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NOTES

1. See for example *De Utilitate Credendi* in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. and trans. by J.H.S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), especially pp. 311-316 (paragraphs 24-29) where Augustine argues for the appropriateness of belief in God that is not based on reason.
2. God weakly actualizes a state of affairs S if and only if (i) God causes S^* and all contingent states of affairs included in S^* to be actual and (ii) S^* counterfactually implies S.
3. Geivett sometimes wrongly assumes that Hick's point is the same as Mackie's (pp. 141-45). For Hick's own statement see his *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 80 and *Arguments for the Existence of God* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), pp. 34-35 (see also the afterword in Geivett's book, p. 232).
4. See David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1947), p. 169.
5. *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 166.
6. *The Nature of Necessity*, pp. 184-190.

Gambling on God: Essays on Pascal's Wager, edited by **Jeff Jordan**. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994. Pp. viii and 168. \$49.00 (Cloth), \$19.95 (Paper).

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This book is a collection of very good essays on Pascal's Wager. As far as I know, it is the first collection of its kind, and it is long overdue. Advanced undergraduates will find most of the essays readable and enlightening; graduate students and scholars will also find it very useful, at least as a starting point in their study of secondary literature on the Wager.

The back cover advertises that the book includes "new and classic essays." In the editor's introduction there is no indication of which are new or classic. The reader is left to assume from the notes (or lack thereof) to each essay that the first two have already appeared; the third is based on material in an earlier book and the remaining six are apparently new. At least one of the "classic" essays (Ryan) is abridged; yet the innocent reader would not necessarily know this. But this is not at all to imply that the abridgement was unsuitable for this volume. Also, some of the "new" essays are not terribly new, but based to a large extent on older material. This is especially the case with the articles by Schlesinger and Jordan. Again, this is not a major complaint, since the goal of the book is to bring together in one volume some of the finer and more accessible work on the Wager. In any case, it appears that three of the essays—by Quinn, McClennen and Sorenson—are entirely new and represent genuine contributions to the literature on the Wager.

I shall briefly discuss each article in the book, on the assumption that my reader is basically familiar with the Wager. But first, it needs to be said that a major issue not addressed by any article in this book is whether the choice to *believe that God exists* or *believe that God does not exist* is "forced." This is an important premise for Pascal, and it deserves treatment. Second, another issue touched upon but not adequately addressed, is the question, what justifies Pascal's assumption that a *belief* in God is necessary, or even likely to increase one's potential, for attaining infinite bliss? I shall return to these issues in due course.

Entitled "The Wager in Pascal and Others", (first published in *New Scholasticism* 19/3; 1945) John Ryan's essay deals with the historical question, how original is Pascal's Wager? Ryan claims (p.11) that "the argument in behalf of theistic belief and conduct in the face of present certainties and future uncertainty has been inseparably associated with Pascal's name Yet the argument must not be thought of as Pascal's creation or property...." Ryan cites arguments found in Socrates (i.e., Plato's *Phaedo*), Arnobius, Lactantius, and St. Thomas More. In fact, I am unconvinced that the citations from Socrates and Lactantius represent pragmatic arguments at all. But Ryan is correct that Arnobius gave pragmatic arguments for *theistic conduct* in the face of uncertainty, as well as for *the belief that there is an afterlife*. Nevertheless, Ryan does not show that anyone prior to Pascal gave a pragmatic argument for *the belief that God exists*. Incidentally, the same point may be made against the argument of Miguel Asín Palacios (referred to but not discussed by Ryan) in his *Los Precedentes Musalmanes del Pari de Pascal* (Santander, 1929). Palacios failed to show that any Muslim philosopher actually argued that, in the face of cognitive uncertainty about whether God exists, one should *believe* that God exists on pragmatic grounds. Regarding the question of who first proposed a pragmatic argument for *belief in God's existence*, it remains the case despite Ryan's article that the Wager was Pascal's creation, if not his property.

Ian Hacking's article on "The Logic of Pascal's Wager" (first published in *APQ* 9/2; 1972) clarifies the reasoning of the Wager by articulating various principles of rational decision making to which Pascal implicitly appeals. But, like many others, Hacking errs in attributing to Pascal the view that the Wager is supposed to work as long as the probability of God's existence is greater than zero. Hacking is right in maintaining that for Pascal, the *expected value* of belief in God would be infinite so long as the probability of God's existence is greater than zero. But Pascal is explicit in that he appeals to considerations of value only because (he claims) there is a parity of evidence for and against God's existence. Pascal does *not* introduce the consideration of infinite value as a response to the objection that God's existence is improbable. He introduces it as a response to the objection that wagering on religious belief may be "wagering too much", i.e., the cost of the gamble is too high even if there is a fifty-fifty chance of winning.

In "Pragmatic Reasons for Belief", Foley defends a thesis which he attributes to Pascal, namely, that even though generally speaking it is not legitimate to take into account pragmatic as opposed to evidential con-

cerns when deciding what to believe, it can on some occasions be relevant and appropriate to do so, especially when the potential gain or loss at stake is very large (as in the case of the Wager). Foley argues that generally we tend to split apart evidential from pragmatic reasons for belief, but we don't necessarily need to. It turns out according to Foley that there are pragmatic considerations which drive our evaluation of the evidential arguments for belief (e.g., we choose scientific theories which are "simple" for pragmatic reasons). There seems to be something of a contradiction here, for Foley ends up claiming that ultimately pragmatic considerations underlie our evaluation of "evidence"; if so, what sense then can be made of Foley's initial concession that sometimes it is *not* appropriate to rely upon pragmatic as opposed to evidential arguments for belief? But whether or not his claim is consistent, Foley misreads Pascal in a way similar to Hacking. Pascal claims pragmatic considerations are relevant to deciding whether or not to believe in God because a) reason (i.e., evidential reason) cannot decide the issue and b) the choice is forced. Thus Pascal claims that willy-nilly, one *has to* make the choice on pragmatic grounds. Foley's discussion is interesting but not pertinent to Pascal's original argument. (It is pertinent to a *variation* on Pascal which would seek to argue that pragmatic justification for belief in God holds even when the evidence weighs *against* God's existence.)

In "Wagering and the Evidence", Tom Morris (citing his own earlier work) rightly points out that Pascal's argument was not devoid of interest in the evidence for or against God's existence. Next he focuses on other aspects of the "existential" and "evidential" background of the Wager. Morris claims, rightly again, that Pascal thinks that evidence for Christianity will be acceptable to those who make a leap of faith; the role of the wager is to help us make that leap. But I think Morris's attempt to show why it is necessary to make the leap of belief in order to "see" the evidence for God's existence is not convincing. At best, Morris succeeds in defending an argument for a variant of Pascal, namely, that we have good pragmatic reason for setting about trying to gain a genuine belief in God's existence. Perhaps "hope" that God exists, and a generally positive attitude toward the possibility of God is helpful, but why should belief be necessary *ab initio*? Aside from this, Morris seems to think (bottom of p. 55) that providing the "existential" background of the Wager—wherein it is presumed that the "live options" available to the Wagerer are only Christianity or Modern atheism—blocks the threat of the "other gods" objection (discussed by Schlesinger and Jordan). But this is incorrect. The question of *which options are live* should not be confused with the question of *what possible states of affairs are relevant* to the Wager. Thus, it appears the atheist could refute Pascal's claim that he should be a Christian on the grounds that it is possible (with perhaps some small degree of probability) that some god exists who allows atheists to attain infinite bliss. If this objection fails at all, it does not fail on the grounds that belief in such a god is not a live option! I shall return to this issue later.

In discussing "Moral Objections to the Wager", Phil Quinn (rightly) follows Morris in insisting on the relevance for Pascal of the claim that

there is a parity of evidence for and against God's existence. In response to the objection that the Wager encourages intellectual docility, Quinn moves to the inference that it is "rationally permissible" to believe in God's existence, and that Pascal's wager encourages us to settle on one of two "rationally permissible" beliefs out of pragmatic considerations. But, one might object that if indeed there is an evidential parity, it seems that agnosticism is the only "rationally permissible" response. An important element of Pascal's original argument is missing here, namely, the claim that the choice is forced: agnosticism is not a real option. Next, in response to Clifford's claim that it is "always wrong to believe anything on insufficient evidence," on the grounds that doing so even once is potentially harmful, Quinn insists that he will not challenge this principle but only ask "what counts as sufficient evidence?" He then suggests that what is sufficient depends on what's at stake. But I think this does represent a serious disagreement with Clifford, who thinks that we can tell when the evidence for some proposition is "sufficient" , *without* resort to pragmatic considerations. Clifford would admit that pragmatic considerations should affect what we *do*; his claim is that they should not affect what we *believe*. Again, Pascal's answer to Clifford would be that the choice between theism and atheism is forced, so, one has no choice but to believe something on insufficient evidence. Finally, Quinn discusses the objection that to accept the wager is to comply with an immoral policy which needs to be attributed to God if the Wager is valid—namely, that God will deny infinite bliss to those who seriously and in all conscience remain steadfast in not believing in him. Quinn suggests that God does not *owe* anyone infinite bliss so there is nothing immoral about granting it to anyone he pleases. I think this is adequate to get around the complicity objection. In effect, this is to say that "Christian exclusivism" (the doctrine that God grants infinite bliss only to Christians) is not immoral. However, Quinn tries to make a bit more of this when he claims further that even if "Christian exclusivism" is "relaxed", so that practitioners of other religions may possibly gain salvation, Pascal's wager has a "point" as long as a person feels that only Christianity and modern atheism are live options. At this point, Quinn appears to have veered from discussing the moral objections and toward the "other gods" objection. But again, as I remarked earlier, talk of live options does not defuse the objection that it is possible that a god exists who grants infinite bliss to atheists. More on this below.

In "A Central Theistic Argument", George Schlesinger deals with three objections. The first is that the appeal to self interest is inappropriate as a justification for religious belief. In response, Schlesinger claims that if the end sought is conceded to be a matter of "greed" or self-interest, it is a "noble" greed and so is unproblematic. It seems to me Pascal has a much better response available: the hoped for end of the religious life is conceived not only as infinitely *happy*, but also as infinitely *good*. Hence even if one were to set aside self-interest, Pascal would still argue that religious belief maximizes one's potential for obtaining an infinitely good condition. The reason he focuses on happiness rather than goodness in the Wager passage is because he assumes his target is selfish; if

this assumption is changed, Pascal can readily change the terms of his argument.

The second objection Schlesinger considers is the “many gods” objection, viz., that Pascal neglects the possibility of other gods, who may also offer an infinite reward. This problem is exacerbated by the apparent mathematical fact that even a relatively small probability of gaining infinite value has the same expected value as a relatively large probability of gaining infinite value: both are infinite! Schlesinger responds that if one wishes to take other gods into account, the rational thing to do is not rely on the expected value principle but simply choose the God that seems most likely of all the options. Schlesinger then argues that the traditional God (of one of the major religions) is more “simple” and *a priori* more probable to be true than any non-standard or weird God. (Schlesinger also defends the principles of simplicity and sufficient reason.) At least three problems may be mentioned here. First, the very fact that an infinite value multiplied by any probability yields the same expected value may cause legitimate suspicion about whether it is rational to use the expected value principle to make decisions even in cases where infinite *versus finite* values are at stake. (This is a point reinforced by McClennan.) Second, the most worrisome “other god” for Pascal’s Wager is the all-accepting god, who would grant infinite bliss to anyone. I do not see that Schlesinger has shown that such a god is *a priori* less probable or less simple than a god who grants bliss only to the devout. This is especially so if we take Quinn’s approach, which is that God does not *owe* anyone infinite bliss, no matter what we do. Third, even if the traditional God is *a priori* more probable than any other god, what justifies the assumption that *belief* in God’s existence is either necessary or likely to increase one’s chances of gaining infinite bliss?

The third objection Schlesinger considers is Antony Duff’s point that no matter what one does, there is a small chance one might become a believer, so, no matter what one does, the expected value of attaining infinite bliss is infinite. Schlesinger responds that (1) it is rational to do what is most likely to result in infinite bliss, and, (2) aside from the infinite nature of the bliss, other qualities of the afterlife might await only those who *pursue* belief and not those who happen to believe by luck. So, to adopt Duff’s advice would be to choose what has the lower utility. Briefly, response (1) has the same problem mentioned above: suspicion remains about the use of the expected value principle to decide even between infinite and finite values. Response (2) seems to fail since if we are to consider the *finite* aspects of reward in the afterlife, one will have to contrast that with the finite things one needs to give up to be a religious believer. Thus one might object that to adopt religious belief is to “wager too much”. This is precisely the objection Pascal sought to block by introducing *infinite* value.

In “The Many Gods Objection”, Jeff Jordan distinguishes three versions of this objection. Basically, the first and second versions amount to the same challenge, namely, that a) there are an infinite number of other possible gods ignored by Pascal and b) once this is taken into account, the Wager does not work because one is left with an indeterminacy

about which god to believe in. Jordan's response is that the mere *possibility* of X does not imply that there is any *probability* that X; and so Pascal was entitled to neglect merely possible gods because belief in any such god carries zero expected value. One may choose to debate this issue, but this certainly seems like a respectable position.

The third version of the many gods objection is somewhat successful according to Jordan; it says that Pascal ignores other gods *that have some probability* (however small), such as, the Jewish God, the God of Islam, and perhaps others as well. So, it is left open which God one should believe. Jordan's response is that a revised Wager argument still has not been shown to be flawed, namely, the "ecumenical" version which states that at the least, one should be a theist of some sort rather than an atheist or agnostic. (Here Jordan does not take Schlesinger's line, as he did in an earlier paper, viz., that it would be rational to choose the god which is most probable of the available candidates despite the fact that all candidates has an equal and infinite expected value. See "The Many-Gods Objection and Pascal's Wager" *IPQ* vol. 31, No. 3 Issue No. 123; Sept. 1991.) But here it seems Jordan has dismissed too hastily the notion that there is some probability (however small) that God is all-accepting and that even the atheist or agnostic will end up with infinite bliss. Jordan simply insists (p. 113,n.13) that "Most, if not all, people believe that there is no reason to hold that atheism or agnosticism could result in an infinite utility." I dare say this is false; most people who are willing to assign some probability to the traditional God of monotheism would concede that there is some probability (however small) that at least some atheists and agnostics might attain infinite bliss. After all, God is conceived as omnibenevolent, and, for some, all-forgiving. Certainly, open-minded atheists and agnostics (the target of the wager) are going to insist that this is a real probability. So, despite the efforts of Schlesinger and Jordan, this is still a serious problem for the Wager.

Finally, the articles by Edward McClennan ("Pascal's Wager and Finite Decision Theory") and Roy Sorenson ("Infinite Decision Theory") explore the notion of infinite utility and the question of whether it makes sense to attempt to apply decision-theoretic principles to a case where an infinite utility is at stake. McClennan tries to show no sense can be made of this "within a Bayesian framework", and that without the Bayesian Framework Pascal's application of expected value principle is questionable. I would agree that some framework is necessary, but I'm not sure it has to be the Bayesian one. McClennan also tries to analyze Pascal's actual text more than anyone else in this book, including Hacking. This is useful but also somewhat frustrating as it appears Pascal's work was unfinished and so somewhat rough in spots. Sorenson's article is more charitable toward the Wager; his article is basically a plea for the case that decision theory must find a way of accommodating infinite value or utility, but he's not sure how. Both articles are somewhat technical and difficult for the beginner; but both raise valid issues and represent contributions to the Pascal literature. If Sorenson's plea is answered, that literature will be increasing again.