

The life of faith as a work of art: a Rabbinic theology of faith

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Abstract This paper argues that God, despite his Perfection, can have faith in us. The paper includes exegesis of various Midrashi texts, so as to understand the Rabbinic claim that God manifested faith in creating the world. After the exegesis, the paper goes on to provide philosophical motivation for thinking that the Rabbinic claim is consistent with Perfect Being Theology, and consistent with a proper analysis of the nature of faith. Finally, the paper attempts to tie the virtue that faith can exhibit to the virtues associated with art, as it is understood by R. G. Collingwood. This association is particularly apt, given the Midrashic description of God as an artist. All of this is offered in response to Rabbi Moses Nachmanides who argued (against other important commentaries) that Abraham’s faith, in Genesis 15:6, wasn’t worthy of particular praise.

Keywords Faith · Art · Midrash · Divine emotions · R. G. Collingwood

In this paper, I claim that the virtue of faith is related to the virtue of self-expression and art. I arrive at these claims in conversation with the Rabbinic tradition that God has faith in us.

Is faith a Jewish virtue?

God assured Abraham that he would have a son. The Bible then reports: Abraham ‘had faith in the Lord; and he considered it unto him as righteousness’ (Genesis 15:6). The *Mekhilta of Rabbi Yishmael*¹ states:

¹ A Midrashic collection, redacted *circa.* third century from texts dating back to the end of the first century.

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Our father Abraham inherited this world and the world to come only as a reward for the faith with which he had faith in the Lord, as it says ‘And he had faith in the Lord, and it was considered unto him as righteousness.’

Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, otherwise known as Rashi, understands our verse the same way. Abraham’s faith was righteous. Moses Nachmanides, in *his* commentary to the verse, disagrees:

I do not understand what this merit would be. Why *wouldn't* you have faith in the trustworthy God? This is about a *prophet*; not a [regular] deceitful human being.² He who had faith enough to slaughter his only beloved son, and [faith enough to endure] other tests; how should he not have had faith regarding *good* tidings [i.e., that he should have a son]?

According to Nachmanides, Abraham had understood previous promises of offspring to be conditional upon Abraham’s continued righteousness, leading him to fear that he may fail to meet the condition. Abraham eventually recognises, through God’s reassurance, that the promise *wasn't* conditional upon *Abraham's* continued righteousness, but upon *God's*. Consequently, Abraham had faith in God’s promise, knowing that God is righteous.

Consider the following sentence:

1. Simon embraced Ruben; he loved him.

Who loved whom? On the straightforward reading, Simon is the subject, and Ruben the object, of both verbs (‘to embrace’ and ‘to love’). To read it as saying that Simon embraced Ruben and that *Ruben* loved Simon is to suggest a somewhat implausible switch of subject and object. Likewise, the most straightforward reading of:

2. Abraham had faith in the Lord, and he considered him to be righteous

would be that Abraham had faith in the Lord and that *Abraham* considered the *Lord* to be righteous.

Rashi and the *Mekhilta* before him, on the other hand, *do* think of faith as virtuous, even for a person in Abraham’s epistemic state. How might *they* respond to Nachmanides, who was singularly unimpressed by Abraham’s having faith in God (at least, in this instance)? I will suggest a response, inspired by (though not dependent upon) the idea that God Himself has faith.

Four options

Does faith require uncertainty? If so, God cannot have faith without the *defect* of uncertainty. However, there are Biblical verses in which the word ‘אמונה’, which is the Hebrew for ‘faith’, *is* applied to God.³ Fidelity to the Bible therefore requires

² There is an allusion here to Numbers 23:19 which is lost in translation.

³ These verses are cited in “[From the bible to the rabbis](#)” section below.

that we: (a) give up on the notion of God’s perfection, (b) argue that a perfect being *can* somehow suffer from uncertainty, (c) read all of the verses in question so as to avoid the conclusion that God *really* has faith, or (d) jettison the notion that faith always requires uncertainty.

Contemporary normative Judaism is generally committed to God’s perfection. Accordingly, I would very much like to avoid option (a). An Open Theist might be able to make sense of option (b). They might think that even an *omniscient* God can’t know future contingents because they haven’t yet happened; they don’t yet exist to be known.⁴ A perfect God could then have faith that *p* as long as the openness of the future generated reasons enough for an omniscient being to doubt whether *p*. Notwithstanding, I want to avoid taking a stance on the metaphysics of time, or on God’s *relationship* to time. Accordingly, I pass-over option (b). In “[From the bible to the rabbis](#)” section, I explore option (c), that the Bible doesn’t *really* attribute faith to God. I find the matter to be under-determined. In the rest of the paper, I develop option (d)—a perfect God *can* have faith *without* uncertainty. I then address the ways in which faith, so understood, might be a virtue.

From the bible to the rabbis

In the book of Numbers (12:6–8) God says:

Listen to my words: When there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is **נאמן** in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord.

What does ‘**נאמן**’ mean? Its root is ‘**נאמ**’, which can mean faith, trust, resilience, or belief. It appears here in the nif’al conjugation. This gives it a passive sense, and is best rendered as ‘faithful’, ‘worthy of faith’, or ‘trustworthy’. The verse seems to be saying that God has found Moses, above all others, to be worthy of *God’s* trust; worthy of God’s *faith*. And thus, this verse implies that God had faith in Moses. The book of Hosea contains the abiding sense that God feels betrayed by His wayward people; a re-occurring trope throughout the prophets. You might think that *betrayal* can only make sense given the prior presence of faith or trust to be betrayed. If God is betrayed, then He must have had faith.

These implicit faith-attributions are relatively easy—for the philosophically inclined—to parry away. It’s possible that ‘**נאמן**’ refers to Moses’ *having faith* (a somewhat forced reading, but it would still respect the passivity of the nif’al form of the word) rather than for his faith *worthiness*.⁵ Biblical portrayals of God’s sense of

⁴ Not *all* Open Theists deny that there are true future contingents, but this denial is *open* to and common among, Open Theists.

⁵ To support the claim that ‘**נאמן**’ can be read as ‘having faith’, see Jubilees 17:15 (with thanks to Professor Michael Segal for the reference). An anonymous reviewer suggests that even if Moses is described as worthy of God’s faith, it doesn’t automatically entail that God *has* faith. Moses could be hypothetically worthy of God’s faith, even if God isn’t the sort of being that *could* have faith!

betrayal could be figurative; designed only to evoke an appropriate response in the reader.

The root, ‘אמן’, appears in the Bible in a number of forms:

- (1) ‘נאמן’: on six occasions this word is applied to God.⁶ Each time it could be read merely to indicate that God is faithful, as in, trustworthy, or faith-worthy.
- (2) ‘האמין’: means ‘has faith’ or ‘believes’. This word is never applied, by the Bible, to God.⁷
- (3) ‘אמונה’: an abstract noun. It isn’t clear how we should translate it. It is either ambiguous—sometimes meaning *faith*, and sometimes meaning *faith-worthiness*—or it unambiguously picks out the property of both having faith *and* being worthy of faith, simultaneously. The Bible applies this word to God 23 times.⁸

The interpretative options presented by the word ‘אמונה’, come to the fore in the Rabbinic reading of Deuteronomy 32:4:

The Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice; a God of faith (אל אמונה), without iniquity, just and right is He.

The *Sifre*⁹ (307) provides us with two competing readings. It first reads our verse as a meditation on God’s act of creation:

‘The rock (Hebrew: *tzur*), His work is perfect’: The sculptor/artist (Heb: *tzayer*) who sculpted (Heb: *tzar*) the world and sculpted man, as it says, ‘The Lord God formed (Heb: *vayitzer*) man’(Genesis 2:7).

‘His work is perfect’: His work is complete over all that come into the world, and there is no place to wonder about His attributes... saying, ‘if only I had three eyes’; ‘if only I had three hands’; ‘if only I had three legs’; ‘if only I could walk on my head’; ‘if only I had a face that could turn all the way round’; ‘how nice it would be.’ The Torah comes to teach us: ‘His works are perfect’.¹⁰

‘For all His ways are justice’: He sits with each and every person in judgement, and gives to them what is fitting for them.

‘God of faith’: that He had faith in the world, and [consequently] it was created.

The Midrash then presents an alternative reading. The verse *isn’t* concerned with God’s acts of *creation*, but with His judicial and executive acts—after all, the verse

⁶ Deuteronomy 9:7, Isaiah 49:7, Jeremiah 42:5, Hosea 12:1, Psalms 19:8 and 111:7—the last two references apply the word not directly to God, but to His statutes, which are presented as fair.

⁷ The Septuagint (Habakuk 2:4) explicitly asserts that God has faith in righteous people. The Masoretic version of the same verse makes no such assertion.

⁸ Deuteronomy 32:4, Isaiah 11:5, Hosea 2:22, Psalm 33:4, Psalm 36:6, Psalm 40:11, Psalm 88:12, Psalm 89:2,6,9,25,34,50; Psalm 92:3, Psalm 96:13, Psalm 98:3, Psalm 100:5, Psalm 119:75,86,90,138, Psalm 143:1, Lamentations 3:23. In one instance, it’s negated of God: Job 4:18.

⁹ A collection of Midrashim, from texts dating back to the early third-century and earlier.

¹⁰ The wishes that get criticised all seem to be uttered by the able-bodied, wishing for super-human capabilities. Would this Midrash criticise a disabled person wishing, for example, that they had two arms, instead of one?

ends with the claim that God is ‘just and right.’ God’s judicial and executive actions are perfect. When the verse attributes ‘אֱמוּנָה’ to God, this alternative reading suggests that God is being designated as *worthy of faith*; as a trusty ‘guardian of a deposit’. What do we *deposit* with God? We deposit our soul with Him when we die. He can be trusted to give you back, at the time of the resurrection, the very same soul that you will entrust to Him at the moment of your death.¹¹

The attribution of אֱמוּנָה to God thus always seems open to two readings—God as having faith, or God as worthy of faith. Accordingly, our focus should shift from the Bible, where (if you stubbornly parry away all of the many *implicit* faith attributions) it’s an open question, to the Rabbis of the first reading of the Sifre. They *certainly* suggest that God’s creating the world was an act of faith. What might *they* have meant?

In the next three sections, I explore various Midrashic treatments of God’s act of creation, in order to understand how it might have been thought of, by the Rabbis, as an act of *faith*.

Taking the plunge

Based on a grammatical peculiarity in Genesis 2:3, the Midrash (*Tanchuma*, Bereshit 17¹²) imagines that God had creations that He had wanted to complete during the six days of creation, but that His work was permanently interrupted by the onset of the Sabbath:

Rabbi Bannaya said: These are the demons, whose souls He had created. While He was creating their bodies, the Sabbath commenced. So He left them alone and they survive to the present as spirit with no body... [W]hen one [ejaculates] upon a female demon, he will have demon children.

Leibniz famously thought that this world is the best of all possible worlds. But perhaps there’s no such thing as a *best* world. Perfection for a world might be nothing more than a regulative ideal that can never be reached. Take any possible world, and you’ll find that you can always make it better. If that’s the case, then if God was waiting until the world had been perfected before He brought in the first Sabbath, He would have been waiting forever. At some point, if God was ever going to create, then He was going to have to take the plunge.

In any possible world, there will always be things that could have been created but weren’t. These are, I suggest, what the demons come to symbolise. In the human reproductive act, the mature adult male ejaculates approximately 300 million sperm cells per millilitre of semen. Only one cell is required to fertilise an egg. The rest, so

¹¹ The *Modeh Ani* prayer attributes great faith to God (alluding to Lamentations 3:23). It seems to imply that we wouldn’t have woken up, each morning, had God not had faith in us. However, a proper reading of that prayer is best informed by this Midrash. God is a *trustworthy* custodian of our soul each night. The theme is developed further by *Midrash Tehellim*, *Mizmor* 25, upon which the prayer was almost certainly based. The prayer thus praises God not for His great faith, but for His great *faithfulness* (i.e., faith-worthiness).

¹² Potentially redacted as late as the ninth century, but certainly containing older passages.

to speak, go to waste. This illustrates quite powerfully that when we create, we create demons in our wake. The artist has to put the paintbrush down. The sculptor has to lay down the chisel. When we *do* stop—when the Sabbath commences—there will always be avenues unpursued; possibilities left unactualised; formless demons forever left without bodies. Creation involves taking a plunge.

Platonism and concreta

In the wake of the sin of Adam and Eve, we are told that the earth was cursed (Genesis 3:17). Why? What had it done wrong? Enter the Midrash (Bereshit Rabba¹³ 5:9):

R. Judah b. R. Shalom said: Because she disobeyed [God's] command. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: "Let the earth put forth grass, herb yielding seed, and fruit-trees bearing fruit" (Genesis 1:11): just as the fruit is eaten, so should the tree be edible. She, however, did not do [as she was told] but "The land produced grass, herb yielding seed, according to their kinds, and trees bearing fruit" (Genesis 1:12): the fruit could be eaten but *not* the tree.

One of the central doctrines of Plato's philosophy is, as explained by Richard Kraut (2015), that:

The world that appears to our senses is in some way defective and filled with error, but there is a more real and perfect realm, populated by entities (called "forms" or "ideas") that are eternal, changeless, and in some sense paradigmatic for the structure and character of the world presented to our senses.

A tree is a tree because it instantiates the form of *treehood*. Plato's account of *instantiation* is that the tree is somehow a *pale reflection* of the form of treehood. Instantiation is a type of similarity. Instantiation can never be exact because exact similarity to the form of *treehood* is *identity* and is only had by the form itself.¹⁴ It follows that everything in the sensible world must be 'in some way defective and filled with error.' Nothing in this world completely lives up to the forms that they instantiate to varying incomplete degrees.

¹³ Most likely redacted in the fourth/fifth century.

¹⁴ I assume that (1) Plato endorses the identity of indiscernibles, and (2) Platonic forms are supposed to instantiate themselves perfectly. Constance Meinwald (1992) denies (2). From the *Parmenides* onwards, Plato was committed to the truth of 'treehood is a tree' and to the *denial* of the notion that forms instantiate themselves. She argues that he made these claims on the basis of the equivocality of 'is', corresponding to a number of different modes of predication (see also Michael Frede (1967, 1992)). Notwithstanding, I think I'm entitled to my assumptions for the following reasons: (a) I'm not interested here in what Plato *really* thought, but in how Plato had been received by those Rabbis under his influence; (b) even according to Meinwald, prior to the *Parmenides*, Plato thought that forms instantiate themselves, and that only *forms* perfectly instantiate themselves; and (3) the conjunction of my two assumptions provides a good way of explaining why Plato thought that the concrete, as opposed to the abstract, was irreparably corrupted.

God has an idea of what trees should be, but it simply isn't possible for a concrete tree to live up exactly to that ideal. There is a poetic justice to God's cursing the earth. It didn't obey God's command. In verse 12, we are told that God looked at what He had created and 'saw that it was good.' That's to say, God wasn't *really* disappointed with the world's disobedience. He recognised that it couldn't be any other way. He wanted a concrete world (along with the inherent defects that come along with being concrete), and a concrete world is what He got. But, in order to create a concrete world, God had to be reconciled to the inherent imperfections that would emerge.

Creativity, mercy, and $\tau\omicron\tau$

Another Midrashic tradition (Bereshit Rabba 8:4):

R. Berekiah said: When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to create Adam, He saw righteous and wicked [offspring] arising from him. He said: If I create him, wicked men will spring from him; if I do not create him, how are the righteous to spring from him?' What then did God do? He removed the way of the wicked out of His sight, and associated the quality of mercy with Himself and created him, as it is written, *For the Lord regards the ways of the righteous, but the ways of the wicked shall perish* (Ps. 1:6). He destroyed [the vision of future wickedness] from before His sight and associated the quality of mercy with Himself and created [Adam].

In a related tradition, it isn't God's *mercy* that has to prevail, but His $\tau\omicron\tau$. I translate ' $\tau\omicron\tau$ ', provisionally, as *lovingkindness*.

Rabbi Simon said: When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to create Adam, the ministering angels formed themselves into groups and parties, some of them saying, 'Let him be created', whilst others urged, 'Let him not be created.' Thus it is written, *Lovingkindness and truth fought together, righteousness and peace combated each other* (Ps 85:11): Lovingkindness said, 'Let him be created, because he will dispense acts of lovingkindness'; Truth said, 'Let him not be created, because he is compounded of falsehood'; Righteousness said, 'Let him be created, because he will perform righteous deeds'; Peace said, 'Let him not be created, because he is full of strife.'

What did the Lord do? He took truth and cast it to the ground. Said the ministering angels before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Sovereign of the Universe! Why do you despise your seal?

Let truth arise from the earth! Hence it is written, *Let truth spring up from the earth* (ib. 12).

The internal conflict of the previous Midrash is here transposed upon the angels, who divide into parties, representing God's conflicted qualities (if you resist this reading, concentrate solely on the previous Midrash where the conflict is *certainly* presented as internal to God). In these Midrashim, God has to allow some of His attributes to suppress others. To be held hostage to your own perfectionism is to be

inhibited from creativity. One of the character traits that helps God, in the Midrash, to overcome this inhibition is *lovingkindness*. As I said, *lovingkindness* is just a working translation of ‘ $\tau\omicron\eta$ ’. What, *really*, is $\tau\omicron\eta$?

In Leviticus 20:17, incest between a brother and sister is forbidden, and called an act of $\tau\omicron\eta$. It seems inappropriate to translate it there as *lovingkindness*.¹⁵ Plausibly, $\tau\omicron\eta$ actually has something to do with breaking down boundaries. Where regular people (or perhaps miserly people) say, ‘what’s yours is yours and what’s mine is mine’, a person animated by $\tau\omicron\eta$ says that ‘what’s yours is yours and what’s mine is yours too!’¹⁶ It *isn’t* characterised as $\tau\omicron\eta$ to say that ‘what’s mine is mine and what’s yours is mine.’ That would be theft, or arrogance. There’s a *direction* to $\tau\omicron\eta$. It starts inside the agent and moves *outwards*. When I give of myself, across a boundary—it’s $\tau\omicron\eta$; not when I *take* for myself. $\tau\omicron\eta$ *can* cross boundaries that the Torah doesn’t want broken, as in the case of incest. $\tau\omicron\eta$ is something like a psychic power that moves outwards, breaking through psychological and social boundaries (often for the good, but sometimes for the bad).

According to the Midrashim we’ve seen, God (a) had to take a plunge; (b) had to reconcile Himself to an inevitable disparity between His plan for the world and the way (He knew) it would turn out; and (c) had to exercise $\tau\omicron\eta$ in order to overcome certain inhibitions. In the next sections, I ask whether a perfect being could plausibly be said to have done these things, and whether they can plausibly be characterised, collectively, as a species of *faith*.

Divine faith

Can god take a plunge?

When talking of God’s choosing between possible worlds—as we did quite freely in “[Taking the plunge](#)” section above, we stumble into some thorny issues. As Klaas Kraay (2010) puts it, when thinking of God choosing a world:

It is sometimes tempting to imagine that, in so doing, (a) God stands outside the set of possible worlds; [and] that (b) God always creates something...

But if God is a *necessary* being, then He exists in all possible worlds. We can’t think of Him standing outside of them. And, just as it’s tempting to say, on the model of God’s choosing a world, that God *must* create something; it also might be tempting

¹⁵ Gesenius (1979, p. 293) suggests that ‘ $\tau\omicron\eta$ ’ can sometimes mean ‘disgrace’, by means of antiphrasis. This was anticipated by Rashi (who appeals to the Aramaic word ‘ $\tau\omicron\eta$ ’) and by Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra (citing Proverbs 25:10). Nachmanides rejects the idea that one Biblical word should have opposite meanings. He argues that ‘ $\tau\omicron\eta$ ’ always means *lovingkindness*, and reads the verse in question to be commenting on the nature of the bond between siblings which is *broken* by incest. Gaby Lebens has suggested, in conversation, a reading of the verse according to which the prohibition is *motivated* by lovingkindness—hoping to avoid birth-defects associated with incest. My explanation, however, is in the spirit of the commentaries of Ibn Caspi and Rabbi Meir Leibush Wisser (better known as the Malbim). The approach is also hinted to by Ibn Ezra.

¹⁶ This is a reference to the Mishna in Tractate Avot 5:10.

to talk of a choice *not* to actualise any world. Either way, we would have been confusing *creation* and *actualisation*. As Kraay (Ibid.) puts the distinction:

Creation occurs when God causes it to be the case that some spatiotemporal entity is actual, but not every instance of world-actualization need involve this. Suppose that God creates nothing. If so, there still is an actual world. We might call it the *bare world*, since it is empty—save for whatever uncreated existents (such as numbers and God) it contains.

Moreover, we should follow Kraay in distinguishing between possible worlds and universes. A universe is ‘a spatiotemporally-interrelated, causally-closed aggregate’ (Ibid.). Kraay urges us not to quickly assume that there is a one-to-one correspondence between possible worlds and possible universes. On the contrary, Kraay argues that some possible worlds contain more than one, causally discrete, universe. Some possible worlds are *multiverses*.

The same considerations apply to universes as to worlds. You might think that there can be no such thing as a best possible universe, but only a hierarchy, or a collection of possible universes with incommensurable value. Accordingly, God will have a choice. He can either create none of them, all of them, or one of them—picked arbitrarily.¹⁷ If He creates none of them, then He doesn’t create at all; the actual world will be bare. Classical theology claims that God had various *reasons* to create a universe: a decision *not* to create would thwart His will. Perhaps He creates *all* of them. This is the option that Kraay recommends to the theist. He calls the resulting world, the Theistic Multiverse. According to Kraay, there is no best universe, but there *is* a best possible world—it is the world that contains all worthy universes. God *must* create the Theistic Multiverse, Kraay insists, given a number of plausible assumptions. They are:

- PP1. If a universe is *creatable* by an unsurpassable being, and *worth creating* (i.e., it has an axiological status that surpasses some objective threshold *t*), that being will create that universe.
- PP2. If a being fails to create any universe that is both worth creating and creatable (by that being), then that being is surpassable.¹⁸

Accordingly, the only world that God could actualise—and therefore, the only possible world, will be one in which God creates every sufficiently worthy universe; i.e., the Theistic Multiverse. Should we accept Kraay’s principles? It seems to depend entirely upon what God’s reasons for creating a universe might be. Imagine

¹⁷ I rule out the idea that God would create n universes where n is less than all of the acceptable universes but $n > 1$. Why would God choose to create an arbitrary number of universes, if one would suffice, or if He could create all of them at no extra cost? If you’re unmoved by this argument, and think that God might chose to create an arbitrarily selected n universes, it still seems as if, by choosing them, and not all possible universes, God is taking a plunge nonetheless.

¹⁸ Another two principles of plenitude state that what can be said about creating universes can be said about sustaining them too, see (Kraay 2010).

that God only decides to create a universe for purpose X, and that for purpose X, one universe suffices—why should we assume that God, having achieved His purpose, would be unable to stop adding universes to His world?¹⁹ If one universe would suffice for God’s purposes, then it would seem like a defect if He were forced to create an infinite number rather than one chosen at random. Given that a perfect God could, given certain purposes, create only one universe, I think that a perfect God could take a plunge, just as the Midrash suggests.²⁰

Can god be disappointed?

Assume Plato’s theory of instantiation. When God decided to create the universe, He must have known beforehand exactly to what degree each particular tree would instantiate *treehood*, and exactly to what degree each flower would instantiate *flowerhood*. There should be no disparity between the vision that God has of the world, before He creates it, and the world He ends up creating, even on a Platonic metaphysics, unless you ascribe some sort of *defect* to God’s intellectual capacities.

Furthermore, the metaphysics seem absurd. Plato’s doctrine of instantiation led him directly to his third man regress. If all red things are only red insofar as they resemble *redness*, then it follows that redness itself must be red. If redness is red, then it shares a property with all red things. What *is* that property? Call it super-redness. If super-redness is shared by redness and all red things, and if property instantiation is similarity, then super-redness, redness and all red things must be similar in a certain respect. They must share a property in common. And thus the regress begins.²¹

Perhaps we could make sense of Rabbi Judah’s position by tying it to a different aspect of Platonic philosophy. Plato didn’t believe in creation *ex nihilo*. God merely gave form to a formless primordial matter that was co-eternal with Him. Creation *ex nihilo* eventually became the default Jewish position, but Gersonides is notable for trying to revive the denial of the doctrine (Feldman 1999). According to Gersonides, the entire notion of creation *ex nihilo* is incoherent. Perhaps Rabbi Judah thought the same. The raw materials available to God were going to place external limits upon just how good a universe He was going to be able to create. God had to reconcile Himself to that. Perhaps this was Rabbi Judah’s real point.

In actual fact, we can make sense of God’s reconciling Himself to creation without endorsing *any* of the distinctive commitments of Platonism; when applied not to *trees*, but to human beings.

¹⁹ Rabbi Hasdai Crescas thought that God’s purposes for creating a universe simply couldn’t be satisfied by any finite number of universes, and hence, according to Crescas, God must have created the Theistic Multiverse. Kraay’s position is therefore represented in the world of Jewish philosophy (Harvey 2011; Feldman 2012).

²⁰ For extensive references to this topic, including the literature concerning whether God can make arbitrary choices, see (Kraay 2008).

²¹ This is a contentious reading of Plato’s Third Man Argument. I merely contend that my presentation is a plausible reading of the *Parmenides* 13128ff. I also contend that, whether or *not* this was Plato’s argument, it is, *nevertheless*, a legitimate concern to hold against Plato’s theory of forms, at least pre-*Parmenides*. See footnote 14 above.

If you're an Open Theist, God really takes a risk in creating a world with free agents. He doesn't know exactly how things will turn out. The Midrashic tradition, by contrast, was open to the idea that God knew exactly how human beings would use and misuse their freedom. He wouldn't *control* it, but He could *foresee* it, and He chose to create the world nonetheless (see Bereshit Raba 27:4). Whether you're an Open Theist or *not*, you can coherently adopt the idea that God, in creating the universe, only chose the initial conditions, and then had to stand back, and allow human beings to chart the course of human history. In so doing, God had an ultimate veto—He could decide not to create at all, and can still destroy it all at any point along the way—but short of exercising that veto, God has to reconcile Himself to a creation that possibly won't live up completely to His hopes. If the trees can't let God down, *we* certainly can.²²

God, inhibitions, and תּוֹן

Some Jewish thinkers have denied the claim that God is a person.²³ But it seems reasonable to demand that God *should* be a person. We are supposed to be able to enter into personal relationships with Him. Accordingly, *I* assume that God *is* a person; a perfect incorporeal person. I assume that God therefore has a mental life. Could the mental life of a perfect person possibility exhibit the sorts of tensions and inhibitions that תּוֹן is supposed to overcome?

First, I claim that God has emotions. Why *deny* that claim? Here are three reasons²⁴:

One. Emotions are *feelings*, caused by changes in one's physiological condition. In the words of William James (1884, p. 190), 'we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and [it is] not that we cry, strike, or tremble, because we are sorry, angry, or fearful, as the case may be'. If God doesn't have a body, then He doesn't have emotions.

Two. Emotions are nothing more than cognitive defects. This seems to have been a dominant view of emotions in ancient Greece (Nussbaum 1994). Emotions like hurt feelings and betrayal would suggest a weakness in God that would be incompatible with His omnipotence. An emotional God would be held captive by His emotions, hamstrung into inaction as often as He might be cajoled into irrational action.

Three. The reasons that rational *humans* might require emotions don't apply to God. Some have argued that *emotions* help us to winnow down the options, when selecting from an infinite stock of possible goals and strategies. According to this

²² This paragraph echoes the core of Alvin Plantinga's Free Will Defence (Plantinga 1977).

²³ I shall argue that personhood requires emotions. Maimonides argues, in his *Guide to the Perplexed*, I. LIV, that God has *no* emotions. For Maimonides, the word 'person', as I am using it, cannot apply to God. My fully articulated position, which I simplify for the purposes of this paper, is that 'God is a perfect person' is literally true, relative to the story in which we live, but possibly meaningless, or false, when said of the same God outside of the story (Lebens 2015, Forthcoming). As far as Maimonides is concerned, on the other hand, it can never be literally true to say of God that He has emotions; or is a person.

²⁴ For a more thorough exploration of these issues, see Anastasia Scrutton (2013).

‘search hypothesis of emotions’, emotions help us to eliminate certain options a priori, saving us from wasting time and processing power (Evans 2002). Emotions play this role by making only certain options salient. A perfect person with infinite cognitive processing power, wouldn’t have this need for emotions.

I respond. First. James’ theory of emotions has been subject to a great deal of scrutiny. The theory is accused of being ill-equipped to stand up to various philosophical and empirical critiques (Cannon 1929; Schacter and Singer 1962; Taylor 1975).²⁵ Second and third. Any idea that emotions are a cognitive defect is undermined by research suggesting that emotions can aid, in *multiple* ways, the *exercise* of reason. The idea isn’t merely that emotions can help us finite beings to take short-cuts in our reasoning. The idea is that emotions give us ‘non-substitutable’ intellectual advantages that can’t in principle be had without emotion (Scrutton 2012). Rosalind Picard has marshalled a lot of this research, and argues that in order to approximate true intelligence, we will have to find ways of imbuing computers with appropriate emotions (Picard 1997).²⁶

Magai and Haviland-Jones (2002, p. 7) argue that emotion ‘is the creative and organizing force behind all mental life.’ On their account, it turns out that without emotion there is no personality, since ‘personality [is] a set of complex, constantly evolving, emotional strategies for coping with the diverse experiences of life’ (Magai and Haviland-Jones 2002, p. 13). Without emotions there is no personality, and without personality, there is no personhood. If God is a person, He must have an emotional life.

Even if God is *not* a person, He couldn’t be omniscient unless He had an emotional life. Omniscience must understand what emotions are like, from the inside (Scrutton 2012, 2013; Zagzebski 2013a, b). On some occasions, emotions are an *apt* response to stimuli. If disgust is thought, *objectively*, to be the appropriate response to stimuli X, and admiration to be the appropriate response to stimuli Y,²⁷ then an agent with no emotions could be said to be curiously unresponsive to objective features of reality.

One can imagine a scene that is both comic and tragic at the same time (i.e. ‘tragicomic’), or an experience that is bittersweet. If there are stimuli that appropriately call forth those sorts of complex emotional responses, then one can

²⁵ Alexander Douglas has suggested to me, in correspondence, that:

the James-Lange thesis is a particularly strong version of the idea that emotions necessarily involve the body, which is very common from the *Phaedo* onwards. A weaker version would be that of Descartes: emotions require a body in the same way that sense-perceptions do. Maybe you can stoically control your crying, trembling, etc., but you still need a nervous system to have the emotions since it’s just part of what an emotion is that it involves nerves.

In response, and in place of an argument, I can only point out that I endorse Linda Zagzebski’s contention that a perfect God would be omnibusjective, and would know exactly what sense-perception is like, even though He doesn’t have sensory organs (Zagzebski 2013a, b). It seems that omnibusjectivity, as a notion, is bound to the doctrine that experiences typically mediated by physiology are, in principle, open to be had by an immaterial subject of experience. Accordingly, I deny that having nerves is part of what emotions are. If I were to develop an independent argument for this claim, I would start with Saul Kripke’s discussion of pain and C-fibres firing, at the end of *Naming and Necessity* (Kripke 1972).

²⁶ Picard doesn’t claim that the advantages bought by emotion are in principle non-substitutable. She argues that we should work towards the creation of affective computers, because we don’t know of any other way to purchase these advantages (Picard 1997, p. 249).

²⁷ See Zagzebski (2013a, b).

start to see how a perfect person would find themselves experiencing even *countervailing* emotions. This is how God was pictured in the “[Creativity, Mercy, and \$\tau\omicron\pi\tau\$](#) ” section above. If that sort of tension held God *prisoner*, then we’d have reason to say that His omnipotence had been impugned. But that’s just a reason to think that He has the power of $\tau\omicron\pi\tau$ —the power that allows His will to break through any apparent psychological barrier, or inhibitions, freeing Him to act, where appropriate, in spite of countervailing emotions.

To attribute emotions to God is thought to be heterodox because it entails the denial of impassibility. I reject the charge of heterodoxy. Impassibility can be bought simply by placing God outside of time. If God is outside of time, then even though He might respond to your actions with appropriate emotions, it can’t really be said that *you’re* acting upon *Him*, since His reactions occur outside of time, in some sort of *simultaneity* with your actions.²⁸ Accordingly, if God is outside of time, one can make sense of His having emotions *and* His being impassable.²⁹ If God is thought to be *in time*, but also unchanging, passive, and unresponsive, then I take His impassibility simply to be the denial that God has emotions. Since I take it that emotions are essential either for personhood, or omniscience, or both, I take it that Divine impassibility, so understood, has to be denied in order to *preserve* orthodoxy.

Faith

God *can* take a plunge; He *can* reconcile Himself to the possibility of disappointment; and He *can* exercise $\tau\omicron\pi\tau$ as a response to emotional inhibitions. The question now is whether these claims amount to the attribution of *faith* to God. We can divide *faith* into three inter-related attitudes: relational faith (*S* has faith in *x*); propositional faith (*S* has faith that *p*); and global faith—the species of faith involved in being *a person of faith* (see Howard-Snyder (2016)). Global faith, unlike the other two species of faith, structures an entire life around a set of ideals. I now say more about each category of faith.

Propositional faith

If you have faith that something is true, then you need to think that it’s the sort of thing that people *should* want to be true. Howard-Snyder (2013) calls this a positive evaluation of the proposition.³⁰

²⁸ For the notion of simultaneity required here, see (Stump and Kretzmann 1981).

²⁹ Although it saves Divine impassibility, the picture of an emotional God is complicated in other ways, when one locates God outside of time. He must be experiencing all sorts of emotions, as responses to distinct temporal stimuli, in one giant and simultaneous mental-event. Again, I’m using the word ‘simultaneous’ in a non-standard way here. See the previous footnote.

³⁰ An anonymous reviewer raises a worthy objection. ‘Why can’t I have ‘faith’,’ the reviewer asks, ‘that my son’s basketball team will win their game—even though I don’t at all expect the opposing teams’ parents to want it to be true?’ I could envisage two lines of response: (1) it might be possible to have faith in such situations, but somehow blameworthy (just like it’s possible, but blameworthy to have beliefs without sufficient evidence). You can have faith that your son will do his best, but to have faith that he’ll win, is to have faith that equally worthy others will lose, and thus perhaps faith is the wrong attitude to

You *can* have faith that something will happen, even if you don't *directly* want it. The mother in the midst of agonising cancer treatment might have faith that she will survive, even though she may no longer care, in any direct sense, whether she lives or dies. Nevertheless, she must at least have some *relevant* desire, perhaps the desire to be there for her children as they grow up, sufficient for making it the case that, even if only *indirectly*, she cares to stay alive. Howard-Snyder (2013) calls this direct or indirect desire, a positive conative attitude. Combining the first two ingredients: you can't have faith that p is (or will be) true unless (a) you have a positive evaluation of p and (b) you have a positive conative attitude towards p .

Faith also requires what Howard-Snyder calls a 'positive cognitive attitude'. There is a grey area between belief and disbelief. A 'positive cognitive attitude' towards a proposition, is a degree of confidence in its truth that's at least in the grey area. Fully-fledged belief is also a positive cognitive attitude. If you *believe* that something is true, and *want* it to be true, and think that it's the sort of thing that you *should* want to be true, then you can be said to have *faith* that it's true. Even *certainty* can do the job. And thus, on Howard-Snyder's analysis of faith, even an omniscient agent can have propositional faith.

You could start out *believing* that something is true, until some counter-evidence comes along, robbing you of your previous *certainty*, leading you to think that it is merely *probable*. Further counter-evidence might make you reassess, until it starts to seem merely *plausible*, or *possible*. These are all positive cognitive attitudes. This entails that faith is a resilient attitude. It will require a lot of counter-evidence before it's lost.

Relational faith

Frost-Arnold (2014) suggests that to *trust* a person is, at least, to enter propositions into one's practical reasoning on the basis of their testimony alone. Dembroff (ms) argues that sometimes this type of trust isn't enough:

Consider, for example, the story of Marie, an 18-year-old woman who reported being raped to her foster parents. At first, her foster parents believed her, or at the very least, they took her testimony as true for the purposes of practical reasoning... But when Marie's behavior did not align with how her foster parents expected someone to behave after experiencing trauma... they went so far as to tell the police that they suspected Marie was lying. (Before finally being vindicated by the physical evidence, Marie was charged with and pressured to confess to false reporting.)³¹

Footnote 30 continued

have here; (2) some sports fans argue that it *would* be objectively good for their team to win out over others. When Leicester City won the Premier League, it was said to be a good thing for English football, in that it demonstrated what could be achieved by smaller clubs with fewer resources. People had faith that Leicester would win, against the odds, and they afforded the proposition a positive evaluation. The first option is more concessive. It accepts that a positive evaluation is not constitutive of faith, but constitutive only of *appropriate* faith.

³¹ See <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/581/transcript>.

Dembroff endorses one aspect of Laura Buchak's account of *faith* (Buchak 2012). According to Buchak, *part* of what faith amounts to is the disposition to act without actively seeking further evidence. Adopting this feature of Buchak's account, we can say the following. If Marie's foster parents had had *faith* in her (over and above Frost-Arnold type *trust*), they would have acted on the basis of her testimony, *without* being on the look-out for counter-evidence. Perhaps we should go further. Not only should they have not been on the *look-out* for counter-evidence; they should have been unwilling to factor even *unsolicited* counter-evidence into their practical reasoning, unless it reached a certain threshold.

Maire would be right to feel that her foster parents lacked faith in her. Relational faith is best thought of in terms of a resilient positive conative attitude towards its object, which in turn has a dispositional profile, leading you to give their testimony a tribunal-closing weight. This holds at least in the absence of a critical mass of unsolicited epistemic defeaters.

Global faith

Global faith is, partly, to have propositional faith in a *set* of propositions. You needn't have faith in each proposition separately, but in their conjunction (since you might desire that $p \& q$ be true, but you might not desire p to be true without the truth of q). Moreover, global faith requires a decision to allow those propositions (or their conjunction) some special role in organising your entire life. Global faith can have non-propositional content too. Then it requires something like Howard Wettstein's (2002, 2012) notion of *signing on* to an image. What it means to *sign on* to an image is to agree to structure your life through its prism, to engage your emotions with it, to make it your *own*, to choreograph your life with this image as part of your personal symbolic landscape. Jonathan Kvanvig's notion of living a life in faithfulness to an ideal seems also to illuminate the nature of global faith (2013, 2015).

God's faith

Choosing an ideal to organise one's life around is *ipso facto* to rule out competing ideals that could have played the same role. When Ruth Chan decided to pursue a career in philosophy, as opposed to law, she took a plunge. These sorts of choices can be guided by reason, but reasons won't always be sufficient.³² There may be an infinite number of candidates to choose between, or they may exhibit incommensurate values. Global faith very often requires taking a plunge.

When a person decides to dedicate one's life to another, in marriage (say), one might be aware that there are other people out there who might be equally compatible with them. To enter into a faith-based relationship, a person has to take a plunge. The decision to close one's internal tribunal is also to take a plunge. Plunge taking is thus a central feature of relational and global faith.

³² See https://www.ted.com/talks/ruth_chang_how_to_make_hard_choices, see also (Chan 2012).

The resilience that's characteristic of each type of faith requires a person to be reconciled to potential disappointments. Faith isn't lost at the first instance of counter-evidence. Faith is resilient to disappointment.

The positive conative attitude, required for faith, has to have the power to create dispositions to act. This attitude maps neatly onto $\tau\omicron\eta$, conceived of as an inward desire, directed towards something external, that breaks through internal and external barriers to become manifest in action.³³

Imagine that God takes a plunge on X. Imagine that He does so with steadfast resilience. Imagine that this stems from God's positive conative attitude towards X, and that the attitude is powerful enough to translate itself, consistently, into action for the sake of X. Shouldn't we say that God has *faith* in X? Plunge taking, resilience and a $\tau\omicron\eta$ -powered conative attitude are not merely central *elements* of faith, but working together in this way, they seem to *constitute* faith.

When the Rabbis said that God's act of creation was itself an act of faith, perhaps they had these notions in mind. Once you become comfortable with the idea that God can have faith, one will start to read the Bible in a different light. It will become obvious to one that God's faith really is a constant feature of the narrative. God has faith in the world, as manifest by its creation. He has faith in Abraham, as manifest by his election. He has faith in the Jewish people, as manifest by His entering into a covenant with them. He trusted Moses. This faith is compatible with God's perfection.

The life of faith as a work of art

R. G. Collingwood proposed a theory of art on the basis of his philosophy of mind. There are, he claims, three levels at which mental phenomena occur.

1. The *psychic level*, where mental phenomena are 'mere feelings' (Collingwood 1938, pp. 159, 197, 221–223); i.e., the immediate deliverances of the senses. These deliverances often, if not always, possess an 'emotional charge' (Ibid., pg. 162). The sensation and its emotional charge are not distinct. Instead, awareness is 'entirely filled by this affective-sensational complex' (Hopkins, ms).
2. At the level of *consciousness*, our sensations and their affective charge come apart, so that we are aware of them as distinct objects of our attention. Furthermore, we are aware of *ourselves* as being the feeling subject of the sensations and affections (Collingwood 1938, p. 222).
3. The sensations and emotions are not given *names* or *descriptions* until the level of the *intellect*. Conceptual *ordering* of the terrain only occurs at this third level.

Hopkins (ms) notes that Collingwood uses 'consciousness' as a term of art:

³³ Dunnington's (ms) account of faith places desire and disposition at its heart.

All three levels are properly mental: none, not even the psychic, is supposed to be the sub-personal basis of sentient life...

The three stages stand in an essential order. You cannot conceptualise something that hasn't risen to the level of consciousness, and nothing can arise at the level of consciousness unless it first occurred as a mere feeling at the psychic level.

By giving an emotion a name, you group it together with all the other emotional states that can aptly be described by the same name. In so doing you gloss over its uniqueness. Collingwood distinguishes between *description* and *expression*. When you *describe* something, you are engaged in conceptualisation with this attendant generalising trend. When you *express* something, you somehow communicate an emotion in all of its particularity.

Imagine a poet trying to convey a very particular terror. Merely labelling it 'terror', or 'dread', will not do the trick (Collingwood 1938, p. 112). That would be to substitute a *description* for a work of *art*; for an act of *expression* (for all expression is art, according to Collingwood). I won't here elaborate upon the mechanisms by which a work of art is supposed to express an individualised emotion, either using words, or paint, or clay, or music. It is this part of the picture that Hopkins (ms) thinks needs the most finessing. But it's essential for my purposes to point out that the act of expression isn't merely supposed to communicate an already individualized emotion. It is the process of expressing them, that *gives* emotions their shape.

At the level of the psychic, the artist is conscious only of 'a perturbation or excitement... While in this state, all he can say about his emotion is "I feel ... I don't know what I feel"' (Collingwood 1938, p. 109). Though the artist is *ignorant* at this stage, Collingwood doesn't mean to say that there is something that the artist is ignorant *of*. He doesn't know what he feels, not because he lacks some item of knowledge, but because the feeling doesn't yet have a determinate *feel*, for the artist to know. Aaron Ridley summarises (2002, p. 53):

[The artist] discovers [the] nature [of the emotion] in expressing it—indeed, it acquires its nature in being expressed...

Accordingly, art provides us with the only means by which we can truly understand ourselves (Collingwood 1938, pp. 284–285):

A truthful consciousness gives intellect a firm foundation upon which to build; a corrupt consciousness forces intellect to build on a quicksand.

Bad art isn't expressing bad emotions; emotions that we are ashamed to have. Those emotions *need* to be expressed if we are going to understand ourselves. Bad art is, rather, to pretend in our acts of expression that we only have emotions of which we can be proud. Collingwood continues (Ibid.):

Every utterance and every gesture that each one of us makes is a work of art. It is important to each one of us that in making them, however much he deceives others, he should not deceive himself. If he deceives himself in this matter, he has sown in himself a seed which, unless he roots it up again, may grow into any kind of wickedness, any kind of mental disease, any kind of stupidity and

folly and insanity. Bad art, the corrupt consciousness, is the true *radix malorum* [root of all evil].

The *value* of art is presented here as epistemic. It is the translation of mere feelings into consciousness. Since all intellectual activity is parasitic on the level of consciousness, bad art threatens our entire intellectual edifice, which may have been built upon ‘quicksand’.

At the level of the psychic, my sensations may have an emotional charge with a negative valence. Until this arises to my consciousness, as a distinct mental phenomenon, I won’t understand why I’m behaving in a short-tempered way. Once I have *expressed* (rather than merely described) the emotion, to myself or others, I will realise that I am feeling (say) *irritated*—the act of expression will give it the clear contours of an individualised irritation, as opposed to something less well-defined but still negative. Once I know the exact contours of my irritation, I will understand my short-tempered behaviour and will be better placed to exercise control over my emotions (Ibid., pp. 109–110).

If the mind of a person (even a perfect person) has something like the structure suggested by Collingwood, then God will neither be omnipotent nor omniscient, *unless He expresses Himself*.³⁴ Only if He expresses Himself, will He give His emotions definite contours in order to exercise control over them. Self-expression will also be required in order to provide a sufficiently stable basis for an omniscient intellect. In Collingwood’s (admittedly, very broad) sense of the word, God has to be an artist.³⁵ He might not be bound to create a *universe*. Perhaps a sonnet would suffice. But a perfect person has to create.

Faith is not always a good thing. Think of the evil done in the name of global faith. Think of the faith that people have placed in tyrants.³⁶ Likewise, even good art can be immoral. It could be painted on somebody’s property against their will, or it could betray somebody’s trust. We wouldn’t want to give the virtue of art a free reign to trump important moral constraints upon it. We likewise shouldn’t give the virtue of faith a free reign. It must have moral constraints placed upon it. But tying our understanding of faith to self-expression (and the arts) opens the door to a new understanding of the ways in which faith might be a virtue that can be central to human flourishing. To organise your entire life around an ideal that you’re profoundly emotionally invested in, is to use your entire life as a vehicle for the *expression* of that ideal. And thus, global faith is, in Collingwood’s understanding of the term, an attempt to transform your entire life into a cohesive work of *art*.

God’s faith is manifest in His act of creation. Like an artist, He has to put the paint-brush down and take a plunge. Like an artist, He has to reconcile Himself to discrepancies between His initial idea and the end product. Sometimes, an artist might be completely satisfied with their work, but even then, they are not in control

³⁴ If God is outside of time, then the only sense in which the psychic can be prior to consciousness, and consciousness prior to the intellect, is if the priority is not chronological but logical.

³⁵ An artist creates ‘in the same sense that Christians asserted, and neo-Platonists denied, that God created the world’ (Collingwood 1938, p. 129).

³⁶ See footnote 30 above. Perhaps the best explanation of why faith can be a bad thing is because it’s placed in things and propositions that don’t deserve a positive evaluation.

of the *reception* of their work—that lack of control is something they have to reconcile themselves to. To create is always to open yourself up to criticism.³⁷ God’s faith-act was to create a world. His faith plausibly inherits the sorts of virtue that we naturally attribute to artists. It’s no wonder that the Midrash that portrays God’s creation, explicitly, as an act of faith, also describes Him as a sculptor/artist.

Abraham’s faith

Imagine a Jew who believes in all of the claims of Judaism, but simply can’t find herself able to unify her life around the ideals, narratives, and *demands* of Judaism. She believes, but she has other priorities. She is unwilling, it seems, to take the plunge. Abraham didn’t just *believe*. He dove into a life of *service*; a life of *faith*. Even as a theist, Abraham could have decided to organise his life around any number of goals, aims, ambitions, or ideals. In deciding to choose God, the service of God, and his role as the father of a nation, above all others, as the organising principles of his entire life, he was taking a plunge. His life was transformed into a work of ‘Collingwoodean’ art in that every action from thereon in was a concerted expression of the new ideals that organised His life.

We’re told that Abraham had faith. Immediately afterwards, he received a very disturbing prophecy. He was told that his offspring would be slaves in a foreign land. He experienced this prophecy in a state of dread and darkness (Genesis 15:12). Abraham’s faith didn’t then waiver. He reconciled himself to the vicissitudes of his faith.

In the Jewish mystical tradition, Abraham, above all other characters, is associated with $\tau\omicron\eta$. He is even presented as a manifestation on earth of God’s *own* $\tau\omicron\eta$.³⁸ The Midrash reports that Abraham was involved in smashing the idols that his father used to sell.³⁹ $\tau\omicron\eta$ involves breaking down boundaries; even to the extremes of iconoclasm. $\tau\omicron\eta$ also includes lovingkindness; reaching out to those beyond one’s kith and kin. Abraham is presented as extremely eager to welcome strangers in for hospitality.⁴⁰ Abraham’s faith, the tradition would surely maintain, was saturated with $\tau\omicron\eta$.

Abraham’s faith in Genesis 15 *isn’t* faith in the face of uncertainty. Just as Nachmanides insists, by this point in the narrative, Abraham is (and had ample reason to be) fully *convinced* that he *will* have the son that was promised to him. However, it is one thing to be certain of something, and another to have a global *faith* that organises one’s entire life around that something. Abraham took a plunge, reconciled himself to disappointment, and exercised great $\tau\omicron\eta$.

If faith is primarily to be understood in terms of *belief*, then Abraham’s having faith in what God says isn’t all that commendable. I contend that Rashi had a

³⁷ Thankfully for us, God’s plans for the world didn’t need to pass through anonymous peer-review. It’s true that the Midrash has God consulting others—but they are neither peers, nor are they anonymous!.

³⁸ See for example, *Tanya, Iggeret Hakodesh: 13*.

³⁹ *Bereshit Rabba* 38:12.

⁴⁰ See *Tractate Baba Metzia* 86b, based on Genesis 18:1–15.

broader conception of what faith amounts to. Rashi and Nachmanides don't disagree about the attitudes and dispositions animating Abraham's life. They merely disagree over what those attitudes and dispositions should be *called*. Rashi would call that bundle of attitudes and dispositions, 'faith'.⁴¹ But whatever you call it, it can transform a life into a work of art. Therein lies, at least a part, of what can make it virtuous.⁴²

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⁴¹ To think of global faith in terms of these desires and dispositions comes close to Dunnington's (ms) account of 'saving faith'. It should be noted that Rashi seems to adopt this conception of faith but consistently reads verses of the Bible that seem to attribute faith to God, as attributing only trustworthiness to Him. Rashi might therefore agree with my conception of faith, and my understanding of its potential virtues, even though he most likely denies that God *embodies* this virtue.

⁴² I am grateful to Trent Dougherty, Daniel Howard-Snyder, and Jonathan Kvanvig, who first encouraged me to turn my attention to a systematic study of the nature and value of faith. I'm grateful to all of the participants at the summer seminar on the nature and value of faith, that took place in Bellingham Wa., in 2016. I'm grateful also to my students at The Drisha Institute for Jewish Studies, who spent the June of 2016 with me, learning Midrash and Jewish texts on the nature of faith—human and Divine. I'm grateful to Robert Hopkins and Robin Dembroff for allowing me to cite their unpublished work. I'm also grateful to my good and erudite friends, Alexander Douglas, Kent Dunnington and Naftali Goldberg who provided me, along with two very useful anonymous reviews, tremendously helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. This whole project took on a life of its own, only after a very encouraging discussion with Elisabeth Camp, to whom I extend warm thanks. Thanks are also due to the guest editors of this Journal, for all of their help. This research was made possible through the support of a grant from the Templeton Religion Trust. The opinions expressed in it are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Templeton Religion Trust.

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