INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

LECTURE EIGHT

If my argument to date is right, there are good reasons to believe that there's a God arising from the fine-tuning version of the Design Argument and there may be good reasons arising from Religious Experience and Reports of Apparent Miracles; there aren't any good reasons to believe that there's not a God. What is the relationship between the belief that I've thus argued is the only rational one, that there's more likely to be a God than not, and having faith in God?

FAITH

The Faith is Belief That Theory: Faith in God = Belief that there's a God

Because faith is commended -

Committed to:	1) it's good to believe that there's a God
	2) it's within one's own power to acquire and maintain the belief that there's a God

Possible objections: To 1: the fact that many people don't believe that God exists is good reason – even on the truth of Theism - to suppose that it can't be that good to believe that He does

The more uncertainty there is about the existence of God the more it's possible for us to have a free choice between right and wrong. It's not implausible to suggest that it's good for us if we have such freedom and that this good might be so good for us that it's worth our missing out on the good of knowing with absolute certainty that there's a God, at least for the duration of our lives on earth.

To 2: beliefs-that are not under the direct control of the will

That's true *- Believe you're in Splat and earn yourself £50 example*
But beliefs-that are under the indirect control of the will *- Acquire knowledge of Philosophy of Religion example*

The Faith is Belief In Theory: Faith = moral/existential commitment to something/someone

Can believe that something is the case/exists (policy, person, et cetera) without believing in it/him/her
Belief-that does not require belief-in. Belief-in requires belief-that: one cannot make a commitment to something/someone one has no beliefs about.

Conclusion

Faith in God is a combination of believing that there's a God and believing in Him. It is not possible to believe in God whilst not believing that He exists, but it is possible - albeit irrational - to believe that He exists yet not believe in Him. And it's possible to have a full faith in God even if one's belief that there's a God is 'just' the belief that there's probably a God.

On the truth of theism, not believing in God will lead inevitably to 'idolatry', which is making one's ultimate moral or existential commitment to something less worthy than God.

Now let's go to the races …

Horse Race # 1

	Pay off if horse A wins	Pay off if horse B wins
Put £1 on horse A	*Plus £1 million net*	*Minus £1*
Put £1 on horse B	*Minus £1, multiple punches to face*	*Zero net*

It's rational for you to put your money on horse A.

Horse Race # 2

	Pay off if horse A wins	Pay off if horse B wins
Believe that horse A will win	*Plus £1 million net*	*Minus £1*
Believe that horse B will win	*Minus £1, multiple punches to face*	*Zero net*

It's rational for you to get yourself hypnotised into believing that horse A is going to win.

Pascal's Wager

	Pay off if there's a God	Pay off if there's not a God
Have faith in God	*Plus infinity net*	*Minus delta*
Don't have faith in God	*Minus infinity net*	*Plus delta*

Prayer as self(God?)-hypnosis? Will regularly praying to God that He help one have faith in Him - as a matter of empirical fact - increase one's chances of ending up believing that there's a God and thus - if one's reasonable - of having faith in Him? Is it reasonable to think of prayer as a truth-directed process?

Criticisms of Pascal's Wager

It's unreasonable to think the pay-offs are as stated. It's more reasonable to think that if there's a God, then He'll ultimately let everybody into Heaven anyway, whether or not they've had faith in Him during their earthly lives. But – unsupported empirical claim - it's also more reasonable to think that faith in God brings at least some net benefits in this world, plus alpha.

Reformed Pascal's Wager

	Pay off if there's a God	Pay off if there's not a God
Have faith in God	*Plus alpha, plus infinity*	*Plus alpha*
Don't have faith in God	*Minus (alpha plus punishment), plus infinity*	*Zero net*

It's rational to have faith in God.

CONCLUSION

I believe that I've shown that the fine-tuning version of the Design Argument gives us good reasons (albeit on controversial assumptions) to believe that there's a God and that the Argument from Religious Experience and the Argument from (Reports of) Apparent Miracles are arguments which might - in principle - give one good reasons for believing that there's a God (and they rely on what are – I'd hazard – less controversial assumptions [philosophical assumptions that is; the empirical points are more controversial]). And I've argued that we don't have any reasons to suppose that there's not a God. If there is then overall reason to believe that there's (probably) a God, that quickly entails that it is reasonable to have faith in Him (and unreasonable not to do so). Furthermore, a reformed Pascal's Wager type argument might - in principle - give one reasons for having faith in God (if there's a this-worldly positive [plus alpha] pay-off, as I suggest that there is), even if one hadn't got the truth-directed reasons that I've suggested one does have for believing that there's (probably) a God.

SUGGESTED READING

My own views are given at greater length in my *Belief in God* (OUP, 2005). Naturally, I'd be delighted were you to buy this, even more so were you to buy it and read it. Some advice on other general reading is given in one of the first handouts I gave you – the one which repeats what's said in the lecture prospectus. (You'll see from comparing this paragraph with the one there that my modesty has decreased in that I'm now recommending my own book.)

CAUTIONARY NOTE

Each week I try to remember to mention that of course my views on the topics covered are ones that you're free to depart from; I've tried to give an overview of the main issues in the discipline, but it's been from a particular perspective and you might quite legitimately have another perspective. In any case, thank you for coming along and hearing mine.

Finally, and of especial interest perhaps if you missed one or more of the lectures, I plan to ask the Faculty to put up (somewhere findable) on it's website some MP3s of these lectures, along with softcopies of the handouts. Wherever they end up, I'll ask that these be accessible via a link from my webpage:-
http://www.philosophy.ox.ac.uk/members/philosophy_panel/tim_mawson.

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