Pascal's Wager Makes Being an Atheist Supererogatory

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Introduction

Famously, Pascal's Wager purports to give one a practical reason for belief in God. Things would go better for us, according to the wager, if we decide to believe in God; believing in God maximizes expected value. Contemporary discussions of the wager have focussed on developing frameworks for dealing with infinite expected value and providing solutions to various prominent objections (e.g., Chen and Rubio (2020), Jackson and Rogers (2019), Rota (2017)). However, I will here consider a *moral* objection to the wager. I will argue that the framework behind Pascal's Wager—the idea that those who do not wager for God are denied infinite utility—is morally unacceptable. Thus, while we might have a strong practical reason to wager for God, we have a strong moral reason to wager against God. While I ultimately think one should choose to be moral and not pragmatic, this tension gives rise to a novel upshot. If the story I tell here is right, then wagering against God would be a morally good, though non-obligatory, thing to do. That is, I will try to show that Pascal's Wager makes being an atheist a supererogatory act.

However, I should concede a few things at the start. The outline above is quite bold and would require lots of argument. My arguments still need work. Second, more engagement with the relevant literature is needed, particularly the limited work on moral objections to Pascal's Wager.[1] Thus, the goal for this current draft is more modest. I will tell a story— each part of which will, in the end, require much more argument—that aims to show my conclusion. Then, I argue that even if the story I tell is uncompelling, we can still draw an interesting lesson.

Here is a brief outline of the paper. I begin by setting up Pascal's Wager and highlighting the possibility that practical and moral reasons can diverge. Then, I divide wagers into two camps depending on their outcomes for those who wager against God when God exists. I call versions of the wager in which those who wager against God when God exists are denied infinite reward—whether by being sent to Hell or by being annihilated—*traditional wagers*. I call wagers in which all are (eventually) saved *universalist wagers*. I argue that traditional wagers are morally

[1] Terance Penelhum (1971) offers a similar moral objection to mine and Philip Quinn (1994) responds. However, I will not engage here with either paper. This is a failing on my part that I plan to correct. I admit at the outset that this draft needs more by way of argument and literature review.

unacceptable and that universalist wagers render the argument irrelevant. Next, following David Lewis (2007), I argue that the divine evil entailed by traditional wagers makes it immoral to wager for God. Thus, we have strong moral reason to wager against God. For me this conclusion is enough to show that Pascal's Wager fails. But I fully admit that not everyone will be convinced. Some might think that possibly, it is morally acceptable for God to deny infinite reward to non-believers. I end by arguing that even if it is only possibly evil to wager for God, this is enough to get us our novel upshot that wagering against God is morally supererogatory.

1. Setting Up the Wager

Pascal (1958 [1970]: fragments 233– 41) writes that one should believe that God exists because "there is here an infinity of an infinitely happy life to gain" and "what you stake is finite". Believing that God does not exist might result in the loss of an infinity of an infinitely happy afterlife. And if Hell exists, then believing that God does not exist might net you an infinity of an infinitely unhappy afterlife. Now, the *Pensées* is a notoriously difficult text to interpret. However, we need not be concerned here with questions of interpretation or historical accuracy. For present purposes, let's represent Pascal's argument with the following decision table.

Table 1	God Exists	God Does Not Exist
Believe in God	+ ∞	F1
Do Not Believe in God	- ∞	F2

We might worry that the above matrix commits us to doxastic voluntarism. But it is highly contentious whether belief is voluntary. I will not enter that debate here. So, I will take the decision being considered in all subsequent formulations to be whether or not to *wager* for God. If you are a doxastic voluntarist, then you can understand "wager for" to mean "believe in". If you are a doxastic involuntarist, you can understand "wager for" to be the set of actions that will result in, or are most likely to result in, belief in God. Such actions might include praying, going to religious ceremonies, spending time with other believers, and, importantly, committing to a certain lifestyle and worldview.

So, the following decision matrix represents the "basic wager".

Table 2	God Exists	God Does Not Exist

Wager for God	$+\infty$	F1
Wager against God	$-\infty$	F2

The leftmost column lists our choices, the top row lists ways the world might be, and the middle four boxes display values assigned to outcomes. Any positive, non-infinitesimal probability for the hypothesis God exists gives us the above expected values (EVs). If God exists and one believes, the EV is positively infinite because, according to the wager, God rewards believers with an infinite afterlife of the greatest bliss. If God exists and one does not believe, then the EV is negatively infinite because, according to the wager, God punishes non-believers with an infinite afterlife of terrible suffering. If God does not exist, then the EV of believing and the EV of not believing will be some finite number, labelled "F1" and "F2" above.

With a few further assumptions, we can get to Pascal's conclusion. First, we need to make two mathematical assumptions: any real number added to infinity is equal to infinity, and any real number greater than zero multiplied by infinity is equal to infinity. Using "p" to represent any positive, non-infinitesimal credence in God's existence, we can see that:

$$EV(\text{Wager for God}) = \infty \times p + F1 \times (1-p) = \infty$$

and

$$EV(\text{Wager against God}) = -\infty \times p + F2 \times (1-p) = -\infty$$

We also need to assume that, in conditions of risk or uncertainty, agents ought to maximize expected value. Though contestable, this assumption is fairly orthodox (Thoma, 2019: 58-9). Lastly, assume that wagering for God and wagering against God are jointly exhaustive and mutually incompatible options: failing to wager for God counts as wagering against God and vice versa. With these assumptions, we can conclude that we ought to—i.e. we have an overring practical reason to—wager for God. For, the EV of wagering for God swamps that of wagering against God, and we ought to maximize expected value.

Now, just because decision theory tells us we should take a certain course of action, it does not necessarily follow that we ought to, all things considered, take that course of action. For instance, Graham Oppy (2006: 225) asks, "[i]f there is a 1000- ticket lottery for which the payout is positive infinite, and I already hold 900 of the tickets, what grounds are there for insisting that I should be prepared to betray all of my friends and family in order to obtain another ticket?" While

Oppy's comment is meant as a rejoinder to a certain response to the mixed strategies objection, we might think there is a deeper point here about the normative force of decision theory. Suppose that decision theory tells Jones she ought to do x, where the "ought" here is the practical, means-ends ought of decision theory. If "x" is "torture an infant for fun", then it will also be the case that Jones ought not to do x, where the "ought" here is the moral ought. So, the norms of morality and the norms of decision theory could pull in opposite directions. The possibility of this kind of divergence will be relevant in what follows.

2. A Story and A Lesson

Now that we have the needed background, it's time for a story.

The Parable of The Royal:

Long ago in a land far away there lived a humble farmer. When he wasn't tending to his fields, the farmer would go to a local tavern to hear news from travelers. The farmer's realm had no ruler. While all the little villages and farmsteads lived mostly in peace, many people yearned for someone to rule them. One day at the tavern, the farmer met a traveler from the neighboring realm. She told the farmer about the ruler of her realm: The Royal. The traveler began by describing The Royal.

"They are loving and kind, fair and just. Their mercy and goodness know no bounds. The Royal loves us and has rich, fulfilling relationships with all their subjects. The Royal has ended poverty, brought peace, and maintains liberty and equality for all," said the traveler.

"Wow! They sound amazing," said the farmer.

Things took a turn as the traveler continued. She told the farmer that because of The Royal's reputation, many of the villagers and farmers in the farmer's realm had started to join the land of The Royal. Indeed, the Royal was beginning to annex—non-violently, and with most people's consent—the farmer's entire realm. The farmer realized his village and farmstead would soon be under The Royal's control.

At first, the farmer was excited by the prospect of having The Royal rule—they seemed perfect. But the traveler warned the farmer.

"While The Royal is loving, just, and wise, they require one thing of you," she said. "You must swear fealty to The Royal to become part of their realm and to be treated this way."

The farmer asked the traveler what happens to those who do not swear fealty to The Royal. While the traveler told the farmer that no one knows for certain, she said that it is very likely that

those who refuse to swear are taken down into The Royal's dungeon and horribly tortured for the rest of their lives. She said many have reported seeing the oathless being taken into the dungeon. Some reported hearing the screams of the oathless. Others said that the oathless are summarily but painlessly executed once they reach the dungeon. Either way, The Royal clearly did not tolerate disloyalty, and they punished the oathless harshly.

"But I thought you said The Royal was kind and just," said the farmer.

"They are! They are merciful and loving," responded the traveler. "All you must do is swear fealty, and you will be richly rewarded." While a small group of rebels had rejected the Royal for their treatment of the oathless, the traveler assured him that the rebels were all very foolish.

Now, though the farmer half suspected that "loving" and "merciful" had different meanings where the traveler came from, he began to worry about the future. In but a few days his whole village would be under the Royal's control. The farmer desperately wanted the life described by the traveler, but he worried that swearing fealty would make him complicit in the wrongs done to the oathless. He wondered aloud whether he should refuse to swear fealty and join the rebels.

"Don't be foolish!" cried the traveler. "The choice is simple. You stand to gain a long happy life by swearing and risk everything by refusing. This is no time for senseless moralizing."

The farmer was told to forget his moral misgivings and be pragmatic instead.

The End

I think that someone considering whether to take Pascal's Wager is in a position like that of the farmer in the Parable of the Royal. There are many disanalogies. While the farmer probably knows, or at least justifiably believes, that The Royal exists, Pascal's Wager supposes that one's credence in God's existence is very low. But this disanalogy only helps my case. If it is wrong for the farmer to swear fealty while in a good epistemic position, it is not clear to me how worsening his epistemic position could help his case. The goodness of The Royal obviously differs from God's goodness. But so too does the punishment the oathless face from the punishment of Hell. So, I think these two differences counterbalance. Finally, The Royal did not create the people and world in the story as God is commonly thought to have done. This strikes me as morally irrelevant. My parents created me in some sense. They are not morally permitted to treat me like the Royal treats the oathless.

The lesson I draw from the story is this: the farmer morally ought not swear fealty to The Royal. Or at least, his swearing fealty would be a morally bad state of affairs. Surely a ruler that

severely punishes people merely for refusing to swear fealty is an evil ruler. It would be wrong to become a servant of that evil by swearing fealty. It could make the farmer complicit in The Royal's evil. Moreover, if the farmer's oath was genuine, this would reflect some vice in the farmer. For it is evil to swear fealty to evil people. Still, we could excuse the farmer if he swore fealty out of self-preservation. So too, as I will argue, with wagering for God. It would be wrong to wager for God even though we might be excised for doing so to preserve one's soul.

In what follows I will try to clarify this lesson and offer some arguments.

3. Clarifying the Lesson

This section will proceed in stages. I consider the three main possible outcomes of not wagering for God when God exists—traditional divine judgment, annihilationism, and universalism. Call any version of Pascal's Wager in which traditional divine judgment or annihilationism are the outcomes of wagering against God when God exists *traditional wagers*. Call wagers in which all eventually receive infinite reward *universalist* wagers. I'll argue that traditional wagers are morally unacceptable and that universalism renders the wager irrelevant.

3.1 Traditional Wagers

Call the orthodox view that those who wager for God receive infinite reward in heaven and those who do not wager for God are punished infinitely in Hell *traditional divine judgment* (TDJ). Traditional divine judgment strikes me as grossly immoral. While I will provide some reasons for thinking this, a full treatment of the issue must be done in later drafts.[2]

I take it that Hell is something like eternal conscious torment; probably the worst state one could be in. The important part is that Hell lasts forever. Here are some reasons to think that TDJ is morally abhorrent. First, we might think that it is morally impermissible to ever subject anyone—regardless of their identity, guilt, history, or willingness—to eternal conscious torment. We might think this because we might think that eternal conscious torment is torture and torture would only ever be permissible, if at all, when something much more morally valuable would be gained by it that could not reasonably be gained otherwise. But Hell lasts forever. So, nothing can be gained by the one in Hell. And God is omnipotent, so it seems to me that there will always be a more reasonable way to gain any potential good gained by eternal conscious torment. One might think

[2] I will provide some considerations I find compelling, and respond to some objections. But much more work is needed here.

that the torment itself is the good gained. All I can say in response is that such a person must understand "good" in a radically different way than the way it is being used in this paper.[3]

Alternatively, we might think that TDJ is immoral because it condemns honest non-believers to Hell, despite not being culpable for their unbelief (Penelhum 1971). There are a couple of ways of unpacking this thought. We might think that belief is involuntary. If this is right, then one might be forced by one's evidence and life history to believe that God does not exist. They could not have believed otherwise. But, if ought implies can, then it is not the case that they ought to have believed that God exists. Thus, it seems wrong to punish someone for something they were not morally required to do. We might instead think that belief is voluntary. But still, there must be some honest non-believers—people who honestly considered the evidence and formed the belief that God does not exist on that basis. While they could have believed otherwise in some sense, it seems that they are still not culpable for their unbelief because it was rational. Thus, TDJ is immoral. Second, even if we hold all non-believers culpable, we might think that administering infinite punishment for a finite crime is deeply immoral. Indeed, we might think that no being, culpable or not, should receive infinite punishment for a finite crime. More on this below.

Finally, as Ted Sider (2002) argues, whatever criterion with which God judges finite beings will always involve some degree of vagueness. This means that there will always be 'edge cases' in which it seems both morally and rationally arbitrary that S_1 received eternal salvation while S_2 received eternal damnation. But the decision to condemn a subject to eternal damnation should not be an arbitrary matter. It would be impermissible, so this line of thought would go, to institute a state of affairs in which subjects were condemned to eternal damnation arbitrarily. But according to Sider, TDJ will by its nature always involve this kind of arbitrariness. Thus, TDJ is morally unacceptable.

While there is much more to be said here, the above should at least show you what I think of TDJ. Let us move on.

Alternatively, it might be that wagering against God when God exists nets you immediate and painless destruction rather than an infinite stay in Hell. Call the view that those who wager against God are (perhaps eventually) destroyed in the afterlife *annihilationism*. On this view, the basic wager would look something like the following.

[3] One might object to the picture of Hell as eternal conscious torment. They may say there is little or no religious text to support this picture. They may instead hold that Hell is merely separation from God. But communion with God is meant to be the highest good. God may also be thought to be the source of all value. If this is right, then Hell would still be a place devoid of the highest good and maybe all value together. This still sounds quite bad to me. If the suggestion is that Hell really isn't that bad, then TDJ begins to look like a form of universalism.

Table 3	God Exists	God Does Not Exist
Wager for God	+ ∞	F1
Wager against God	F3	F2

While non-believers are not sent to Hell, they are still denied infinite reward. This, no doubt, is morally better than the traditional view. Still, I argue that this outcome too is morally unacceptable.

To begin to see why, think back to the Parable of the Royal. It would be of no help to the farmer if he learned that the oathless were painlessly but summarily executed rather than tortured for the rest of their lives. Indeed, it would not help much if he learned that the oathless were banished from the realm rather than executed. But this end is what we are to imagine makes annihilationism morally acceptable.[4] Those who find the death penalty unacceptable may have similar intuitions here about annihilationism. One of the deep flaws of this kind of divine justice is that it leaves no room for forgiveness, rehabilitation, growth, and eventual reunion with God.

I think that both TDJ and annihilationism are morally unacceptable outcomes. My strong intuition that God's perfect love disbars forms of retributive justice is driving this conclusion. I take it that omnibenevolence entails rehabilitation and reconciliation (Hart 2019). Many will disagree. For instance, some philosophers (e.g., Crisp 2003: 37; Kvanvig 1993; Rogers and Conroy 2015) variously argue that since God is an infinite being, sins committed against God constitute infinite crimes for which infinite punishment is justified. To me, this kind of response requires a principle according to which the greater a being is, the worse it is to morally wrong that being. This principle seems obviously false to me. While in the past we may have thought it was worse to assault a queen than a common person, this strikes me as classism. Greatness is a morally irrelevant property when it comes to harms and wrongs.[5]

Others have argued that traditional wagers are acceptable because God is not the one who chooses our fate, we are. That is, we in some sense freely choose to end up in Hell or be annihilated. There are a few different ways of understanding this response. It might be that since God gave us

[4] Again, some might appeal to the fact that God created (and possibly sustains) all of us. Again, I find this to be morally irrelevant. This kind of response is akin to the parent on a family sitcom who, in a fit of anger, says "I brought you into this world and I can take you out of it!". To me, rolling the laugh track afterward makes sense because what was said can only reasonably be taken as a joke.

[5] Indeed, the required principle has unintuitive consequences. It would seem to imply that it is better to wrong a child than it is to wrong an adult. I suspect that not only do many find this false, they find it backwards. It might be *worse* to wrong a child. But this is because children are limited, defenseless, and often lacking agency none of which applies to God.

free will, we are the ones who choose to wager against God and sin. Thus, we are responsible for our punishment. I have already argued that the punishments of traditional wagers are morally unacceptable, so this response will not work. Following philosophers like C. S. Lewis (1945), we might instead interpret the response as saying that those in Hell freely choose to stay there, perhaps by freely continuing to sin. I do not think this response escapes the worries about the moral acceptability of traditional outcomes. Indeed, the response seems to presuppose the existence of Hell in the first place. Moreover, this kind of response inherits the flaws and difficulties of the free will defense to the problem of evil—it fetishizes libertarian free will. It would be a moral failing on God's part if God gave creatures libertarian free will while knowing (or reasonably believing) that those creatures would choose Hell or annihilation. Indeed, we do not value free will this much. We restrict the freedom of people we think are dangers to themselves or others. If it is acceptable for humans to violate the free will of people sometimes, surely it would be permissible for God to do so to save them from Hell or annihilation.

Thus, TDJ and annihilationism are morally unacceptable.[6]

3.2 Universalist Wagers

Universalist wagers look something like the following.

Table 4	God Exists	God Does Not Exist
Wager for God	+ ∞	F1
Wager against God	+ ∞	F2

According to universalism, all are (eventually) saved. The problem Universalism poses for the wager itself is also intuitive: if both believers and non-believers go to heaven, then there is no chance of missing out on infinite utility. So, there is no need to wager.[7]

Now, Elizabeth Jackson and Andrew Rogers (2019) argue that universalist wager can still give us a reason to wager for God. They write that:

[6] While I will have a bit more to say on this later on, I recognize that this is a very hasty conclusion.

[7] Indeed, if taking a traditional wager is morally unacceptable, then we might think a dilemma arises. Either universalism is true, or it is false. If universalism is false, then we cannot wager for moral reasons. If it is true, then we have no reason to wager at all. Either way, Pascal's Wager fails.

> a version of Pascal's Wager is consistent with universalism, given the possibility of levels of heaven that vary in terms of infinite goodness (for example, ten versus twelve units of happiness per day). On this version of the wager, you have reason to take actions that maximize your chance at getting into the higher level of heaven possible. (76)

However, I think this proposal is more difficult to make work than it might seem. On the one hand, it needs to turn out that the notion of levels of heaven is itself a morally acceptable notion. On the other, it must be that the notion of levels of heaven does not render the wager irrelevant again.

Let's consider the first worry. Perhaps levels of heaven are locked-in for eternity. Once you arrive in the afterlife at a certain level, you are stuck at that level forever. Here are two reasons to think this is morally problematic. First, this seems to rule out the possibility of growing and deepening one's relationship with God in heaven. Presumably 'higher' levels of heaven are higher because they are closer to God. But coming closer to God seems like one of the most valuable parts of being in heaven. It seems to me less than perfectly good to block those who are yearning a chance to deepen their relationship with God. Second, we might appeal to relational egalitarianism to argue that rigid levels of heaven would constitute an unjust kind of social hierarchy. According to the relational egalitarian, the just society (or afterlife in this case) is one in which citizens relate as equals (Anderson 1999). We might think that rigid levels of heaven would be morally problematic because they would impede relations of equality. Now, it might be that we can learn to grow and deepen our relationship with God in the afterlife. That is, it might be that levels of heaven are not rigid in the sense that they are locked in for eternity. This would solve the moral issues outlined above. However, this alternative renders the wager irrelevant again. For now all levels of infinite reward are available regardless of how one wagers.

I do not see a good way for Jackson and Rogers to thread this needle. So, I think that universalist wagers are irrelevant. In what follows, I will mostly only be concerned with traditional wagers.

4. A Moral Reason to Wager Against God

Let's assume the above is enough to show that traditional divine judgment and annihilationism would constitute divine evils. How would that make wagering for God an immoral act? Well, I follow David Lewis (2007) in thinking that evil is contagious in a sort of way. Certain acts, vices, and dispositions can make a person evil. But so can admiring, valuing, worshipping, or making oneself

subservient to someone one knows is evil. Lewis (238) asks us to consider Fritz the neo-Nazi. Fritz adores Hitler one of the most evil men in history. Though Fritz is committed to the ideals of Nazism and deeply admires Hitler, he is not disposed to act violently on his principles. For instance, Fritz never beats "defenseless weaklings" because he thinks that only Hitler himself is worthy of committing those glorious violent acts. Indeed, if the opportunity arose to beat a weakling, Fritz would even try to restrain his fellows knowing they too are unworthy of such acts. So, Fritz is not evil because he commits violent or hateful acts. Rather, Fritz is evil simply because "…it is evil to admire someone evil in full recognition of the characteristics and actions that express their evil" (Lewis 2007: 239). Lewis sees worshipers of God in a similar the same light. Lewis writes that while those who worship, admire, or believe in God while thinking that God administers TDJ would "label divine evil as divine justice", they really "worship the perpetrator [of an infinitely great evil]" (241).

I agree with Lewis: one can be contaminated by evil by admiring someone you know to be evil (at least in full recognition of what makes them evil). But recall our notion of "wagering". Wagering for God may indeed involve belief in God's existence. But more importantly wagering for God involves committing to a certain lifestyle and worldview. It may involve participating in ceremonies of praise, communion, and worship. I argue that there is no morally relevant difference between admiring what one knows is evil and seeking/being in communion with, praising, or worshiping what one knows is evil. It is evil to commit oneself to a lifestyle and worldview centered around what one knows to be evil. Likewise, it is immoral to wager for that which you know is immoral. So, traditional wagers make wagering for God immoral.

One might say that to wager for God is not to do so in full recognition of what would make God evil. But this will not do. For the logic of the traditional wager *requires* recognizing how bad it would be to wager against God when God exists. To consider the traditional wager is to consider what would make God evil. Thus, we have strong moral reason not to wager for God. To do so would be to contaminate oneself with the evil of the outcomes of the traditional wager. This was exactly the lesson of the Parable of the Royal. While the Royal is in many ways morally admirable, their treatment of the oathless was enough to make swearing fealty to them morally problematic. So too with wagering for God.

Now, one might offer one last objection. We might think that those who wager do not know that the outcomes of traditional wagers are evil because they believe that these outcomes are just. Lewis' previous comments aside, we should take this issue seriously. It might not be evil to take a traditional wager for God so long as one thinks that the outcomes of a traditional wager are just. But

one must admit that the outcomes of the traditional wager are at least possibly evil. Next, I will briefly respond to this worry. Then, I will show how this possibility gives rise to our novel upshot.

5. Being an Atheist is Supererogatory

I suspect many will have found my treatment of traditional wagers lacking. One might suggest that I've missed a crucial possibility. It might be that a perfectly good God is compatible with the outcomes of traditional wagers. Perhaps TDJ and annihilationism really are morally permissible. In response, I will begin by saying that this proposal is hard for me to understand. I lose my grip on concepts like *love*, *justice*, and *mercy*. It just strikes me as something close to an analytic truth that a being cannot be both perfectly good and administer, oversee, or otherwise permit the outcomes of a traditional wager. Put differently, imagine someone arguing for the existence of Evil God. Suppose they told you that Evil God was malicious, deceitful, hateful, and revengeful. Evil God, they tell you, is *perfectly* evil. But suppose they end by noting that Evil God also gives everlasting and loving bliss to all beings once they die. This last point seems deeply incongruent. Symmetry should lead us to think that the combination of perfect goodness with the outcomes of traditional wagers is similarly incongruent.

While not everyone will agree that taking a traditional wager is morally unacceptable, I take the earlier considerations to show that it is at least *possible* that taking a traditional wager is immoral. This puts us in position to see that being an atheist is supererogatory. Suppose we do not know whether or not traditional wagers make God evil. Suppose further that we are more confident that if God exists, then TDJ and annihilationism are morally acceptable then we are in its negation. This possibility is enough to get us our interesting upshot.

To see how, imagine the following scenario. You work for a construction company, and you must demolish a derelict house within the next few hours. You have some evidence suggesting that several teenagers are living in the house, but your boss and the police give you strong evidence to the contrary. The chance that there are people in the house given your evidence is exceedingly low, but not zero. Suppose further that, if you refuse, you may be fired and unable to pay your mortgage. Practically, you ought to demolish the house. Further, since the practical cost of refusing is so high, we might think you are also morally permitted to do so. But refusing to demolish the house out of concern for the safety of others would be, it seems to me, a good thing to do. But you are not morally required to refuse. This scenario is similar to the Parable of the Royal except we have added an element of uncertainty.

But even if one's credence that God is evil is vanishingly low—indeed, lower even than one's credence that traditional wagers are acceptable—one still has moral reason to wager against God. For one is still risking doing something morally wrong. This risk might be very small. Moreover, wagering against God comes with its own, hugely costly practical risks. Still, I think it would be a good thing—a praiseworthy thing—to wager against God. It would be good to be an atheist. But this risks ending up in Hell for eternity: the cost might be very high. So, it is excludible if one does not take this option. And this is one way of construing supererogatory acts.

This lesson, I think, is baked into the logic of the Wager itself. The very thing that generates such a strong practical reason to wager for God—the loss of an infinite good and, possibly, the risk of an infinite harm—is what generates the moral reason against so wagering. We are meant to believe that wagering for God is what causes—i.e., is either necessary or sufficient for—one to end up with an infinite reward. Likewise, we are meant to believe that wagering against God is what causes one to end up losing this reward or even netting infinite punishment. But any being that would set things up like this, I submit, is deeply morally flawed. Such a being would be so morally flawed that we should not even risk wagering for them. Or, at least, it would be morally good not to risk this. Due to the severe risk to one's personal well-being, it might be too much to morally require of finite critters like us. Thus, Pascal's Wager makes it such that choosing to wager against God—choosing to be an atheist—goes above and beyond the call of duty.

Conclusion

In this paper I argued that the means-ends norms of decision theory and the categorical norms of morality can come apart and that this phenomenon has special import in the case of Pascal's Wager. I have tried to show that the wager requires a picture of the afterlife that would make it morally wrong to wager for God. While Pascal and decision theory tell us to be pragmatic and wager for God, I argued that we should be moral and reject the wager. However, I conceded that this might be too strong. It might be that my moral assessment is wrong or that the practical cost would be just too high. Still, the story told here reveals an interesting upshot: Pascal's Wager makes being an atheist supererogatory.

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