

A Better Version of Pascal's Wager

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Abstract. The standard version of Pascal's Wager suffers from serious problems. In this paper I present a modified version of a Wager-style argument that avoids several of the most serious objections to the standard version, viz., the objections of Duff and Hajek relating to infinite utilities, moral objections concerning the use of pragmatic considerations, and the many-gods objection. I argue that a serious commitment to living a Christian life is rational (and the failure to make such a commitment irrational) if one is rational in assigning a credence to Christianity of at least $\frac{1}{2}$. The upshot is that considerations of practical rationality dramatically lower the bar for natural theology.

How confident must one be in the truth of a religion for it to be rational to live one's life as a committed adherent of that religion? It's natural to think that a very high level of confidence is necessary, whether because authentic religious commitment requires belief and belief requires a high level of confidence, or because a religious lifestyle carries high costs, or for other reasons. In this paper I argue that this conclusion is mistaken, at least in the case of Christianity. Considerations of practical rationality dramatically lower the bar for natural theology. Drawing on and developing recent work

on Pascal's Wager,¹ I argue that if one is rational in assigning a credence to Christian theism of at least $\frac{1}{2}$, then a serious commitment to living a Christian life is rational (and a failure to make such a commitment is irrational). More precisely, I argue that this is true for persons in ordinary circumstances, living in a country with religious freedom.²

I

Pascal's Wager and its Critics. Despite the common use of the singular "Pascal's Wager," it's clear that there are several distinct arguments gestured at in Pascal's posthumously published notes on the topic. Hacking sees three;³ Jordan finds four.⁴ The most widely discussed has been the Argument from Generalized Expectations, formulated by Alan Hájek as follows:

1. Either God exists or God does not exist, and you can either wager for God or

¹ I'm especially indebted to Jeff Jordan's excellent work in *Pascal's Wager: Pragmatic Arguments and Belief in God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

² What if one's credence is less than $\frac{1}{2}$? I set this issue aside to focus solely on the question of whether a credence of at least $\frac{1}{2}$ is sufficient to make Christian religious commitment rational.

³ Ian Hacking, "The Logic of Pascal's Wager," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 9 (1972): 186–192.

⁴ Jeff Jordan, *Pascal's Wager: Pragmatic Arguments and Belief in God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 21–24.

wager against God. The utilities of the relevant possible outcomes are as follows, where f_1 , f_2 , and f_3 are numbers whose values are not specified beyond the requirement that they be finite:

	<i>God exists</i>	<i>God does not exist</i>
<i>Wager for God</i>	∞	f_1
<i>Wager against God</i>	f_2	f_3

2. Rationality requires the probability that you assign to God existing to be positive, and not infinitesimal.
3. Rationality requires you to perform the act of maximum expected utility (when there is one).
4. Conclusion 1. Rationality requires you to wager for God.
5. Conclusion 2. You should wager for God.⁵

Strong objections to this argument abound. For one thing, premise (3) is false. There are situations in which rationality does not require one to perform the act with the highest expected utility, as evidenced by the St. Petersburg Paradox. A second objection to the Argument from Generalized Expectations focuses on the expected value of wagering against God. Taking ‘wagering for God’ as attempting to induce belief in God, and ‘wagering against God’ as refraining from such an attempt, Antony Duff points out that if

⁵ Alan Hájek, “Pascal's Wager,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2012 Edition, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/pascal-wager/>.

we follow Pascal and allow an infinite expected value to be assigned to wagering for God, then we should also assign an infinite expected value to wagering against God:

For suppose I take no steps to make it more likely that I will come to believe in God. There must still be some probability, however small, that I will nonetheless come to believe in Him—there must be such a probability even if I try to avoid coming to believe in Him; and that probability is enough to generate an infinite expected value for my actions. No course of action can make it absolutely certain that I will not come to believe in God: therefore, every course of action has an infinite expected value—the infinite value of believing in God multiplied by the probability that God exists, and by the probability that I will come to believe in Him.⁶

The upshot, then, is that even if premise (3) were true, (4) would not follow, because the expected value of wagering for and against God is equal. Hájek offers a similar objection, arguing that by Pascal's lights mixed strategies (e.g. flip a coin and if it's heads wager for God, if it's tails wager against God) should also have infinite expected utilities.⁷

And, third, there is the moral objection that trying to induce belief for pragmatic reasons is wrong.

⁶ Antony Duff, "Pascal's Wager and Infinite Utilities," *Analysis* 46 (1986): 107–9, at 108.

⁷ Alan Hájek, "Waging War on Pascal's Wager," *The Philosophical Review* 112 (2003): 27–56.

Strong though they may be, these objections do not succeed against the pragmatic argument given in the next section. Taking a cue from Pascal's suggestion that committing to Christianity weakly dominates⁸ a complacent agnosticism, I formulate a pragmatic argument in support of religious commitment (rather than belief) which employs neither the claim that we must always maximize expected utility nor the mathematical concept of infinity as a way to quantify utility or value. In section II, I present a basic version of this argument, which I'll refer to as "the Wager." In section III, I consider objections and refine the Wager.

II

The Basic Argument. In this section I argue for the conditional "If a person in ordinary circumstances rationally assigns a credence of at least $\frac{1}{2}$ to Christian theism, then that person should commit to living a Christian life." For the sake of conditional introduction, then, assume the perspective of a person who does rationally assign a credence of at least $\frac{1}{2}$ to Christian theism. (This credence might come from arguments, religious experience, properly basic belief, or some combination thereof.)

Three concepts from decision theory will be helpful: states, strategies, and outcomes. A *state* is a possible way things might be (it will rain today, or it won't rain today); a *strategy* is a possible action the decider might take (bring my umbrella, or leave

⁸ A possible action "weakly dominates" another if there are some (epistemically) possible states of the world on which the first action would result in a better outcome than the second, and there are no (epistemically) possible states of the world on which the first action would result in a worse outcome than the second.

it at home). An *outcome* is a situation that results when a given strategy is taken and a certain state is actual (e.g., the situation of being stuck in the rain without an umbrella). In order to assess the suitability of the various available strategies, the decision maker attempts to form a judgment about how valuable the various outcomes are.

Now, consider two possible ways the world might be: the way which Christianity portrays the world as being and the way which naturalism portrays the world as being (on which, I assume, there is no life after bodily death). And consider two possible courses of action one might take: commit to God (in a Christian way), or omit such commitment. In section III, I'll consider additional possible states and strategies, but for now, just to get the basic argument on the table, let's focus on Christianity and naturalism.

Here, "commit to God" does not mean "decide to believe that God exists" or "induce belief in God." The primary component of committing to God is the firm intention to seek a relationship with God. Committing to God is thus a course of action that can be undertaken by a theist or by an agnostic.⁹

While both believer and agnostic can commit to God, the strategy will look different for the two of them. For the person who already believes, committing to God will involve seeking a closer relationship with God. It will involve prayer and the

⁹ Some have suggested that even an atheist could *seek* a relationship with God, e.g. an atheist who while disbelieving in God still assigned some non-negligible credence to theism (e.g. 5%). I'll forgo discussion of this interesting issue, since I'm arguing for a proposition concerning what would be rational for a person who assigns a 50% or higher credence to Christian theism.

intention to live a life of moral excellence. It will involve attendance of religious services, association with other religious believers, the reading of sacred writings, and perhaps study and discussion on religious questions.

For an agnostic, to seek a relationship with God is to seek a relationship with a being whose existence is in doubt. This is atypical, but possible—compare a situation in which a person camping alone hears some ambiguous but possibly human sounds outside the circle of firelight, and calls out “Is that a person? If somebody’s out there, you’re welcome to come closer.” For the agnostic, committing to God will involve prayer, likely in a similar conditional form, e.g. “If you’re there, God, please forgive me for that, and help me with this...” An agnostic seeking God will probably also want to attend religious services, although full participation might be ruled out—no duplicitousness should be involved in an agnostic’s search for God. Association with religious believers, thought and discussion on religious matters, and the reading of sacred writings are all called for by the intention to seek a relationship with God. Further, and crucially, the inquiring agnostic will want to live a life that would be pleasing to God, if God does indeed exist.

The agnostic who commits his life to God need not turn a blind-eye to counter-evidence, and it may be that one day he will decide to stop committing his life to God. Still, adopting the strategy involves a sincere openness to the possibility of God, a desire to search for Him, and an openness to belief in God, should it come. Should future experiences or arguments prove sufficient for belief, then a person who is seeking a relationship with God won’t resist the transition from agnosticism to belief.

Although committing to God will involve somewhat different things for the agnostic and the believer, we can still legitimately think of there being a single strategy

here, since the essential core is the same for believer and agnostic alike: the effort to form a close personal relationship with God.

One strategy, then, is to commit one's life to God. The other is simply not to do that. We can represent all this with a decision matrix:

	Christianity	Naturalism
Commit to God	Outcome WC (Wager and Christianity is true)	Outcome WN
Fail to Commit to God	Outcome ~WC (Don't wager and Christianity is true)	Outcome ~WN

Starting with outcome WC: what sort of value should one place on the outcome that results from committing to God, if Christianity is true?¹⁰ It might be tempting to write "eternal life," perfect happiness with God and others, without end. But that would be to assume that salvation is guaranteed for anyone who embarks on the project of committing to God. Better to merely write that one has maximized one's chance at eternal life, relative to the other strategy under consideration.

¹⁰ For Christianity to be true requires that Christianity have a determinate propositional content, and of course different denominations disagree about what that content includes. For the purposes of this argument I'm thinking along the lines of C. S. Lewis's "mere Christianity." More precisely, let the propositional content of Christian theism be the core beliefs mentioned in the Apostles' Creed, as understood according to those interpretations which are common to traditional Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Christians.

This is where a typical presentation of Pascal's Wager would move on to outcome WN. But there is more to include in outcome WC; for one thing, the benefits aren't just for the decision maker. If Christianity is true, God is there, holding out His hand, so to speak, desiring that each human being seek a relationship.¹¹ One can turn one's back on Him, or reach out one's hand. By seeking closeness with God, one will bring joy to God, and all others who are with God in Heaven. (Jesus expresses this thought in the parable of the prodigal son.) This is a second good that should be included in the evaluation of outcome WC.

Third, if God exists and one commits to God, one has done something morally excellent, responding appropriately to the divine invitation and likely exhibiting the virtue of gratitude to God.

Fourth, one is more likely to receive divine aid for moral and spiritual growth if one seeks a relationship with God than if one doesn't. No doubt God would not leave a person without grace if he or she didn't seek God, but it's reasonable to think that if one is more open to God's assistance in this life, then one will end up more effectively cooperating with the help God sends along.

Fifth, one is more likely to be a help to others in their journey to God. Since the ultimate good for human beings will be closely connected to their relationship with God, we can include in outcome WC the idea that the person who has committed to God is more likely to help others in the most important way possible.

¹¹ By "desiring" here I mean willing, in Aquinas's sense of God's antecedent will.

There are also costs and benefits pertaining to earthly life that should be included in outcome WC, but I will postpone consideration of them until outcome WN, since they pertain to outcome WN as well, and since they are largely swamped by the comparative magnitude of the goods involved in outcome WC.

A typical presentation of Pascal's Wager sums up the evaluation of outcome WC with a lazy eight, estimating its value as positive ∞ . Using a mathematical concept of infinity to evaluate outcome WC isn't necessary, however—we regularly make decisions without quantifying the various possible outcomes. All that's required here is that we hold the goods involved in mind, for later comparison with the other outcomes.

Moving on to outcome WN: suppose you live your three score years and ten committing to God, going to church, spending time in prayer, and then at death it all goes black. Have you wasted your life? Pascal didn't think so:

But what harm will come to you from taking this course [committing to God]?

You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, doing good, a sincere and true friend. It is, of course, true; you will not take part in corrupt pleasure, in glory, in the pleasures of high living. But will you not have others? I tell you that you will win thereby in this life...¹²

Empirical results have since been kind to the notion that a commitment to God carries benefits in the present life. Sociologists Rodney Stark and Roger Finke discuss “a huge, and growing literature that finds religion to be a reliable source of better mental and even

¹² Blaise Pascal, *Pensees and other writings*, trans. H. Levi, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 156.

physical health.”¹³ In the most comprehensive review of research on the subject to date, Koenig et al. find strong evidence that religion and spirituality have both indirect and direct positive effects on well-being.¹⁴

Religious participation can indirectly affect well-being by directly affecting things like marital stability, social support, and hope, which themselves in turn affect well-being. On this score, Koenig et al. present evidence that religious persons are less likely to divorce and more likely to have intact marriages, that they have more social contacts and greater satisfaction with their social support, higher self-esteem, more optimism, are more hopeful, and have a greater sense of meaning and purpose in life. These conclusions are more impressive when we learn the details, for example:

[I]n a twenty-eight year follow-up of 5286 persons participating in the Alameda County Study, Strawbridge and colleagues (1997) found that married individuals who attended religious services at least once per week in 1965 were almost 80 percent more likely to stay married to the same person (compared to those who attended less than weekly).¹⁵

¹³ Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 31–2.

¹⁴ Harold G. Koenig, Dana E. King, and Verna B. Carson, *Handbook of Religion and Health*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), especially 123–144 and 301–307.

¹⁵ Koenig et al., *Handbook of Religion and Health*, 2nd ed., 127.

Regarding studies on the direct connection between religiousness and well-being, Koenig et al. write:

In the last ten years, 175 of 224 quantitative studies (78 percent) found positive associations between greater religiousness and greater well-being...; eight (4 percent) reported mixed findings...; two reported complex relationships difficult to interpret; thirty-eight (17 percent) reported no association; and two studies found a negative relationship.¹⁶

Similar results obtain for studies dating from 2000 and before.

Just how large is the effect of religiousness on well-being? Sociologist Chaeyoon Lim and political scientist Robert Putnam observe:

Scholars who study the connection between religion and subjective well-being appear to agree on a few points. First, most studies find a positive association between religious involvement and individuals' well-being. ...Second, studies find that the association between religion and subjective well-being is substantial (Inglehart 2010; Myers 2000; Witter et al. 1985). Witter and colleagues (1985) estimate that the gross effects of religious involvement account for 2 to 6 percent of the variation in subjective well-being. When compared with other correlates of well-being, religion is less potent than health and loneliness, but it is just as or more potent than education, marital status, social activity, age, gender, and race. Other studies find that religious involvement has an effect comparable to or

¹⁶ Koenig et al., *Handbook of Religion and Health*, 2nd ed., 131.

stronger than income (Ellison, Gay, and Glass 1989).¹⁷

Lim and Putnam go on to report the results of their own analysis of 2006-2007 data. In an average case, and controlling for other variables,

28.2 percent of people who attend a service weekly are predicted to be “extremely satisfied” with their lives, compared with only 19.6 percent of those who never attend services. This result is roughly comparable to the difference between someone in “good” health and another in “very good” health, or the difference between someone with family income of \$10,000 and another with \$100,000. Given that health and income are the strongest predictors in the model, this association between attendance and life satisfaction is notable.¹⁸

What should be concluded from all of this? Just because higher religiosity is statistically *correlated* with higher well-being, that doesn’t necessarily mean that practicing a religion

¹⁷ Chaeyoon Lim and Robert D. Putnam, “Religion, Social Networks, and Life Satisfaction,” *American Sociological Review* 75 (2010): 914–933, at 915.

¹⁸ Lim and Putnam, “Religion, Social Networks, and Life Satisfaction,” 920. See also Chaeyoon Lim, “In U.S., Churchgoers Boast Better Mood, Especially on Sundays,” *Gallup* Mar 22 2012, accessed Nov 20 2013, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/153374/churchgoers-boast-better-mood-especially-sundays.aspx>; and Frank Newport, Dan Witters, and Sangeeta Agrawal, “Religious Americans Enjoy Higher Wellbeing,” *Gallup* Feb 16, 2012, accessed Nov 20 2013, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/152723/religious-americans-enjoy-higher-wellbeing.aspx>.

typically causes people to be happier. Do we have any reason to think that a typical person will likely be happier if she or he practices a religion devoutly?

We do, for two reasons. First, sociologists and psychologists have plausible theories about the causal mechanisms that link religiosity and well-being. Lim and Putnam argue that the key factor is the friendships which committed religious people make and enjoy in their church communities. Interestingly, friendships in religious contexts seem to be special in an important way: even among respondents who had the same number of close friends, those with more close friends in their church community tended to have higher life satisfaction.

Koenig et al. attempt to offer a more comprehensive explanation than Lim and Putnam, presenting a complicated model according to which belief in and attachment to God is the source of a number of activities, commitments, experiences and behaviors (e.g. participation in worship services, prayer, commitments to a certain moral code or worldview, religious peer influences, etc.) which (a) have direct effects on mental health and (b) promote decisions, virtues, social relations and ways of thinking about the events of one's life which collectively tend to cause good mental health.¹⁹

Now, one might accept that religiosity tends to increase happiness for committed religious believers, but still wonder whether a person without belief (e.g., a person with a mere credence of ½ on Christianity) would experience the same benefits as a religious believer. Two points are worth noting here. First, a person with a credence of ½ who makes a serious religious commitment to Christianity is more likely to eventually become

¹⁹ Koenig et al., *Handbook of Religion and Health*, 2nd ed., 307–311.

a believer than one who does not, so even commitment short of belief will raise the probability of experiencing the this-worldly benefits of religion. Second, and more importantly, there is reason to think that at least some of the impact of religiosity on happiness will be present in the case of non-believing but religiously committed individuals. Non-believing but committed individuals stand to benefit from friendships within religious settings, which is the key issue on Lim and Putnam's theory. And an agnostic but religiously committed person is also likely to have many of the commitments and undertake many of the activities that are the causal mediators of religion's effect on happiness according to Koenig et al.

A second reason to think that religiosity causally influences well-being comes from studies in hedonic psychology. Alan Krueger, Daniel Kahneman, and their collaborators have developed a time-diary method which involves asking people to reconstruct their activities in the previous day and describe how they felt during those activities. They conducted the Princeton Affect and Time Survey (PATS) in 2006. Respondents were asked to describe the activities of their day, and then to rate the extent to which they felt happy, sad, stressed, tired, in pain, or interested during those activities. A 0-6 rating scale was used, where 0 meant "not at all" and 6 meant that the feeling was very strong. With respect to the question of religion, their results were striking. Out of the twenty categories of activity reported on, the average happiness rating for religious activity (4.97) was the second highest, bested only by sports and exercise (5.08). The

average for socializing was 4.74, childcare 4.63, eating and drinking 4.57, relaxing and leisure 4.34, and watching T.V. 3.91.²⁰

Krueger et al. also compared different activities by calculating the percentage of time a person engaged in a given activity reported more stress, sadness or pain than happiness. (So a lower percentage is better.) On this score religious activity was best of all—those involved in religious activity reported feeling more stress, sadness or pain than happiness only 6.4% of the time, compared to 7.4% for sports and exercise, 9.7% for eating and drinking, 13.4% for relaxing and leisure, 13.5% for socializing, 15.6% for child care, and 26.9% for working.²¹ Something about religious activities themselves seems to affect the subjective well-being of the agent at the time of the activity.

In addition to being happier, frequent churchgoers also tend to live longer. In a meta-analysis of twenty-nine studies on the connection between religious involvement and mortality, McCullough et al. found that individuals involved in religion had a

²⁰ Alan B. Krueger, Daniel Kahneman, David Schkade, Norbert Schwarz, and Arthur A. Stone, “National Time Accounting: The Currency of Life,” in *Measuring the Subjective Well-being of Nations: National Accounts of Time Use and Well-being*, ed. Alan B. Krueger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 9–86, at 46.

²¹ Recent Gallup studies on positive emotions also provide evidence of causal influence. See Chaeyoon Lim, “In U.S., Churchgoers Boast Better Mood, Especially on Sundays,” *Gallup* Mar 22 2012, accessed Nov 20 2013, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/153374/churchgoers-boast-better-mood-especially-sundays.aspx>.

substantially higher survival rate.²² After controlling for possibly confounding variables, the size of the effect (an odds ratio of 1.23) amounts to this: Suppose we randomly selected 1000 highly religious people and 1000 who were not highly religious, and suppose we then tracked our group of 2000 until half had died. We would then expect to find 526 people from the highly religious group still alive, and 474 of the less religious.²³ Not a trivial difference. More recent meta-analyses have yielded similar results.²⁴

So, where are we? The person who commits to God will be a frequent churchgoer, and is also more likely to acquire and/or maintain a belief in God (more likely than she would have been if she had not committed to God). This in turn means she will probably experience greater life satisfaction and a sunnier emotional life, and a longer life than she would have if she had refrained from committing to God, other things being equal. Under outcome WN we should therefore include “increased chance of higher subjective well-being and longer length of life.” Committed atheists can of course be satisfied with their lives and live to a ripe old age, but the point is that religious involvement, over the course of time, is likely to give one an appreciable boost on the various positive dimensions

²² Michael E. McCullough, William T. Hoyt, David B. Larson, Harold G. Koenig, and Carl Thoresen, “Religious Involvement and Mortality: A Meta-analytic Review,” *Health Psychology* 19 (2000): 211–22.

²³ Michael E. McCullough, William T. Hoyt, and David B. Larson, “Small, Robust, and Important: Reply to Sloan and Bagiella,” *Health Psychology* 20 (2001): 228–9.

²⁴ See Koenig et al., *Handbook of Religion and Health*, 2nd ed., 477–478.

discussed. This by itself isn't a reason to believe in God, and just by itself it's not a sufficient reason to become religious, but it is relevant to the decision matrix under construction.

Religious commitment may also have significant costs. One is the opportunity cost of time spent in prayer, in church, in study of religious teachings, etc. A second possible cost is psychological. The person transitioning from a nonreligious or only moderately religious lifestyle to a seriously religious lifestyle might experience a loss of a sense of control, a loss of the sense that he can do what he pleases with his life.

A different possible cost is mentioned by Richard Gale: "People morally ought not to live their worldly lives in a way that they deem inauthentic, no matter what possibilities it might open up" for other gains.²⁵ Perhaps the thought is this: for some agnostics, it would be inauthentic, dishonest, or in contradiction to their deepest values to engage in Christian religious practices. One can see how this could be true for a person who judges that the probability of Christianity is very low. But what about a person who thinks it is at least as likely as not that Christianity is true? (This is the key question here, given the conditional here being argued for.) For the person who does think this, it would not be inauthentic to engage in the sorts of religious practices described above. Imagine that a person had a serious health problem, and learned that a certain regimen of diet and exercise had a 50% chance of curing it. (Suppose also that there was no other cure that offered a better chance.) Such a person would not be inauthentic if he embarked on the

²⁵ Richard M. Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 352.

regimen, and the same is true for the person who thinks Christianity has at least a 50% epistemic probability, and makes a commitment to pray, attend religious services, do some reading on religious questions, and so on.

When Pascal considers the costs of a devout life, he mentions abstaining from “corrupt pleasure” and “high-living.” Certainly a person who commits to God in a Christian way can appreciate pleasure and enjoy food, drink, sex, and relaxation. But only in the right contexts, in the right way, at the right times, and while also realizing that pleasure is not the goal of life. If one is seeking to live a life God would want one to live, one will be attempting to guide one’s conduct according to what is best, for others as well as for oneself, and in the long-term as well as the short-term. Since human beings are naturally inclined to value their short-term well-being over their long-term well-being, to value positive feelings over more abstract moral goods (like keeping a promise), and to value their own well-being over the well-being of others, the effort to live a life of moral excellence is bound to involve painful sacrifice at times. This sacrifice will involve positive acts as well as abstention. In a world where millions of people suffer cruelly from lack of basic necessities or oppression by others, the person seeking moral excellence will avoid purchasing luxury goods where he could instead contribute his resources to those who really need help.²⁶

²⁶ The renunciation of luxury doesn’t rule out the appropriateness of paying special attention to one’s own family and community, and it doesn’t rule out celebration or the consumption of things beyond bare necessity. But moral excellence, and the message of Jesus, do seem to require a much larger willingness to share one’s goods with

A careful regard for morality, the renunciation of luxury, and a focus on others will therefore be components of a devout life. But whether these consequences of a devout life should count as *costs* for a given wagerer will depend on what he or she would have been doing otherwise. If a given person would live just as virtuously whether or not she were committing to God, then the costs of living virtuously will appear in both outcome WN and outcome ~WN, and therefore won't stand as a reason to refrain from committing to God.

On the other hand, if committing to God would involve for a given person a more comprehensive and demanding effort to live virtuously, then any costs of this extra effort at morality should be included in outcome WN but not in outcome ~WN for that person. At the same time, outcome WN should also include whatever *benefits* come from the extra effort at morality (e.g. direct benefits to others, more harmonious personal relationships, less dissatisfaction with one's own character, etc.). If one includes the loss of corrupt pleasures as a cost of committing to God, then one should also include the benefits of avoiding those corrupt pleasures as a benefit of committing to God.

Next, if one commits to God but God does not exist, then one has made a commitment to a life that is in some sense based on a falsehood. Though this may never be experienced *as* a cost, it may be a cost nonetheless.

In summary, for a typical person, outcome WN should include (i) a modest but still appreciable increased chance at greater life satisfaction and happiness (along with a

the needy than is standard in contemporary industrialized countries. I'm helped here by the unpublished work of Thomas Crisp on "Jesus and Affluence."

myriad of mediating states such as greater hope, optimism, and social support), and (ii) an increased chance at a longer life, but also (iii) the opportunity cost of time spent in religious activities, (iv) the possible loss of a sense of control, and (v) a commitment based on a falsehood. Finally, (vi) if the wagerer in question would be making greater efforts at moral excellence on the strategy of committing to God than on the alternative, then the costs and benefits of these extra efforts should be included in outcome WN.

We can now draw the basic presentation of the Wager to a close. Outcome ~WC is the flip side of outcome WC. That is, since maximizing one's chance of eternal life was a benefit of committing to God if God does exist, we should include minimizing one's chance of eternal life as a cost of not committing to God, if God does exist. Relative to the strategy of committing to God, one significantly reduces the probability that one will enjoy eternal life by not committing to God, supposing that Christianity is true. Each of the benefits we listed in our discussion of outcome WC is absent in outcome ~WC, which should thus include a minimized chance of gaining eternal life, the bringing of sadness (or something analogous) to God and those in Heaven, a failure to express gratitude to God, a lower chance of being a help to others in their journey to God, and a lower receptivity to God's help in this life. In outcome ~WC we should also add the regret that one might feel upon realizing, after death, that one has in a very important way misspent one's life. Finally, outcome ~WC also includes the earthly costs and benefits mentioned in outcome ~WN, though these would most likely be swamped by the magnitude of the other values associated with outcome ~WC, so as to make the earthly costs relatively unimportant for the overall evaluation of outcome ~WC.

In the same way, outcome \sim WN is the flip side of outcome WN. If God does not exist, and one has refrained from committing to God, one would have had extra time, possibly a greater sense of control over one's own life, and one would not have made a commitment based on a falsehood. As negatives we should include a lower chance of greater life satisfaction and a lower chance of a longer life. Plus, for any extra effort at morality that one *wouldn't* be exerting, there would be the consequent pleasures of moral laxity and the costs of vice.

Having examined the various outcomes, we can now consider the rationality of the two opposing strategies in the decision matrix. To do so it will be helpful to ask about the comparative value of WC and \sim WC, and WN and \sim WN. Outcome WC is much more valuable than outcome \sim WC. But what about the comparison between outcome WN and outcome \sim WN? There are circumstances in which one would lose much by committing to Christianity, if Christianity is false. (Suppose one were the sole bread-winner in a family of eight, living in a country where the practice of Christianity carried a high risk of persecution, imprisonment or martyrdom.) While some people face such circumstances, though, the vast majority of people living in countries with religious freedom do not find themselves in such difficult situations. In this paper I'm limiting my focus to people living in countries with freedom of religion, in ordinary circumstances, which include the absence of catastrophic this-worldly costs attaching to commitment to God.

For such people, it seems to me, it should be concluded that outcome WN is either more valuable than outcome \sim WN, roughly equal in value, or if less valuable, then only less valuable by a small amount. If earthly life is the only life there is, then an increased chance at a longer and happier life is a huge benefit. True, the person who has committed

to God spends a portion of their time engaging in religious activity, but if one finds the right church community, the time spent with that community can be deeply meaningful. And recent work in neuroscience indicates that prayer and meditation affect the brain in significant positive ways. Brain researcher Andrew Newberg and colleague Mark Waldman summarize:

[R]eligious and spiritual contemplation changes your brain in a profoundly different way [than other types of thinking or concentrating] because it strengthens a unique neural circuit that specifically enhances social awareness and empathy while subduing destructive feelings and emotions.²⁷

Regarding costs associated with moral excellence, these shouldn't stand as a reason to refrain from committing to God, as we should all be striving for moral excellence anyway. And once one is striving for moral excellence, there is a sense in which one is already not one's own master.

If a person agrees that outcome WN is at least as valuable as outcome ~WN, then it is rational for that person to commit to God. For, given the obvious fact that outcome WC is more valuable than outcome ~WC, to say that outcome WN is at least as valuable as outcome ~WN is to say that the strategy of committing to God weakly dominates the strategy of not committing to God. It might be better, and it's definitely not worse.

²⁷ Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009), 14.

But even if one thinks that outcome \sim WN is better than outcome WN, it's still rational to commit to God, so long as the difference between outcome \sim WN and outcome WN is small, and given that the probability of Christianity is 50% or more. For if Christianity has a 50% or more probability of being true, it would be exceedingly unwise to risk the loss of outcome WC merely for the *chance* of the small gain in benefit of outcome \sim WN over outcome WN. All this suggests that for a person in ordinary circumstances who rationally assigns a credence of at least $\frac{1}{2}$ to Christianity, it is entirely reasonable to commit to a devout Christian life, and, indeed, irrational not to.

We can make the basic Wager more rigorous by expressing it as follows:

(1) Given any decision matrix of the form

	State 1	State 2
Do A	O1	O2
Fail to do A	O3	O4,

if (i) States 1 and 2 exhaust the epistemically possible states,
(ii) the epistemic probabilities of the states are not dependent on the agent's choice of strategy in any way which favors failing to do A,²⁸

²⁸ On the need for this clause, see Alan Hájek, "Blaise and Bayes," in *Probability in the Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Jake Chandler and Victoria Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 167–186, at 169–170. The basic issue is that in some circumstances one's choice of strategy might affect the probability of one or more of the states. (Suppose the states are "They want to offer me the job" and "They don't want to offer me the job" and the strategies are "Apply for the job" and "Don't apply for the

(iii) O1 is much more valuable than O3 and O2 is either more valuable, equal in value, or only a small amount less valuable than O4, and
 (iv) an agent rationally assigns a credence to state 1 of $\frac{1}{2}$ or higher,
 then it is practically rational for that agent to do A, and practically irrational for that agent to fail to do A.

It follows by substitution that

(2) Given the decision matrix

	Christianity	Naturalism
Commit to God in a Christian way	WC	WN
Fail to commit to God in a Christian way	\sim WC	\sim WN,

if (i) *Christianity is true* and *naturalism is true* exhaust the epistemically possible states,
 (ii) the epistemic probabilities of *Christianity is true* and *naturalism is true* are not dependent on the agent's choice of strategy in any way which favors failing to commit to God in a Christian way.
 (iii) Outcome WC is much more valuable than Outcome \sim WC and Outcome WN is either more valuable, equal in value, or only a small amount less valuable than Outcome \sim WN, and
 (iv) an agent rationally assigns a credence to *Christianity is true* of $\frac{1}{2}$ or

job.”) Such cases can provide counter-examples to principles of practical rationality that do apply in situations where the probability of the states is independent of the choice of strategy.

higher,
then it is practically rational for that agent to commit to God in a Christian way,
and practically irrational for that agent to fail to commit to God in a
Christian way.

Next, for conditional introduction assume (3):

(3) H is a human agent living in a country with religious freedom, in ordinary
circumstances, who is epistemically rational in assigning a credence of at
least .5 to *Christianity is true*.

(4) *Christianity is true* and *naturalism is true* exhaust the epistemically
possible states. (This obviously false premise will be dispensed with in
section III.)

(5) The epistemic probabilities of *Christianity is true* and *naturalism is true*
are not dependent on H's choice of strategy in any way which favors
failing to commit to God in a Christian way.

(6) Outcome WC is much more valuable than Outcome ~WC and Outcome
WN is either more valuable, equal in value, or only a small amount less
valuable than Outcome ~WN.

Given (3), we have

(7) H rationally assigns a credence to *Christianity is true* of $\frac{1}{2}$ or higher,

Thus, from (2) and (4)–(7),

(8) It is practically rational for H to commit to God in a Christian way,
and practically irrational for H to fail to do so.

And so from (3)–(8) it follows that

(9) If H is a human agent living in a country with religious freedom, in ordinary circumstances, who is epistemically rational in assigning a credence of at least .5 to *Christianity is true*, then it is practically rational for H to commit to God in a Christian way, and practically irrational for H to fail to do so.

As noted, (4) is included merely to show how the basic Wager can be made into a formally valid argument, and will be dispensed with below. (6) is supported at length above. (5) is true because no human decision can now affect the truth or falsity of Christianity (or naturalism), and so at the time of a decision whether or not to commit, the outcome of H's decision won't raise the rational credence for H to assign to either state. Most importantly: in lieu of the principle that one should always maximize utility, or the principle that one should always pick the weakly dominant of two strategies, the basic Wager uses the principle expressed by (1). In addition to the intuitive support which concrete examples give to (1), there is also a strong argument in its favor.

The notion of a comparative benefit (or loss) will be helpful in making this argument. Suppose that action A is *lock up my friend's bicycle which I am borrowing*, that state 1 is *a capable thief will happen by*, and state 2 is *no capable thief will happen by*. Suppose that O1 is therefore "I spent a minute locking the bike, but I'm able to return the bike to my friend," and that O3 is "I get my friend's bicycle stolen by not locking it, but I don't spend a minute messing with the lock." O2 is "I spend a minute locking the bike, and am able to return it," and O4 is "I don't spend a minute locking the bike, and am able to return it."

The comparative benefit of locking the bicycle (over not locking it), given state 1, is a measure of how much more valuable O1 is than O3. While it would be difficult to

compute a numeric measure here, one can mentally compare O1 to O3, and get some sense of the magnitude of the comparative benefit of locking up. For most of us, being able to return the bicycle rather than not at the cost of an extra minute is quite valuable. Importantly, we can make comparisons between comparative benefits. If state 2 is actual, not locking up carries a comparative benefit—the difference in value between O4 and O2, which here is the value of a minute of one’s time. It’s easy to see that the value of the comparative benefit of locking given state 1 is greater than the value of the comparative benefit of not locking given state 2.

I’ll use locutions of the form “the difference in value between O4 and O2,” but this isn’t meant to suggest that the difference is necessarily calculable as a number (or an infinite quantity, for that matter). The difference in value between a first outcome and another is just short-hand for how much more (or less) valuable the first outcome is than the second. In some cases, this won’t be a number. How much more valuable is it to have a good relationship with one’s father than to not be on speaking terms? Very valuable, but few would put a number on it.

Returning to the general case described in (1), define the comparative benefit of doing A over failing to do A given state 1 as how much more valuable O1 is than O3. Similarly, define the comparative loss of doing A over failing to do A given state 2 as how much more valuable O4 is than O2.

Now, to the argument for (1). Assume a decision problem of the form described in (1), and assume the conditions in the antecedent of (1) are met. If (1) is true in cases where the agent’s credence on state 1 is exactly $\frac{1}{2}$, then *a fortiori* it will be true in cases where the agent’s credence on state 1 is higher than $\frac{1}{2}$. So, for ease of exposition, assume

the credence is exactly $\frac{1}{2}$. Then it follows that doing A carries a 50% chance of a big comparative benefit (the difference between O1 and O3), and a 50% risk of what is at worst a small comparative loss (the difference between O2 and O4). In contrast, failing to do A carries a 50% chance of at best a small comparative benefit (the difference between O4 and O2), and a 50% risk of a big comparative loss (the difference between O3 and O1).

So both doing A and failing to do A carry a 50% chance of comparative benefit and a 50% risk of comparative loss. On that score there is no reason to prefer doing A to failing to do A. Abstractly considered, there is only one relevant difference between A and not-A: the values of the comparative benefits and losses are different. Doing A carries a chance at a big comparative benefit and a risk of a small comparative loss; vice versa for failing to do A. It would therefore be rational in such a situation to do A, and irrational not to, since there is a reason to prefer doing A to not doing A (equal chance at a bigger benefit, equal chance at a smaller loss), and no parallel reason to prefer not doing A to doing A.

III

Objections and Refinements of the Basic Argument. I now examine how the foregoing argument stands with respect to three important responses to Pascal's Wager: objections regarding infinity, moral objections regarding the need to ignore pragmatic considerations and focus only on evidence, and objections regarding religions other than Christianity.

First, recall the objection of Duff and Hajek to the Argument from Generalized Expectations: since any course of action has some probability of resulting in one's

wagering for God, any course of action has infinite expected value, and so there is no reason to attempt to wager for God rather than not. This objection has no force against the Wager as I'm presenting it, since neither the notion of an infinite quantity nor the notion of expected value was invoked. Where the Argument from Generalized Expectations involves (a) a calculation of expected utility and (b) the claim that one should maximize expected utility, the basic Wager as presented here relies merely on (a) the judgments that outcome WC is much more valuable than outcome \sim WC and that outcome WN is better, equivalent or at least not much worse than outcome \sim WN, and (b) premise (1). Any mixed strategy that made it less likely one would commit to God would decrease the chance of the big comparative benefit and increase the risk of the big comparative loss. Given the other features of the decision matrix, this is sufficient reason to prefer committing to God to any mixed strategy.

A second objection to standard formulations of Pascal's Wager is that it is immoral to attempt to induce belief on pragmatic grounds. Thus Antony Flew:

Deliberately to set about persuading yourself of the truth of a conclusion which is not warranted by the available evidence is flatly to reject... a principle fundamental to personal and intellectual integrity.²⁹

²⁹ Antony Flew, *The Presumption of Atheism and Other Philosophical Essays on God, Freedom and Immortality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 64. The principle to which Flew alludes is that you should follow the evidence as far as you can, but then "frankly and honestly... recognize the limits of your knowledge," (p. 32) rather than, say, allow practical considerations to affect one's beliefs.

Upon inspection, it's not clear that this objection applies to the argument under consideration, however. For in the Wager just given, the strategy being suggested was not to deliberately try to form a belief that God exists, but to take a certain action—to seek a relationship with God.

Still, at a minimum the strategy of committing to God will include being open to theistic belief if it comes. And it will probably include some efforts at cultivating belief, for example, prayers for faith. Here there may be cause for concern. To the extent that committing to God involves some efforts at cultivating belief, the worry is that the person who takes the Wager will have to suppress his own critical mind, and will incur the risk of self-deception. J. L. Mackie argues that taking Pascal's advice amounts to "playing tricks on oneself that are found by experience to work upon people's passions and to give rise to belief in non-rational ways," and that to do this "is to do violence to one's reason and understanding."³⁰

I have sympathy for Mackie's views here. If one honestly thought that the probability of Christianity's being true was, say, 1%, then it would be wrong to deliberately attempt to make oneself believe that Christianity is true. But things aren't so clear in a situation where one thinks the evidence for an important claim is roughly balanced, or better yet where the evidence is in its favor even if not demonstrative. Likewise, some methods one might use to try to acquire a belief are more questionable than others. It's one thing to subject oneself to subliminal messages and quite another to

³⁰ J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 202.

simply ask God to give oneself awareness of his existence, or more generally to put oneself in a situation where one might acquire new evidence for a belief. The strategy of committing to God should only include an effort to cultivate belief to this extent: one should ask God for faith, look at the evidence that is available, and search for more, strive for moral excellence (the pure in heart shall see God—*Matthew* 5:8), and resist non-rational or emotional impulses to doubt or distance oneself from God. Nothing here requires the suppression of one's reason, or the intention to deliberately acquire a belief come what may.

That being said, it remains the case that the agnostic who embarks on a religious life will be taking a course of action that significantly raises the probability that he will one day form a belief in God. What if one ends up coming to believe simply for psychological reasons? Aligning oneself with a particular belief, as the wagerer does with Christian theism, may make one more likely to adopt it, somewhat in the way that, psychologists tell us, choosing one appliance rather than another seems to cause one to increase one's valuation of the appliance chosen, so as to reduce a sense of loss about the good features of the appliances one didn't choose, or to justify one's own choice to oneself.³¹ The agnostic contemplating the wager must take into account the fact that, by committing to God, he risks becoming ensnared in an illusion. Should this risk dissuade the would-be wagerer?

³¹ See J. Brehm, "Post-decision Changes in Desirability of Alternatives," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 52 (1956): 384–389.

Suppose your brother has gone missing. He was backpacking in a foreign country, one lacking the rule of law and in a state of some turmoil. It's been a year now and no one has heard from him. Then one day you receive a letter. It purports to be from your brother, but is typed and so short that you can't tell one way or the other if it is really from him. The letter states that he has been taken captive by a militant rebel group, which is using him for his knowledge of computer programming. They won't let him go, but will let him receive letters. They won't let him write back. But he begs you to write with news from home, every week if possible. Suppose you judge that it's about as likely as not that this letter is really from him. What should you do? If you do write to him week after week, you may become so emotionally invested that you will end up believing that he's getting the letters and that they're helping him cope. But that might be false! By writing, you face some risk that you will become ensnared in an illusion. Nonetheless, I think we can see that it wouldn't be wrong to write the letters.

It's thus not always wrong to take a course of action which may result in one's acquiring a false belief. Now, in certain circumstances it may be wrong to expose oneself to the risk of false belief, but the case of wagering for God doesn't seem to be one of them. The decision matrix of section II suggests that committing to God is a smart move, at least for the person who thinks Christianity is as likely as not. And for such a person, both the decision to commit to God and the failure to make that decision carry risks. There is the risk of false belief on the side of committing to God. But there is the risk of underliving one's life on the side of refraining from committing to God. The person who does not commit to God also risks missing out on the most important truth in life. If

Christianity is true and he remains agnostic, he doesn't have a false belief about Christianity, but he also lacks a true belief about Christianity.³²

I turn now to the many-gods objection to the Wager. In order to show how the basic Wager of section II could be made into a valid deductive argument, I relied on the false premise that Christianity and naturalism exhaust the epistemically possible states to consider. What happens when we expand the set of states to include other possibilities?

According to the Qur'an, "Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book [this is taken to include Jews and Christians] and the idolaters will have the Fire of Hell, there to remain. They are the worst of creation."³³ On one interpretation, this implies that a person who has learned of Islam and its teachings but rejects it will be consigned to eternal suffering. Just for the sake of getting a clear understanding of the many-gods objection, pretend for the moment that Islam is the only epistemically possible rival religion to Christianity, and consider only a version of Islam that accepts the interpretation mentioned above. Assume also that the agent in question has learned of Islam and its teachings. Then the decision matrix should be:

³² One's concern for truth might actually give one a reason to commit to God: maybe one needs to commit in order to acquire the evidence required to know the truth in this case. On this point, see T. V. Morris, "Wagering and the Evidence," in *Gambling on God: Essays on Pascal's Wager*, ed. Jeff Jordan (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994): 47-60.

³³ Section 98 (Al-Bayyina), verse 6, translation from *The Qur'an*, trans. M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

	Christianity	Islam	Naturalism
Commit to God in a Christian way	Outcome $W_C C$	Outcome $W_C I$	Outcome $W_C N$
Commit to God in a Muslim way	Outcome $W_M C$	Outcome $W_M I$	Outcome $W_M N$
Do neither	Outcome $\sim W_C$	Outcome $\sim W_I$	Outcome $\sim W_N$

The first thing to note is what hasn't changed in this matrix, as compared to the 2x2 matrix of section II. Outcome $W_C C$ in our new matrix is the same as outcome WC in the old; outcome $W_C N$ in the new matrix is the same as outcome WN in the old; the new outcome $\sim W_C$ is in all important respects equivalent to the old outcome $\sim WC$; the new outcome $\sim W_N$ is equivalent to the old outcome $\sim WN$. Also note that in the new matrix there is no great difference between outcome $W_C I$ and outcome $\sim W_I$ (both result in eternal misery). All this implies that the strategy of committing to God in a Christian way is still preferable to not committing to God in any way. For if Islam is true, then committing to God in a Christian way is no worse than "doing neither." And if Islam is false, then committing to God in a Christian way is preferable to not committing to God in any way for the reasons given in section II (for the person in ordinary circumstances, with rational credence of $\frac{1}{2}$ or higher on Christian theism). Bringing Islam into consideration has done nothing to challenge the conclusion that it is better to commit to God in a Christian way than to not be religious at all.

What a consideration of other existing religions does bring to light is that the reasoning of section II provides no way to choose among competing religions. That's true enough. But it hardly follows that there *is* no way to choose among competing religions. The way seems clear: practice the religion that seems to you most likely to be true, which

will be Christianity for the typical person who assigns Christianity a credence of $\frac{1}{2}$ or more. This policy is recommended on two counts: it follows from a proper regard for truth and the desire to avoid self-deception, and it is the policy that, in all but the most unusual circumstances, maximizes one's chance at a supremely valuable outcome.³⁴

³⁴ For the wagerer with a .5 credence or higher on Christianity, committing to the religion thought most likely to be true will maximize the chance at eternal happiness...except in certain unusual circumstances. As Johannes Grossl has pointed out (at the 2012 St. Thomas Summer Seminar for Philosophy of Religion), there are possible situations in which a person could find that the religion he thinks most likely to be true is not the religion that will maximize his chance at eternal happiness. For example, imagine a case where you think there is a 50% probability that Christianity is true and a 49% probability that religion Y is true, and a 1% probability that naturalism is true. Furthermore, you believe, if religion Y is true then only adherents of religion Y, and all adherents of religion Y, will gain eternal salvation. And suppose you also believe that if Christianity is true, then your salvation is not guaranteed by being a Christian—say it's only 90% likely. And suppose you also believe, if Christianity is true, that you might be saved even if you are a member of religion Y—say you thought there was a 25% chance of that. Then, making a few simplifying assumptions, you should conclude that your probability of gaining salvation if you commit to Christianity is 45%, and that your probability of gaining salvation if you commit to religion Y is .49 times 1 plus .50 times .25 = 61.5%. I raise this objection only to point out that it is extremely unlikely that one will find oneself in this sort of situation. So for almost all those assigning Christianity a

Thus the Wager faces no trouble from a judgment that Islam is an epistemic possibility, so long as the wagerer thinks Christianity is considerably more likely than Islam. We could continue to add other actually existing religions, and the result would be the same: for the typical person who assigns Christianity a credence of $\frac{1}{2}$ or more, it will be rational to commit to the religion thought most likely to be true.

I've just argued that a consideration of other actually existing religions doesn't challenge the conclusion that practicing Christianity is a better bet than practicing no religion at all. But what if practicing a religion (any religion at all) might actually reduce one's chance of gaining eternal happiness? Several philosophers have raised an objection to Pascal's Wager along these lines, urging that there is a non-zero epistemic probability of a deity who rewards the non-religious and punishes the religious. Thus Michael Martin:

Suppose there is a supernatural being—call him the perverse master (PM)—who punishes with infinite torment after death anyone who believes in God or any other supernatural being (including himself) and rewards with infinite bliss after death anyone who believes in no supernatural being.³⁵

It's not obvious that such a possibility should be assigned a non-zero epistemic probability, but for the sake of argument, suppose it should. To zero in on the challenge

credence of $\frac{1}{2}$ or higher, the policy of committing to the religion thought most likely to be true will face no objection.

³⁵ Michael Martin, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 232.

raised by Martin, let's set aside the nuances of section II, and consider this decision matrix:

	Christianity	Naturalism	Perverse Master
Commit to God in a Christian way	Higher chance at eternal happiness	X	Eternal torment
Commit to God in a non-Christian way	Lower chance at eternal happiness	Y	Eternal torment
Do neither	Lower chance at eternal happiness	Z	Eternal happiness

Such a matrix will make trouble for a pragmatic argument that quantifies the value of eternal torment as $-\infty$ and the value of eternal happiness as ∞ , and utilizes an expected value calculation. But the Wager presented here does neither of those things. What's more, when we bring the low epistemic probability of the Perverse Master into consideration, the rational course of action is not hard to discern. First, note that the introduction of the Perverse Master does nothing to favor the strategy of committing to God in a non-Christian way over committing to God in a Christian way. If the Perverse Master does not exist, then committing to God in a Christian way is preferable to committing to God in a non-Christian way for the reasons (and given the caveats) given above. If, on the other hand, the Perverse Master exists, then committing to God in a Christian way is no worse than committing to God in a non-Christian way. So introducing the Perverse Master hasn't changed the decision problem in any way which favors a commitment to God in a non-Christian way over a commitment to God in a Christian way. Second, committing to God in a Christian way is preferable to not committing to God at all, given that the appropriate epistemic probability to assign to the

Perverse Master is exceedingly low. Recall that the wagerer we have in mind assigns a credence of 50% or more to Christianity, and note that the rational credence to assign to the Perverse Master is extremely low (much less than 1%, surely). For the wagerer under discussion to refrain from religious commitment due to considerations about the Perverse Master would be for the wagerer to forgo what he or she takes to be a 50% or greater shot at the goods that come with Christianity (if it is true), merely in order to gain what he or she takes to be a miniscule chance at the eternal bliss on offer if the Perverse Master exists. But electing such a trade-off would be irrational.

To see this last point, consider a game where you have two possible strategies, A and B. A fair coin will be flipped, but you must choose a strategy before you have learned of the outcome. If you have chosen A, and the coin turns out to be Heads, you will gain eternal happiness. If you have chosen A, and the coin is Tails, you will gain \$15 dollars. If you have chosen A, and the coin lands balanced exactly on its edge, you will suffer eternal misery. On the other hand, if you have chosen B, you will suffer eternal misery if Heads, you will gain \$15 if Tails, and you will gain eternal happiness if the coin has balanced on its edge. A is the preferable strategy, since it maximizes one's chance at the supremely valuable benefit of eternal happiness. For the same reason, committing to God in a Christian way is preferable to refraining from religious commitment, even if the Perverse Master is given a small non-zero credence.

IV

Conclusion. The literature on Pascal's Wager is vast, and no article-length treatment can address all the worthwhile objections that could be made against the version of the Wager I've given here. Still, I hope to have shown that pragmatic

reasoning can dramatically lower the bar for natural theology: religious commitment to Christianity is typically rational for someone who (rationally) thinks Christianity is as likely as not. *A fortiori*, it is typically rational for those who rationally think it is more likely than not. Constructing the Wager in terms of commitment rather than belief dulls the edge of moral objections to pragmatic reasoning, and developing the argument without the use of expected utility or an assignment of infinite utilities avoids some of the most pressing objections to what is often taken as the canonical version of Pascal's Wager, the Argument from Generalized Expectations. The many-gods objection, for its part, can be addressed by examining the relative epistemic probabilities of the various religions being considered, and utilizing the principle that one should commit to the religion one thinks most likely to be true.³⁶

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