

FAITHFULLY TAKING PASCAL'S WAGER

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Abstract: This paper examines the relationship between Pascal's wager, faith, and hope. First, I argue that many who take Pascal's wager have genuine faith that God exists. The person of faith and the wagerer have several things in common, including a commitment to God and positive cognitive and conative attitudes toward God's existence. I also argue that if one's credences in theism are too low to have faith, the wagerer can still *hope* that God exists, another commitment-justifying theological virtue. I consider two upshots of my argument, including how my picture provides responses to common objections to Pascal's wager.

Keywords: Faith, Hope, Pascal's Wager, Commitment, Theistic Belief

1. Introduction

Should you believe in God? Proponents of Pascal's wager argue yes, but for a different reason than the traditional theistic arguments provide. Proponents of the wager argue that you should believe in God because, by believing, you have much to gain and little to lose (see Table 1):

	God exists (Pr = n)	God doesn't exist (Pr = $1-n$)	EV
Believe in God	ω	$f1$	ω
Don't believe in God	$-\omega$	$f2$	$-\omega$

Table 1: Pascal's Wager

If God exists, the value of believing in God is infinitely positive (given the possibility of going to heaven, having a relationship with God, and attaining union with God), and the value of not believing is infinitely negative (given the possibility of going to hell and being separated from God). If God does not exist, the gains and losses associated with either course of action ($f1$ and $f2$) are both finite, and thus negligible in the face of infinite gains/losses. Thus, as long as one thinks that n , the probability that God exists, is non-zero (and non-infinitesimal), one pragmatically ought to believe in God.

The wager has been criticized on a variety of fronts, but I will set aside many classic objections for the purposes of this paper.¹ Here, I'm concerned with a worry that has to do with the *motives* associated with taking the wager. William James (1896/1956: 6) explains the worry as follows: "We feel that a faith in masses and holy water adopted willfully after such a mechanical calculation would lack the inner soul of faith's reality; and if we were the place of the Deity, we should probably take particular pleasure in cutting off believers of this pattern from their infinite reward."

Along these lines, some claim that those that take Pascal's wager are simply motivated by a fear of hell or a selfish desire to get the rewards of heaven.² But these sorts of motives don't seem to underlie a genuine theistic commitment. Furthermore, as James suggests, God wouldn't be pleased with someone who takes Pascal's wager because doing so is associated with these bad motives. Then, it's not even clear that believing in God for Pascalian reasons would realize the positive outcome reflected in Table 1.

To respond to this objection, my goal in this paper is to show how taking Pascal's wager need not reflect poor or selfish motives. What's more, I argue that there's a way of taking Pascal's wager that demonstrates genuine faith. Second, I'll argue that even if the wagerer's confidence in theism is too low to demonstrate faith, taking the wager can demonstrate *hope*. I'll show how, on both pictures, taking the wager expresses worthy motives, and that both faith and hope can underlie a genuine, rational, and virtuous theistic commitment.

The paper is structured as follows. In **Section 2**, I'll clarify what exactly counts as taking Pascal's wager. Then, I'll show how the wagerer has quite a bit in common with recent (plausible) accounts of religious faith, and argue that if one takes Pascal's wager, one

¹ A co-author and I respond to many other objections to Pascal's wager, such as the many gods objection, mixed strategies objection, and Pascal's mugging, in Jackson and Rogers (2019).

² Other proponents of this objection include Flew (1976), Mackie (1982: 203), Oppy (1991: 167), Golding (2018).

has faith that God exists. I then consider a few upshots of this connection. In **Section 3**, I'll address hope, and how, if the wagerer doesn't meet the requirements for having faith, she may nonetheless have hope. In **Section 4**, I conclude.

2. Faithfully Taking Pascal's Wager

2.1 Taking Pascal's Wager

My goal in this paper isn't to argue that it is impossible to take Pascal's wager with poor motives. Of course this is possible. My goal is to carve out a way that one could take the wager virtuously, in a way that demonstrates genuine faith or genuine hope. Further, I'll show how Pascalian reasoning can underlie and rationalize a genuine theistic commitment.

What do I mean by "taking the wager"? Roughly:

Taking Pascal's Wager: making a commitment to God, largely motivated by non-epistemic reasons.

A few clarifications about this. First, 'making a commitment to God' should be read broadly. It includes at least two ways of wagering—the *doxastic wager*, i.e. a belief-oriented wager that involves choosing to believe that God exists or taking steps to induce belief in God. The second is the *acceptance wager*, i.e. an action-oriented wager that involves accepting, or acting as if, God exists, and going to church, praying, reading Scripture, immersing oneself in a religious community, etc.³ Some have worried that the doxastic wager is problematic for various reasons—a common worry is that we don't have the right kind of control over our beliefs.⁴ While I'm not convinced this objection is ultimately devastating for the doxastic wager, we need not take a stand on this here. Furthermore, others have pointed out that taking the acceptance wager could eventually induce belief, so the acceptance wager and the

³ Rota (2016) defends the acceptance wager.

⁴ Those who object to the doxastic wager include Mackie (1982: 201), Duff (1986: 108), Jordan (1998: 173, 2006: 38). I respond to these worries in Jackson (forthcoming).

doxastic wager may be connected. Nonetheless, it is helpful for our purposes to distinguish these two ways of wagering, in terms of belief or action.

Second, ‘non-epistemic reasons’ include both practical and moral reasons. On the traditional version of the wager, the wagerer’s primary concerns are practical. However, Rota (2016) has argued that one might wager for *moral* reasons, whether that be the well-being of others or those close to you, or even considerations about what God would desire or require, if God existed. Thus, the positive consequences associated with wagering can be either practical or moral.⁵ I say that the wagerer will be *largely* motivated by non-epistemic reasons because, a recent lesson from the literature on Pascal’s wager is that probability matters, even in the infinite case. This is for at least two reasons. One, the probability of God’s existence must be non-zero (and non-infinitesimal) to even get the wager off the ground. Two, the most plausible response to the many gods and mixed strategies objections to Pascal’s wager acknowledges that the probabilities of various religions matter—in deciding both whether to wager on God and what religion to wager on.⁶ So epistemic reasons have a role to play, even if not a starring role.

Third, the wagerer I am concerned with is motivated primarily by the goodness of the outcome of God's existence, given they commit to God—the shaded box in Table 2.

	God exists	God doesn’t exist	EV
Believe in God	ω	$f1$	ω
Don’t believe in God	$-\omega$	$f2$	$-\omega$

Table 2: Why Take Pascal’s Wager

The wagerer reasons that if God exists and they commit to God, that would be a very good thing. They realize that, if God existed—a powerful, good being who created the universe—God is someone they would want to pursue and commit to. Thus, even the possibility God

⁵ See Jackson (MS) for an exception to this—a version of the wager that appeals to epistemic consequentialism, so the expected epistemic value of wagering gives one an *epistemic* reason to believe in God.

⁶ See, e.g. Jackson & Rogers (2019) and Chen & Rubio (2020).

exists provides a strong reason to pursue a relationship with God, because knowing such a being would be so incredibly valuable.⁷ Whether this goodness is pragmatic, moral, or both, they maintain that committing to God if God exists would lead to a positive outcome, and this is the primary reason that they wager. Once they commit, then they maintain that God's existence would be a good thing.⁸ After all, they've bet their life on it.

2.2 The Nature of Faith

Now, we turn to a second question, that may at first seem unrelated to Pascal's wager: what is faith? More specifically, we'll focus on the question: what is to have faith that a proposition is true?

To answer this question, consider the difference between two kinds of mental states. *Cognitive* mental states have a mind-to-world direction of fit. They represent the world. They are normally truth-tracking, responsive to evidence, and evaluable from primarily an epistemic point of view. Examples of cognitive mental states include beliefs, credences, or probability-beliefs.

Conative mental states, by contrast, have a world-to-mind direction of fit. They reflect what an agent takes to be desirable or valuable, and are inherently motivating. They needn't involve evidence or epistemic justification for their contents. (I can desire that p, even knowing p is false—e.g. I desire a catastrophe never occurred, but I know it did. Of course, for the belief "p is good" to be justified, one needs evidence that p is good or desirable—but one doesn't need evidence that p is *true*.) Examples of conative mental states include desires, pro-attitudes, or beliefs about the good.

With this distinction in mind, consider the following case of faith. Let's suppose that I have faith that you will win your upcoming basketball game. What can we conclude from

⁷ See Benton (2018) for an argument that one could know God interpersonally without knowing that God exists.

⁸ Relevant here is the axiology of theism literature, see Kraay (2018, 2021) and Loughheed (2020).

this? First, I want you to win—it doesn't make sense to say I have faith you'll win if I want you to lose. This is the *conative* element of faith. Further, I take it to be sufficiently likely that you will win—if I take it to be, say, impossible you'll win, then I probably can't (and definitely shouldn't) have faith you'll win. This is the *cognitive* element of faith. And finally, I will, to some extent, continue to have faith even in light of counterevidence—for example, if one of your starting players gets injured, I will continue to have faith that you'll win. (This doesn't mean I'll have faith in light of *any* amount of counterevidence.)

This example suggests a first pass at a definition of having faith that p (Audi 2011: 79; Howard-Snyder 2013; Buchak 2017):

S has faith that p iff:

- (i) S has a positive conative attitude toward p (e.g. desiring p, having a pro-attitude to p),
- (ii) S has a positive cognitive attitude toward p (e.g. thinking p is likely, having a high credence in p, believing p), and
- (iii) S is resilient to new counterevidence against p.⁹

One might wonder about condition (ii), especially in light of a recent debate in the faith literature: whether faith that p entails belief that p. The definition above lends itself to the idea that one can have faith that p without believing that p, since it's natural to think that cognitive states besides belief can play the role of (ii).¹⁰ This includes (but is not limited to): a high credence/high confidence in p, believing p is likely, thinking p is well-supported by evidence, thinking p is most likely of the alternatives, and thinking p is more likely than not.¹¹ This raises several questions, including how weak these cognitive attitudes can be (e.g., can a 0.4 credence play the relevant role?). We'll return to this question later.¹² I'll also

⁹ Howard-Snyder (2013) adds a fourth condition: you need some kind of positive affective evaluation of p (e.g. positively valenced emotions toward p). These emotions may be commonly associated with faith, but in my view, they are either subsumed under condition (i) or not strictly required (consider the Christian who "isn't feeling it" but decides to, e.g. go to church, tithe, etc., anyway. Doing so seem to demonstrate faith, even if they lack the relevant emotions).

¹⁰ That faith doesn't entail belief is defended by Pojman (1986), Audi (1991, 2008, 2011), and Alston (1996), among others.

¹¹ See Audi (2011), Howard Snyder (2013).

¹² For more on how weak the cognitive component of faith can be, see Jackson (2019).

discuss versions of my view that fit with the idea that faith entails belief, so we can remain ecumenical on the relationship between belief and faith.

The above definition, however, doesn't capture the idea that faith seems to be deeply intertwined with, and underlie, many of our important life commitments. Faith is central to, e.g., upholding a new year's resolution, the commitment that fans have to their sports teams, religious commitment, surviving a serious illness, marriage, or finishing graduate school (see Jackson 2021). I take commitment to be action-oriented: roughly, a resolution to act in certain ways over a period of time.

Now, one might respond that a long-term commitment might not be associated with *all* cases of faith that *p*. I might have faith that a chair will hold me, but have not commitment to that chair. In response, perhaps I do have some kind of thin commitment to the chair; even if not an explicit resolution, I have a disposition to sit in the chair and treat it as reliable. Further, if faith always involves commitment this seems to nicely explain why condition (iii) holds, and faith is resilient to counterevidence. However, we need not take a stand on the precise general relationship between faith and commitment. I'm interested in a particular case of faith: faith that God exists. And it's much clearer that faith that God exists involves some kind of commitment to God, even if faith in general doesn't. There may be some restrictions on what exactly this theistic commitment should look like, but it can be manifested in a variety of ways. (Note that one could be a *theist* without having faith that God exists or a commitment to God. The claim isn't that merely believing that God exists involves a religious commitment. Rather, the claim is that those who have faith that God exists commit to God.) Summing up what we've discussed so far:

S has faith that God exists *if*:

(i*) S has a positive conative attitude toward God's existence (e.g. desiring God's existence; having a pro-attitude toward God's existence)

(ii*) S has a positive cognitive attitude toward God's existence (e.g. thinking God's existence is likely, having a high credence in God's existence, believing that God exists),

(iii*) S is resilient to new counterevidence against God's existence, and

(iv*) S has a commitment to God.

For my argument, I only need that (i*)–(iv*) are jointly *sufficient* for having theistic faith; I don't need that they are necessary (and while they are widely regarded to be necessary, some have challenged this orthodoxy; e.g., see Malcolm and Scott 2021 for an argument that (i*) is not necessary for faith). This is because I will now argue that those who take Pascal's wager have faith that God exists in virtue of satisfying these four conditions. In other words: *at least a subset of the conditions that are sufficient for taking Pascal's wager are sufficient for having faith that God exists*. But this leaves open whether there are other ways to have faith that God exists (and of course, other ways to have faith in other propositions, or faith in general). And this is plausible, because not all with theistic faith are wagerers.

2.3 The Faith of the Wagerer

Taking stock, we've seen first that those who take Pascal's wager commit to God, largely for non-epistemic reasons, and they are motivated by the goodness of the outcome on which they commit to God and God exists. We've then seen that faith that God exists is a mental state with four components: cognitive, conative, resilience, and commitment.

But do these four components characterize taking Pascal's wager? Yes. The wagerer has a positive conative attitude toward God's existence—they are motivated by the goodness of their committing to God, given God exists, and once they commit to God, they desire God to exist. They also have a positive cognitive attitude toward God's existence—recall that one shouldn't take the wager if their credence in theism is 0 (or infinitesimally small). The wagerer is plausibly also resilient to counterevidence to God's existence, in part because their commitment is based on non-epistemic reasons. Since non-epistemic reasons keep them going, they can maintain their commitment to God even in light of counterevidence. And both the person of faith and the wagerer commit to God—whether this involves a doxastic

wager (a commitment to believe in God) or an acceptance wager (a commitment to live as if God exists).

Thus, *if S takes Pascal's wager (in the way described in sec. 2.1), S has faith that God exists*. Two things to note about this claim. First, this claim is neutral on whether faith entails belief. If faith entails belief, my argument is simply limited to the doxastic wager.¹³ In other words, if one *believes* in God because of Pascal's wager (either directly or via taking steps to induce belief), then one demonstrates genuine faith. While this raises the question of whether believing in God for this reason could be epistemically rational—because if not, it would appear that whatever faith is demonstrated is importantly defective—I've argued that taking the doxastic wager can be epistemically (not merely practically) rational (see Jackson MS; see also Ballard 2017).

Second, as mentioned above, my claim is not that having faith is sufficient for taking Pascal's wager. One may make a commitment to God primarily based on *epistemic* reasons, and thus not take Pascal's wager but nonetheless have faith—if they have the right cognitive and conative attitudes, their commitment is resilient in light of counterevidence, etc. Again, I'm arguing that at least a subset of the conditions that are sufficient for taking Pascal's wager is sufficient for having faith, not that all who have theistic faith wager on God.¹⁴

This brings me to two upshots of my argument. First, it is possible to take the wager with virtuous and honorable motives. The wagerer I'm focused on here is motivated by the goodness of knowing God, if God exists, and, by wagering, demonstrates faith that God exists. Faith is a theological virtue and a central mark of a devoted religious life (see Jeffrey 2017-a). Thus, I've carved out a way of taking the wager that demonstrates virtuous motives that would please God.

¹³ Mugg (2016) and Malcolm and Scott (2016) argue that faith entails belief.

¹⁴ If faith that God exists is inconsistent with credence 1 that God exists, then all those who have faith may be in some position of uncertainty, and in some sense thus wager on God. But I won't take a stand on this here.

Second, another objection that has been raised to Pascal's wager is the impossibility objection—taking the wager is impossible because (e.g.) one cannot force oneself to believe in God.¹⁵ However, we've seen that taking Pascal's wager demonstrates faith. And if faith, rather than belief, is what God requires, then those who wager won't have to force themselves to believe.¹⁶ Rather, the commitment that results from taking Pascal's wager will be sufficient, as it constitutes having faith. There are two caveats on this point, however. First, for this response to the impossibility objection to be successful, the wagerer *will* need some degree of control over the four conditions discussed above, including the relevant conative attitudes and the commitment's resilience. Second, if one thinks the only legitimate way of wagering is the doxastic wager, or thinks that faith entails belief, then they need an additional story about why we have more control over our beliefs than many philosophers think. I've argued for this elsewhere (Jackson forthcoming).

3. Hopefully Taking Pascal's Wager

In this section, I explain how *hope* answers an outstanding objection to the above proposal. One might raise the following worry: it doesn't seem like faith that God exists is consistent with *any* non-zero (non-infinitesimal) credence that God exists. For example, if someone has a 0.01 credence that God exists, it seems like having faith that God exists is impossible, or at the very least irrational. In this case, one might rationally take Pascal's wager (even if the probability that God exists is small, there's nonetheless a lot to gain by wagering and little to lose by not wagering), but not count as having faith.

First, note that faith may be consistent with quite low credences. Even if faith entails belief, recently some have argued that rational belief is consistent with credences below 0.5.¹⁷

¹⁵ Proponents of the impossibility objection to Pascal's wager include Mackie (1982: 201), Duff (1986: 108), Jones (1998: 173).

¹⁶ For evidence that faith, rather than belief, is what God requires for salvation, see Pojman (1986), Speak (2007), McKaughan (2017), and Howard-Snyder (2017).

¹⁷ See Maher (1993: 183ff), Smith (2016: 72ff), Hawthorne et al (2016), Cevolani (2017), Jackson (2022).

Further, if faith doesn't entail belief, faith could be consistent with even lower credences than belief, as I argue in Jackson (2019). For example, it may be that you should only give up your faith in the face of certain *types* of evidence, but some kinds of evidence (like statistical evidence) can chip away at your credence but not require you to give up your faith.

Whether faith entails belief or not, the most popular and plausible response to the many-gods objection to Pascal's wager says that, all else equal, you should pick the religion (with an infinite afterlife) that is the most likely of the live options. In many cases, this might fulfill the relevant cognitive component of faith—as mentioned earlier, taking a possibility to be the most likely of the live options is a potential cognitive component of faith. Further, Hawthorne et al (2016) argue that rational *belief* is consistent with low credences in some cases when you believe the most likely of the live options (even if it is nonetheless somewhat unlikely in absolute terms). Of course, this doesn't entail that one *always* ought to believe the most likely live possibility, but interestingly, this could be a case where faith and/or belief are consistent with credences below 0.5.

My second response is that even if one's credences are too low to count as having faith, the wagerer may nonetheless *hope* that God exists. Hope is similar to, but importantly distinct from, faith.¹⁸ On the standard view,

S hopes that p iff:

- (i) S has a positive conative attitude toward p, and
- (ii**) S has a positive cognitive attitude toward p that does not rule out the possibility of p (e.g. a non-zero credence in p, a belief that p is possible).

Like faith, hope has a positive conative component. Hoping for p requires a desire for p to be true, a pro-attitude toward p, or a belief that p is very good. As Born (2018: 107) writes, "Hope is essentially a desire, a pro-attitude..." Almost everyone in the hope literature maintains that a positive conative component is necessary for hope. However, the cognitive

¹⁸ See Jeffrey (2017-b) on the relationship between faith and hope.

component of hope is much weaker than faith's. In the case of faith, if one has a very low credence in *p*, one shouldn't—and most wouldn't—continue to have faith. But hope is uncontroversially consistent with very low credences, as long as they are non-zero. So hope's positive cognitive attitude toward *p* can be weaker than faith's; it merely needs to leave the possibility of *p* open. Examples of states that do this would include a non-zero credence in *p* and a belief that *p* is possible. Some add that, if *S* hopes that *p*, *p* cannot be certain for *S*—or *S* cannot have a credence of 1 in *p*. Then, as Martin (2013: 69) notes, hope that *p* is consistent with any credence in *p* between, but excluding, 1 and 0.¹⁹

Consider some examples. If there's a 95% chance of rain tomorrow but I have a picnic planned, I can *hope* it won't rain tomorrow, since I want that to be true and take it to be possible. Furthermore, a loss of evidence may cause one to move from faith to hope. Recall above the case where I had faith your basketball team will win an upcoming game. Suppose I get quite a bit of evidence you won't win—maybe *all* of your starting five players get injured and cannot play. The probability you'll win, then, is quite low. However, I can nonetheless *hope* that you will win—though it's unlikely, my credence you'll win isn't zero, and I have a strong desire for you to win.

Due to two puzzles about hope—one that involves distinguishing hope from despair, and another that involves explaining hope's motivating power in difficult circumstances—some have argued that (i) and (ii*), while necessary for hope, are not sufficient for hope. For example, Meirav (2009) argues that hope involves an 'external factor'—an attitude towards some factor (e.g., nature, fate, God) on which the realization of the hoped-for end causally depends. Calhoun (2018) argues that hope provides the hopeful a 'phenomenological idea of the future.' On Martin (2013)'s 'incorporation' account of hope, the hopeful take a 'licensing

¹⁹ Downie (1963: 248); Day (1969: 89); see Milona (2019) for a recent defense of the standard view. For an overview of the nature and rationality of hope, see Rioux (2021).

stance' and their cognitive attitudes provide a 'justificatory rationale' for related emotions and actions. Finally, Chignell (forthcoming)'s 'focus theory' of hope entails that hoping involves special attention to the hoped-for outcome.

What about these additional conditions for hope? Fortunately, when one commits to God based on Pascal's wager, motivated by the goodness of the outcome of God's existence, they satisfy these extra conditions that, in conjunction with (i) and (ii*), are sufficient for hope. To see this, consider Chignell's view. Chignell motivates his view with a case of two prisoners who both desperately want to get out of jail, and both acknowledge that freedom is possible. However, one prisoner is full of hope, and the other is full of despair. It seems like both hoping and despairing are consistent with (i) and (ii*): both prisoners desire to be free, and take freedom to be possible. This motivates the idea that we need a third condition to distinguish hope from despair (see Bovens 1999 for further discussion of this case). Chignell argues that the primary difference involves where their attention is focused: the hopeful prisoner attends to the possibility and goodness of freedom, whereas the despairing prisoner attends to the how unlikely freedom is. The wagerer, as described in section 2.1, plausibly meets Chignell's attention condition, as they are focused on, and motivated by, the goodness of the outcome on which both God exists and they commit to God. Because knowing such a being would be so incredibly valuable, they are motivated to wager. In this, they attend to the positive outcome's goodness—not its unlikelihood.

The wagerer plausibly satisfies the conditions added by the other accounts of hope as well. For example, they are committed to God as the external factor on which their hope depends. In virtue of their commitment to God and their focus on future goods (e.g. heaven), they exemplify Calhoun's 'phenomenological idea of the future', and the relevant actions and emotions of Martin's account are justified for them. (See Jackson (2021) and Rioux (forthcoming) for more on how hope justifies action and commitment.)

Furthermore, the type of hope we're concerned with is actually thicker than the standard account of hope. Philosophers normally distinguish between two kinds of hope. First, there are *prosaic* or mundane cases of hope—for instance, my hope that the cashier at the grocery store has a nice day, that my distant cousin gets the job he wants, or that my picnic doesn't get rained out.²⁰ These are generally not hopes that are essential to our long-term commitments or ones that we build our lives around. Second, there are *profound* hopes; for example, the religious person's hope for the afterlife or the political activist's hope for world peace (see Chae 2020). The latter cases involve stronger desires and have more significant practical impact. Here, we're concerned with a wagerer who has made a commitment to God, and thus God's existence is a profound, life-shaping hope for them. Because of this focus, we can add a third jointly-sufficient condition to describe the cases of hope of interest:

S hopes that God exists *if*:

- (i*) S has a positive conative attitude toward God's existence, and
- (ii***) S has a positive cognitive attitude toward God's existence that does not rule out the possibility of God existing, and
- (iv*) S has a commitment to God.

And again, we only need (i), (ii***), and (iv*) to be sufficient for theistic hope, for the reasons discussed in the previous section. This brings me to my ultimate and final thesis: if one takes Pascal's wager, then one either has faith that God exists or hopes that God exists. In other words, taking the wager is sufficient for the conditions associated with theistic faith *or* the conditions associated with theistic hope. This is significant both in and of itself, but also because faith and hope are theological virtues. I aim to have dispelled the idea that taking Pascal's wager is inherently selfish or demonstrates poor motives. On the contrary: on a

²⁰ For further discussion of prosaic hopes, see Pettit (2004), Martin (2013: 70ff), and Blöser and Stahl (2017: 368–9).

natural way of taking the wager, the wagerer exemplifies theological virtues. Taking the wager is thus not only virtuous, but also plausibly something that would be pleasing to God.

Before I conclude, I'll consider two final worries. If one's taking the wager merely demonstrates hope that God exists, does this answer the impossibility objection discussed above? In other words, does merely *hoping* that God exists lead to the good outcome of the shaded box in Table 2? To be maximally charitable to the objector, I'll assume that we are dealing with a hopeful person who takes the acceptance wager, rather than the doxastic wager. In response, first, note that going from completely uncommitted to committed to God and hoping that God exists at least raises the probability that one is saved and will receive the goods of heaven; it brings the wagerer closer to their goal of salvation and relationship with God. It's difficult to be certain of the exact requirements for salvation (a subject of theological debate—e.g. universalists maintain that all will be saved, and even non-universalists disagree about the precise soteriological requirements. Belief that God exists is almost definitely not strictly necessary; e.g. young children who die before they have the capacity to believe in God are likely saved, even without belief). All we may be able to do is raise the probability of getting the good outcome of the shaded box. Second, salvation may not be the only good the wagerer is concerned with; the wagerer may also be interested in, e.g. the benefits of pursuing God during their earthly life. Or one might wager for moral reasons, concerning God and others, as discussed above. Theistic hope may more easily secure these goals of wagering. Finally, the hopeful wagerer might, as they continue in their commitment to God, eventually come to have faith and/or belief that God exists. So the hopeful wagerer puts themselves on a path to satisfy even more stringent requirements for salvation.

Second, one might worry that the *attitudes* of faith and hope are different than the *virtues* of faith and hope. Virtues are traits that a virtuous person possesses and exercises.

Virtues are acquired through free decision, are stable in a wide range of circumstances, and contribute to the flourishing of individuals and their communities (see Jeffrey 2017-a). Are the attitudes of hope and faith equivalent to (or at least sufficient for) the virtues of hope and faith?²¹ In response, given the conditions laid out above, it's plausible that theistic faith and theistic hope are virtues. One, the choice to wager on God is a free one—one weighs the costs and benefits, and decides to commit to God. This is very different than say, someone who is brainwashed into believing God exists. Two, because both faith and hope involve a commitment, they are stable over time in a range of circumstances. Three, because the faith and hope demonstrated by the wagerer maximize expected value—and given the possibility of wagering for moral reasons—it's plausible that theistic faith and hope contribute to the flourishing of both individuals and communities. Furthermore, even if one insists that faith and hope as described above cannot be virtues, the result that taking Pascal's wager demonstrates the *attitudes* of faith or hope is still significant. Theistic faith and hope *qua* attitudes are honorable pursuits, and acting from these attitudes can be a noble motivation for taking the wager, even apart considerations involving virtue.

4. Conclusion

I've argued that if one takes Pascal's wager, then one either has faith that God exists or hopes that God exists. First, I've clarified what exactly counts as 'taking Pascal's wager.' Then, I've shown why it is plausible that if one takes Pascal's wager, motivated by the goodness of the possibility that God exists, one has faith that God exists. I've also shown why this is significant: it is possible to take the wager with virtuous motives, and offers a response to the impossibility objection to Pascal's wager. Then, I've addressed hope, and argued that even if the wagerer doesn't meet the requirements for having faith, she will

²¹ Thanks to Anne Jeffrey for raising this worry. On faith as a virtue, see Chappell (1996) and Jeffrey (2017-a). On hope as a virtue, see Kadlac (2015) and Jeffrey (2019).

nonetheless have hope. I've finally argued that theistic hope is theologically (and soteriologically) significant.²²

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