

Religious Conversion, Self-Deception, and Pascal's Wager

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Blaise Pascal's *Pensées* is a sustained attempt to convert, to lead its reader to form the belief in the articles of faith. Pascal does not hope to convert by a direct presentation of evidence or argument, but rather attempts to induce in the reader a desire for belief in the articles of faith. He hopes that this desire will lead the reader to put herself in a situation in which she will form the belief. Pascal, in other words, wants the reader to take control over her belief in the articles of faith, to form it because she *wants* to do so.

We commonly put ourselves in a situation for the purpose of forming beliefs. This is what happens when we choose to go, say, to university; choosing to learn is choosing to form beliefs in a given field. Pascal urges something more paradoxical.¹ He wants to induce us to form a *particular* belief (or set of beliefs). His dual aim is (i) to induce the unbeliever to want a belief, and then (ii) to induce her to do what she can to gain that belief.

Now if I want a particular belief, I might place myself in a situation in which nonrational or pragmatic determinants would bring about the belief. I might, that is, visit a hypnotist or a brainwasher. I might choose some process which will either directly bring about the desired belief without involving my epistemic capabilities, or which will diminish my epistemic capabilities. Alternatively, I might search for evidence for the desired belief. Wanting to believe that the earth is flat, for example, I might join the Flat Earth Society, hoping to discover or be convinced by the evidence that there is for such a belief. If successful, either process would end in our adoption of a belief. There are,

however, differences. The former process, going to a hypnotist or brainwasher, is self-deception. Employing nonrational methods to gain control of our beliefs is one way in which we can deceive ourselves. The latter type of control, on the other hand, does not appear to be self-deceptive at all, involving as it does the search for evidence for our desired belief.

If, in the *Pensées*, Pascal is trying to induce the reader to want theistic belief, an interpretative question arises: Is he trying to induce self-deception? Does Pascal want the unbeliever to deceive herself into becoming a believer? Is 'Pascalian conversion'—the conversion process which he envisions in the *Pensées*—analogous to hypnosis or to joining the Flat Earth Society? I will argue that it is the latter, that Pascal does not intend the unbeliever to self-deceive. Indeed, I hope to show that Pascal's theory of conversion is not only in an important (but qualified) sense rational, but also reveals a sophisticated understanding of belief-formation.²

I. PASCAL'S PRACTICAL ARGUMENT

Arguments are offered to either induce or defend beliefs. Arguments for the existence of God are no different. They are presented to an audience, with one of two hoped-for effects. The *unbelieving* reader will hopefully come to believe in God, while the *believing* reader will be able to use the argument to rationally support or defend that already-held belief. An argument for the existence of God is therefore successful if it either induces a belief or provides a rational basis for such a belief.

Descartes and William Paley defend very different versions of arguments for the existence of God. Descartes, writing in the mid-seventeenth century, was a proponent of the ontological argument and a version of the first cause argument, while Paley published a popular account of the argument from design in 1802. Despite their differences, however, both are clear that they intend their arguments to affect beliefs in God, either to induce them or to strengthen them.

In the dedicatory letter to his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes tells the Faculty of Theology at the Sorbonne that the arguments for God's existence found in the *Meditations* are intended for the unbeliever.

For us who are believers, it is enough to accept on faith that...God exists; but in the case of unbelievers, it seems that there is no religion, and practically no moral virtue, that they can be persuaded to adopt until these two truths are proved to them by natural reason.

Later he adds,

I know that the only reason why many irreligious people are unwilling to believe that God exists and that the human mind is distinct from the body is the alleged fact that no one has hitherto been able to demonstrate these points. Now I disagree with this: I think that when properly understood almost all the arguments have the force of demonstrations...³

On the other hand, the intended audience of William Paley's *Natural Theology*, a popular and extended version of the argument from design, is not the atheist or the agnostic, but the believer. He concludes with a discussion of the effect of the argument on the reader.

[T]he greatest part of those, who, either in this book or any other, read arguments to prove the existence of a God, it will be said, that...they were never ignorant of this great truth, never doubted of it. Now I answer that, by investigation, the following points are always gained, in favour of doctrines even the most generally acknowledged, (supposing them to be true), viz. stability and impression.

He further explains the virtue of 'stable' beliefs:

Occasions will arise to try the firmness of our most habitual opinions. And upon these occasions, it is a matter of incalculable

use to feel our foundation; to find a support in argument for what we had taken up upon authority.⁴

For those who already have belief in the existence of God, arguments for his existence provide independent grounds for belief. The believer need no longer depend on the Bible and the authority of the church. As with Descartes, Paley forwards an argument for the existence of God with the goal of changing the reader's belief in the existence of God. Where Descartes discusses the possibility of changing the unbeliever to a believer, Paley asserts that his argument can change the epistemic or psychological nature of an already-existing belief.

Writing in the 1650s, Pascal expressed disdain at attempts to use argumentation as a way of inducing religious belief. Pascal saw that arguments such as Descartes' or Paley's leads one, at best, solely to a belief that God exists. The simple belief that God exists, however, falls far short of the complete articles of faith. Salvation is promised only to those who believe in the incarnation, the virgin birth, the resurrection, the Trinity, and the other claims in the creeds.⁵ The belief that God exists is one of the articles of faith, but only one. By itself, such a belief cannot bring about salvation.

Even if someone were convinced that the proportions between numbers are immaterial, eternal truths, depending on a first truth in which they subsist, called God, I should not consider that he had made much progress towards his salvation.⁶

The reader who responds to an argument like that of Descartes' or Paley's and only adopts a belief in the existence of God will not be a Christian. She will be a deist, and deism is attacked by Pascal throughout the *Pensées*.

All those who seek God apart from Christ, and who go no further than nature, either find no light to satisfy them or come to devise a means of knowing and serving God without a mediator, thus falling into either atheism or deism, two things almost equally

abhorrent to Christianity.⁷

Belief in the existence of God without any of the other articles of faith will not gain the favor of God. A belief in God without the other saving faiths is, Pascal writes, 'useless'.

On this point, Pascal echoes Aquinas. Although Aquinas defends five arguments for the existence of God, he takes arguments to be merely 'preparation' for the formation of beliefs in the other articles of faith.

The existence of God and other like truths about God, which can be known by natural reason, are not articles of faith, but are preambles to the articles [of faith].⁸

The belief in God's existence, Aquinas realizes, is only a single step towards the possession of a full faith in the articles. Unlike Pascal, however, he takes it to be a step nonetheless. If a proof of God's existence leads to a belief in his existence, it will be a step in the right direction, towards, that is, the full set of beliefs which will give us salvation.

Pascal might have shared Aquinas' qualified endorsement of proofs had he thought that proofs could bring about belief that God exists. He did not. Proofs for the existence of God are not only useless, Pascal suspects, they are impotent.

The metaphysical proofs for the existence of God are so remote from human reasoning and so involved that they make little impact, and even if they did help some people, it would only be for the moment during which they watched the demonstration, because an hour later they would be afraid they had made a mistake.⁹

So not only is it true that demonstrations of the existence of God strive to bring about a belief which is useless to bring about salvation on its own, they furthermore cannot, by themselves, bring about a lasting belief. Both these criticisms are summarized later in the *Pensées*.

I shall not undertake here to prove by reasons from nature either the existence of God, or the Trinity or the immortality of the soul, or anything of that kind: not just because I should not feel competent to find in nature arguments which would convince hardened atheists, but also because such knowledge, without Christ, is useless and sterile.¹⁰

In spite of this disparaging attitude towards epistemic argument as a means of conversion, Pascal clearly intended the *Pensées* to be a conversion tract. It was written for an educated agnostic audience.¹¹ As we will see, the *Pensées* differ from a Cartesian conversion tract in that the former attempts to lead its readers to belief not (merely) via epistemic reason but also via grace and the church. And whereas the *Pensées* and a Thomist conversion tract both emphasize the necessity of belief in the articles of faith, Pascal wants the reader to approach the articles of faith as a whole. Aquinas would have us reason to a belief in God's existence on the way to the articles of faith. Pascal skips Aquinas' first step altogether.

Pascal's Wager is fragment 418 in the *Pensées*, and its structure is well-known. One can either adopt a belief in the articles of faith, or not adopt this belief. If you accept the articles of faith, then you will gain the infinite reward of immortality (as Pascal writes, "you win everything"), lose any finite rewards an impious life offers, or both. If you do not accept the articles of faith, then you will realize an infinite punishment, gain any finite rewards an impious life offers, or both. If I assign a noninfinitesimal probability to the articles of faith, then the expected utility of believing is infinite and the expected disutility of disbelieving is infinite. Therefore, Pascal concludes, as long as I begin with a noninfinitesimal probability in the articles of faith, it is more rational to become a believer than to stay an unbeliever. Because the outcome of believing is an infinite reward or a finite loss or both, and because the outcome of not believing is an infinite loss or a finite gain or both, the Wager is forceful whatever probability we assign to the

articles, as long as it is not infinitely small.¹²

Insofar as Pascal's Wager is attempting to lead the reader to a belief, it is an argument like those of Aquinas and Descartes. Both share the goal of leading the reader to form a belief, but there are important differences. First, the Wager makes the goal of belief-formation explicit. Descartes and Paley intend their arguments to bring about a belief in God by supporting the conclusion 'God exists'. Pascal's argument, on the other hand, leads to the conclusion not that God exists, but that *the reader should form the belief that* God exists (along with all the other articles of faith). In other words, while the conclusion of a Cartesian argument is "Therefore, God exists", the conclusion of Pascal's Wager is "Therefore, you should believe that God exists". The very content of the Wager targets the reader's belief in the articles of faith, and not the content of that belief (e.g., God's existence). Secondly, the Wager contains no evidence or truth-conducive considerations for the articles of faith. Neither trusting nor optimistic about the belief-inducing power of proofs for the articles of faith, Pascal does not rely solely on evidence in his attempt to convince the reader that the articles are true.

The Wager focuses on the practical consequences of believing. Beliefs have practical and epistemic aspects. On the one hand, beliefs are like actions in that they are states which can have consequences for the believer. They can be good or bad for us. The father who believes that his convicted son is innocent has a belief which is good for him; it brings him some contentment. Furthermore, like other mental states, beliefs also have intentional content. They are about the world. This aspect of belief we can discuss in terms of how well it fits or reflects the world, regardless of how it affects the believer or anyone else. Each aspect of belief has its own form of assessment. We can say that a belief is *practically* rational if it is adopted to fulfill some desire or goal a person has, and we can say that a belief is *epistemically* rational if it is well-supported, or likely to be true.¹³

Descartes' and Paley's arguments address the epistemic aspect of belief.

They offer us considerations which ground or support the belief in the existence of God. Pascal's Wager focuses on the practical aspect of belief. It has us look at the consequences of a state of believing. Like a man's belief in his son's innocence bringing him contentment, a belief in the articles of faith will, potentially, bring one immortality. The Wager shows that forming a belief in the articles of faith is a practically rational state to be in, that forming the belief that 'God exists' is a rational thing *to do*. What is more, the Wager itself *ignores* the epistemic side of belief. The Wager ignores, that is, whether we have any support for the proposition that God exists.

This latter aspect of the Wager, its blatant neglect of whether the belief in the articles of faith is epistemically rational, has gained it an infamous reputation. Voltaire said of fragment 418: "This article seems a little indecent and puerile: the idea of a game, and of loss and gain, does not befit the gravity of the subject."¹⁴ Pascal does not deserve such criticism. To the contrary, the traditional Christian understanding of our relationship with God makes the Wager entirely appropriate. The Wager is not so much a 'game' as it is the recognition of a great bargain, a bargain which God, and not Pascal, has set. Our side of the bargain is to believe in the articles of faith. God's side of the bargain is to grant us immortality once we do. If Pascal has shown us anything, it is the extent to which (at least some) Christian traditions have made belief in the articles of faith a commodity. We trade belief for immortality. Insofar as Christianity adopts the doctrine 'salvation by faith', we are promised an extraordinary reward for a state of believing.¹⁵ If we adopt this state, then we will be saved; we will live forever. Pace Voltaire, the *entire* idea is of loss and gain. It would be surprising if greater consequences for adopting a belief, or for that matter executing an action, have ever been claimed.

II. THE WAGER AS AN INDUCER OF BELIEF

Since the *Pensées* were written to convert its readers, it will be useful to imagine

an ideal reader. She desires immortality. While she does not believe the articles of faith, she does not completely rule them out. Consequently, she is moved by reading the Wager, and she becomes fully convinced that it would be rational for her to form a belief in the articles of faith, indeed, more rational than to remain without such a belief.

It is important to understanding the nature of the Wager that we see that even the ideal reader will not, upon reading it, form a belief in the articles of faith. This should not be surprising. We cannot consciously form a belief because we think that forming it would be good for us, or because we want to form it. We cannot form a belief and at the same time realize that we are believing it because it will confer benefit on us.¹⁶ The ideal reader will not form a belief in the articles of faith upon reading Pascal's Wager any sooner than she will respond to an offer of money for the belief that the earth is flat. This is an extension of the phenomenon of doxastic involuntarism, our inability to be immediately induced to form a belief. We are aware, at times, of the determinants of our beliefs, of how they are, or were, formed. That second-order awareness affects the formation, or retention, of the first-order beliefs themselves. If we are aware of being *motivated* to form a belief, then we will not form it. This faculty is in place to prevent desires and self-interests from bringing beliefs about, to keep our representations of the world from being consciously motivated. In reading Pascal's Wager, our awareness that our belief in the articles of faith will be motivated by the desire for immortality blocks the formation of the belief which will bring that immortality about.

This does not stand as a criticism of Pascal. He fully recognizes that merely reading his Wager would not bring about instant belief. This is because, as it induces desire, the Wager appeals only to the will. But, says Pascal,

The will is one of the chief organs of belief, not because it creates belief, but because things are true or false according to the aspect by which we judge them. When the will likes one aspect more than

another, it deflects the mind from considering the qualities of the one it does not care to see. Thus the mind, keeping step with the will, remains looking at the aspect preferred by the will and so judges by what it sees there.¹⁷

The Wager can only induce the desire for belief, and one cannot want a belief and thus possess one just like that. The closest the will can get to having a direct effect on belief is by affecting inquiry; it can lead us to look for evidence in some places and to ignore evidence in others. The will cannot directly lead us to belief in response to an argument which tells us to believe. Pascal realizes that with an argument of the type he was offering, he could not expect immediate belief. If the Wager is to bring about belief, it will have to do so indirectly.

This is precisely Pascal's tactic. The Wager is intended to induce the desire for belief, this desire cannot (consciously) lead to belief, but it can lead to action, and this action can (at least indirectly) lead to a belief. What Pascal hopes for is that the Wager will instill in his reader the desire to form a belief in the articles of faith, and then the reader will want to do something to form a belief. That is all that the Wager sets out to do. The Wager is an argument for undertaking an action which will lead to belief. Pascal shows that the formation of a belief in the articles of faith is practically rational. Given the desire for immortality, a belief in the existence of God and the other articles of faith should also be desired.

Towards the end of fragment 418, Pascal enters into an imaginary dialogue with his reader. What should I do now, she asks:

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?¹⁸

This is the ideal reader of the Wager consciously desiring that she have a certain belief. Yet since the appeal to desires and the pragmatic effects of believing cannot directly lead to belief, there is a gap between argument and belief, a gap which Pascal seeks to fill by taking action. It is for this reason that the Wager

must be seen within the context of the rest of the *Pensées*. The Wager induces a desire and much of the rest of the *Pensées* tells the reader what to do with that desire. The Wager is only one step in an extensive effort to convert.

The end of fragment 418 sees Pascal telling the reader to act in a way which will result in a belief. The reader is given a specific recipe, a specific action, to follow in order to gain the belief she now wants. Pascal's advice to his belief-desiring reader is well-known:

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.¹⁹

Be among believers and act like a believer, and you will come to believe. This action—churchgoing—is not the desired end of the Wager, but the means to that end, belief in the articles of faith. Since Pascal realizes that our conscious control over our beliefs can at best be mediate, he has given a practical argument, an argument telling us to do something, to act in a certain way which will bring about belief. Pascal thinks that churchgoing behavior will somehow lead to the belief in the articles of faith. It is the nature of this 'somehow' that I want to explore in the remainder of this paper.

III. THE WAGER AND SELF-DECEPTION

One view of the Wager is that Pascal is defending self-deception. In sending the reader off to mass and prayer, he is sending her to delude herself. According to this interpretation, Pascal conceives of the belief in the articles of faith as epistemically irrational but practically rational. The force of the Wager is that it can be rational to put oneself in a belief-forming situation in which epistemic

considerations are completely ignored. Anthony Flew interprets the Wager in this way.

If now “reason inclines you to believe” when before you were not so inclined, it is because Pascal’s argument has persuaded you that it would be madly imprudent not to brainwash yourself into conviction.²⁰

Flew’s use of ‘brainwash’ is clear. He takes Pascal to be recommending that the unbeliever enter into a belief-forming situation which compares to hypnosis or brainwashing, a situation in which the belief in the articles of faith will be formed without any regard whatsoever to epistemic rationality.

This would indeed be self-deception. One form of self-deception is the process of putting oneself in a situation in which one will form a belief which one does not have. But it is more than this, for this description includes going to Kenya to form beliefs about giraffes or going to a laboratory to form beliefs about cell motion. Neither of those are self-deceptive processes. The added element is that (this type of) self-deception includes what might be called an ‘arational’ process of belief-formation. The self-deceiving person chooses to be in a situation in which he will form a belief nonrationally, not the result of perception and without the consideration of evidence. The determinant of the resulting belief will be an emotion, desire, social position, value, or some other nonevidential or nonperceptual determinant. Self-deception involves placing oneself in a situation in which non-truth-conducive determinants will be responsible for one’s belief. This is why allowing oneself to be hypnotized or brainwashed with the intent of forming certain beliefs is self-deception. I could not have myself hypnotized into believing that God exists, and later retain the belief while knowing that hypnosis was why I had it. I cannot hold a belief and explain it arationally.²¹ I cannot hold a belief and explain it by appeal to hypnosis. This is why seeking hypnotic belief-formation would be self-deception. One self-deceives by knowingly placing oneself in a situation in which one will form a belief in a way which one could

not later recognize while retaining the belief.²²

As I argued in the last section, it is a general fact about believers that we cannot account for our beliefs by citing arational determinants. If we give an explanation at all of our beliefs, then we either describe some experience we have had or we state some fact which we take to support our belief. Now if self-deception involves entering a situation in which one forms a belief arationally, then it follows that we cannot, either during or after the process of belief-formation, be aware of how we formed the belief in question. The constraint says that deceptive belief-formations will ultimately be hidden from us. This fact is useful in that it can serve as a test of (at least this type of) self-deception. If a believer has deceived himself, then he will not be able to explain how he gained the given belief. If self-deception involves gaining a belief arationally, then self-deceivers will be marked by an inability to account for the belief they deceived themselves into forming.

This is the test we will use against Pascal. Is Pascal using the Wager to justify self-deception? Is he defending a total disregard for epistemic rationality? Out of context, the Wager shows only that given certain circumstances it is practically rational to adopt a belief in the articles of faith. It does not tell us that we should form this belief one way and not another. As an entirely nonepistemic argument, the Wager does not distinguish between different ways of belief-formation. The Wager might be used to justify hypnosis and brainwashing as a way of forming saving beliefs just as it justifies using evidence and argumentation. However, my interest is not in how the Wager *could* be used, but in how Pascal himself used it.

Does Pascal think churchgoing-in-order-to-believe is a nonrational process? When he sends the nonbelieving reader of the Wager to church, does he send her to a situation in which she will delude herself? In order to answer this question, we must look beyond the Wager to Pascal's own view of conversion. In asking whether Pascal was using the Wager to endorse self-deception, we are

asking whether or not Pascal thought conversion was an arational belief-forming process. We are asking whether churchgoing, as Pascal conceived of it qua belief-forming process, involves the consideration of evidence or not. Pascalian conversion is the conversion that the ideal reader of the *Pensées* would undergo. In the next section, I will look at two interpretations of Pascalian conversion.

IV. PASCAL'S THEORY OF CONVERSION

Pascal thought that forming a habit or custom could result in belief.

Custom [*coutume*] is our nature. Anyone who grows accustomed [*s'accoutume*] to faith believes it...and believes nothing else.²³

Proofs only convince the mind; habit [*coutume*] provides the strongest proofs and those that are most believed. It inclines the automaton [*l'automate*], which leads the mind unconsciously along with it. Who ever proved that it will dawn tomorrow, and that we shall die? And what is more widely believed? It is, then, habit that convinces us and makes so many Christians....In short, we must resort to habit once the mind has seen where the truth lies, in order to steep and stain ourselves in that belief which constantly eludes us, for it is too much trouble to have the proofs always present before us.²⁴

The tying of habit and custom to belief recalls Hume's theory of belief.²⁵ But there is an important difference. While Hume offers a theory in which habitual or repeated experience affects belief, Pascal suggests that habitual or repeated behavior affects belief. He is suggesting that if we engage in certain actions, that will bring (or help to bring) about certain beliefs. In order to believe, one should behave as if one already did believe. Look again at Pascal's infamous advice to the interlocutor in the Wager:

Learn from those who were once bound like you and who now

wager all they have....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.²⁶

Krailsheimer's translation of 'et vous abêtira' as 'and will make you more docile' does not capture the epistemic nature of the word 'abêtira'. He admits this in a footnote, defining it more fully as to "act unthinkingly and mechanically, and in this become more like the beasts". Other translations make the epistemic element of 'abêtira' primary: "blunt your cleverness" or "stupefy you".²⁷

This is a key passage in support of the view that Pascal intends the reader to deceive herself into converting, and it is consistent with his tendency to contrast belief via reason and belief via *coutume*. The possibility of behavior leading to belief is by no means foreign to our understanding of belief. David Pears takes it to be one of the three main strategies of self-deception, writing:

This strategy of self-deception reverses the usual order of things, because the person acts in order to produce the belief that would normally support the actions.²⁸

Talking to the houseplants, we think, can lead to the belief that they understand us. This is what I will call the 'arational interpretation' of Pascal: *coutume* leads to conversion without the intervention of reason or evidence. On this interpretation, the conversion process Pascal envisions is completely nonepistemic; the behavior leads directly to the belief. Habitual behavior is the primary determinant in the subsequent belief in the articles of faith. The act of praying induces a belief in that which is prayed to. Hearing fiery sermons induces fear, resulting in a belief in that which is feared. In such cases, a non-truth-conducive determinant, like one's behavior, alone determines subsequent belief.

Pascal's pessimism about reason's ability to know God adds support to this interpretation.

If there is a God, he is infinitely beyond our comprehension, since,

being indivisible and without limits, he bears no relation to us. We are therefore incapable of knowing either what he is or whether he is.

And again,

‘Either God is or he is not.’ But to which view shall we be inclined? Reason cannot decide this question...Reason cannot make you choose either, reason cannot prove either wrong.²⁹

God, Pascal declares, is a ‘Deus absconditus’, a being which is completely hidden from us. By themselves, such passages appear to support the view that Pascal thought there was no evidence at all for the articles of faith, and that if we are converted it will not be with any evidential support. This supposed lack of evidence, it is thought, leads Pascal to see the need for a practical argument, an argument which would induce belief without any epistemic considerations. This argument, the Wager, would display the utility of the saving beliefs, and then he could send the unbeliever to church to get a belief habitually. The unbeliever would be converted without once considering any support for her belief.

So on the arational interpretation of Pascal, there is no evidence for the articles of faith to be found, either in argument, experience, or any other form. There is, therefore, no rational way of raising the probability we assign to the propositions of the articles of faith. This leads Pascal to use the Wager to show us that we should form the belief in the articles of faith, and he tells us that if we go to church and behave as believers do, then this *coutume* will directly and nonepistemically bring about saving belief.

The arational interpretation of Pascal has textual basis in fragment 418, but it does not do justice to the *Pensées* as a whole. First, while it is true that churchgoing behavior can play a role in Pascalian conversion, the arational interpretation is wrong in claiming that he takes habitual behavior to be the sole determinant of conversion. Second, while Pascal thought that reason has limited

power in both belief-formation and discovery of truth, it is wrong to think that reason has no role to play in conversion. The right interpretation of reason and its place in Pascalian conversion is more complex.

We first need to see that, *pace* the *coutume* interpretation, reason *does* play a role in Pascal's view of conversion. In attacking a priori arguments for the existence of God, Pascal does not abandon reason as a force in conversion. Far from it. Pascal takes the occurrence of miracles and the fulfillment of prophecies to be a posteriori reasons to believe Christian doctrine.

We have the prophecies which are solid and palpable proofs. By being fulfilled and proved true by the event, these prophecies show that these truths are certain and thus prove that Jesus is divine.³⁰ Much (perhaps most) of the *Pensées* is devoted to documenting and interpreting prophecies and to discussing miracles. Each of these, he says, is evidence for the articles of faith, and they make belief in the articles of faith reasonable.

Secondly, we need to see the importance of grace in conversion. Pascal takes God himself to be the main determinant of saving belief.

There are three ways to believe: reason, habit, inspiration. Christianity, which alone has reason, does not admit as its true children those who believe without inspiration. It is not that it excludes reason and habit, quite the contrary, but we must open our mind to the proofs, confirm ourselves in it through habit, while offering ourselves through humiliations to inspiration, *which alone can produce the real and salutary effect.*³¹

'Inspiration' and 'grace' are Pascal's words for God's own involvement in conversion. In a doctrine which goes back to the writings of St. Paul, Pascal sees conversion as requiring a divine intervention. Grace is an action of God himself on the unbeliever. In an act of grace, God makes himself responsible for the unbeliever's conversion. Acts of grace can take a number of forms. Pascal's own conversion was a divine experience. As I will argue below, the sort of conversion

Pascal envisioned for the reader of the *Pensées*, involved God's changing the unbeliever's appreciation of the force of the evidence for the articles of faith.

Grace is the one necessary (as well as sufficient) determinant of saving belief. Krailsheimer writes,

The doctrine characteristic of Augustinians in general, and of Jansenists in particular, was that human nature was so corrupted by the Fall that only the direct intervention of God's grace, mediated by the redeeming power of Christ, could enable man to do good and be saved. This grace could never be earned, and man could never put God under an obligation to save him...³²

It is ultimately up to inspiration, an act of grace, to bring about conversion. "Faith," Pascal writes, "is a gift of God."³³

The arational *coutume* interpretation leaves out two important elements in Pascalian conversion: reason and grace. The task now is to understand how these three elements fit together to result in conversion.

1. Reason and coutume prepare the unbeliever for grace

Pascal takes it that reason and *coutume* can each increase the unbeliever's opportunity for God's grace. The unbeliever can prepare the way for God to bring about conversion. As Krailsheimer notes, the Jansenists generally claimed that

man could try to remove some of the chief obstacles to grace and thus create in himself a disposition more favorable to its reception.³⁴

Coutume and reason serve this latter function. They can 'create a disposition more favorable' to belief, making grace more likely to occur, and more likely to bring about conversion. Even though it is ultimately up to God to grant faith to the unbeliever, we can go some distance towards making that grace possible and effective.

This is why Pascal sends the ideal reader of the Wager to church. It is not that churchgoing *coutume* will bring about belief, but rather that it will make us more receptive of grace. As Pascal writes,

The Church teaches and God inspires, and both infallibly. The work of the Church serves only to prepare either for grace or for condemnation. What it does is enough to condemn, but not to inspire.³⁵

It is only because we can make a contribution towards belief-formation that the Wager makes any sense.³⁶ The Wager is premised on the fact that one's behavior can be a catalyst to one's conversion. Its *raison d'être* is to induce behavior which will make conversion more likely.

The notion of preparing for grace was neither new nor purely theoretically motivated in Pascal. His own conversion came through a personal religious experience in November of 1654, at the end of a day of prayer and meditation.³⁷ Discussing Pascal's divine experience, F.T.H. Fletcher writes,

There is...ample evidence of mystic experience following prayerful or contemplative preparation, or coming as the crown of a virtuous life. The psalmist was clearly of this class....It is clear from the *Memorial* that Pascal's experience belongs to the category of 'union by means'. In it he speaks explicitly of 'un jour d'exercice' culminating in his admission into eternal joy.³⁸

Referring to this 'jour d'exercice' in the penultimate line of the *Memorial* itself, Pascal exclaims, "Everlasting joy in return for one day's effort on earth." The activities which preceded Pascal's conversion were *coutume*, precisely the sort of behavior which he recommends to the unbeliever at the end of the Wager. This is not to say that Pascal intends the nonbelieving reader of the *Pensées* to have a conversion by divine experience. At no place in the *Pensées* does Pascal discuss divine experience.³⁹ He knew that a less dramatic conversion, a conversion involving reason, was more likely for the ideal reader. Nevertheless, the ideal

reader could prepare for conversion, both by engaging in *coutume* and, as we will see now, by understanding what evidence there is for the articles of faith.

2. Reason 'points' the way to belief, but alone is not able to convert

Pascal's attitude towards reason and conversion is complex. On the one hand, he repeatedly emphasizes that there is evidence for the articles of faith, and he goes to great lengths documenting it. This evidence gives us reason to believe in the articles of faith. On the other hand, Pascal expresses an explicit pessimism about reason. First, reason does not have access to all realms of truth. "Reason's last step is the recognition that there are an infinite number of things which are beyond it."⁴⁰ More importantly, reason has only a limited power to bring about belief. We might say that Reason is neither necessary nor sufficient for conversion. Since many people believe in God without considering evidence at all, it is not necessary to conversion.⁴¹ Since it cannot convince us by itself, it is not sufficient for conversion. In a telling passage at fragment 835, Pascal unequivocally states that evidence will not convince without grace.

The prophecies, even the miracles and proofs of our religion, are not of such a kind that they can be said to be absolutely convincing, but they are at the same time such that it cannot be said to be unreasonable to believe in them. There is thus evidence and obscurity, to enlighten some and obfuscate others. But the evidence is such as to exceed, or at least equal, the evidence to the contrary, so that it cannot be reason that decides us against following it, and can therefore only be concupiscence and wickedness of heart. Thus, there is enough evidence to condemn and not enough to convince, so that it should be apparent that those who follow it are prompted to do so by grace and not by reason, and those who evade it are prompted by concupiscence and not by reason.

Copious as it is, the evidence for the articles of faith is not enough to convert the

unbeliever.

In order to see this point, we have to appreciate the distance between *appreciating* evidence and *being convinced* by evidence. I can have evidence for the proposition *p* as well as for a distinct incompatible proposition *q*, without believing *p*, *q*, or either. I can see that they each have evidence on their side without being convinced by the evidence for either. Both believers and unbelievers can see that miracles and fulfilled prophecies are evidence for the articles of faith. Pascal rightly realizes that conversion requires more than just seeing that certain facts are evidence for the articles of faith. Conversion requires being *convinced* that the articles of faith are true. As reason cannot perform this latter task, he says, there must be an extra determinant helping reason to bring about belief.

Both these positive and the negative attitudes toward reason for the articles are expressed in passages like the following from fragment 820.

There are two ways of persuading men of the truths of our religion; one by the power of reason, the other by the authority of the speaker.

We do not use the latter but the former. We do not say: 'You must believe that because Scripture, which says it, is divine,' but we say that it must be believed for such and such reason. But these are feeble arguments, *because reason can be bent in any direction*.⁴²

Reason can be part of conversion, because, as Pascal believes, Christianity has reason on its side. But it cannot work alone. Other determinants are needed to supplement reason to induce belief.

These determinants are *coutume* and, more importantly, grace. Like reason, *coutume*'s role in conversion is neither necessary nor sufficient. We do not have to engage in *coutume* to be converted, but it can help. As we saw above, it can make the unbeliever more conducive to receiving grace. And in at least one place in the *Pensées*, he suggests that *coutume* plays a role in helping the retention

of belief.

In short, we must resort to habit once the mind has seen where the truth lies, in order to steep and stain ourselves in that belief which constantly eludes us, for it is too much trouble to have the proofs always present before us.⁴³

This is not *coutume* working by itself towards the determination of belief, but *coutume* working with reason and with grace.

Grace is the one thing Pascal takes to be always necessary for conversion. Grace can take a number of forms, but the conversion Pascal intends for the ideal reader of the *Pensées* involves *coutume* and reason. In this type of conversion, *coutume* prepares the unbeliever for grace, which establishes belief—establishes the subjective conviction—to which reason has pointed. Evidence *points* the way to belief, and *coutume prepares* the way for belief, but without grace they cannot *establish* belief.

3. *Grace can cause an unbeliever to be convinced by evidence*

Pascal appears to think that even though evidence by itself could not convince the reader of the articles of faith, grace can convince via, or through, evidence. In this form of grace, God converts by making the evidence for the articles of faith convincing. He convinces the unbeliever of the propositions she hitherto had evidence for but by which she was not convinced. He finishes the job which the evidence of miracles and prophecies could only start. As Pascal writes, in being given grace, we are “prompted to follow the evidence” for the articles of faith. God changes the effect of the evidence upon us. Where the unbeliever merely sees that fulfilled prophecies were or could be evidence for the articles, the believer is convinced by that evidence. Grace is thus combined with reason. We are convinced by argument, but we are helped along in being so. Thus the plea from Psalm 119 which Pascal is fond of repeating: “Incline my heart unto thy testimonies.”

The thought that God brings about conversion by affecting our assessment of arguments is also found in the work of the 16th Century English theologian Richard Hooker. Like Pascal, Hooker takes the combination of reason and grace to be involved in (many) conversions, and to be responsible for many religious beliefs. Furthermore, he sees grace as affecting believers' appraisal of the evidence there is for the articles of faith. He writes in the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*:

[W]hatsoever our hearts be to God and to his truth, believe we or be we as yet faithless, for our conversion or confirmation the force of natural reason is great. The force whereof unto those effects is nothing without grace. What then? To our purpose it is sufficient, that whosoever doth serve, honour, and obey God, whosoever believeth in Him, that man would no more do this than innocents and infants do, but for the light of natural reason that shineth in him, and maketh him apt to apprehend those things of God, which being by grace discovered, are effectual to persuade reasonable minds and none other, that honour, obedience, and credit, belong of right unto God.⁴⁴

Natural reason is reason without grace. Hooker takes it that reason cannot convince without grace, and yet that grace can work through reason. "In vain it were to speak any thing of God," he writes, "but that by reason men are able *somewhat* to judge of that they hear, and by discourse to discern how consonant it is to truth."⁴⁵

Montaigne, by whose work Pascal was deeply influenced, holds the same position. In his "Apology for Raymond Sebond", he writes

We must...accompany our faith with all the reason that is in us, but always with this reservation, not to think that it is on us that faith depends, or that our efforts and arguments can attain a knowledge so supernatural and divine.

And again,

Now our human reasons and arguments are as it were the heavy and barren matter; the grace of God is their form; it is that which gives them shape and value.

And of Sebond's arguments for the existence of God, he writes,

[T]hey are capable of serving as a start and a first guide to an apprentice to set him on the road to this knowledge; they fashion him to some extent and make him capable of the grace of God, by means of which our belief is afterward completed and perfected.⁴⁶

Like Hooker and Montaigne, Pascal envisions a relationship between grace and evidence such that grace involves changing the unbeliever's assessment or weighing of evidence for the articles of faith. Although grace can bring about conversion without the unbeliever's consideration of evidence, the two can be combined. In this sort of conversion, grace makes the difference between this attitude, that of the appreciating unbeliever, on the one hand, and the believer who is convinced by that evidence. It is this sort of conversion, I suggest, which Pascal had in mind for the ideal reader of the *Pensées*.

If we now recall the intended audience of the *Pensées*, we can see the subtle rhetorical use to which Pascal was putting this theory. He was on one side of an intellectual debate, a debate over the truth or falsity of the articles of faith, and he sets out to convince the other side. The *Pensées* were written for this other side, an agnostic and educated audience. On the one hand, Pascal recognizes that he would leave the debate, and lose his audience, were he to say that there is no evidence for God's existence. He does not want to deny altogether the epistemic rationality of Christianity. On the other hand, he sees that there is evidence for each side, but this evidence is not enough to break the stalemate in his favor. As with any entrenched intellectual debate, Pascal recognizes that the evidence is often not enough to convert individuals from one side to another.

The theory of belief-by-grace gives Pascal both an explanation of this stalemate and, more importantly, a strategy for infiltrating the other side. Pascal informs the agnostic opposition that a belief in the articles of faith will not come until God himself grants it.⁴⁷ The evidence for these propositions is not enough to cause belief. At the same time, and to prevent himself from appearing to offer merely weak evidence for his side, Pascal repeatedly denies the importance of reason in conversion. The opposition, he says, should not expect the debate to be carried out in mere evidential terms.

It is here in the dialectic that Pascal forwards the Wager. Pascal's Wager is an extraordinary change of strategy—from epistemic to practical—within an intellectual debate. Like all opponents in an intellectual debate, Pascal is up against those who do not believe his 'position'. The Wager is offered in order to get the unbelieving opposition to *want* to be converted to his side. He makes the remarkable move of attempting to *entice* the unbeliever to belief. He ensures that the ideal reader of the *Pensées* never loses sight of the evidence for the articles, while using the Wager to instill a powerful motivation for desiring to believe. Once this desire is in place, with a background of evidence from the prophecies and miracles, Pascal tells the ideal reader to engage in *coutume* and to familiarize herself with the evidence for the articles. It is this which will most readily prepare the unbeliever for grace and conversion. By introducing the Wager, and then using it to recommend *coutume* and consideration of evidence, Pascal can play down, without rejecting altogether, the force of reason. He entices belief while at the same time avoiding making the enticement itself the main determinant of belief. Like someone who offers us money if we gain the belief that the earth is flat, and then suggests we go live among the Flat Earth Society, Pascal shows us, in the Wager, the reward we are promised if we gain the belief in the articles of faith, and then he suggests we go to church and study the bible in order to get this reward. Belief must come by grace, he tells us, and biblical study and *coutume* are the best we can do towards gaining grace.

The ideal reader of the *Pensées* then, (1) is enticed by the Wager to desire belief, (2) goes to church, (3) appreciates the evidence for the articles of faith, and then (4) is converted by the intervention of God's grace. It is the nature of the conversion of this ideal reader which determines whether Pascal is using the Wager to encourage deception. As I argue in the remaining section of this paper, he is not.

V. CONCLUSION: SELF-DECEPTION AND PASCAL'S THEORY OF CONVERSION

In section III, I claimed that we cannot, either during or after the process of self-deception, be aware of how we formed the belief while retaining that belief. If self-deception involves entering a situation in which one forms a belief arationally, then one cannot know that one is doing so.

In the previous section, I looked at two interpretations of Pascal's theory of conversion. The first, which I called the 'arational *coutume* interpretation' of Pascal, is clearly a self-deceptive process. In such a conversion, the main determinant of belief is habit. One habitually behaves as if one believes, and this behavior eventually results in belief. Having formed a belief in God in this way, I could not then recognize that I did so. I cannot say that I believe in the articles of faith because I had formed a habit of behaving as if I believed in them. Nor, equally, could I say that I formed a belief in God because a sermon filled me with fear or love. These are just as impossible, from the first-person, as 'I believe in God because I want to live forever', or 'I believe in God because of the culture I grew up in'.

I am not claiming that all these are self-deceptive belief-forming processes. We arationally form beliefs all the time. We have many beliefs which arise through habit or emotion or desires or social environment. These are not necessarily self-deceptive. However, if Pascal had a simple arational *coutume* view of conversion, then he would, as Flew claims, be using his Wager to

endorse self-deception. Willingly setting out to form a belief in this way is clearly a self-deceptive process. Were these Pascal's intentions, then, at the end of fragment 418, he would be sending the ideal unbeliever off to form a belief in a way which could not later be correctly acknowledged without giving the belief up.

I defended a more complex interpretation of Pascalian conversion, on the grounds that it allows us make sense of the Wager's position in the broader context of the *Pensées*. The *Pensées* is a conversion tract, an attempt to lead an unbeliever to belief. Seeing the *Pensées* thus, one becomes aware that the Wager plays only one part in a complex project of rallying various resources in Pascal's fight against agnosticism. The right theory of Pascalian conversion, the belief-formation which the ideal reader of the *Pensées* would follow, is not an arational theory of conversion. His theory describes a belief-formation which can be recognized once conversion is complete. Conversion comes about when God performs an act of grace, when he instigates belief where evidence alone cannot. God himself brings about faith. However this inspiration occurs, either by a divine experience or a less apparent intervention in the belief-forming processes of the unbeliever, God's grace will be the necessary determinant. The ideal reader of the *Pensées* will undergo a conversion in which the evidence of prophecies and miracles prepared the way for grace. God's intervention into the faculty of reason, says Pascal, will be the main, and only sufficient determinant, while desire (induced by the Wager), evidence, and *coutume* will have secondary roles to play. The believer can surely cite the evidence in the explanation of her belief, and she will, perhaps, admit that desire and *coutume* play a role in the determination of her belief, but all three will be in a minor, and surely insufficient, role, and the latter two will not threaten her belief, as they would if they were thought to be more important.

The most important factor in Pascalian conversion is grace, and a conversion by grace would be in no way self-deceptive. Neither religious

experience nor the 'evidential conversion' which Pascal encourages in the *Pensées*, is arational. Both involve the direct intervention of God, so either of them can be recognized from the first-person. If a believer is convinced that she has received grace, then that very belief acts as evidence for her belief in the articles of faith. Grace not only brings about belief, it subjectively justifies it as well. As in sense-perception, the believer takes the very fact believed to have been involved in the determination of the belief. Grace is *taken by the believer to be* a truth-conducive determinant of belief. Thus grace can be cited in a first-person doxastic explanation.

The religious experiencer, like Pascal himself, will say something like 'I believe in the articles of faith because I have had a religious experience of God/Christ'. Innumerable believers have discussed their divine experiences. As in sense perception, the subject takes the event to be a conscious direct presentation of God. The converted reader of the *Pensées* could account for her belief in a similar way: 'I believe in the articles of faith because God has shown me the force of the evidence of the prophecies.' Since it is God who supposedly brought about her new appreciation of the evidence, the believer can readily admit that grace is responsible for that conversion.

Grace by divine revelation and grace by reason are each examples of the sorts of explanations Christians can give of their own faith. Someone who has undergone something like an arational *coutume* conversion cannot truthfully reflect on her conversion, on the source of her belief in God. If and when they occur, *coutume* conversions are hidden from their subjects, as are similar emotion-, desire-, and socially-determined conversions. The process Pascal describes, on the other hand, is not a process of conversion which must be hidden from the subject of belief. He describes conversion in terms of grace, divine experience, and the consideration of evidence. The believer who forms a belief in this way will, in full sincerity, be able to recount her conversion. She will be able to give a first-person account of how she formed a saving belief. This, I

suggest, is the primary difference between a deceptive and a non-deceptive conversion, as well as what makes Pascal's use of the Wager non-deceptive.⁴⁸

NOTES

¹ But, I will presume, by no means impossible

² In this paper, I use 'faith' and 'belief' synonymously. Pascal takes faith to be a type of belief, and any difference he sees between them should not affect my discussion.

³ R. Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, edited by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), Vol. II, 3 and 4.

⁴ W. Paley, *Natural Theology, or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity*, 12th Edition (Lincoln-Rembrandt Publishing, Charlottesville VA), 536-7.

⁵ The major Christian creeds are the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian.

⁶ B. Pascal, *Pensées*, translated by A.J. Krailshimer (London: Penguin, 1966) fragment 449 (Lafuma numbering).

⁷ Pascal, *Pensées*, fragment 449.

⁸ T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Maryland: Christian Classics, 1981) Question II, Article 3.

⁹ Pascal, *Pensées*, fragment 190.

¹⁰ Pascal, *Pensées*, fragment 449. The added reference to the immortality of the soul may be a reference to Descartes' Meditations, which was originally subtitled 'in which are demonstrated the existence of God and the immortality of the soul'.

¹¹ A.J. Krailshimer, *Pascal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) Chapter 4.

¹² For a good short discussion of the Wager, see I. Hacking, "The Logic of Pascal's Wager", *American Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 9 No. 2 (1972): 186-192.

¹³ This distinction is conspicuous in the literature on doxastic rationality. See R. Nozick, *The Nature of Rationality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993) Chapter III, or R. Foley "Some Different Conceptions of Rationality" in *Construction and Constraint*, edited by E. McMullin (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

¹⁴ "Sur les pensées de M. Pascal", in *Voltaire: Lettres Philosophiques*. Quoted in I. Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) p. 72.

¹⁵ I take it that strict Calvinism, with its belief in a predestined electorate, is an example of a doctrine which does not accept the doctrine 'salvation by faith'. For this reason a Calvinist would not be enticed by the Wager.

¹⁶ For this position, see B. Winters, "Believing at Will", *Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1979): 243-256. See also B. Williams, "Deciding to Believe", in his *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) and M. Ayers, *Locke* Vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 1991) Vol. 1, Chapter 16.

¹⁷ Pascal, *Pensées*, fragment 539.

¹⁸ Ibid., fragment 418. Exchanges with interlocutors are present throughout the *Pensées*.

¹⁹ Ibid., fragment 418.

²⁰ A.G.N. Flew, *The Presumption of Atheism* (London: Elek/Pemberton, 1976), 63.

²¹ See B. Winters, "Believing at Will": 243-256.

²² This is not the only type of self-deception. See for example D. Pears, *Motivated Irrationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), Chapter IV.

Kent Bach claims, without argument, that this would not be self-deception at all, since self-deception is the wish for a certain state of affairs to be true, and not the wish to gain a certain belief. See K. Bach, "An Analysis of Self-Deception", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, XLI, No. 3: 353. This is unnecessarily restrictive. Setting out to gain a belief via hypnosis for whatever reason would seem to be to set out to delude oneself.

²³ Pascal, *Pensées*, fragment 419.

²⁴ Ibid., fragment 821.

²⁵ D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) Book I.

²⁶ Pascal, *Pensées*, fragment 418.

²⁷ The first is from N. Rescher, *Pascal's Wager* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 9. The second is from I. Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability*, 66.

²⁸ D. Pears, *Motivated Irrationality*, 60.

²⁹ Pascal, *Pensées*, fragment 418.

³⁰ Ibid., fragment 189.

³¹ Ibid., fragment 808, my emphasis.

³² A. Krailsheimer, Introduction to Pascal, *Pensées*, 21.

³³ Pascal, *Pensées*, fragment 588.

³⁴ A. Krailsheimer, Introduction to Pascal, *Pensées*, 21.

³⁵ Pascal, *Pensées*, fragment 874.

³⁶ See footnote 15.

³⁷ His personal (and poignant) record of the event is recorded in the *Memorial*. See Pascal, *Pensées*, fragment 913. Within a few weeks of this experience Pascal made his first retreat to the Jansenist community at Port Royal. A parchment copy of the *Memorial* was found sewn into Pascal's clothing when he died in 1662.

³⁸ F.T.H. Fletcher, *Pascal and the Mystical Tradition* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954), 21.

³⁹ The 'Memorial' is included in present editions of the *Pensées*, but it was not intended for publication.

⁴⁰ Pascal, *Pensées*, fragment 188.

⁴¹ Ibid., fragments 380-82.

⁴² My emphasis.

⁴³ Ibid., fragment 821.

⁴⁴ R. Hooker, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1907), Vol. 1, 318.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 319, my emphasis.

⁴⁶ M. de Montaigne, Miguel de, “Apology for Raymond Sebond” in *The Complete Works of Montaigne*, translated by D. Frame (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1948).

⁴⁷ The explanation is somewhat spurious. In order for the ‘opposition’ in this debate to be convinced by it, they would *already* have to believe that God exists. This does not, however, affect Pascal’s position. As long as the unbeliever assigns *some* prior probability to the articles of faith (including, perhaps, the claim that grace is necessary for belief in the articles of faith), the Wager makes belief in the articles practically rational, and (if my claims in the next section are right) Pascalian conversion makes such belief epistemically rational.

⁴⁸ Thanks to Michael Ayers, Jeff Buckley, Jonas Jølle, Jim Reed, Nigel Voak, and two referees for this journal.