but believe rationally, holding what seems certain for certain, what seems probable for probable, what seems desirable for desirable, and what seems false for false.' CHARACTER AND OPINION IN THE UNITED STATES, 87.
22. LIFE AND LETTERS I, 219, 221.