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THE MANY GODS OBJECTION TO PASCAL'S WAGER: A DECISION THEORETIC RESPONSE

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Abstract: The Many Gods Objection (MGO) is widely viewed as a decisive criticism of Pascal's Wager. Some have attempted to rebut it by employing criteria drawn from the theological tradition. This paper will offer a different sort of defense of the Wager, one more suited to its apologetic aim as well as to its status as a decision under ignorance. It will be shown that there are characteristics already built into the Wager's decision theoretic structure that can block many categories of theological hypotheses including MGO's more outrageous "cooked-up" hypotheses and "philosophers' fictions."

INTRODUCTION

The Many Gods Objection (MGO) is among the earliest, best known, and most frequently discussed objections to Pascal's Wager. In the mid-eighteenth century, both Diderot and Voltaire raised the concern that there is more than one theological hypothesis upon which to wager¹ and in more recent years, MGO has been expanded to include "cooked-up" hypotheses and "philosophers' fictions"²: gods who require us to step on every third sidewalk crack,³ gods who punish us in proportion to the number of insects we have killed,⁴ gods who only reward those who prefer Chardonnay to all other wines,⁵ and gods who require that we reject theism.⁶

There have been various attempts to defend the Wager against MGO. Some claim that the "cooked-up" hypotheses violate demands of simplicity,⁷ fail to express the "exalted notions" of genuine religions,⁸ or can only be overcome if the Wager is relativized to a specific audience.⁹ One further attempt is developed by Jeff Jordan, who has been among the most prolific defenders of the Wager.¹⁰ His defense is based on two key claims. First, he argues that we may legitimately ignore theological hypotheses that are

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“maximally implausible,” even if they are logically possible. Second, he draws his account of maximal implausibility from the difference in epistemic merit between those hypotheses that “enjoy the backing of a living tradition” and those that do not.¹¹ These claims, he believes, allow for a defense of an “ecumenical” version of the Wager, a defense that establishes the prudential superiority of traditional theism over atheism.¹²

However, Jordan’s argument, like other appeals to the theological tradition, will carry little weight among nonbelievers. Believers may find in these avenues the means to bar “cooked-up” hypotheses and “philosophers’ fictions” from inclusion within a decision matrix and so see the Wager as a possible buttress to their faith. But the invocation of either particular theological doctrines¹³ or their record of debate will not have much influence among atheists and agnostics. Accordingly, if these avenues offer the only means to bar “cooked-up” hypotheses and “philosophers’ fictions” from inclusion within a decision matrix, the Wager will have little if any impact on those not already sympathetic with religion. It will fail to shake atheists and agnostics out of their irreligious worldviews, and thus using the theological tradition to rebut MGO greatly weakens, if not undermines, the Wager’s ability to serve as an apologetic directed to nonbelievers.

A parallel concern is that the more common rebuttals to MGO employ criteria independent of the Wager itself. Rather than finding within the Wager and its decision theoretic structure a way to rebut MGO, their shared and unstated assumption is that the Wager does not, on its own, offer adequate resources to fend off MGO; and so they turn to various external criteria to distinguish between those hypotheses that can be allowed into the matrix and those to be barred. Thus, without realizing it, most defenders of the Wager have implicitly accepted MGO’s position that the Wager on its own is quite weak. Though their intent is to defend the Wager, their turn to external criteria threatens its status as a decision under ignorance and, as noted in the preceding paragraph, as an effective apologetic.

It is the purpose of this paper to demonstrate that the Wager can do more to protect itself without having to turn to external criteria. We can instead tap into the numerous presuppositions and formal characteristics already built into the Wager’s decision theoretic approach to religious belief and see how they can be used to fend off many categories of “cooked-up” hypotheses and “philosophers’ fictions.”

The first section of this paper will offer a brief presentation of the Wager and the Many Gods Objection. The second section will then discuss existing attempts to defend against MGO, focusing in particular on Jeff Jordan’s appeal to tradition. In section three, we shall begin to catalog how specific features built into the Wager’s decision theoretic structure can be paired against various categories of theological hypotheses used by MGO.

1. PASCAL’S WAGER AND THE MANY GODS OBJECTION

The typical formulation of Pascal’s Wager follows what Ian Hacking calls

“Dominating Expectation.”¹⁴ A decision matrix is said to have a dominating expectation when:

- (α) one outcome of a choice has a greater expected utility than the outcomes of all other choices
- (β) the probability of that outcome is greater than zero, and
- (γ) the other outcomes of that choice have equal or greater expected utility than the outcomes of any other choice.

(β) further allows the Wager to be formulated as a “decision under ignorance”¹⁵ as we do not know or have to know the relevant probabilities aside from the claim that the one at issue is greater than zero.

We may formulate the basic decision matrix for the Wager as follows:

	God exists	God does not exist
One chooses God	+ ∞	+ f
One does not choose God	- ∞ or 0	+ f

The theistic choice¹⁶ results in either a heavenly afterlife of infinite value if one is correct or, if one is incorrect, +f, some finite value that our mortal lives are assumed to ordinarily have. The atheistic choice results, if incorrect, is either - ∞ or 0 (depending upon whether or not Hell or nonexistence is assumed), or if correct, +f, some value that our worldly existence is assumed to ordinarily have.¹⁷

Assuming that the probability of God’s existence is > 0, then the expected utility of the choice to be a theist *sums to* + ∞ whereas the expected utility of the choice to not be a theist *sums to* - ∞ or +f (depending upon whether or not Hell or nonexistence is assumed). Thus, the Wager offers a prudential argument for theism: however improbable God’s existence is, so long as it is not impossible, then the slimmest chance of an infinite reward makes its pursuit preferable to a choice to not accept God.

The best known objection to the Wager is that it should not be presented as a binary choice: there are many religions and many claims about what is required to receive a heavenly reward.

Let us use the term “theological hypothesis” (TH) to refer to the set of claims pertaining to supernatural beings who putatively play a role in our afterlife fate, the nature of that fate, and what is within our power with respect to that fate (rituals, beliefs, moral conduct, etc.). According to this objection, at least some theological hypotheses carry exclusivity clauses such as the requirement that all our acts of piety must be directed toward a particular deity and a prohibition against performing any actions for the purpose of winning favor with any other deity. Such clauses are to be found in the biblical commandments: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” and “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them” (EX 20:3, 20:5).

With such clauses in effect, let us refer to the traditional theological hypothesis as TH₁ and let TH₂ be the theological hypothesis of a divinity who requires that we always wear purple slippers while indoors and are prohibited from all other footwear while indoors (such as by wearing pur-

ple slippers over pink ones).¹⁸ Of course, MGO's matrices can stretch to infinity, given all the theological hypotheses that can be "cooked up," but for the sake of simplicity, let us limit our portrayal of the MGO decision matrix to just three options:

	TH ₁ is true	TH ₂ is true	TH ₁ and TH ₂ are false
One chooses TH ₁	+ ∞	- ∞ or 0	+ f
One chooses TH ₂	- ∞ or 0	+ ∞	+ f
One does not choose any TH	- ∞ or 0	- ∞ or 0	+ f

According to MGO, if the probabilities of TH₁ and TH₂ are each >0, then the expected utility of the top two rows is the same. To simplify the math, if we assume nonexistence rather than Hell if one is wrong, the two top rows would each sum to + ∞ and the third row would sum to +f. Thus, theism is supported over atheism. However, there appears to be no decision theoretic solution as to which deity, religion, or set of rituals to choose, leaving the wagerer without the means to determine which theological hypothesis is in his best interest. If limited to just what is contained in the Wager, it appears as if the wagerer is stuck, unable to choose between a traditional theological hypothesis and an outlandish "cooked-up" hypothesis about wearing purple slippers. In section three, we shall see that the decision theoretic structure of the Wager offers many resources through which this and other "cooked-up" hypotheses can be eliminated. But before we turn to these, let us first discuss the more common strategy of stepping outside of the Wager and turning to the theological tradition for assistance.

2. THE TRADITION RESPONSE

Jeff Jordan's defense of the Wager begins by interpreting it in terms of subjective rather than objective probabilities.¹⁹ The probabilities in play are not based upon how our actual universe or how possible universes are configured. We are not, for example, modeling probabilities as one would when rolling a die, where the probabilities are a function of how many sides it has. Instead, the assigned probabilities express the degrees of conviction one may have in hypotheses. Zero would express one's complete rejection of a hypothesis, one would express total confidence/certainty in it.

Jordan then argues that it is not irrational for us to allow subjective and objective probabilities to diverge. At least in some instances, it is legitimate for us to have a degree of conviction greater or less than the objective probability of some outcome. He builds his case by way of various examples. One of which cites the Goldbach Conjecture, a mathematical theorem that if true, is necessarily true; if false, is necessarily false. Its objective probability can thus only be one or zero. However, when a mathematician leans in favor of one of these options, "it is perfectly reasonable [for him] to assign it a subjective probability that falls somewhere between one and zero."²⁰ Another

example comes from an ordinary coin toss: it may be logically possible for a coin to land on its edge or even remain in mid-air when flipped, yet “one quite properly neglects these possibilities and considers the partition of heads and tails jointly to exhaust the possibilities.”²¹

Jordan does not, however, suggest that it is perfectly fine to assign whatever subjective probabilities we please, regardless of objective probability. Objective probability, or more precisely, our assessment of objective probability, should still guide us to some extent.²² A mathematician’s opinion about the Goldbach Conjecture is informed by various arguments; and our willingness to limit results in a coin toss to just heads and tails is informed by beliefs about gravity, momentum, etc.

In the case of theological hypotheses, Jordan contends that we may disregard those that are “cooked-up” because, at least in part, they do not “enjoy the backing of a living tradition.”²³ These hypotheses “have not stood the test of time,” have not “undergone . . . vetting by multiple generations of inquirers.” They are, he claims, without such epistemic credentials and are “maximally implausible.” By contrast, only theological hypotheses backed by a tradition “should be given epistemic weight, since those who have gone before us are . . . our epistemic peers.”²⁴

Various concerns may be raised against Jordan’s appeal to tradition. Like other attempts to present the superiority of some theological hypotheses over others, it jeopardizes the rhetorical stature of the Wager as an apologetic meant to persuade nonbelievers. Just as a nonbeliever would not filter theological hypotheses based upon specific doctrinal standards (how well the hypothesis articulates the nature of original sin, miracles, grace, etc.), so a tradition infused with doctrinal commitments will not be taken as carrying much epistemic weight.

However, it may be argued that Jordan’s appeal to tradition is more general, for it does not claim that the epistemic merits of the vetting process are related to any specific doctrine, set of doctrines, or even the collective record of theological debates through history. Rather, his intent is to bring us to see that some theological hypotheses have the merit of having been vetted by our “epistemic peers,” a standard that is supposed to abstract away from the content of the theological tradition and simply consider the fact that some hypotheses have undergone scrutiny while others have not. Accordingly, Jordan contends that since recent “cooked-up” hypotheses have not undergone this vetting, traditional theological hypotheses have an epistemic advantage over them, an advantage gained by the mere fact of vetting as opposed to an adjudication based upon specific doctrines.

Nevertheless, the fact of vetting may not be so easily separated from the methodologies, conceptual tools, and historical circumstances of the process. To help illustrate this point, let us draw a distinction between “epistemic peers” and “intellectual peers.”²⁵ “Intellectual peers” refers to individuals or groups who have similar abilities to recognize subtle conceptual distinctions, uncover presuppositions, discern implications, evaluate arguments, and so on. “Epistemic peers,” on the other hand, suggests more. In

addition to being intellectual peers, epistemic peers should share a common knowledge base.

Consider Thomas Aquinas and Isaac Newton. They may be intellectual peers, but they are not epistemic peers. Newton had the advantage of living after the discoveries of Copernicus, Brahe, Kepler, Galileo, and so forth. As a result, not only was his cosmology scientifically superior but his theology was informed by these advances. One example of this is the impact of his First Law of Motion on the First of Aquinas' Five Ways. Simply put, the *reductio* of the First Mover argument is blocked by the principle of inertia.²⁶

If we consider tradition as a whole (religion, philosophy, geography, psychology, physics, etc.), far too much has been discredited to grant epistemic merit to the mere fact of *traditionality* as such. In fact, quite the reverse seems more appropriate, especially when it comes to empirical matters. But even if we narrow Jordan's appeal to tradition to religious claims, the epistemic merits of traditionality still seem quite weak. In addition to the above example of inertia and First Mover arguments, consider also the impact of General Relativity on Newton's speculation that since action at a distance is not possible, gravity is evidence for God's existence.²⁷ A third example, though one that is still disputed in some quarters, is the tenability of the design argument since Hume's *Dialogues*, Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, and the key discoveries within molecular biology.²⁸

Thinkers of the past worked with what they had. Their thoughts are products of their times and even though there are issues that science does not seem capable of touching (the divinity of Jesus, whether the Koran is *Wahy*, etc.), these are more the exception than the rule. Tradition thought otherwise, but we now know that the stars are not glimmers of Heaven and that disease is spread by microbes and not demons. We forget how many such claims held for centuries, if not millennia, were deeply embedded within the tradition, and only in comparatively recent times lost their viability. Of course, these examples do not undermine all that has been upheld through the tradition, but given how much of it has been discredited, it is naive of Jordan to grant the vetting of tradition much epistemic merit. It certainly is not enough to declare the nontraditional to be "maximally implausible."²⁹

If the Wager is to survive MGO's assault, some other strategy is needed. Jordan has not offered a persuasive case for the "maximal implausibility" of nontraditional hypotheses. Once the difference between epistemic and intellectual peerage is understood, it does not seem reasonable for a theist to grant the vetting process much epistemic weight, and it should be clear that appeals to the theological tradition will not move atheists or agnostics. Moreover, such appeals implicitly accept MGO's contention that the Wager is a weak argument. The appeal to tradition undermines its apologetic force and illustrates that without external support, the Wager would collapse, apparently lacking internal means to fend off MGO. However, there are many resources within the Wager that have gone untapped. Rather than

turning to criteria outside the Wager itself, we shall see that within its decision theoretic structure, there are features that can be used to greatly weaken MGO, blocking its numerous categories of “cooked-up” hypotheses and “philosophers’ fictions.”

3. DECISION THEORETIC RESPONSES TO MGO

The Many Gods Objection is typically presented as a decisive blow against the Wager, and the common rebuttals to MGO are supposed to offer decisive responses to it. We have seen this intention in the case of Jordan’s tradition response: the filter of traditionality is supposed to be on its own sufficient to save the Wager from MGO. Thus, both sides of the dispute claim that they can offer a single, decisive response to their opponent.

The alternative strategy we shall here consider is not that of knock-out punches but rather of attrition. To achieve this, we will not turn to principles that stand outside the decision theoretic structure of the Wager. Instead, we shall see that there are numerous untapped resources built into the Wager that, one by one, can be paired against various categories of “cooked-up” hypotheses and “philosophers’ fictions.” Through the following subsections, we shall draw out some of the formal features and presuppositions of decision theoretic approaches to religious belief and see that through them, many theological hypotheses can be eliminated.

3.1. *The Stability Constraint*

Let us begin with a formal feature of decision theoretic matrices in general. One condition that a hypothesis must meet for inclusion within a matrix is that there is a stable choice-outcome relation. That is, under the condition that the hypothesis is true, it must be the case that anyone who chooses it will receive what everyone else who chooses it will receive. We may call this the Stability Constraint and if it does not obtain, then the expected utilities falling under that hypothesis cannot be calculated.

Consider, for instance, theological hypotheses employing “trickster” deities like the Norse god Loki or Akba-atatdia, the Native American coyote god. Such divinities are erratic in behavior and if they were placed in charge of what we will receive in the afterlife, they would not hold to any stable principle when allocating those fates. They may offer a heavenly reward to one of their devotees, but then on a whim, choose to deny that reward to another who is just as devoted. They may now and then grant even a wicked apostate eternal joy, perhaps just to befuddle the onlookers from various afterlife realms.

Advocates of MGO would grant the above category of hypotheses (i.e., trickster deities) logical possibility and so we may then ask how to render them within a decision matrix. The problem here is that without a stable choice-outcome relation, we cannot assign values to some of the matrix cells. At best, a matrix that tried to include a hypothesis from this category would appear as follows:

Let TH_1 = a traditional theological hypothesis where afterlife outcomes will vary based upon one's choice; and let TH_2 = a trickster deity hypothesis.

	TH_1 is true	TH_2 is true	TH_1 and TH_2 are false
One chooses TH_1	$+\infty$?	+ f
One chooses TH_2	$-\infty$ or 0	?	+ f
One does not choose any TH	$-\infty$ or 0	?	+ f

The rational merits of choosing TH_2 cannot be evaluated. Even if TH_2 and its kin are logically possible, this category of theological hypotheses lacks a feature that is necessary for decision theoretic analysis. A wagerer, that is, someone who is evaluating what theological hypothesis to adopt on strictly decision theoretic grounds, cannot choose TH_2 . Without a stable decision-outcome relation, TH_2 lacks, we may say, one of the structural elements necessary for a hypothesis to be “well-formed.”

The Stability Constraint illustrates one way in which one category of logically possible theological hypotheses can be rejected without either claiming that the probability of the hypothesis is zero or by using a principle that is external to the Wager. Instead, it serves as a formal principle for the inclusion of hypotheses within a matrix, analogous to the syntactic principles of formal logic that govern well-formed formulas. Accordingly, theists and atheists alike can accept the Stability Constraint as it is merely a formal requirement for the inclusion of hypotheses within a decision matrix and does not presuppose any further epistemological or metaphysical doctrines. It does not pre-filter hypotheses on grounds that already favor theism and neither begs the question of the Wager nor threatens its standing as a decision under ignorance.

Of course, this single constraint does not offer a definitive rebuttal to MGO. It is not meant to. It is, however, our first strike against the objection and is illustrative of how an incremental assault can be waged. By drawing upon specific features of decision theoretic approaches to religious belief and showing how each feature can vanquish specific categories of theological hypotheses, we can, bit by bit, subdue the Many Gods Objection.

3.2. *The Outcome Plurality Constraint*

A second feature of the Wager we can bring to bear against MGO is the Outcome Plurality Constraint. A theological hypothesis can still be well-formed if it violates this constraint, but if it is the case that regardless of what choice is made, there is no change in outcomes, a rationally self-interested wagerer will opt for a choice whose outcomes do vary based upon what choice is made. To illustrate this constraint, let us consider the theological hypothesis of Universalism (i.e., the doctrine that all receive salvation). This hypothesis does not have the quality of being a mere “philosopher’s fiction” like other hypotheses used in MGO. In fact, it is a hypothesis that has the backing of the tradition. Versions of Universalism were endorsed by some figures of the Early Church (Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa) and the

hypothesis reemerged after the Reformation among Quakers, Pietists, Moravians and Unitarians. It has, thus, been vetted by tradition and so at least according to Jordan’s standards, it merits inclusion with the Wager’s matrix (consequently threatening the Wager as an argument of dominating expectation).³⁰ But as we shall see, there is another way to eliminate it.

Let TH_1 = a traditional theological hypothesis where afterlife outcomes will vary based upon one’s choice; and let TH_3 = a Universalist hypothesis³¹:

	TH_1 is true	TH_3 is true	TH_1 and TH_3 are false
One chooses TH_1	+ ∞	+ ∞	+ f
One chooses TH_3	- ∞ or 0	+ ∞	+ f
One does not choose any TH	- ∞ or 0	+ ∞	+ f

The prudential logic of the above should be obvious. The best outcomes for TH_1 and TH_3 are the same, but a choice of TH_3 carries a risk that is not present if one chooses TH_1 . TH_3 can thus be rejected solely by a decision theoretic analysis: there is nothing to be gained by choosing it, but something to lose if one does not choose TH_1 . In short, TH_3 is a wasted bet. If the hypothesis is true, whether or not one chooses it, the expected utility will always be the same. Accordingly, the believer and nonbeliever alike could dismiss TH_3 , not because of any commitments antecedent to or independent of the Wager, but merely from the logic of the matrix alone.

We thus have a second general criterion for theological hypotheses: they must meet the Outcome Plurality Constraint. This is something that traditional Universalism fails to do. Likewise, more “cooked-up” hypotheses where there is no variation in outcomes would also be rejected merely by the logic of their matrices. Consider for example, diabolical Universalism, that is, a hypothesis where regardless of what is chosen, if the hypothesis is true, infinite suffering awaits everyone. Once again, nothing is to be gained by choosing this hypothesis, but there is something to lose by not choosing the more traditional hypothesis where outcomes do vary based upon what choice is made.

3.3. The Anti-Skepticism Constraint

A third constraint upon theological hypotheses can be generated from a very general presupposition. As with other methodologies we may use when making a decision, when one chooses to explore theological hypotheses through a decision matrix, the wagerer assumes his calculations of utility and his practical deliberations are accurate and reliable. That is, the wagerer puts trust in his arithmetic ability as well as his grasp of such concepts as choice, infinity, death, and so forth. However, many “cooked-up” hypotheses and “philosophers’ fictions” are not compatible with such trust and choosing them yields what others have called a “performative contradiction.”³²

A performative contradiction occurs when you commit to a claim that contradicts one or more presupposed claims underlying the means you

have used to commit to it. Jaakko Hintikka has used this strategy to interpret Descartes' Cogito, thereby showing that when we doubt our own existence, we are doubting something that doubting presupposes: the existence of the consciousness engaged in doubting.³³ Jürgen Habermas has used this strategy in order to challenge some of the Postmodern critiques of reason and the meaningfulness of language.³⁴ And Hilary Putnam has used it to refute the brain-in-a-vat conjecture.³⁵ In our case, the wagerer would perpetrate a performative contradiction if he were to choose a hypothesis that commits him to the rejection of the reliability of the cognitive apparatus he employs to bring him to the determination that the chosen hypothesis rationally merits its selection over others in the matrix. In other words, the sincere wagerer would place himself in a performative contradiction if he were to commit to a hypothesis that precludes his taking the Wager seriously.

We may cook-up our first example of a theological hypothesis that would lead to a performative contradiction by placing Descartes' evil deceiver in charge of our afterlife fates. Let us assume that if we choose to affirm the existence of this deity, he will offer us a reward of infinite worth when we die. But in choosing to affirm this hypothesis, we are choosing to affirm that there is a being who is actively manipulating our cognitive functioning so that we will constantly make arithmetic errors and/or distort our thoughts about various concepts key to wagering. The evil deceiver may, for instance, lead us into some fundamental misunderstanding about choice-outcome relations or the difference between infinite and finite utility. We might think we are making the choice that maximizes self-interest, but that's only because the evil deceiver has twisted our thought processes.

Such a theological hypothesis is well-formed and could be represented in a standard matrix, for we may assume that regardless of his deceptive activity, if we satisfy what he demands of us, we will be rewarded. Accordingly, let TH_1 continue to be a traditional theological hypothesis and let TH_4 = a theological hypothesis that undermines our confidence in decision theory:

	TH_1 is true	TH_4 is true	TH_1 and TH_4 are false
One chooses TH_1	$+\infty$	$-\infty$ or 0	$+f$
One chooses TH_4	$-\infty$ or 0	$+\infty$	$+f$
One does not choose any TH	$-\infty$ or 0	$-\infty$ or 0	$+f$

This matrix offers the appearance of a standard MGO scenario, one that typically is thought to undermine the Wager. But if TH_4 involves the acceptance of an evil deceiver, by choosing it, one would be accepting a hypothesis which holds that we cannot trust that the above matrix accurately represent the intended wager. Thus, a wagerer would commit a performative contradiction if he were to adopt a hypothesis that undermines his trust in the faculties he uses to evaluate the merits of the hypothesis. He cannot both take his wagering seriously and also accept that he cannot rely upon his wagering in pursuit of what is in his rational self-interest.

3.4. *Philosophers' Fictions and The Anti-Skepticism Constraint*

Let us now turn to such “philosophers’ fictions” as the sidewalk crack god, the cockroach god, the Chardonnay god, and the purple slipper god. These hypotheses allocate our afterlives according to requirements that, *prima facie*, seem extremely petty. The sidewalk crack god requires that we step on every third sidewalk crack, the cockroach god demands that we avoid killing insects, the Chardonnay god is concerned with our white wine selection, and the purple slipper god restricts access to Heaven based upon the color and style of our indoor footwear.

Yet, however petty these requirements seem to be, let us for the purpose of this subsection entertain the possibility that they are, rather, of eminent intrinsic value and so are quite appropriate for the determination of what we deserve in the afterlife. It may be more intuitively appealing to render them as petty requirements imposed by an unjust deity, but we will save that interpretation for the next subsection. For the moment, let us instead understand the “philosophers’ fictions” as stipulating requirements that, contrary to our intuitions, are of profound intrinsic worth and completely appropriate for the allocation of postmortem rewards and punishments. So, following this rendering of the purple slipper hypothesis, there is nothing more intrinsically important than the style and color of our indoor footwear, and it is perfectly just for the deity to reward and punish us accordingly.

Of course, many people think that what happens to us in the afterlife should be determined by how loving and generous we are; many Christians hold that it depends whether or not we have accepted Christ’s death as atonement for our sins; and many Muslims maintain that our afterlife fate is based upon our observance of Sharia. But according to the purple slipper hypothesis, they are all wrong. They are wrong about what is required for our entry into Heaven. They are also wrong about what is truly important in this life. The traditional precepts are of either no or of just minor importance, and despite their popularity, it is inappropriate for our afterlives to depend upon them. By contrast, only those who wear purple slippers are worthy of eternal joy while the sock-wearers, the bare-footed, the flip-flopers, or the most despicable of all, the apostate pink slipper wearers deserve nothing less than an eternity of the most grievous torment.

Our theological hypothesis is thus that the deity is just and that our afterlives depend upon our fulfilling the most intrinsically important of all duties, the wearing of purple slippers. We may place this hypothesis (TH₅) in the decision matrix along with a traditional theological hypothesis (TH₁) and thereby craft a standard MGO matrix:

	TH ₁ is true	TH ₅ is true	TH ₁ and TH ₅ are false
One chooses TH ₁	+∞	-∞ or 0	+f
One chooses TH ₅	-∞ or 0	+∞	+f
One does not choose any TH	-∞ or 0	-∞ or 0	+f

Although this matrix is well formed, for the wagerer to choose TH₅, he must commit to a wildly implausible hypothesis. But we will not here challenge it for its implausibility or its nontraditionality. Instead, let us consider whether in choosing TH₅, the wagerer perpetrates a performative contradiction.

Since TH₅ takes purple slipper wearing to be of profound intrinsic value and the appropriate basis for the allocation of our afterlife fates, a wagerer who accepts this hypothesis is forgoing the ordinary conception of what is and is not of value. Insofar as he came to the Wager with such ordinary views, he would have to accept that his (and the mainstream) conception of value is deeply askew. It is not just that we are wrong about some detail or nuance of moral concern. Rather, when we look at what counts as right and wrong, worthless and valuable, just and unjust, from the standpoint of TH₅, we've got it all terribly off.

The wagerer, thus, if he were to choose TH₅, would have to accept that his capacity for recognizing what is and is not of value is severely flawed. But this is not something that the wagerer would have any positive reasons for choosing, and in fact he has a powerful reason to not choose it: if his understanding of value is so deeply flawed, insofar as the Wager is an argument involving expected utility, he cannot reasonably trust his ability to assess the merits of each hypothesis within the Wager or even be sure that pleasure rather than pain, happiness rather than sorrow ought to be pursued.³⁶

Thus, so long as the classic "philosophers' fictions" are understood as stipulating something that appears to us to be of trivial value is rather of profound intrinsic value properly suited to being the requirement for what happens to us in our afterlives, we have grounds internal to the Wager for rejecting this category of hypotheses. Such hypotheses imply that we cannot trust an important aspect of our cognitive activity; and without such trust, we cannot consider ourselves fit to engage in wagering.

3.5. Philosophers' Fictions and the Practical Reason Constraint

Unlike the preceding rendering of the "philosophers' fictions," where their afterlife requirements were assigned great intrinsic value, let us now shift to a second interpretation, one that takes their afterlife requirements as they appear, i.e., of little to no intrinsic worth and unjust bases for the determination of what we should reap in our afterlives.

This category of hypotheses will satisfy all our preceding constraints: the Stability Constraint, the Outcome Plurality Constraint, and the Anti-Skepticism Constraint. For example, the purple slipper deity will stably hold to the stipulated requirement, will grant a heavenly reward to those who choose the right type of indoor footwear, and deny this reward to those who do not. Further, there is nothing in this hypothesis that jeopardizes our trust in our cognitive faculties since unlike the previous rendering of the "philosophers' fictions," values are here as they appear.

There are countless hypotheses of this sort that we may cook-up, and if no further constraint is available to eliminate them, they would devastate the Wager. We may, for instance, modify the basic purple-slipper hypothe-

sis so that the deity does not require just any shade of purple, but one of an exact wavelength. From this, we may project an infinite number of different purple slipper hypotheses, each deity demanding a fractionally different hue. A purple whose wavelength is just one nanometer off would violate the afterlife requirement and thus the wagerer who chooses slippers ever so slightly too blue or too red would be damned to Hell for all eternity.

There is nothing internally inconsistent in the above, and as noted, the infinite series of purple hue hypotheses can satisfy all the constraints we have so far explored. But there is something within this category that may yet generate another constraint. They all present something of infinite value to be dependent upon our observance of a requirement that in itself is of little to no value.³⁷ They forgo such traditional requirements as moral obedience, virtuous character, faith in Christ, observance of Sharia, etc.—that is, requirements whose intrinsic worth is either conventionally accepted or can be explained through further theological principles. Instead, “philosophers’ fictions” present the universe as ultimately unjust since those who do live a life of genuine intrinsic worth will still be damned simply for their failure to wear the right hue of purple slippers, while those who are evil and the cause of great suffering in the world, if they happen to satisfy this petty requirement, will be granted eternal joy.

Such a universe would strike most as morally objectionable. But on its own, this is not enough to challenge this category of hypotheses. What we need is to look at our interest in a just universe and consider whether it may somehow be a necessary presupposition of practical reason. This has, in fact, been done by Kant. But before we move to his account of why we must presuppose a just universe, it would be helpful to explore another strand of performative contradictions.

More often than not, performative contradictions are employed either epistemically or semantically. In the previous sections, we examined hypotheses of the former type, hypotheses whose acceptance is not compatible with one or more cognitive activities used when choosing the hypothesis. A semantic performative contradiction would be one where a claim uttered is not compatible with one or more conditions upon which the utterance can have meaning. A helpful example is Hilary Putnam’s attempt to refute the possibility that one is just a brain in a vat. His argument is that the utterance “I am a brain in a vat” is nonsensical (given his extensional theory of meaning) for if one is a brain in a vat, then one lacks the appropriate relation with the world such that the word *vat* can be used meaningfully.³⁸ This argument is (ironically) similar to George Berkeley’s critique of physicalism, for if all meaning stems from our mental content and there is no mental content about mind-independent entities, the utterance “there exists an extended world of matter” either reduces to a peculiar way of expressing *esse est percipi* or is gibberish.

A third type of performative contradiction may be titled “practical.” One example is choosing to affirm strong determinism. One who makes this “choice” is committing to a worldview where choosing is not possible. Though

idiomatically we may still say that someone has chosen to believe in determinism, and, of course, allow within a determinism that unchosen processes may simulate what we call "choice," in some contexts, including the Wager; where free will is presupposed, it becomes a performative contradiction to choose strong determinism. A theological hypothesis that includes strong determinism is thus not one that a sincere wagerer would choose, for in doing so, they are abandoning that genuine wagering is going on.³⁹

Similarly, consider a theological hypothesis where the afterlife requirement holds that we must not wager. A sincere wagerer cannot choose this hypothesis, for in choosing it, he is going against the point of the Wager. By making this choice, he is violating the requirements for receiving a heavenly reward and so it is a hypothesis incompatible with his self-interest. The same holds for hypotheses that prohibit setting ends, making choices, contemplating the afterlife, etc. In each of these cases, a performative contradiction takes place that is practical in nature. A wagerer cannot affirm a hypothesis that prohibits wagering without going against his own self-interest. Of course, we can in most contexts choose contrary to self-interest without committing a performative contradiction, but for a wagerer to make such a choice is to abandon the particular activity of wagering. The Wager is an argument to one's self-interest and so to choose a hypothesis incompatible with self-interest is to no longer play along with the Wager. That is, one cannot be a sincere wagerer and choose a hypothesis that either prohibits wagering as such, or prohibits a particular feature of what one must do when wagering.

Collectively, these examples present what we may call a practical variant of performative contradictions. Some choices are not compatible with a genuine engagement in an activity. These activities can be quite incidental, such as playing a game, or can be more integral to our practical lives. In the case of the former, a practical performative contradiction would arise if one tries to win a game by cheating.

For examples of the latter, the natural figure to turn to is Kant. Performative contradictions arise whenever we attempt to justify a maxim that cannot be made into a universal law. The reason for this, according to Kant, is that justification is itself a rational procedure that requires that the grounds one uses to justify the action also hold for all other rational agents. When we make an exception for ourselves, we are pretending to justify our maxim, but the making of an exception is formally incompatible with the universal character of practical justification. In other words, one cannot perform the act of justifying an exception since its form of reasoning is incompatible with the true nature of practical justification.

For our purposes, let us consider another aspect of Kant's practical philosophy. In addition to various other presuppositions built into the nature of practical reason, he maintains that we must also presuppose that the universe is just—and how he presents this presupposition is particularly germane to the category of hypotheses that include "philosophers' fictions."⁴⁰

It would be too vast of an endeavor to present here a comprehensive

account of Kant's understanding of practical reason. However, most readers of this paper will have a general understanding of his practical philosophy and at least a rough grasp of his doctrine of the Highest Good. Although the doctrine undergoes various changes through the Critical Period, it is consistently represented as (among other things) a state of affairs where there is an exact distribution of happiness in accordance with moral worth. All three *Critiques*, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, and various shorter works of the 1780s and 90s affirm this doctrine,⁴¹ though the particulars of how it is argued for do change.

In short, the argument of the *Critique of Practical Reason* is that the competing ends of happiness and morality must be reconciled. Otherwise, (a) there is a schism in practical reason for it would then have a plurality of ends in conflict with one another; (b) the moral law's claim to authority would be compromised as it would fail to regulate non-moral ends⁴²; (c) the relation of *ought implies can* would be violated because morality commands that those who are worthy of happiness receive it (5:110).⁴³

In the Preface to the first edition of *Religion*, Kant offers a somewhat different argument for the Highest Good, one that does not argue for its necessity on the basis of the unity of practical reason, as such, but instead as "one of the inescapable limitations of human beings and of their practical faculties of reason" (6:7n). The argument here is that although pure practical reason gives us our duties, it is our "all-too-human reason" that needs to connect these duties with ends.⁴⁴ We cannot bring ourselves to act, even on our duties, unless we know "how to answer the question, *What is then the result of this right conduct of ours?*" (6:5). This leads Kant to "the concept of an ultimate end of all things." . . . "a special point of reference for the unification of all ends" (6:5). The Highest Good is thus offered as the (sole satisfactory) principle that can hold our ends of morality and happiness together.⁴⁵

Thus, at least as understood by Kant, our faculty of practical reason requires, either as a pure *a priori* principle, or as "one of the inescapable limitations of human beings and of their practical faculty of reason" (6:7n), that there is an ultimate distribution of happiness in accordance with moral worth. If correct, the Highest Good is yet another presupposition of practical reason and the wagerer would commit a performative contradiction if he were to use this faculty in such a way that is not compatible with it.⁴⁶

Following this conception of practical reason, there are internal reasons for rejecting the category of hypotheses that stipulate that our afterlives are determined by way of some petty requirement, such as those found in the classic "philosophers' fictions." By making such things as wearing purple slippers the condition for our receiving a positive afterlife, they push morality and happiness apart, and forgo the justice demanded by a Kantian interpretation of practical reason. If this interpretation of practical reason is correct, we have found our way to block the category of hypotheses that most perniciously affects the Wager. Of course, there are other conceptions of agency that compete with Kant's. But his happens to offer one that can bar hypotheses incompatible with ultimate justice and if it or something like it is correct,

we can legitimately reject the classic “cooked-up” hypotheses and “philosophers’ fictions” on grounds built into the faculties used while wagering.

CONCLUSION

As MGO has been understood as a definitive knock-out blow to the Wager, so Jeff Jordan and others have likewise attempted to save the Wager through definitive knock-out rebuttals. By contrast, this paper has offered a different sort of strategy, one that progressively wears away at MGO’s categories of theological hypotheses.

Further, unlike other rebuttals to MGO that draw upon criteria independent of the Wager itself, this paper has looked to formal features and presuppositions already within the Wager in particular, or within practical reason more generally. By drawing out what is already built into wagering, we have been able to block numerous categories of hypotheses, including those employing capricious deities, deceptive deities, Universalist soteriologies, and two different renderings of the more notorious “philosophers’ fictions,” all without threatening either the status of the Wager as a decision under ignorance or its function as an apologetic directed toward atheists and agnostics.

Of course, this paper has not addressed every possible threat that MGO can offer, nor has it demonstrated that ultimately there is only one viable hypothesis with an infinite expected utility. As such, it has not offered a complete rebuttal to MGO. But that was not its aim. The purpose of this paper has rather been to harness the formal decision-theoretic features already internal to the Wager in order to show that the wagerer is not simply left in an aporetic state, unable to adjudicate between a plurality of theological hypotheses with infinite expected utility, but rather has resources at his disposal to rebut scenario after scenario employed by MGO. This is, therefore, a shift in the balance of power between the Wager and MGO. Because these resources can be extended as needed to further hypotheses that may be “cooked-up,” a new burden is placed upon MGO. It is no longer free to merely “cook-up” new hypotheses, but must further test them against the formal features and presuppositions that this paper has identified, and perhaps, further features that, in time, may be identified by others.

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NOTES

1. Denis Diderot, "Additions to Philosophical Thought" in *Pensées philosophiques: OEuvers*, ed. J. Assezat (Paris: Brière, 1875–77), para. 59; F. M. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, ed. and trans. T. Besterman (London: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 280.

2. These are terms used by Jeff Jordan. He migrates from the former to the later over time. See footnote 10.

3. Richard Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 349–351.

4. Paul Saka "Pascal's Wager and the Many-Gods Objection" *Religious Studies* 37 (2001): 321–341. Saka's example is taken from Ellen DeGeneres, *My Point . . . and I Do Have One* (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

5. Robert Anderson, "Recent Criticisms and Defenses of Pascal's Wager," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 37 (1995): 45–56.

6. Walter Kauffman, *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 171; J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 203; and Mike Martin, "Pascal's Wager as an Argument for not Believing in God," *Religious Studies* 19 (1983): 57–64.

7. William Lycan and George Schlesinger, "You Bet Your Life: Pascal's Wager Defended" in *Reason and Responsibility*, ed. Joel Feinberg (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1991), pp. 100–108. George Schlesinger, "A Central Theistic Argument" in *Gambling on God*, ed. Jeff Jordan (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994), 83–99.

8. See Schlesinger, "A Central Theistic Argument"; J. Golding, "Pascal's Wager," *The Modern Schoolman* 71 (1994): 115–143; Robert Anderson, "Recent Criticisms and Defenses of Pascal's Wager"; Virgil Nemoianu, "The Insufficiency of the Many Gods Objection to Pascal's Wager," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84.3 (2010): 513–530.

9. Nicholas Rescher, *Pascal's Wager* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1985), p. 25; Franklin, "Two Caricatures, I: Pascal's Wager," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 44 (1998): 115–119. See also Hoyler, "Scepticism, Evidentialism and the Parity Argument: A Pascalian Perspective," *Religious Studies* 25 (1989): 191–208.

10. Jordan has published approximately ten books and articles on the Wager since 1991, five of which are cited at various points in this paper.

11. These two claims are found in many of his works on the Wager. For example, "The Many-Gods Objection and Pascal's Wager," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 31 (1991), p. 314; "The Many Gods Objection" in *Gambling on God*, ed. Jeff Jordan (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994), p. 107; and Jeff Jordan, *Pascal's Wager* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), pp. 81–82.

12. Again, this is found in many of his works on the Wager. For example, "The Many-Gods Objection and Pascal's Wager," pp. 315–316; "The Many Gods Objection," p. 110; and *Pascal's Wager*, pp. 85–87. Jordan attributes to Pascal a two-step apologetic strategy. The Wager is introduced to draw one prudentially toward theism with the case for Christianity developed elsewhere (much of the *Pensées* and the *Lettres Provinciales* are devoted to it). See *Pascal's Wager*, pp. 8–9. See also C. Natoli, "The Role of the Wager in Pascal's Apologetics," *New Scholasticism* 57 (1983): 98–106; and M. Moriarty, "Grace and Religious Belief in Pascal" in *The Cambridge Companion to Pascal*, ed. Nicholas Hammond (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 144–161.

13. Lycan and Schlesinger have looked to more ecumenical doctrines, but others hold that the Wager requires more specific doctrinal supports. See Nemoianu, "The Insufficiency of the Many Gods Objection to Pascal's Wager," p. 517.

14. Ian Hacking, "The Logic of Pascal's Wager," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 9 (1972): 186–192. The Wager can be found in *Pensée* S680/L418 (Sellier/Lafuma numbering).

15. Pascal writes, as part of his transition to the Wager, that God "is infinitely incomprehensible, since, having neither parts nor limits, he bears no relation to us. We are therefore incapable of knowing either what he is or if he is . . . either God is, or he is not. But to which side shall we incline? Reason can determine nothing here" (S680/L418— from Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2005). A "Decision Under Ignorance" is one where there may be a known preference ordering among out-

come states but the probability of one or more of these states is unknown. Such decisions can be analyzed in various ways: maximin, maximax, minimax regret, etc. Any of these rules could be employed to endorse theism in standard formulations of the Wager. However, the analysis typically given follows the convention of summing the expected utilities for each outcome of a choice and picking the choice with the highest sum. Rescher, for one, emphasizes that the Wager is "merely an instance of the standard process of probabilistic decision on the basis of expected-value calculations." Rescher, *Pascal's Wager*, p. 14.

16. What is being chosen may be a belief, the intention to cultivate a belief, to enact various rituals, to adhere to moral rules, etc. The scope of what may be chosen is meant to accommodate not merely MGO, but a variant of it known as the "Many Practices Objection." See Anthony Duff, "Pascal's Wager and Infinite Utilities," *Analysis* 46 (1986): 107–109. Further, Pascal recognizes that we cannot merely choose to believe. We can, however, choose to take actions which may engender a belief and take actions that could make one a recipient of Grace (see *Pensée* S680/L418, S41/L7, S767/L944). See also Moriarty "Grace and Religious Belief in Pascal" in *The Cambridge Companion to Pascal*, pp. 152–157.

17. One assumption that I will not discuss in detail is whether the finite values of life are equal for the theist and the atheist. Let us grant that so many factors play a role in the value of an individual's life that their multitude swamps the impact of (most) theistic and atheistic commitments. Put technically, religious commitment has a low correlation coefficient to the values in one's life, i.e., it has a P-value approaching 1.

18. Through this paper, I will use this theological hypothesis as our paradigm, capable of standing in for most other "cooked-up" hypotheses and "philosophers' fictions." It was cooked-up during a conversation between me and Paul Saka, one of the more prolific proponents of MGO.

19. Explicit appeal to subjective probabilities for the Wager can first be found in James Cargill's "Pascal's Wager," *Philosophy* 41 (1966): 250–257. Rescher also explicitly follows this approach.

20. Jordan, *Pascal's Wager*, p. 79.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

22. We should not forget that numerical assignments of objective probabilities to all but the most mechanical systems is highly speculative; and numerical assignment of subjective probabilities are wild contrivances. Neither can I plausibly calculate the objective probability of there being exactly one god nor can I justifiably assign a specific numerical value to my personal degree of confidence in this or other claims. I may be able to say "close to zero," "close to one," "closer to zero than one," but much more precision than that is just pretense.

23. Jordan, *Pascal's Wager*, p. 80.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

25. Jordan seems to consider the two as equivalent. See, for example, *Pascal's Wager*, p. 81.

26. We might wonder how comfortable Newton would have been with this implication since he (despite popular belief) rejected the standard clockwork universe of Deism. Space, according to Newton, is an emanation of God and a *Divine Sensorium* (See General Scholium, *Principia Mathematica*; *Opticks* Q.23); God is needed to periodically make adjustments to the cosmos (*Opticks* Q.31); and, perhaps, gravity is a manifestation of God's constant, direct, and ubiquitous influence on matter. A few have attempted to insulate the First Mover argument from the law of inertia. One can be found in William Wallace, "Newtonian Antinomies against the 'Prima Via,'" *The Thomist*, 19 (1956): 151–192. For a more recent discussion, see Simon Oliver, "Motion According to Aquinas and Newton," *Modern Theology* 17.2 (2001): 163–199. I do not want to enter more fully into the details of this debate as I have no intention (or need) to take a stand on it. These are just a few illustrations to reflect the general point that far too much has been discredited to grant epistemic merit to the mere fact of *traditionality* as such. I presume few would doubt this claim, but for those who do, I presume they still can grant that nonbelievers would see the authority of tradition in this way.

27. From a 1693 correspondences with Richard Bentley: "It is inconceivable that

inanimate brute matter should, without the mediation of something else which is not material, operate upon and affect other matter without mutual contact. . . . Gravity must be caused by an agent acting constantly according to certain laws; but whether this agent be material or immaterial I have left to the consideration of my reader." Correspondence with Richard Bentley in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Andrew Janiak (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 102. Though Newton clearly rejected the possibility of action at a distance, there is a scholarly dispute as to whether he genuinely supported the claim that God is the best explanation for gravity. Nevertheless, some of his close colleagues (e.g., Nicholas Fatio de Duillier and perhaps Clarke) did endorse this view.

28. God may or may not be the designer, hiding behind the appearance of self-ordering matter. But scientific discoveries have supplanted most traditional appeals to supernatural explanations for observable phenomena. This paragraph illustrates how scientific discoveries sometimes overcome supernatural explanations, how they sometimes introduce new explanatory problems for which some may look to the divine, and how sometimes that new problem may later find a well justified natural explanation.

29. Before moving on, let me address one further problem with Jordan's appeal to tradition. Presumably without intending it, his argument would oppose the legitimacy of Pascalian belief for first generation Zoroastrians, Christians, Muslims, etc. When a new religion arises, there's at yet no tradition, no "vetting by multiple generations of inquirers." They are "cooked-up" and therefore, by his standards, ought to be rejected as "maximally implausible." Thus, those who *do* accept the religion, are kicking off a tradition in violation of an important epistemic principle according to Jordan. Woe to those later generations who are then supposed to accept what becomes the "authority" of tradition. Saka as well makes this point in "Pascal's Wager and the Many Gods Objection."

30. Developing this further objection to Jordan would draw us away from the main discussion in this section, but it does deserve some attention. Jordan hopes to find some ecumenical hypothesis that can stand in for all theological hypotheses that have undergone due vetting. But this does not seem possible. Not only are there numerous non-ecumenical hypotheses that have traditions backing them, but also the very inclusivist hypothesis of Universalism has extensive backing. The appeal to tradition, thus, cannot on its own secure a hypothesis with dominating expectation.

31. Following our previous discussion of exclusivity, let us assume that the deity in TH_1 will not reward those who chose TH_3 .

32. See Karl-Otto Apel, "The Problem of Philosophical Foundations in Light of a Transcendental Pragmatics of Language," in *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* ed. K. Baynes, J. Bohman, and T. McCarthy (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), pp. 250–290.

33. Jaakko Hintikka, "Cogito Ergo Sum: Inference or Performance?" *Philosophical Review* 71.1 (1962): 3–32.

34. Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 116–119.

35. Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 1–21.

36. There are various cognitive activities involved in wagering: employing concepts of life and death, performing arithmetic using transfinite numbers, adjudicating values relative to self-interest, etc. A wagerer who accepts TH_3 , is accepting that his ability to assess value is unreliable and thus may be ill equipped to perform at least some of what is involved in wagering. He may think that infinite joy is to be valued, but just as he was terribly wrong about the value of purple slippers, he may also be wrong about what is being offered by the deity of TH_3 .

This concern about judging value engendered by choosing TH_3 may also expand outward to one's cognitive capacities in general for it seems hard to resist a more global doubt if one can be *that* wrong about something so seemingly obvious as the value of purple slippers. Unless we can clearly sequester the cognitive functions involved in judging the worth of wearing purple slippers, drinking Chardonnay, etc., it seems reasonable for any wagerer contemplating whether or not to affirm TH_3 that he sees such an affirmation as carrying with it a more radical and widespread challenge to his cognitive faculties. This is presumably something he would choose to avoid, for if he were to select TH_3 he would commit a very similar performative contradiction as we saw in the previous sub-

section: for a wagerer to choose TH₁ is to forgo his trust in one or more cognitive activities he employed to arrive at that choice.

37. A point of clarification must here be made regarding the difference between the philosophers' fictions and the more traditional notion that there are some commands given by God whose actions are in themselves of little to no intrinsic value, but that they are commanded by God is what gives them value. Their value is still extrinsic, but their ground of the value is not simply the theists' interest in winning favor with the deity. Rather, their value may be understood as coming from their being commanded by a deity who is genuinely worthy of being worshiped and obeyed. Put differently, it may be a profoundly good thing to be in a right relationship with God as he is traditionally understood and achieving this relationship through following his commands may be taken as a just basis for determining our afterlife fates. This point is implied by the next sentence, which mentions the observance of Sharia (alternately, the observance of Kashrut, Catholic rites, etc.). By contrast, because of the qualities we associate with the deities populating the philosophers' fictions, the character of our relationship with them as well as the observance of what they command have, as intended by the authors of these fictions, little to no intrinsic value.

38. See Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, pp. 1–21.

39. The Wager can be understood as consistent with determinism, as noted by Mougouin and Sober ("Betting against Pascal's Wager," *Noûs* 28.3 (1994): 382–395). It can be understood descriptively, expressing the causal relations that obtain between what hypotheses are held and one's afterlife fate. My point here is that if a wagerer affirms a theological hypothesis that includes determinism, he is affirming a hypothesis that is not compatible with the sort of agency that wagering assumes. This assumption can be understood psychologically, as merely how one who engages in the wager would understand what he is doing; or, it can be understood normatively, as an epistemic obligation having to do with consistency. Thanks to Jeff Jordan for pressing me on this issue.

40. Before we move forward, one important point must be addressed. This turn to Kant is not an appeal to tradition in the manner used by Jordan. The analysis here is not based upon there being some traditional view that runs counter to the classic MGO hypotheses. This is not an appeal to a "great mind" of the tradition, or a positive *ad hominem*. Rather, we are looking at the nature of choosing and following an account of it. If choosing is not constrained by the *a priori* principles to which we shall turn, then we will have failed to block this category of hypotheses. But if Kant is correct about what practical reason is like, then our turn to its structure does offer us important resources—resources that, if correct, are immanent in the practical faculty itself and thus underlie what choice is made by a wagerer. Further, this appeal to Kant's conception of practical reason is not meant to be a claim about Pascal's actual views about practical reason or what Pascal might or might not have actually thought about what may underlie the Wager. There is no claim here about the history of ideas. The issues here do not have to do with who claimed what. Rather, they have to do with *what practical reason may actually be like* and its philosophical (vs. historical) implications for dealing with MGO hypotheses.

41. See A809/B837, A812/B840, 5:110, 5:119, 5:129, 5:130, 5:144, 5:450, 5:451, 5:453, 6:5, 6:69, 6:99, 8:328–330, 20:298, etc. Citations to Kant are to the Akademie Ausgabe by volume and page, except for the *Critique of Pure Reason* where citations will use the standard A/B edition pagination. Unless otherwise indicated, English quotations (when available) will be from the Cambridge Edition of the *Works of Immanuel Kant*, general editors Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

42. For practical reason to retain its normative structure, it must be able to offer a complete system of ends, which means that there are *a priori* grounds through which each end can be set in relation to each other end. If the system is not complete, then there are ends that stand outside of the *a priori* normative structure of practical reason, and if that is the case, then the authority of practical reason is undermined.

43. One point of significant controversy is the relationship between the Highest Good and the postulates of God and immortality. Some recent interpreters have encouraged readings of Kant that separate the Highest Good from the postulates. See Andrews Reath, "Two Conceptions of the Highest Good in Kant," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*

26 (1988): 593–619; Paul Guyer, *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 289. Secularized or this-worldly interpretations are also supported in forthcoming works by Lara Denis and Kate Moran.

Although Kant's particular views and how they might have changed through the 1780s and 1790s are only marginally relevant to this paper, whether the Highest Good does actually entail theism is a serious issue. If it does, then an appeal to the Highest Good may make the Wager moot since practical reason would not only be committed to a just universe but also to God as the agent of that justice.

Fortunately, neither does the Highest Good entail theism, nor does Kant claim that it does. For the reasons briefly discussed in this paper, Kant holds that we are practically committed to the universe being just, but he does not argue that there is a necessary connection between this justice and theism. When Kant turns to God and immortality, his reasoning is that *somehow* this justice must be possible and as it does not appear to happen by our own powers or according to the laws of nature, it must come about in some other way (see: A811/B839, 5:119, 5:450–452). His *postulation* of God and immortality are thus the *conjectures* offered as to how it occurs. We are justified in assenting to these conjectures (in the mode of belief/faith [*Glaube*]), not by virtue of a theoretical demonstration, nor directly needed by practical reason. Rather, we turn to these conjectures because they offer some cognitive purchase to how the Highest Good may be realized (see: 6:109)—a question that our speculative appetite wants answered and also as an aid to our moral fortitude (see: 5:452). For a more thorough examination of the doxic relationship between the Highest Good and the postulates, see my discussion of the topic in “The Development and Scope of Kantian Belief: The Highest Good, the Practical Postulates, and the Fact of Reason,” *Kant-Studien* 102.3 (2011): 290–315.

44. “In the absence of all reference to an end no determination of the will can take place in human beings at all” (6:4). See also Lewis White Beck's *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 254.

45. There is nothing within happiness that dictates that there must be this reconciliation, or how it is to be realized. But Kant argues that “a human being who honors the moral law” would set out morality as a necessary and sufficient condition for happiness (6:5–6). In effect, a moral evaluation of how to reconcile happiness and morality would make the latter a condition of the former.

46. One objection that may be raised here is that Kant's account of divine justice stands in tension with Christianity's appeal to forgiveness through Christ. John Hare, Philip Quinn, and Nicholas Wolterstorff in particular have pressed this issue. They are correct that Kant explicitly rejects the doctrine of vicarious atonement, and more generally, that there can be forgiveness for sin. But Kant does have an alternative view regarding the fate of the debt of sin that these critics have overlooked. See 6:72–6:76; 6:146n, as well as my “Kant on the Debt of Sin,” *Faith and Philosophy* 29.1 (2012): 30–52.

A related objection is that Kant's doctrine of the Highest Good, so deeply tied to distributive justice, leaves no room for divine forgiveness. But there are various ways to get past this problem. One is to treat the acceptance of Christ's sacrifice as transformative in such a way that it brings not simply forgiveness (in the sense of overlooking guilt), but either a transformation that liberates one from his debt of sin or similarly, a merit in the act of acceptance that makes one worthy of entering Heaven. These issues are more fully explored in my “Kant on the Debt of Sin.” Alternately, one might want to soften the strict views built into Kant's conception of justice and offer instead some other *a priori* commitment of practical reason that can block the gross injustices or absurdities of the philosophers' fictions. Thanks to both Wes Morriston and Jeff Jordan for pressing me on this point.