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DATES:

Published: 4 April 2024

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Nyman, B., 2024. Pascal's Wager and Its Postmodern Counterpart. *KOERS — Bulletin for Christian Scholarship*, 89(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.19108/KOERS.89.1.2505>

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Pascal's Wager and Its Postmodern Counterpart

ABSTRACT

Pascal's Wager is probably the most analysed apologetic argument in the history of apologetics. What has often been the case, however, is that this piece of Pascal's *Pensées* has often been misinterpreted and taken out of the Pascal's total apologetic work. For that reason, the Wager has been misappropriated and has undergone a battery of misplaced criticism. Taken in its proper context, the Wager is a beautiful vindication of the Christian faith, cleverly constructed to make the sceptic re-think his position and contemplate the importance of the Christian faith. Much confusion exists about the placement of this particular *Pensées*, and where it is situated in his overall apology (*Pensées* 418) lends itself to the challenge of what has become "the Many Gods Objection." For that reason, I would suggest that Pascal's Wager belongs at the very beginning of his *Pensées*, where the rest of the *Pensées* are an explanation for the reason Christianity is the most attractive belief. Postmodern philosophers have re-appropriated the Wager and made it fit their own philosophical and theological presuppositions playing in the hands of the "Many-Gods-Objection." This paper describes the beauty of Pascal's Wager in its proper context and expresses the erroneous postmodern appropriation of the Wager.

Keywords: Pascal, Wager, postmodernism, *Pensées*, Richard Kearney.

Introduction

Pascal's apology will always be associated with his famous *Wager*. His *Pensées* might long be ignored, but this section of his *Thoughts* has been remembered and analysed for more than three hundred years. As David Wetsel (1994: 248) exclaimed, "No other single passage in the *Pensées* has generated more commentary than the 'infini/rien' fragment, popularly known as 'the Wager.'" Several issues must be taken in consideration when scrutinizing Pascal's *Wager*. Firstly, it would be misguided to evaluate and interpret Pascal's wager in isolation from the rest of his *Pensées*. Secondly, we must keep in mind the audience of Pascal when he proposed the religious wager. Ignoring the overall context in which the Wager is placed can lead to a skewed interpretation such as presented by Slavoj Žižek (2010: 136-140) in his article "The Atheist Wager," in which he interprets and critiques Pascal's wager in isolation, ignoring all other *Pensées* regarding the existence of God and the proofs that Pascal presents in subsequent fragments. Above all, because of its emphasis on the existential aspect of religion, the *Wager* still speaks to a contemporary audience well over 350 years after it was first written. The *Wager* argument has been wrongly appropriated by postmodern theologians to further their theological viewpoints, playing in the hands of the most ardent objection to Pascal's *Wager*, the so-called "Many Gods Objection."

Although a reference or an allusion to some kind of wager was not original (cf. Ryan, 1994: 11-18), Pascal was the first who explicitly and elaborately used the wager as an apologetic tool. In Pascal's time nine versions of the wager argument were in currency and Pascal simply adapted a model for his own purposes (Hazelton in Van Vliet, 2000: 53-54). Others after Pascal, such as John Tillotson have made use of the wager concept to convince the sceptic that being a Christian is overall far more advantageous than holding the position of scepticism or even atheism. The Archbishop of Canterbury in his work *The Wisdom of Being Religious* contends that *venturing* into the Christian faith is far more propitious, for

“he [the Christian] is inwardly more contended and happy, and usually more healthful, and perhaps meets with more respect and faithfuller [*sic*] friends, and lives in a more secure and flourishing condition” (Tillotson, 1819: 108-109).

Apologists have been known to be overly concerned with proving or demonstrating the existence of God using a variety of pieces of evidence. Pascal, in his *Wager*, was not at all concerned with establishing an apology for the existence of God, however. Pascal's *Wager* and his subsequent elaboration in the remainder of his *Pensées* as a vindication of the Christian faith, bore down to existential aspects that spoke to the gambling *libertine* and, as a matter of fact, can still speak to a contemporary audience. Sister Marie Louise Hubert (1973:69) aptly notes, “With the firm conviction, mingled with sympathetic understanding, which resulted from his own religious experience, Pascal realized that something more dynamic was needed in order to reach the heart as well as the mind of the libertines.” This more dynamic approach, which is not only employed in the *Wager* but also in the rest of the *Pensées*, stresses the need for “happiness and welfare, temporal as well as eternal” (Hubert, 1973: 69).

Much research has been done to discover the true meaning of Pascal's *Wager* and many objections have been levelled to discredit it. Books are devoted to explaining in-depth the rationale, whether philosophical or existential, behind this famous fragment (cf. Jordan, 1994, 2006; Rota, 2016), and some have confused us more by providing philosophical formulae (c.f. Jordan, 2002) or mathematical equations (c.f. Adamson, 1995). A definitive and clear understanding regarding the *Wager* seems illusive, mainly because this fragment appears to be situated in the *Pensées* somewhat disconnected from the rest of the fragments. Michel and Marie-Rose Le Guern suggest that the *Infini/Rien* (or *Wager*) fragment forms a self-contained unit as an independent apology (Le Guern in Wetsel, 1994: 244). It is understandable that speculations have been made regarding the placing of the *Wager* in Pascal's overall apologetic scheme because the arrangement of Pascal's *Thoughts* has mostly been dependent on different editors. But to propose that fragment 418 is an independent apology must be dismissed. On the contrary, it can be argued that the *Wager* could be posited early in Pascal's entire Apology, and that the rest of the *Pensées* is an elaboration and a clarification of the reason why wagering on God is reasonable. David Wetsel (1994: 275) agrees and has come to the same conclusion, “As I see it, we should perhaps best think of the wager fragment as a kind of prelude to the *Apology* sketched by the dossier of 1658. Perhaps it is a kind of lure, intended to draw a certain kind of unbeliever into the chapters that will follow.” This conclusion makes the most sense because the remainder of Pascal's *Pensées* clarifies the content of the *Wager*.

The Wager's Content and Its Original Audience

At first blush, Pascal's *Wager* suggests a questionable proposal and reveals some dubious theological propositions. At closer examination, however, we discover that Pascal is entirely consistent in his overall scheme of thinking as his *Pensées* indicate. What becomes clear is his deep desire to promote the Christian faith to his interlocutor. Speculations abound, however, regarding the type of interlocutor(s) Pascal addressed in his *Wager*. David Wetsel spends an entire chapter in his book *Pascal and Disbelief* speculating the nature of Pascal's interlocutor. There are those who wonder if the audience could be the *libertine*, as addressed above or the sceptics like Montaigne (Henri Gouhier and Paul Bénichou in Wetsel, 1994: 248 respectively). Sister Marie Louise Hubert (1973; 14) in her work *Pascal's Unfinished Apology* suggests as well that Pascal's audience indeed consists of libertines who are indifferent to religion, but well-acquainted with the Christian faith. These libertines are addressed in *Pensées* 427, where they despairingly note, “Just as I don't know whence I come from, so I don't know whither I am going. All I know is that when I leave this world I shall fall for ever into nothingness or into the hands of a wrathful God...” (Pascal, 1966:158). It is more than likely that the interlocutor is “the one who is starting to seek God or who at least is unhappy”

(Wetsel, 1994: 248). One thing is clear when reading the *Wager* the interlocutor is not an ardent atheist or comfortable unbeliever. The person (or persons), whom Pascal addresses has a listening ear and is somewhat familiar with Pascal's theological position and, although rebutting the proposal of Pascal, the interlocutor is interested in hearing more of what the apologist has to say. The manner in which Pascal addressed the speculative gamble suggests that the interlocutor is one that he is familiar with from his, so-called, "worldly period", which was marked with selfishness, pride and materialism (Krailsheimer, 1966: 14). It appears that Pascal had intimate knowledge of the mindset of the gambler who, in all appearances, enjoyed a carefree lifestyle but was utterly unhappy and was bound to search for the truth.

In consistent fashion, Pascal begins his *Wager* denouncing the high place of reason in matters of religion. On the one hand, the French apologist stresses that no rational demonstrable proofs of God's existence are available, yet on the other hand he emphasizes that betting on God is most reasonable. The *Wager* goes directly to the heart of the matter. It does not deal with the existence of God, as a matter of fact it does not intend to prove God's existence at all, but it deals with the existential implications of the meaning and purpose of life. In other words, the *Wager* deals with the question we all have to answer at one point in the context of our own mortality. The urgency of this question was not only pertinent in Pascal's day but is still very much the question the contemporary mortal has to deal with as well. Whether we want to admit it or not, there exists a human urge to search for the truth and God. The fact that humankind has a God-shaped vacuum leads all of us to contemplate the concern for the human *telos*. Pascal keys in on this human desire for truth that can only be found in the infinite God. His argument runs counter to the nihilistic outlook on our existence as proposed by the likes of Nietzsche and the relativistic sense of reality of the pragmatic postmodern. In all, the *Wager* appeals to man's desire for true happiness, which comes through the affections rather than through reasoning. Thus fragment 418 does not set out to produce an apologetic argument for the existence of God or to prove "the real possibility of God, but rather to set people on fire to seek God" (Gilbert, 2011: 211).

In his *Wager*, Pascal continues by stressing that, humanly speaking, it is impossible for the finite (human) to comprehend the infinite (God), as in accordance to the rest of his *Pensées*. Asking then for rational grounds or proofs for the Christian's belief is futile for there are none, according to Pascal. We must not conclude from this that Pascal is admitting the irrationality of the Christian faith; all Pascal is saying that proofs like scientific formulae are not available to convince the unbeliever of the truth of Christianity. He (1966: 150) admits that "reason cannot make you choose either, reason cannot prove either wrong." In what follows, Pascal invites the gambler to make a choice, "either God is or he is not." The essence of the gamble is found in fragment 387: "I should be much more afraid of being mistaken and then finding out that Christianity is true than of being mistaken in believing it to be true" (Pascal, 1966: 143). Pascal appeals to the psychological element of the Christian belief; the stakes are infinitely high: relief from your wretched state and receive ultimate happiness in this life and the next or remain in your current state of wretchedness and receive your due reward.

The third century apologist Arnobius (AD 255-330), who made use of a wager to convince the unbeliever of the truth of Christianity, was far less subtle in pointing out the high stakes to the heathen in his *Adversus Gentes*, where he (2004: 457) states, "Your interests are in jeopardy, - the salvation, I mean, of your souls; and unless you give yourselves to seek to know the Supreme God, a cruel death awaits you when freed from the bonds of the body, not bringing sudden annihilation, but destroying by the bitterness of its grievous and long-protracted punishment." Although Pascal never explicitly mentions the aspect of punishment in fragment 418, the loss incurred when ignoring the wager is clear. He refuses to use the fear of punishment as the sole motivator for the gambler to take the wager; Pascal points out what the gambler has to gain and allows him to weigh the gains against the losses, all the while making sure that the gains are infinitely more than the losses.

Peter Kreeft (1993: 297) explains it as follows,

The Wager can easily be recast to appeal to a higher motive than the fear of Hell. One could wager as follows: if God exists, he deserves all my allegiance and faith. And I don't know whether he exists or not. Therefore, to avoid the terrible injustice of refusing God his rights, I will believe. Thus, we can simply substitute the 'high' motive of love (giving God his due) and fear of injustice for the love of Heaven and the fear of Hell, and everything in the Wager remains unchanged.

Not surprisingly, the interlocutor suggests not to make the gamble, "...the right thing is not to wager at all" (Pascal, 1966: 150). Pascal cleverly points out that the gambler must wager, for by not wagering he is already committed. One cannot remain indifferent or neutral, the agnostic has already made his bet against God; simply not to wager is not an option. Peter Kreeft (1993: 299) rightly points out, "The option of agnosticism is closed to us, not by thought but by life – or rather, by death." Now that the interlocutor has been made aware of his obligation to make a choice, Pascal offers him a risk assessment. As a gambler, the interlocutor is familiar with the bets he takes on a regular basis; risk assessment is something every gambler intentionally participates in. Pascal (1966: 151) assesses the gamble as follows, "if you win, you win everything, if you lose, you lose nothing."

Afraid and unsatisfied, the gambler fears he is still wagering too much, still depending on his reason to assess the tangible benefits that the gamble should be giving him; he needs to place his bet "in accordance with a certain calculation, a calculation that can be represented by a simple formula for the determining what can be called *Expected Value*: (EV): (Probability x Payoff) – Cost = Expected Value" (Morris, 1992: 112). Pascal offers the *Expected Value* as an infinitely happy life to be won when choosing God. For him, the gamble is reasonable for the reward is obviously immeasurable. Christianity offers eternal happiness, therefore you gain everything and lose nothing, while if you do not believe you gain nothing and you lose everything; in atheism there is no eternal bliss, only nothingness at death.

There is also a crass psychological edge to the gamble for Christianity as opposed to the gamble against: on the one hand, if Christianity is true, then after death the Christian will have the satisfaction of knowing he was right; if he were to lose he will never discover that he was wrong. On the other hand, the atheist, if he loses will be consciously aware of the fact that he was wrong; if he wins the bet, he will never discover that he was right because of his extinction at death. Pascal offers a gamble worth taking.

One thing must be made clear; Pascal does not offer his interlocutor an irrational leap into the dark, as if evidences do not play a crucial role in the *Wager*. These evidences, however, are not and cannot ever be the determining factors in considering Christianity. In fragment 835, Pascal (1966: 286) clarifies the role of these evidences explaining, "The prophecies, even the miracles and proofs of our religion, are not of such a kind that they can be said to be absolutely convincing, but they are at the same time such that it cannot be said to be unreasonable to believe in them." The gambler cannot blame Pascal for making an irrational choice, but as is true with any stubborn unbeliever, the interlocutor insists on making excuses. First, he blames Pascal for not seeing what the cards are before making the gamble. Pascal (1966: 152) responds by giving reasonable proofs such as "Scripture and the rest, etc." He does not elaborate on the "rest" of these evidences, for the gambler probably has some knowledge to what these are. Not satisfied by this, the interlocutor resorts to blaming God for his unbelief, complaining that, "I am being forced to wager and I am not free; I am being held fast and I am so made that I cannot believe."

Again, the gambler has a somewhat skewed theological knowledge regarding Pascal's notion of predestination; how can a person believe if he is not chosen? Pascal knows very well what his interlocutor is trying to do, and responds swiftly by turning the tables on him. He calls out the gambler for trying to conjure up enough evidences so as to make an airtight

choice based solely on reason alone. Pascal appeals to the centre of belief and unbelief: the heart. He blames the gambler's unbelief on his own passions. Pascal (1966: 152) asserts, "Concentrate then not on convincing yourself by multiplying proofs of God's existence but by diminishing your passions." The interlocutor believes that when he has faith he will give up his passions, but Pascal turns this around and posits that he must give up his passions and then faith will come. Fragment 816 is clear on this issue, "I should soon have given up a life of pleasure," they say, "if I had faith." But I tell you: "You would soon have faith if you give up a life of pleasure. Now it is up to you to begin. If I could give you faith I would. But I cannot, nor can I test the truth of what you say, but you can easily give up your pleasure and test whether I am telling the truth" (Pascal, 1966: 273). Implied here is not that the seeker is able to give himself faith, or any other created being, for only God can give him faith, but earthly pleasures prevent him from accepting his faith.

Pascal's proposal seems somewhat ambiguous and theologically dubious, and many have speculated on what Pascal means when he implies that to be cured of unbelief one should act *as if* he believes. On the surface Pascal seems to indicate that acting religiously can produce faith. Some have suggested that Pascal reverses the Augustinian, Anselmian and Calvinistic credo of "faith seeking understanding" into "understanding seeking faith" (cf. Hartle, 2017: 22). We must conclude, however, that Pascal was far too Augustinian to make that reversal, and that this would destroy Pascal's entire theological impetus and would again put the onus on man's reasonable capacity (cf. Pascal, 1966: 34, 85, 138, 149-153, 248). At closer examination, Pascal is not inconsistent in his theology, but he is also not ignorant of the fact that outward religious actions conjure up inward affections; outward actions cannot be divorced from inward affections. *Pensées* 944 clearly states, "We must combine outward and inward to obtain anything from God; in other words, we must go down on our knees, pray with our lips, etc., so that the proud man who would not submit to God must now submit to his creature. If we expect help from this outward part, we are being superstitious, if we refuse to combine it with the inward, we are being arrogant" (Pascal, 1966: 324). As with faith, the heart and the mind cannot be separated, so as well, outward actions must accompany inward affections. The serious seeker, according to Pascal, is able to overcome the affliction of unbelief by, firstly, observing the actions of the Christian and, secondly, by attending church services and studying the rituals as tangible tools of instruction. Pascal refers to this practice in *Pensées* 427, where he charges the unbeliever for religious ignorance and his lack of effort to seek what the Church has to offer by way of instruction. For him, Christian belief and the practice of that belief in the Church are inseparable.

The proposition to "act as if you believe" as suggested by Pascal (1966: 152) is closely connected to the worldly passions the libertine gambler is caught up in that prevents him from believing. Pascal calls for a certain openness of mind: associate with the believer, imitate the believer and attend the religious services that confirm Christian belief. Pascal calls the interlocutor to leave his passions that aggravate his unbelief. It becomes clear that Pascal's interlocutor wants to believe but does not want to leave his life of worldly passions. Pascal encourages the gambler to avoid the dispositions that lead him to unbelief, and "to act as if you believe" by associating themselves with believers. It seems here that Pascal calls upon the "implicit" faith that Calvin (1960: 545) warned about, where the believer might share "implicitly" by his trust in the church, "understanding nothing but submitting his feeling obediently to the church; calling the believer to the teaching of the church without the benefits of understanding the meaning of that teaching." This would be a fair criticism, for Pascal was, and remained a true Roman Catholic, but Pascal does not leave his interlocutor without the eventual understanding of what he may get himself into. We can also interpret Pascal's imperative using Calvin's (1960: 547) definition of "implicit" faith, where the observation and participation of ecclesiastical "rituals" can be seen as implicit faith as a preparation of faith. Pascal would never deny Calvin's (1960: 547) proposition that "faith consists in the knowledge of God and Christ." The remainder of the *Pensées* can attest to this proposition and is devoted to the clarification of true faith in Christ.

To be a Christian, or a seeker for that matter, and neglect the instructions and the rituals that the Church has to offer is incomprehensible. Thus, the suggestion of Pascal “to act as if you believe,” is not too far-fetched. In a similar vein, C.S. Lewis instructs his listeners, regarding the case of charity, to begin by acting to “love” the neighbour even if it does not come easy. He (2000: 131) states, “As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him”. He continues to explain that this outward action of love must accompany the inward affection that the object of our love is a person made by God. In other words, just like Pascal, C.S. Lewis encourages the action without compromising the affection that must accompany it.

Pascal poses the crucial question to his interlocutor regarding the benefits of choosing Christianity and deciding to follow his advice asking: what harm has come to you from choosing to take the aforementioned course of action? The French apologist (1966:153) quickly answers his own question and lists the benefits gained: being a “faithful, honest, humble, grateful, and full of good works, a sincere and true friend.” This runs in total opposition to the choice of agnosticism or indifference. In fragment 427, Pascal (1966:159) states, “Now what advantage is it to us to hear someone say he has shaken off the yoke that he does not believe that there is a God watching over his actions, that he considers himself sole master of his behaviour, and that he proposes to account for it to no one but himself? Does he think that by doing so he has henceforth won our full confidence, and made us expect from him consolation, counsel and assistance in all life’s needs?” For Pascal, not choosing God has left the person without respect and his counsel should be disregarded. As a matter of fact, no self-respecting person would even ask life counsel from those who have willingly disregarded the God of the Bible. This is a serious indictment but it shows the seriousness and apologetic fervour that Pascal possesses. He ends his *Wager* assuring his interlocutor that he has been where they are at and so convinces the gambler that the *Wager* is rationally compelling and reasonably plausible. For the seventeenth century seeker there were few options: Christianity or atheism. In a time of numerous options when Christianity has less and less credibility, is the *Wager* still a viable option and would a postmodern Millennial still heed the advice of Pascal to consider Christianity?

The Postmodern Appeal to the Wager

In contemporary postmodern thought, there is a particular attractiveness to the Pascalian *Wager* and the apologetic method of Pascal as a whole, mostly because of Pascal’s appeal to the affections. Another reason that postmodernists gravitate to the *Wager* is its seeming avoidance of any exclusive religious claim. One of the characteristics of postmodern theology is the call to either pluralism or inclusivism; Christianity is just the religion of choice, one among a myriad of choices. It is not a matter of ultimate truth but a matter of religious preference. In other words, Pascal’s *Wager* just happens to ask one to wager on Christianity but one could just as well wager on any other available religion. This sentiment would, of course, have been anathema to Pascal because it runs counter to Pascal’s intention of convincing unbelievers that *Christianity* and not any other religion, is the most attractive option. The main objection to Pascal’s *Wager*, what is best known as the “Many-Gods Objection.” Jeff Jordan (1994: 101) describes the many-Gods objection as follows, “The range of betting options is not limited solely to Christianity because one could formulate a Pascalian wager for Islam, certain sects of Buddhism, or for any of the competing sect found within Christianity itself.” In the entire scheme of Christian apologetics, the many-Gods objection would have been a formidable objection were it not for the fact that we must read Pascal’s *Wager* as prelude to his whole Apology.

For the postmodern, religious adherence cannot offer any certainty and must always be approached with a certain level of scepticism. In the minds of many, the *Wager* proposes a religious option without offering the modernistic certainty, so prevalent among modern apologists. Thus, another aspect of the *Wager* that might be attractive to the postmodern is

the matter of uncertainty, which is the postmodern epistemic distinctive. Initially, therefore, the *Wager* might speak to the mind of the “postmodern libertine,” but a clarification of the essence of Pascal's apology must be given before it can take a foothold in the mind of the contemporary listener, not unlike the seventeenth century libertine gambler in the days of Pascal.

The postmodern rejects the aspect of reason as determining factor in all cases of knowing. Whereas Christian thought might stand in the postmodern position when seeking to expose the pretensions of the modernist precept of autonomous and objective human reason, it must avoid disregarding the use of reason in religious knowledge. The driving force of postmodern epistemology, especially in the case of religious knowledge, is the existential impulse. Here is where the postmodern has entirely minimized the concept of reason in religious knowledge. Pascal, without a doubt, abhorred the use of autonomous reason in apprehending God, and he made sure that he downplayed the initial use of empirical evidence to come to the knowledge of God he did not, and would never have neglected reason. We can contend that Pascal was not averse to the evidence, and thus the use of reason, in religious apprehension, for a large segment of his *Pensées* is devoted to giving enough evidence, although secondary as they may be, to make the Christian faith reasonable. Ultimately, giving evidence or proofs was not what Pascal had in mind when he presented his wager. Sister Hubert (1973: 70) asserts, “...Pascal intended the wager argument to be, an exhortation, not a proof...it served as the preliminary step to their acceptance of the proofs based on scripture which were to form the substantial part of Pascal's *Apology* of the Christian religion.” Nicholas Rescher makes an acute observation that disparages the accusation of inconsistency and clarifies Pascal's position by making the distinction between the use of “evidential” reason and “practical” reason, employed by Pascal in his *Wager*. Rescher (1985: 44) suggests,

For two very distinct species of ‘reason’ are at issue in Pascal – the *evidential* that seeks to establish facts (and in his view entirely inadequate to the demands of apologetics) and the *practical* that seeks to legitimate actions (and can indeed justify us in ‘betting on God’ via the practical step of accepting that he exists). The heart too has its *reasons*. Only by blithely ignoring this crucial distinction between evidentially fact-establishing and pragmatically action-validating reason can one press the charge of inconsistency against Pascal.

Rescher (1985: 45-46) continues to explain that when evidence fails to settle the issue and when waiting for the evidential situation to change is not a viable option, one must make a decision one way or the other, for suspending any judgment might prove catastrophic. The best available course must be considered in these circumstances but must still be done under the guidance of rational considerations. Pascal is perfectly consistent in his use of practical reason throughout his *Wager*. Betting on God is the reasonable thing to do on rational reasons when evidential reasons are insufficient.

When the more moderate postmodern accepts a semblance of the Christian faith or any other religious faith practice but neglects the aforementioned distinction mentioned by Rescher, and equates the wager with a leap, he is in danger of falling prey to extreme fideism, something Pascal (1966: 76-80) did not succumb to. Alvin Plantinga (2000: 87-88) makes the distinction between the extreme fideism where reason and faith are in conflict and the fideism of the Reformed epistemologist. Pascal could be counted among the latter, where faith is placed over against demonstration but not over against knowing. Although the existential impulse might engender postmodern interest in the Pascalian wager, the postmodern assumptions that degrade the true meaning of Pascal's *Apology* must be taken seriously. Pascal might have the ear of the postmodern and points of contact are present in their interpretation, but we must avoid seeking too close of an affiliation with and allegiance to the postmodern wager; a careful Pascalian corrective can and must be applied. When taken in isolation, the *Wager* can be interpreted with other religions in mind. Postmodernists

have indeed done so and have bastardized Pascal's intentions and have grossly missed his Christian apologetic intentions by applying postmodern philosophical influences.

In addition to the existential impulse that incites interest in the concept of wager for the postmodern, the matter of uncertainty is another factor favourable to postmodern interest. After all, uncertainty is one of the hallmarks of postmodern thought which repeats Nietzsche's (2015: Loc. 12954-12960) statement that "men prefer the uncertainty of their intellectual horizon." The beauty of faith, according to postmodern theology which is guided by the hermeneutics of suspicion, is the lack of absoluteness and certainty (cf. Kearney, 2011:7). Keeping this in mind, the postmodern philosopher Brian Treanor (2010: 558) holds out the hope that "by returning to the deep ground that necessitates the wager, we can recover faith, 'returning' to a second innocence, one still open to the surplus of meaning found at the wellspring of faith, but without the ignorance of the first." Treanor refers here to Richard Kearney's antitheism, better described as a return to faith from the faith; "faith as an accident of our birth to a more mature faith that frees us from the limitations of our first naiveté" (Treanor, 2010:558). According to both Kearney (2010: 8) and Treanor (2010: 546-559), this requires an antitheistic wager, which is "marked by a moment of radicalized 'innocence' that opens the door to ulterior dimensions of truth.

Richard Kearney describes this wager more in detail in his work *Anatheism: Returning to God After God*. In this work, Kearney (2010: xvii) points out two aspects of the wager – the philosophical and the existential. According to Kearney, the Pascalian wager is charged with calculation, blind leaps and even fideism. In other words, Kearney erroneously charges Pascal with proposing an existential wager, which ultimately results in an existential "leap" not unlike Kierkegaard's. Kearney and other postmoderns, so they claim, adhere to an existential wager that solicits fidelity and is based on imagination and hospitality (Kearney, 2010: xvii). According to Kearney our lives consist of making wagers and religious wagers are no exception. Upon closer examination, however, we discover that Kearney has misinterpreted Pascal's views and unlike Pascal's *Wager*, where the choice and the object of the wager is made abundantly clear, his wager is far more ambivalent and does not point directly to God but to a "God" of our own choosing. Kearney (2010: 7) explains,

The *ana* signals a movement of return to what I call a primordial wager, to an inaugural instant of reckoning at the root of belief. It marks a reopening of that space where we are free to choose between faith or nonfaith...Anatheism, in short, is an invitation to revisit what might be termed a primary scene of religion: the encounter with a radical Stranger who we choose, or don't choose, to call God.

Here it becomes clear that it is Richard Kearney who proposes an existential wager that contradicts Pascal's wager of which the object is not a Stranger who we "choose" to call God but is the God of the Bible. Kearney (2010: 30) continues to explain that these encounters with the Stranger are not new but have occurred all throughout history. He cites Abraham's encounter with God in Genesis 18, but also, and just as legitimate Muhammad's encounter on the summit of Mount Hira, which Kearney describes as the "Islamic wager." In other words, the wager that Kearney describes is a religious existential wager regardless of the object of the wager. For the postmodern, the attractiveness of the wager is in exactly the reasons Kearney describes: the option to choose to wager on the god of one's own liking.

Conclusion

When we consider the *Wager* in isolation, the objection seems quite legitimate. Pascal's *Wager*, however, must be regarded as a primer where the reasonableness of *Christianity* will be spelled out in far more detail in the rest of his *Apology*. As well, the *Pensées* clearly spell out the reasonableness of *Christianity* in juxtaposition to different religions. In our apologetics we call on Pascal's wager rather than the postmodern (e.g., Kearney's) rendition of the wager, which is far too ambivalent and, still, does not give the seeker any certainty and hope (although this is exactly what postmodernists like Kearney shy away from). There is no doubt in the mind of Pascal where our certainty lies and he painstakingly clarifies the object of the *Wager* in the remainder of his *Pensées*.

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