And with this famous aphorism of Coleridge—
He who begins by loving Christianity better than Truth,
will proceed by loving his own sect or Church better than Christianity,
and end in loving himself better than all.

Inquiry into the evidence of a doctrine is not to be made once for all, and then taken as finally settled.
It is never lawful to stifle a doubt; for either it can
be honestly answered by means of the inquiry al-
ready made, or else it proves that the inquiry was not
complete.

"But," says one, "I am a busy man; I have no
time for the long course of study which would be
necessary to make me in any degree a competent
judge of certain questions, or even able to understand
the nature of the arguments."

Then he should have no time to believe.

**BLAISE PASCAL**

**The Wager***

Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) was a French mathematici-
and philosopher.

Infinite—nothing.—Our soul is cast into a body,
where it finds number, time, dimension. Thereupon
it reasons, and calls this nature, necessity, and can
believe nothing else.

Unity joined to infinity adds nothing to it, no
more than one foot to an infinite measure. The finite
is annihilated in the presence of the infinite, and
becomes a pure nothing. So our spirit before God, so
our justice before divine justice. There is not so great
disproportion between our justice and that of God,
as between unity and infinity.

The justice of God must be vast like His compass-
ion. Now, justice to the outcast is least vast, and
ought less to offend our feelings than mercy towards the elect.

We know that there is an infinite, and are ignorant
of its nature. As we know it to be false that numbers are
finite, it is therefore true that there is an infinite
in number. But we do not know what it is. It is false
that it is even, it is false that it is odd; for the addition
of a unit can make no change in its nature. Yet it is


a number, and every number is odd or even (this is
certainly true of every finite number). So we may
well know that there is a God without knowing what
He is. Is there not one substantial truth, seeing there
are so many things which are not the truth itself?

We know then the existence and nature of the
finite, because we also are finite and have extension.
We know the existence of the infinite, and are igno-
rant of its nature, because it has extension like us,
but not limits like us. But we know neither the exis-
tence nor the nature of God, because He has neither
extension nor limits.

But by faith we know His existence; in glory we
shall know His nature. Now, I have already shown
that we may well know the existence of a thing,
without knowing its nature.

Let us now speak according to natural lights.

If there is a God, He is infinitely incomprehen-
sible, since, having neither parts nor limits, He has
no affinity to us. We are then incapable of knowing
either what He is or if He is. This being so, who will
dare to undertake the decision of the question? Not
we, who have no affinity to Him.

Who then will blame Christians for not being able
to give a reason for their belief, since they profess
a religion for which they cannot give a reason? They
declare, in expounding it to the world, that it is a
foolishness, *stultitiam;* and then you complain that
they do not prove it? If they proved it, they would
not keep their words; it is in lacking proofs, that they
are not lacking in sense. "Yes, but although this ex-
cuses those who offer it as such, and take away from
them the blame of putting it forward without reason,
it does not excuse those who receive it."

Let us then examine this point, and say, "God is, or He is not."
But to which side shall we incline? Reason can decide
nothing here. There is an infinite chaos which sep-
rates us. A game is being played at the extremity of
this infinite distance where heads or tails will turn up.
What will you wager? According to reason, you
can do neither the one thing nor the other; according
to reason, you can defend neither of the propositions.

Do not then reprove for error those who have
made a choice; for you know nothing about it. "No,
but I blame them for having made, not this choice,
but a choice; for again both he who chooses heads
and he who chooses tails are equally at fault, they
are both in the wrong. The true course is not to wager
at all."

—Yes; but you must wager. It is not optional.
You are embarked. Which will you choose then?
Let us see. Since you must choose, let us see which
interests you least. You have two things to lose, the
true course, and the false course. Take, your life,
your reason and your will, your knowledge and your
happiness; and your nature has two things to shun,
error and misery. Your reason is no more shocked in
choosing one rather than the other, since you must of
necessity choose. This is one point settled. But your
happiness? Let us weigh the gain and the loss in
weighing that God is. Let us estimate these two
chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you
lose nothing. Wager them without hesitation that
He is.—"That is very fine. Yes, I must wager; but
I may perhaps wager too much."—Let us see. Since
there is an equal risk of gain and of loss, if you had
only to gain two lives, instead of one, it might still
wager. But if there were three lives to gain,
you would have to play (since you are under the
necessity of playing), and you would be imprudent,
when you are forced to play, not to chance your life
to gain three at a game where there is an equal risk
of loss and gain. But there is an eternity of lives.
And so, there were no infinity of chances, of which
only one would be for you, you would still be right in
wagering one to win two, and you would act stupidly,
being obliged to play, by refusing to stake one life
against three at a game in

which out of an infinity of an infinitely happy life
to gain. But there is here an infinity of an infinitely
happy life to gain, a chance of gain against a finite
number of chances of loss, and what you stake is
finite. It is all divided; whereas the infinite is and
there is not an infinity of chances of loss against
that of gain, there is no time to hesitate, you must
give all. And thus, when one is forced to play, he
must renounce reason to preserve his life, rather
than risk it for infinite gain, as likely to happen as
the loss of nothingness.

For it is no use to say it is uncertain if we will
gain, and it is certain that we will, and that the infinite
distance between the certainty of what is staked and
the uncertainty of what will be gained, equals the
finite good which is certainly staked against the
uncertain infinite. It is not so, as every player stakes
a certainty to gain an uncertainty, and yet he stakes
a finite certainty to gain a finite uncertainty, without
transgressing against reason. There is not an infinite
distance between the certainty staked and the uncer-
tainty of the gain; that is untrue. In truth, there is an
infinity between the certainty of gain and the certainty
of loss. But the uncertainty of the gain is proportioned
to the certainty of the stake, according to the propor-
tion of the chances of gain and loss. Hence it comes
that, if there are as many risks on one side as on the
other, the course is to play even; and then the cer-
tainty of the stake is equal to the uncertainty of the
gain, so far is it from the fact that there is an infinite
distance between them. And so our proposition is of
infinity, whereas it is finite.

A game is then played in this way. You are in
a game where there are equal risks of gain and of loss,
and the infinite to gain. This is demonstrable; and if
men are capable of any truths, this is one.

"I confess it, I admit it. But still is there no means
of seeing the faces of the cards?"—"Yes, Scripture
and the Gospels, &c. —"Yes, but my hands tied
and my mouth closed; I am forced to wager, and am
not free. I am not released, and am so made that I
cannot believe. What then would you have me do?"

"True. But at least learn your inability to believe,
since reason brings you to this, and yet you cannot
believe. Endeavour then to convince yourself, not
by increase of proofs of God, but by the abatement
of your passions. You would like to attain faith, and
do not know the way; you would like to cure your-
self of unbelief, and ask the remedy for it. Learn
of those who have been bound like you, and who now

stake all their possessions. These are people who know the way which you would follow, and who are cured of an ill of which you would be cured. Follow the way by which they began; by acting as if they believe, taking the holy water, having masses said, &c. Even this will naturally make you believe, and deaden your acuteness, "—But this is what I am afraid of."—And why? What have you to lose?

But to show you that this leads you there, it is this which will lessen the passions, which are your stumbling-blocks.

The end of this discourse.—Now what harm will befal you in taking this side? You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, generous, a sincere friend, truthful. Certainly you will not have those poisonous pleasures, glory and luxury; but will you not have others? I will tell you that you will thereby gain in this life, and that, at each step you take on this road, you will see so great certainty of gain, so much nothingness in what you risk, that you will at last recognize that you have wagered for something certain and infinite, for which you have given nothing.

"Ah! This discourse transports me, charms me," &c.

If this discourse pleases you and seems impressive, know that it is made by a man who has knelt, both before and after it, in prayer to that Being, infinite and without parts, before whom he lays all he has, for you also to lay before Him all you have for your own good and for His glory, so that strength may be given to lowliness.

WILLIAM G. LYCAN AND GEORGE N. SCHLESINGER

You Bet Your Life: Pascal's Wager Defended*

William G. Lycan (1945— ) and George N. Schlesinger (1925— ) both teach philosophy at The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Pascal's famous wager is often mentioned in introductory philosophy classes and very occasionally addressed in the professional literature, but never favorably on the whole. It is considered an amusing quandary and an entertaining early example of decision theory, but it is hardly thought convincing or even intellectually respectable. We maintain, to the contrary, that the Wager is seriously defensible and that the stock objections to it can be answered, even if there are more sophisticated criticisms to be made of Pascal's argument. We are inclined to think that the Wager is rational, and we propose to defend it here.

1. THE ORIGINAL ARGUMENT

We shall concentrate on the standard expected-utility version of the Wager.1 Pascal supposed that the relevant partition was ("God exists", "God does not exist"), and, for the sake of argument, that its members are equiprobable, since

reason can decide nothing here. There is an infinite chaos which separates us. A game is being played at the extremity of this infinite distance where heads or tails will turn up. What will you wager?

The relevant choices are to believe in God and adopt a reverent and devout lifestyle, or not to believe and to behave however one otherwise would.2 Since the Christian God, at least, promises eternal joy and blissful union with Himself to those who do truly believe, and damnation (on some accounts eternal torment) to those who have heard but do not believe, the expected payoffs are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>God exists</th>
<th>God doesn't exist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Believe</td>
<td>-∞</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t</td>
<td>-20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The two nonfinite payoffs represent (respectively) the eternal joy granted to the believer if God does exist, and the infinite suffering one will undergo if God exists and one chooses not to believe in Him. -20 somewhat arbitrarily represents the inconveniences of living a devout and continent life when one doesn't have to, and "20" represents the fun one would have if totally released from religious hangups. (We assume for the moment that sin is fun; if not, so much the better for Pascal's argument.) The expected utility (EU) of theism is thus .5(∞) + .5(-20) = -∞, the EU of agnosticism or atheism is .5(-∞) + .5(20) = -∞.4 According to Pascal, this doesn’t even leave room for discussion; one would have to be demented to pass up such an offer. Whatever inconveniences may attend the devout and unportly life, they pale beside the hope of eternal joy and the fear of damnation.

Pascal is, of course, arguing for the existence of God; he affects to think that no such argument can be given and that the balance of evidence favors agnosticism. He is contending that despite the epistemic irrationality of theism, if you like, it is prudentially rational—i.e., in one's interest—to believe in God regardless of the balance of evidence.5

2. MISGUIDED OBJECTIONS

Just to get a better feel for the Wager, let us very quickly run through a few preliminary objections, before coming to the two which we consider serious.

(i) "But my beliefs are not under my control; if I can't believe, any more than I can believe there to be a live swordfish in front of me just because someone offers me $1,000 if I can get myself to believe that." Reply: In the long run, most people's beliefs are under their control; as Pascal himself emphasized, behavior therapy is remarkably effective even upon intellectuals. Start going to church and observing its rituals; associate with intelligent and congenial religious people; stop reading philosophy and associating with cynics and logical positivists. To quote William James's pungent paraphrase of Pascal, "Go then and take holy water, and have masses said; belief will come and stupefy your scruples." It may be that some people, of an indefatigably analytical and unorthodox temperament, simply cannot let themselves neglect the evidence and acquiesce in faith, just as some people simply cannot let themselves be hypnotized. But this is no reflection on the prudential rationality of the Wager; many people are psychologically incapable of doing what is demonstrably in their interest and known to them to be in their interest.

(ii) "The Wager is cynical and mercenary; God wouldn't reward a 'believer' who makes it." Reply: Of course He wouldn't, just like that. Pascal's claim is rather that our interest lies in leaving our cynicism behind and eventually becoming believers, if we can. There is no particular reason to think that God would punish a truly sincere and devout believer just because of the historical origins of his/her belief. People are reportedly saved as a result of death-bed conversions, even after lives of the most appalling corruption, if their new belief is sincere and authentic.

(iii) "Pascal is wrong in conjuring that the probability of theism is as high as .5. It isn't; it's minuscule." Reply: That doesn't matter; even if the probability of theism is .001, the expected payoffs are still infinite. "All right, then, the probability is zero. I'm certain there is no God," Reply: How certain? And on what grounds? We would need to see a very convincing argument that no God of even roughly the traditional sort could exist, and it would have to be better than most philosophical arguments. (How many philosophical arguments do we know that confer probability 1 on their conclusions?)

(iv) "But if I bet on theism and in fact there is no God, my life will be based on a lie." Reply: But if one bets on atheism and in fact there is a God, one's life will have been based on a lie. (And one's afterlife will be based on the worm that dieth not and the fire that is not quenched.) But Pascal is telling us, brazenly, to form a firm belief that is unsupported by evidence and may even go directly against the evidence. That is an epistemic vice, the shirking of an epistemic obligation. As a professional philosopher I couldn't live with myself knowing I had done
A first and sensible reply would be that most of us who are reading this paper have excellent (though reasonably common) reasons for thinking that we will never in fact be called upon to martyr ourselves; and if so, then the Wager remains reasonable at least for us until such time as we are presented with ominous new contrary evidence. But this is too simple. For in order to attain the genuinely religious life, as is required for salvation, we must achieve a condition in which we can come to believe in ourselves if called upon to do so, even though we could not rationally want this in our present agnostic state. Could it possibly be reasonable for us, now, in our present circumstances and state of mind, to embark on a procedure that we fully intend will brainwash us into accepting a potentially disastrous course of action? Is this any more rational than (for money) taking a pill that will make us into suicidal depressives or lunatic dardevils? Yes, of course it is. The expected payoff is still infinite. For death, even horrible and very painful death, is still only finitely disutable. There are finite worse than death, as is evidenced by the plain fact that countless human beings willingly and not irrationally chosen death before dishonor, death rather than drastic indignity, death to save a loved one, death in service of a cherished cause, or the like. In that sense one’s life is one’s own, and is available as a stake among other stakes in a gamble, though such a gamble would not be a good one. If this is right, then our instinctive recoil from martyrdom is just that—instinctive recoil. Of course we shrink from violent death, and of course the prospect of immediate rending and shredding would very likely cause us (quickly) to rethink the Wager. But could we all agree on some argument to show that the Wager is not still in fact rational. At best it shows that visceral fear drives out sound argument, and we know that anyway. If Pascal’s argument works at all, it works in the face of martyrdom, and one cannot show the falsity of this latter conditional’s antecedent by simply assuming that of its consequent; one must find an independent objection to the Wager.

Let us turn at last to the Many-Gods problem. Pascal assumes a very specific sort of god—roughly a Christian god who rewards His own partisans with infinite bliss and who perhaps sentences opponents and even neutrals to damnation of one truly awful sort or another. But logical space contains countless possible gods of very different natures—all infinite, if you like—and if we can know nothing of infinities then we cannot have reason to prefer any one of them conclusively and definitively, their respective expected payoffs are diverse and conflicting: What if instead of the Christian God there is a Baal, a Moloch, a Wotan, or a Zeus, who prepares a particularly nasty fate for devout Christians? What if there is a very shy and recluse god who does not want to be believed in and who carefully guards His temple so as not to attract the attention of any of His devotees? Et cetera. Pascal assumed that his God has a .5 probability of existing, but this is grossly presuppositional in the face of all the other gods who cannot be ruled out a priori. Either Pascal’s Christian God must take His place equiprobably alongside the indefinitely many other possible deities so as to make the probability of His deity’s existence, if it is negligible, or Pascal’s argument could be reitered for every other god who offers infinite payoffs, in which case it proves too much and leads directly to contradiction due to incomparably jealous gods.

4. A FIRST ANSWER TO THE MANY-GODS OBJECTION

A natural response is to say that for one reason or another all the various possible gods are not equiprobable. Intuitively, it is far more likely that the Christian God, the God of the Jews, or Allah exists, than that there is a vindictively shy god or a god who rewards all and only those who do not show them favor. If this is right, then our instinctive recoil from martyrdom is just that—instinctive recoil. Of course we shrink from violent death, and of course the prospect of immediate rending and shredding would very likely cause us (quickly) to rethink the Wager. But could we all agree on some argument to show that the Wager is not still in fact rational. At best it shows that visceral fear drives out sound argument, and we know that anyway. If Pascal’s argument works at all, it works in the face of martyrdom, and one cannot show the falsity of this latter conditional’s antecedent by simply assuming that of its consequent; one must find an independent objection to the Wager.
ample, offers infinite bliss to those who deny him and eternal torture to his worshippers, then (so long as the probability of his existence is not a flat zero, which it is not) the EU of belief in him is itself still infinite and so equal to that of belief in the Christian God despite the far greater probability of the latter.

Our first reply to this is that if EU's are equal, then by Bayesian principles it doesn’t matter what one does and one may follow one’s inclinations. Moreover, so long as prudence does not rule on the matter, one would do best on epistemically-rational grounds to go with the probabilities, and side with one’s best traditional bet rather than with a crankpot or made-up god. Indeed, in this case we think a person should be rationally faulted for failing to prefer an objectively more probable god, so long as EU's are equal.15

This response is complemented by our second general answer to the Many- Gods objection, to which we now turn.

5. LEMMA FOR A SECOND ANSWER TO THE MANY-GODS OBJECTION: ST. ANSELM ON THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

Some people may see no empirical ground for distinguishing the probabilities of the various rival theistic hypotheses, and may find no other reason for preferring any one possible supernatural being to the others. Even so, it seems reasonable for such people to employ a further, common methodological principle, universally applied in more mundane situations which present us with indefinitely large choices among down-to-earth empirical hypotheses.

In science, underdetermination of theory is rife: When we can find one hypothesis accounting for a particular body of observational data (no matter how large), then we are invariably able to produce indefinitely many alternative and competing hypotheses, each capable of accounting for the same body of data. For example, if an expression y = f(x) explains such-and-such a large set of experimental results we have just obtained, then necessarily these same results could equally have been accommodated by y = f(x) + g(z), where g(z) = 0 for all observations made prior to now. The two equations (actually infinitely pre-existing to varying versions of g(z)) are of course equivalent with respect to all past observations, and so the observations cannot adjudicate between them; but they make different predictions as regards future observations, and so there is a genuine question as to which we should rationally adopt. As everyone knows, we escape such in- decision by using the principle of simplicity, and choose the simplest of all such hypotheses.16

For the case of theistic hypotheses, we suppose that the postulate is simpler than another if its state- ment requires fewer new entities or subtractions (as a predicate is adventitious if it is just made up by the theologian, in the manner of ‘grie,’ to abbreviate a longer complex expression). Now, St. Anselm called our attention to the very remarkable predicate “absolutely perfect,”17 which is theologically unique in that it implies all the other predicates traditionally ascribed to God.18 In proclaiming the existence of an absolutely perfect or ‘greatest possible’ being, the theist offers a complete description of the deity thus postulated. The theist’s brief statement, that his ob- ject of worship necessarily exemplifies a maximally consistent set of great-making properties, enables one to determine for any particular putative being who does or does not possess P: If having P contributes to the excellence of a thing that does have P, then an absolutely perfect being has P; otherwise the being does not have P. (If there are eva- lutively neutral properties that a divine being could exemplify, these presumably do not affect the rationality of our choice. We shall take a bit more below on the question of neutral properties.)

By contrast, a statement of the existence of any deity other than the absolutely perfect being will inevitably be more complex. For example: Although there is a very considerable body of ancient Greek literature regarding Zeus, we are still far from having a complete description of Zeus’ characteristics. We are informed that Zeus, who weighs the lives of men and infones the Fates of his decisions, can nevertheless change his mind; but we have no notion of just how unstaidfast he is and in what ways. He is sometimes described as being asleep, but we have no idea how many hours of sleep he gets per day. We know he is not omnipotent, but we are given no detail here. And so on.

No one would suggest that Zeus constitutes the simplest alternative to Anselmian theism. But some- one might be attracted by the hypothesis that there is a deity who is almost perfect except in such-and-such a respect, say, except for falling short of being 100% just. The trouble is that that characterization provides incomplete information; we would need some further specification of the precise ways in which that god may be unjust.

Here again there are two obvious objections. First, one may question the sweeping assumption that it is within the power of a single nonadventitious predicate to contain a full description of all the Di- vine attributes. After all, for some properties P it is hardly conceivable that God would or could add or subtract from the excellence of its possessor. For example, we usu- ally assume that omniscience is a perfection or at least an admirable quality. Yet someone might argue that a being whose knowledge is forever incomplete and who constantly, nobly seeks to increase it—who never ceases from inquiry and learning—is more to be admired (and so to be emulated) than one for whom the concepts of seeking and inquiry do not even make sense. A more familiar example might be that of timelessness. Theologians have insisted throughout the ages that a being who exists in time is therefore in some important sense limited or circumscribed; so they have thought it necessary to re- fuse any predicate being does or does not possess P: If having P contributes to the excellence of a thing that does have P, then an absolutely perfect being has P; otherwise the being does not have P. (If there are eva- lutively neutral properties that a divine being could exemplify, these presumably do not affect the rationality of our choice. We shall take a bit more below on the question of neutral properties.)

By contrast, a statement of the existence of any deity other than the absolutely perfect being will inevitably be more complex. For example: Although there is a very considerable body of ancient Greek literature regarding Zeus, we are still far from having a complete description of Zeus’ characteristics. We are informed that Zeus, who weighs the lives of men and infones the Fates of his decisions, can nevertheless change his mind; but we have no notion of just how unstaidfast he is and in what ways. He is sometimes described as being asleep, but we have no idea how many hours of sleep he gets per day. We know he is not omnipotent, but we are given no detail here. And so on.

No one would suggest that Zeus constitutes the simplest alternative to Anselmian theism. But some- one might be attracted by the hypothesis that there is a deity who is almost perfect except in such-and-such a respect, say, except for falling short of being 100% just. The trouble is that that characterization provides incomplete information; we would need some further specification of the precise ways in which that god may be unjust.

Here again there are two obvious objections. First, one may question the sweeping assumption that it is within the power of a single nonadventitious predicate to contain a full description of all the Di- vine attributes. After all, for some properties P it is hardly conceivable that God would or could add or subtract from the excellence of its possessor. For example, we usu- ally assume that omniscience is a perfection or at least an admirable quality. Yet someone might argue that a being whose knowledge is forever incomplete and who constantly, nobly seeks to increase it—who never ceases from inquiry and learning—is more to be admired (and so to be emulated) than one for whom the concepts of seeking and inquiry do not even make sense. A more familiar example might be that of timelessness. Theologians have insisted throughout the ages that a being who exists in time is therefore in some important sense limited or circumscribed; so they have thought it necessary to re- fuse any predicate being does or does not possess P: If having P contributes to the excellence of a thing that does have P, then an absolutely perfect being has P; otherwise the being does not have P. (If there are eva- lutively neutral properties that a divine being could exemplify, these presumably do not affect the rationality of our choice. We shall take a bit more below on the question of neutral properties.)

By contrast, a statement of the existence of any deity other than the absolutely perfect being will inevitably be more complex. For example: Although there is a very considerable body of ancient Greek literature regarding Zeus, we are still far from having a complete description of Zeus’ characteristics. We are informed that Zeus, who weighs the lives of men and infones the Fates of his decisions, can nevertheless change his mind; but we have no notion of just how unstaidfast he is and in what ways. He is sometimes described as being asleep, but we have no idea how many hours of sleep he gets per day. We know he is not omnipotent, but we are given no detail here. And so on.

No one would suggest that Zeus constitutes the simplest alternative to Anselmian theism. But some- one might be attracted by the hypothesis that there is a deity who is almost perfect except in such-and-such a respect, say, except for falling short of being 100% just. The trouble is that that characterization provides incomplete information; we would need some further specification of the precise ways in which that god may be unjust.

Here again there are two obvious objections. First, one may question the sweeping assumption that it is within the power of a single nonadventitious predicate to contain a full description of all the Di- vine attributes. After all, for some properties P it is hardly conceivable that God would or could add or subtract from the excellence of its possessor. For example, we usu-
problem as an uncertainty regarding the kinds of particular we should postulate.

It also seems, therefore, that distinct individuals may be compared with respect to their simplicity. We may say that one individual is simpler than another if its properties can be described by simpler statements, that is, if its behavior can be described by simpler laws.

If we are realists enough to regard acceptable scientific hypotheses as presumed to be literally true, then it is also unreasonable to select the Anselmian hypothesis rather than any of its many rival theologies. A staunch scientific realist thinks of the principles of simplicity as an aesthetic consideration or a measure of short-term convenience, but as providing the best chance that we shall make the correct choice when faced with an infinite array of equally well confirmed hypotheses. Reason recommends that we employ the same principle in our theological context.59 Our second approach to the Many- Gods problem is of course troubled by the Problem of Evil: The Anselmian hypothesis of an absolutely perfect superbeing is not obviously compatible with the amount and variety of suffering we know the world to contain. We shall not suggest any particular theological here, but only point out that for purposes of Pascal's Wager there need only be some nonnegligible chance that an adequate deity exists; the Wager is still prudentially rational if we can assign a nonzero probability to the hope that the Problem of Evil admits of solution.

7. A THIRD ANSWER TO THE MANY-GODS OBJECTION

A deeper and more authentic approach would take into account the special nature of the reward on which one is bid to wager. First, we are to realize that what Pascal is urging is for the gambler to set his eyes upon a prize of a sort entirely different from the "poisonous pleasures" Pascal advises him to abandon. The gratification to be pursued by the religious seeker is not something extrinsic to the devout life, but an organic outgrowth of it. It does not differ in kind from the seeking, as if one were to be handed a new IBM computer monitor as a prize for having won the marathon, that the natural fruit of one's way of life. Thesists in every age have anticipated the dissolving of their narrow selves in the ecstasy of a God-centered life here on earth and, more to Pascal's point, their eventual smooth translation into a disembodied existence in holy felicity—an eternal love of the Divine. A human being becomes capable of this kind of love only after he/she has grasped the idea of God. Maimonides puts it as follows:

What is the proper love of God? It is the love of the Lord with a great and very strong love so that one's soul shall be tied to the love of the Lord, and one should be continually occupied by it, like a love-sick individual. Even then, God's mind is at no time free from his passion for a particular woman, the thought of her filling his heart at all times, when sitting down or rising up, even when he is eating or drinking. Still more intense should be the love of God in the heart of the one who loves Him.60

According to classical theologians, one who has spent one's life as a passionate servant of the Lord will have developed and perfected one's soul adequately to have acquired the capacity to partake in the transmundane bliss that awaits in the afterlife. The suitably groomed soul, when released from its earthy fetters, will bask in the radiance of the Divine presence and delight in the adoring communion with a loving God (if this is a multiply mixed metaphor, it doesn't matter).

It is appropriate at this point to comment again upon objection (ii) considered in sec. 2 above, the complaint that because of its calculating and mercenary character, the Wager is both morally repugnant and inefficacious, and incompatible with the spirit of any genuine religion. Many people would recoil from a Wagerer just as they would from a hypocrite who went out of his way to brighten the mood of an endangered (but well-intended) but not overly perspicacious reason to increase his chance of being mentioned in that person's will. Such misgivings could not easily be dismissed if Pascal had had in mind a pie-in-the-sky, anthropocentric sort of heaven such as that which Heinrich Heine sarcastically claimed to be resembling so closely the rewards. According to the mouth-watering description, Heaven is a place where road geese fly around with gravy boats in their bills and there are brooks of boulion and champagne and everyone revered in eternal feasting and carousing. It would and should be hard to admire anyone who pursued a godly, righteous and sober life mainly in the hope of gaining heaven, for the sake of the prize. But we are considering the Wager in the context of an infinitely more exalted afterlife. Suppose that we have always had great admiration for Smith because of the noteworthy humanitarian works he has performed, and that lately we have heard of further truly heroic acts of benevolence on his part that make his previous accomplishments pale into insignificance. Then we should hardly be condemned for making efforts to discover more information concerning Smith's further laudable deeds—even if we are fully conscious of the sentiments of Of course, does not every true man feel that he is himself made higher by doing reverence to what is really above him?60 Most people would find our conduct neither ignoble nor stupid, even if our efforts to discover the grounds of Smith's greatly intensified worthiness were done explicitly for the sake of feeling ourselves made higher by doing reverence to a more exalted personage.

Let us return for a moment to the notion of expected utility. Rationality requires that when faced with a number of choices one is to be on the hypothesis having the highest EU. In the special case in which the various outcomes are equiprobable, one's choice is then determined by the magnitudes of the respective payoffs. In Pascal's situation, then, where D ranges over possible deities: The degree of justified inclination to embark on a process leading to worshipping D = the probability that D exists × the magnitude of religious fulfillment to be gained by worshipping D provided D does exist. And when $D_1, D_2, \ldots$ are equiprobable, the degree of justified inclination and the rationality of one's choice must be determined by the second factor on the right-hand side.

It is the crux of our problem that for more than one deity there is an extremely small chance of infinite payoffs. Still, the very nature of the sublime gratification the believer aspires to ensures that its quality will vary with the character of the deity he/she bets on. When Carlyle spoke of the self-enhancement resulting from doing reverence to what is above oneself, he had in mind an entirely worldly context. But when the object of one's homage is a divine being, the uplift is immensurably greater. Pascal wagered on the ecstasy to be derived from exalting a supereminent being and basking in its radiance, and naturally, the more glorious and sublime the being, the greater that worshipful ecstasy would be. Thus, Pascal's argument leads us to maximize religious benefit by sitting that superbeing which is the very most worthy of worship, viz., the absolutely perfect being, which we take to be the God of Judeo-Christian theism and of some other, non-Western religions as well, minus some of the tendentious if traditional special features ascribed to Him by sectarian practitioners of those religions.63

8. CONCLUSION

If one does not already incline toward theism, or perhaps even if one does so incline, there is still a temptation—a powerful one—to refuse to take the wager seriously. How, again, can one listen to all this stuff about grieving one's soul, absolute perfection, infinite ecstasy, and the like, if one (as things are) simply does not believe in any god and regards theism of any sort as being on an equal epistemic footing with belief in the Easter Bunny?

To this we say: Consider the arguments fairly. We maintain that the standard and ubiquitous intuitive rejection of the Wager by philosophers is grounded in a confused conflation of the objections we have already addressed, particularly: the feeling that one could not do anything about one's beliefs even if one tried, the feeling that theism has probability zero, and the feeling that any failure to proportion one's belief to the evidence is a shameful if secret vice. But once these various misgivings have been relegated and cast aside explicitly in the form of objections, they are seen to have little rational force.64 If one wishes to decline the Wager one will have to think of more subtle criticisms than those which have appeared in the literature to date.

We do not claim that our case is conclusive, or that the Wager is conclusive for that reason. We do say that at the present stage of investigation Pascal's argument is unrefuted and not unreasonable.

Let us pray.

NOTES

1. In "The Logic of Pascal's Wager" (American Philosophical Quarterly 9 [1972]), Ian Hacking distinguishes the "equal probabilities" version of the argument from a simpler "dominance" version from and a mixed "dominating expectation" version. He also provides a fascinating account of the historical context and of the early reception of Pascal's "l'infiniti-m.".


3. Of course there are degrees of belief in between, including a significant range of agnosticism. The possibility of metaphysical agnosticism accompanied by a self-styled beneficent—even vengefully as it must be, the last bastion of many major religions, but we shall neglect it here.
REASON AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF

4. Again, agnostics and atheists might not in fact be treated the same, depending on one's idea of God's jealousy, but we pass over this theological tangling.

5. The distinctiveness of these two notions of "rationality" should be obvious enough. The second seems not epistemic at all; but for that matter cost-benefit considerations have recently begun to enter into traditional discourses on a distracting way. See Lynn, "Epistemic Value," *Synthese* 64 (1985), and Hillary Kornblith, "Justified Belief and Epistemically Responsible Action," *Philosophical Review* 92 (1983).

6. William James, "The Will to Believe," extract reprinted in this volume, pp. 91–98.

7. Someone experiences an ominous medical symptom, and does not—cannot—go to the doctor because he is paralyzed with fear. He ends up dead. Someone else does not—cannot—make Pascal's wager because he is paralyzed with textbook rationality. He ends up dead. Permanently.

8. Indeed, if Pascal is right in conjecturing that the probabilities are, say, 100 to 1 in favor of God's existence, and we make a genuine error, it is arguable that when probabilities are ever, one may believe as one likes. (On this issue, see Lehrer, Koelof's and Swain, "Reason and Evidence: An Unsettled Problem," *Ratio* 9 [1967], and George Mavrodes, "Belief, Proportionality, and Probability," in M. Bradle and K. Sayes, eds., *Reason and Decision* (Basing Green Studies: Applied Philosophy, Vol. III [1981]). Mavrodes' article is the most trenchant examination we know of the thesis that one ought always to "proportion one's belief to the evidence.")

9. Actual demographic surveys do show at least that religious people fare better with respect to divorce, suicide, and other indicators of troubled personal life.


11. There was nothing dialectically suspect about this at the time; Pascal was writing specifically for fellow Christians whose faith was wavering, stagnant, or limited. Cargile (op. cit.) briefly considers this option, but dis misser it without much ado and goes on (p. 256) to propose the negligible-probability version of the Many-Gods objection. Our own response to that objection, we believe, is consistent with Cargile's version in particular.


13. One might wish to join Peirce, and more recently D. M. Armstrong, in seeing consensus as a mark of epistemic probity; though the epistemic value attaches more properly to methods of producing belief than to beliefs themselves.

14. It still holds (as it has been by Cargile in correspondence and by Michael Resnik in conversation) that the very idea of an infinite EU is still intricately problematic. In the St. Petersburg paradox, the game is constructed which affords an infinite expected payoff in money but which no even faintly sensible person would regard as a worthwhile amount of money to play (cf. R. D. Laue and H. Raiffa, *Games and Decisions* [New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1957, p. 20]). We cannot take up the paradox in any detail here, but we are inclined to follow Benoist himself in ascribing it to the declining marginal value of money. If the game were recast in terms of some intrinsic value, such as happiness, and if the infinite payoff were made possible to obtain (which presumably requires eternal life), then it does not seem to us unreasonable to pay an arbitrarily large amount to play (it follows in some one way known that one will not win).


16. This simple idea has not received nearly the attention it deserves.

17. This seems particularly rational if one supposes that time is nomologically, even meta-nomologically intertwined with space and matter-energy, in such a way that time is inextricably part of the physical world and so part of creation.


19. There is of course the possibility that timelessness is evaluatively neutral and that two beings identical in every respect save that one is timeless while the other is not cannot differ in degree of excellence. If this were so we would refuse Anselm's thesis, since the property of absolute perfection would not then determine the temporal nature of its possessor. Analogous theology must presuppose that every property that a candidate for ascension to a divine being must either enhance or diminish the excellence of its instance; there cannot exist any exception to this rule. Although a fairly strong thesis, this does not seem unreasonable to us.

20. For that matter, it is by no means obvious that the questions of the kinds of particulars that constitute the furniture of the universe and the laws that govern those particulars are fundamentally different, or that the two notions of "initial conditions" and the "laws of nature" are truly separate and independent. In order to describe the initial conditions prevailing at t one must give a full characterization of every particular existing at t, and we can not fully have described a particular unless we have stated all the properties in virtue of which that particular belongs to its particular kind, which in turn requires listing all the fundamental physical laws that obey it.

21. A further and small advantage of the Antievolutionist conception of God is that it answers to the feelings of many people that some version of the Ontological Argument is plausible. We do not share that feeling ourselves, but many excellent philosophers have maintained, formally or informally, that the doctrine of the existence of God, the Ontological Argument is simple and obviously a non- stetter—no one would even think of trying to prove the existence of the God of the Bible, or by Antievolutionists.


25. Oddly, the Many-Gods problem, which is surely the most powerful philosophical objection to the Wager, does not play a significant role in people's immediate intuitive revulsion; most people do not even think of it.

WILLIAM JAMES

The Will to Believe*

1. Let us give the name of hypothesis to anything that may be proposed to our belief; and just as the electricians speak of live and dead wires, let us speak of any hypothesis as either live or dead. A live hypothesis is one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed. If I ask you to believe in the Mahdi, the notion makes no electric connection with your nature—it refuses to sanctify with any credibility at all. As an hypothesis it is completely dead. To an Arab, however (even if he be not one of the Mahdi's followers), the hypothesis is among the mind's possibilities: It is alive. This shows that deadness and liveness in an hypothesis are not intrinsically properties, but relations to the individual thinker. They are measured by his willingness to act. The maximum of liveness in an hypothesis means the highest willingness to act irrevocably. Practically, that means belief; but there is some believing tendency whereby there is willingness to act at all.

2. Next, let us call the decision between two hypotheses an option. Options may be of several kinds. They may be first, living or dead; secondly, forced or available; or thirdly, absolute or trivial; and for our purposes we may call an option a genuine option when it is of the forced, living, and momentous kind.

3. A living option is one in which both hypotheses are live ones. If I say to you: "Be a theosophist or be a Mohammedan," it is probably a dead option, because for you neither hypothesis is likely to be alive. But if I say: "Be an agnostic or be a Christian," it is otherwise: trained as you are, each hypothesis makes some appeal, however small, to your belief.

*Extracts from William James, "The Will to Believe," an Address to the Philosophical Clubs of Yale and Brown Universities. First published in the *New World*, 1896.

The next matter to consider is the actual psychol- ogy of human opinion. When we look at certain facts,