

Douglas Groothuis,
*Beyond the Wager: The
 Christian Brilliance of
 Blaise Pascal.*

Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press,
 2024, 224 pp.

Beyond the Wager is a revision and expansion of the author's earlier book *On Pascal* from 2003. It depicts the everlasting problem of combining empirical science with religious beliefs and God's existence. That is why Blaise Pascal can be considered a relevant philosopher today. The author Douglas Groothuis, a great admirer of Blaise Pascal's intellectual greatness, wishes to raise the reader's faith in God by presenting Pascal's work. In his opinion, Blaise Pascal is mostly unknown amongst contemporary philosophers and only his famous quotes and the "wager" argument are present in the literature.

Pascal truly was a renaissance man, with great achievements in mathematics, natural science, philosophy, theology, and ethics, a man of great intellect and deep faith, none of which afflicted the other. Reason on its own is insufficient to comprehend all of the truths of faith; body, mind and heart are required for believing, says Pascal. By observing Pascal's life, one can comprehend that science and religion can go together. He passed away at the age of just thirty-nine, leaving his great apologetics of Christianity unfinished. Posthumously, those fragments were gathered in a book entitled *Pensées*, but they do not have a linear flow of thoughts and were poorly organized. Because his thoughts were

left unfinished, Pascal is often misunderstood.

Throughout the book, the author presents Pascal's ideas, which we will briefly summarize here. Groothuis is not afraid to express his opinion and even disagreement with Pascal, but he clearly indicates what is his and what is Pascal's opinion. Pascal was in favor of using reason to describe faith, despite some accusations that he was a fideist. He was a philosopher of science and religion. In his "wager" argument, Pascal states that it is better to believe in God's existence, even though God may not exist, than not to believe and God may actually exist. In other words, it is better to falsely believe Christianity is true, than not to believe, and to find out it is true in the afterlife. In the second chapter, the author lists Pascal's biography, commenting and correlating Pascal's major life events with his creative thought. Furthermore, Pascal's scientific discoveries are also depicted. He is the inventor of the calculator and he also supported the hypothesis that vacuum exists in nature, despite the contrary beliefs of earlier scientists and the scientific community of his time. By standing up against old incorrect theories, Pascal paved the way for new (scientific) empirical theory for worldly hypotheses and remained faithful to the Bible for the matters regarding God, soul, and Christianity. He was always standing for the truth, even if it was groundbreaking, such as for the idea that cosmos is not quasi-emotional, but rather susceptible to mathematical experimentation, and despite that under God's teleological influence.

Pascal dismisses the proof of God's existence from natural theology (purely from nature and cosmos, without

revelation in the Bible) and claims that in humans' fallen nature one can find a reason for the existence of the Redeemer. It is derived from believers' spiritual experience, not from universal rational proof. Still, Pascal involves reason in discovering the existence of God, but only combined with divine revelation, as otherwise it would be impossible to figure out metaphysical truths and living God as the Bible knows him. God is partly revealed and partly hidden so the world can have the need and hope for redemption. Those who seek God can find him. One can truly know God if he enters a relationship with him. For Pascal, God cannot be rationally knowledgeable, because he is infinite and hidden. Nevertheless, that is not a reason for being a sceptic; man must choose if God does or does not exist. Also, if man does not believe in God, he will lose the goods promised to the believers if God exists — if one wagers in favor of God's existence, he will get everything (eternal happiness) and lose nothing. Not to wager on God would be renouncing reason. The risk is losing the truth if one ends up being wrong.

Pascal's view of human nature is also worth noting. Morally and epistemologically, Pascal claims, humans are both miserable and great. Human philosophies alone cannot define the human dualistic nature — they underline either human greatness (like stoicism) or wretchedness (like skepticism). The truth about humans is found only in the gospels. The truth is: humans have a fallen nature because of the original sin, and depend on God's grace, but they are not completely damned. He does not use inductive or deductive, but abductive reasoning (in which the

conclusion remains uncertain) for human nature.

People can know God only through Jesus Christ. Biblical miracles prove that Christianity is the true religion. A miracle, according to Pascal, exceeds the natural power of the things involved in a miracle. Pascal defends the gospels' reliability using evidence for the truthfulness of the gospels, Jesus Christ's messianism, and resurrection. The fulfilment of biblical prophecies is a sign of the existence of an intelligent supernatural mind who precogitates and guides historic events. Both Pascal and the author do their best to show that reason must be used together with faith and be susceptible to divine revelation — this is the true Christianity. Every human has a God-shaped vacuum in him, which only God can fill. For Pascal, Christians are thinking members of one body, the Church. God created people as thinking beings, so they can understand his creations. They also need to love their Creator and other members of the body.

To contextualize Pascal's philosophy in the seventeenth-century philosophy even more, the author in the last chapter enacts an imaginary dialogue between Blaise Pascal and René Descartes. Both philosophers are keen to prove skepticism wrong, each from a different perspective.

In conclusion, let us say that the author is an apologetic of Pascal. He has in mind Pascal's ideas and discovers where they were mentioned in the literature, opposed or intentionally omitted to this day. The author enlightens Pascal's less-known statements, especially on Christian apologetics. Pascal's apologetics inspired and still inspires Christian scholars. Also, the

reader can notice that Pascal had a discernment for people's problems and sins that came because of the original sin. The book's subtitle, *The Christian Brilliance of Blaise Pascal*, serves as the best summary of its content. As the reader slowly discovers Pascal's ideas, again and again he/she becomes convinced of Pascal's love for God and catholic doctrine. Pascal's ideas are objectively presented and put into the

wider philosophical and theological perspective. This is done by mentioning figures that had influenced Pascal, and whom he had impacted, and those who had different viewpoints. It is a great book for those who wish to truly understand the Christian philosophy, Blaise Pascal, or the relation between science and faith.

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