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COMBATING THE NOETIC EFFECTS OF SIN: PASCAL'S STRATEGY FOR NATURAL THEOLOGY

Terence D. Cuneo

Pascal is traditionally thought to be a fideist and a severe critic of natural theology. In this essay, I argue that though Pascal is certainly an anti-evidentialist he nonetheless envisions natural theology to play a unique epistemic role in acquiring faith. Natural theology is useful for combating the epistemic results of sin. Pascal draws upon a rich psychology to show both how sin stunts some of our natural belief forming tendencies and how natural theology can stymie the effects of sin by moving our volition away from love of self to love of God, thereby facilitating the movement of God's grace.

If you want him to be able to find the truth, drive away the creature that is paralysing his reason.

Pascal, *Pensées*, F 48.¹

Many philosophers find themselves attracted to the thesis that,

- (1) For S to be justified in believing p, S must have sufficient evidence for p.²

The merits of this position, christened by the literature as *evidentialism*, has provoked a flurry of debate among recent philosophers of religion. On the one side line up those who consider evidentialism both wanting in general and implausible with respect to theistic belief; on the other stand those who find evidentialism convincing and who argue that theistic belief is justified only if based upon the right sort of evidence.³ A rather interesting upshot of this debate is the light it sheds upon the motivations for natural theology.⁴ This is to say, where one stands on the evidentialism issue determines in many respects how one views the role of natural theology. The connection is easy to see. If justified belief in God does not require evidence — and if we couple this with the observation that most theists do not arrive at theistic belief via natural theology — natural theology will seem somewhat superfluous. If, however, justified theistic belief does require evidence, natural theology will occupy a central place in rational theistic believing. One figure who cuts across these somewhat facile boundaries is the 17th century philosopher Blaise Pascal. Pascal holds that natural theology plays an important role in



what he calls “reasonable” theistic belief, but not because he finds the evidentialist thesis of (1) convincing. In fact, Pascal rejects (1). Pascal thinks many of our beliefs, theistic ones included, are epistemically blameless, even when not based upon evidence. But Pascal also maintains that we humans suffer from a debilitating malady. Our deplorable moral state, our sin, has had such deleterious noetic consequences that we fail to accurately perceive some of the most important features of reality, including the fact that there is a God who has created and sustains us. And this is where natural theology comes into the picture. Pascal deems natural theology epistemically important largely because it is a useful tool for combating the noetic effects of sin. How and why Pascal thinks this is the case is the subject of this essay.

I. Skepticism and the Heart

The most promising avenue to gain insight into the entire Pascalian project, and hence his approach to natural theology, is to consider the philosophical anthropology of the *Pensées*. According to Pascal, we humans are almost “incomprehensible to ourselves” (F 134); we are a curious union of the angelic and the bestial, the innocent and the fallen.

Is it not clear as day that man’s condition is dual? The point is that if man had never been corrupted, he would, in his innocence, confidently enjoy both truth and felicity, and, if man have never been anything but corrupt, he would have no idea of truth or bliss (F 110).

This ontological thesis that portrays man as a “thinking reed,” at once great and insignificant, finds epistemological expression in the form of a skeptical — rationalist tension that runs throughout the entire *Pensées*.

Pascal’s skeptical proclivities run very deep. One strain of this skepticism concerns the inherent *fragility* of reason. Reason can be “bent in any direction” by the passions (F 44, F 119, F530), colored by our preconceptions (F 199), serve the whims of custom (F 60) and easily be distracted by external events (F 48). Ultimately, however, this fragility of reason is nested in what we might term the *corruptness* of reason. Here Pascal draws upon the Augustinian idea that sin, through the Fall, has had lamentable noetic effects — “once this fine reason of ours was corrupted, it corrupted everything” (F 60). The question to raise, of course, is whether Pascal means that our noetic faculties themselves have suffered damage because of sin or whether in some sense our tainted moral characters, our debased wills, often lead our fundamentally sound reasoning capacities astray.

Pascal is far from clear on the matter though it seems the latter option comes closer to the spirit of the *Pensées*. One clear indication for believing that Pascal thinks reason is not hopelessly vitiated by sin is what I have called Pascal’s rationalist streak. For instance, we find Pascal claiming

Man is obviously made for thinking. Therein lies all his dignity and his merit; and his whole duty is to think as he ought (F 620).

Thus all our dignity lies in thought. It is on thought that we must depend for our recovery, not on space and time, which we could never fill. Let us then strive to think well (F 200).

Reason, or more precisely, *thought*, clearly has value and goodness for Pascal. Attempting to untangle this relationship between the goodness of reason and the corruptness of reason looms as a perplexing task for any interpreter of the *Pensées*. The key for solving this problem and indeed for understanding Pascal's religious epistemology is to examine Pascal's philosophical psychology as manifested in the notion of *le coeur*, or the heart.

A. *Le Coeur*

The Pascalian heart represents a most complex and cryptic organ that is the seat of a cluster of cognitive and volitional faculties such as thought, feeling, will and memory. In simplest form we could say that the heart has an *intellectual* and a *volitional* component. There exist a few key fragments, one worth quoting at length, where Pascal explains the concept of *le coeur*.

We know the truth not only through our reason but also through our heart. It is through the latter that we know first principles, and reason, which has nothing to do with it, tries in vain to refute them. The sceptics have no other object than that, and they work at it to no purpose. We know that we are not dreaming, but, however unable we may be to prove it rationally, our inability proves nothing but the weakness of our reason, and not the uncertainty of all our knowledge, as they maintain. For *knowledge* of first principles, like space, time, motion, number, is as solid as any derived through reason, and it is on such knowledge, coming from the heart and *instinct*, that reason has to depend and base all its argument. The heart *feels* that there are three spatial dimensions and that there is an infinite series of numbers, and reason goes on to demonstrate that there are no two square numbers of which one is double the other.

Our inability must therefore serve only to humble reason which would like to be the judge of everything, but not to confute our certainty. As if reason were the only way we could learn! Would to God, on the contrary, that we never needed it and knew everything by *instinct* and feeling. (F 110, italics mine).

Now there are a number of claims being made here. Most generally, Pascal maintains there are two distinct faculties by which we know particular truths concerning the reality that surrounds us: reason and the heart. Much of our knowledge, especially that of first principles — which for Pascal includes concepts such as space, time, numbers, etc. — is “felt” by the intellectual aspect of the heart. Moreover, says Pascal, reason stands in a somewhat awkward relation to the deliverances of the heart. Reason cannot refute nor

confirm the veracity of these principles; in fact, reason in some sense depends upon them in order to operate. Pascal claims this inability to justify the first principles of the heart does little to impugn the high epistemic status of these principles. We are told the knowledge of such principles is quite certain. But this is partially obscure. What exactly does Pascal mean when he says that the intellective aspect of the heart “feels” principles?

The English translation of *sentiment*, “feeling,” clearly has a non-cognitive connotation which belies Pascal’s intentions. F 821 gives us a clear contrast between feeling (*sentiment*) and reasoning (*raisonnement*).

Reason works slowly, looking so often at so many principles, which must always be present, that it is constantly nodding or straying because all its principles are not present. Feeling (*sentiment*) does not work like that, but works instantly, and is always ready.

Pascal means that *sentiment* is the immediate grasping of ideas and principles and is not discursive reasoning that proceeds from first principles. *Sentiment* is a type of direct intuition, a type of non-inferential, immediate knowledge that often operates through *le coeur*. This intuitive perception of first principles is closely analogous to what Pascal later in F 512 calls the intuitional mind or *l’ esprit de finesse*.

Nor is the mention of *instinct* unimportant. We find that *instinct* corresponds to *le mémoire*, or an inchoate recollection we have of our pre-fallen *grandeur*.

That is the state in which men are today. They retain some feeble instinct from the happiness of their first nature... (F 149).

Instinct, it seems, is closely allied with *sentiment* and too represents an immediate grasping of principles, in this case the principles concerning our human nature.

The intellectual component of the heart should now be clear enough. But as noted, Pascal claims that the heart possesses a volitional aspect as well. We are told the heart loves and inclines and seeks (F 380, F 424, F 427). The heart then in addition to knowing can be said to will and choose.⁵ When Pascal speaks of the heart in its volitional sense he primarily speaks of the heart’s desire, or lack thereof, to know the truth concerning the moral and spiritual state of oneself and one’s neighbor.

Man is therefore nothing but disguise, falsehood and hypocrisy, both in himself and with regard to others. He does not want to be told the truth. He avoids telling it to others, and all these tendencies, so remote from justice and reason, are naturally rooted in his heart (F 978).

But most importantly, Pascal proclaims that the heart tends in two directions: it can either become entirely self-absorbed and love itself or turn outward to love God.

I say that it is natural for the heart to love the universal being or itself, according to its allegiance, and it hardens itself against either as it chooses (F 423).

This phenomena when the heart in its volitional sense chooses something or someone else other than God in which to place its absolute trust and love can be termed *absolutizing*.⁶

So let's tidy this picture up: the heart in its intellectual aspect immediately grasps certain first principles; we are so to speak, "hard wired," or designed in such a fashion that we immediately grasp concepts such as space, time, etc. The heart in its volitional aspect chooses persons or states of affairs to which it will direct its attention and trust. The relevant questions, I take it, for understanding both aspects of this psychology of the heart are these: how do the intellectual and volitional aspects of the heart interact and influence each other? And how, in turn, does each aspect of the heart interact with reason? The answers to these questions I suggest give shape to Pascal's entire religious epistemology and his natural theology.

First, however, a number of points need to be made. It should seem clear that the doctrine of *le coeur* offers an explanation of the skeptical-rationalist tension in the *Pensées*. Reason is corrupt insofar as it remains in bondage to a heart engaged in love of self. But reason is not our sole epistemic faculty; neither need it serve the whims of a corrupt heart. The intellectual aspect of the heart and reason evince goodness and value when directed by the volition of a virtuous agent. Second, Pascal places great emphasis on the idea that the volitional aspect of the heart can greatly influence which beliefs we hold. Thus, in some sense, Pascal believes that the volitional part of our being can influence the intellectual part of the heart and our reason. Pascal then adopts a form of *doxastic voluntarism*, or the doctrine that some portion of our beliefs are subject to voluntary control. In particular, Pascal champions a form of *indirect doxastic voluntarism* with respect to beliefs concerning the spiritual and moral state of ourselves, our neighbors, and the existence of God. This is to say, Pascal is not claiming that we can by fiat decide whether or not to believe some proposition concerning ourselves, our neighbors and God; rather the claim is that by acts of volition we can influence what beliefs we hold on these subject matters by deciding what persons or states of affairs to direct our attention, what influences to admit in our belief forming tendencies, what beliefs to keep in the forefront of consciousness, and so on.⁷ Moreover, and this will become clear as we examine Pascal's natural theology, if the volitional part of our being can influence the intellectual part of the heart and our reason, it turns out reason can in some sense influence the volitional aspect of the heart, and indirectly, the intellectual aspect of the heart. How exactly reason operates through the use of natural theology will be considered in the next few sections.

II. Epistemology of Religious Belief

Pascal makes two major claims concerning our belief in God. First, belief in God is necessarily attained via the heart. Second, we cannot know God without knowing our own morally and spiritually depraved state. Let's first consider the second claim.

Pascal argues,

Knowing God without knowing our own wretchedness makes for pride. Knowing our own wretchedness without knowing God makes for despair (F 192).

Man's true nature, his true good and true virtue, and true religion are things which cannot be known separately (F 393).⁸

But what precisely is Pascal's thought here? Two things, I think. If we recall Pascal's doxastic voluntarism, we notice our volition has a great deal of indirect influence over many beliefs we hold. If we turn our attention to the moral state of the self and examine ourselves closely, so thinks Pascal, we will find that we are a concatenation of self-aggrandizement, pride and deceit. This realization will prevent us from considering ourselves the most worthy object of our own trust and love. We will not be able to absolutize ourselves.

The nature of self-love and of this human self is to love only self and consider only self. But what is it to do? It cannot prevent the object of its love from being full of faults and wretchedness: it wants to be great and sees that it is small; it wants to be happy and sees that it is wretched; it wants to be perfect and sees that it is full of imperfections; it wants to be the object of men's love and esteem and sees that its faults deserve only dislike and contempt (F 978).

Pascal holds that our volition must, as it were, turn outward to find a more worthy object of love, an object that satisfies this insatiable appetite for *eudaimonia* (F 149).

Pascal's second point, I take it, is to bring to our attention the connection between a morally virtuous character and epistemically virtuous belief. To govern our volition in such a manner so that we tend toward self-reflection and truthful examination of the self requires that one already possess certain *Pascalian virtues*. In particular, a virtuous epistemic agent must be characterized not only by the desire and ability to see reality truthfully, but also exhibit enough honesty to accept what is true. In fact, this is how Pascal defines reasonableness; reasonableness is a wholehearted desire for truth (F 427). By acts of volition wherein we engage in self-inquiry, we can sharpen the workings of our epistemic faculties. We increase our sensitivity to both the true state of our characters and the reality that surrounds us; hence, we increase the amount of true beliefs we hold. For Pascal, at least, for one to hold true beliefs concerning the emptiness of self-love requires an advanced stage of moral development.

So self-reflection is an activity that exhibits both moral and epistemic virtue and results in the realization that we cannot ourselves possibly be the object of *eudaimonia*. This realization is for Pascal the necessary condition for religious faith. And this brings us to Pascal's first point that religious belief is attained through the heart. We are told,

It is the heart that perceives God and not the reason. That is what faith is: God perceived by the heart, not by the reason (F 424).

Here Pascal does not speak of knowledge or even belief as such but of *faith*. Though faith is a most complex concept, we might provisionally view it as an inclining of the volitional part of our being to trust in God.⁹ Thus the most natural manner to read this passage is to understand Pascal as setting up an opposition between reason and the volitional aspect of the heart. Once the volitional aspect of the heart realizes that self-love is bankrupt, Pascal thinks it turns, through the prompting of grace, toward a more worthy object of adoration in God. This reading of Pascal seems correct, but not entirely so. For notice the metaphor here is an epistemological one of *perception*, the same metaphor Pascal employs to characterize *l'esprit de finesse*.¹⁰ Perhaps more tellingly, in the very same passage where Pascal lays out the structure (F 110) of the non-inferential knowledge of the heart, he is at pains to point out that religious faith is akin to *sentiment* and *instinct*.

Our inability must therefore serve only to humble reason, which would like to be the judge of everything, but not to confute our certainty. As if reason were the only way we could learn! Would to God, on the contrary, that we never needed it and knew everything by *instinct* and *feeling*...

That is why those to whom God has given religious faith by moving their hearts are very fortunate, and feel quite legitimately convinced, but to those who do not have it we can only give such faith through reasoning, until God gives it by moving their heart...(F 110).

Finally, if we take seriously Pascal's claims concerning those who believe "by intuition of the heart" (F 179), those who *feel* that God made them (F 381), Pascal's own religious experience recounted in the "memorial" (F 913), and the orthodox Catholic view that faith too has a cognitive element (after all, Pascal was a Catholic!), we are lead to the conclusion that Pascal believes that the intellectual aspect of the heart has a special role to play in the acquisition of faith. In short, faith in God is a phenomenon that involves both the volitional aspect of the heart inclining towards God and the intellectual aspect of the heart perceiving God in a non-inferential manner.¹¹ The propositional content which results from the activity of the heart perceiving God is the *cognitive content of faith*. If this account is correct, the psychology of faith is an instance of the volitional aspect of the heart directly influencing what the intellectual aspect of the heart perceives. Epistemologically speaking,

belief in God, as manifested in faith, is one more instance of an immediate perception by the intellective aspect of the heart. It follows that according to this scheme, the immediate perception of God which constitutes the cognitive content of faith, is analogous to the immediate perception of concepts such as space, time, etc.

What we have here then is an intuitionist analogue to some of the themes broached in what has been dubbed Reformed Epistemology.¹² But in Pascal's terms, this is a bit fuzzy and bound to raise a few brows. Is Pascal claiming that given any person who engages in truthful self-reflection the volitional aspect of the heart will cease to absolutize, come to love God, and consequently the heart in its intellective aspect will perceive God? Not quite. For Pascal, a necessary condition (note, not a sufficient one) for faith is that the volitional aspect of the heart turn away from love of self; the upshot of this, Pascal argues, is not some inferential process by which we come to believe in God but a movement of divine grace in which the heart turns its love toward God and perceives the reality of God. But what of this talk of perception? Pascal clearly envisions perception of God to be an *experiential awareness* of God in which God in some fashion presents Himself to us. Pascal speaks of his own case of perceiving God as involving sensations of fire, peace and joy, and God presenting Himself as the "Father of Righteousness" (F 913). Now it may be that Pascal has something broader in mind when he speaks of the heart perceiving God than mere experiential awareness. In certain contexts Pascal seems to speak of immediate *beliefs*, such as the belief that God made me, which represent the upshot of *sentiment* (F 382). If this is right, the heart perceiving God need not entail someone being experientially aware of God presenting Himself; rather, while involved in certain activities in certain circumstances a person might find herself with certain immediate beliefs concerning God's nature or God's activities, etc. So for instance, while I am involved in a moment of introspection God's grace may cause my heart to immediately perceive, through *mémoire* or *instinct*, that God made me. The anthropology and epistemology might fit together like this. God in his creative activity has planted a whole array of belief-forming dispositions, "instincts" if you will, in all humans. A tendency of the heart to believe and trust in God (our "first nature") is among these dispositions. This disposition, however, has become dulled by our sinful characters and activities (our "second nature"). When we turn away from the vice of self-love, this disposition can be triggered in various manners such as God presenting Himself to us or God's grace causing us to *re-collect* that we are fashioned in His image.¹³ The suggestion is, then, that Pascal's use of perception covers both experiential awareness and immediate beliefs. A most important point for our purposes lies in the realization that the perceptions of the heart are of a particular type. For Pascal, reason does not *infer* from some perception, whether an

experience or a belief, that God must be real; Pascal is not speaking of an inference to the best explanation, what we might call *mediate perceptual grounds*. Rather, when involved in activities such as introspection or when having religious experiences such as Pascal's own, one immediately comes to hold a belief concerning God's reality. Let's call these experiences which form the core of faith for Pascal *immediate perceptual grounds*.¹⁴

So by Pascal's lights it is unsurprising that some people have faith even though they do not know any sorts of proof for the existence of God.

Do not be astonished to see simple people believing without argument. God makes them love him and hate themselves. He inclines their hearts to believe (F 380).

Those who believe without having read the Testaments do so because their inward disposition is truly holy and what they hear about our religion matches it. They feel that a God made them, they only want to love God, they only want to hate themselves...It takes no more than this to convince men whose hearts are thus disposed and who have such an understanding of their duty and incapacity (F 381).

Nor does Pascal think that these believers whose faith is constituted by immediate perceptual grounds are in any sense epistemically culpable.

Those whom we see to be Christians without knowledge of the prophecies and proofs are no less sound judges than those who possess such knowledge. They judge with their hearts as others judge with their minds. It is God himself who inclines them to believe and thus they are most effectively convinced (F 382).

But this just seems too easy, even if we do grant Pascal the controversial belief-disposition model of knowledge. For one, the immediate perceptual religious grounds that Pascal has in mind are a notoriously subjective affair. How are we to distinguish intuition from mere imagination, true religious experience from the sham variety? Moreover, if Pascal is correct concerning the sorry state of the human heart then surely most of us do not possess the Pascalian virtues that make immediate belief possible. And finally, there are many seemingly virtuous people who *do* seek after truth and yet lack religious faith. Pascal explicitly considers these objections at various points in the *Pensées*. Let's take them in turn.

The author of the *Pensées* is quite sensitive to the ambiguous character of *sentiment*. *Sentiment* is often easily confused with *fantaisie*.

All our reasoning comes down to feeling.

But fancy (*fantaisie*) is like and also unlike feeling (*sentiment*), so that we cannot distinguish between these two opposites. One person says that my feeling (*sentiment*) is mere fancy (*fantaisie*), another that his fancy (*fantaisie*) is feeling (*sentiment*). We should have a rule. Reason is available but can be bent in any direction (F 530).¹⁵

Pascal's answer to this problem is straightforward: supply evidence or "proofs" for the truth of immediate perceptual religious grounds.

I freely admit that one of these Christians who believe without proof will perhaps not have the means of convincing an unbeliever, who might say as much for himself, but those who do know the proofs of religion can easily prove that this believer is truly inspired by God, although he cannot prove it himself (F 382).

The scenario seems to be that some believers will not be capable of offering any type of demonstrative argument for the veridicality of their perceptual beliefs, but the Christian community at large can. For the sake of manageability, let us here restrict our discussion and speak of immediate perceptual grounds as experiential awareness or *immediate experiential grounds*. With this in mind, there are perhaps some worthwhile distinctions to be made. One can offer evidence for the reality of the *object* of immediate religious experience, namely, God, or one might offer evidence for the reliability of immediate experiential religious grounds as a *general doxastic phenomenon*, or one can offer evidence for the veridicality of a *particular immediate experience*. Pascal is unclear as to what phenomenon he means to address. Presumably there are a number of ways to approach the issue. One might offer arguments to the effect that immediate experiential religious beliefs should be considered reliable because they resemble other reliable epistemic functions. This seems to be Pascal's approach in drawing the parallels between how the heart perceives certain concepts and how it perceives God. Alternatively, one might offer independent evidence for the reality of a God who interacts with His creatures through religious experience. The strategy throughout the *Pensées* seems closer to the second alternative. Pascal appears to take the approach that if we take heed of the high explanatory power of Christianity with respect to the dual nature of man, and consider the evidence for the reality of the Christian God in the form of arguments from the authority of tradition, revelation, miraculous activity in the world, etc., we can conclude that the object of immediate religious experience, the Christian God, exists; hence, we have reason to believe that many instances of faith are veridical experiences of this God. Given the nature of the Christian God we would expect Him to move the hearts of humans through grace. Thus, although Pascal's evidential strategy may not offer much help for determining if a *particular* experiential ground is veridical, it does offer support for the idea that the God of scripture exists and that the doxastic phenomenon of experiential awareness is one we might expect Him to initiate.¹⁶

One now comes to see a manner in which natural theology is useful in Pascal's world. Natural theology is one of many justificatory supports for immediate religious experience and belief. A successful piece of natural theology (and by that I mean simply a highly plausible theistic argument) can

serve to show that we have good reason to suppose the object of religious experience indeed exists. Though this function of natural theology is an interesting one, it elicits little attention in the *Pensées*; this being the case, I now turn to Pascal's strategy for natural theology.

III. Natural Theology

We have explored one paradigm religious believer, the person who has faith without arguments, and some of Pascal's attempts to show that immediate perceptual grounds are not in any sense epistemically culpable. But of course the fact remains that for the majority of us who are busy absolutizing, the virtue of faith will represent an unattainable ideal. Most of us will find ourselves seeking evidence for the existence of God and yet remaining unconvinced of His reality.

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....Thus there is enough evidence to condemn and not enough to convince....(F 835).

So what then is the reasonable person to do, suspend belief? To the contrary, Pascal says that reasonable people must continue to seek (F 257, 427). But of course Pascal believes that the reason why the evidence seems roughly equal is that we view it through a glass darkly. Our propensity to love ourselves above and to the exclusion of all else obscures our perception of the traces of the *Deus absconditus*. And it is here that natural theology has a role to play. The task of natural theology is not merely to convince us that we have good reasons to believe God exists but to clear the obstacles that inhibit faith. The heart must be turned away from self-love by none other than reason itself.

That is why those to whom God has given religious faith by moving their hearts are very fortunate, and feel quite legitimately convinced, but to those who do not have it we can only give such faith through reasoning, until God gives it by moving their heart...(F 110)

Faith is different from proof. One is human and the other a gift of God...This is the faith that God himself puts into our hearts, often using proof as the instrument...(F 7)

So whereas with the first paradigm believer volition influenced the intellectual aspect of the heart, in this second type of believer, it is reason that influences our volition, and ultimately, the intellectual part of the heart. In particular, reason in the form of natural theology must accomplish two goals. First, it must convince us of our tendency towards self-love, and second, it must give us evidence that there exists a worthy object of absolute devotion in God since "knowing our own wretchedness without knowing God makes

for despair" (F 192). But to accomplish this twofold task, form must follow function. Only certain forms of argument will "clear the passions" (F 418). Thus it is unsurprising that Pascal has little patience for much of traditional natural theology such as the different forms of the teleological and cosmological arguments (F 781). Because such arguments do little to prompt self-reflection they do little to bring a person to faith. We might say there is a bad "cognitive fit" between such proofs and faith.

Pascal's favored approach to natural theology is not to look at the world without but the world within. He endeavors to provide probabilistic arguments to the effect that the existence of the Christian God best explains the perplexities of our dual nature and our deep longing for happiness.¹⁷ Neither naturalism (F 199) nor rival religions (F 617) can explain these phenomena as well as Christianity.¹⁸ These arguments will in turn place us in a position to explore seriously the more substantively rich evidence for Christianity in the form of proofs from scripture, miracles, morality and prophecy. There is, however, an interesting twist to the story. On one level Pascal is offering a number of arguments to the best explanation. Yet the purpose of these arguments is not to produce in the reader such a high level of confidence in their plausibility that we should believe their conclusions with great firmness. Pascal does not seem to think his arguments worthy of such confidence; they are merely probable. But at a deeper level, Pascal hopes through these argumentative strategies to break down our complacency and the multiple layers of prejudice that inhibit our ability to perceive the reality of God. Pascal wishes to grant us a new perspective from which we can experience the infusion of grace which often takes the form of immediate experiential awareness of God.

So before us is the second type of believer with which Pascal concerns himself. This second type of believer comes to have faith only after evidence has been furnished which clears away the passions and grants the agent good reasons for believing the Christian God exists. After the volitional part of the heart has been prepared, faith, through the movement of grace, "kicks in." So faith is the goal, and evidence in the form of probabilistic proofs is the means to this goal. A number of questions arise concerning this Pascalian evidentialist strategy. Does this person believe in God *on the basis of* the evidence? And does this evidence in any sense *sustain* her belief in God such that were we to show the evidence false her belief would no longer be justified?

We have seen that the first paradigm believer believes in God immediately and according to Pascal, she has immediately entitled belief in God. What Pascal seems to indicate in the case of this second type of agent is a belief in God that is partly immediate and partly mediate, what we might call "mixed belief." When this belief is justified in part by the evidence, I will

call this type of justification *mixed justification*. So to answer the question of whether this second believer's belief in God is based on the evidence we should distinguish two different senses of "based on." First, there exists the sense in which S's belief p is "based on" reasons R when R acts as evidence for the truth of p. Second, there is the sense in which S's belief p is "based on" reasons R in which R acts as evidence but makes some other contribution to S justifiably believing p. In this second sense of "based on" the evidence may not directly support the belief but could serve the purpose of undercutting or outweighing contrary evidence or the like. Pascal often envisions the second type of agent's belief in God to be based on evidence in this second sense. Perhaps a perceptual analogy will make the point more clear.

Consider Jackie, who has been given what she considers conclusive evidence from her father that her rich old Uncle Joe is dead. Moreover, Jackie has motivation to believe Uncle Joe dead, since she will inherit a portion of his millions. Jackie is then given contrary evidence by her Uncle Paul to the effect that Uncle Joe may still be alive and wandering the streets of Chicago. This new evidence casts doubt on her belief that Joe is dead. When Jackie now walks the streets in Chicago she begins to be very careful to train her eyes to recognize anyone who remotely resembles Uncle Joe. Suppose that one day, while waiting for the bus, Jackie sees out of the corner of her eye a person who remarkably resembles Joe slip from the side door of a small pub into a nearby alley. This perceptual belief causes Jackie to believe that her Uncle Joe indeed lives.

We begin to see how evidence operates in this context. Jackie does not base her belief (in the first sense) that Uncle Joe is alive on the evidence given to her by her Uncle Paul, but that evidence undercuts her belief that Joe is dead and causes her to begin to look for Joe in odd places. When she does perceive Uncle Joe it is because the new evidence has caused her to look for Joe in unlikely places and when she does see Joe she bases her belief that Joe is alive on this perceptual belief.

The analogy with the Pascalian seeker-as-unbeliever and the role of evidence should seem manifest. This believer does not base her belief (in the first sense we specified) in God on the evidence but the evidence serves to undercut her motivation not to look for God and causes her to seek God more diligently. Her belief in God, much like Jackie's perceptual belief concerning her Uncle Joe, is the result of an immediate "perceptual" experience. So what this analogy concerning a "mixed version" of belief makes clear is that since the cognitive content of faith is always a function of the intellective aspect of the heart, the cognitive content of faith will always be, if not wholly the product of immediate perceptual grounds, at least partially the product of immediate perceptual grounds. Evidence will have the largely negative task of clearing away prejudice, epistemically culpable inclinations, and undercutting contrary evidence.

So we have seen that Pascal does believe that faith is based on evidence in a very specific, we might say, indirect sense. But does evidence in any sense sustain the cognitive content of faith? Let us first follow Robert Audi by defining a *sustaining requirement* as this: S's believing p sustains his belief q at t if his believing p explains why he believes q.¹⁹ Allow p to be some probabilistic Pascalian argument such as the "dual nature argument" and let q be some proposition contained in the cognitive content of faith such as "God exists." Given Audi's definition we might be tempted to conclude that the Pascalian proofs do sustain certain portions of the cognitive content of faith. But we should note that a sustaining requirement is not alluding to how we *come* to acquire some belief; if that were the case, natural theology, along with a whole constellation of other beliefs would sustain the cognitive content of faith. Rather a sustaining requirement picks out what in fact supports or holds up some belief at a certain time. And of course it may be that a certain belief has not one but multiple sustainers, which may be of varying strength. It should then seem clear that just as Jackie believes that Joe is in Chicago on the basis of the perceptual experience of seeing her uncle, the Pascalian seeker-as-believer believes that God exists on the basis of immediate perceptual grounds. The perceptual grounds in both cases serve as *dominant sustainers*. So if this is right, what if someone demonstrates to this second type of believer that Pascal's proofs for Christianity are fallacious? Would that be enough to show that the Pascalian seeker holds the cognitive content of faith unjustifiably?

In some cases it would seem not. Consider our analogy of Jackie and Uncle Joe once again. Suppose Jackie discovers that the evidence supplied by Uncle Paul concerning the whereabouts of Uncle Joe is entirely false. Is Jackie unjustified in her belief that Uncle Joe is alive? Not necessarily. Jackie's perceptual experience of Uncle Joe may be sufficient to justify her belief that Joe is alive. To assert that Jackie's belief that Uncle Joe lives is unjustified, one would need to demonstrate that her perceptual belief is unreliable in some way. Now consider our second type of believer. Suppose some pivotal evidence such as the "dual nature" argument or the reliability of scripture were shown to be false by some ingenious materialist-atheistic argument that she cannot rebut. Also posit that it was the "dual nature" argument, in part, that allowed her to receive the gift of faith. Is this believer unjustified in her belief that God exists, that Christianity is true? Not necessarily. She may still be justified in her belief in God by virtue of her immediate perceptual grounds. To argue that she is unjustified in her belief one would need to make clear that the immediate perceptual grounds which sustain the cognitive content of faith are themselves unreliable or in some manner insufficient. That someone could show such a thing is undeniably a real possibility. In this case, natural theology might re-enter the picture to defend the claim that we have good

reason to believe that there exists a God who presents Himself in various manners to human beings.

We have now explored how the first two types of believers that Pascal treats in the *Pensées* come to have faith. The objection still remains, however, that there are seemingly virtuous people who are not consumed with love of self but who do not have faith. And yet these people *want* to have faith. Perhaps it is the case that these virtuous people who desire to have faith cannot bring themselves to believe due to fear of committing some gross epistemic impropriety. Pascal's solution to this case of unbelief is the infamous Wager (what Richard Gale calls the Rodney Dangerfield of natural theology) and the "proof from the machine." The Wager symbolizes a significant shift in Pascal's natural theology strategy. No longer is the seeker-as-unbeliever told that Christianity offers the best explanation for the phenomena of our dual nature and our desire for happiness. Pascal also ceases to encourage the seeker-as-unbeliever to seek more evidence. Instead Pascal challenges the unbeliever to consider the fact that there exist only two possibilities concerning the existence of God: either God exists or He does not. One has only two epistemic options with regard to this choice: either believe God exists or that He does not (withholding assent is equivalent to non-belief for Pascal). Given the benefits of believing (eternal happiness) and the odds of God existing, Pascal thinks that the calculus of probabilities favors "wagering" in favor of the existence of God.²⁰ So in this instance, when confronted with a belief for which there is inconclusive evidence, Pascal says the rational agent should wager and believe. But Pascal does not think that the wagerer can by direct volition come to believe God exists. Rather he puts forth the "proof from the machine" to demonstrate how one might come to believe. The idea behind the proof from the machine is that many of our doxastic attitudes are largely a function of our habits and actions.

For we must make no mistake about ourselves: we are as much automaton as mind. As a result, demonstration is not the only instrument for convincing us...Proofs only convince the mind; habit provides the strongest proofs and those that are most believed...It is, then, habit that convinces us and makes so many Christians. It is habit that makes Turks, heathen, trades, soldiers, etc. 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 to us (F 821).

We can, according to Pascal, take certain steps, acquire certain habits so that we come to believe certain propositions we did not believe previous to practicing these habits. Reason can then influence the volitional part of a person in such a way that the will induces that person to undertake certain actions that in turn influence what beliefs he holds. A person's coming to believe in the existence of the Christian God in this way entails both that

person's believing that it is in some sense rational to do so and that person's cultivating good habits such as attending mass and taking holy water so as to "steep and stain" himself in the ways of faith (F 418). What seems a bit perplexing about this strategy is that while Pascal says that habit can take us a long way down the road to acquire certain theistic *beliefs*, he never indicates how far habit can take us down the road to acquire *faith*. It would clearly appear that habit alone is insufficient for acquiring faith when considering Pascal's adamant claim that faith is attained only through the movement of grace. The best we can do here is fill in the blanks. Habit functions in such a way that it turns the volitional part of the heart further away from self-love and prepares the way for God's movement of grace through the intellectual part of the heart. Thus habit is only a most circuitous route to the experience of God.

IV. Conclusion

In section I, I claimed that Pascal's religious epistemology is best viewed as a network of interactions between the intellectual part of the heart, the volitional part of the heart and reason. Pascalian natural theology was then said to issue from this general epistemology. In particular, I discussed how reason, through the conduit of natural theology, can influence both the intellectual and volitional aspects of the heart. But what are we to make of the Pascalian approach to natural theology?

There are, I think, some very attractive features intrinsic to Pascal's approach. Most generally, Pascal's strategy for natural theology is fueled by a crucial but oft overlooked observation: our doxastic attitude toward theism is a function of our occurrent and non-occurrent, conscious and sub-conscious, desires, inclinations, habits and beliefs. Call this pack of qualities a person's *doxastic framework*. But since Pascal is not so much interested in our doxastic attitude toward theism in general but how we stand with respect to *faith*, we might put it this way: a person's relationship to *faith* is a function of that person's doxastic framework. We have noticed, furthermore, that within our doxastic frameworks, our volition has the central role to play. It is our volition that determines in many respects what beliefs we hold at some time or other.

It follows from this approach that any approach to natural theology which endeavors to bring a person to seriously consider the importance of faith and which fails to pay sufficient attention to our entire doxastic framework and the role volition plays within our doxastic framework will be ineffectual. Natural theology must in some sense change not only the beliefs that make up a person's doxastic framework but also the desires and attitudes that comprise a person's doxastic framework. Pascal has offered a strategy by which these goals might be accomplished. A large task perhaps, but one which relies not so much on powerful theistic arguments as astute psychology.

This brings us to the obvious point that Pascal's strategy for natural theology is predicated upon certain assumptions concerning philosophical psychology, epistemology and the nature of faith, to name a few. How convincing is Pascal's development of these areas? It varies. The philosophical psychology of the *Pensées* is quite rich and also thoroughly controversial. Although I will not attempt here to defend Pascal on this point, I think it can, with some modification, be defended. And though Pascal's heavily intuitionist epistemology is rather rough, I can't see that Pascal's approach to natural theology hinges upon the specific details of his account. For Pascal's natural theology to remain intact, one would need only to defend a moderate form of foundationalism which defends the thesis that we can have immediate beliefs, theistic ones included, which are justified or count as knowledge. The real problems for Pascal's approach to natural theology arise from his account of faith. Pascal seems to think that having faith involves having immediate religious perceptual grounds in the form of experiential awareness or immediate beliefs. But why should we think this? Certainly Pascal has misdiagnosed the nature of faith (which, I might add, is a very complex nature) by claiming that faith always includes immediate religious perceptual grounds. People come to have faith in an amazing variety of manners, many of which do not include having immediate perceptual grounds. Could it not be the case that the cognitive content of my faith is composed of the testimony of someone else who has "perceived God" though I myself never have? And why not think faith is in some sense inferential, based on mediate perceptual grounds, rather than resulting from immediate ones? Perhaps Pascal would admit all this. But if we grant that Pascal has construed the nature of faith too narrowly it also follows that Pascal's approach to natural theology has as its object one of the many ways by which we develop faith. This by no means discredits Pascal's approach. Rather the strategy for natural theology merely becomes more complicated. For those attracted to such a Pascalian approach, this approach to natural theology must be expanded to accommodate the many ways by which we acquire the virtue of faith.²¹

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NOTES

1. I will be working from the *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin, 1966).

2. See, for example, Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, "Evidentialism," *Philosophical Studies*, 48 (1985), pp. 15-34. Philosophers of course disagree about how broadly we should construe the notion of evidence; i.e. should evidence be conceived as propositional, or is propositional evidence only one species of a broader genus called evidence? The question is an important one, but I shall use the term to mean *propositional evidence*.

3. See especially, Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," and Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Can Belief in God be Rational If It Has No Foundations?" in *Faith and Rationality*, edited by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983) for discussion of these issues.

4. I take natural theology to be the project of providing proofs or arguments for the existence of God.

5. Pascal, in fact, often speaks of the will (*volunté*) and the volitional aspect of the heart as if they were identical. See: Janet Morgan, "Pascal, Concupiscence and 'La Machine'," *The Modern Language Review*, 71, (1976), pp. 272-281. Also, Martin Warner, *Philosophical Finesse* (Clarendon: Oxford, 1989), p. 153.

6. I borrow the term from Wolterstorff. *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 32.

7. For an overview of the different types of doxastic voluntarism, see William Alston, "The Deontological Concept of Epistemic Justification," in *Epistemic Justification* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 115-152.

8. Pascal borrows this idea from Augustine. See *Contra Faust. Manich.*, xxxiii. 9.

9. This is of course to very much oversimplify the nature of faith. An excellent treatment of faith can be found in Scott MacDonald, "Christian Faith," in *Reasoned Faith*, edited by Eleonore Stump (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 40-69.

10. See F 512.

11. As we will see, the role of grace places a central role when the intellective aspect of the heart perceives.

12. The classic text here is *Faith and Rationality*, edited by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

13. Plantinga, in "Reason and Belief in God," conjectures that Calvin had something like this in mind as well; pp. 66-67.

14. This distinction is close to William Alston's in "The Place of Experience in the Grounds of Religious Belief," in *Our Knowledge of God*, edited by Kelly James Clark (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), pp. 87-112. Like Alston, I use the term *ground* here to represent either a belief or an experience.

15. See also F 44 and F 805.

16. The basic contours of this argument can be applied to immediate *beliefs* as well. We might argue that immediate religious beliefs resemble other reliable immediate beliefs and that we have good reason to believe that God would cause us to have these sorts of beliefs in certain circumstances.

17. Robert Holyer has formulated and defended an argument of this form. See: "The Argument from Desire," *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 5, no. 1, (January 1988), pp. 61-71.

18. Daniel Fouke makes this point in "Argument in Pascal's *Pensées*," *170 History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 6, no. 1 (January 1989), pp. 57-68.

19. See: Robert Audi, "The Causal Structure of Indirect Justification," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. LXXX, No. 7, (July 1983), p. 399.

20. For a full treatment of the Wager see: Thomas V. Morris, "Pascalian Wagering," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 16, no. 3., (September 1986), pp. 437-454.

21. Thanks to John Conley, Richard McCombs, and especially John Greco, for helpful suggestions concerning this essay.