1. Introduction

What role (if any) does faith play in the practice of being supportive? What is the value of supporting another on the basis of faith? The questions I shall take up are a bit more specific. What role (if any) does non-religious and propositional faith play in our close relationships, particularly as it may concern supporting intimates in their personal projects? Is there anything distinctly valuable about such faith-based support of intimates?

It’s worth noting that the questions I shall take up concern only a subset of the contexts in which the practice of being supportive takes place. The practice of being supportive in general occurs in both larger-scale institutional contexts as well as in our close, interpersonal relationships. In the former, it often goes by the name of social accommodation. Governments accommodate—are supportive of—their citizens’ religious convictions in granting exemptions of conscience to the military draft. Employers accommodate—are supportive of—their employees’ family commitments in offering them the opportunity to take parental leave. It may be that these larger-scale institutional forms of support require or are facilitated by something like collective or communal faith to sustain it. To avoid complicating matters, though, I will not focus here on the possible connection between collective faith and social accommodation practices.

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1 On the value of accommodation practices, see Shiffrin (2004).
What I will focus on is the connection between being supportive and faith in the context of intimate relationships. More specifically, I will restrict my inquiry to the context of *thick* interpersonal relationships between two autonomous adult, able-minded persons, and to a particularly rich and robust form of support in that context. Paradigmatically, the relationships that are my focus include close friendships, romantic or committed relationships, and the relationship between parent and adult child. They may also include relationships between siblings, colleagues, and neighbors. What makes these relationships *thick* in the relevant sense is a certain shared history between the individuals in the relationship—some sufficient degree of engagement, interaction, and regard between them over time. In such cases, we naturally say not merely that the participants *stand in some relation to* one another, but that they *have a relationship with* one another.

Finally, the notion of faith that I shall be concerned with is general in one sense but specific in another. I shall be concerned with a _generalized_ notion of faith that is not restricted to the religious context. Thus, the notion applies both to the question of God’s existence as well as of a friend’s loyalty. (Indeed, I will be focusing primarily on the non-religious context.) I shall also be concerned with *propositional* faith, or faith expressed in statements containing a _that_-clause: e.g., faith that one’s employee is trustworthy. In particular, I shall draw on and apply Lara Buchak’s account of faith. ² Since I am interested in the action of supporting intimates in their projects on the basis of faith that the project is choiceworthy, I find her account—which relates faith to a proposition and an action that expresses the proposition—to be amenable for my purposes.

My discussion will unfold as follow. In section 2, I reflect generally on the stance and practice of being supportive. In section 3, I characterize a virtue possessed by _good_

² Buchak (2012)
friends, lovers, and other intimates—the virtue of being supportive—interpreting it as what Philip Pettit calls a “modally demanding value.”\(^3\) In section 4, I draw on Buchak’s account of faith and argue that the virtue of being supportive involves a distinctive kind of faith: faith that our intimate’s self-expressive projects are choiceworthy. (These pursuits include projects and relationships that allow us to express our identity and values in an important sense associated with leading a meaningful and rewarding human life.) After describing the crucial role that faith plays in the virtue of being supportive, I articulate, in section 5, some respects in which this kind of faith-based support is especially valuable or worthy. More specifically, I argue that faith-based support has the power to: (1) enable the supported party to enjoy a more meaningful exercise of agency in self-expressive arenas, and (2) engender a sense of unity between ourselves and the supported party, deepening the normative and emotional bonds of the relationship. I briefly conclude in section 6.

2. Being Supportive: General Reflections

I begin with some general reflections on the practice of being supportive in the interpersonal context, before turning (in section 3) to the virtue of being supportive. The term ‘support’ is associated with the idea of lending aid, giving care and comfort, and offering encouragement and advice, particularly to someone who is undergoing a trial or ordeal. When I support you in the aftermath of your spouse’s sudden death, my support may involve helping you make funeral arrangements or notifying relatives or looking after your children. In doing these things, I help you get ‘back on your feet.’ As your PhD supervisor, I may support you in your aspiration to become a member of the scientific community, helping you to secure the kind of meaningful, fulfilling life you aspire to lead advancing human understanding.

\(^3\) Pettit (2016).
Just as a bridge or architectural structure needs support because of the downward pressure of gravity, so the person in need of support needs it because there is something in their life that can be expected to *weigh them down*—to bring, stress, struggle, and adversity upon the person. Certain objective conditions obtain in that person’s life that generates the need to be supported, objective conditions that can include psychological conditions like addiction, depression, and grief.

In being supportive of someone, we are usually supporting them *in something or with respect to something*—some aspect or condition of their life. That is, the stance and practice of being supportive is best understood as a three-place relation: A supports B in C, where the C term stands for some relevant circumstance, context, or domain of B’s life.¹

Three general (but not exhaustive) types of support-needed circumstances, C, are worth nothing. These are circumstances connected with: (1) unchosen misfortune, (2) self-inflicted misfortune, and (3) self-expressive pursuit.⁵

Examples of unchosen misfortunes include: having one’s home destroyed by a flood, losing one’s spouse in a plane crash, and falling into a serious depression. In these cases, someone is in a bad way (thus in need of support) but it is not their fault that they confront the situation. The fact that they are in the situation is neither a result of their direct agency, nor something they could have been reasonably anticipated or prevented. The agent is in an important sense *passive* to the situation’s coming about, bearing no (special or particular) responsibility for it.

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¹ This formulation needn’t overlook the phenomenon of *simply* being supportive of another: being supportive of someone without apparent reference to any particular circumstance, context, or domain of that person’s life. But since this generalized form of support can be understood as involving a willingness to bear costs to hold up the other in a several (if not all) circumstances, contexts, and domains, the C term is still tacitly present in these cases.

⁵ These categories are not meant to be exhaustive but represent central cases.
Examples of self-inflicted misfortunes include: being justly imprisoned for committing a crime, failing out of university as a result failing to take one’s academic work seriously, and gambling away one’s family savings at the casino. In these cases, someone is in a bad way (thus in need of support), but there is a sense in which it is their fault that they’re in the situation they’re in. The fact that they are in the situation is a result of their agency, or could have been reasonably foreseen and prevented. The agent bears some significant responsibility for their situation.

Examples of self-expressive pursuits include: starting a charter school for disadvantaged children, coming out as an openly transgendered public figure, adopting a child, and embarking on a committed romantic relationship. In these cases, the person in the support-relevant circumstance is pursuing an activity, engagement, project, or relationship central to their identity—their sense of self. In contrast to the first case (unchosen misfortunes), but like the second case (self-inflicted misfortunes), the agent is in an important sense active (as opposed to passive) with respect to their being in the support-relevant circumstance: their agency (choice, decision, commitment, or reflective endorsement) is directly implicated in the situation. In that sense, the person bears some responsibility for being in a situation that calls for others to hold them up.

Self-expressive pursuits include activities, projects, and relationships that allow a person to express who they are and what they value in a fundamental sense associated with leading a meaningful and fulfilling life. In the modern western industrialized context, they

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*6 Having stressed that self-expressive pursuits are chosen or endorsed in distinguishing them from circumstances of misfortune, I want to be clear that as a matter of first-person phenomenology, self-expressive pursuits are sometimes experienced not as a matter of choice or decision but of necessity. We should not hold an overly voluntaristic conception of self-expressive pursuits, at least in describing our experience from the inside. Nevertheless, even if our self-expressive pursuits often have the force of practical necessity, self-pursuits are still things we can assume responsibility for.*
constitute answers or resolutions to practical questions like: what profession or career to pursue, what kinds of projects to engage in, what kinds of relationships and family arrangements to enter into, whether and when to have children and how many, what kind of friends and intimates to have, and where to live and what communities and associations and religious groups to join. When we are supportive of an intimate’s self-expressive pursuit, we are willing to bear costs on their behalf to hold them up in a circumstance or context linked to their pursuit of an activity, project, or relationship central to their sense of self. (I shall be particularly interested later in the role of faith in supporting another’s self-expressive pursuit.)

So far, I have focused on the supported persons and their support-relevant circumstances. Let me now turn to the supporting party and what is involved in providing support. The notion of weight in the literal idea of support as bearing the weight of something suggests that being supportive in the interpersonal context can involve bearing burdens that one would not otherwise. To be supportive of someone is to hold them up, by means that can involve bearing orShouldering or absorbing or assuming significant burdens or costs on their behalf.

Consider the varieties of support in in our interpersonal lives: parents taking out second home mortgages to finance their children’s university education; spouses quitting their jobs to re-locate to another part of the world so that their significant other can accept a promotion or advance their career; and neighbors preparing meals for the couple grieving the recent loss of a child. A less weighty example of cost-bearing is that of holding up our friends in their romantic pursuits: say, by enduring unpleasant social outings with a friend and their insufferable significant other, or cancelling important plans to give comfort when their relationship falls apart. It is a familiar fact that the broken-hearted are often long-
winded and repetitive in airing grievances and regrets; supporting a broken-hearted friend can demand significant amounts of time and energy.

Holding someone up can even involve acting in ways that stands in uneasy practical tension with one’s ideals or principles. For example, in social contexts where gay-marriage is not legally sanctioned, feminists and gay activists of certain bents may still attend the weddings of their heterosexual friends, despite their objections to the intrinsic or contingent properties of the marriage institution. Indeed, they may go beyond merely attending the weddings of their heterosexual friends and assist with the wedding planning. Similarly, someone who is an ethical vegetarian might support a friend’s plans to open up a non-vegetarian restaurant (say, by providing a loan or getting the word out about the grand opening), even despite their serious scruples about the practice of eating meat. Indeed, ethical vegetarians will often dine out with their non-vegetarian friends (say, to cheer up a despondent mutual friend), and refrain from initiating discussion of the ethics of eating meat. Willingly splitting the bill equally with their omnivorous friends, they effectively subsidize the others who order the more expensive meat dishes. These cases involve a kind of compromise of one’s ethical commitments (to marriage equality, to animal rights): in lending support, one does not act in a way that meets the highest or purest standards of the relevant ideal.

In sum, holding someone up can involve assuming significant costs or making sacrifices in time, opportunities lost, financial and non-financial resources, psychic and physical energy, and compromises in one’s moral commitments and personal ideals. More generally, the practice of being supportive—or the act of being supportive—involves the

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7 On the related idea that the reasons of friendship may conflict and override moral considerations, see Cocking and Kennett (2000).
provision of certain benefits or resources (care, concern, comfort, assistance, advice, guidance, and encouragement) in order to hold someone up, typically by means of bearing costs (in financial and non-financial resources, lost opportunities, time, physical and psychic energy, reputation and social-esteem, and compromise of ideals). The stance of being supportive—the disposition or attitudes that undergirds supportive behavior—involves a willingness to absorb costs on behalf of the supported intimate. To have such willingness is to have certain characteristic patterns of thought, feeling, and responses, including being disposed to treat certain kinds of considerations as supplying reasons for response and action.

Given that support can involve the assumption of significant costs on the part of the supporter, we might wonder what psychological attitudes realize and sustain it. My suggestion will be that in some cases, there will be a place for faith (and along with other similar attitudes such as trust, hope, love, and care) to play in enabling support. The remainder of the discussion will thus be concerned with bringing out the role of faith in the case of supporting an intimate in their self-expressive pursuit. More specifically, I shall focus on the role of faith in the kind of support that takes on a special, rich form.

3. The Virtue of Being Supportive

Let’s distinguish between support that is highly contingent on features of the actual circumstance, on the one hand, and support that is more robust, steadfast, and

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8 Of course, this does not mean that the supportive intimate must always experience the cost-bearing as cost-bearing. In many cases, to experience one’s support of an intimate under the description of bearing costs is to have, in the words of Bernard Williams, ‘one thought too many.’ See Bernard Williams (1981). Indeed, there is something about the idea of weighing up costs and benefits that seems antithetical to the spirit and phenomenology of friendship and loving relationships—at least when things are going well. Still, we can acknowledge that being supportive often involves bearing costs, even if the supportive intimate needn’t (sometimes shouldn’t) experience their supportive behavior.
unconditional, on the other. I shall call the former *providing mere support* and the latter *exercising the virtue of being supportive*. My aim in this section is to characterizing the virtue of being supportive as an instance of what Philip Pettit calls a *modally demanding value*. In the next section, I shall theorize the role of faith in enabling the exercise of this virtue, arguing that this virtue is constituted and sustained by a certain kind of faith.\(^9\)

In labeling support that is more robust, steadfast, and unconditional a *virtue*, I mean to suggest the *evaluative difference* between providing mere support and exercising the virtue of being supportive.\(^10\) It is my contention that the virtue of being supportive (so understood) is a quality of intimates that relate to us well or admirably—a quality of *good friends, good parents, and good romantic partner*. Put differently, possessing the virtue of being supportive is part of what it is to be a *good romantic partner* or friend or parent. Later, I shall make the case that there is something distinctly preferable, especially worthy about the kind of support that is more robust, steadfast, and unconditional—that kind of support that relies in part on faith—insofar as it facilitates or realizes (in a way that mere support does not) certain important goods.\(^11\)

Modally demanding values are values the instantiation of which depends not only on what actually happens, but also on what would happen across a range of non-actual (or possible) circumstances. To get a sense of the structure of modally demanding values,

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\(^9\) The notion of a modally demanding value is presented in Pettit (2016).

\(^10\) What the evaluative difference consists in will become apparent as the discussion unfolds, but it should be noted that instances of mere support might count as virtuous in the thin sense of having moral worth or value.

\(^11\) But appreciating the evaluative difference is compatible with acknowledging that praise, gratitude, and admiration towards actual support that is highly contingent on features of a circumstance is sometimes appropriate.
consider the case of freedom.\textsuperscript{12} One might view one’s freedom as simply consisting in actual non-interference. Against this claim, Pettit argues that, in order to determine whether or not one enjoys freedom, it is not enough simply to consider what is \textit{actually} done to one—whether one is \textit{in fact} interfered with, constrained, or coerced. To enjoy freedom, it must also be true that one \textit{would enjoy} non-coercion or non-interference across a range of non-actual circumstances.

Consider the paradigm of an unfree person: the slave. Slaves are typically coerced and interfered with on an arbitrary basis by their masters. But we could imagine a slave with a benevolent master, who, as a matter of fact, has never laid a hand on him—a master who provides him a fine cottage to live in, delicious meals to eat, and four weeks off each the year. Even if the slave is treated quite well in all these respects \textit{as a matter of fact}, still, he is a slave, insofar as the following is true: if the benevolent master wanted to, he could do all sorts of horrible things to him—force him to work against his will, whip him, and so on. What this suggests is that freedom is a modally demanding value. In order to be free, it is not enough for one to be provided the good of non-coercion (or non-interference) on an arbitrary basis; it must also be the case that one would continue to enjoy the thin good of non-coercion (or non-interference) across a range of non-actual situations.\textsuperscript{13}

Consider, next, the case of honesty. Honesty is also a modally demanding value in that to be honest, it is not enough that one tell the truth (avoid deceiving and misleading others) \textit{actually}. To be honest, it must also be the case that one \textit{would continue} to tell the truth (avoid deception) across a range of non-actual circumstances. To see this, imagine someone—call him Mark—whose life is such that he is never faced with a situation wherein

\textsuperscript{12} For Pettit, love, friendship, honesty, freedom, and justice are examples of modally demanding values.

\textsuperscript{13} See Pettit (2016)
he would personally benefit by telling a lie (or acting deceptively). Moreover, let’s suppose that Mark, if he were presented with a situation wherein he would personally benefit by telling a lie (and acting deceptively, misleadingly), he would not hesitate to do so. Intuitively, it seems that Mark is not an honest person. If this is right, it suggests that honesty is a modally demanding value: it is not enough to be honest to simply tell the truth actually; to be honest, it must also be the case that one would continue to tell the truth across a range of non-actual situations. Like the status of freedom then, the character trait of honesty is also a modally demanding value.14

Consider, now, the idea that the virtue of being supportive is a modally demanding value. To say that the virtue of being supportive is a modally demanding value is to say that it requires not merely that the supportive intimate actually possess a willingness to shoulder burdens to hold up the supported intimate in the actual circumstance tied to their self-expressive pursuit, but also that the supportive intimate would be prepared to do so across a range of relevant non-actual circumstances.

Suppose you are deliberating what to do with your life: what career or profession to pursue? After thinking it over, you decide you want to pursue a career in medicine. Suppose that as a matter of fact, your parents are quite willing to assume costs to hold you up in this pursuit: They offer to pay a substantial portion of your tuition, provide you lots of encouragement, cook you comforting, nutritious meals when you’re stressed out, and so on. Suppose, moreover, that, as a matter of fact, a medical career is expected to be very lucrative, carries significant social prestige, allows you to live nearby, and makes them the envy of my friends. However, suppose that had a medical career not been expectedly lucrative, or did
not involve social prestige, or prevented you from living nearby, or did not make me the
envy of my friends, your parents would have been unwilling to assume costs to hold you up
in your decision to pursue a medical career. Or suppose that had they been uncertain that
that a career in medicine was indeed a good idea for you, they would have been unwilling to
assume costs to hold you up in your decision to pursue a medical career. Even if there is a
sense in which they can be said to be supporting your decision, they are not exercising the
virtue of being supportive with respect to your decision to pursue a medical career, since
their willingness to bear costs to hold you up is conditional on such factors in this way. To
exercise the virtue of being supportive of your decision to pursue a medical career (as
opposed to merely supporting it), it must be the case that their willingness to bear costs to
hold you up would continue to be realized across a range of non-actual circumstances,
including those in which they are less than confident that your decision is choiceworthy.

I've been describing the modally demanding requirements of the virtue of being
supportive in the case of supporting someone’s self-expressive decision. But what about
supporting someone in a self-expressive domain, like career or love or friendship or family
arrangement? Here, the virtue of being supportive is modally demanding in a somewhat
different way. Return to the case involving your deliberations about career pursuit. Suppose
that had you not chosen to pursue a career in medicine but a different career instead, your
parents would have been unwilling to bear costs to hold you up (in suitably relevant and
comparable respects) in your pursuit of that career. They would not then be exercising the
virtue of being supportive with respect to the domain of your professional ambition (the particular
domain of career or professional choice), if their willingness to bear costs to hold you up is
only conditional on your actually choosing to pursue medicine. To instantiate the virtue of
being supportive of you in the domain of your professional ambition, it must be the case
that they would continue to be willing to bear costs to hold you up across a range of non-
actual circumstances in which the profession you choose to pursue is not medicine, but
something else (say, education, public service, law, academia, non profit, performing art, and
so on). Included in these other possible professions are those that they do not believe (or
fall short of fully believing) is choiceworthy.

To summarize: To possess the virtue of being supportive (of someone’s self-
expressive decision or someone’s domain of self-expressive choice), it is not enough to
simply possess the willingness to bear costs to hold the other up actually; it must also be the
case that one would continue to have a willingness to bear costs to hold the other up across
a range of non-actual circumstances.

4. Faith’s Role in the Virtue of Being Supportive

I have characterized (in section 3) the virtue of being supportive in modally
demanding terms. I argued that the virtue of being supportive involves a willingness or
readiness to take on risks/costs to hold the other up in their project actually, as well as
across a range of non-actual (or possible) situations. This range of possible situations
includes those in which (by the putative supporter’s lights) there is not enough evidence to be certain that our
intimate’s self-expressive project is likely to add to the goodness or choiceworthiness of their lives. I shall
now argue that we can think of the willingness to take on costs to hold the intimate up in
these situations as faith. If this is right, then faith is an important element in constituting the
virtue’s modally demanding character.

To make the case that faith is an element of the virtue of being supportive, I will
draw on Lara Buchak’s account of faith. According to Buchak:

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15 The relevant non-actual circumstances needn’t be likely or highly probable.
16 Buchak (2012).
A person has faith that X, expressed by A, if and only if that person performs act A when there is some alternative act B such that he strictly prefers A&X to B&X and he strictly prefers B&¬X to A&¬X, and the person prefers {to commit to A before he examines additional evidence} rather than {to postpone his decision about A until he examines additional evidence}.

Note that this is (in the first instance) an account of propositional faith—the sort of faith expressed in statements containing a that-clause: faith that a felon who has served his time is trustworthy, faith that a friend one confides in is loyal, faith that God exists, faith that the criminal justice system is fair, etc. Buchak’s account relates faith not just to some proposition, but also to an action that expresses (one’s faith in) the proposition. In her words, “I propose, then, to make faith that X, expressed by A the basic unit of analysis, where X is a proposition and A is an act…” (my emphasis).

Her account connects one’s faith to one’s preferences (which can be thought of as dispositions to act). We understand this connection by considering Buchak’s claim that faith does not require believing some proposition but acquiescing to it. She distinguishes acquiescing and believing as follows:

I speak of acquiescing to a proposition rather than believing it because I am not sure that if I have faith in something, I thereby believe it. While it sounds infelicitous to say ‘I believe that ¬X but I have faith that X’, there may not be anything wrong with saying ‘I don’t know whether X—I have no idea

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17 Buchak (2012)
18 On propositional faith, see Howard-Snyder (2013)
19 Buchak (2012)
20 Buchak’s account is of propositional faith—the sort of faith in statements containing a that-clause: faith that a former felon is trustworthy, faith that a friend one confides in is loyal, faith that God exists, faith that the criminal justice system is fair, etc.
whether I believe that X or not—but I have faith that X’. So as not to
prejudge that issue, I make a weaker claim: that having faith involves taking
the proposition to be true, that is, ‘going along with it’, but not necessarily
adopting an attitude we might describe as belief.

Having faith that X (where X is a proposition), thus, does not entail adopting an attitude of

belief toward X, but rather an attitude of acquiescence.

For Buchak, acquiescing to a proposition is connected to one’s preferences. Consider
the following example, adapted from Buchak’s discussion. Suppose you are deliberating
whether to tell a friend a secret. It matters to you that your friend keeps your secret: there
are risks/costs to you of having your secret revealed by your friend. If you decide to tell the
secret to your friend, your doing so may involve having faith that your friend will keep your
secret. Or, equivalently, your action may involve having faith that your friend is trustworthy,
where this just means disposed to keep your secret. (Your friend’s not being trustworthy, then, is
just her not being disposed to keep your secret.)

Using Buchak’s locution, we could say that the act of telling your friend your secret
may express (your faith in) the proposition that your friend is trustworthy. And you have faith that
your friend is trustworthy, if and only if you have the following preferences:

(i) you prefer the combination of (telling your friend the secret and your friend is

trustworthy) to (not telling your friend the secret and your friend is trustworthy), and

(ii) you prefer the combination of (not telling your friend the secret and your friend is not

trustworthy) to (telling your friend the secret and your friend is not trustworthy), and

(iii) you prefer to act now rather than wait on additional evidence.

Let me comment on (iii). For Buchak, faith involves a preference to act (to do
something that expresses one’s faith in a proposition) without needing to further examine additional
evidence that could potentially bear on the relevant proposition. Consider an example Buchak provides to motivate her conception:

If a man has faith that his spouse isn’t cheating, this seems to rule out his hiring a private investigator, opening her mail, or even striking up a conversation with her boss to check that she really was working late last night—that is, it rules out conducting an inquiry to verify that his spouse isn't cheating. If he does any of these things, then she can rightfully complain that he didn’t have faith in her, even if she realizes that, given his evidence, he should not assign degree of belief 1 to her constancy [i.e., even if he couldn't be 100% sure that she's been faithful].

As I understand it, then, faith requires a willingness or commitment to act on a proposition—to act as if some proposition is true—while also refraining from gathering evidence for the purpose of checking whether it is true.21

Let’s now apply Buchak’s account to the case of faith that an intimate’s self-expressive pursuit(s) is choiceworthy, which I take to be an element of the virtue of being supportive. If one has faith that one’s friend’s self-expressive pursuit is choiceworthy, then one possesses a willingness to act as if one’s intimate’s self-expressive pursuit is actually choiceworthy—is actually worth pursuing, will actually promote the goodness of her life—while also refraining from gathering evidence to settle the epistemic question whether it is indeed worth pursuing. For practical purposes, that question is already settled in one’s mind.

Moreover, faith (of this sort) does not require having an attitude of belief toward the proposition that one’s friend’s self-expressive pursuit is choiceworthy. It does not require

21 On this understanding, faith needn’t be something that one maintains despite evidence to the contrary.
one to actually believe that it’s choiceworthy—indeed, one may be quite uncertain that it is choiceworthy. But it does require acquiescing to the proposition, insofar as one is willing to act in ways that express one’s faith in the proposition. Shoultering burdens or taking on costs to hold up one’s friend’s in their self-expressive pursuit can be an act that expresses one’s faith that the friend’s self-expressive pursuit is choiceworthy.

In other words, supporting one’s friend can be an act of faith. To see this, suppose you are considering supporting your friend in their self-expressive pursuit, say, by giving him a loan to start a small business. Given the risks of giving him your loan (for example, contributing to a project that makes your friend miserable, his life worse, etc.), your action of supporting your friend might involve faith of a certain sort. Let’s suppose supporting your friend expresses the proposition (in which you have faith) that his project is choiceworthy. It will involve faith that your friend’s project is choiceworthy, as expressed by the action of supporting your friend (giving him the loan) if the following is true:

(i) you prefer (supporting your friend and having the self-expressive pursuit be choiceworthy) to (not supporting your friend and having the self-expressive pursuit be choiceworthy),

(ii) you prefer (not supporting your friend and not having the self-expressive pursuit be choiceworthy) to (supporting your friend and not having the self-expressive pursuit be choiceworthy), and

(iii) you prefer to act now rather than to wait and gather additional evidence.

\[22\] Of course, it is also possible to support someone in their self-expressive pursuit while being certain that it is not choiceworthy. In such cases, support is based neither on faith nor belief.

\[23\] Buchak characterizes acts of faith as follows: “A person performs an act of faith (or acts on faith) if and only if he performs some act A such that there is a proposition X in which he has faith, expressed by A.”
Recall that the virtue of being supportive involves a willingness or readiness to take on risks/costs to hold the other up in their project across a range of possible situations, including *those in which (by the putative supporter’s lights) there is not enough evidence to be certain that one’s intimate self-expressive project is likely to be choiceworthy*. It is faith of the sort with the structure just described that accounts for the willingness or readiness on the part of the virtuous supporter to act in these situations to hold the other up—to act as if one’s intimate’s chosen self-expressive pursuit is choiceworthy and refrain from examining further evidence to determine whether it actually is.

5. The Special Goods of Faith-Based Virtuous Support: Autonomy and Solidarity

Having characterized the virtue of being supportive as a modally demanding value (in section 3) and just argued that faith is an element of the virtue (in section 4), I want to now argue that faith—through its role in the virtue of being supportive—has the power to: (1) enable the supported party to enjoy a more meaningful exercise of agency in self-expressive arenas, and (2) engender a sense of unity between ourselves and the supported party, deepening the normative and emotional bonds of the relationship.

Let me begin with the idea of autonomy understood as the capacity to determine the shape of one’s life, to be the author of it. Autonomy so understood admits of degrees and requires the ability to exercise one’s agency and the opportunity to do so. By *agency*, I mean the capacities to canvass and weigh reasons, form intentions and plans, and carry them out. One has the *opportunity* to exercise one’s agency, only if one is free from others’ interference, coercion, manipulation, and other agency-undermining forms of influence. Moreover, the relevant notion of opportunity also depends on having what Joseph Raz calls ‘an adequate
range of options’ (1986, Ch. 14). What matters for ‘adequacy’ is not the number of options, but that there be a wide enough range of available significant options, conceived of as individually worthy but mutually incompatible alternatives.

How does the virtue of being supportive further autonomy thus understood? Suppose you are the young adult mentioned earlier, deliberating what to do with your life: you are deciding what career or profession to pursue, and among the options you are considering is medicine. Why would it matter to know, not only that your parents would shoulder burdens to hold you up should you decide to pursue medicine, but that they too would shoulder burdens to hold you up across a range of other options, including those in which they are less than confident what you’ve chosen is worthwhile? What difference would it make to know that should you decide to pursue, say, philosophy (rather than medicine), that your parents would shoulder costs to hold you up as well on faith?

You will not feel as free to choose what you really want to do, knowing that pursing medicine is the only option where your parents would be willing to shoulder costs to hold you up. Here, your parent’s preference regarding your choice is liable to exert pressure on your deliberations in a way that involves loss. Their willingness to bear costs to hold you up only if you make a particular choice (based on their judgment of what’s choiceworthy for you) makes it harder for you to deliberate more purely on the basis of the reasons most centrally relevant to the choiceworthiness of the various options for you. (These include considerations tied to: your interests, talents, and temperament, and how well they suit the options before you; the distinctive goods associated with the various career options; the potential costs of pursuing each option in terms of employment prospects, future income, geographic location; and so on.) Rather than focusing attention on these reasons, you overly

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24 On Raz’s conception of autonomy as ‘an ideal of self-creation,’ see Raz (1986), Ch. 14.
focus on the consideration that your parents are only willing to shoulder burdens to hold you up in the case where you choose medicine. This shift in focus *distorts* your deliberations and decision in the domain of career choice.\(^{25}\)

On the other hand, when our intimates support us on faith, they enable us to enjoy a freer experimental space, to engage with greater meaning and autonomy with the reasons and values in these domains. Supportive friends and lovers enable us a richer opportunity to engage these reasons and values more purely and directly, without being overly distracted by the potential external costs to them of our decisions. In this way, faith-based support facilitates autonomy by shielding the considerations of external costs from dominating and distorting one’s experience of value.

It is also worth registering that many of the activities, projects, and relationships that have self-expressive significance have a dimension of risk to them. The pursuit of activities, projects, and relationships that are meaningful often exposes us to dangers: depending on how the chips fall, one may be seriously harmed or worse off as a result of pursuing something genuinely worth pursuing. Enjoying the modally demanding support of one’s intimates in a self-expressive domain can thus protect one against the vulnerability tied up with the pursuit of meaningful activities, projects, and relationships.\(^{26}\) Such faith-based support provides one with the kind of assurance, peace of mind that accompanies the thought: ‘Were things to go seriously wrong for me, I wouldn’t be on my own to deal with it.’ Knowing that a friend or lover is prepared to assume costs to hold me up under various

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\(^{25}\) For discussion of the importance of having an opportunity to make significant decisions for the reasons most relevant to the choiceworthiness of self-expressive pursuits, see George Tsai (2014).

\(^{26}\) On the idea that participation in valuable intimate relationships such as love and friendship involve vulnerability essentially, see Tsai (2016). On the idea that valuing in general involves emotional vulnerability, see Scheffler (2012).
contingencies thus provides a kind of security—some degree of freedom from anxiety that is a further condition of the meaningful exercise of autonomous agency. In sum, the willingness to bear costs to hold up one’s intimate across a range of possible self-expressive pursuits respects and enables autonomy, for it acknowledges that each of us should play the central part in making our own lives, and provides us with greater security.

Let me now turn to solidarity in a relationship. The willingness to take on costs to hold the other up in their project, and do so on the basis of faith that their project is choiceworthy, can also strengthen the fabric of intimate relationships. By relational solidarity, I mean a sense of unity or oneness between members in a relationship. Relational solidarity has both affective and normative aspects: it involves attitudes and responses such as empathy, sympathy, and trust; and it involves certain reasons or obligations. When A is willing to support B on the basis of faith, this generates solidarity between A and B in ways that involving both aspects, by: (1) encouraging cooperative feelings and emotional bonds between A and B, and (2) strengthening the normative fabric of the relationship, through the creation of reasons for A and B that each may not have otherwise in the absence of support.

When I exercise the virtue of being supportive with respect to your self-expressive pursuit, I display acceptance of your identity and agency in a way that will tend to give rise to fellow feelings between us. My willingness to have your back, to hold you up, across a range of possibilities, will likely generate affection, cooperative attitudes like trust, and other emotional bonds. This affection-generating dynamic is explained partly by our social nature: the fact that we are social creatures who care immensely about the attitudes others (especially

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27 On the broader phenomenon of the deep human need for a dependably supportive community and the social ills that arise when there is a lack of social capital, see Robert D. Putnam (2000).
those with whom we stand in close relations) take toward us, including their recognition of our self-conception and respect of our agency.\(^{28}\)

In addition to promoting mutual and reciprocated emotional bonds between us, faith-based support can *by itself* constitute a strengthening of the normative bonds of our relationship. Independent of what warm feelings are generated, my commitment to supporting you on faith generates reasons for me to bear costs to hold you up, reasons that I may not otherwise have.\(^{29}\) That faith-based support is able to strengthen the normative fabric of a relationship through the creation of reasons is due to the processes of identification with, or commitment to, the other’s projects that support involves. Consider the connection between commitment and reasons: In committing myself to something (supporting you), I *create* reasons to follow through on my commitment. These additional reasons are suggested by the fact that failure to follow through on one’s commitments will entail a loss of integrity. In supporting you, I put my agency behind you in a way that generates (additional) reasons for me to respond and act in ways to hold you up and assume costs on your behalf. You will in turn have reasons to respond and act in various ways toward me (for example, out of gratitude, reciprocity) in virtue of my actions and responses toward you in being supportive. Thus, the lives of friends, lovers, and family members become more deeply normatively intertwined when they are robustly supportive of one another. This deepening of normative interconnectedness is a second way in which faith-based support generates unity or solidarity between the members of the relationship.

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\(^{28}\) P. F. Strawson observed that we are the kinds of beings that care immensely about whether others display good (or ill) will towards us. See Strawson (1974).

\(^{29}\) On the creation of reasons through commitment, see Chang (2013). See also, Raz (1986), Ch. 14.
6. Conclusion

To recap: I began with some general reflections on the stance and practice of being supportive, and offered an interpretation of the virtue of being supportive as a modally demanding value. Next, I argued that the virtue involves a distinctive kind of faith: faith that our intimate’s self-expressive pursuit is choiceworthy. I then argued that the virtue of being supportive is especially worthy, because it facilitates or realizes (in a way that mere support does not) two important goods: autonomy and solidarity. If I’m right, then faith plays an important role in the kind support that: (1) enables our intimates to enjoy a more meaningful exercise of agency in self-expressive arenas, and (2) engenders a greater sense of unity between the ourselves and intimates, deepening the normative and affective bonds of our most valued relationships.
REFERENCES


