

Long, “Religious Pragmatism through the eyes of Luke Skywalker”

Distinguish: Truth-conducive reasons: Reasons demonstrating the truth of a belief

Pragmatic reasons: Practical benefits for holding belief

Distinguish: Moral wrong
Epistemic wrong

“What makes a belief immoral is not simply a matter of whether that belief is true or false, or even whether it is fruitful or unfruitful, but rather of how it originated.”

What this suggests: Whether a belief is *morally acceptable* and whether it is *advantageous* are separate matters

Q1 is faith morally acceptable?

Three conditions for moral acceptability in faith:

- 1) Proposition must be intellectually undecidable
 - a. Not resolvable by empirical (or other) inquiry
 - i. If there's a way to externally justify the belief, then you should
- 2) Taking faith is a *genuine option*
 - a. The option is *living*
 - i. There exist at least two “real possibilities” to choose between
 - ii. Not rigorously defined, but we can intuitively understand:
 1. It's *logically* possible for me to win the UFC belt, but not a live option for me right now
 - b. The option is *forced*
 - i. You can't “not decide”
 1. ex: Either you do my HW for me, or I kill your cat
 2. Question: Is there really any such thing? The example in the book is Luke's decision to swing across the death star chasm, because “choosing not to decide would be identical to choosing death”.
 - a. It's true that the *results* of this choice would be the same (so the same from a practical standpoint), but is that all that matters here?
 - b. Raise Emilio case. Is choosing not to shoot the one the same as choosing the deaths of the remaining 9?
 - c. The option is *momentous*
 - i. It must be a matter of some consequence

Let's suppose that religious faith (such as the faith Luke has in the force's ability to guide his torpedo) meets these three conditions. Do we therefore think it's ok for Luke to turn off the computer? If so, is this only because it happens to have the right result? If he had missed, could we blame him for having this faith?

Q2 Is faith advantageous?

Long approaches this by asking whether the possible advantages of faith in Luke's case are greater than the possible disadvantages of believing wrong

P1

"Believing what's true is equally or even more important than weeding out false beliefs." (209)

We could avoid error simply by holding no beliefs. But isn't it also important to positively believe true things?

P2

"Some truths cannot be realized without faith"

Han "creates the truth of his survival" by having the faith to charge into an asteroid belt

-But he could get them all killed! And so could Luke by trusting the force rather than the computer!

-Rejoinder: Another guy missed using the computer—so maybe it's ok to trust the force instead?

So there are good practical reasons to have faith

But there's something weird going on here: "I believe in the goodness of my students because I think some good will come of it and no harm will be done." But this isn't the same as the case with Luke or Han—massive harm could be done!

Let's think about the status of other religious beliefs:

Suppose I have what I take to be a religious experience. God appears to me and tells me that if I don't rid the world of all left-handed women, he will flood the earth and kill everyone in 2020. So, on faith, I get after it and start killing left-handed women. It seems like my faith meets the three criteria for James' moral permissibility, but isn't there something *deeply morally wrong* about it?