



Pascal's wager: tracking an intended reader in the structure of the argument¹

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ABSTRACT

Pascal's wager is the name of an argument in favor of belief in God presented by Blaise Pascal in §233 of *Thoughts*. Ian Hacking (1972) pointed out that Pascal's text involves three different versions of the argument. This paper proceeds from this identification, but it concerns an examination of the rhetorical strategy realized by Pascal's argumentation. The final form of Pascal's argument is considered as a product that could be established only through a specific process of persuasion led with respect to an intended reader with a particular set of initial beliefs. The text uses insights from the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation, especially the concept of rhetorical effectiveness of particular choices from the topical potential. The argumentation structure of Pascal's wager is considered to be a reflection of the anticipated course of dialogue with the reader critically testing the sustainability of Pascal's standpoint "You should believe in God". Based on the argumentation reconstruction of three versions of the argument, Pascal's idea of opponent/audience is identified. A rhetorical analysis of the effects of his argumentative strategy is proposed. The analysis is based on two perspectives on Pascal's argument: it examines the strategy implemented consistently by all arguments and the strategy of a formulation of different versions of the wager.

KEYWORDS

argumentation structure; Pascal's wager; pragma-dialectics; rhetorical analysis; strategic maneuvering; topical potential

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INTRODUCTION

Pascal's wager is an argument in favor of belief in God introduced by Blaise Pascal in § 233 of his *Thoughts* (Pascal, 2013). The examination of Pascal's argument was paid a lot of attention in the past, however, the analysis presented by Ian Hacking (1972) is currently considered as standard (*e.g.* Hájek, 2012; Jordan, 2006; Saka, 2005). Hacking identified three versions of the argument in *Thoughts*: Pascal supports belief in God gradually by the argument from dominance, the argument from expectation and the argument from dominating expectation (*e.g.* Hacking, 1972: 187).

Pascal could certainly support the standpoint "You should believe in God"² by a variety of arguments or, conversely, by a single argument. However, he selects a specific procedure: he presents three different versions of an argument that attempt to show that belief in God leads to the maximization of the reader's utility. In a pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation, a specific choice of arguments is conceived as strategic maneuvering, particularly as a choice from the topical potential. A speaker submitting a standpoint before an immediately absent opponent can choose between different argument forms and structures. The particularly implemented route chosen for the defense of a standpoint is led by an idea of the opponent and his anticipated objections. According to the concept of strategic maneuvering, the speaker tries to build the strongest possible defense by presenting (a combination of) arguments to answer any (anticipated) critical reactions of the reader by a choice of argumentation schemes that seem most effective in a particular context (*e.g.* van Eemeren, 2010: 45).

In this paper, I proceed from the identification of three versions of the argument. The structure of argumentation is considered as a record of Pascal's strategy of persuasion of the audience of whose beliefs Pascal has a fairly specific idea. The text aims to examine two questions: (1) What characteristics does Pascal's intended reader have? (2) What kind of rhetorical strategies does Pascal use to persuade him?³

The text has the following structure. The first part briefly introduces Hacking's analysis of Pascal's wager (sections 1.1–1.3). In the second part, some

² We should interpret the standpoint "You should believe in God" as a "You should follow the Christian rite". Pascal remarks: "Follow the way [...], that is acting as if they believed, in taking consecrated water, having mass said" (Pascal, 2013: 114). By leading a virtuous life in accordance with the doctrine of the Church the reader can gradually come to believe. Nevertheless belief is conceived by Pascal as a free and undeserved gift from God (*e.g.* Franklin, 1998: 110–111).

³ In the text I deliberately look away from exploring the rhetorical effects in terms of specific choices of linguistic expressions. I focus exclusively on the effects of specific choices of argumentation structures.

insights from pragma-dialectics are introduced. I propose to conceive a structure of individual arguments as a record of the implicit dialogue between the author and the anticipated reader (section 2.1) and as an attempt to make the most effective conviction of such a reader (section 2.2). On the basis of this proposal, I present a pragma-dialectical reconstruction of Pascal's arguments (section 2.3). The reconstruction is in the third part conceived as a starting point for the analysis of topical choices with respect to the anticipated reader. The topical strategy is analyzed on two levels. The analysis of the general strategy implemented consistently by all arguments serves as the basis for the answer to the first question (section 3.1). Exploring the strategy of transitions between versions of the argument serves as the basis for the answer to the second question (section 3.2).

1. THREE PASCAL'S WAGERS

1.1. ARGUMENT FROM DOMINANCE

Ian Hacking (Hacking, 1972) identified three different versions of the wager that all use aspects of the decision theory. The first one is called argument from dominance. According to this version, the decision problem is defined by two possible states of the world: God exists or does not exist, and two alternative actions: acceptance or rejection of belief in God. If God does not exist, then both actions have the same outcome: in neither case we are losing anything (*e.g.* Hacking, 1972: 188). However, if God exists, then belief brings eternal salvation and disbelief brings damnation. The values can be observed in a decision matrix:

Tab. 1: Decision matrix of argument from dominance

	God exists	God does not exist
You believe in God	(a) eternal salvation	(c) you lose nothing
You do not believe in God	(b) eternal damnation	(d) you lose nothing

The worst possible outcome of belief in God (you lose nothing) is as good as the best possible outcome of disbelief (you lose nothing). Simultaneously, the best possible outcome of belief (eternal salvation) is far better than the best outcome of disbelief (you lose nothing). Thus, the utility of the wager on belief dominates the utility of wager on disbelief. Rationality encourages us to choose the behavior that maximizes our utility, so we should choose belief in God.

1.2. ARGUMENT FROM EXPECTATION

After advancing the first version, Pascal submits the argument from expectation. He puts it forward as a response to the anticipated objection of the reader: “That is admirable. Yes, I must wager, but, may be, I stake too much” (Pascal, 2013: 111). This objection is raised by a reader who is not willing to accept that in case of God’s non-existence, belief and disbelief have the same outcome. He loses something by the acceptance of belief, something that he would not lose by disbelief. By the adoption of belief and the associated pious way of life he renounces the pleasure of worldly life which he highly values (*e.g.* Hacking, 1972: 189). In other words, the field (c) of the decision matrix does not represent the outcome adequately, it should capture some loss. It is therefore not true that the utility of belief dominates the utility of disbelief: the worst possible outcome of belief (you lose the pleasure of worldly life) is in fact worse than the best possible outcome of disbelief (you lose nothing).

Dominance is thus undermined and Pascal offers a formulation of the argument that operates with probabilities and implements a strategy of maximizing expectation. In the second version of the argument, Pascal conducts two revisions: the probability of God’s existence is calculated as fifty percent and the utility of belief in God — assuming he exists — as the infinite value (*e.g.* Hájek, 2012). If there is a fifty percent chance that God exists, we can calculate the expected utility of belief. If God exists, an optimal outcome is salvation, which is an infinite value. If God does not exist, then an optimal outcome is worldly life, which is a finite value. If there is an equal chance of God’s existence and nonexistence, the expected utility of belief is greater than the expected utility of disbelief (*e.g.* Hacking, 1972: 189; Saka, 2005):

Tab. 2: Decision matrix of argument from expectation

	God exists	God does not exist
You believe in God	(a) + infinity	(c) finite value
You do not believe in God	(b) – infinity	(d) finite value

The expected utility of the action is calculated by multiplying the probabilities of outcomes and their consequent sum. The expected value of belief in God is infinite gain:

$$(+ \text{infinity} \times \frac{1}{2}) + (\text{finite value} \times \frac{1}{2}) = + \text{infinity}$$

The expected value of disbelief is, on the contrary, infinite loss:

$$(-\text{infinity} \times \frac{1}{2}) + (\text{finite value} \times \frac{1}{2}) = -\text{infinity}$$

Rationality encourages us to choose the action with a higher expected utility and commands us again to choose belief in God.

1.3. ARGUMENT FROM DOMINATING EXPECTATION

The third version is a generalization of the argument from expectation. Pascal points out that we have no reason to say that the probability of God's existence is just $\frac{1}{2}$. Hacking called this assumption "a monstrous premise" that can be taken in the strongest sense only by people who are just as unsure whether God is as whether he is not (*e.g.* Hacking, 1972: 189).

To the others Pascal offers a new version of the argument in that it is not important how high the probability of God's existence is. There is a nonzero probability that God exists: zero probability would mean his impossibility that has not been proven. No matter how small the probability is, the expectation associated with belief in God dominates the expectation associated with disbelief. With infinite value in the field (a) if the probability of God's existence is any finite positive number, then the expected utility associated with belief is infinite:

$$(+\text{infinity} \times (0 < \frac{1}{2})) + (\text{finite value} \times (0 < \frac{1}{2})) = +\text{infinity}$$

It is therefore obvious that belief in God leads to the maximization of utility, we should therefore choose it.

2. ARGUMENTATION STRUCTURE FROM PRAGMA-DIALECTICAL POINT OF VIEW

2.1. ARGUMENTATION STRUCTURE AS A RECORD OF (ANTICIPATED) COURSE OF DIALOGUE

Pragma-dialectics is a theoretical approach to the argumentation which began to be formed by Frans H. van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst in the seventies as a combination of two perspectives on argumentation: linguistic insight into the function of language (*i.e.* pragmatics), which is connected with elements derived from the study of critical dialogue (*i.e.* dialectic) (*e.g.* van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984; van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992; van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004). The starting point of this combination is the conception

of argumentation discourse as the exchange of verbal moves that is ideally aimed at resolving a difference of opinion. Pragma-dialectics defines argumentation as “verbal, social, and rational activity aimed at convincing a reasonable critic of the acceptability of a standpoint by putting forward a constellation of propositions justifying or refuting the proposition expressed in the standpoint” (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004: 1). This concept of argumentation is generally different in comparison with Hacking’s default understanding argumentation.

Hacking approaches the analysis of Pascal’s argument as a finished product. This approach involves analyzing the relationship between premises and conclusion and leads Hacking to the verdict that all versions of the argument are valid in the sense that the conclusion follows from the premises (*e.g.* Hacking, 1972: 190). Hacking’s approach to the evaluation of arguments corresponds so-called geometric concept of reasonableness: the argument is considered valid if it is logically valid, *i.e.* if its conclusion is inferred from the premises (*e.g.* Toulmin, 1976: vi; van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1988: 275). Pragma-dialectics on other hand adopts as its starting point the critical concept of reasonableness inspired by Popperian critical rationalism, which takes into account the fallibility of the human mind and elevates the concept of systematic critical testing in all areas of human thought and action to the guiding principle of problem solving (*e.g.* van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1988: 279). From this position, the soundness of an argument is also conceived: the argument is sound if it succeeds in the procedure of systematic critical testing.

Pragma-dialectical approach allows us to connect the “argument-as-product” approach with the “argument-as-process” and conceive the final argument as a result of the activity of persuasion and gradual removal of raised or anticipated objections (*e.g.* van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004: 1). Francisca Snoeck Henkemans (Snoeck Henkemans, 1997) showed that different — simple and complex — structures of the arguments are the result of argumentative responses to different kinds of (anticipated) criticism. The standpoint supported by a specifically structured composition of arguments is understood as a record of the process in which the speaker (the protagonist) tries in the context of doubt or disagreement of counterparty (the antagonist) to support the standpoint that is further critically tested by the counterparty.

For the argument to be accepted, an antagonist has to accept its propositional content (the truthfulness of proposition) and its justificatory force (sufficiency of proposition to support the standpoint). In the event that the acceptability of the propositional content of the argument is tested, the protagonist’s response is a support of the argument in a subordinate way. In the case that justificatory force of argument is tested, the protagonist strengthens the argument via adding new evidence to an already submitted argument. Arguments support the standpoint together, *i.e.* coordinatively. If it becomes apparent that an argument is potentially unsustainable, it is completed by a new attempt,

an independent argument branch. This step leads to multiple argumentation structure (e.g. Snoeck Henkemans, 1997).

Tab. 3: Types of argumentation structure

Subordinative structure	Coordinative structure	Multiple structure
$ \begin{array}{c} 1 \\ \uparrow \\ 1.1 \\ \uparrow \\ 1.1.1 \end{array} $	$ \begin{array}{c} 1 \\ \underbrace{\hspace{2cm}} \\ 1.1a \ \& \ 1.1b \end{array} $	$ \begin{array}{c} 1 \\ \swarrow \quad \searrow \\ 1.1 \quad 1.2 \end{array} $

Considering the final form of the argument from a processual point of view, we are able, on the basis of the reconstruction of its structure, to identify the course of the anticipated dialogue. We can identify the argument which was submitted by the protagonist and the critical objections that were raised by the antagonist to critically test the argument and that led to the formulation of the argument in a particular way regardless of whether they were actually raised or only anticipated.

2.2. ARGUMENTATION STRUCTURE AS RECORD OF STRATEGIC MANEUVERING

In its later development, pragma-dialectics connects research of argumentation with examining rhetorical effectiveness (e.g. van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2002; van Eemeren, 2010). This extension leads to a questioning of the effectiveness of a specific choice of arguments and their structures with regard to the expected antagonist/audience. While the standard model of pragma-dialectics represents argumentative schemes and specifies steps that may be used with respect to the type of critical objections, the extended model studies the rhetorical effectiveness of choices from options thus defined. Selecting specific argumentation schemes and their structuring is considered as the choice from topical potential.⁴

According to the extended model, the arguers in a dialogue simultaneously try to achieve two objectives: dialectical correctness and rhetorical effectiveness, and to achieve these objectives they maneuver strategically. In putting forward argumentation, the protagonist's dialectical objective is identified with testing the acceptability of the standpoint by advancing arguments in response

⁴ Pragma-dialectics distinguishes three aspects of strategic maneuvering: choice from topical potential, adaptation to demands of the audience and choice of presentational devices. These aspects are according to van Eemeren inseparable in argumentative practice and we can distinguish them only analytically (e.g. van Eemeren, 2010: 93–95). In this text I focus specifically on effects of choice from topical potential.

to criticism expressed by (or ascribed to) the antagonist. Rhetorical objective is the choice of the most efficient way of support, which is achieved by articulating

[...] those (combinations of) reasons that satisfy the antagonists and continue doing so until no critical doubts remain unanswered — using multiple, coordinative and subordinative argumentation depending on the antagonists' (anticipated) responses and exploiting the argument schemes they consider most effective in the situation at hand (van Eemeren, 2010: 44).

I suppose that Pascal maneuvers strategically by a selection and structuring of his argument to convince the audience about whose set of beliefs he has a particular idea. Compared to face-to-face communication, in the presentation of an argumentative text there is no direct interaction with the reader. The author expresses his point of view but the reader cannot explicitly express any doubt, criticism or opposing opinion. The consequence of this discourse is that the author of the text can only anticipate potential criticism of the counterparty. An arguer maneuvers strategically when choosing arguments and structuring them in a way to optimally deal precisely with those objections that are raised by the antagonist. From this perspective, we can say that the use of a complex argument reflects the idea of an audience, which raises a number of critical questions or doubts. The use of a simple structure reflects the idea of an audience that shares most of its beliefs with the arguer and does not need to test the shared assumptions critically.

2.3. RECONSTRUCTION OF PASCAL'S WAGER AS A DIALOGUE WITH THE ANTICIPATED READER

Considering Pascal's wager as a set of particular choices from a topical potential allows us to explore the idea of his audience and the way considered as optimal for the conviction of such an audience. I propose a reconstruction of three Pascal's arguments in which the tools of pragma-dialectical analytical overview are used. Pragma-dialectical way of reconstruction captures the structure of the argument in a more suitable manner reflecting a process of dialogue with an anticipated antagonist. In order to adequately reconstruct the argument, it is necessary to capture a standpoint, used premises, structure of the argument and used argument schemes (*e.g.* van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004: 119).

Table 4 captures the reconstruction of arguments.⁵ All versions are reconstructed as an argument using scheme of so-called pragmatic argumentation.

⁵ In this paper I use standard pragma-dialectical notation in reconstruction, where the arguments in subordinative structure differ in decimal levels, multiple arguments have different numbers on the same decimal level, coordinative arguments have the same number but different letters (*e.g.* van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004).

Tab. 4: Pragma-dialectical reconstruction of Pascal's wager

<p>Argument from dominance 1 You should believe in God. 1.1 The belief in God leads to maximizing the utility. 1.1.1 The utility of the belief in God dominates utility of the disbelief in God. 1.1.1.1a If you believe in God, and God exists, you receive an eternal salvation. 1.1.1.1b If you believe in God, and God does not exist, you lose nothing. 1.1.1.1c If you do not believe in God, and God exists, you receive an eternal damnation. 1.1.1.1d If you do not believe in God, and God does not exist, you lose nothing.</p>	<p>Argument from expectation 1 You should believe in God. 1.1 The belief in God leads to maximizing the utility. 1.1.2 If there is 1/2 probability of God's existence the expected utility of the belief in God dominates the expected utility of the disbelief in God. 1.1.2.1a The expected utility of belief in God is the infinite gain. 1.1.2.1a.1a If you believe in God and God exists, you receive an infinite gain. 1.1.2.1a.1b If you believe in God and God does not exist, you receive a finite gain. 1.1.2.1b The expected utility of disbelief in God is an infinite loss. 1.1.2.1b.1a If you do not believe in God, and God exists, you receive an infinite loss. 1.1.2.1b.1b If you do not believe in God and God does not exist, you receive a finite gain.</p>	<p>Argument from dominating expectation 1 You should believe in God. 1.1 The belief in God leads to maximizing the utility. 1.1.3 If there is nonzero probability of God's existence the expected utility of the belief in God dominates the expected utility of the disbelief in God. 1.1.3.1a The expected utility of belief in God is an infinite gain. 1.1.3.1a.1a If you believe in God, and God exists, you receive an infinite gain. 1.1.3.1a.1b If you believe in God, and God does not exist, you receive a finite gain. 1.1.3.1b The expected utility of disbelief in God is an infinite loss. 1.1.3.1b.1a If you do not believe in God, and God exists, you receive an infinite loss. 1.1.3.1b.1b If you do not believe in God and God does not exist, you receive a finite gain.</p>
<p>Counterargument -/1.1 The belief in God does not lead to maximizing the utility. -/1.1.1 The utility of belief in God does not dominate utility of disbelief in God. 1.1.1.1a If I believe in God, and God does not exist, I lose something. 1.1.1.1a.1 By the belief in God and the acceptance of a pious life I lose the value of worldly life. 1.1.1.1b We have no certainty that God exists.</p>	<p>Counterargument -/1.1.2 It is not true that if the probability of God's existence is 1/2 expected utility of belief in God dominates expected utility of disbelief in God. 1.1.2.1 We have no reason to ascribe 1/2 probability to God's existence.</p>	

The differences identified by Hacking are reconstructed as subordinative support of the argument. The decision matrix is reconstructed as coordinative type of support, the quantification of probability as antecedent capturing conditions of acceptability of this support. I offer a reconstruction of the opponent's objections that lead to a reformulation of premises in the next versions of the argument (premises challenged by counterargument are signified as $-/P$). The different versions of premises 1.1.1/1.1.2/1.1.3 are considered as submitting a new attempt to defend premise 1.1, so I reconstruct them as a use of multiple structure.

2.4. METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Pascal's argumentation is fairly complex if we focus on individual arguments, and variable if we follow the process of their gradual replacement. The arguments have similar features: the main argument 1–1.1 and coordinative support on level 1.1.1.1, as well as elements that are fundamentally different: in the presented reconstruction it is the reformulation of premise 1.1.1.

In the analysis, I use the following method. Section 3.1 is devoted to identifying a general argumentative strategy that is implemented by all arguments. I identify the intended audience of the pragmatic argument (1–1.1) and rhetorical effects of this topical strategy. I explore the strategy of using the decision matrix.

Section 3.2 focuses on the differences between arguments. I examine the reasons that lead Pascal to the gradual reformulation of premise 1.1.1. I reconstruct the anticipated counterarguments and Pascal's strategy of their removal. Next I examine Pascal's argument as a complex of advancing three arguments. I examine the effects of rhetorical strategy of gradual advancing, removal and replacement of arguments.

3. TRACKING AN INTENDED READER IN THE STRUCTURE OF ARGUMENT

3.1. THE GENERAL LINE OF ARGUMENTS

Let us mention an important step that affects Pascal's argumentation. His argumentative maneuvering is preceded by a maneuver that Pascal does before in the moment of formulation of a difference of opinion. Because there is not direct confrontation with readers, Pascal can choose way to present an initial difference of reason. Pascal presents the conflict with his opponent as a so-called single nonmixed difference of opinion. Single difference means

that the dispute is related to only one premise, here particularly whether the reader should believe in God. Nonmixed difference means that the reader does not hold a counter-standpoint, he just raises doubts regarding acceptability of standpoint submitted by Pascal. The definition of confrontation in this way gives a certain advantage to Pascal: he can focus only on justifying his own standpoint, he does not have to deal with the counterparty's standpoint.

If we focus on common features of three reconstructed arguments, we can identify a common line followed by all arguments:

1 You should believe in God.

1.1 The belief in God leads to maximizing utility.

1.1.1 Utility of the belief in God dominates utility of the disbelief in God.

1.1.1.1 (decision matrix)

At the top-level there is the standpoint encouraging the reader to believe in God, whose acceptability is in all versions identically supported by the so-called pragmatic argument in the premise 1.1. The acceptance of this premise is then supported by some variant of claim about the domination of utility of belief over disbelief (premise 1.1.1 and its variants). Neither this premise according to Pascal is acceptable to the reader in itself. It is offered support in the form of a coordinative argument that captures the outcomes of the decision matrix (argument 1.1.1.1a–d and its variants). Let us deal with them one by one.

3.1.1. The pragmatic argument

All three versions of Pascal's argument implement a pragmatic argument at the top-level. In the pragmatic argument the standpoint encourages certain behavior which is supported by pointing to the desired result of such behavior (*e.g.* Garssen, 1997: 21). The argument can be reconstructed as follows, where the premise 1.1' is a principle which transmits acceptability from reason to the standpoint:

1 You should believe in God.

1.1 The belief in God leads to maximizing utility.

1.1' Rationality requires realization of acts leading to maximizing utility.

The standpoint of argument is an advice: "You should believe in God". Such an advice could, however, be supported by other types of argumentation. Why does Pascal choose this scheme for defense as the most effective defense to the intended reader? The answer may provide a view on Pascal's advice in terms of speech act theory.

In John Searle's speech act theory, which is built into the very theoretical basis of pragma-dialectics (*e.g.* van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984), the advice is viewed as a specific speech act associated with a set of felicity conditions. Searle (Searle, 1969) defines conditions that guarantee that the speech act is not defective. In the case of Pascal's standpoint, if all conditions of the advice "You should believe in God" have been met then the reaction on the reader's side should be something like "OK, good idea". But if it is expected that the reader is not convinced about fulfillment of some of these conditions, it is possible to correct this mistake by advancing arguments. Felicity conditions are in this respect considered as indicators of possible doubts that may ever arise regarding the standpoint (*e.g.* van Poppel, 2013: 46–47).

An unfulfilled condition relevant for reader's doubt about Pascal's standpoint can be formulated as a condition of usefulness: Pascal has some reason to believe that belief in God will benefit the reader.⁶ Advancing pragmatic argument serves to demonstrate the benefits that the reader will reach by following the advice in the standpoint (*e.g.* van Poppel, 2013: 62). Pascal presents the argument to a reader about whom he assumes that his doubts concern the usefulness of belief in God. The premise 1.1 in Pascal's arguments is presented as an attempt to show that doubt on the side of the reader concerning the existence of benefit is needless. Selecting a pragmatic argument is therefore an optimal topical choice in respect to the reader who is expected to have this type of doubts.

Note that in all versions of the wager only the pragmatic argument is always chosen and it is not completed or replaced by another type of argument. From the choice of argument that corrects only doubt concerning one condition, we can deduce that Pascal does not consider that his reader doubts the fulfillment of the other felicity conditions. We can therefore infer that Pascal generally conceives his readers as people in principle willing and able to believe in God (and associate belief with a pious life), however, they currently do not believe in God and Pascal does not expect them to change this behavior of their own accord. Otherwise, their persuasion through pragmatic argument would be either pointless or superfluous.

The choice of the (right and only) pragmatic argument in favor of standpoint can be seen as a specific choice from many possible choices guided by the idea of an audience. In the absence of a counter-standpoint, we can say that Pascal presents arguments which optimally target readers who do not formulate their own reasons for disbelief in sense of a counter-standpoint "You should not believe in God" supported by arguments. They are not obstinate rejectors. Because of the expected fulfillment of other felicity conditions, moreover, we

⁶ The supplemented list of felicity conditions for advice was presented by van Poppel, 2013: 51.

can infer that Pascal models his audience as the audience willing to follow his advice, if their only doubt is removed.

3.1.2. The belief as an act leading to maximizing utility

All versions of Pascal's wager were generally identified as an argument which should lead the reader to accept belief based on removing his doubts about the usefulness of such an act:

1.1 The belief in God leads to maximizing utility.

The premise 1.1 is according to our reconstruction in all three versions supported subordinatively. Subordinative support is according to the pragma-dialectics suitable if the protagonist assumes that the antagonist could critically test the propositional content of the argument (*e.g.* Snoeck Henkemans, 1997: 89; van Poppel, 2013: 86). In other words, the antagonist does not accept the argument simply because he has doubts about the truth of the proposition.

In the case of a pragmatic argument the antagonist might challenge the normative and causal element expressed in the premise 1.1. He could express his doubts by raising three so-called critical questions that can be for our argument formulated as follows:

1. Is maximizing utility, in fact, desirable?
2. Does the belief in God indeed lead to the maximizing utility?
3. Are there any other factors that must be present together with belief in God to create the maximizing utility?

The topical potential therefore principally consists of three possible options — with regard to the expected critical question. Note that Pascal does not consider that his opponent would raise question no. 1 or 3. Regarding these elements he apparently expects agreement of his reader and does not regard it as necessary to prevent these critical questions argumentatively. His support of premise 1.1 can be conceived as a response to an anticipated question no. 2 regarding the causal element. Specifically, he claims that belief in God really leads to maximizing utility because:

1.1.1 Utility of the belief in God dominates utility of the disbelief in God.

However, it is obvious that not even this argument is regarded by Pascal to be acceptable to his readers without additional support. Even here, as we can infer from the subordinative structure, he assumes doubts concerning the propositional content.

3.1.3. Shared assumptions of decision matrix

The dominance of benefits of belief over disbelief is supported in all versions of the decision matrix at level 1.1.1.1, which has a form of a coordinative argument whose premises express individual outcomes of matrix. Submitting such an argument can again be considered as a preliminary response with respect to the criticism testing the acceptability of propositional content of the argument 1.1.1. Pascal apparently assumes continuing doubt regarding the support of a causal element. He therefore presents an argument that on a lower level responds to anticipated doubt on a key element of this support: does the utility of belief in God dominate the utility of disbelief? The choice of a matrix as an argument that implements a coordinative structure can be understood as a response to the anticipated doubt concerning the sufficiency of the individual premises to derive a conclusion.

In Pascal's formulation of matrix we can track other indicia about the intended reader. The matrix is designed as a key part of the wager. It is located on the lowest level of argument and it is not supported by additional reasons. We can infer that the layout of the matrix and its outcomes are conceived as elements that the reader shares with the author and does not desire to test them critically. This is important because we can infer other properties of the intended reader from that: in the matrix they are "embedded" Christian assumptions of argument. In all three versions of the matrix, the possibility of God's existence is associated with reward or punishment (eternal salvation/damnation, respectively infinite gain/loss). In other words, in the matrix only two outcomes are considered (*e.g.* Archie & Archie, 2004: 174–175):

1. God exists and punishes or rewards as stated in the Bible, or
2. No God exists.

According to critics, Pascal presents a false dilemma: we do not have to accept that God, if he exists, will realize just reward/punishment as stated in Bible.⁷ We do not know God's qualities, so we do not have to accept that his behavior is precisely captured by biblical text. Nor do we have to accept the layout of the matrix, which is based on biblical text. From our perspective, however, the layout of the matrix serves as an indication that leads us to the interpretation that Pascal obviously does not want to address the reader, who would have a different concept of God than Christian God. For readers who do not share this basis, the argument is not convincing. We can therefore conclude that Pascal's argument is targeting such an audience that shares his particular vision of God and his behavior in agreement with Bible. We can specify the idea of Pascal's reader

⁷ Most of famous counterarguments (the many Gods objection, Professor's God, perverse God, forgiving God, God rewarding only the chosen, possibility of reincarnation *etc.*) are directed against this assumption of wager (*e.g.* Hájek, 2012; Saka, 2005).

regarding this findings: we can speculate that Pascal addresses by his argument the reader which is currently a believer (of Christian, particularly Catholic confession) however ponders over giving up the belief in God or keeping the pious life, or the reader which is currently an unbeliever (however originally of Catholic confession too) and Pascal wants bring him back to the belief in God.

3.2. DIALECTICS OF THREE ARGUMENTS

Let us now focus on the differences of versions of Pascal's wager. The formulation of premise 1.1.1 was identified as an element undergoing the most significant change. Each subsequent version is used to remove one of the failures of the previous versions. Let us compare the formulation of premise 1.1.1 in different versions arguments:

- 1.1.1 Utility of the belief in God dominates utility of the disbelief in God.
- 1.1.2 If there is $\frac{1}{2}$ probability of God's existence | the expected utility of the belief in God dominates the expected utility of the disbelief in God.
- 1.1.3 If there is nonzero probability of God's existence | the expected utility of the belief in God dominates the expected utility of the disbelief in God.

Note that there are two changes in formulation: in the second and third version appears the formulation of expected utility and formulation of antecedent capturing the conditions under which the protagonist is willing to defend the acceptability of the premise. In the premise 1.1.2 it is the condition of $\frac{1}{2}$ probability of God's existence; in the premise 1.1.3 it is nonzero probability.

Both changes are related, they cannot be considered separately: the degree of expected utility relates to considered degree of probability. Reformulation of premises is connected with the counterarguments that Pascal explicitly or implicitly ascribes to his reader. The first counterargument attacks the acceptability of premise 1.1.1, the second one attacks the acceptability of antecedent of premise 1.1.2.

3.2.1. Transition from the dominance to the expectation

As pointed by Hacking (Hacking, 1972: 189) Pascal after the formulation of the first version of the argument raises a rather enigmatic objection that the reader could ask: perhaps he stakes too much. The objection should be reconstructed as an attack on the acceptability of the first version of the argument, in which the reader refers to the loss associated with the adoption of belief and

pious life. The reader challenges the acceptability of premise 1.1.1 and through it the sustainability of premise 1.1:

- /1.1 The belief in God does not lead to maximizing utility.
- /1.1.1 Utility of the belief in God does not dominate utility of the disbelief in God.
 - 1.1.1.1a If I believe in God, and God does not exist, I lose something.
 - 1.1.1.1a.1 By the belief in God and the acceptance of a pious life I lose the value of worldly life.
 - 1.1.1.1b We have no certainty that God exists.

This reconstruction preserves the elements which Hacking highlights, namely the explicit premise 1.1.1.1a and its implicit support derived from the interpretation of pious life as a loss. Simultaneously it captures the assertion about the uncertainty of the existence of God necessary to ensure sufficient justificatory force of argument for the support of -/1.1.1. Reconstruction of counterargument in this way captures the concurrence of two factors on which premise 1.1.1 does not apply: (a) with the context of nonexistence of God is connected the loss and (b) there is no certainty that would exclude this loss.

Pascal does a remarkable step: he accepts both the points as valid, leading to the retraction of the original argument. He replaces it by the reformulated version that incorporates both factors. The objection regarding the uncertainty of the existence of God is formulated as an antecedent of premise 1.1.2, the loss associated with the nonexistence of God is reformulated as “a finite gain” in a decision matrix and shows that the finite gain is prevailed by the infinite gain in case of God’s existence. Involvement of probability calculus into argument is reconstructed as an antecedent of premise 1.1.2:

- 1.1.2 If there is $\frac{1}{2}$ probability of God’s existence | the expected utility of the belief in God dominates the expected utility of the disbelief in God.

Note that according to this reconstruction, the protagonist chooses a reformulation of the original premise, which restricts the acceptability of the argument by a condition: provided fulfillment of the antecedent, he commits to defend the premise expressed in the consequent one. Conditional premise according to Janne Maaïke Gerlofs (Gerlofs, 2009: 126) is typically advanced when there is uncertainty regarding any fact. Because the discussion can continue only if the uncertainty is withdrawn, the claim is conditionally accepted as correct. In the context thus formulated the discussion can continue. In our case, the antecedent incorporates the argument advanced by the antagonist that it is not certain whether God exists. Pascal’s move shows that even if we accept

this objection as true, it is possible to successfully defend a premise about the dominance of the utility of belief over the utility of disbelief.

3.2.2. Transition from expectation to dominating expectation

The switch from the second to the third version can be reconstructed as a response to an anticipated attack to acceptability of the antecedent of premise 1.1.2:

-/1.1.2 It is not true that if the probability of God's existence is $\frac{1}{2}$ | the expected utility of the belief in God dominates the expected utility of the disbelief in God.

1.1.2.1 We have no reason to ascribe $\frac{1}{2}$ probability to God's existence.

In the case that the antagonist attacks the antecedent of the premise, it is expected that the protagonist withdraws the premise: it is meaningless to seek to maintain it if the condition does not apply. However, in some cases the antecedent may prove to be in a strict sense of the word false, without further discussion on the premise to be absurd: if we can formulate another general condition that extends the context of the previously strictly formulated condition (*e.g.* Gerlofs, 2009: 132).

This is also a strategy that Pascal uses in the third version. He accepts anticipated objection but it does not lead him to retract the premise that the expected utility of belief dominates the expected utility of disbelief, because the sustainability of this premise is provided by a more general condition: any nonzero probability of God's existence. In 1.1.3 only the antecedent is reformulated; claim which is formulated in the consequent one is retained in respect to the raised counterargument:

1.1.3 If there is nonzero probability of God's existence | the expected utility of the belief in God dominates the expected utility of the disbelief in God.

The reconstruction of the antagonist's counterarguments provides us with information that helps to capture Pascal's ideas about the reader more plastically: the reader's high valuation of worldly life and the uncertainty of God's existence can be interpreted as the reason why the reader does not believe in God. For such readers Pascal offers a second version of the argument, which is trying to prevent the objection and confirm the acceptability of the premise 1.1.1 expressed in the consequent one. As shown, he achieves the incorporation of both parts of the objection into the argument. The same procedure is used in the case of the second objection: the attack on quantification of the probability of God's existence is accepted and incorporated into the antecedent of the third version of the argument.

3.2.3. Strategy of gradual reformulation of arguments

If we examine Pascal's wager as a complex of three arguments that are presented to the reader gradually, we can say that dialogue gradually passes through two conflicts of opinion regarding the acceptability of the premise 1.1.1. Pascal always accepts the objection which leads him to submit a new version in which the acceptability of the original premise 1.1.1 is conditioned by the antecedent. But reformulation is in fact the beginning of a new conflict of opinion. We may ask: why does Pascal proceed in this way, *i.e.* why does he present two failing versions of argument? Can this procedure be considered as rhetorically effective?

Certain answer can be found when focusing on the element that undergoes the greatest change in the argument. The source of the antagonist's objections is repeatedly the uncertainty of God's existence. Pascal incorporates this uncertainty into the conditions of acceptability of 1.1.1. First he interprets the uncertainty about God's existence by $\frac{1}{2}$ probability, after the antagonist's critical objection generalizes this interpretation to any non-zero probability. Pascal does not mention any other objection afterwards, so he presents this dialogue as concluded by presenting the third argument — in favor of the protagonist as we can conclude from the reader's anticipated retraction of his initial doubts: "O! your words transport me, ravish me &c" (Pascal, 2013: 114).

Generally we can paraphrase the course of dialogue concerning premise 1.1.1 as follows. X represents the uncertainty of the existence of God expressed in the reader's objection, X_1 , X_2 represent Pascal's interpretation of this uncertainty. X_1 expresses fifty percent probability, X_2 expresses non-zero probability:

- Argument from dominance: Prot.: 1.1.1. ("Utility of the belief in God dominates utility of the disbelief in God").
 Ant.: 1.1.1 does not apply, because of X.
 ("We have not certainty that God exists").
 Prot.: OK.
- Argument from expectation: Prot.: (If X_1 , then) 1.1.1.
 Ant.: We have no reason to choose X_1 as appropriate interpretation of X.
 Prot.: OK.
- Argument from dom. exp.: Prot.: (If X_2 , then) 1.1.1.
 Ant.: OK.

This schematization reveals an important feature of the dialogue: the formulation of the antagonist's anticipated objections allows the protagonist to specify the conditions of the acceptability of premise 1.1.1 in a particular way: from a vague notion of uncertainty over its simplest interpretation ($\frac{1}{2}$

probability) to an interpretation acceptable for a reader with little confidence in God's existence (any nonzero probability). The process of specification of the probability during the dialogue can be considered as the protagonist's fulfilling the dialectical objective of discussion. But can we think about fulfilling its rhetorical analogue?

The gradual explication of the concept of probability, which seems designed in regards to objections, provides Pascal with a crucial advantage. It allows him to formulate his own argument to make it acceptable to the widest possible audience: an audience with any possible certainty about the existence of God. Both objections that Pascal ascribes to his readers as well as the two failing versions of the argument serve a gradual specification of the audience.

Given that Pascal himself probably considered the latest version of the argument as sufficiently compelling, we can say that as the audience that he wants to address, he considers the audience of third version. He is not interested in readers that believe that by pious life they lose nothing, or those who have the same degree of confidence in the existence and the nonexistence of God. He wants to reach an audience differentiated with respect to varying degrees (but rather small) of confidence in the existence of God. It is an audience that is much wider in comparison with the groups addressed by the first and second versions of his argument. Pascal leads his readers by the strategy of gradual submission of failing arguments and anticipated counterarguments to self-identify with this audience. The process of formulation of new versions of the argument as if in direct response to reader's objections allows him to address the readers directly by the third version of the argument completely adapted to "their critical point of view". In addition, consistent development of only one line of argument repeatedly in all three versions allows him to distract the readers from other possible critical objections. By dealing with only one line of criticism in thus presented "collaboration with readers" and not mentioning other possible objections in the process of submitting new versions of argument Pascal creates an impression that the third version is acceptable because in the whole process there was not disagreement between him and his readers regarding other starting points of argument.

CONCLUSION

The paper offered a reconstruction of Pascal's wager and its rhetorical strategy. The reconstruction proceeds from the identification of three different versions of the argument, uses insights from extended pragma-dialectics, especially the typology of argumentation structures. Pascal's wager is considered as a set of specific choices from a topical potential selected with respect to an idea of audience. We can summarize the results of our analysis as follows:

- (1) What characteristics does Pascal's intended reader have? The analysis focused on the structure repeatedly implemented all the arguments shows that the intended reader is in the position doubting (not rejecting) audience. His doubt rests on his extreme distrust regarding the validity of the causal element ("The belief in God leads to maximizing utility"), which manifests itself by adding subordinative support at lower levels. Examining the bases of the decision matrix shows that Pascal assumes agreement of the reader regarding the concepts of God as being behaving in accordance with traditional Christian conceptualization. From the above it is clear that Pascal does not try to bring unbelievers or even atheists to believe, but rather those who are more or less in harmony with Christian doctrine, but just do not put it into practice.
- (2) What kind of rhetorical strategies does Pascal use to persuade him? The analysis shows that a gradual reformulation of the argument has several strategic functions: from a dialectical point of view it corrects deficiencies of previous versions to the objections of the readers and allows Pascal to specify the relevant interpretation of uncertainty of God's existence. From the rhetorical point of view, Pascal opens by gradual retractions the way for the formulation of the third version of the argument so as to be acceptable to the widest possible audience: an audience with any degree of certainty about God's existence. Putting forward failing versions and their revisions as if in collaboration with the reader and at his initiative can be considered as elements leading the reader to self-identify with this intended audience.

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