

Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 26 | Issue 2

Article 6

4-1-2009

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Raymond J. VanArragon

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Recommended Citation

VanArragon, Raymond J. (2009) "Jeff Jordan, PASCAL'S WAGER: PRAGMATIC ARGUMENTS AND BELIEF IN GOD," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 26 : Iss. 2 , Article 6.
DOI: 10.5840/faithphil200926227
Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol26/iss2/6>

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BOOK REVIEWS

Pascal's Wager: Pragmatic Arguments and Belief in God, by Jeff Jordan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Pp. 227. \$65.00.

RAYMOND J. VANARRAGON, Bethel University

While many believers find traditional proofs for God's existence to be obscure and disconnected from their faith, the same does not seem true of pragmatic arguments for belief in God like those made famous by Blaise Pascal and William James. Cultivating belief in God in light of the potential benefits of doing so seems intuitively a sensible thing to do. In *Pascal's Wager*, a new book by Jeff Jordan, these pragmatic arguments are explored and defended in some detail. Jordan himself concludes that pragmatic arguments give good reason for a person to believe in God, provided that the person finds the evidence for and against God's existence to be more or less counterbalanced.

The main focus of the book is the evaluation of the two versions of Pascal's wager that Jordan considers most significant. The first, which he calls the Canonical version, is based on the expected utility of belief in God. As the argument goes, a person has two options, believing in God or not believing; and either God exists or God does not. Given a non-zero probability that God exists and, if God does exist, an infinite reward for believers, one should believe in God, since the expected utility of that choice is infinite. This argument, then, is based on the potential post-mortem benefits of believing.

The second argument Jordan calls the Jamesian version. It puts less emphasis on the potential eternal benefits of belief in God and focuses more on the goods that will accrue to the believer even if God does not exist. According to the Jamesian Wager, since one must choose between belief and non-belief (where options that fall under non-belief include atheism and belief in other deities), and (roughly speaking) the outcomes that could come with belief in God are always as good or better than the outcomes of non-belief, and they are better even if naturalism obtains, one should believe in God. This Wager is called Jamesian, of course, because it is inspired by William James' "Will to Believe" argument; but Pascal himself also thought that theists would lose nothing by believing:



But what harm will come to you from taking this course? You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, doing good, a sincere and true friend. . . . I tell you that you will win thereby in this life. (Pascal, cited by Jordan, p. 24)

Thus Pascalian Wagers do not inevitably depend on potential post-mortem benefits.

After drawing out various versions of the Wager, Jordan spends much of the rest of the book on objections to it. His considered view is that the Jamesian Wager stands up to every objection even if the Canonical one does not.

The first objection claims that pragmatic reasoning—which involves coming to belief based on reasons that provide no evidence that the belief in question is true—is illegitimate. The most basic version of this objection claims, following W. K. Clifford, that it is always wrong to believe based on insufficient evidence. Jordan answers by giving a plausible case in which one ought to cultivate belief in an unsupported proposition because the lives of many people depend on one's doing so. That aside, Jordan does endorse what he calls "defeasible evidentialism," which implies that the demand for evidence is in force most of the time, even if there are exceptions to it. He also defends a number of principles that fill in his evidentialism and rule out holding beliefs in the absence of evidence, for pragmatic reasons, in cases where the benefits of believing depend on the relevant proposition's being true. Of course, the Canonical Wager is truth-dependent, since if God does not exist there are no afterlife benefits to believing; hence, by Jordan's lights, that Wager fails. With the Jamesian Wager, however, the benefits do not depend on the belief's being true, and so the defeasible evidentialist's demands are not violated.

Next Jordan tackles the famous many-gods objection. The objection comes in both possibilist and actualist varieties, where the former refers to what he calls "philosophers' fictions" cooked up solely to refute Pascal's Wager, and the latter refers to deities that are the objects of worship for actual religious groups. The standard possibilist version goes something like this. It is possible that God exists and that theistic belief will result in infinite happiness. At the same time, it is possible that there exists a deity who rewards with infinite happiness all and only those who do not believe in God. Moreover, these possibilities can be multiplied, so that there are infinitely many possible deities each of which rewards all and only those who believe in it. But then, in the first case, the expected utility of believing in God is precisely the same as that of not believing, and in the second, the Wager fails to recommend one deity over any of the others. Jordan's basic response to this objection is to reject the assumption that all logical possibilities must be assigned some probability in pragmatic reasoning, and hence to claim that these philosophers' fictions can safely be ignored and not treated as "practical possibilities," even if the God of theism is taken seriously.

More troubling, perhaps, are the plausible deities posited by actual religions other than Christianity. How can a Pascalian decide between them? One might take Pascal's own solution and be content that, for the person torn between different religious options, he or she should at least believe

one rather than remain agnostic or endorse naturalism. On the other hand, where each religious option has equal (infinite) expected utility, Jordan suggests that the bettor might sensibly seek to determine which option is most likely to be true. And the Jamesian Wager offers more resources for differentiation here, since where expected utility values of the options are equal (and infinite), the Jamesian can appeal to the truth-independent benefits that attend each option in this life, in order to break the tie.

In the next chapter Jordan considers the problems associated with infinite utility values. The primary problem here has to do with standard decision theory, which does not countenance infinite values. This again causes trouble for the Canonical Wager because it is based on the infinite expected utility of belief in God, though nothing prevents the proponent of that version from coming up with a more amenable decision theory or cashing out the argument in terms of very high but finite utility outcomes.

The final chapters of the book include a discussion of miscellaneous "showstopper" objections, all of which Jordan argues can be answered satisfactorily, and a collection of alternative pragmatic arguments for belief (or hope) in God courtesy of William James, John Stuart Mill, James Beattie, and others. In his conclusion, Jordan turns briefly to concerns about divine hiddenness, and in particular to the claim that the lack of weighty evidence for God's existence is good evidence that God does not exist. Jordan argues that this claim is mistaken, and hence that people who find the evidence for God inconclusive can legitimately take the next step and use pragmatic reasons to guide their belief.

In all, this is a very good book for explanation and discussion of different aspects of Pascal's Wager and the literature surrounding it. The book does seem a little dry at times, and Jordan might have used more helpful titles for the complex epistemic principles he comes up with. (He simply uses letters as labels, which makes it difficult later on to remember what principles he is referring to.)

The least satisfying part of the book, in my view, is Jordan's discussion of evidentialism. As I said, Jordan endorses a softer version of evidentialism, one which allows that the demand for evidence be lifted under certain conditions. But it is not wholly clear what Jordan's evidentialism amounts to, especially with regard to belief in God, and it is also doubtful that many people are in the epistemic position that Jordan requires them to be in before they may allow pragmatic considerations to guide their believing.

Part of the problem is Jordan's lack of precision when discussing probabilities, together with his apparent inclination to equate "believing that p " with "believing that p is probable." One can see some of this in the following statement about the evidentialist demand.

With regard to any proposition that one entertains, a person will stand in one of four doxastic states. Either one will have the belief that the proposition's probability value is greater than one-half, or one will believe that the proposition's probability is less than one-half, or one will believe that its probability value is one-half, or one will have no determinate belief concerning the probability value of the proposition. According to the evidentialist imperative, one

should believe a proposition only if one finds oneself in the first doxastic state. (p. 47)

Now this gives only a necessary rather than sufficient condition for permissible belief, but nonetheless it is difficult to know how the condition applies. Most of us, I expect, give no thought to the probability values of most of the propositions we entertain, in which case we surely do not have determinate beliefs about the probability values of those propositions. But then the above quotation implies that we are not justified in believing them—an unusual path to the conclusion that most of our beliefs are not justified. So Jordan's characterization of evidentialism is problematic if explicit consideration of the probabilities is required. But suppose it is required only that we be *inclined* to believe that propositions we believe are probably true. If so, then we get the opposite problem: the requirement becomes too easy to fulfill. After all, to believe a proposition is to believe that it is true and not merely probably true, and hence to be inclined to assign it a probability of one. And so the evidentialist imperative is met for every proposition we believe.

This cannot be what Jordan's evidentialist has in mind. Perhaps in the passage cited earlier, Jordan is thinking of *epistemic* probability (a notion he does not discuss until later), where the requirement is that for any proposition one believes, one also believes that its probability is greater than one-half on the *evidence* that one has. Even with this qualification, however, I suspect that most of us do not typically have a lot of beliefs like these, which again would render many of our beliefs unjustified. And if we say again that what is required is only that one is inclined to believe the probability is greater than one-half on one's evidence, we are left with extremely vexed questions about what evidence one can appeal to in these situations and about how evidence of certain sorts renders probable the relevant propositions.

It seems to me that difficulties of this sort with Jordan's account of evidentialism leak into his discussion of belief in God, and call into question how many people are actually in the initial position where Jordan's Pascalian reasoning would be available to them. Jordan's conclusion, recall, is that the Jamesian Wager gives to a person who judges that God's existence has a probability of one-half or slightly below (on the evidence) good pragmatic grounds for believing in God anyway, and that cultivating that belief on those grounds is legitimate and does not violate the evidentialist demand. But I doubt that many people engage in the sort of evidence-weighting and probability-assigning that Jordan requires as a prelude to pragmatic considerations. Jordan does say that a professional-caliber weighing of the arguments for and against God's existence is not required for most people. Indeed, at one point he says that the general evidentialist requirement can be met with *experiential* rather than propositional evidence (p. 44). If certain kinds of experiences can constitute evidence for (or against) God's existence, that may make it easier for regular people to meet Jordan's evidentialist demand. Unfortunately, Jordan never applies this concession to belief in God, and he never considers what experiential evidence for God might be. Instead, he says that the Pascalian *needs* natural theology to offset the evidence provided by natural atheology (p. 110).

But this only makes it more unlikely that regular people are going to be in the epistemic position that for Jordan must constitute the Pascalian's starting point.

In short, Jordan's defeasible evidentialism, though more lenient than some of the alternatives, contains elements that strike me as unrealistic, and this infects his discussion of the epistemic requirements placed on the prospective bettor. Jordan says, and I agree, that pragmatic considerations are instrumental in the lives of many believers. My complaint is that his version of the Wager does not seem to "bridge the gap between the academy and the 'real world'" in the way that he suggests in his preface. Many people tempted by Pascalian arguments, I suspect, do not engage in the sort of evidence weighing and probability assigning that Jordan appears to require. Instead, they find themselves inclined toward belief and seek, for pragmatic reasons, to cultivate it, to make it deeper, to turn it into the sort of conviction that can shape their lives and their characters. Much of what Jordan says in defense of the Wager (and in opposition to too-strong evidentialism and the many-gods objection) could be useful to the believer who desires to turn her mustard-seed faith into something stronger. And that is significant even if Jordan's way of characterizing the initial position of the prospective bettor is not entirely true to life.

Intellectual Virtues: an Essay in Regulative Epistemology, by Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007. Pp. x + 329.

ANTHONY RUDD, St Olaf College

Perhaps the most interesting and fruitful development in recent epistemology has been the renewal of interest in the intellectual virtues. Roberts and Wood's book is a major contribution to this emerging tradition. It is divided into two parts. In the first, the authors discuss the nature of the intellectual virtues in general terms, looking at their importance for epistemology, their relation to the goods of intellectual inquiry, to the practices within which those goods are pursued and to faculties (such as memory, vision and so on). Part Two gives detailed discussions of particular virtues—starting with the Love of Knowledge, and going on to Firmness, Courage and Caution, Humility, Autonomy, Generosity and Practical Wisdom. As the authors say, discussions of virtue epistemology have tended to concentrate on the more general issues they address in Part One, so the detailed analyses in Part Two are an important reason why this book is distinctive.

The first chapter surveys the recent history of thought about the intellectual virtues. Roberts and Wood follow Zagzebski in favouring a rich, broadly Aristotelian account of the intellectual virtues as character traits, rather than Sosa's equation of virtues with properly functioning faculties (p. 7). However, they reject Zagzebski's attempt to use a virtue-based approach to solve the Gettier problem and produce a definition of knowledge (pp. 9–14). There are many things we can know simply through the proper