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After Pascal's Wager: On Religious Belief, Regulated and Rationally Held.

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Introduction

Perhaps the most discussed passage in the *Pensées* is Pascal's wager (1995/1670, 131. §418).[1] As will be familiar to most readers, the wager goes something like this:

1. Either God exists or he doesn't, and you can wager either way. The utilities of the outcomes are as follows, where f_1, f_2, and f_3 are all finite values:

	God exists	**God doesn't exist**
Wager that God exists	∞	f_1
Wager that God doesn't exist	f_2	f_3

2. Rationality requires you to assign a probability to God's existence which is positive and non-infinitesimal.
3. Rationality requires you to perform the act of maximum expected utility (when there is one).
4. So, rationality requires you to wager that God exists.
5. So, you should wager that God exists.[2]

In this paper, we don't intend to provide another analysis and evaluation of Pascal's wager; rather, we want to consider what happens after it.[3]

To wager that God exists, for Pascal, is to believe that God exists.[4] However, Pascal is no voluntarist about belief (see §149, also §418). We cannot simply decide to believe something, no

[1] All references to Pascal's *Pensées* are numbered according to Lafuma's 1963 arrangement.

[2] Slightly adapted from Hájek (2003, 27-8).

[3] Pascal's wager has faced serious objections which we will not discuss in this paper. See, for instance, Hájek 2000, 2003, 2015; Martin 1983; and many more. Jackson and Rogers respond persuasively to many of these objections (2019).

[4] At least, belief is a part of what it is to wager that God exists, we suppose. Pascal himself uses the French verb 'croire', that is, 'to believe'.

matter how much we would like to, or think we should, believe it. How then could a person come to believe that God exists? You might think that they could search out evidence for God's existence, that is, the sort of publicly available evidence we find in the teleological, cosmological, and other such arguments for God's existence. But as Garber explains (2010, 151), Pascal thinks that such arguments lead us nowhere and that experience cannot guide us either, since, he thinks, there's 'darkness everywhere' (Pascal 1995/1670, 141. §429). The problem, according to Pascal, is our passions, and he counsels us to undergo a 'regimen', that is, a process of habituation, to cure us of this intellectual malady.[5] He writes, first in the voice of his interlocutor:

> 'I confess, I admit it, but is there really no way of seeing what the cards are?' - 'Yes. Scripture and the rest, etc.' - 'Yes, but my hands are tied and my lips are sealed; I am being forced to wager and I am not free; I am being held fast and I am so made that I cannot believe. What do you want me to do then?' - 'That is true, but at least get it into your head that, if you are unable to believe, it is because of your passions, since reason impels you to believe and you cannot do so. Concentrate then not on convincing yourself by multiplying proofs of God's existence but by diminishing your passions. You want to find faith and you do not know the road. You want to be cured of unbelief and you ask for the remedy: learn from those who were once bound like you and who now wager all they have. These are people who know the road you wish to follow, who have been cured of the affliction of which you wish to be cured: follow the way by which they began. They behaved just as if they did believe, taking holy water, having masses said, and so on. That will make you believe quite naturally, and will make you more docile.' (Pascal 1995/1670, 131. §418)

Pascal recommends that the seeking non-believer induce religious belief in herself by joining a religious community and taking part in their ritual activities. Therefore, it's plausible that Pascal thought that it was possible to regulate your religious beliefs and induce religious belief in yourself. And the result of such a process, he seems to think, could be rational, particularly in the case of belief in God:

> 'I do not demand of you blind faith.'
>
> 'I do not mean you to believe me submissively and without reason; I do not claim to subdue you by tyranny. Nor do I claim to account to you for everything. To reconcile these contradictions I mean to show you clearly, by convincing proofs, marks of divinity within me which will convince you of what I am, and establish my authority by miracles and proofs that you cannot reject, so that you will then believe the things I teach, finding no reason to reject them but your own inability to tell whether they are true or not.' (Pascal 1995/1670, 51-52. §149)

[5] 'Regimen' is Garber's term (2009).

That being said, as Garber notes, Pascal's writings are open to interpretation here (2010, 152-155). At times it seems as if Pascal thinks that the evidence is available for those who seek it, but elsewhere he seems to suggest that divine grace alone can guide the seeking non-believer to belief. While there are difficult points of interpretation here, let's assume for this paper that Pascal thinks that religious belief regulation is possible and that the resulting beliefs could be epistemically rational.

Let's consider an example. Meet Sally: Sally doesn't believe that God exists, but she also doesn't believe that God's existence is inconsistent with her evidence. Rather, she thinks that the evidence for God's existence is inconclusive, in the sense that it renders neither God's existence nor non-existence significantly more probable than not. She also finds the evidence to be inconclusive in the sense that it is open to two viable, competing interpretations, one on which God exists and the other on which he doesn't. Now, having read Pascal's *Pensées*, she comes to believe that she should believe that God exists, even though she does not have decisive evidence for this belief. Making use of the acceptance/belief distinction, a distinction first proposed by van Fraassen (1980, 1984) and refined by Maher (1990), we could say that she accepts that God exists, but doesn't believe it, at least, not to begin with. For Maher, to accept a theory is to make a 'sincere intentional assertion' of its truth (1990, 387). To make a sincere intentional assertion of a theory's truth is to propose deliberately that the theory is true—perhaps prescribing behaviour as if it were true—and to do so with no intention to deceive, mislead, or obfuscate. On Maher's view, this is possible even if the subject's subjective confidence in the theory's truth or even in its empirical adequacy is low (1990, 389). One situation in which it might be rational to accept a hypothesis when your confidence in its truth is low is when 'the utility of accepting it when true … is high enough, and the disutility of accepting it when false … is small enough' (1990, 389). Thus, Sally follows Pascal's advice, joining a community which holds that belief and acts in accordance with it. After spending some time as a member of this community, in particular, acting as they act, that is, as if God exists, she comes to adopt the community's mind set, that is, their way of reasoning, gathering and weighing evidence, and making judgements. To borrow Garber's words: 'Mind sets are the glasses through which people look at the world: they make certain facts and reasons more salient than others, and enable us to see some things and ignore others' (2010, 157). In other words, she comes to adopt their standards of rationality, where (i) belief that God exists is consistent with those standards and (ii) finding the arguments for God's existence compelling and objections to his existence not compelling are also consistent with those standards.[6] In such a context, the belief that God exists arises naturally, since it is now rational relative to her current standards of rationality.[7]

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[6] Adapted from Schoenfield 2014.

[7] This example is inspired by Cook's example of an aspiring scientist who undertakes to replace his creationist worldview with one based on evolutionary biology (1987).

At the beginning of this story, Sally is agnostic with respect to her target belief that God exists. At some point, she becomes aware of the fact that quite apart from whatever epistemic reasons she may possess, she has non-epistemic, pragmatic reasons to induce in herself her target beliefs. Pragmatic reasons to believe some proposition are reasons that favour forming and holding that belief because doing so is pragmatically advantageous, regardless of whether it is true.[8] So, in our case, once Sally learns that believing that God exists has the maximum expected utility for her, she takes the belief-inducing regimen and emerges with her target belief and the standards of rationality and evidence to support it.

Some problems arise when we consider that Pascal's regimen is both non-cognitive and contingent (Garber 2009): a person comes to believe, say, that God exists not from studying the evidence concerning his existence but rather from engaging in rituals that presuppose his existence, and she could quite easily have undergone a regimen to come to have quite different religious beliefs. The non-cognitivity and contingency of the regimen seem to make the beliefs that result from it epistemically irrational. In essence, the worry here is that it's impossible for a belief to be both regulated and rationally held.

This is an interesting and important problem, not only because it's key to understanding and evaluating a central element of Pascal's thought, but also because it intersects with how many, if not most, come to have a religious faith. They do so not by considering the evidence for and against, say, God's existence, but, rather, because they were socialized to believe in God, and, had they been born in different circumstances, would likely have had quite different religious beliefs. Yet, many of those who come to believe in God take their faith to be reasonable, rational, responsible, and other related epistemic honorifics. How could this be? To address this problem, we'll begin by giving a model of regulated belief in order that we might assess whether it could be rational.

Towards a model of belief regulation

In this section, we propose a model of belief regulation, inspired by Debus's work on mental regulation (2016). To begin, at least some of our beliefs are open to 'indirect voluntary control' (Alston, 1988). Of particular relevance to Pascal's Regimen is the possibility of what Alston defines as 'long range voluntary control':

> It is the capacity to bring about a state of affairs, C, by doing something (usually a number of different things) repeatedly over a considerable period of time, interrupted by activity directed to other goals. (1988, 275)

Just how does a person exercise such long-range voluntary control over their beliefs? To answer this question, we will develop a Regulation Condition based on Debus's Understanding

[8] See Reisner 2018 for an overview of the debate around pragmatic reasons for belief.

Condition for the regulation of our mental lives (2016, 358-360) and then show that it is possibly satisfied by a subject's deliberate manipulation of the determining factors of belief. Debus proposes the following Understanding Condition for mental regulation:

> In order for a subject to regulate a certain aspect of her own mental life, it is necessary that the subject understand what some of the many different factors which jointly determine the unfolding of the relevant aspect of her own mental life are, how these factors contribute to the unfolding of the relevant aspect of her own mental life, and how she herself might interact with those factors in such a way as to make an intervention in the relevant aspect of her own mental life successful in reaching her regulatory goal. (2016, 358-360)

This results from the combination of four criteria which Debus calls 'guidance', 'intervention', 'manipulation', and 'understanding' (2016, 364). With relevant adaptations, the same conditions can be made for belief regulation. If belief regulation is possible:

1. The subject must be able to *guide* her beliefs in a goal-directed way.

The seeking non-believer desires to gain the belief that God exists by taking Pascal's Regimen. This is the goal to which the regimen is directed. If religious belief regulation *via* Pascal's regimen is possible, then the seeking non-believer must be able to guide her religious beliefs towards her target belief.

2. The subject must be able to *intervene* in the processes of belief formation.

It follows, as in mental-state regulation more generally, that if someone does not believe that *p* but nevertheless desires to believe that *p*, she must be able to intervene in her belief-formation processes in some way. If she were unable to do so, then belief regulation would be impossible.

3. The subject must be able to *manipulate* the determining factors of her beliefs.

This is a practical requirement. If there are certain factors which determine what we believe, then, to guide our belief formation processes, we must be able to manipulate specifically those factors. Intervention is insufficient—to render yourself unconscious with sedatives would intervene on the relevant processes but it would not manipulate them towards a probable and desired goal.

4. The subject must *understand* what the determining factors are and how they operate in determining her beliefs.

Only a practical understanding of our epistemic mind set is required for the manipulation of the determining factors of belief. The subject is not required to have a theoretical understanding of her belief forming processes to have a practical understanding of how these processes can be manipulated in a goal-directed way. This is analogous with the fact that one needn't have a theoretical understanding of computer programming to understand how to make words on a computer screen.

If belief regulation is possible, then a subject must be able to have a practical understanding of what factors determine her beliefs and regulate some of those factors, and to do so in such a way that predictably yields a desired belief in a way informed by the subject's practical understanding. Before we proceed, we must explain what is meant by the term 'determining factor'. The determining factors on our beliefs can be divided along epistemic/non-epistemic lines. The epistemic factors which determine our beliefs are, among other things, our standards of rationality and our total evidence. The non-epistemic factors which determine our beliefs are, for instance, the historical facts about our upbringing, our prejudices, and our preferences. Pascal's regimen will be sufficient for belief regulation if it allows the subject to manipulate any of the determining factors of our beliefs in such a way that leads the subject to acquire their target belief. So, to continue this discussion in the terms of the regulation of religious belief, we will explain how we are able to manipulate these factors.

Evidence is one of the determining factors of beliefs. A subject's total evidence with respect to a given proposition will consist of all of her evidence and argument which relates to the truth or plausibility of that proposition and all her evidence about her own epistemic position, such as what she believes about the quality of her evidence and her capacity to respond rationally to it. We might think of this as higher-order evidence. Feldman (2009, 304) describes higher-order evidence as '[e]vidence about the existence, merits, or significance of a body of evidence.' This can be broadened to include beliefs about non-rational influences on belief-formation processes. A subject's higher-order evidence includes evidence which pertains to her ability to collect evidence, process that evidence, and so on.

Consider the following plausible claims about our ordinary, epistemic lives. First, the body of available evidence with respect to many of the hypotheses we consider and beliefs we hold is mixed, which is to say that it includes some pieces of evidence that support belief in that hypothesis, and others which instead support disbelief in that hypothesis. Second, we seldom come to possess all of the relevant evidence with respect to a given proposition. In our ordinary epistemic lives, we often operate under the condition that the emergence of some new piece of evidence could change our minds. Third, what evidence we epistemically rational thinkers possess makes a difference to what doxastic attitude we will take towards a given hypothesis, at least if we're compelled to make up our minds about it.

Epistemic standards are also determining factors of beliefs. If a subject has high epistemic standards with respect to a given hypothesis, then she will withhold belief that *p* until

her evidence strongly supports believing that *p*. Conversely, if a subject has low epistemic standards with respect to a given hypothesis, then she will believe it on the basis of relatively weak evidence. The epistemic rationality of applying different epistemic standards often features in discussions of pragmatic encroachment. It's sometimes argued that people apply different epistemic standards when they update their beliefs depending on what's at stake.[9] This is usually framed in terms of accommodating the costs of different types of error:[10] for example, if believing that *p* when *p* is false would be extremely costly for a subject, then the subject might apply high epistemic standards when deciding whether *p*. When presented with weak evidence in support of *p*, a subject with high epistemic standards will withhold judgement. Thus, her epistemic standards can be said to be determining factors of her belief. Likewise, if suspending judgment about *q* when *q* is in fact true would incur the higher cost to the subject, then they might apply low epistemic standards when deciding whether *q*. When presented with weak evidence in support of *q*, a subject with low epistemic standards will nevertheless form the belief that *p*. Thus, epistemic standards can be determining factors of belief.

In summary, our total evidence and our epistemic standards are among the determining factors of our beliefs, at least for epistemically rational agents whose doxastic attitudes are responsive to those factors. Given this insight, we must now consider how Pascal's regimen allows us to manipulate our total evidence and our epistemic standards in a goal-directed way, that is, in a way that induces belief in the target proposition. Pascal suggested that, in order to bring ourselves to believe that God exists, we should follow in the path of those who already believe. This may be read as a suggestion to join an epistemic community which holds the belief which the subject desires. The most suitable communities will believe that God exists on the basis of their evidence and their epistemic standards.

What happens when the seeker joins the religious community?

For Pascal, the reason why the seeker can't bring herself to believe that God exists is a matter of her passions. He advises the seeker against 'multiplying proofs of God's existence' (Pascal 1995/1670, 131. §418). For Pascal, at least, the problem facing the seeking non-believer isn't that she lacks the correct evidence, or that the evidence she does possess is misleading. Rather, for Pascal, the problem facing the seeking non-believer is somehow located in her passional response to the evidence in her possession.

To explore this further, we should look to the determining factors of belief. What might the relation between her passions and the determining factors of her belief be? If the seeker's

[9] Of course, it's not necessary for us to endorse pragmatic encroachment views of epistemic justification. We mention the topic now for illustrative purposes only. The crucial point is that a subject's epistemic standards are among the determining factors of her beliefs.

[10] Schroeder (2012) draws a clear distinction between these two types of error.

evidence isn't the cause of the problem, then perhaps it's her epistemic standards that are preventing her from forming the belief that God exists. The thought, then, is that by joining the religious community, the seeker is able to manipulate her epistemic standards in a way that yields the target belief, namely, the belief that God exists.

For this model of religious belief regulation to be at all plausible, the following claims must be correct:

A. The religious community that the seeker joins has different epistemic standards from her prior epistemic standards.
B. Adopting the religious community's epistemic standards and rationally updating her religious beliefs is sufficient to yield the target belief in the seeker. In other words, no change in evidence is necessary.

If these claims are true, then we're one step closer to seeing how the regulation condition can be satisfied in Pascal's regimen. In fact, there are good reasons to think that both of these premises are true. In this section, we'll offer some modest support for each of them. We'll try to consider both secular and religious cases too, by way of anticipating the complaint of *ad hoc* theory selection.

First, it is plausible that the religious community has different epistemic standards from the seeker's prior epistemic standards. Although it's hard to support this point empirically, we will nevertheless attempt to provide some reasons to think that this is the case. One reason to think that this is the case is to refer to the differential subjective stakes for community members and outsiders. While it's not likely that we can voluntarily form belief, it seems to be among our psychological capabilities to withhold belief, especially in response to heightened subjective assessment of error (Schroeder 2012, 277). In particular, when believing a falsehood is more costly than not believing a truth, we may withhold belief altogether. Ross and Schroeder (2014) provide an interesting example of this, which I have adapted here. Imagine how someone with an allergy to peanuts might respond to evidence that only weakly supports (probabilistically speaking) the hypothesis that the cookies at their local café contained no trace of peanuts. They would probably withhold judgement on the matter and order something else. We can imagine how they would require much more evidential support for that hypothesis than would a non-peanut allergic customer. One way to understand this is that people with peanut allergies have higher epistemic standards when it comes to questions of the peanut-content in food. For this to make sense, though, more must be said about the differential subjective stakes within and without a given religious community.

Let's speculate a little about Sally's circumstances. We can imagine that before taking Pascal's regimen, the thought of being duped about God's existence was mortifying to Sally. Perhaps religion just wasn't part of her life. How will her friends and family react? Now, it's not as if they would reject her for joining a religious community, but she's nevertheless worried that

moving into the new community and adopting its beliefs and practices could cause her to grow distant from her old friends and her family. What's more, joining a religious community and becoming a committed believer might require her to make some lifestyle changes. Some of these lifestyle changes might seem pretty costly from her pre-regimen perspective. Not to mention the fact that coming to believe in the existence of God might have a knock-on effect on her other beliefs. She might, for example, come to believe that mind-body dualism is true and people have souls. This in turn might have major implications for some of her moral beliefs, for instance about abortion and euthanasia.[11] And if God doesn't even exist, what a terrible mistake it would be to make all these changes she thinks.

Things are different once Sally joins the religious community. Her new friends, all members of the religious community, won't think any less of her for wholeheartedly taking part in religious rituals. Since many of them were raised in a religious community with the metaphysical, epistemic, and moral commitments that such an upbringing can instil, incorrectly believing that God exists does not present a very high subjective risk for them. We might recall William James's words here. In his response to Clifford, he writes: 'For my own part, I have also a horror at being duped; but I can believe that worse things than being duped may happen to a man in this world' (1992/1897, 469).

Second, it's plausible that adopting the epistemic standards of the religious community and rationally updating her religious beliefs is sufficient to yield the target belief in the seeker. This premise is much easier to defend. The thought is simply that a change in your epistemic standards can bring about a change in your belief, without any relevant change in your total evidence. Let's consider a version of Ross and Shroeder's allergy case. Two colleagues, Ainsley and Hector, go to a local café. They share the relevant evidence about whether the cookies on the counter contain a trace of peanuts, but Ainsley mistakenly believes that Hector has a peanut allergy. In response to this perceived risk, Ainsley applies very high epistemic standards when considering whether the cookies contain a trace of peanuts. The outcome is that, even though they share their evidence, only Hector forms the belief that the cookies contain no trace of peanuts. Ainsley withholds his judgement. This is a dynamic situation. When Hector orders a cookie, Ainsley urges him to be cautious. But when Hector explains to Ainsley that he isn't allergic to peanuts, Ainsley's subjective assessment of the costs of error changes. It no longer matters if he incorrectly believes that the cookies are peanut-free. As a result, he slackens his epistemic standards and comes to believe that the cookies contain no trace of peanuts.

We can imagine a similar situation in the process of belief regulation *via* Pascal's regimen. Supposing that the religious community maintains lower epistemic standards with respect to the question of whether God exists, and assuming that the body of evidence for God's existence weakly supports the hypothesis that God, indeed, exists, it's plausible that a difference

[11] That being said, we take it that religious belief is compatible with a liberal stance towards each of these important moral issues.

in epistemic standards could be all that keeps the seeking non-believer from believing. This particular example assumes that the total evidence possessed by the seeker and the members of the religious community weakly supports the existence of God. It does not follow that for this mechanism to work, the publicly available evidence for God's existence must weakly support belief in the existence of God. We need only concern ourselves with the evidence actually in the possession of our subjects.

Not only does the religious community that the seeker joins have different epistemic standards from her prior epistemic standards, but also, adopting the religious community's epistemic standards and rationally updating her religious beliefs is sufficient to yield the target belief in the seeker.

Are regulated religious beliefs ever epistemically rational?

Pascal's regimen provides a means for the seeker to regulate her religious beliefs. By joining a religious community, she is able to cultivate religious belief in herself even though she was not able to before. We might wonder, though, about the epistemic status of the seeker's new, regulated, religious beliefs. In this section, we argue that, for all we know, regulated religious beliefs can be epistemically rational. That is, though we acknowledge the possibility that regulated religious beliefs are sometimes epistemically irrational, we reject the stronger claim that they are always epistemically irrational.

We'll focus on two objections to the claim that belief regulation *via* Pascal's regimen can result in epistemically rational, religious belief: the problem of non-cognitive belief formation and the problem of contingency. Now, it's not our intention to advocate belief regulation *tout court*. That is, we are not committed to the claim that belief regulation is possible for all people or for all putative beliefs. For instance, it may seem unlikely that one could deliberately acquire the beliefs that 2 + 2 = 5 or that the appearance of an external world is an illusion, simply by joining a community where these beliefs are widely held.[12] Nor is it our intention to argue that belief regulation is always rational, all things considered. With that being said, what we hope to show is that in some cases, belief regulation is possible and that in some of those cases, regulated beliefs may be rationally held.

[12] It is worth noting that such communities do in fact exist. A notable example is found in the adherents of Shankara's Advaita Vedanta, who believe on the basis of sophisticated arguments that the appearance of the external world is an illusion. We are indebted to an anonymous reviewer for this point.

The problem of non-cognitive belief formation[13]

At the core of the problem of non-cognitive belief is the following question: Is it epistemically rational to believe that *p* if you believe that *p* as a result of non-cognitive processes? Garber's first major objection to the claim that Pascal's regimen could lead to epistemically rational, religious belief is that the change in belief does not occur for epistemic reasons. Rather, he says, it is the result of non-epistemic, or to borrow Garber's term, non-cognitive, factors. He writes:

> [O]ne obvious issue is the fact that the Pascal Regimen seems to be *non-cognitive* in a clear way. That is to say, the change in belief is caused not by some process of education, study, training of the senses, etc., but because I entered into certain practices such as going to mass and taking holy water. (2009, 27)

When Garber writes that Pascal's regimen is a non-cognitive belief forming process, what he means is that, while the regimen may successfully induce belief in the seeker, this change would not have been brought about in response to any relevant changes in the seeker's epistemic states. This, so the thought goes, should be a source of anxiety, at least to the extent that the seeker cares about the epistemic rationality of her regulated religious beliefs.

Why might we worry about the epistemic implications of the non-cognitivity of Pascal's regimen, if indeed it is a non-cognitive belief-forming process? If Garber's account of Pascal's regimen is correct, then taking Pascal's regimen is rather like taking a special, belief-inducing pill. This pill causes you to believe that *p* even if the evidence in your possession doesn't support belief that *p*. If your evidence doesn't support believing that *p* but you come to believe that *p* because a special pill has caused certain chemical changes in your brain, then, so the thought goes, your belief that *p* will be epistemically irrational. We can see why for straightforward, evidentialist reasons: if a subject is epistemically justified in withholding judgement about whether *p* given all the evidence in her possession at a given time, then taking a pill that induces the belief that *p* will lead her to form a belief that is not supported by her evidence.

We can apply this to the case of the seeker who takes Pascal's regimen. Let's suppose that the seeker was epistemically justified in withholding judgement about whether God exists before she took the pill. Now, assuming that there's only one epistemically rational interpretation of her evidence, her newly induced belief that God exists will be epistemically

[13] Garber first considers a possible objection to the claim that Pascal's regimen can lead to rational religious belief, namely, that it is a form of self-deception (2009, 18-25). However, Garber himself explains that 'self-deception may be a factor [that renders regulated religious beliefs epistemically irrational] but there is more at work here' (2009, 25). We do not address this objection in this paper.

irrational. If the seeker's new belief in the existence of God is not supported by her evidence, then, so the thought goes, her new belief is epistemically irrational.

Response to the problem of non-cognitivity

The objection from the problem of non-cognitive belief formation fails, or so we'll argue here. In particular, we'll defend the following claim: it's not the case that the presence of non-cognitive factors in the causal history of the regulated religious beliefs of someone who had taken Pascal's regimen provides us with good epistemic reasons to think that their beliefs are epistemically irrational. In short, our response is that while the seeker may not be 'oriented towards truth', in the sense that forming true beliefs is not their epistemic priority, their beliefs and other doxastic attitudes are nevertheless primarily determined by epistemic factors, such as their evidence and their epistemic standards. The non-cognitive factors that preoccupy Garber don't play a determining role in the formation of regulated religious beliefs.

On the model of religious belief regulation presented here, when the seeker joins the religious community,the determining factors of her religious belief undergo certain, predictable changes. In particular, we've suggested that the seeker may experience changes in her epistemic standards. Now, it's true that these changes are brought about as a result of changes in the seeker's environment or lifestyle that are not 'purely cognitive', so to speak. But the mere fact that a person's evidence or epistemic standards change as a result of non-cognitive causes is not sufficient to justify the conclusion that the beliefs that she holds on the basis of that evidence and those epistemic standards are epistemically irrational.

It would be problematic if the non-cognitive influences on the seeker's belief caused her to fail to comply with her own epistemic standards. But it's not clear that she has failed to update her beliefs in accordance with her epistemic standards or that she has misapplied them. Indeed, we've just as much reason to think that her belief has changed *because* she's updated her beliefs in accordance with her new evidence.

It's tempting to think that changing a subject's epistemic standards for non-epistemic reasons (i.e., in response to Pascal's wager) and *via* non-epistemic means (i.e., by taking Pascal's regimen) is epistemically irrational, or rather, will lead her to hold epistemically irrational beliefs. Nevertheless, there are some reasons to think that it's not epistemically irrational to change your epistemic standards. Therefore, it's not the case that the presence of non-cognitive factors in the causal history of the regulated religious beliefs of someone who had taken Pascal's regimen provides us with good reasons to think that their beliefs are epistemically irrational.

The problem of contingency

Is it epistemically rational to believe that *p* when the fact that you believe that *p* rather than some inconsistent proposition, *q*, is contingent on irrelevant factors, such as the decision to induce the belief that *p* in yourself? For Garber, one serious challenge to the claim that Pascal's regimen can lead the seeker to epistemically rational religious belief is that such beliefs would be viciously contingent on irrelevant factors. He writes that:

> Implicit in the Pascal case is a certain kind of contingency. The Pascal Regimen makes me into a believing, perhaps rationally believing Catholic. But there are other regimens that I might have chosen as well. Study Talmud, go to synagogue, and keep kosher, and I will become a believing orthodox Jew. Go to a madrasah, pray in a mosque at all the required times of day, visit Mecca, and I will become a devout Moslem. Study magic and witchcraft, participate in the rites of my local coven, and I will become a believer in magic and witchcraft. Now, Pascal might argue, other regimens may lead me to *belief*, but only his regimen can lead me to *rational* belief. But […] there is every reason to believe that the alternative regimens will lead me to beliefs as rational as the Pascal Regimen will. (2009, 27)

Suppose that the seeker takes Pascal's regimen and becomes a believing Catholic. Then, one day, a catalogue from *Make-U-Believe: Your Local Specialists in Regulated Religious Belief* drops through the letterbox. In the catalogue are details of a variety of regimens, including Pascal's Catholic regimen. Should this discovery worry the newly-minted believer? That is, upon finding out that the regimen she took was simply one regimen among many, should worry about the epistemic rationality of beliefs that she holds as a result of the regimen that she, in fact, took?

A natural move is to make a kind of counterfactual argument like this one:

1) If the seeker had not taken Pascal's regimen, she would not now believe that God exists.
2) Therefore, the seeker's belief that God exists is epistemically irrational.

There's something intuitively appealing about this kind of counterfactual argument. We sometimes tell people 'You only believe that *p* because X', where X is some reason that doesn't provide good epistemic reasons to believe that *p*. We sometimes criticise people's moral convictions in just this way: 'Jim only thinks that eating meat is morally permissible because he was raised in a meat-eating family. If he had been brought up in a vegetarian family, he would realise that eating meat is morally impermissible.' The thought is that the facts about Jim's upbringing somehow blocks him from believing what he rationally ought to believe.

The problem is that the counterfactual argument is invalid.[14] It's easy to imagine counter-examples. We can tell counterfactual stories like this about the vast majority of our beliefs. For example, if you had not taken a course on the history of British parliamentary democracy at college, you would not now believe that the Secret Ballot Act was passed in 1872. But this doesn't seem like a good epistemic reason to doubt that you know that the Secret Ballot Act was passed in 1872. Presented in this form, then, the counterfactual argument has little to commend it.

We can be a bit more generous to the counterfactual argument, though. This sort of argument seems to assume that (a) there's a uniquely rational way to respond to a given body of evidence *and* (b) that's the way that the seeker had responded before she took the regimen. On this account of proceedings, Pascal's regimen serves as a kind of distraction, whereby the epistemically reasonable subject is led astray from truth and rationality and towards falsehood and irrationality. The problem is that the conjunction of (a) and (b) cannot be taken for granted.

Suppose there are three regimens on offer in the catalogue. Alongside Pascal's original regimen, which led the seeker to become a believing Catholic, and an Islamic regimen that would lead the seeker to become a believing Muslim. How can Sally know that the standards she picked up in her new religious community are the right epistemic standards? Remember, Sally chose to take Pascal's regimen because she was persuaded by Pascal's pragmatic argument for religious belief, and not because she thought that the rational standards of the Catholic community were the ones most likely to lead her to the truth and deliver her from error.

Response to the problem of contingency

Is it epistemically rational to believe that *p* if your believing that *p* is contingent on some irrelevant factor? This problem has received some attention in contemporary social epistemology. The idea that beliefs that are contingent on irrelevant factors, that is, factors that don't have any bearing on whether the belief is true, seems to have a strong intuitive appeal, at least to some philosophers. Cohen (2000), for example, worries that his belief in the analytic-synthetic distinction might be irrational because he only believes it because he studied philosophy at Oxford, where the distinction was endorsed, rather than at Harvard, where it was not. Cohen predicts that if he had gone to Harvard, he would have very different philosophical beliefs from the ones he has now, including his endorsement of the analytic-synthetic distinction. Similarly, Tomas Bogardus (2013) explores the potential worry that religious beliefs are irrational because, for most believers, if they had been raised in a different community, even a different family, they would probably hold different religious beliefs from the ones they actually hold.

[14] This point is due to Hawley's discussion of the rationality of epistemic partiality in friendship (2014).

A problem is that this line of argument assumes that there's only one epistemically rational doxastic response available to the seeker with respect to her evidence about the existence of God. This view has become known as the Uniqueness Thesis and is due to Feldman (2007).[15] He states the Uniqueness Thesis in the following terms:

> [A] body of evidence justifies at most one proposition out of a competing set of propositions (e.g., one theory out of a bunch of exclusive alternatives) and that it justifies at most one attitude toward any particular proposition. (2007, 205)

Is the Uniqueness Thesis correct?[16] Dogramaci and Horowitz defend an interpersonal version of the Uniqueness Thesis on the grounds that only Interpersonal Uniqueness explains the practical value of the 'social practice of epistemically evaluating one another's beliefs' (2016, 131). Dogramaci and Horowitz (2016) propose that there are two theoretical virtues of Interpersonal Uniqueness. The first of these is that it allows us to serve as each other's epistemic surrogates (2016, 136-138): If everyone is bound by the same epistemic standards, then, if a known-competent speaker tells you that *p*, then you have good epistemic reasons to believe that you would have reached the conclusion they have reached, had you been in their position. If Interpersonal Uniqueness is false, you cannot be sure that you would have come to the same conclusion as the testifier, based on their evidence. This, surely, is an impediment to the social practice of sharing knowledge through testimony. The second theoretical virtue of Interpersonal Uniqueness is that it allows for the division of epistemic labour (2016, 138-139): First, if Interpersonal Uniqueness is true, then we're better able to divide the epistemic labour of gathering evidence. If we know that our collaborators are bound by the same epistemic standards as us, then we can send them to gather evidence and, when they return with testimonial evidence about the world, be confident that we would believe what they believe, if we'd gathered the evidence for ourselves (Dogramaci & Horowitz 2016, 138). What's more, if Interpersonal Uniqueness is true, then we're better able to divide the epistemic labour of reasoning. Groups who operate according to the same epistemic standards, they write, 'can also more efficiently accomplish the task of drawing inferences on the basis of known premises' (2016, 139). That's because we can rely on our collaborators to implement the same rules of belief-formation as us.

Dogramaci and Horowitz (2016) argue that Interpersonal Uniqueness is a plausible thesis about evidential support. Where does this leave us? Well, if Interpersonal Uniqueness is true, then your evidence for a proposition either does or doesn't support the doxastic attitude that you hold to it, regardless of what epistemic standards you happen to apply. The point, crucially, is that shifting your epistemic standards won't make a difference to whether your belief is justified on the basis of your evidence. Rather, it will only make a difference to what belief you hold.

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[15] The following paragraphs are adapted from Warman 2019.

[16] See Kopec & Titelbaum 2016 for an overview of this debate.

The Uniqueness Thesis has some appeal, but it also faces several objections. We don't have the space to consider all these objections here. One such objection is that the Uniqueness Thesis is counterintuitive, or at least, less intuitive than its negation, namely, Permissivism. According to Permissivism, it's not the case that, for any body of evidence and a given proposition, there's exactly one epistemically rational doxastic response. Gideon Rosen notes that Permissivism is more intuitively appealing than the uniqueness thesis when we consider cases of apparently reasonable disagreement.[17] He explains that, while paleontologists share their evidence about what caused the extinction of the dinosaurs, they disagree about how to interpret it. Moreover, the existence of this disagreement doesn't alone entail that one or other group of paleontologists is epistemically irrational (Rosen 2001, 71).

Perhaps we should reject the Uniqueness Thesis and adopt Permissivism in its stead. Among the supporters of Permissivism, there's an ongoing disagreement about just how permissive a body of evidence can be. Extreme Permissivism allows that there are bodies of evidence which support belief that *p* and that not-*p*. Moderate Permissivism, on the other hand, allows only a narrower range of permissible doxastic responses to a given body of evidence. I'll not attempt to resolve this disagreement here. Horowitz (2014) argues persuasively that, out of Extreme Permissivism, Moderate Permissivism, and the Uniqueness Thesis, Moderate Permissivism faces the most serious challenges. The problem, Horowitz argues, is that unlike Extreme Permissivism and the Uniqueness Thesis, Moderate Permissivism doesn't help us to explain what's valuable about epistemic rationality. Those who endorse the Uniqueness Thesis can explain the value of epistemic rationality in terms of accuracy. Those who endorse Extreme Permissivism can explain the value of epistemic rationality in terms of the value of coherence or living up to one's own standards. But these answers are unavailable for Moderate Permissivism. For argument's sake, let's assume that a version of Interpersonal Permissivism is true: It's possible that for a given epistemic agent and some body of evidence in her possession, there's more than one epistemically rational, doxastic response to that evidence with respect to a given hypothesis.

It's possible, then, that both the seeker's prior agnosticism was epistemically justified and her newly-acquired, regulated belief in the existence of God is also epistemically justified. If, through the process of the regimen, her epistemic standards change, then so long as she forms and updates her religious beliefs in accordance with her *new* epistemic standards, then the resulting religious beliefs may still be epistemically rational. In other words, if Permissivism is true, then, for all we know, the problem of contingency is not so threatening after all.

But even if the Uniqueness Thesis is correct, we cannot assume that the seeker's newly-acquired belief in the existence of God is epistemically irrational. That's in part because

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[17] Schoenfield gives this passage as an exemplary case of the intuitive appeal of permissivism in her defence of permissivism as a solution to the problem of irrelevant influences on belief (2014, 196).

we can't assume that it was epistemically rational of her to withhold judgement before she undertook the regimen. In fact, for all we know her evidence was conclusive and it was epistemically irrational of her to suspend judgement. On this view of events, the regimen didn't leave her with an epistemically irrational belief. On the contrary, the regimen actually improved her epistemic position, removing her from the epistemic irrationality of withholding belief despite conclusive evidence and placing her in the position of a justified believer.

Now, we don't intend to push this point further: Of course, it's extremely controversial whether the publicly available evidence supports belief in the existence of God. We hope to have made the slightly subtler case that for all we know, the seeker's newly-acquired belief in the existence of God isn't epistemically irrational, at least, not just because the religious believer's epistemic standards are contingent on her having taken this regimen rather than that one.

Before closing, though, it's worth mentioning that permissivism isn't a cure-all for the epistemic problems of contingency. It's more accurate to say that the contingency of regulated religious beliefs on apparently irrelevant factors should not be a source of anxiety about the epistemic rationality of those beliefs, without further information. After all, as Katia Vavova (2018) argues, irrelevant influences should only be a source of anxiety about the epistemic rationality of our doxastic attitudes when we have good reasons to think that those irrelevant influences caused us to fail to live up to our own epistemic standards. She writes:

> The rationality of what I believe is a function of my epistemic standards, yes, but I might violate those standards. Evidence that I am violating those standards is evidence of irrationality, and evidence of irrelevant influence can be such evidence. (Vavova 2018, 140)

Note that this is compatible with permissivism. If epistemic rationality is understood as requiring that you form and update your beliefs according to your epistemic standards, then you are epistemically irrational to the extent that you fail to live up to your own standards. Vavova proposes the Good Independent Reason Principle, according to which: 'To the extent that you have good independent reason to think that you are mistaken with respect to p, you must revise your confidence in p accordingly—insofar as you can' (Vavova 2018, 145). Even if epistemic rationality is maximally permissive, you can still hold beliefs irrationally. You might, for instance, worry that you have indoctrinated (DiPaolo & Simpson 2015). Alternatively, you might worry about the epistemic rationality of your contingently-held beliefs if, upon reflection, you realise that they count as cases of unresolved peer disagreement (Mogensen 2016).[18] Nevertheless, without further evidence for thinking that this is what's going on when someone takes Pascal's regimen, we have no special reason to worry about the epistemic rationality of the resulting beliefs.

[18] For further discussion of this topic, see Elga 2007, Schechter MS., and Schoenfield 2014.

Conclusion

We have argued that Pascal's regimen can lead the seeking non-believer to religious belief that is both regulated and rationally held. By following Pascal's advice and joining a religious community, the seeker is able to intervene on the determining factors of her beliefs—her evidence and her epistemic standards—in a way that is oriented towards the goal of believing that God exists. What's more, we have argued, neither the contingency nor the non-cognitivity of the regimen should be a source of special concern about the rationality of that belief in this case.

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