

Pascal, Pascalberg, and Friends

0. Introduction

Blaise Pascal hoped to demonstrate that Christianity was worth betting on. I argue that his wager is more effective when aimed at specific audiences, factoring into consideration their cultural and social situation. The notion of *epistemic rootedness* can provide an explanation for when and where it is legitimate to factor out options that would otherwise interfere with the wager. With this insight in hand, we'll arrive at multiple Pascals: a Jewish one, a Christian one, a Muslim one, and more – each of them with significant persuasive power relative to certain audiences.

1. Pascal's Wager

The basic idea of Pascal's wager is that a person stands to win more than they stand to lose by, so to speak, betting on the truth of Christianity. Even if the odds of a religion being true are minuscule, the bet will be worth it – according to the dictates of rational decision theory – if the potential winnings are of *infinite* value, and if you've got nothing to lose.

But then again, it's fair to worry that decision theory isn't well suited to dealing with infinite values (see Jordan, 1998; Oppy, 2018), and thus it's fair to worry: perhaps our reasoning about such a wager is likely to be unreliable. Moreover, it's difficult to calculate the probabilities of a religion being true, and it's difficult to calculate the actual value of the various possible outcomes. In other words: Pascal's wager presents a situation in which decision theory could be thought to break down.¹

¹ Indeed, the presence of infinite value in Pascal's wager allegedly renders his argument invalid (Hájek, 2003). The notion that decision theory breaks down in the presence of infinite values is even more vividly illustrated by an argument that could be called *Pascal's Revenge* (see Hájek, 2015); according to this argument, Pascal's wager-argument is invalid, but any positive credence whatsoever towards its premises, even if our credence is

For the meantime, we can avoid these worries with a toy example (drawn from Rota, 2016) that trades in clear and finite values and probabilities.

An eccentric wealthy person comes to you with a shiny pound coin. She’s going to flip the coin and cover it up. You get to choose whether to play or to pass. If the coin falls heads up, and you chose to play, then you’ll win an extraordinary sum – one million pounds. But if you chose to play, and it falls *tails* up, then you’ll win something measly in comparison, but hey, it’s still free money; you’ll win twenty-five pounds. Alternatively, you could choose to *pass*. If you do so, you’ll win nothing if the coin comes up heads, and you’ll win a hundred pounds if it comes up tails.

The following table represents the game.

		
Play	£1,000,000	£25
Pass	£0	£100

The average winnings of those who chose to play will be £500,012.50.² The average winnings of those who choose to *pass* will be just £50.³ In other words: the person who plays walks off, on average, £499,962.50 richer than the person who passes. It’s a no brainer. Michael Rota

infinitesimally low, entails that every single action receives an infinite expected utility (but for considerations in *favour* of the infinite-value version of the wager, see Jackson & Rogers, 2019).

² $(\frac{1}{2} \times \text{£}1,000,000) + (\frac{1}{2} \times \text{£}25) = \text{£}500,012.50$

³ $(\frac{1}{2} \times \text{£}0) + (\frac{1}{2} \times \text{£}100) = \text{£}50$

(2016) suggests that we model Pascal's wager on this no brainer, thereby avoiding worries to do with infinite values and uncertainty.

Imagine, for simplicity's sake, that there's only one religion: Christianity. Imagine that heads-up represents Christianity being true, tails-up represents Christianity being false, the coin is evenly weighted, playing represents committing to Christianity, and passing represents a life with no religion. We can run a straightforward calculation.

If you committed to Christianity and it was *true*, then you maximised your chances of eternal blissful life, expressed appropriate gratitude to God, and likely brought others salvation too. You'd also receive the this-worldly goods associated with living a religious life.

Rota points to a wealth of scientific research. Apparently, committing to religion tends to generate "greater life satisfaction and a sunnier emotional life", an appreciable increase in life expectancy, and the likelihood that you'll engage with volunteering, charitable giving (to both religious and secular causes), and that you'll be more likely to embody other civic virtues too.⁴

There *will* have been some costs. You'll have spent more time praying than you would have done as a non-Christian. You'll have avoided certain pleasures from which Christians abstain. But these costs pale in comparison to the benefits, such as eternal bliss. We're avoiding talk of infinite values. So, let's say you've won a million pounds.

If you committed to it, and Christianity turns out to be *false*, then what did you really lose? You still had a nice life, committed to noble ideals. You may have wasted some time praying, but don't forget the emotional benefits that those prayers gave you. There were

⁴ To substantiate these claims, Rota cites: McCullough, et al. (2000), Stark & Finke (2000), McCullough, et al. (2001), Krueger, et al. (2009), Newport, et al. (2010), Lim (2012), Newport, et al. (2012), Lim & Putnam (2012), and selected chapters from Koenig, et al. (2012).

some pleasures avoided that could have been enjoyed, but perhaps avoiding those pleasures played a role in shaping your moral character. It's hard to say that you'll have lost all that much. You'll probably have gained something from your life immersed in a religious community, but nothing like eternal bliss. Let's model this by saying that you won twenty-five pounds.

Using one million pounds to signify the prize you win for betting on Christianity if "the coin" comes up heads, and using twenty-five pounds to signify the prize that you win for betting on Christianity if it comes up tails, assuming a fair coin, then the value we should associate with playing will be – once again – £500,012.50.

And what if you *pass*? If the coin comes up heads you'll have minimised your chances for eternal life, you'll have lost an opportunity to express gratitude to God, you'll have lost the opportunity to bring salvation to others, and you'll have lost out on the this-worldly goods associated with a religious life. We're being generous to say that this is like getting zero pounds, rather than a fine (and we've not even factored in the notion of hell-fire). But let's be generous and symbolise the outcome of passing, when the coin comes up heads, as winning nothing.

If you pass, and Christianity is false, then perhaps you'll have had a better life than the Christian. You were noble and moral *without* Christianity. You had more time for certain pleasures and leisure than did the church-going, Bible-studying Christian. You might value the fact that you didn't commit your life to a *falsehood*!⁵ On the other hand, you lost the benefits associated with living a religious life. Let's be generous to the atheist here and say that you come out better off than the Christian (which is to concede a lot, given the empirical evidence

⁵ So long as the Christian never finds out that she was wrong, and so long as there's no afterlife in which she might be corrected, she'll never have the displeasure of *knowing* that her life was dedicated to a falsehood.

that Rota cites). You won't win a million pounds – there's no eternal life here. It's more like you've won a hundred.

Using zero pounds to signify the prize you win for *not* betting on Christianity if the coin comes up heads, and one hundred pounds to signify the prize that you win for not betting on Christianity if the coin comes up *tails*, and if the coin's fair, then the value we should associate with not betting on Christianity will be £50. The figure should be much *lower*, perhaps in the minus once you factor in the cost of *hell*. But the numbers, as they are, still help to make the point.

If the chances really are 50-50,⁶ and if we agree to model the outcomes on our somewhat arbitrary but surely illustrative monetary values, then by betting on Christianity you can expect to come out, on average, with the equivalent of £499,962.50 more than you would have done by passing. We're in exactly the situation of the person faced by the eccentric coin-flipper. We'd be crazy not to 'wager without hesitation' (Pascal, 1995, p. 154).

2. Problems with Pascal

But what if the coin is weighted? What if the eccentric millionaire tells you that it hardly ever lands heads up? "In fact," she says, "it only lands heads up, on average, one in a million times." This dramatically alters the mathematics of the situation. The average winnings you could expect from playing, rather than passing, would be just £25.99.⁷ And the average winnings that you could expect from *passing* would be £99.99.⁸ And thus, with this *weighted* coin, the person who chooses to pass walks off, on average, £74 better off than the person who

⁶ To be clear, Rota goes on to offer arguments that the epistemic probability of Christianity *is*, at least, 0.5; i.e., 50-50.

⁷ $\left(\frac{1}{1,000,000} \times £1,000,000\right) + \left(\frac{999,999}{1,000,000} \times £25\right) = £25.99$

⁸ $\left(\frac{1}{1,000,000} \times £0\right) + \left(\frac{999,999}{1,000,000} \times £100\right) = £99.99$

chooses to play. You *might* want to try your luck, but – if you’re being guided by rational decision theory – the smart thing to do in this situation, all things being equal, is to pass.

If the chances are 50-50 that Christianity is true, then you’d be crazy not to play. But the chances *aren’t* 50-50. Isn’t that a problem for Pascal?

Not necessarily. Imagine that the coin is weighted, but not *extremely* heavily. Imagine that the coin falls tails-up 75% of the time, and heads-up 25% of the time. In that case, you’d still be wise to play the game. The average winnings of those who play will be £250,018.75,⁹ and the average winnings of those who pass will be just £75.¹⁰

Even if the chances are only one in a *hundred*, it’s still a pretty good bet, despite the fact that the projected winnings would be radically diminished. At odds of one in a hundred, you’d still stand to win, on average, £10,024.75.¹¹ The average winnings of those who pass will be just £99.¹² You’d *still* be wise to play.

But then again, you might think that the likelihood of Christianity being true is very slim indeed. You might think that the chances of it being true are *less* than one in a hundred; you might think them to be less than one in a million. If the coin is weighted *extremely* heavily to fall tails up, and – likewise – if the evidence renders Christianity *extremely* unlikely, then the smart wager might be to *pass*.

Richard Swinburne (2004) thinks that we have good reason to believe that God exists. Moreover, he argues that, if God exists, it would make sense for him to become incarnate,

⁹ $(\frac{1}{4} \times \text{£}1,000,000) + (\frac{3}{4} \times \text{£}25) = \text{£}250,018.75$

¹⁰ $(\frac{1}{4} \times \text{£}0) + (\frac{3}{4} \times \text{£}100) = \text{£}75$

¹¹ $(\frac{1}{100} \times \text{£}1,000,000) + (\frac{99}{100} \times \text{£}25) = \text{£}10,024.75$

¹² $(\frac{1}{100} \times \text{£}0) + (\frac{99}{100} \times \text{£}100) = \text{£}99$

to suffer for our sins, and to pull off a miracle like a resurrection, so as to prove that the person in question really was God incarnate (Swinburne, 2003).

If your background commitments lead you to *expect*, or at least render the claim unsurprising, that at some point in time, God *will* become incarnate and suffer for your sins, and then undergo a bodily resurrection, and if you think that first-Century Judea would be a specifically good time and place for this to happen (as Swinburne does (ibid. p. 66)), then you won't require as much evidence as would a neutral by-stander, to feel convinced by the testimonial evidence that we *do* have, for Jesus's resurrection. With that sort of evidence in favour of Christianity, perhaps the odds really do favour the wager. So Rota would argue.

But I would argue that it's far from obvious, even if you *do* adopt a theistic world view, that we should *expect* God to become incarnate and suffer for our sins. There are plenty of *other* ways for an all-powerful being to arrange for our salvation. In fact, God's becoming incarnate in order to die for us might be very surprising indeed.¹³

Accordingly, once we regard God's becoming incarnate and dying as a surprising choice of action for God to take, the evidence that Jesus was resurrected, which is all by way of written testimony, is more plausibly explained by the theory that there was some sort of *hoax* resurrection,¹⁴ or a *well-intentioned* hoax,¹⁵ or that the "testimony" arose through a process of wishful thinking, or collective delusion, or through some other natural process, witting or unwitting, innocent or malign. Just think of all of the followers of Rabbi Menachem

¹³ For an example of a model of salvation and atonement that *doesn't* require God to become incarnate, see Lebens & Goldschmidt (2017).

¹⁴ The book of Matthew (chapter 28) goes to great lengths to address the seemingly wide-spread belief that it was a hoax.

¹⁵ See Bahrtdt (1784-92).

Mendel Schneerson, present at his funeral in 1994, but who still didn't believe that he had died!¹⁶

Once we've raised the possibility that God exists, but that Christianity is nevertheless false, we arrive at the main problem with the wager. It assumes that there are only two options: atheism and Christianity. But that's not true.

What if Islam is true, and what if it's true under the interpretation that says that non-Muslims are damned to eternal hellfire? What if some form of Hinduism is true, and if I don't engage in certain Hindu rituals I risk reincarnation into some horrible state of affairs? These other options wouldn't be so problematic for the wager if there really was evidence to suggest that Christianity was more likely to be true than any other religion. But I'm not aware of such evidence.

With these different options on the table, each promising a very different, but very extreme set of rewards and punishments, it's far from clear how I should bet. This is known as the many gods problem.¹⁷

We should raise another concern too. For Pascal, what will bring you eternal bliss is *belief* in Christianity – salvific faith. But belief doesn't fall under our voluntary control. We can't just believe something because we recognise that it pays to believe. Pascal is aware of this. For him, what it means to wager for God is to engage on a course of actions that will, with any luck, raise your credence that God exists until you *do* find that you believe in Him. But, you might think, isn't it equally reasonable for the non-believer, when faced with Pascal's wager, to engage in a course of action that will increase their credence in *atheism* to such a

¹⁶ See Dein (2001).

¹⁷ This objection was first raised by Denis Diderot (2018) in section LIX of 'Addition to the Philosophical Thoughts'. It was later developed by Cargile (1966), Dalton (1975), Martin (1975), Flew (1976), Oppy (1900), Carter (2000), Saka (2001), and Mackie (1982, pp. 200-203).

degree that the wager will no longer bite? If we recognise that the wager no longer bites once the probability of theism drops below one in a million, then why wager for God – and seek to increase our credence in theism – when we could just as easily wager against God and seek to decrease our credence to the point at which the wager no longer bites? Call this the *Why-Go-High* problem.¹⁸

Pascal's worries don't end there. Other objections could be noted. But the many gods objection and the *Why-Go-High* problem are perhaps the most troubling. Other problems have to do with the difficulties associated with living a religious life based upon a wager, as you wait for your credences to rise: could it ever be authentic, for example?¹⁹ But the many gods objection, and the *Why-Go-High* problem attack the wager itself. If we could *overcome* these worries, we'd be faced with a compelling wager, irrespective of the practical concerns it might generate.

3. Limiting your options

One way to respond to the many gods objection is to recognise that not every religion is a "live option" for every person. William James (1956, pp. 2-3) would allow you to dismiss from consideration any religion that isn't, for you, a live option. In a similar vein, Jeff Jordan recommends that we dismiss those options that strike us as "bizarre," or "maximally implausible" (Jordan, 2006, p. 81). If every other religion, but Christianity, strikes you as bizarre, or implausible, or otherwise fails to be a live option for you, then these thinkers will

¹⁸ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.

¹⁹ Michael Rota (2016, p. 53) raises the concern that there may be something avaricious about taking the wager, using God for personal gain rather than searching for a sincere relationship. Others have worried that a religion lived on the basis of a wager would be inauthentic (Gale, 1991, p. 352). J. L. Mackie (1982, p. 202) worries that it does violence to our epistemic faculties to try to convince ourselves that something is true only because of what the belief might *do* for us.

allow you to dismiss them. The many gods objection evaporates. But these responses seem to be recommending that we fix the books; that we cheat. Just because you find something implausible, it doesn't mean it's not true.

Paul Saka (2018, p. 198) writes:

If you were building a nuclear power plant, you would conduct a risk assessment that would admittedly not consider every conceivable contingency; there is an unending number of them and, besides, most will seem to have negligible likelihoods or incalculable probabilities. Yet considering only those few contingencies that viscerally move you, or that are “intuitive” or “simple,” would be inexcusable. In real life you would invest time and money to hire consultants to examine at least those dangers which the opponents of nuclear power publicly worry about.

And yet, he notes that James, Jordan, and others would have us “disregard relevant religious views simply because they come from exotic cultures” (Ibid.). He continues (Ibid.):

If wagerers truly think that every soul faces possible infinite reward/punishment then they will hold that the question of theism is more significant than the question of whether to build some power plant. Since the latter calls for openminded research, the former should too. Instead of thinking off the top of one's head, or nakedly emoting, one should at least look in readily available reference books on world religions.

Restricting one's religious options to save Pascal's wager, simply by ruling out those options that seem exotic or odd to you, cannot be commended as the rational thing to do. On that front, Saka is right. And yet, in the remainder of this paper, I argue that in a large number of

cases there exist good reasons for a person to round one's options down to a choice between just one religion, and atheism. In those situations, I argue, Pascal's wager is in good order.

4. Unthinkability

My wife and I are currently thinking of buying a refrigerator. We'll do some research and come to an informed decision from among a dazzling array of brands and models. Once we've made the decision and taken the plunge for Fridge X, we'll likely come to think – after the fact – that Fridge X is even better than we currently think it to be.

Perhaps we'll do this to justify our choice to ourselves, to make ourselves feel good, or to dampen the pain of the Fridge-shaped dent in our bank account. Maybe the bias will emerge because Fridge X really is very good. We'll get to see this daily, without ever getting to see just how good its competition would have been. Either way: it's well documented that people develop biases in favour of past choices.²⁰

What if this bias was unavoidable? Would that mean that we should never buy a fridge?

Similar evidence suggests that we tend to develop biases in favour of our friends and loved ones; especially our spouses.²¹ This might be a *side-effect* of personal attachment. But some have argued that it's part of what it means *to be* a friend.²² Either way, the fact remains. For most of us, the path to friendship and love is a path towards becoming less sensitive to certain sorts of evidence.

²⁰ See Svenson & Benthorn (1992).

²¹ See Brown (1986) and Murray & Holmes (1993; 1997).

²² See Keller (2004) and Stroud (2006).

Alternatively, perhaps making friends actually helps to *correct* our epistemic practices. Perhaps we judge strangers too harshly, and by transforming strangers into friends, we're not *skewing* our reasoning so much as helping to correct it.

Even so, to the extent that we can distinguish between our friends and strangers, and to the extent that this distinction is causing differential treatment in our epistemic practices, the distinction *is* causing a defect in our reasoning – an unwarranted differential treatment. We can't befriend everybody in the world, merely to correct this defect. So, what's the rational thing to do? Should we become hermits and conscientiously eschew the formation of any bonds of fraternity?

One response is to say that what it takes for a belief to be justified by the evidence depends upon what's at stake. A certain amount of suspicious behaviour may lead *you* to believe that my wife is plotting to murder me. But for *me* to entertain that belief would be to harbour a very serious suspicion against my own wife. I have a much higher stake in its being false than you do. Perhaps epistemic rationality demands that *I* wait for more evidence than you do, since the stakes – for you – are lower.²³ This response is called “pragmatic encroachment” since it claims that practical stakes can encroach upon epistemic notions, such as justification.

Another response simply distinguishes between two *forms* of rationality. What we might call '*practical* rationality' is about acting in ways that, given what you believe, are most likely to advance your personal goals and desires. By contrast, '*epistemic* rationality' is about forming beliefs in ways that objectively respect the evidence. These two forms of rationality can come apart.

²³ See Fantl & McGrath (2002) for an account of epistemic justification that factors in pragmatic considerations. See Stanley & Hawthorne (2008) for a similar account about what counts as knowledge.

Imagine that an evil villain plugs you into a mind-reading device. He tells you to form the belief that $2+2=5$. If you can't bring yourself to believe it, he will bring on a nuclear apocalypse; killing millions of people.

In that situation, it would be *practically* rational to work on believing that $2+2=5$, perhaps by seeking the help of a hypnotist or taking a course of drugs that would warp your mind sufficiently to help you add the numbers up incorrectly. On this account, pragmatic considerations never encroach upon epistemological considerations. It can never be epistemically rational to believe something against the evidence, however high the stakes might be. But it can sometimes be *practically* rational to *try*.

You want to live a life that has room for meaningful human relationships. You *don't* want to be a hermit. These desires make it practically rational to seek out such relationships, even if doing so may render some of your beliefs less sensitive to certain sorts of evidence.

If you present me with compelling evidence that my wife is plotting to kill me, but not enough to justify certainty, then it might be practically rational for me to *refuse* to believe it. Perhaps I can't literally *refuse*, because I can't directly control what I believe. But because of my love for my wife, an attachment that was practically rational for me to foster, I'm going to find it *difficult* to believe such a hideous claim about her. You'll need to give me *more* evidence; perhaps more than epistemic rationality demands, but only because of the consequences of my attachment to her; an attachment that was sanctioned by *practical* rationality.

Moreover, even if your evidence *convinces* me, I might still try to *bracket* the belief and wait for *more* evidence; *pretending* I don't believe, even if I do. I might do so in the hope that my loyalty to her will be vindicated. The value of her being a loving wife is extremely high

to me. The cost of my being found out to have seriously suspected her of murderous intent, if she's actually innocent, is also extremely high.

Let's call a thought 'unthinkable' if you cannot bring yourself to factor it into your practical reasoning.²⁴ You might be waiting for a heart transplant for your loved one. You *know* that one way to save the day would be to find a healthy match, and drug them, in just the right way to cause a brain-stem death whilst giving the doctors time to salvage the heart. You know that that this strategy would work, but it's *unthinkable* for you, and rightly so. You do not factor it into your practical deliberations.²⁵

To be ethical is going to make some things unthinkable to you. To love somebody, or to be a committed member of a community will likewise make some things unthinkable to you. This isn't irrational, so long as it's practically rational for you to be moral, a friend, and/or a member of the community in question.²⁶ Friendship, community, and even one's ethical ideology, can render a person – so to speak – epistemically rooted.

Two things are important to note about epistemic rootedness. First: it doesn't entail close-mindedness. Second: it can be the consequence of otherwise praiseworthy choices. In such situations it would be difficult to criticise a person for their rootedness. Let's take these points in turn.

²⁴ There may be some propositions that you're willing to consider, in your practical reasoning, but not *particularly* seriously. We could therefore talk about *degrees* of unthinkability.

²⁵ For important discussions about unthinkability and moral incapacity, see: Frankfurt (1988; 1998) and Williams (1973, pp. 92-93; 1995).

²⁶ For similar considerations, see Allan Hazlett's (2016) discussion of *intellectual loyalty*. One might resist describing our phenomenon as a species of *loyalty*. As Frankfurt (1998, p. 80) points out, when Martin Luther said, "I can do no other", he was explaining what was unthinkable for him, and this had more to do with his *will* than with loyalty.

5. Rootedness and Closed-Mindedness

A person who feels a strong sense of belonging and loyalty to the Jewish community will likely find it unthinkable that Jesus was the Messiah.²⁷ This is nothing personal against Jesus or Christians. It's just that the Jewish community has for two millennia been defined, in part, by its rejection of Jesus. In almost every Jewish circle there is much more of a stigma attached to becoming a Christian than to becoming an atheist. The history of Christian anti-Semitism clearly plays some role in informing this stigma.²⁸

A Jew who embraces Jesus does so at the cost of their communal bond to the mainstream Jewish community. To the extent that a person is committed to their Jewish identity, the thought that Jesus is the Messiah will be unthinkable. Does this constitute close-mindedness?

The entire point of philosophy is to transcend our epistemic rootedness and to consider every argument on its own objective merits. As the objection was put to me by Daniel Statman (in correspondence):

[C]limbing out of the epistemic cave in which we find ourselves is always very hard.

Nonetheless... most philosophers assume that it is possible; that we can step back from our dearest beliefs qua atheists or Muslims or what have you, and appreciate the force of arguments... So, although in some sense it is "unthinkable" for those down in the cave that what they see and hear is not the real world, with a lot of effort and with appropriate guidance they can come to see the truth.

²⁷ Perhaps they belong to a community of so-called 'Messianic Jews', but already, to belong to such a community is to be significantly alienated from the mainstream Jewish world. Many Jews wouldn't recognise them, and certainly their religion, as Jewish at all.

²⁸ In correspondence, Michael Rota rightly notes an irony. According to Judaism, Christianity is closer to the truth than atheism, and so to it's odd to stigmatise Christianity more than atheism. On the other hand, perhaps there's a practical wisdom here: a Jew who becomes an atheist may be easier to bring back to Judaism than a Jew who has become rooted in a Christian community and life-style.

Surely the point of philosophy is to free the masses from the cave. We shouldn't allow epistemic rootedness to function as a free pass to *remain* in the cave.²⁹

I respond: we must distinguish between the philosophy seminar room and the outside world. In the philosophy seminar room, all intellectual options should be on the table. And, in the philosophy seminar room we're all capable of entertaining a wide range of intellectual options, even those that seem horrific to us outside of it.

Solipsism is a good example. In the philosophy seminar room, it should be seriously entertained. In fact, it's not at all easy to construct compelling philosophical arguments against solipsism. But outside of the philosophy seminar room, as I reason practically about how to act, I do not so much as *consider* the possibility that I'm the only real person affected by my actions. Does this mean that I learnt nothing in the philosophy seminar room? Does it make me close-minded?

No. The philosophy seminar room helped me to improve my critical faculties. Moreover, if – in the philosophy seminar room – I come across *overwhelming* reason to adopt a theory that I wouldn't hitherto have considered *outside* of the seminar room, then reason dictates that I take that theory back with me into the world at large. In these ways, philosophy *can* change us, despite our rootedness. We are open to argument. We are open to being moved.

The Jew in the philosophy seminar room should be willing to entertain all evidence and arguments for other religions. She should listen with a patient and open-minded ear. But

²⁹ A similar point is raised by Helen de Cruz (ms). Philosophy should be looking to *broaden* its intellectual horizons, rather than narrowing them down to the confines of our own particular culture.

if the evidence isn't overwhelming, then she is licenced to leave those arguments at the door, and to ignore them in her practical reasoning, just as we all do with solipsism.³⁰

So long as we're all encouraged to spend some time (so to speak) in the philosophy seminar room, and so long as when we're in there we're willing to listen to other opinions and to gather contrary evidence, and so long as there's a threshold beyond which the evidence *would* make inroads and *compel* us to bring the arguments home with us, from the philosophy seminar room into our outside lives, then we can't say that fidelity to one's epistemic roots is straightforwardly (or irredeemably, or culpably) closed-minded.

6. Rootedness, Culpability, and Flourishing

If you gather a sense of belonging and fraternity from your membership of the Ku Klux Klan, then you're wide open to criticism. The organising principles of your community are

³⁰ My talk of the philosophy seminar room is supposed to resemble John Rawls and *his* talk of an "original position." We're supposed to reason, in the original position, without knowing basic facts about our own gender, religion, race, sexuality, *etc.* Michael Sandel responds: we *cannot* reason behind a veil of ignorance because, in such conditions, we wouldn't be *ourselves*. We don't exist in abstraction from the things that we care most about (Sandel, 1982, pp. 150-65). This is the communitarian critique of liberalism.

When I say that non-Jewish religions are *unthinkable* to the Jew, I'm *not* embracing the communitarian critique of liberalism. I'm not saying anything that Rawls couldn't also endorse.

Rawls (1993, p. 222) was well aware that cultural ties tend to provide us with the "the language we use in speech and thought to express and understand our aims, goals, and values; the society and culture whose history, customs, and conventions we depend on to find our place in the social world." Consequently, he recognised that these ties were "normally too strong to be given up" and that "this fact is not to be deplored" (*ibid.*, p. 277). Rawls *recognises* that we have a lot to lose upon being dislocated from our epistemic roots, and that – other things being equal – we *shouldn't* criticise a person for the mere fact of their rootedness.

The original position is just like the philosophy seminar room. It's a place that we can go to, intellectually speaking, to investigate all possibilities. Whatever the state of our rootedness, we can all go there. Doing so can have many benefits. But it's not generally a space in which we can live out our life goals. And that fact isn't to be deplored.

The view I'm embracing is close (although not identical) to Will Kymlicka's view. He believes that a certain sort of epistemic rootedness provides a very important backdrop for the possibility of individual freedom. It plays an indispensable role in making sense of a person's options – providing her with a language and a conception of the good. Epistemic rootedness, we might say, "provides a meaningful context of choice for people, without limiting their ability to question and revise particular values and beliefs" (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 93).

inherently immoral. Even if membership gives you lots of things that you personally value, and thus even if your membership is practically rational for you – given your preferences – we’re still right to criticise you for it. Your epistemic rootedness would be a consequence of something despicable about you.

But rootedness is harder to criticise if it’s a consequence of a sense of belonging that adds value to your life and to the world. Some belonging is praiseworthy. This has to be assessed on a case by case basis.

When evaluating a person’s sense of belonging, we should also distinguish a person *joining* a community from a person *staying* in one. Leaving a community that you were born into can be like abandoning the family of your birth. It might constitute a dereliction of certain inherited duties. Some communities might be immoral enough to justify criticism whenever an *outsider* chooses to join, but moral enough to justify a certain degree of *criticism* when a person born into it chooses to *leave*. Other times, the obligation to leave might outweigh any reasons to say.

We should also distinguish between members of communities who hope to reform their communities from within, and those who are complacent about the moral failings of their communities.

A number of Jews feel that they have a special obligation to their ancestors not to assimilate completely, given the huge sacrifices that those ancestors made to keep the Jewish identity alive.³¹ Moreover, holding a particular identity with pride can sometimes play a role

³¹ See for example Fackenheim (1994). Ariel Meirav raises an interesting response to this line of thought (in correspondence): “Arguably, what [Jewish forbears] sacrificed for was the truth regarding God and his will, and if one comes to a different view as to what is true about God and his will, one’s deeper obligation to one’s ancestors is to leave the community. One who does not do so under such conditions will be justly criticised.” I think that, in a sense, Meirav is right. But, given that the sacrifices in question were made on the assumption that the Jewish identity *was* important in the eyes of God, one would need an unusually large amount of evidence before *abandoning* that identity. With overwhelming evidence for the truth of another religion, a

in forming a person's confidence, self-image, and conceptual and emotional landscape, allowing them to flourish and grow as moral agents, which might benefit people way beyond the confines of any particular community.

If a Jew can hold her identity without neglecting her moral commitments to people beyond her community, and if it helps her to flourish as a person, and to respect the sacrifice of her ancestors, then it's going to be difficult to criticise her for her commitment to her cultural identity.

Paul Saka (2018, pp. 196-197) argues that, when *explaining* a person's choices, it often makes sense to occupy their perspective. Doing so, we can see why something seemed rational to them. But, when *assessing* or *evaluating* their choices, he would urge us to adopt a broader perspective.

The stigma attached to Christianity might *explain* why a Jew doesn't even consider the truth of Christianity. But if we want to *evaluate*, rather than to *explain*, the decisions of this Jew, we should – according to Saka – adopt a broader (less rooted) perspective. Perhaps a perspective that transcends this subjective stigma. But, once we recognise that Jewish rootedness, much like rootedness in other communities, can sometimes be objectively valuable, it becomes harder to evaluate a person negatively for the consequences of their rootedness.

So far, we've established that epistemic rootedness needn't entail closed-mindedness and that it is often the case that a person cannot fairly be held culpable for their rootedness. Sometimes it's a consequence of something praiseworthy. We can now return to Pascal.

person may well be *honouring* their Jewish ancestors by converting to it. But *short* of overwhelming evidence, we might have a duty to regard the truth of other religions as unthinkable.

7. Baruch Pascalberg

Pascal was trying to convince readers, from all walks of life, to commit to Christianity. The argument was ingenious, but unsuccessful.

Let me introduce you to Baruch Pascalberg. He recognises that there are no knock-down arguments to convince the impartial observer to commit to a Jewish way of life. He's less ambitious than Pascal. Judaism isn't a proselytising religion. Gentiles can achieve union with God in a blissful afterlife *without* converting to Judaism.³² Accordingly, Baruch Pascalberg doesn't feel any pressure to proselytise among the Gentiles.

Instead, Pascalberg looks out at the Jewish community. He notices that there exist a number of Jews today, deeply committed to their Jewish identity, without any sense of obligation to follow the laws of the Torah (however they may be interpreted). And yet, they are fully integrated into the Jewish community and reap many of the benefits that come to a person through belonging to a religious community, without the need to adopt stringent religious observance in their lives.

Pascalberg notices another fact: the identity in question can survive public non-observance, but it couldn't survive conversion to another religion. To convert to another religion would require the person to sacrifice their communal integration, and to fracture their sense of Jewish identity.

For many Jews, integrated into the mainstream Jewish community today, atheism and lax observance of Jewish law are *thinkable*, but conversion to another religion is *unthinkable*. And, to the extent that their communal commitment is a source of tremendous strength and motivation, to the extent that their Jewish identity enables them to be healthy citizens of the

³² See, Tractate Sanhedrin 105a.

world, and to the extent that they're not ignoring overwhelming evidence in favour of other religions, then the *unthinkability* for them of other religions isn't *irrational* and it isn't open to criticism.

Pascal's wager failed, but *Pascalberg's* wager is different. The theological decision that faces every human being, in the abstract, isn't to commit or not to commit to *Christianity*. The decision is to commit to any one of a dazzling array of religions, or to none.

Unlike Pascal, Pascalberg addresses himself not to humanity *writ large*, but to a specific category of people already immersed in the Jewish community, and already cherishing their Jewish identity. For many of *those* people, there really are two *thinkable* options; and two only: To commit to being religious Jews, or not to commit to being religious Jews.³³

This isn't because they've written off the exotic, or because of intellectual laziness. This is merely a consequence of their blameless rootedness.

Admittedly, there are a number of ways to *be* a religious Jew. The Jewish community is host to a number of different religious movements. The Reform movement will say that you can commit to being a religious Jew under *their* auspices. The Conservative movement will say the same thing. So too will the various flavours of Orthodoxy.

Perhaps, for some people, given their familial connections to certain synagogues, only *one* Jewish denomination will be thinkable without overwhelming evidence for the truth of

³³ There will be atheist or agnostic Jews with a strong Jewish identity, for whom religious Jewish observance would be as unthinkable as conversion to a non-Jewish religion. For example, some Jews are as rooted in their Jewish identity as they are in their secular Israeli identity, say. Such Jews are not part of Pascalberg's potential audience; an audience that I call the Jewish undecided. *Staunchly* secular Jews have, perhaps, already *decided*. They would need overwhelming evidence for the truth of religious Jewish claims before they would feel compelled to embrace religious Jewish observance. Pascalberg recognises this fact. He wouldn't address *those* Jews with this argument. He would be addressing Jewish atheists and agnostics who feel less rooted to their denial of theism. Thanks to Iddo Landau for raising this point.

another. But for many Jews, and I daresay that for *most* Jews, whether or not this is fair to the movements in question, these denominations simply represent a spectrum of religiosity – Orthodoxy being the most religious, and movements to the left each being progressively less religious than the next.

The options, for Pascalberg’s audience, divide into two: (1) commitment to being a religious Jew (either in the denomination closest to their epistemic roots, or within the confines of Jewish *Orthodoxy*), or (2) no commitment to being a religious Jew.

We’re now in a position to consider a final coin-toss. Let heads represent the truth of the following proposition: *God exists and he wants Jews to follow Jewish law (under some denominational interpretation or other)*.

The notion that God wants Jews to be Christians, or Muslims, or Hindus, or anything other than Jewish, is unthinkable to Pascalberg’s audience. Accordingly, tails would represent something like: *God probably doesn’t exist, or he does, but he doesn’t care whether or not you’re fastidious in observing Jewish law, so long as you’re a nice person, but – of course – it can still be rewarding to embrace certain Jewish rituals as and when you want to (or some other, similar proposition)!*

Before we go through the costs and benefits of our wager, we should rule some costs out of consideration. I’m not going to consider the cost of exposure to anti-Semitism. Pascalberg’s audience are *already* committed to their Jewish identity come what may.

I’m not going to assess the costs and benefits of performing a circumcision upon baby boys. The majority of Jews with a strong Jewish identity already embrace that practice. I’m not going to factor in the risk of martyrdom. Pascalberg’s contemporary audience don’t tend to face such a risk. I’m not going to assess the costs and benefits of strenuously searching for

a spouse only from the Jewish people. Many (if not most) of Pascalberg's audience are already on board with that.

The costs and benefits that are relevant to Pascalberg's wager are only the costs and benefits that are at stake in the decision at hand – a decision facing people who are already proud to be Jews. Should they be *more* religious?

Judaism teaches that *Jews* cannot maximise their afterlife bliss if they failed to observe Jewish law. Accordingly, if the coin comes up heads, the Jew who wagers will have maximised their eternal reward. They will have expressed appropriate gratitude and reverence to God without trespassing his commandments. Immersed in religious ritual, and observance, they'd be more likely aware of God's love in their life. They'd also be more likely to spread religiosity to other Jews, and ethical monotheism to non-Jewish friends.

The audience that Pascalberg's addressing already receive many of the earthly goods associated with religious life, even without religious commitment or strict observance. But there may be some *added* worldly benefits that come only with *strict* observance.

For example, several large population studies reveal that observant Orthodox men exhibit decreased cardiovascular mortality compared to non-observant counterparts. One hypothesis, with some experimental support, is that daily use of phylacteries improves cardiovascular function, and carries with it an anti-inflammatory effect (Owens, et al., 2018). But even if we ignore the this-worldly benefits, we can surely say that blissful eternal reward, and a fulsome relationship with a perfect being is still a pretty big prize. The cost of increased observance will pale in comparison to the prize. Let's represent it then, somewhat arbitrarily (and avoiding the complications of infinite value), with a million pounds.

If the Jew took the wager, but the coin came up *tails*, then what did she *lose*? Chances are, she still had a nice life, committed to noble ideals. But she'd also have dedicated herself

to a large number of very invasive and time-consuming rituals. She may have sacrificed important career opportunities, foreclosed to her by Jewish law. Think of an Orthodox Jewish woman blessed with a beautiful singing voice, who shuns a rewarding career as a musician in deference to various Jewish modesty laws, or an observant Jew who chooses not to pursue a career in theatre or football because it wouldn't accommodate their Sabbath observance.

More trivial costs accrue too. Think of all the television missed due to Sabbath observance. These costs, both the big and the small, are *real*. But one must factor in the associated benefits that come to a person who cherishes a healthy sense of modesty (if they get the balance right), which fosters a healthy body image in a world where we're bombarded with negative body messages.³⁴ Think of the benefits that come along with Sabbath observance. Think of the peace of mind that a day without screens and social media can bring (since these technologies are forbidden on the Sabbath). Time would have been wasted praying, but we'd also have to factor in the psychological and social benefits of those communal and private prayers.

Moving to more serious sorts of abstinence, the observant Jew refrains from marital relations more than they would have otherwise done, in order to abide by the Jewish laws of family purity. These laws regulate when relations are permitted and when they're not. On the other hand, a marriage can benefit from the ritual and the rhythm of these observances.

What happens to the wager if you are in the LGBTQ+ community? To commit to *Orthodox* Jewish observance would then take on new and severe costs. You might be committing yourself to a life of celibacy, or – perhaps more realistically – to a life of struggling with the *attempt* at celibacy, and inner turmoil, and alienation. There *are* serious attempts in

³⁴ See Dunkel, et al. (2010).

the Orthodox Jewish community to combat the stigma and challenges faced by LGBTQ+ Jews.³⁵ But there's no doubt that the LGBTQ+-Jewish identity becomes much harder to live with after the decision to commit to fastidious observance of religious laws as understood by Orthodox Judaism.

Becoming more religiously observant can also strain certain friendships and relationships. Less observant family might feel inconvenienced and even judged by your new way of life. But these costs can often be avoided with a simple dose of human understanding, kindness, and consideration, on all sides.

Using one million pounds to signify the prize that you win for betting on Jewish observance if the coin comes up heads is probably conceding too much, since eternal bliss is surely worth considerably more (perhaps infinitely more). But conceding too much will only strengthen the argument if it manages to succeed in the face of these concessions (and we're anyway wise to avoid mixing infinite values with decision theory). So, in the same spirit of generosity to the wager's opponents, let's imagine that the cost of committing to Jewish observance, if the coin comes up tails, is *significant*. You don't merely get zero pounds. You get *fined* one hundred pounds. That's a horrible outcome for a coin-toss that was forced upon you, although it would pale in comparison to eternal bliss.

If we use minus one hundred pounds to signify the cost of betting on Jewish observance if the coin comes up tails, and a million pounds to signify the winnings if it comes up heads, and if there's really a 50-50 chance, then the average value we should associate with playing will be £499,950.³⁶ Even with these somewhat arbitrarily picked numbers, which perhaps concede too much, this represents a very good bet.

³⁵ See Mirvis (2018), from the Office of the Chief Rabbi, in the UK.

³⁶ $(\frac{1}{2} \times \text{£}1,000,000) + (\frac{1}{2} \times -\text{£}100) = \text{£}499,950$

And what if you pass? Well, if the coin comes up heads, then you'll be kicking yourself. You'll receive considerably less blissful eternal reward, you may even have to be punished in the afterlife before you can receive *any* reward, you'll have lost an opportunity to express gratitude and reverence to God, you'll have trespassed his commandments, and you'll have lost opportunities to bring salvation to others.

It would be generous to say that this is like getting zero pounds when, in fact, it would probably be more like receiving another and perhaps even bigger fine. But, again we're being generous, hoping that, if anything, we'll have conceded too much to the opponents of the wager. In that spirit, let's symbolise the outcome of not playing, when the coin comes up heads, simply as winning nothing.

What if you pass, and – luckily for you – God *doesn't* exist, or doesn't care about your religious observance? It's difficult to say. Perhaps Jewish observances, unlike Christian ones, are so arduous and demanding that you get a *much* bigger benefit from having been freed from them. On the other hand, perhaps their arduousness and demandingness gives their adherents a greater sense of satisfaction. But let's be generous again and say that you win £200 – twice what was made by the non-Christian in Rota's reconstruction of *Pascal's* argument, when the coin came up tails.

Using zero pounds to signify the prize you win for *not* betting on Jewish observance if the coin comes up heads, and using two hundred pounds to signify the prize that you win for not betting on Jewish observance if the coin comes up *tails*, and if there's really a 50-50 chance, then the value we should associate with passing on Jewish observance will be £100.³⁷

³⁷ $(\frac{1}{2} \times £0) + (\frac{1}{2} \times £200) = £100$

Possibly conceding too much to Pascalberg's opponents, the results are as follows: If the chances really are 50-50, then by betting on rigorous commitment to Jewish observance, you can expect to come out 499,850 pounds richer than you would have done by not betting. If you're a member of Pascalberg's audience, then his is a wager worth taking.

Even if you think it 75% likely that God *doesn't* exist, or that he *doesn't* care about Jewish law, you should *still* take the bet. Even at *those* odds, the average winnings of those who play will be £249,925.³⁸ The average winnings of those who pass would still be much smaller, at £150.³⁹

Even if Pascalberg can only convince his audience that there's a 1% chance that God exists and wants them to observe Jewish law, he'd still have a wager well worth considering. The average winnings from playing would be £9,901.⁴⁰ Those winnings would still be £9,703 more than the average winnings of those who pass, calculated at £198.⁴¹

Pascalberg's wager is on stronger grounds than *Pascal's* because it doesn't face the many gods objection. It only seeks to address an audience of people who, given their particular situation in life, are *rationaly licensed* to find religions other than Judaism unthinkable. In so doing, they are beyond reasonable repute. Pascal can avoid the many gods problem if he can convince you that the odds in favour of Christianity are at least 50%. Pascalberg has no such problem to avoid. 1% odds might therefore be enough.

"Fine," Pascal might say, "I concede that a Jewish person's communal identity contributes to her flourishing. Yes, it makes Christianity unthinkable to her. But this identity

³⁸ $(\frac{1}{4} \times £1,000,000) + (\frac{3}{4} \times -£100) = £249,925$

³⁹ $(\frac{1}{4} \times £0) + (\frac{3}{4} \times £200) = £150$

⁴⁰ $(\frac{1}{100} \times £1,000,000) + (\frac{99}{100} \times -£100) = £9,901$

⁴¹ $(\frac{1}{100} \times £0) + (\frac{99}{100} \times £200) = £198$

is practically *irrational* for her to maintain if her flourishing would be infinitely greater upon conversion to Christianity.”

But the notion that conversion to Christianity would have this effect is unthinkable to Pascalberg’s audience. “Unthinkable” considerations only need to leave the philosophy seminar room when we have overwhelming evidence for them. Without overwhelming evidence, they can remain, with solipsism and scepticism, in the seminar room. In our practical everyday reasoning we can ignore these outlying hypotheses entirely.

Surely Pascal would have to agree. Why doesn’t he factor into *his* wager the possible existence of a wager hating God; a God who dishes out infinitely terrible punishment to people who make religious decisions based upon a wager?⁴² In the philosophy seminar room we can all explore such a possibility. But it’s so remote as to merit being ignored in our everyday reasoning unless, when we’re *in* the philosophy seminar room, we come up with some sort of overwhelmingly convincing argument for its truth. Pascalberg’s audience are in the same position vis-à-vis Jesus being the Messiah as Pascal is in vis-à-vis the wager hating deity.

In fact, Pascalberg’s audience are in a better position. They can argue that the rootedness that’s in play in their wager is a function of a praiseworthy form of fidelity to their community, which respects the martyrs of Jewish history whilst contributing to their personal flourishing. They aren’t rejecting options on a whim. They’re doing so as a consequence of a blameless, and even praiseworthy, rootedness. If a good God exists, and if he knows the epistemic situations into which people were born, he surely can’t be upset with such people for finding the blamelessly (or even praiseworthily) unthinkable *to be* unthinkable without

⁴² Thanks to Iddo Landau, for introducing me to the notion of such a deity (in correspondence).

overwhelming evidence to the contrary. But he *can* be upset with us for not taking the thinkable seriously enough.

Pascalberg's wager also avoids the *Why-Go-High* problem. For Pascal, what gets you into heaven is salvific faith – which, according to the *Why-Go-High* problem, includes belief. But Pascalberg isn't interested in belief. He's only interested in practice.

Does God, on the basic Jewish picture, care about the credences of the Jew when deciding her ultimate fate? Or, does God only care about whether the Jew has observed Jewish law? It has been argued that Judaism is much more interested in practice than in belief, and that – so long as you don't go around *saying* that God doesn't exist, the religion isn't too bothered if, in your heart of hearts, you're an atheist (see Kellner, 2006).⁴³

If God only cares, or primarily cares, about whether the Jew *observes* Jewish law, and is indifferent, or cares much less about, what credence a Jew has in the existence of God, then the question – should the Jew act in such a way as to raise his credences or lower them, in the face of the wager – doesn't arise. Pascalberg isn't asking the wagerer to strive to increase her credence in theism. Pascalberg would argue that the atheist Jew (who's credence in God's existence is, say, 0.1) should simply “play the percentages” without seeking to adjust her credence that God exists. If engaging in Jewish practices happens to increase the wagerer's credence in God, as she plays along, then so much the better!

You might argue that there's something unstable about the values and credences of a person who ends up committing to serve a God that he doesn't believe in. If that's the situation you find yourself in, perhaps you should be looking to alter your values or your credences. If that's your worry, I'll offer a new variation of the wager. A Jewish atheist, given

⁴³ Indeed, the Mishna (Tractate Sanhedrin 10:9), only says you lose your share in the world to come for *saying* that the Torah isn't Divine. The Mishna doesn't explicitly address what you *believe*.

her epistemic roots, will probably be convinced of the truth of this conditional: if God exists, then he wants Jews to observe Jewish law. This all but follows from the fact that Judaism is the only thinkable religion. He might give this conditional a credence that's near certain, say 0.999. Even if the Jewish atheist gives very little credence to the existence of God – say, 0.001 – she might nonetheless think that she has very good reason to follow Jewish law (“just in case”). There doesn't seem to be any instability in the credences and values of a person who says, “look, I don't think that God exists, but I'm pretty certain that if God did exist then he'd want to me to keep these laws, so I'm going to do so, just in case.”⁴⁴

Perhaps even a Christian wager can avoid the *Why-Go-High* problem. If one adopts a non-doxastic account of faith, and if faith, rather than belief, is what brings salvation – then the new wager, just like Pascalberg's wager, isn't asking the wagerer to engage in any course of action that increases or decreases credences. Faith is, according to some accounts, compatible with very low credence.⁴⁵ Credences are not what bring salvation. Faith is.

Pascalberg's insight can be generalised. It can generate an argument for any religion R, relative to an audience, SF, such that SF is what we might call a secular but proud and integrated fringe of the community associated with R, and such that members of SF are blamelessly epistemically rooted to their community in such a way as to render R thinkable, and religions other than R unthinkable.⁴⁶ For members of SF, the only live choices to feed into practical religious deliberations will be commitment to R, or little-to-no commitment to R. So long as R doesn't require belief for salvation, you'll be able to get a version of Pascalberg's

⁴⁴ This paragraph owes its existence to an anonymous reviewer.

⁴⁵ For the sort of account of faith I have in mind, see – for example – Howard-Snyder (2013).

⁴⁶ This is likely to be only a sub-section of the community's secular fringe; some secular members will not be rooted in such a way as to make other religions unthinkable, and some will not be rooted in such a way as to make *any* religion thinkable. Thanks to Iddo Landau and Michael Antony for helping me to clarify this point (in conversation).

wager working for those audiences.⁴⁷ Accordingly: we'll have a Blaise Pascal (with a non-doxastic account of salvific faith) arguing to a secular fringe of the Catholic community, a Baruch Pascalberg, a Blaisedeep Pascal-Singh, an Abu-Blaise Ibn Pascal, and so on, and so forth.⁴⁸

Diderot mocked Pascal's wager since he thought an equally good argument for Islam could be advanced by an Imam.⁴⁹ But I embrace Diderot's criticism. The wager *isn't* powerful if aimed at *everybody*. But wagers of this form *can* give some people good reason to adopt a particular religion, depending on their own social and cultural circumstances. Such an argument can work for Priests, Rabbis, *and* Imams, so long as they're not preaching to too wide an audience; so long as belief isn't what they require; and so long as the rootedness in question is beyond repute.

A wager-argument for religion R doesn't suffer from the many gods problem when addressed only to members of SF. Moreover, wagers for religions that don't require *belief* don't give rise to the *Why-Go-High* problem. Accordingly, wager-arguments for such religions, when addressed to the right audience, should be taken very seriously. Of course, people can avoid the consequences of any such wager by changing their values, or their credences, but so long as they are rooted in the right way to their community, the wager is likely to bite.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ As Saul Smilansky pointed out to me (in correspondence), perhaps Judaism is a particularly good context for arguments like this. Judaism tends to think that the Jewish people, or nation, exists prior to the religion. And, because of that, the Jewish identity – and its religion – is particularly hospitable to people who have no theological commitments. Accordingly, Judaism is an R that doesn't tie salvation to belief, and it has a particularly substantial and well-integrated SF. Nevertheless, the argument does generalise.

⁴⁸ As a Jewish philosopher, I was amused by the thought of a 'Baruch Pascalberg', I hope that Sikh and Muslim readers will be equally amused by my extrapolation of the joke. I certainly meant no offense.

⁴⁹ Section LIX of 'Addition to the Philosophical Thoughts' (Diderot, 2018).

⁵⁰ Thanks to Michael Antony, Scott Davidson, Helen De Cruz, Allan Hazlett, Iddo Landau, Ariel Meirav, Michael Rota, Saul Smilansky, Danny Statman, and Eleonore Stump for comments and conversations that contributed to the development of this paper.

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