

Faith And Epistemology

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ICHIKAWA'S CONCERN

Ichikawa discusses faith and epistemology to criticize the idea of being neutral about certain issues, or that we can and should always seek common ground from which to reach an understanding, or the idea that there cannot be a certain *standpoint* that is the *better standpoint* or even the *best*, and that these are all ideas that seem to work at least sometimes but, that we might ought not abide by them at other times. Ichikawa hopes to identify each sort of context.

I will present Ichikawa's competing theories of faith. I will amend his favored theory of faith. And finally, seeing an opportunity left open by Ichikawa, I will further argue that our amended theory of faith can be used as an epistemic norm. That is, "faith" as an undesired gap between psychological confidence and epistemic merit regarding a judgment one relies on can imply an impoverished *standpoint*; "faith" is a psychological ascription.

I will argue that "faith," as I have defined it and would apply it to epistemology, falls into the larger conversation generally referred to as *The Ethics Of Belief*.

DEFINITIONS

- *Epistemic Anxiety* = *df.* the feeling there is a heightened need for more evidence.
- *Epistemic Certainty* = *df.* having no rational grounds for doubting.
- *Epistemic Overreach* = *df.* going beyond the evidence.
- *Epistemic Merit* = *df.* referring to a quantity and quality of evidence.
- *Epistemic Standards* = *df.* standards of justification relative to context.
- *Genuine Disagreement* = *df.* any disagreement between two reasonable persons.
- *Reasonable Persons* = *df.* any person seeking to believe what is true to the best of their ability.
- *Standpoint* = *df.* a perspective, point-of-view, owing to experience.
- *Virtuous Faith* = *df.* trust in one's perceptual abilities, in determining whose word to trust, in one's *a priori* reasoning, and in the epistemic capacities that are specific to one's social environment.

WHAT IS FAITH?

Faith can be:

- a response to risk and a response to something when there is no risk at all.
- relative to what's at stake and not relative to what's at stake.
- relative to *epistemic standards* and not relative to *epistemic standards*.
- a response to evidence or unconcerned with evidence.
- a response to *epistemic anxiety* or *epistemic certainty*.

There seems to be a problem in that faith could be related to just about anything. Maybe though, what we really care about is a sort of faith or an instance of faith in the right circumstances. That is, maybe we only care about saying something is an act of faith if the person having faith has it epistemically inappropriately. That would at least give it some purposeful use.

WHEN DO I USE FAITH?

A person will exhibit appropriate faith when:

- faith is *virtuous* or not *virtuous*.
- faith is not *epistemically overreaching* or is *epistemically overreaching*.
- evidence is optimal or sub-optimal.
- a person is *epistemically certain* or when *epistemically uncertain*.

There still seems to be a problem since instances of faith in any given context do not alone seem to guarantee that a person having faith in those contexts is having appropriate faith nor imply they are having inappropriate faith.

ICHIKAWA'S FAITH AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Conclusion: We should describe a subject's *having faith* in terms of *should-be faith*.

Motivation: Given other plausible ways to describe a subject's *having faith*, *should-be faith* is the only one that is the most flexible and is not weak.

The Argument ...

ICHIKAWA'S THEORY OF FAITH

Candidate Theories:

Anxious Faith = *df.* manifesting *if and only if* a subject relies on their epistemic judgments despite their felt temptation to epistemic anxiety.

Judgment Faith = *df.* manifesting *if and only if* a subject relies on their epistemic judgments regardless of whether they feel tempted to epistemic anxiety.

Would-be Faith = *df.* manifesting *if and only if* a subject relies on their epistemic judgments, even though a *psychologically ordinary human* would be likely to experience a felt temptation to epistemic anxiety.

Should-be Faith = *df.* manifesting when a speaker accurately describes a subject as relying on “faith” *if and only if* the subject relies on their epistemic judgments, even though the speaker’s conversational context treats temptations to epistemic anxiety as natural for someone in the subject’s position.

These theories should *in principle* follow this guide:

Faith Principle = *df.* we should flexibly describe *faith* as reliance on judgments where the anxiety-disposing potential epistemic shortcomings are relevant or salient to us, without the description being weak.

ICHIKAWA'S THEORY OF FAITH

In principle, we should flexibly describe *faith* as reliance on judgments where the anxiety-disposing potential epistemic shortcomings are relevant or salient to us, without the description being weak.

Does *anxious faith* work?

(1) If *judgment faith* is true, then *anxious faith* is false. (basic, implicit)

(2) *Judgment faith* is true. (basic)

(3) So, *Anxious faith* is false. (MP 1, 2)

E.g., *I have faith that tomorrow will very much resemble today.* (Confidence, not apprehension)

ICHIKAWA'S THEORY OF FAITH

In principle, we should flexibly describe *faith* as reliance on judgments where the anxiety-disposing potential epistemic shortcomings are relevant or salient to us, without the description being weak.

Does *judgment faith* work?

- (4) If *judgment faith* should not apply to subjects that should not typically feel *epistemic anxiety*, then *judgment faith* is a weak description of faith. (basic)
- (5) *Judgment faith* should not apply to subjects that should not typically feel *epistemic anxiety*. (basic)
- (6) **So, *judgment faith* is a weak description of faith. (MP 4, 5)**
- (7) If *judgment faith* is a weak description of faith, then we should use some description other than *judgment faith* that is flexible and is not weak. (basic, implicit)
- (8) **So, we should use some description other than *judgment faith* that is flexible and is not weak. (MP 6, 7)**

ICHIKAWA'S THEORY OF FAITH

In principle, we should flexibly describe *faith* as reliance on judgments where the anxiety-disposing potential epistemic shortcomings are relevant or salient to us, without the description being weak.

Does *would-be faith* work?

- (9) If *would-be faith* relies on the idea of *human psychology*, and *ordinary* is too broad a term, then *would-be faith* is not flexible and is weak. (basic)
- (10) *Would-be faith* relies on the idea of *human psychology*, and *ordinary* is too broad a term. (basic, implicit)
- (11) So, *would-be faith* is not flexible and is weak. (MP 9, 10)**
- (12) If *would-be faith* is not flexible and is weak, then we should use some description other than *would-be faith* that is flexible and is not weak. (basic, implicit)
- (13) So, we should use some description other than *would-be faith* that is flexible and is not weak. (MP 11, 12)**

ICHIKAWA'S THEORY OF FAITH

In principle, we should flexibly describe *faith* as reliance on judgments where the anxiety-disposing potential epistemic shortcomings are relevant or salient to us, without the description being weak.

Does *should-be faith* work?

- (14) *Should-be faith* is flexible and is not weak and *should-be faith* describes *faith* as reliance on judgments where the anxiety-disposing potential epistemic shortcomings are relevant or salient to us. (basic, implicit)
- (15) If *should-be faith* is flexible and is not weak and *should-be faith* describes *faith* as reliance on judgments where the anxiety-disposing potential epistemic shortcomings are relevant or salient to us, then we should describe a subject's *having faith* in terms of *should-be faith*. (basic)
- (16) **So, we should describe a subject's *having faith* in terms of *should-be faith*. (MP 14, 15)**

MY CONCERN

Ichikawa holds that a key feature of faith ascription is that there must be a relevant-to-us potential for anxiety stemming from perceived epistemic shortcomings. On that condition, one *has faith* in relying on those judgments. However, there is at least one case where *having faith* cannot be represented by his conclusion that *should-be faith* is flexible and not weak while meeting the aims of this key feature.

Recall:

Should-be Faith = *df.* manifesting when a speaker accurately describes a subject as relying on “faith” *if and only if* the subject relies on their epistemic judgments, even though the speaker’s conversational context treats temptations to epistemic anxiety as natural for someone in the subject’s position.

Ichikawa himself provides a possible situation where a person finds no fault in their epistemology while noting that acting on a judgment might take faith just in case one must overcome psychological anxiety. Imagine any phobia and not just Ichikawa’s example of fear of heights. Such fears are not generated from epistemic doubts or from any want of more evidence or epistemic assurances. To act against that sort of anxiety is an act of epistemic faith, nonetheless.

A REVISION

Faith Principle = *df.* we should flexibly describe *faith* as reliance on judgments where the anxiety-disposing potential epistemic shortcomings are relevant or salient to us, without the description being weak.

Faith Principle* = *df.* we should flexibly describe *faith* as reliance on judgments despite a gap existing between those judgments' epistemic merit and psychological confidence in those judgments, without the description being weak.

Should-be Faith = *df.* manifesting when a speaker accurately describes a subject as relying on “faith” *if and only if* the subject relies on their epistemic judgments, even though the speaker’s conversational context treats temptations to epistemic anxiety as natural for someone in the subject’s position.

Should-be Faith* = *df.* manifesting when a speaker accurately describes a subject as relying on “faith” *if and only if* the subject relies on their epistemic judgments, even though the speaker’s conversational context treats the subject’s psychological states as relevant to the subject’s reliance and as epistemically unwarranted.

These changes include not only reluctance to rely on judgments given apprehension but includes *epistemic overreach* where one has a confidence in a judgment that is not warranted given *epistemic merit*. Ichikawa simply denies *epistemic overreach* but that seems mistaken. These changes enhance descriptive flexibility while not weakening our sense of what faith is.

I ARGUE

We should consider faith to be *should-be faith** and then:

Faith is about relying on judgments, judgements rely on beliefs, and beliefs should be ethical.

Intuitively, belief is not just private, it is social too. What we believe affects others as well as ourselves, especially beliefs that matter most. So, *having faith* is not always a private affair. And, when faith is a private affair, there generally is not anything at stake in getting things wrong. When there is, in any case, we owe it to ourselves and others to get things right.

We believe what is true because that is virtuous. We believe what is true because we think it is good for us, and not just individually but good for all of us. Not believing what is true can be harmful, deceptive, dishonest. So, believing what is true is not just practical, it is ethical.

Now when there is a gap between psychological confidence in a judgment and the epistemic confidence that judgment merits, then faith is involved when we rely on that judgment.

Definitions of faith are not simply academic. We want something from the effort of sketching it out. It seems too that it is not just about noting that epistemically, psychological and epistemic confidence gaps are undesirable. The ascription of *having faith* is usually one of praise or blame.

We can extend Ichikawa's framework to serve as an objective basis for considering a person's *having faith* as praiseworthy or blameworthy.

Having faith regards epistemic judgments and that *faith* in reliance on those judgments ought to help morally desirable ends obtain. *Good faith* is then reliance on judgments aimed at truth and where we desire our beliefs to be ethical beyond just their being true. *Bad faith*, in this context, would simply be the antithesis of *good faith*.

Good faith examples can be found in the *principle of charity* and *benefit of the doubt* where these judgments ethically ignore evidence until evidence is sufficient to clearly indicate the truth.

This is a praise of *faith* from a purely ethical notion that despite what appears true at least to us, we ought to see things in the best light possible until it is clear the truth is actually the same or different than we thought.

A *bad faith* example can be found in the disbelief of our scientific knowledge of biology and biological diversity for the sake of some religious conviction.

This is blame of *faith* on the *should-be faith** account, where the context is science and evolution and a notion of ethics is applied; there is something at stake with getting science and evolution wrong and there is literally no good reason to doubt theories of biodiversity.

The argument can be seen in its simplest form ...

- (17) *Good beliefs* are beliefs that are ethically warranted and all judgments derive from beliefs. (basic)
- (18) If *good beliefs* are beliefs that are ethically warranted and all judgments derive from beliefs, then *good judgments* derive from *good beliefs*. (basic)
- (19) So, *good judgments* derive from *good beliefs*. (MP 17, 18)**
- (20) *Faith* entails reliance on judgments. (basic)
- (21) *Good judgements* derive from *good beliefs* and *faith* entails reliance on judgments. (ADJ 19, 20)
- (22) If *good judgments* derive from *good beliefs* and *faith* entails reliance on judgments, then *good faith* is reliance on *good judgments*. (basic)
- (23) So, *good faith* is reliance on *good judgments*. (MP 21, 22)**

Should-be faith* provides a way to objectively identify instances of faith. ***Should-be faith**** also gives us a way of treating the goal of *good faith* and epistemology both as ethical endeavors. In this way, we can better incorporate the use of *faith* in epistemology as part of the ongoing discussion of *The Ethics Of Belief*. So while it is true we should possess sufficient evidence for our beliefs, we do not always and in those cases, we should rely on *good faith*.

APPENDIX

The *faith principle* is implied by: "... I am more inclined towards a more flexible treatment of 'faith' language, according to which we describe something as faith when someone relies on judgments, where the anxiety-disposing potential epistemic shortcomings are relevant or salient to us." (134)

(2) *Judgment faith* is different than *anxious faith* because it allows that faith can also be used as a term for someone who is not epistemically anxious; quite the contrary, a person having *judgment faith* has faith because they confidently trust in their epistemic judgment. Ichikawa gives *virtuous faith* as an example: "Virtuous faith is central to a great deal of epistemology." (121)

(5) We can of course argue that supreme confidence in epistemic judgments entails to supreme faith, but "... do we really want to say [*for instance*] that ordinary, unchallenged perceivers of augmented sevenths are exercising faith in their perceptual abilities?" (133)

(6) "Should we go so far as to say that any time one relies on a conclusive judgment, one manifests faith, regardless of whether one has or would be expected to have considered any kinds of skeptical pressure? [*Judgment faith*] has a certain attractive simplicity, but it posits a rather weak notion of faith. (133)

(10) "... I am dubious that the notion of a 'psychologically ordinary person' is robust enough to do the work needed. Individuals vary with respect to which kinds of apparent epistemic shortcomings they find troublesome. Furthermore, it seems like a mistake to characterise faith in general in terms of ordinary human psychology; we want our notion of faith to be applicable to hypothetical Martians, etc., too. So I am more inclined towards a more flexible treatment of 'faith' language, according to which we describe something as faith when someone relies on judgments, where the anxiety-disposing potential epistemic shortcomings are relevant or salient to us." (134)

(14) "On this account whether one counts as exhibiting 'faith', in relying on one's judgment about something, will depend on which kinds of worries are treated as important in the speaker's conversational context. In a conversation in which the basics of racism in America are treated as obvious, and where no one is taking seriously the possibility that it might all be a phantasm of P.C. culture run amok, someone's firm commitment to the recognition of racism in America will not be described as 'faith'; in other contexts, where an inability to establish it from common ground is a salient liability, it will be accurately described as 'faith'." (134)