



Can We Do Away With Faith?

*“Now faith [=pistis] is the
assurance of things hoped for, the
conviction of things not seen.”
(St. Paul, Hebrews 11:1)*

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PHI 171 - Fall 2014

*“For we live by faith, not by sight.”
(St. Paul, 2 Corinthians 5:7)*

God, Suffering and Faith

Can we prove
that God exists?

If God exists,
why is there
suffering in the
world?

Can we do
away with
faith?



Bruegel the Elder, *Tower of Babel*

Can We Do *Away* With Faith?

Clifford's *Ethics of Belief*

A Shipowner and His Ship



—Clifford, *The Ethics of Belief*, PART I

“A shipowner was about to send to sea an emigrant-ship [...] Doubts had been suggested to him that possibly she was not seaworthy. These doubts preyed upon his mind, and made him unhappy; he thought that perhaps he ought to have her thoroughly overhauled and refitted, even though this should put him to great expense. Before the ship sailed, however, he succeeded in overcoming these melancholy reflections [...] He would put his trust in Providence [...] In such ways he acquired a sincere and comfortable conviction that his vessel was thoroughly safe and seaworthy”

What Happened Next?



“[...] he watched her (=the ship's) departure with a light heart, and benevolent wishes for the success of the exiles in their strange new home that was to be; and he got his insurance-money when she went down in mid-ocean and told no tales.”

—Clifford, *The Ethics of Belief*, PART I

Shall We Hold the Shipowner Accountable for the Disaster?

The Shipowner Had No Right to Believe Things on Insufficient Evidence

“What shall we say of him? Surely this, that he was verily guilty of the death of those men [...] he did sincerely believe in the soundness of his ship; but the sincerity of his conviction can in no wise help him, because *he had no right to believe on such evidence as was before him [...]* And although in the end he may have felt so sure about it that he could not think otherwise, yet inasmuch as he had knowingly and willingly worked himself into that frame of mind, he must be held responsible for it.”

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—Clifford, *The Ethics of Belief*, PART I

The Duty To Question and Doubt Everything



“No simplicity of mind, no obscurity of station, can escape the universal duty of questioning all that we believe. It is true that this duty is a hard one, and the doubt which comes out of it is often a very bitter thing. [...] We feel much happier and more secure when we think we know precisely what to do [...] we naturally do not like to find that we are really ignorant and powerless, that we have to begin again at the beginning [...] It is the sense of power attached to a sense of knowledge that makes men desirous of believing, and afraid of doubting.”

—Clifford, The Ethics of Belief, PART I

But Why Should We Doubt and
Question What We Believe?

Bad Consequences Result from Believing Without Evidence

“Every time we let ourselves believe for unworthy reasons, we weaken our powers of self- control, of doubting, of judicially and fairly weighing evidence. We all suffer severely enough from the maintenance and support of false beliefs [...] But a greater and wider evil arises when the credulous character is maintained and supported, when a habit of believing for unworthy reasons is fostered and made permanent [...] The danger to society is not merely that it should believe wrong things, though that is great enough; but that it should become credulous, and lose the habit of testing things and inquiring into them; for then it must sink back into savagery.”

—Clifford, The Ethics of Belief, PART I

Clifford's Main Claim—

“It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.”

But if we accept Clifford's claim, do we have sufficient evidence to believe in God?

William James' *Will to Believe*

It is Advisable to Keep Doubting and Questioning in the Realm Science and Philosophy

“The attitude of skeptical balance is therefore the absolutely wise one if we would escape mistakes. What difference, indeed, does it make to most of us whether we have or have not a theory of the Roentgen rays, whether we believe or not in mind-stuff, or have a conviction about the causality of conscious states? It makes no difference. Such options are not forced on us. On every account it is better not to make them, but still keep weighing reasons *pro et contra* with an indifferent hand”

—James, *The Will to Believe*

But Can We Keep Doubting About
Everything?

We Cannot Keep Doubting in Matters of Religion

“We are supposed to gain, even now,
by our belief, and to lose by our
nonbelief, a certain vital good. [...]

We cannot escape the issue by
remaining skeptical and waiting for
more light, because, although we do
avoid error in that way if religion be
untrue, we lose the good, if it be true,
just as certainly as if we positively
chose to disbelieve. . . .”

—James, The Will to Believe

Fear
(That Religion is False)
versus
Hope
(That Religion is True)
—
Which Should We Follow?

“To preach skepticism to us as a duty until “sufficient evidence” for religion be found is tantamount therefore to telling us, when in presence of the religious hypothesis, that to yield to our fear of its being error is wiser and better than to yield to our hope that it may be true.”

—James, *The Will to Believe*

Weighing Two Risks — Pascal's Wager

	I. God exists	II. God does not exist
i. I believe	A. Infinite gain minus finite loss	B. Finite loss
ii. I do not believe	C. Finite gain minus infinite loss	D. Finite gain

A. If we believe in God, we run the risk of being wrong. God might not exist.

This risk involves a **finite loss**.

B. If we do not believe in God, we run the risk of being wrong. God might exist after all.

This risk involves an **infinite loss**, for example, the loss of eternal life.

The second risk is greater than the first, so it's reasonable to believe in God.