

WAGERING A LIFE

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Life is risk. Nothing we do that is of any importance carries with it a guarantee of success. Nothing we can do is absolutely sure to secure even our own personal safety or well-being from one hour to the next. Yet we are constantly faced with choices. Lots of decisions, no guarantees.

We all, in some way or another, adopt strategies for living, ways of approaching the world, ways of making choices that aim at the attainment of what we consider good. These strategies are all, to some extent or another, calculated gambles. We have no compelling proofs that our strategies will work. None of them is a sure thing. But we are used to the risk. We are accustomed to living without many true certainties, to the extent that we ordinarily forget that life is risk.

Is there a God? Does human existence have an objective, unshakable meaning? Do our interests, projects, or loves survive beyond the narrow bounds of this transitory world? Over the centuries, many intelligent, reflective people have answered Yes to these questions. And many have answered No. Some of the yeasayers have claimed direct, powerful personal experiences as the basis for their answer. It is a rare naysayer to have made his own such claim. Negative answers are usually based on some form of reasoning from what the naysayer takes to be relevant evidence. There are arguments against the existence of God, arguments against objective meaning in life, arguments against life after death. And there are arguments to the contrary, arguments affirming the existence of God, affirming objective meaning in life, and affirming the existence of life after death.

Arguments are rarely as powerful as direct experiences, however, and rarely as satisfying. When I get home for lunch, seeing my wife is always preferable to merely inferring her presence in the house from small bits of evidence. Likewise, having some experience of God would beat having any number of theistic arguments available for consideration. But for people who seem to lack any experiences sufficient for the answering of ultimate questions, what is left except argument?

In his attempt to recommend a Christian worldview to his unbelieving contemporaries, Pascal hit upon a rare form of argument, an argument meant to help them move themselves into a better position to have the sort of experience of the reality of God that they lacked and to experience as well the truth of the Christian message about right relations with God. Throughout human history, almost all the arguments that have been devised for or against a religious worldview have attempted to show that some central religious belief is either true or false. These arguments have attempted to establish or at least to raise the probability of some claim about the nature of ultimate reality. Pascal's intriguing argument is not like that at all. His argument attempts to show that, in light of the ultimate questions, we ought to adopt a certain kind of strategy for living, with the aim in view of coming to know, and attaining the proper relation to, the highest Truth. We all employ life strategies, and we all gamble with those strategies. Pascal devised an argument to show us that we all ought to bet our lives on God. It is known, appropriately enough, as Pascal's Wager.

Pascal begins to lay out the famous wager argument with this striking passage:

"Either God is or he is not." But to which view shall we be inclined? Reason cannot decide this question. Infinite chaos separates us. At the far end of this infinite distance, a coin is being spun which will come down heads or tails. How will you wager? Reason cannot make you choose either, reason cannot prove either wrong.

In this life, there is no absolute proof available to the skeptic that there is a God. Nor is there any way of proving that there is not. Reason by itself cannot decide the issue. We live in a world that seems to many people deeply ambiguous. It does not clearly speak of its ultimate nature. There are some indications that a religious view of the world is true. There are some indications that it is not. Pascal asks each of us a simple question about this ultimate issue: How will you wager? He hopes to help us place the right bet.

Imagine a race between two horses. Let's say that they've competed many times before. Call them "Gold" and "Silver." Gold has come in first in two out of every three races they've had. Silver has finished ahead only one third of the time. Today you are at the track, as you have been many times before. You want to bet on this race, and you have to decide which horse to back. Gold is twice as likely to win, but there are some other factors to consider. How much does it cost to bet on Gold? On Silver? And what's the payoff if you bet on Gold and Gold wins? Correspondingly, what do you get if you successfully back Silver? All these factors must be taken into consideration.

There seem to be, at first thought, two different kinds of goals a gambler could have in placing his bets. One goal would be to minimize his losses. Another would be to maximize his gains. If someone cared only about the former, he wouldn't go to the track at all. He would stay at home. And to the extent that the loss minimization goal is valued, he will try to shy away from risk whenever possible. A regular gambler accustomed to risk presumably seeks to maximize his gains, and not just today or in one particular bet but over the long run. Pascal seems to have been one of the first people to help us understand that a rational gambler seeking to maximize his gains over the long run will place his bets in accordance with a certain calculation, a calculation that can be represented by a simple formula for the determining of what we can call Expected Value:

$$(EV): (\text{Probability} \times \text{Payoff}) - \text{Cost} = \text{Expected Value}$$

Expected Value is an abstract guide to maximal gain over the long run. The rational gambler places the bet that has associated with it the highest Expected Value. I call the Expected Value of a bet an "abstract guide" only to make clear that it does not represent what will be won, concretely speaking. What will be won is the amount specified as "payoff." The gambler who bets in accordance with the highest Expected Value may lose a few more bets than the gambler who bets always in accordance with the highest probability, but because of the greater payoff he gets when he does win and the lesser costs he typically incurs, these short-term losses allow for a greater gain in the long run.

Now, as a matter of fact, Expected Value often follows along with probability, so that the horse with the greatest chance of winning will also be the horse that carries with it the greatest Expected Value. But these measures can diverge. To see how, let's fill in our example a bit more. For the sake of simplicity, we'll use some highly artificial numbers.

Suppose that the payoff associated with Gold is three hundred dollars. To place a bet on Gold costs sixty dollars. The less likely Silver pays nine hundred dollars, and to bet on this horse costs only twenty dollars. This can all be represented by a simple chart:

| Horse | Probability | Payoff | Cost | Expected Value |
|--------|-------------|--------|------|----------------|
| Gold | 2/3 | \$300 | \$60 | \$140 |
| Silver | 1/3 | \$900 | \$20 | \$280 |

Again, the Expected Value is not the amount of money to be placed in your hand at the end of this race if you bet on a certain horse and win. It is the way of quantifying the overall value of each bet in this particular wagering situation, all things considered. Figuring the Expected Values of our two horses on the basis of our formula, we find that Gold, the horse more likely to win, has in this case the lower overall Expected Value. Silver, the bet with the lower probability, enjoys the higher Expected Value. Thus, in this

particular case, the rational gambler seeking to maximize his gains over the long run places his wager on Silver. Again, the particulars of this example have been contrived in such a way as to show how it is possible for Expected Value and probability to diverge, although very often they go hand in hand.

Now we are in a position to see how all this can be applied to considerations of religious belief. Pascal believed that Christian theism is true and, furthermore, that a fair, unbiased inquirer could come to see that there is a substantial body of evidence in favor of its truth to be found in the world. Yet hardly any of us are altogether fair and unbiased when we consider ultimate issues. And what we are affected how much we can see. At one point Pascal says,

The prophecies, even the miracles and proofs of our religion, are not of such a kind that they can be said to be absolutely convincing, but they are at the same time such that it cannot be said to be unreasonable to believe in them. There is thus evidence and obscurity, to enlighten some and obfuscate others. But the evidence is such as to exceed, or at least equal, the evidence to the contrary, so that it cannot be reason that decides us against following it, and can therefore only be concupiscence and wickedness of heart. (835)

He ends this passage with some strong words. In many of his notes, he makes the point that reason does not always call the shots in human life. Our deepest desires can affect not just what we do but even how we see the world. We so often see what we want to see and fail to see what we want not to see. Christian theism is true, and the evidence is there. It is such as to exceed, or at least equal, the evidence to the contrary. If we are rightly disposed to see it, we'll be able to see this evidence for what it is - a sign of the truth.

But what is all this evidence of which Pascal speaks? We'll have to spend the next two chapters laying some of it out for inspection. The evidence was important to Pascal. He was no irrationalist. As an empirical scientist, he recognized the vital role solid evidence should play in the forming of our beliefs. As a shrewd psychologist and a person of deep religious vision, however, he also realized how important our desires, emotions, attitudes, and patterns of action are when it comes to forming beliefs on ultimate issues.

Let us, for the sake of argument at this point, at least provisionally grant Pascal his view that, with respect to the claims of Christian theism, the world in which we live is ambiguous to many observers. There seems to be evidence both ways. If such a person were asked how probable is it that the Christian God exists, he might reply, "I don't know - 50/50, 60/40, 40/60 - it's unclear." Such an answer would express an appropriate level of uncertainty concerning the issue. But either the Christian God exists or the Christian God does not exist. If we had to assign numerical probabilities to reflect our degree of confidence over the issue, amid the conflict of apparent evidence we might likely find ourselves saying, "God, roughly one chance out of two; no such God, roughly the same."

Pascal believed that each of us is either betting for God - betting that there is a God - or betting against God - betting that there is no God - by the way we are living right now. There is nothing equivalent to staying home from the track. Either we are living as if there is a God, praying, seeking to determine God's will, and trying to live in accordance with those determinations, or we are living as if there is no God, refraining from or ignoring all such religious activities. There is, according to Pascal, no middle ground. We already are making one bet or the other. Which is it? Which should it be? If we find that our answers to these two questions diverge, it is not too late to change our wager.

Well, which bet should we make? Pascal thinks that there is no absolutely overwhelming argument for or against the existence of God, and no body of cumulative evidence on one side of the issue or the other that will compel us to see where the truth lies. Reason cannot force us to choose either answer; reason cannot prove either wrong. Pascal believes, however, that viewing the situation as a wager, as a rational gamble, can help us here to decide our course.

In order to construct an argument to assist us in determining which wager we should make, we need first to ask whether something can be said about the factors other than probability that are operative in this sort of

decision. In the example of the horse race, we asked about payoffs and costs. Are there costs and benefits to be considered here as well? Pascal certainly thought so.

Imagine that we've thought over the various basic options available on the issue of whether there is a God, and we feel that the liveliest possibilities are Christian theism and atheism. We'll explore how we might get to this conclusion in the next two chapters. For now, let's just suppose that we have arrived at the point where we are contemplating these two alternatives of Christianity and atheism. They are, as a matter of fact, the two alternative worldviews most discussed, and viewed as rivals, in our culture. Are there costs associated with taking up either Of these views of ultimate reality? The nonreligious person will certainly insist right away that, understood in any traditional sense, there are costs associated with being a Christian. Didn't Christ himself use the metaphor of taking up our own crosses to follow him? And the apostle Paul speaks prominently of sharing he sufferings of Christ. At a minimum, taking up a Christian worldview involves endorsing a perspective on the human condition that is not universally shared, and this can occasion offense on the part of people who do not share it. Christianity claims to offer to human beings the supreme revelation of God, the best account of divine-human relations, and the deepest truth about the only path to eternal salvation, the ultimate fulfillment for any creature. From an outsider's point of view, this can all sound quite presumptuous and arrogant. And the resulting annoyance can generate ill will - indeed, ill treatment.

But it might seem that a version of the same sort of cost can be incurred by the atheist. To take up an attitude of self-sufficiency in the world, or to deem that ultimate reality is best viewed as bereft of any loving intelligence (either at the top or the bottom, depending on which metaphor you prefer), can itself seem rather presumptuous as well. Pascal asks,

what advantage is it to us to hear someone say he has shaken off the yoke, that he does not believe that there is a God watching over his actions, that he considers himself sole master of his behaviour, and that he proposes to account for it to no one but himself? Does he think that by so doing he has henceforth won our full confidence, and made us expect from him consolation, counsel and assistance in all life's needs? Do they think that they have given us great pleasure by telling us that they hold our soul to be no more than wind or smoke, and saying it moreover in tones of pride and satisfaction? (427)

A profession of atheism, or a life lived in an atheistic direction, can also exact untoward social consequences, unless the person who makes this wager is subtle and cagey enough. I know atheists who attend church because they enjoy the beauties of liturgy. It is possible to be an atheist and enjoy the benefits of religious community, too, at least to some extent. It is possible to be an atheist in secret. Sufficiently well-disguised atheism need not alienate anyone in the way in which the sentiments of Pascal's smug unbeliever are likely to.

For that matter, it is hard to specify many costs an atheist is sure to incur up front, so to speak, while making his wager. Recall that in assigning costs to a bet, we cannot assume we know which horse will win the race. The costs we are looking into are the price of admission into the bet, the investment up front. We thus can't say here that the cost of betting against God is hell, or eternal separation from God, or a life without ultimate fulfillment. We can say that it is a life without a certain sort of hope, a kind of hope the religious believer does have. The atheist also denies himself access to a certain sort of psychological resource for transcending the vicissitudes of life in this world, a source of equanimity the believer has. But perhaps the mature atheist can develop his own psychological resources for handling life's ups and downs, for getting his bearings amid life's troubles.

The costs of casting one's lot with the religious seem by contrast, at least initially, fairly easy to specify. The Christian is called to avoid the sort of subtlety and social shrewdness that will hide his allegiance from public scrutiny. He is not to hide his light under a basket. But holding one's light aloft when people prefer the dark can be very difficult. Loving your neighbor as yourself can be very demanding. Not all neighbors are so lovable. Doing unto others as we would have them do unto us is not always easy in a world where we are most often tempted rather by a "first strike" mentality to do unto them before they do unto us.

"Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together," the New Testament says. There are acts of worship to be performed. There are lessons to be learned. It's not always easy to drag your half-dead carcass to church on Sunday morning. There are pleasures to be shunned on some occasions, or at least with some people. One can drink deep from the tankard of pleasant sensation, but the truly religious person typically avoids total immersion, at least of the sort that, from the believer's point of view, too often drowns the unbeliever. We may even be called upon to suffer for the sake of others. Deprivation, sacrifice, the aggravations of enforced godliness, the demands of constant goodness or at least efforts at goodness - these are a lot for any naturally self-inclined individual to take. Are there costs incurred by the person who bets on God? I think an honest answer is "Yes." However, I think a more complete answer begins with "Yes, but..." as we will now see.

Let's assume some very small initial cost for wagering on atheism, and a more significant cost for betting on God. We now need to ask about the payoffs or benefits associated with each bet. First, atheism.

What does the atheist win if he bets that there is no God and it turns out that he's right? Well, presumably, one benefit he will not derive will be the experience of finding out he was right. If there is no God, there probably is no life, or existence of an individual's conscious experiencing self, after death either. But even if there could be survival of bodily death in a Godless universe, it is hard to see how there could be any sort of experience on either side of the grave that would prove the atheist to have been right. If he is right, he will never experience the satisfaction of finding out for certain that he was right.

Is there then nothing to be gained from the atheistic wager? This would be the wrong conclusion to draw. The atheist derives a certain freedom from his wager, a freedom to do whatever he sees fit to do. He can design his own lifestyle. He can tailor it to fit his desires and his perceptions of the world as he chooses. If he is right, his conduct will not flout or violate any objective desiderata for human life, just in virtue of its having been atheistic. Now, I don't mean to imply that every atheist will be an unrestrained hedonist, following no law but the demands of his own desires. An atheist can believe that there are objective moral principles that should be obeyed, but it is awfully hard to give a convincing account of exactly what such principles consist in, where they might come from, or exactly what their status could be in a thoroughly physical system such as our universe is thought to be from an atheistic point of view. Or, without recognizing any objectivity to morality, an atheist can just choose to live in accordance with generally accepted morals. Or he can invent his own. Or he can live day to day in whatever way he chooses, varying his conduct with his mood. It is hard to see that much in this world is closed to him. He is a person focused on this world, since he believes it to be the only world there is. And from that field he can presumably reap any harvest he cares to. In the end, if he is right, nothing he has done in this world will have been doomed to failure simply in virtue of being atheistic.

But assuming, as most atheists do, that in an atheistic world death is the end of any human's existence, there will at best be only a finite number of benefits, or moments of benefit, to be derived from the wager against God, and this is significant. For when we consider the benefits to be derived from the Christian wager if it turns out to be right, we find something very different. The promise of eternal life, everlasting blissful communion with God and with those other fellow creatures who love God, is at the heart of the Christian faith. If Christianity turns out to be true, then anyone who has sincerely lived in a Christian way, relating himself to God as the Christian faith instructs, will find that he has been issued into a qualitatively superior form of life, consonant with the deepest truths about ultimate reality, a form of life that will be enjoyed, literally, forever.

If the Christian wager proves to be right, will the Christian enjoy the experience of satisfaction to be derived from finding out decisively that he is right? Even such staunch critics as Not-wood Russell Hanson seem to acknowledge that the answer is "Yes." A range of experiences can easily be imagined that would preclude any reasonable doubts about what the outcome is if the Christian God does exist. So the Christian can have the satisfaction of finding that he was right. Moreover, if he loses the bet over whether there is a God, he will not be forced to face his error. For if there is no God and no existence beyond the moment of death, he can never have an experience beyond death that will disappoint. And if we were right in what we said about the atheist's inability on either side of the grave to enjoy an experience of finding out decisively

that he is right, the same points will apply to the religious wagerer's finding out that he himself has been wrong. The disappointment of a decisive disproof is not to be dreaded. For the religious wager, it cannot materialize.

Here we have an interesting asymmetry, an interesting difference, between the two wagers. In fact we may even have a symmetrical asymmetry. The Christian wagerer can experience the profound satisfaction of discovering for sure that he was right, and he cannot experience the terrible disappointment of finding out for certain that he was wrong. The atheist, on the contrary, cannot experience any satisfaction from a discovery that he was right, and, moreover, can, according to the claims of the alternative, Christian theology, experience the terrible regret of discovering that he was wrong - that he lived his life in ignorance and disregard of the deepest truths of reality. Christian theology speaks of judgment, and it speaks of worse. Whatever is meant, it is plausible to suppose that it includes at least this sort of realization. So, in an important sense, we can say that for atheism there is a final no-satisfaction guarantee, whereas for theism, there is a final no-dissatisfaction guarantee.

Setting aside this last point, we can draw up a chart to represent our betting situation:

| Bet | Probability | Payoff | Cost | Expected Value |
|--------------|-------------|----------|--------|----------------|
| Christianity | c 1/2 | infinite | finite | infinite |
| Atheism | c 1/2 | finite | small | finite |

Even if we are unable to quantify more precisely the various factors to be considered in this wager, we can see what the outcome will be. Atheism brings with it, at best, only a finite expectation, whereas Christian theism carries with it an infinite Expected Value. No disparity could possibly be greater. Therefore, says Pascal, a rational gambler will bet on God.

Pascal himself develops the argument a bit differently. In his notes there are some enigmatic passages and also twists and turns of mathematical reasoning that are a bit more finely tuned than what we have considered. However, I think that the best of what he had in mind is well represented by what we have considered.

But some questions still need to be asked. If we find the reasoning persuasive, exactly how are we supposed to make the wager Pascal urges on us? Pascal anticipated this question and discusses it in a dialogue with an imaginary partner. His representative unbeliever has found that in considering the question of God, theoretical reason - the concern with discovering proofs of truth claims and evidence of truth-reaches an impasse. Pascal's argument, by contrast, can be considered an exercise in practical reasoning concerning how we ought to act. The unbeliever in Pascal's dialogue agrees to the force of Pascal's argument. He acknowledges that despite the uncertainty of theoretical reason, practical reason shows that he ought to bet on God. But there is a problem. The following exchange ensues:

UNBELIEVER: "Yes, but my hands are tied and my lips are sealed; I am being forced to wager and I am not free; I am being held fast and I am so made that I cannot believe. What do you want me to do then?"

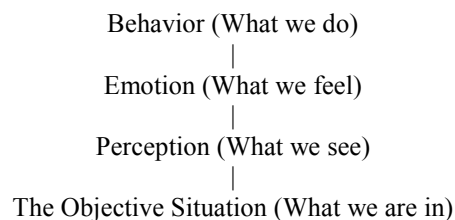
PASCAL: "That is true, but at least get it into your head that, if you are unable to believe, it is because of your passions, since reason impels you to believe and yet you cannot do so. Concentrate then not on convincing yourself by multiplying proofs of God's existence but by diminishing your passions. You want to find faith and you do not know the road, You want to be cured of unbelief and you ask for the remedy learn from those who were once bound like you and who now wager all they have. These are people who know the road you wish to follow, who have been cured of the affliction of which you wish to be cured: follow the way by which they began. They behaved just as if they did believe, taking holy water, having masses said, and so on." (4 18)

Pascal goes on to say that as these people find themselves engaged in religious wagering behavior, they

naturally move in the direction of true belief. His recommendation is that anyone who sees the reasonableness of the wager should begin to enter into a new pattern of living and thinking, insofar as he or she finds it possible. The unbeliever should begin to attempt to conform his life to a pattern set by true believers. He should begin to think on the idea of God, he should meditate upon moving religious stories, he should attempt to pray (as far as that is possible), he should associate with people who already believe and hold religious values to be very important, and he should expose himself to religious rituals of worship. The recommendation of the wager argument is not "It is in your best interest to believe in God, so therefore go and believe." Belief is not under our direct voluntary control. If someone offered me ten thousand dollars on the spot to believe right now that within the next hour, without leaving my office, I will see thirty-seven prize Indiana hogs wearing straw hats and dancing to harmonica music, even though I never in the past have had such an extraordinary porcine vision, I would find myself immediately well disposed to the proposition (a reward of ten thousand dollars is quite an offer), but I would not be able to just manufacture belief, even in response to the most lucrative inducements. If something seems to me to be the case, I believe it. I can't believe it if it does not seem to me to be the case, regardless of how strong an argument might be presented to me to the effect that it is to my great advantage so to believe. I can say I believe it. I can project mentally or visualize in accordance with it, but if it doesn't seem to me to be true, I can't actually believe it is true, regardless of what I'm offered for so believing. And I think Pascal was a sufficiently shrewd psychologist to realize all this. He did not intend his wager argument to issue in an immediate belief in God, as a direct result. He intended it only to issue in a certain form of behavior, which would erode obstacles to belief, obstacles to be found in our emotions, attitudes, passions, and habitual ways of thinking and acting. He believed that religious behavior and religious thought would, at least over the long run, open the way to religious insight, to a perspicacious perception of religious reality. It is a complete and, unfortunately, common distortion of the human condition to think that what we see is altogether independent of what we do and how we feel. We can distinguish intellect from emotion, or reasoning from feeling, as an exercise in conceptual abstraction, and these are indeed distinguishable facets of the overall human grappling with the world, but we can't always separate what we distinguish in this way.

Open your eyes and you can see the physical world. But some truths about the physical world cannot be grasped without years of skilled preparation. Any normal thinking person can handle simple straightforward ideas, but there are tremendous reaches of the intellectual realm inaccessible to us apart from arduous training, persistent attention, and a firmly disciplined patience. The discernment of spiritual truth may also require certain capacities that in most of us desperately need cultivating. Pascalian wagering is best viewed as a determined attempt to cultivate those capacities on the part of people who, because of the great values involved, are gambling their lives, hoping for success.

To illustrate what Pascal has in mind, consider the following simple chart:



Ordinarily, we tend to think about life like this: the objective situations we are in are responsible for what we perceive to be true. What we perceive our circumstances to be in turn influences how we feel. It elicits one sort of attitude rather than another, one set of emotions rather than another. And these emotional and attitudinal states feed into our behavior. What we do is affected by what we feel.

What Pascal wants us to see is that things can also work the other way around. Action creates emotion. How we behave can influence, over the long run and sometimes even on the spot, what attitudes and emotions are operative in our lives. And these in turn can open our eyes or blind us to aspects of our objective environment. They can affect deeply our ability to perceive the world aright. Emotions and

attitudes can color patterns of perception that either reveal to us or hide from us the ultimate realities all around us. Reaching the objective truth about any subtle and profound matter may require a great deal of preparatory behavior, or wagering in the right direction.

On the basis of his own experience, Pascal was convinced that religious truth is present in the world to be perceived by those who are capable of seeing. The evidence is out there to be gathered, if we are prepared for it. But how much preparation should we undertake? Before launching into any new enterprise, most of us would prefer to wait until all the evidence is in. We want evidence up front that success, or fulfillment, can be attained in this way. And often that means wanting sufficient evidence for any of the distinctive assumptions upon which the enterprise is predicated. I won't go into business producing blankets unless I believe that there will continue to be cold weather each year. But some enterprises require investment before all the evidence is in. Any successful entrepreneur knows that. And in the realm of human relationships we discover this fairly early on. It is no oddity for this to be true of religious involvement as well.

But some evidence is required up front. No one wants to leap into utter darkness. The more investment an enterprise requires, the more it costs to place the bet, the more evidence we want before taking the first step. But of course, as Pascal points out, it is not as if we can stay at home and keep all our money in a safe bank until we get all the evidence we would like. We are already moving down one road or the other. And we can't even slow our movement. Are we now on the right road? What is the evidence we have for betting against God, evidence that an atheistic life is best hooked into the true structure of reality? Considering all the benefits and costs relating to each of the rival bets, Pascal claims that the evidence that can be marshaled for an atheistic worldview is inadequate. He believes that the religious wager, by contrast, enjoys from the start an adequate evidential base and, moreover, promises to be able to extend that base.

So what is that evidence? Well, there is first of all a body of evidence that in this life a person seeking to live in a genuinely religious way is richly rewarded. Pascal even goes so far as to say that

Only Christianity makes men both happy and lovable. (426)

Elsewhere he explains that

The Christian's hope of possessing an infinite good is mingled with actual enjoyment as well as with fear, for, unlike people hoping for a kingdom of which they will have no part because they are subjects, Christians hope for holiness, and to be freed from unrighteousness, and some part of this is theirs already. (917)

Any individual engaged in Pascalian wagering must attempt to redirect his attention and energy from the natural fixation we all have with our selves and considerations of self-interest to a concern with God and with what he intends for us, as reported in the Christian tradition. A Christian wagerer initiates lines of conduct that lead to his gaining a new measure of control over his passions, however imperfect that control may yet be. A person making this wager with his or her life will also have a transcendent focus and source of psychological comfort in this world of turmoil and pain. The apostle Paul described the results of the Christian life, fully lived, as the production of a character full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). To the extent that lives are changed as a result of Christian living, to the extent that basic character dispositions are transformed for the good during the process of wagering, evidence is produced that this wager is in accordance with the deepest conditions for full and fulfilling human living.

But there is more, much more. And to some of that more, we now need to turn.

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