



Philosophical Review

The Persecutor's Wager

Author(s): Craig Duncan

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 116, No. 1 (Jan., 2007), pp. 1-50

Published by: [Duke University Press](#) on behalf of [Philosophical Review](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20446937>

Accessed: 15/01/2013 13:25

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Duke University Press and *Philosophical Review* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Philosophical Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

The Persecutor's Wager

Craig Duncan

Ithaca College

I have a story to tell about consequentialism and salvation. It begins in 1553.

1. Death of a Heretic

In October of 1553, the Unitarian theologian Michael Servetus was burnt at the stake in Geneva on the grounds of heresy. An anonymous source has left us with a description of his death. We are told that the executioners secured Servetus to the stake with an iron chain. They wound a thick rope several times tightly around his neck, until Servetus pleaded that it be wound no further. A pile of wood was placed at his feet, and a crown of straw coated in sulfur was placed on his head; the whole contraption was then set alight. Several people from a large crowd of spectators came forward to throw some wood of their own onto the fire. As the flames began to reach him, Servetus let forth a horrifying shriek; within half an hour he was dead.¹

Because Servetus was a well-meaning and intelligent man, his gruesome death provoked a lively debate among Swiss Protestants about the proper bounds of religious toleration. One party to this debate was John Calvin, who defended the execution of Servetus in a treatise entitled *A Defense of the Orthodox Faith of the Holy Trinity against the Errors of*

I would like to thank Elizabeth Anderson, Edwin Curley, James Joyce, Peter Railton, and Stephen P. Schwartz for helpful discussion in the writing of this essay. Thanks too are due to several anonymous referees whose comments led to many improvements. Any mistakes, oversights, or ridiculous claims that remain are, of course, my fault alone.

1. This account of Servetus's end is based on Bainton 1953, 211–12.

Philosophical Review, Vol. 116, No. 1, 2007

DOI 10.1215/00318108-2006-021

© 2007 by Cornell University

Michael Servetus (1554). Calvin was unrepentant. Servetus had denied the Trinity, he explained, and since that was a damnable belief, it could not be tolerated:

That humanity, advocated by those who are in favour of a pardon for heretics, is greater cruelty because in order to save the wolves they expose the poor sheep. I ask you, is it reasonable that heretics should be allowed to murder souls and to poison them with their false doctrine, and that we should prevent the sword, contrary to God's commandment, from touching their bodies, and that the whole Body of Jesus Christ be lacerated that the stench of one rotten member may remain undisturbed? (Quoted in Lecler 1960, 1:334)

Intolerant words, indeed.

And yet . . .

Might not Calvin have had a point?

2. A Case of Cruel to Be Kind?

To see this point, we must try to look past the overwrought imagery of the passage just quoted and consider Calvin's claim that those people who would pardon heretics in fact commit a "greater cruelty" than those who would punish them. Heretics, says Calvin, "murder souls" with their poisonous doctrine; by this, of course, he means that heretics entice innocent others into giving up beliefs essential for their eternal salvation.² Might it not, then, be that punishing heretics is genuinely a case of "cruel to be kind"? Calvin certainly thought so. Indeed, he thought this point important enough to repeat again in his treatise. "What preposterous humanity is it," he asks in a later passage, "to cover with silence

2. How can a heretic "murder" another person's soul if, as Calvin believed, each person's soul is predestined by God for either heaven or hell? I am not aware of any passage by Calvin that explicitly takes up this question. However, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin (1960, book 3, chap. 23, sec. 13) attempts (via mainly scriptural arguments) to rebut the objection that predestination renders pointless all admonitions to virtue; he surely would make a similar effort to show that despite predestination there remains a point in combating the false admonitions of heretics. Interestingly, one prominent defender of religious toleration, Roger Williams, argued in his 1644 treatise *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience* that in fact predestination renders heresy harmless (see Polishook 1967, 88, for the relevant passages). This argument elicited an angry response from the Calvinist minister John Cotton who, in a 1647 work entitled *The Bloody Tenent, Washed and Made White in the Bloude of the Lambe*, attempted a reductio ad absurdum of Williams's argument: Williams's reasoning, Cotton claimed, would by analogy absurdly entail that a magistrate has no reason to combat the plague, since God has already foreordained who shall and shall not die from it (see *ibid.*, 90).

The Persecutor's Wager

the crime of one man and to prostitute a thousand souls to the snares of Satan?" (quoted in Castellio 1965, 203).

Many others before and after Calvin agreed. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, wrote that:

In so far as heretics are concerned, there is a sin by which they not only deserve to be separated from the Church by excommunication, but also to be separated from this world by death. It is, indeed, far more serious to pervert the faith which ensures the life of the soul than to counterfeit money which is only necessary for our temporal needs. Therefore, if those who counterfeit money or commit other crimes are in true justice immediately put to death by secular princes, with how much more justice may heretics be excommunicated and even put to death immediately upon conviction. (*Summa Theologiae*, 2nd part of the 2nd part, question 11, article 3; cited in Lecler 1960, 1:85)

Consider, too, the following quotation from Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva and an important Reformation figure in his own right.

Shame upon that contradictory charity, that extreme cruelty, which, in order to save Lord knows how many wolves, exposes the whole flock of Jesus Christ! . . . For the sake of the salvation of the flock use that sword righteously against those monsters disguised as men. (*Concerning the Rights of Rulers over Their Subjects and the Duty of Subjects towards Their Rulers* [1574]; cited in Lecler 1960, 1:348)

Clearly, a proper concern for the salvation of innocent others was once widely thought to call for the use of forceful measures against religious dissenters.

And why *shouldn't* it be thought to call for this? Of course, we can agree that religious dissenters should not be handed such a cruel fate as death at the stake. But why go to the opposite extreme of the modern liberal state, which leaves dissenters free of any sort of penalty, and even protects them against private acts of discrimination in the civil sphere? Why think, that is, that those in power should simply turn a blind eye to the eternal well-being of those very people whose interests they are charged with protecting?

The point is a broadly consequentialist one. This is not to say that Aquinas, Calvin, Beza, and the like were consequentialists through and through; they surely were not. But they did believe that a duty of benevolence requires public officials to look after the welfare of those under their charge; hence even religious moralists like Aquinas, Calvin, and

Beza could find *some* limited role for consequentialist-style reasoning in their moral views. True, they would have regarded the promotion of welfare by officials as properly constrained by other duties, and so their reasoning in the passages above is perhaps most accurately described as “constrained consequentialist” reasoning. But constrained though it was, the consequentialist element of their thinking apparently led them to conclude in favor of persecution.³

Even though Aquinas, Calvin, and Beza are figures from an earlier era, their conclusion is a timely one, given the recent rise in religiously motivated violence around the world. Hence, let us ask: Were these thinkers right to conclude that a concern for others’ salvation justifies persecution? The answer to this question, I will argue in this essay, is “In a sense, yes.” For I will argue that given Aquinas, Calvin, and Beza’s belief that orthodox Christian convictions are essential for salvation, consequentialist reasoning does indeed endorse the persecution of unorthodox believers in a significant range of cases.

So described, this conclusion is perhaps not so surprising; it is, after all, well known that consequentialism in principle permits the coercing of some for the benefit of others. What *is* surprising, however—and what it is my goal in this essay to show—is *just how* amenable to religious persecution consequentialism turns out to be. This is surprising, for after all one might have thought that consequentialism would give persecutors the go-ahead only so long as they were *reasonably certain* that orthodox belief is essential for salvation. But in fact this is far from the case, I will argue. Instead, so long as (1) there is some probability, *no matter how small*, that only orthodox believers are saved, and (2) no rival religious group can as credibly claim that only its believers are saved, then in a significant range of cases that I will specify, consequentialism not only permits religious persecution, but absolutely requires it. The upshot is the revelation of an unnoticed premise of any robust consequentialist case for religious liberty, namely, a surprisingly strong form of religious skepticism according to which no one has any reason whatsoever, no matter how slight, to believe in “salvific exclusivism,” the doctrine that God excludes some individuals from salvation. I will end this essay by

3. Clearly, none of Aquinas, Calvin, or Beza accepted a constraint that requires toleration of heresy. One might think that the New Testament itself clearly requires this. However (as the long history of debate on the subject suggests), the New Testament scriptural evidence regarding toleration is in fact quite ambiguous. For further discussion, see Duncan 2000, chap. 2, “The Bible Problem.”

arguing that the need for this categorical type of skepticism constitutes a problem for the consequentialist defender of religious liberty, since intuitively it seems that even the nonskeptical among us have moral reason not to persecute.⁴

3. The Persecutor's Wager (Simple Case)

My plan is to proceed by defining a "Persecutor's Wager" along lines analogous to Pascal's Wager.⁵ To bring the central issues into sharp focus, I will (like Pascal) begin with a very simple wager involving only one sort of god; I will then (unlike Pascal) move on to consider a more complicated wager involving more than one sort of god. It should not really be surprising that there exists an analogy between the Pascalian believer and the persecutor whom I will imagine. One can after all think of Pascal's Wager as the offspring of a marriage between two doctrines. First, there is the doctrine of salvific exclusivism. Second, there is a doctrine of prudential rationality according to which one ought to maximize one's own expected utility in the manner described by standard rational choice theory. Combine these doctrines and one gets Pascal's famous argument that prudence requires belief in God. Suppose, though, that one were to combine salvific exclusivism, not with a doctrine of prudence, but rather with the moral doctrine of welfare consequentialism, according to which one is morally required to maximize the total happi-

4. Moreover, though I will not explore the point in any detail, the conclusion of this essay generalizes beyond the case of religious liberty. For suppose that God saves believers of all religious stripes, but refuses to save (say) unrepentant murderers. A god of this sort is still an exclusivist god, as I defined salvific exclusivism above. If such a god is any more likely to exist than a god who saves even unrepentant murderers, then the arguments below would imply that a consequentialist ruler should not just outlaw murder, but should also commit vast social resources to the cause of convincing murderers to repent. Indeed, given the vast amount of well-being at stake in salvation, this cause should take priority over everything else not likewise focused on matters of salvation. I trust that not many consequentialist philosophers would be willing to endorse such a conclusion and would prefer instead to keep their focus squarely on the well-being to be had or lost in this world. If my argument is sound, though, such "otherworldly indifference" can be purchased only at the price of rejecting salvific exclusivism, in a categorical fashion not hitherto recognized.

5. Edwin Curley (1999, 93–95; 2004, 61–63), in some richly interesting studies of historical arguments for religious toleration, has independently anticipated the basic idea of the Persecutor's Wager and its affinity to Pascal's Wager.

ness of the whole population of persons.⁶ The offspring of *this* marriage is the Persecutor's Wager.

More specifically, this is so provided that consequentialism instructs me to perform, from among the acts available to me, the act with maximal *expected value*. This is a quite common form of consequentialism; philosophers who have interpreted consequentialism along these lines include Bertrand Russell (1966, 30–31), Richard Brandt (1959, 381–84), Bart Gruzalski (1981), Frank Jackson (1991), Allan Gibbard (1990, 42–43), Mark Timmons (2002, 124), and Michael Zimmerman (forthcoming).⁷ Moreover, I believe there is good reason to prefer this form of consequentialism to the alternative form that understands right acts solely as those that produce the best *actual* consequences. A simple example (adapted from one due to Frank Jackson [1991, 462–63]) reveals why. Imagine a doctor who is treating a patient with a life-threatening disease. The doctor has three drugs in her cabinet: drug A will certainly cure the disease but will also cause some painful albeit temporary side effects; of drugs B and C, one will cure the disease in a pain-free manner, whereas the other will kill the patient, and there is no way

6. Although I will define the Persecutor's Wager in terms of welfare consequentialism (utilitarianism by another name), this is purely for ease of exposition. My points hold against "pluralistic" consequentialists who recognize a variety of goods, so long as among these goods salvation is an incomparable good (see sec. 4.1 below; see also note 31 below for more commentary on pluralistic consequentialism and its bearing on the wager.)

7. Richard Brandt, in his influential *Ethical Theory* (1959, 381n2), does note that there are some advantages to actual value consequentialism, but his all-things-considered preference is for expected value consequentialism—a preference he stuck with in his later work *A Theory of the Right and the Good* (1998, 271–72). Significantly, Brandt (1959, 382) also claims that expected value consequentialism is closer to Jeremy Bentham's own view than are alternatives that rely on actual value. John Stuart Mill is harder to pin down, I believe. He famously defines the "Greatest Happiness Principle" as the principle according to which "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness" (Mill 1957, 10). One might read this formula as identifying actions as right just to the extent, and no more, that they *actually* produce happiness, and so read Mill as opting for actual value over expected value. Alternatively, one might read this formula as identifying actions as right insofar as they are of kinds that are *likely* to produce happiness, which would be consistent with an expected value interpretation. (Thus—to anticipate an example I will shortly use in the text below—on this latter reading, an Austrian villager who saved Hitler from drowning as a youth acted rightly because saving youths from drowning tends to promote happiness. This is so even though in the case in question overall long-term happiness actually would have been better served by letting the young Hitler drown.) It is unclear to me which of these two readings of Mill's formula to prefer.

The Persecutor's Wager

of knowing which drug will do which. Surely the right thing to do in this case is to prescribe drug A. Significantly, drug A produces (on plausible calculations) the consequences with the highest expected value. It does not, however, produce the best *actual* consequences, for that is only true of one of either drug B or C. Thus “actual value consequentialism” must, quite implausibly, condemn the prescribing of drug A as wrong. This example, then, furnishes a powerful reason for thinking that consequentialists should aim at maximizing expected value rather than maximizing actual value. Hence my preference in this essay for “expected value consequentialism” over actual value consequentialism.

However, the main conclusion of this essay—namely, that expected value consequentialism too easily endorses religious persecution—should also be worrisome to actual value consequentialists. This is so because actual value consequentialists (for example, G. E. Moore [1912, 118–21]) sometimes take into account the uncertainty of outcomes by distinguishing between judgments of wrongness and judgments of blameworthiness, with actual consequences being criterial for the former and expected consequences criterial for the latter. (On this way of understanding things, for example, an Austrian villager who saved Hitler from drowning as a young boy would have done the wrong thing but would not be blameworthy for doing so.) Whether this is in fact the correct way of understanding things will not be my concern. What matters for my purposes is that if this is correct, then the Persecutor's Wager described below can simply be reformulated in terms of moral blameworthiness, with the unwelcome result that persecutors are far too easily excused from blame.⁸ Thus, although in the pages that follow I will mean expected value consequentialism when I speak simply of “consequentialism,” it should be borne in mind that the Persecutor's Wager is potentially a challenge to more than just this type of consequentialism.⁹

8. Relatedly, J. J. C. Smart considers an agent who chooses an action that at the time of decision had the most probable benefits but which in fact turns out to be suboptimal. According to Smart (1973, 47), we should say of such an agent that although the agent chose the wrong action, he or she acted *rationally* in pursuit of the morally best results. Formulating the Persecutor's Wager using Smart's form of consequentialism, we would be forced to conclude that in a wide range of cases persecution is the rational way in which to pursue the morally best results.

9. I would like to thank an anonymous editor of this journal for pressing me to distinguish these different types of consequentialism. I should mention too that for reasons of space I will restrict myself to direct act consequentialism. I do not think this restriction substantially weakens my argument. For one thing, it is not clear to me

On, then, to the wager itself; here it is in its simplest form. Let us suppose that I am a consequentialist state official in a largely Christian country, and I am trying to decide whether to enforce Christianity as a state religion (say, by attaching legal penalties to non-Christians' religious acts and beliefs, and giving non-Christians a lesser set of civil and political rights generally). Suppose too that like Pascal I consider only two possible states of nature (or "supernature," in this case): the state in which there exists an exclusivist Christian god who saves only orthodox Christians, and the state in which no god exists.¹⁰

Since I aim to maximize expected value, I will proceed by constructing a decision matrix in order to determine the expected values of my options. The matrix I will construct employs the following variables:

c = the number of Christian citizens absent any enforcement
 Δc = the change in the number of Christians under enforcement

that rule consequentialism is a viable alternative to act consequentialism. And while indirect act consequentialism (of the sort defended in Hare 1981, for instance, and Railton 1984) *is* a viable alternative, I believe it too is vulnerable to the Persecutor's Wager. For surely the vast utilities associated with salvation—that is, the vast utilities associated with life among the angels, so to speak—would militate in favor of deliberating from the perspective of the "archangel" rather than the "prole" (in Hare's famous terms) when salvation is at stake. With so much at stake, after all, one should want to deliberate with the most extensive information available, in directly consequentialist terms. And once one is deliberating in consequentialist fashion, the Persecutor's Wager rears its head. It is worth noting too that the distinction between direct and indirect act consequentialism is independent of the distinction between actual value and expected consequentialism. For example, Peter Railton (1984) observes that his arguments for indirect act consequentialism, which are in fact formulated in terms of actual value, could be reformulated in terms of expected value and remain "virtually the same" (ibid., 143n13; compare 152n24).

10. Admittedly, it may at first blush seem paradoxical for a consequentialist to consider the first of these two states, for by a consequentialist's lights any god who fails to admit everyone to heaven would seem to be an immoral god. As a consequentialist, then, shouldn't I assume there is no exclusivist god? The answer is No, for I have to take account of the possibility that an immoral god exists, or that divine morality is distinct from human morality, or even that God is above morality altogether, as Marilyn McCord Adams (1993, 308), among others, has claimed. Moreover, unless I assign value 1 to the probability of consequentialism's being true, I must also consider the possibility that an exclusivist god could in fact be moral. (See, for example, Quinn 1994, which argues that an exclusivist god can be a moral god.)

The Persecutor's Wager

- p_C = the probability that an exclusivist Christian god exists¹¹
 p_N = the probability that no god exists
 S = the amount of well-being a saved individual enjoys in the afterlife

Three comments are in order before turning to the matrix. First, since we are interested in saving souls, I want to stipulate that the variable c is meant to represent the number of current citizens who absent any enforcement will *die* as Christians “in good standing” (as determined by an exclusivist Christian god). This fact is relevant to a correct understanding of the variable Δc . For to anticipate an important objection, even if enforcement should prove ineffective at bringing genuine recruits into Christianity (as alleged in John Locke’s [1983] famous argument that coercion cannot produce saving belief¹²), by preventing heretics from spreading their “seductive lies,” enforcement may still succeed in retaining within the fold some current Christians who would otherwise fall away over time. Such success at retention will show up as a positive Δc . Hence this variable can be positive even when enforcement generates no new recruits.

The two remaining comments concern features of the matrix itself. First, it is important to note that the quantities in the four cells of the matrix represent only “otherworldly well-being,” that is, the total amount of well-being current citizens will enjoy in the afterlife. After first examining this sort of well-being, I will turn to consider as well the this-worldly effects of liberty and enforcement. Second, the matrix assumes that God sends no one to hell; the unsaved simply have no afterlife. One reason I assume this is to mirror Pascal’s own presentation of his wager, for damnation apparently plays no part in it.¹³ A second, more important reason for this assumption is that, significantly, even on this more humane picture of the afterlife, the result is the same: it still turns out that the consequentialist defender of religious liberty must just as categorically reject salvific exclusivism.

11. The probability I speak of is to be understood as *epistemic* probability (that is, probability on either a personalist or logical relations interpretation), defined via the standard Kolmogorovian axioms (see Hájek 2003a for an overview).

12. But see Waldron 1988 and Barry 1990 for important criticism of Locke’s argument. More on this later.

13. See Pascal 1966, fragment 418, “Infini-rien.” See also Hájek 2001, sec. 4, for discussion of whether Pascal meant for hell to figure in his wager.

Let us now turn to the matrix itself, which appears below as figure 1, “The Simple Case.”

Options	An exclusivist Christian god exists (p_C)	No god exists (p_N)
Grant religious liberty (L)	$S \cdot c$	0
Enforce Christianity (E_C)	$S \cdot (c + \Delta c)$	0

Figure 1. The Simple Case

Which option offers the greatest expected otherworldly value? To answer, let us examine the quantity $EV(E_C) - EV(L)$, where “ $EV(E_C)$ ” and “ $EV(L)$ ” stand for the expected value of enforcement and liberty, respectively. If this quantity is greater than zero, then enforcement has the greater expected otherworldly value. Computing expected value in the standard way, then according to the Simple Case we have

$$EV(L) = p_C \cdot S \cdot c$$

$$EV(E_C) = p_C \cdot S \cdot (c + \Delta c)$$

And hence

$$EV(E_C) - EV(L) = p_C \cdot S \cdot \Delta c$$

Since $S > 0$, it follows that $EV(E_C) - EV(L)$ is greater than zero so long as $p_C \neq 0$ and $\Delta c > 0$. Thus, so long as there is *some* probability of an exclusivist Christian god existing, and so long as enforcement adds at least one person to the Christian ranks or retains within the fold one

The Persecutor's Wager

person who would otherwise slip away, enforcement has greater expected otherworldly value than liberty.

But what about *this-worldly* expected value—that is, the expected amounts of well-being produced by each option in this world? Were we to include these in our calculations, we would end up with an equation of the following sort:

$$EV(E_C) - EV(L) = p_C \cdot S \cdot \Delta c + A$$

where A represents the difference between the this-worldly expected values associated with enforcement and liberty. From this it follows that

$$EV(E_C) > EV(L) \text{ if and only if } p_C \cdot S \cdot \Delta c > -A$$

With respect to choosing between options, then, the key question is whether the quantity $p_C \cdot S \cdot \Delta c$ is greater than the quantity $-A$. Since religious enforcement undoubtedly causes great anguish to those subject to it, A is very likely to be a large negative number, making $-A$ a large positive number. Hence the quantity $p_C \cdot S \cdot \Delta c$ will have to be an even larger positive number in order for enforcement to have greater expected value than liberty.

When will this happen? Borrowing a page from Pascal's *Pensées*, a religious persecutor might answer "very often." This is so, the persecutor can claim, because the well-being associated with salvation is *infinite* in scope—and when we set S equal to ∞ , then so long as p_C and Δc are both greater than zero, the quantity $p_C \cdot S \cdot \Delta c$ will likewise equal ∞ . This will be infinitely greater than $-A$, a finite quantity, and thus enforcement will have *infinitely* greater expected value than liberty, *no matter how much anguish the enforcement option will cause in this world*.

In the Simple Case, then, consequentialism combines with salvific exclusivism much as gasoline combines with fire; in both cases a mere spark of the latter is enough to produce explosively bad results. I submit that something like the thinking of the Simple Case, in however inchoate or clumsy a form, has likely influenced many a real-life religious persecutor. That makes the Simple Case significant in its own right. The larger lesson, though, is that according to the Simple Case, the consequentialist defender of religious liberty must either (1) categorically reject Christian exclusivism (that is, insist that $p_C = 0$), or (2) argue that on balance enforcement will do absolutely nothing either to bring new people into Christianity or to retain those who are already Christians.

The latter of these two options may appear tempting, for no doubt there are genuine risks associated with enforcement. For example, severe

forms of enforcement might spark off a civil war that there is no guarantee of winning. Less drastically, enforcement may sour the reputation of Christianity, turning away (or failing to retain) some people who otherwise would have joined (or stayed). Finally, history suggests that too cozy a relationship between church and state corrupts the church.

These are indeed risks of which any would-be persecutor must be wary. All the same, I cannot believe these risks are *always* enough to clinch the case for religious liberty. A perilous civil war is a real risk when one's rivals are powerful, but not otherwise. Enforcement will sour the reputation of a religion primarily in societies whose political culture is *already* strongly committed to religious liberty. And although theocracy tends to corrupt the church, there are forms of church-state interaction well short of theocracy. In short, these risks of enforcement are real, but they are contingent risks that will not be present in a significant range of cases.¹⁴ To be sure, there are other potential risks of enforcement besides these three, but there is no reason to be confident these other risks will tip the balance in favor of liberty in each context.

Moreover, it is worth noting there are varying degrees of religious enforcement, from autos-da-fé on one end to, say, the treatment of Catholics in the eighteenth-century Calvinist Dutch Republic on the other end. Catholics there were allowed significant freedom of worship, but Calvinism (as the official state church) had a monopoly on public forms of worship; Catholics had to worship in private anonymous buildings—homes or businesses—rather than churches designated as such. Additionally, Catholics were excluded from political office and municipal jobs (Van Rooden and Spaans 1997, 11–12).¹⁵ As one moves incrementally toward this less repressive side of the enforcement spectrum, the contingent risks of backfire surely abate; Dutch Catholics did not rise up in bloody revolt. Thus a case for religious liberty premised entirely on pragmatic considerations is hardly a robust case; instead, the consequen-

14. I am of course not the first person to stress the limits of purely pragmatic arguments for religious liberty. Two influential and effective presentations are Barry 1990 and Waldron 1988. Barry (*ibid.*, 48) writes bluntly: "The effectiveness of coercion in producing genuine belief over the course of a few generations is beyond question." I expand on Barry's and Waldron's arguments in Duncan 2000, chap. 3, "Pragmatism and Perdition." There I argue that the plight of the Bahá'ís in Iran constitutes a real-life case in which pragmatic objections to persecution are not decisive.

15. For a recent general overview of toleration in the "Dutch Golden Age," see Hsia and van Nierop 2002.

tialist defender of religious liberty must in a significant range of cases categorically reject salvific exclusivism.

There is, though, a reply that may appear less vulnerable to the contingencies of different cases, namely, John Stuart Mill's argument in *On Liberty* that under free discussion the truth will prevail (Mill 1991, chap. 2). Mill would argue that if Christianity is true, then it will gain adherents under liberty, rendering enforcement unnecessary; if by contrast, Christianity is not true, then all the more reason not to enforce it. This is an important point, to be sure. But I believe it is far from decisive against the Persecutor's Wager. Consider for instance the objection made by David Lewis (1989, 155–56), who of this argument wrote

Mill's guess about what will happen if received opinion is vigorously contested seems remarkably optimistic. Will there be debate at all, and not just warfare? If there is debate, will it help the debaters think through their positions, or will they rather throw up a cloud of sophistries? If they think things through, will they discover unappreciated reasons or bedrock disagreement?¹⁶

The essential point is that with respect to the Simple Case it remains an open empirical question whether liberty will really increase the number of Christians; hence this cannot explain the easy confidence with which most modern consequentialists support religious liberty.

Of course, Mill has other arguments for toleration that deserve attention. As far as I can tell, however, these fail to meet the challenge that salvific exclusivism poses to liberty.¹⁷ Consider, for instance, Mill's (1991, 22) claim that "All silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility." The Persecutor's Wager shows, however, that consequentialist persecutors need not regard themselves as at all infallible; all they need to insist is that there is *some* probability an exclusivist god exists. Consider too an argument that appears to speak to a persecutor's concern that heretics will lead others astray, namely, Mill's argument that if vice does in fact lead to self-harm, then far from setting an example that others will follow, a person's vice will in fact display the harm and

16. Lewis's paper is the only one I know of explicitly to raise the question of what utilitarian conclusions follow from a belief in exclusive salvation. He too concludes that this would license persecution in a range of cases. The present paper can be understood as offering formal support for Lewis's conclusions and extending them: Lewis does not appreciate just how categorical a rejection of salvific exclusivism the utilitarian requires (see, for example, his remarks at the end of sec. 6, 159).

17. See Lewis 1989, 155–56, for a more thorough canvassing of Mill's arguments.

serve as a deterrent to others (92). This claim will entirely fail to assuage the persecutor, however, for he will point out that the harms caused by heresy occur in the *next* life, far away from the view of this-worldly mortals. Finally, consider Mill's claim that since individuals differ one from another in their goals and tastes, each individual is his own best judge of where his well-being lies. "But," the persecutor will forcefully ask, "who wouldn't want the *infinite* good of salvation?!" (Or even: "Who wouldn't want to avoid eternal damnation?!")

4. Just How Good Is Salvation?

Part I: Salvation as an Incomparable Good

My conclusions so far have concerned only the Simple Case. One obvious recourse for the consequentialist is to point out that the Simple Case is surely too simple, for more than one sort of possible god needs to be considered. This is right, and in the next section I will explore a less simple case. For now, though, I want to consider an important objection that the consequentialist might make even to the argument of the Simple Case.

To appreciate this objection, recall that the foregoing argument presumed the well-being of saved individuals to be infinite in magnitude, and hence infinitely valuable. One might, however, object to the very use of infinite values. For instance, one might point out that when S is set equal to ∞ , one ends up with the following results for the expected value of each option:

$$EV(L) = p_C \cdot S \cdot c = p_C \cdot \infty \cdot c = \infty \quad (\text{so long as } p_C > 0 \text{ and } c > 0)$$

$$EV(E_C) = p_C \cdot S \cdot (c + \Delta c) = p_C \cdot \infty \cdot (c + \Delta c) = \infty \quad (\text{so long as } p_C > 0 \text{ and } c + \Delta c > 0)$$

This is significant, for now a consequentialist can insist that the wager yields no determinate advice in either direction; hence it fails to endorse persecution.

In response I wish to note that even if this objection is convincing, it likewise follows that the wager also fails, regrettably, to endorse what is surely the best option, namely, religious liberty. However, a consequentialist at this point might reply by arguing that infinite values have no place at all in rational choice theory, inasmuch as the inclusion of infinite values wrongly renders probabilities irrelevant for purposes of choice among the options. To see this, suppose (quite fancifully) that you are a bomb expert who is faced with the unenviable task of defusing

a “hell-bomb”—that is, a bomb that upon explosion creates an infinite amount of misery. You consider your options: defuse the bomb in the usual way, or simply give it a swift kick. Since each option has some risk of failure, each option will yield negatively infinite expected utility; consequentialism thus gives no determinate advice as to what to do. But it would surely be *insane* to kick a hell-bomb. Shouldn't we conclude from this, the consequentialist might ask, that we should simply shun all talk of infinite value? (Compare Duff 1986.)¹⁸

Although the problem highlighted—namely, the rendering of probabilities as irrelevant—is a real one, the response just proposed strikes me as an overreaction. For we must ask what the point of assigning an infinite value to the good of salvation is in the first place. Toward this end, consider the following passage by Antoine Arnauld (Arnauld and Nicole 1662, 369) from the famous *Port Royal Logic*:

It belongs to infinite things alone, as eternity and salvation, that they cannot be equaled by any temporal advantage; and thus we ought never to place them in the balance with any of the things of the world. This is why the smallest degree of facility for the attainment of salvation is of higher value than all the blessings of the world put together; and why the slightest peril of being lost is more serious than all temporal evils, considered simply as evils.¹⁹

18. Relatedly, one might argue that infinite utility violates the axioms of Bayesian decision theory (for example, as Edward F. McClennen [1994] argues). Several points are in order here. First, as I will shortly argue, showing that infinite utility violates these axioms does not show that the idea of an *incomparable* good does. Surely there is some way of mathematically modeling a person who would sacrifice any good Y for any positive finite chance of gaining good X. If not, then Bayesian decision theory is incomplete. Second, in any case it is very unclear what relevance decision-theoretic utility has for consequentialists. This is so because: (i) Consequentialists need a notion of well-being that permits meaningful interpersonal comparisons. Decision-theoretic utility, however, is not such a notion (which is not to say there have not been attempts by decision theorists to make such comparisons—see, though, Gibbard 1987 and Barry 1989, 110ff. for critical discussion of some of these attempts). (ii) Decision-theoretic utility measures well-being only on a preference-satisfaction account of well-being, which may not be the best account of this notion (see, among others, Nussbaum 2000, chap. 2 for criticism). Third, as it happens, a number of decision theorists and utilitarians are already in fact willing to countenance infinite utilities (see, for example, Sorenson 1994, Hájek 2003b, and Kagan and Vallentyne 1997).

19. Although the work was cowritten by both Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, the above quotation comes from the fourth and final part of the work, which was written entirely by Arnauld. It is worth noting too that Arnauld and Nicole were, like Pascal, members of the Jansenist movement within Roman Catholicism; the eponymous Port-Royal was a Jansenist monastery.

I suggest that the root intuition at work in this assignment of infinite value to salvation is the idea that the good found in salvation is incomparably better than the goods one finds in this world; its magnitude is such as to swamp into irrelevance any good we are familiar with in our temporal existence.²⁰ That is to say, the same conclusion will follow from the wager so long as the good of salvation is so immense that by comparison the goods of this world utterly pale in significance. Regarding saved individuals as infinitely well-off turns out merely to be the most dramatic form this swamping effect can take, not the only form.²¹

For instance, in the Simple Case, we could interpret S , not as ∞ , but rather as a tremendously large finite number. To see this, recall from section 3 that had I included this-worldly well-being in the Simple Case, a comparison of options E_C and L would have yielded the following equation:

$$EV(E_C) - EV(L) = p_C \cdot S \cdot \Delta c + A$$

with A representing the difference in this-worldly expected value associated with options E_C and L . Clearly, so long as $p_C > 0$ and $\Delta c > 0$, we can always set S equal to a finite positive number (say, $100^{100^{100}}$) large

20. This idea of incomparability, for instance, is at the heart of Marilyn McCord Adams's book-length response to the problem of evil (see, for instance, Adams 1999, 12, 82–83, 147, 155, 166). This testifies to the intuitive accessibility of the idea, despite the somewhat oxymoronic ring to the phrase “incomparably better.” The key idea is just the idea of one thing's value being so great as to dwarf all other things' value into insignificance.

21. Let me here suggest that the incomparability of salvation, as I take it to be understood by a wide range of religious believers, comes not just from the promise of *eternal* life, but also from the intrinsic nature of the experience of salvation. After all, an eternity of ho-hum days—days ever so marginally worth waking up for—would over eternity sum to infinity (provided it does not bizarrely constitute a converging sum). Thus the incomparability of salvation surely lies in more than just its eternity. Arnauld in the quotation above, for instance, speaks of eternity *and* salvation. Something like this thought, moreover, probably moved Pascal (1966: 151) to speak of salvation as “an infinity of *infinitely* happy life” (emphasis added). I am proposing that we understand this as “an infinity of incomparable happiness,” and then model incomparability as I propose below in this section. This excuses me from exploring the fascinating puzzles, much discussed of late, regarding how one might compare the utilities of infinite futures. (See Kagan and Vallentyne 1997 and the symposium in issue 3 of volume 73 of the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* [1995] for entry points into the literature on infinite futures.) Suffice it to say, however, that if consequentialists solve these puzzles (and solve them they must, in order to rescue consequentialism from the charges in Nelson 1991), this would only strengthen the Persecutor's Wager by legitimizing actually infinite utilities.

The Persecutor's Wager

enough that the resulting quantity $p_C \cdot S \cdot \Delta c$ is *itself* large enough to “absorb” the negative number A with only a negligible difference in its size, proportionally speaking. In this case A could be said to be swamped into irrelevance.

This, I suggest, is a legitimate way of proceeding; its legitimacy is apparent once one recognizes that the key religious idea in play is that of the incomparability of salvation. One can attempt to *model* this key idea mathematically by using ∞ as it is usually understood. If, however, this attempt fails for purely technical reasons (as the foregoing discussion suggests), then one should not ipso facto reject the claim that the good of salvation is incomparable in magnitude to the goods of this life. I should think it odd indeed if a substantive ethical/religious claim like this could be disproved on technical mathematical grounds. Instead, *one ought to conclude that the usual mathematical notion of ∞ turns out not to be the proper way of mathematically modeling the root idea of incomparability.* Realizing this should lead one to explore alternative mathematical models; I have suggested that the idea of a tremendously large finite number is one such alternative. Moreover, it is only one alternative among many. As Alan Hájek (2003b) has noted, one might also assign otherworldly well-being “lexical priority” over this-worldly well-being, or represent otherworldly well-being with “surreal” numbers, a type of infinite number with different properties than the more familiar ∞ (which strictly speaking is not itself a number).²²

Part 2: Salvation as Not an Incomparable Good

Suppose, though, that there is no satisfactory way to model the idea of an incomparable good, or that no such good exists. Unfortunately, the Persecutor's Wager can still assume a threatening form even when S is not an incomparable good. This can be seen as follows. Let us define the variable A_a as the *average* amount of anguish caused (over the course of a life) to each individual who experiences religious enforcement.

22. This is not to suggest such alternatives are immune to controversy. Hájek himself argues that these alternatives face problems on the grounds that they do not lead to a unique representation; in my example above, for instance, why choose $100^{100^{100}}$ for the value of S ? Why not choose $1000^{1000^{1000}}$? No matter what number is chosen, Hájek (2003b, 45) observes, there is always a higher number. Thus God is portrayed as a mere satisficer, and this sits uneasily with his alleged perfection. Moreover, the door is open for rival religious adherents to claim that *their* god delivers an even more valuable salvation, thereby initiating a sort of “eschatological arms race” (my phrase) that cannot in principle end.

Recalling that A was defined earlier to represent the *total* expected drop in citizens' well-being caused by enforcement, it follows that $A_a = A/T - c$, where T represents the total number of citizens (making $T - c$ represent the number of non-Christians absent enforcement). Since from section 3 we know that $EV(E_C)$ is greater than $EV(L)$ if and only if $p_C \cdot S \cdot \Delta c > -A$, then so long as $p_C > 0$ and $\Delta c > 0$ it follows that

$$EV(E_C) > EV(L) \text{ if and only if } S > \frac{-(T-c)A_a}{p_C \Delta c}$$

This result can be manipulated further. Let us define c_p as equal to the quantity $\Delta c/T - c$; this can be thought of as the "conversion/retention proportion of enforcement," since it represents the proportion of "lost souls" who are successfully converted to Christianity or retained within it (a "lost soul" being someone who would under conditions of liberty die as a non-Christian). With this definition in hand, it follows that

$$EV(E_C) > EV(L) \text{ if and only if } S > \left(\frac{-1}{p_C \cdot c_p} \right) A_a$$

Thus, for example, if the probability of an exclusivist Christian god is 0.25 and the conversion/retention proportion of otherwise lost souls is 0.25, then enforcement will be superior to liberty if and only if $S > 16(-A_a)$, that is, if and only if a saved soul's salvation is sixteen times as good as the average lost soul's enforcement-caused anguish is bad, so to speak. And if the probability of an exclusivist Christian god is a mere 0.02 and the conversion/retention proportion is a feeble 0.05, then enforcement will be superior to liberty if and only if $S > 1000(-A_a)$. And so on. Alas, then, in the Simple Case the prospect of salvation can exert decisive pressure in favor of religious enforcement even with (what a persecutor would judge to be) modest values for p_C , c_p , and S . For this reason, worries about infinite goods and incomparable goods should not lead one simply to dismiss the Persecutor's Wager out of hand.

Indeed, the opponent of the wager, rather than reject the idea of an incomparable good, would perhaps do better to try to turn the tables

I do not believe, however, that the specific choice of number should make any difference so long as it suffices to swamp this-worldly well-being into irrelevance. Hájek errs by attaching too literal a significance to the number chosen, when in fact the specific number used is meant only to *model* the incomparability of heavenly well-being, not to denote its precise quantity. Only by misunderstanding this is one led to worry that God is a mere satisficer or that an unending eschatological arms race is inevitable.

on any would-be persecutor, and argue in favor of a *this-worldly* incomparable good to rival the good of salvation. Having just discussed Mill at the end of the previous section, for instance, it is fitting at the end of this section to observe that one might take note of Mill's famous distinction between higher and lower pleasures and interpret him as arguing that the higher ones—say, the pleasures of exercising our intellects—are incomparably better than the lower ones. And if this is so, then a Millian might try to escape the wager by arguing that it would be irrational to sacrifice the incomparable good of autonomous thought for the lower pleasures of comfort in an afterlife, as the Persecutor's Wager may seem to demand.

I believe, however, that this attempted escape is doomed to fail. To begin with, it is hardly obvious that autonomous thought, good though it is, really is *incomparably* better than *all* other goods. Even more important is a second consideration. For recall that if one is not saved, then one is either nonexistent, or worse yet, suffering in hell. In both fates, then, the pleasures of autonomous thought are absent. (I assume that residents of hell find it quite hard to think autonomously amidst their torments!) So the choice presented by the wager can be viewed, not as a choice in which one sacrifices autonomous thought today in return for the lower good of mere comfort in the next world, but rather as a choice in which one sacrifices autonomy with respect to one belief today in order to avoid a permanent sacrifice of autonomy in the next world.²³

In short, the Persecutor's Wager has survived challenges based on worries about measuring the good of salvation. Hence the wager is worth investigating further, in a less simple form than the far-too-simple Simple Case. That is my aim in the next section.

5. The Persecutor's Wager (Three Gods Case)

The main flaw of Pascal's Wager, many (most?) philosophers agree, is its blindness to other sorts of exclusivist gods besides a Christian one; this is the point of the so-called "Many Gods" objection to the wager.²⁴ The

23. Mill's discussion of higher and lower pleasures occurs in Mill 1957, 12ff. Thanks to an anonymous referee for calling my attention to this potential objection, and thanks to Elizabeth Anderson for further discussion of it. Note too that I say more about the idea of autonomous belief as a good below in sec. 7.2 when I discuss the possibility of an "extreme autonomy-loving god."

24. For a recent overview of the extensive literature on the Many Gods Objection, see Saka 2001.

Simple Case version of the Persecutor's Wager suffers from the same sort of blindness. Hence I will consider a decision matrix that includes more than just an exclusivist Christian god. To be thorough, I ought to consider a matrix that makes room for all possible sorts of gods. The essential points can be brought out, however, with a matrix containing three gods. Thus, for simplicity's sake, I will in the remainder of the essay discuss a Three Gods Case; those who are interested will find a general case discussed in appendix A of this essay.

Suppose, then, that I am a state official in a country in which every citizen is either a Christian or a Muslim. Suppose further that when judging the possible outcomes of various state policies, I restrict myself to considering three possible sorts of gods: an exclusivist Christian god who saves only Christians; an exclusivist Islamic god who saves only Muslims; and a "pluralistic god," that is, a god who saves all people (regardless of their religious beliefs) who meet a minimal standard of moral decency (for example, people who do not murder, rape, torture, cheat pensioners out of their life savings, and so forth).²⁵ Finally, suppose I consider three possible options: enforcement of Christianity, enforcement of Islam, and granting religious liberty.

I will now construct a "decision matrix" that keeps the same variables as the Simple Case matrix and adds the following new ones:

25. The New Testament and the Qur'an contain many, many passages that on a straightforward interpretation endorse salvific exclusivism. John 3:36 in the New Testament, for instance, states that "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God rests upon him" (Revised Standard Version; compare Matthew 10:32–33; Mark 16:15–16; Luke 8:11–12; John 3:5, 3:16–18, 6:53, 8:23–24, 14:6; Acts 4:11–12, 16:29–31; 1 Corinthians 1:18–21; 2 Timothy 2:12; Hebrews 9:27–28; 1 John 2:23–25; and 1 John 5:11–12; see Sanders 1992 and Sullivan 1992 for helpful overviews of the history of Christian thinking on salvific exclusivism). Surah 33:64–66 in the Qur'an states "Verily Allah has cursed the Unbelievers and prepared for them a Blazing Fire, to dwell therein for ever: no protector will they find, nor helper. The Day that their faces will be turned upside down in the Fire, they will say: 'Woe to us! Would that we had obeyed Allah and obeyed the Messenger!'" (The translation is Yusuf Ali's [Ali 1946]; compare 2:161–62, 3:116, 5:47, 5:86, 33:64–66, 35:36, 58:5.) Some passages in the Qur'an (for example, 2:62, 3:113–14) do, though, suggest that Christians and Jews ("People of the Book")—though no others—would be saved in the hereafter, were they only to lead upright lives. Other passages, however, tend in an opposite direction, suggesting that the People of the Book are lost unless they accept God's word as revealed by Muhammad (for example, 4:47, 5:47, 5:72–73). It is not clear how best to resolve this tension. (See Nettler 1995 and Sherif 1995, 130–33 for commentary.)

The Persecutor's Wager

- m = the number of Muslim citizens absent any enforcement
- d = the number of minimally decent citizens absent any enforcement
- p_I = the probability that an exclusivist Islamic god exists
- p_P = the probability that a pluralistic god exists

Additionally, I will use the notation " $\frac{\Delta d}{E_C}$ ", " $\frac{\Delta c}{E_C}$ ", " $\frac{\Delta m}{E_C}$ " to represent the change, under enforcement of Christianity, in the number of minimally decent citizens, Christian citizens, and Muslim citizens, respectively. Mutatis mutandis, similar notation will be used for the corresponding changes under enforcement of Islam.

The matrix of the Three Gods Case appears as figure 2 below.

Although we have seen (section 4.2) that it is not strictly speaking necessary, for simplicity's sake let us assume that the otherworldly well-being of salvation is incomparably better than any well-being found in this world; hence the latter is swamped into irrelevance and can be ignored without mathematical consequence. Thus from this matrix we can conclude that the expected values of the various options are as follows:

$$EV(L) = S[p_P (d) + p_C (c) + p_I (m)]$$

$$EV(E_C) = S\left[p_P \left(d + \frac{\Delta d}{E_C}\right) + p_C \left(c + \frac{\Delta c}{E_C}\right) + p_I \left(m + \frac{\Delta m}{E_C}\right)\right]$$

$$EV(E_I) = S\left[p_P \left(d + \frac{\Delta d}{E_I}\right) + p_C \left(c + \frac{\Delta c}{E_I}\right) + p_I \left(m + \frac{\Delta m}{E_I}\right)\right]$$

What, then, should I do? Should I grant religious liberty (L), enforce Christianity (E_C), or enforce Islam (E_I)? This can be decided by picking two of the options at random, determining which of these has the greatest expected value, and then pitting the winner of this comparison against the remaining third option (think for instance of the tournament brackets of a tennis competition).²⁶

Thus, let me start by picking two of the options—say, E_C and L—and ask which has the greater expected value. As in the Simple Case, we can find this out by asking a mathematically equivalent question,

26. Because consequentialists must employ a cardinal measure of well-being (so that interpersonal comparisons are meaningful), this method of determining the greatest expected value does not run into selection-order difficulties like those made famous by Kenneth Arrow.

Options	A pluralistic god exists (p_P)	An exclusivist Christian god exists (p_C)	An exclusivist Islamic god exists (p_I)	No god exists (p_N)
Grant religious liberty (L)	S·d	S·c	S·m	0
Enforce Christianity (E_C)	$S(d + \frac{\Delta}{E_C}d)$	$S(c + \frac{\Delta}{E_C}c)$	$S(m + \frac{\Delta}{E_C}m)$	0
Enforce Islam (E_I)	$S(d + \frac{\Delta}{E_I}d)$	$S(c + \frac{\Delta}{E_I}c)$	$S(m + \frac{\Delta}{E_I}m)$	0

Figure 2. The Three Gods Case

namely, is $EV(E_C) - EV(L) > 0$ or not? From the matrix we have (after simplification):

$$EV(E_C) - EV(L) = S \left(p_{PE_C} \Delta d + p_{CE_C} \Delta c + p_{IE_C} \Delta m \right)$$

We can go further than this. Since for simplicity's sake we have assumed that every citizen is either a Christian or a Muslim, if Christians gain in size under enforcement option E_C , then this must be in virtue of drawing members from Muslim ranks. Hence, it must be that $\frac{\Delta m}{E_C} = -\frac{\Delta c}{E_C}$. Substituting this identity into the equation above yields

$$\begin{aligned} EV(E_C) - EV(L) &= S \left[p_{PE_C} \Delta d + p_{CE_C} \Delta c + p_{IE_C} \left(-\frac{\Delta c}{E_C} \right) \right] \\ &= S \left[p_{PE_C} \Delta d + (p_C - p_I) \left(\frac{\Delta c}{E_C} \right) \right] \end{aligned}$$

Therefore, since $S > 0$ we can derive the following conclusion, which I will call "The Persecutor's Theorem" (a fully general, analogous theorem can be found in appendix A of this essay):

$$EV(E_C) > EV(L) \text{ if and only if } (p_C - p_I) \left(\frac{\Delta c}{E_C} \right) > p_P \left(-\frac{\Delta d}{E_C} \right)$$

In the next section, I will explore the implications of this theorem.²⁷

6. To Persecute or Not?

To understand the Persecutor's Theorem, we must understand its parts. Since p_C represents the probability that an exclusivist Christian god exists and p_I the probability that an exclusivist Islamic god exists, the quantity $(p_C - p_I)$ can be thought of as the "epistemic advantage" of Christian exclusivism over Islamic exclusivism. Thus the quantity $(p_C - p_I) \left(\frac{\Delta c}{E_C} \right)$ represents the conversion/retention success (if any) of Christian enforcement $\left(\frac{\Delta c}{E_C} \right)$ discounted by the epistemic advantage of Christianity exclusivism (the greater the advantage, the less the discount). The quantity $p_P \left(-\frac{\Delta d}{E_C} \right)$, by contrast, represents the number of people driven *out of* the ranks of the minimally decent $\left(-\frac{\Delta d}{E_C} \right)$ discounted by the probability of a pluralistic god's existence (p_P).²⁸

Understanding the parts of the Persecutor's Theorem allows us to state the following:

IF (1) belief in an exclusivist Christian god has a positive epistemic advantage over its Islamic rival; (2) on balance at least one Muslim is converted to Christianity or one Christian is prevented from converting to Islam; and (3) Christian enforcement does not lead to a net decrease in the number of minimally decent indi-

27. To be thorough, we would also need to compare the larger of E_C and L with enforcement option E_I . I will do this in general form in appendix A of this essay.

28. It is worth noting that were we to suppose that a pluralist god eventually forgives all acts of gross indecency, and hence ultimately saves *everyone* (this is Marilyn McCord Adams's view, for example, in Adams 1993), then it would no longer make any difference what effect religious enforcement has on the prevalence of gross indecency since indecency would no longer disqualify anyone from receiving salvation from a pluralistic god. This fact shows that the quantity p_P in the Persecutor's Theorem as written above is properly understood only as the probability that an *eternally unforgiving*, pluralistic god exists. If we think of an eternally unforgiving god as "super-strict" and a pluralistic god as "not-so-strict," we can say that p_P represents the probability that a super-strict not-so-strict god exists. Putting it this way suggests that p_P is rather low.

viduals, THEN the expected value of option E_C is greater than the expected value of option L.

This, then, is a *sufficient* condition (but *not* a necessary one) for the superiority of religious enforcement over religious liberty in the Three Gods Case. The implications of this can be surprising. For instance, even if we let $p_N = 0.9$, $p_P = 0.09999$, $p_C = 6 \times 10^{-6}$ and $p_I = 4 \times 10^{-6}$, it remains the case that so long as at least one person is converted to (or retained within) Christianity and no one is made indecent, it would be morally wrong to *fail* to enforce Christianity!

Clearly, then, we ought to consider whether there is any reason to think this sufficient condition is ever met. One way of denying that it is ever met is by insisting that we have no reason for thinking p_C is any greater than p_I —that is, by insisting that there is no reason whatsoever to think that a Christian exclusivist god is any more likely to exist than an Islamic exclusivist god. Caution is in order regarding this path away from persecutionist conclusions, however, for if p_I turns out to be any greater than p_C , then by parallel reasoning it will turn out that Islamic enforcement is morally superior to religious liberty. Hence this path genuinely leads away from persecutionist conclusions only so long as one is prepared to assert that $p_C = p_I$, that is, only so long as one is prepared to assert the equiprobability of exclusivist Christian and Islamic gods.

I will reserve my comments on this path out of the Persecutor's Wager for the final sections of this essay. For now, I wish to examine two further ways the sufficient condition above might fail to be met. First, it might be that enforcement backfires and Christian numbers decrease, for reasons discussed in the Simple Case (civil war, soured reputation, corruption). Once again, however, I see no reason to think that these serious risks of religious enforcement must be significantly present in *every* case.²⁹ Moreover, even if enforcement backfires, liberty may still not be the best option, for a rather surprising reason. For suppose it turns out that enforcement reliably backfires, regardless of the religion enforced. Then so long as enforcement does not deplete the

29. With the Three Gods Case, Mill would insist that there arises another risk of enforcement, for by suppressing all debate we lose an important opportunity for updating our probability assignments. So if we enforce Christianity, we lose an opportunity for, say, later discovering that Islam is more likely to be the true religion. This is indeed a genuine risk of enforcement, one that deserves further exploration in rational choice-theoretic terms. Rather than embark on this project, however, let me just make several points. First, I cannot see that this risk alone will always militate in favor

ranks of the minimally decent, the Persecutor's Theorem implies that one should enforce the *less* probable religion. So for instance if $p_C > p_I$, then by enforcing Islam the backfire effect will lead to an increase in Christians, making the key quantity $(p_C - p_I) \left(\frac{\Delta}{E_c} c \right)$ positive (a diabolical plan, indeed!). Hence I do not think that the risk of backfire is as secure a way out of the Persecutor's Wager as it may first appear.

The second further way that the sufficient condition can fail to be met is if Christian enforcement decreases the number of minimally decent individuals (that is, if $-\frac{\Delta}{E_c} d$ is positive). Earlier I defined minimally decent people as those who do not murder, rape, torture, cheat pensioners out of their life savings, and so on. It is not at all clear, however, that enforcement of Christianity would lead to an overall increase in these sorts of acts. To be sure, burning heretics at the stake is likely to encourage a general taste for violence in spectators, and thus I think worries as to the effects of enforcement on citizens' decency do thankfully tell against such extreme forms of enforcement.³⁰ Religious enforcement need not take such an extreme form, however; it could, for instance, consist instead in fining individuals for nonattendance at church services, or in proselytizing in the schools, or in forbidding non-Christians to proselytize, and so forth. It seems highly unlikely that these sorts of policies would swell the ranks of murderers and rapists. Moreover, it is at least possible that the penalties associated with religious enforcement might scare some individuals into behaving decently who otherwise would not. In short, it is an open empirical question just what the effects of religious enforcement would be on the number of minimally decent people; a defense of religious liberty premised on a particular answer to this question is hardly a robust defense.

of free debate since free debate has its potential costs too (for example, people may be led astray by sophistries). Compare, also, what too much ratiocination cost Hamlet. Second, even if one judges more debate to be warranted because matters are currently so inconclusive, this debate could be confined to elites. Third, whether debate is open to all or confined to elites, the logic of the Persecutor's Wager would suggest that given the well-being stakes involved, consequentialists should make organizing symposia, funding research, and so forth on religious truth an absolute top priority.

30. John Calvin himself recommended (unsuccessfully) that Servetus be executed by sword, not fire.

7. Options for Reply

Option 1: A Persecution-Hating God

So far the prospects for a robust, nonskeptical consequentialist rejection of persecution have been dim. Here, though, is a significant possibility that deserves consideration: what if the pluralistic god in our matrix considers religious enforcement itself to be grossly indecent, and as a result refuses salvation to any person who engages in enforcement activity? If this is the case, then enforcement could result in the quantity $-\frac{\Delta}{E_c}d$ being quite high, and this may be enough to tip the balance in favor of liberty, according to the Persecutor's Theorem.³¹

Although persecutors should indeed count this as a genuine risk of religious enforcement, I do not believe that the bare possibility of a persecution-hating god is enough to defeat the Persecutor's Wager. A persecutor might after all reason that, unlike the actions of murderers, rapists, and so forth, *his* actions are inspired solely by a rational concern to produce the greatest total human well-being; why should a pluralistic god think that *that* is grossly indecent? Moreover, he might reason that in any case, surely there are *some* forms of religious enforcement that even the pluralistic god regards as venial (after all, the pluralistic god in general appears to be a very forgiving sort of god³²); these forms of enforcement could be safely enacted.

I will not explore these ideas further, however, for my skepticism about this option for reply stems ultimately from the fact that in the wager the loss of salvation for some individuals can be compensated for by the gain of salvation for even more individuals. (In the terms of the Persecutor's Theorem, this is to say that a high $-\frac{\Delta}{E_c}d$ can be compensated for by a sufficiently high $\frac{\Delta}{E_c}c$.) To see the relevance of this, imagine that a persecutor were to realize that by persecuting he risks forfeiting his own salvation, should God turn out to hate persecutors. What conclusion might he draw from this realization? One conclusion he might

31. A variation on this option for reply would be to shift from welfare consequentialism to a more pluralistic form of consequentialism, according to which persecution has negative value. As I mentioned above in note 6, this will not dissolve the Persecutor's Wager so long as the value of salvation is regarded as incomparable. One could turn the tables and regard persecution-avoidance as incomparably better than other sources of value, even salvation. This move, though, would strike me as an awkward attempt to cram an essentially deontological moral outlook into a consequentialist framework.

32. In this regard, see the remarks in note 28 above.

draw is that persecution is personally too risky a course of action. It is not at all clear, however, that consequentialism permits this conclusion. For if by forfeiting his own salvation he can ensure the salvation of two or more others, then consequentialism will require him to do so. This is merely an otherworldly instance of a well-known counterintuitive feature of consequentialist theories generally, namely, their extreme demandingness. (And *you* thought *secular* consequentialist theories were demanding!) This counterintuitive feature is, in a sense, infinitely exaggerated when the theory is extended to the afterlife.³³ Hence, a conscientious consequentialist persecutor will ask whether the risk to his own salvation can be offset by the prospect of even more saved souls. And I think such a persecutor might reasonably conclude that it can, for at least two reasons.

First, the persecutor can try to contain the risks to other people's souls by containing the number of religious enforcers—say, by permitting only specially appointed officials to oversee religious enforcement and punishing harshly any vigilante enforcers. No doubt there will still be some vigilante enforcers, and so the risk to others' salvation cannot be perfectly contained. But so long as this risk is offset by the prospect of a significant increase in (nonvigilante) Christian numbers, the persecutor can reckon it a risk worth running. Second, persecution need

33. I cannot forbear mentioning here another apparent counterintuitive implication of consequentialism that is infinitely exaggerated when the theory is extended to the afterlife, namely, Derek Parfit's "Repugnant Conclusion." According to this, a (welfare) consequentialist should strive to increase the human population up to the point where the marginal gain in total well-being with each newly created life becomes negative (due to overcrowding, and so forth) (Parfit 1984, chap. 17). Extending consequentialism to the afterlife, the parallel implication is that we should all strive to increase Heaven's population. But then, supposing that infants who die are admitted to Heaven, it follows that consequentialists should all go about slaughtering infants (though not so many, of course, as to threaten the human race with extinction). At least, this would be required of men; women, it seems, would be required to spend their time producing infants for this slaughter. One might with good reason call this the "*Really* Repugnant Conclusion"! Alas, this reasoning seems to have had some real-life influence, for Bertrand Russell (1957, 35) reports that "the Spaniards in Mexico and Peru used to baptize Indian infants and then immediately dash their brains out: by this means they secured that these infants went to Heaven." He wryly adds: "No orthodox Christian can find any logical reason for condemning their action, although all nowadays do so" (ibid.). More recently, in 2001 Texan mother Andrea Yates drowned her five children in the bathtub; she told authorities that she killed her children so that they could go to heaven (Rust 2006, A3). Far from being judged logical, she was ultimately found by a jury to be not guilty by reason of insanity (ibid.).

not be adopted as a permanent policy. A persecutor might decide to enforce Christianity until, and only until, the proportion of citizens who are Christians is high enough that the marginal returns of further persecution no longer justify running the risk of creating more persecutors. One might cite as a case study of this phenomenon the Spanish Inquisition and the Spanish conquest of the New World. Despite their extreme brutality, we must frankly admit that these policies did largely succeed in catholicizing Spain and the Spanish New World, to the point where by all appearances Catholicism is self-sustaining in these lands. If, then, an exclusivist Christian god is even a smidgen more likely to exist than its exclusivist rivals, the Persecutor's Theorem will not only approve of the ruthless tactics of Torquemada, Cortes, and Pizarro; given the incomparable increase in expected well-being that their tactics brought about, it will surely assign these individuals to the upper reaches within the pantheon of consequentialist heroes.

Option 2: A Believer-Hating God, Etc.

We have just seen two ways in which a persecutor might judge that religious enforcement remains a good bet despite the possibility that God refuses to save persecutors. Here, though, is another risk: What if God turns out to hate people who think only orthodox believers are saved? This, however, is no way out of the wager. For ironically, if this sort of exclusivist god is *any more likely* to exist than other sorts of exclusivist gods, then a public official should use all means at his disposal to root out exclusivist religious belief.

But perhaps it might be thought that another sort of nontraditional god poses more of a challenge to the Persecutor's Wager, namely, a god who loves religious skeptics (for their independence of mind) but hates religious believers of any stripe (for their credulity). Such a god is familiar from the literature on Pascal's Wager, where opponents frequently argue that the possibility of such a god makes atheism and agnosticism prudentially permissible.³⁴ With respect to the Persecutor's Wager, the risk is that in converting atheists and agnostics as the wager recommends, one would be costing them their souls if a believer-hating

34. See, for instance, Mackie 1982, 203; Martin 1983, 59ff.; Oppy 1990, 165; Blackburn 1999, 188. Moreover, although he is not explicitly addressing Pascal's Wager, David Hume (1998, 129) makes a similar point about whom God would favor. In part 12 of his *Dialogues on Natural Religion* he writes: "And were that divine Being disposed to be offended at the vices and follies of silly mortals . . . the only persons entitled to

god exists. Consequentialists who would press the possibility of such a god against the Persecutor's Wager, however, must tread an extremely fine line. For if they insist that a believer-hating god is in fact *more probable* than a god who saves only religious believers, then the logic of the Persecutor's Wager will direct them to persecute in the name of nonbelief. The danger here, then, is that, in availing oneself of this popular way out of Pascal's Wager, one may have to approve of antireligious coercion. This is of course grossly illiberal. In order to make this illiberality vividly concrete, and in order to set the stage for some further points I wish to make in this section, it is worth examining as a case study the real-life sorts of antireligious coercion practiced in the former Soviet bloc.

Although orthodox Marxism-Leninism predicted that the "religious humbugging of mankind," in Lenin's words (quoted in Holmes 1993, 126), would naturally cease with proletarian emancipation (since religion would then have no ideological function to serve), the rulers of the new Soviet regime preferred to take no chances, and within months of the 1917 October Revolution, the regime required religious organizations to surrender control of their privately run parochial schools to the newly formed "Commissariat of Enlightenment," the organization tasked with overseeing education in the Soviet state (Holmes 1993, 127). Later in 1925 the League of the Militant Godless was formed in order to wage aggressive campaigns of antireligious propaganda.³⁵ Antireligious policy assumed its harshest forms under Nikita Khrushchev's rule from 1953–64, a period in which (among other things) over half of existing churches and seminaries were closed, numerous dissident priests and monks were confined to asylums, parents who wished to baptize their infants were required to register with the police, children under eighteen were banned from attending church services, and the career prospects of known religious believers were cut short by discrimination (Fletcher 1971, 254–72).

Of course, one possible argument against such antireligious repression is that it is ineffective, or even counterproductive. As scholars of religious policy in the Soviet bloc like to point out,³⁶ the commu-

his *compassion* and *indulgence* would be the philosophical sceptics, a sect almost equally rare, who, from a natural diffidence of their own capacity, suspend, or endeavor to suspend all judgment with regard to such sublime and such extraordinary subjects" (emphasis in original).

35. On the League and its activities, see Powell 1975 and Peris 1998. The League was disbanded in 1941.

36. For example, Powell 1975, 156.

nists' efforts wholly to eradicate religion were a failure, for religion survived. However, in terms of the Persecutor's Wager, the fact that religion remains in *some* form does not entail that the persecution was useless. For if a believer-hating god exists, then a net gain of just one person converted to atheism/agnosticism (or prevented from renouncing this) will garner incomparably high expected value, thereby justifying the repressive tactics used.

In light of this fact, some statistics on religious belief from the former Soviet bloc are instructive. In the most recent (1999–2001) World Values Survey, for instance, 60 percent of Russians reported that they believe in God; this compares favorably with western Europe, for 71 percent of the western Europeans surveyed report that they believe in God. Moreover, 24 percent of Russians reported that they do not believe in God, and 14 percent answered “Don't Know.” By contrast, 21 percent of western European respondents said they do not believe in God, and 6 percent answered “Don't Know.” (The comparable percentages for the United States are an astounding 94 percent “Do Believe,” 4 percent “Do Not Believe,” and 2 percent “Don't Know”!)³⁷ The case of Germany in particular is very interesting, since its former division into East and West Germany constitutes a natural experiment of sorts as to the effectiveness of antireligious state policy. In the 1999 World Values Survey, 29 percent of East Germans answered “Yes” to the question of whether they believed in God, compared to 70 percent of West Germans who answered “Yes,” while 66 percent of East Germans answered “No,” compared to just 21 percent of West Germans who answered “No.”³⁸ Clearly at least some of the former East German government's antireligious policies worked quite well!³⁹

37. Data available at www.worldvaluessurvey.org (accessed October 14, 2005). The western European countries in the survey are Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Spain, and Sweden. I treat the special case of Germany separately in the text below. For informed skepticism (based on the World Values Survey data) regarding some recent claims of a widespread religious revival in the former Soviet-bloc, see Norris and Inglehart 2004.

38. Data from www.worldvaluessurvey.org (accessed September 2, 2006). The differences between East and West are equally as stark for the other religious indices in the survey. Moreover, these are robust results. The International Social Survey Programme poll of 1998, for instance, found that 66 percent of East Germans classified themselves as atheists or agnostics, compared to only 24 percent of West Germans; data available at www.issp.org/data.htm (accessed October 14, 2005).

39. Like the Soviet Union, GDR officials forcibly closed private religious schools upon assuming power and discriminated against committed religious believers (for

Hence, I see little reason to believe antireligious persecution is entirely ineffective. As a result, consequentialists who wish to follow their counterparts in the literature on Pascal's Wager and invoke the possibility of a believer-hating god must be careful, since they can avoid persecutionist conclusions only by arguing that a believer-hating god is just as likely to exist—no more, no less—than any other sort of exclusivist god. Thus, this option turns out to require the more general, skeptical response of claiming that all exclusivist gods are equiprobable.

Before moving on to consider this more general response, however, let us consider one more possible nontraditional god, namely, what we might call an "extreme autonomy-loving god." This sort of god does not care whether one is a believer or nonbeliever, so long as one's view was formed in an autonomous manner; salvation is granted to both autonomous believers and autonomous nonbelievers. This has the advantage, unlike the possibility of a believer-hating god, of not requiring antireligious persecution since this god cares little about the *content* of one's belief, focusing instead on the *mode* of one's belief. (At least, this appears true at first pass. Should religious belief in general turn out to be rooted wholly in emotion and/or require the suspension of one's critical rationality, then there will be no functional difference between the extreme autonomy-loving god and the believer-hating god since only atheism and agnosticism will be compatible with autonomy.⁴⁰ I will not press this point further in what follows, however.)

example, believers who wished to attend university were only permitted to study theology, thus hurting the professional ambitions of any believers who sought a nonchurch career). Fortunately GDR antireligious oppression never, to my knowledge, assumed the virulent form it assumed under Khrushchev. Perhaps this helps account for its greater effectiveness, but I suspect three other factors were still more crucial. First, there was more atheistic instruction in the schools, with intermittent expulsion of believing students. By contrast, Russian teachers never rallied to the cause of atheistic instruction; apparently the task of teaching Russian peasants just the basics of reading and math was formidable enough given the extremely scarce educational funding available (Holmes 1993, 127; Powell 1975, 52). Second, the GDR was able to create an enormously popular, atheistic "confirmation" ritual for fourteen-year-olds, the *Jugendweihe* (roughly, "youth dedication"), to rival church confirmation. Third, the GDR was able to infiltrate the church hierarchy via a network of secret informants and have some effect co-opting church policy. (For overviews of GDR religious policy, see Fulbrook 1995, chap. 4; and Allinson 2000, chap. 5.)

40. See also James Rachels's (1997) argument that acts of religious worship are incompatible with autonomy inasmuch as they express the worshipper's belief that he or she is unconditionally subject to God's authority.

Of course, it remains the case that if this sort of exclusivist god is any more likely to exist than other sorts, then public officials should do *whatever they can* to increase the proportion of autonomous belief among citizens. Unlike in the case of state promotion of religious belief or atheistic belief, however, in which the state had an incentive to suppress counterevidence to the favored sort of belief, the state in the case of an extreme autonomy-loving god will welcome the airing of a wide range of arguments since presumably it is consideration of counterevidence that makes for autonomous belief in the first place. Thus the extreme autonomy-loving god at first pass holds more promise as a way out of the Persecutor's Wager than does the believer-hating god previously considered.

The promised way out, however, fails to materialize on further inspection, for several reasons. First, rather brutal methods are in a range of cases still likely to prove advisable. This is so because officials who are concerned to please an extreme autonomy-loving god will rightly regard fundamentalists and others who believe in a less than entirely critical fashion as Public Enemy Number One, since these believers discourage autonomous thinking and instead appeal to people's irrational emotions, prejudices, and tendencies toward wishful thinking. A one-off slaughter of fundamentalist preachers, say, or perhaps their confinement in asylums (à la Khrushchev) might increase the incidence of autonomous belief in the long run. Only slightly less barbaric, the cause of autonomy might be served by confiscating the children of fundamentalists and raising them in orphanages or foster homes that encourage imagination and critical thought. Significantly, Khrushchev-era Soviet officials occasionally terminated the parental rights of religious believers and withdrew their children to boarding schools (Powell 1975, 43; Walters 1993, 22). Leonid F. Ilyichev, a leading Soviet ideologue at the time, defended such measures as follows: "We cannot and we must not remain indifferent to the fate of the children on whom parents, fanatical believers, are in reality inflicting an act of spiritual violence. We cannot allow blind and ignorant parents to bring up their children like themselves and so deform them" (cited in Powell 1975, 43). Devotees of an extreme autonomy-loving god would be hard-pressed to disagree, I think (provided it is really only "fanatical believers" who are targeted).

Second, suppose though that officials forswear such brutal methods, on the grounds, say, that such methods would merely inspire a counterproductive resentment or fear among citizens and thus set back the cause of autonomy. (This is a genuine risk, but as I pointed out in sec-

tion 3, whether persecution will in fact backfire depends on a host of empirical contingencies—in the present case, for instance, it will depend on how numerous fundamentalists are, whether or not they are despised by the larger majority, to what extent the existing political culture has already been liberalized, and so on.) Even supposing that officials fore-swear brutal methods, there still remains the option of a massive state-sponsored campaign of (rational) persuasion targeted against religious fundamentalists and others. Thinking seriously about the intrusions this might entail ought to give liberals pause before signing on.

Again the Soviet experience is illuminating since, to their credit, many Soviet officials frequently voiced their preference for persuasive means over coercive means in their struggle to enlighten their citizens; many of their tactics reflected this preference and would be compatible with the promotion of autonomous belief. Members of the League of the Militant Godless, for instance, organized competitions between “godless fields” and “priest-blessed fields” to make the case for the critical methods of science to the peasants and would occasionally stage a popular play titled “Who is Going to Help the Peasant—the Agronomist or God?” (Young 1997, 130). They held competitions between christened and unchristened infants to compare rates of growth. They opened ancient sarcophagi to show, contrary to popular belief, that the saints’ remains inside were not miraculously exempt from decomposition. They put mummified rats in shrines to show that saints’ relics on open display therein were not preserved by divine intervention. They would travel to villages and host “An Evening of Miracles without Miracles,” in which they would (among other things) explain the tricks behind “weeping” icons and show via a microscope that holy water has the same bacteria as ordinary water. They organized debates between believers and nonbelievers. They arranged question-and-answer sessions with former believers (including some former clergy). They assigned individual atheists to individual believers, whom the atheists were to befriend and then present with the case for atheism.⁴¹ And so on. While such state activities admittedly run the risk of creating dogmatic atheists in place of dogmatic believers, this risk has to be weighed against the (very probably greater) autonomy-conducive benefit of challenging those who hold their religious beliefs uncritically to consider the counterevidence to their view.

41. The examples in this paragraph are found in Powell 1975, 35, 105, 112, 114.

Third, even if one is willing to bite the bullet and endorse a massive campaign of persuasion targeting uncritical citizens, it should be borne in mind that in the case of an extreme autonomy-loving god such a campaign should dwarf all other state activities in importance, given the incomparably high payoffs associated with autonomous thought. Hence, it would be rational for public officials to shift significant state resources away from crime prevention, economic growth and job creation, highway maintenance, poverty relief, and so on, and toward the project of promoting critical thinking. Indeed, such officials will only begin to worry seriously about crime and so forth when the fear thereof begins negatively to affect citizens' ability to think well. Such a policy of "autonomous belief at any cost" clearly goes far beyond the calls for autonomy-promotion made by "perfectionist liberals" (such as Joseph Raz [1986]⁴²) in their debates with "political liberals" like John Rawls.

Indeed—and this is a fourth point against seeking a way out of the wager via an extreme autonomy-loving god—"autonomous belief at any cost" implies that significant sacrifices in other values may be justified. Take the value of liberty, for instance. If autonomous belief matters above all, why not require all citizens to pass periodic exams in critical thinking, on pain of retakes, fines, or even jail? Why not require all university students to major in, say, philosophy, alongside their other interests? One might object that such coercive tactics by their very nature cannot produce genuinely autonomous thinking among citizens. This, however, is not a decisive objection. Some people may reluctantly take up their studies in critical thought only to discover that they find them worthwhile, and as a result become lifelong, sincere devotees of critical thinking. Do the coercive origins of such a person's devotion to critical thinking *really* render all that person's subsequent years of critical thinking nugatory with respect to autonomy? I doubt it.⁴³ And as for those people who, alas, develop no devotion to critical thought despite the coercive requirements, one must ask whether they would have acquired such a devotion had there been no use of coercion; if not, then they represent no loss to associate with coercion. Finally, and most important, if threats of state punishment really are inherently injurious to long-run autonomous belief, then this fact itself is a decisive objection against the

42. See, too, Brighouse 2000, chaps. 4–5, for a subtle examination of, and cautious endorsement of, autonomy-facilitating public education.

43. See Jeremy Waldron's similar remarks on an autonomy-loving god in Waldron 1988, 82–83.

The Persecutor's Wager

existence of an extreme autonomy-loving god, who after all threatens the nonautonomous with punishment—namely, the loss of their salvation (or worse yet, the fires of hell).

In short, neither the possibility of a believer-hating god nor the possibility of an extreme autonomy-loving god offers an easy way out of the Persecutor's Wager. In order to avoid such a conclusion, modern consequentialists will do best to turn to the general, skeptical response of claiming that all exclusivist gods are equiprobable. Let us, then, turn to examine such a response.

Option 3: Skeptical Options

In this subsection I will describe three possible skeptical responses the consequentialist can make to the Persecutor's Wager. I believe these skeptical responses are the consequentialist's best response to the Persecutor's Wager. In fact I myself accept the last of these responses described below (namely, Option 3C). Thus my overall aim in this subsection is *not* to argue that the consequentialist would err in adopting one of these skeptical responses. Rather, my aim in this subsection is just to highlight the fact that the best way out of the wager requires a surprisingly strong sort of religious skepticism. In the final section of this essay, I will comment on the significance that the need for strong religious skepticism has for an overall assessment of consequentialism's plausibility as a moral theory.

3A. *Argue that there is zero probability of an exclusivist god existing.* Such an argument can take various forms: (1) one might argue that there is zero probability that *any* god (exclusivist or not) exists; (2) one might assign probability 1 to the proposition "If there is a god, then all people are saved";⁴⁴ (3) one might argue that there is zero probability of life after death; or (4) one might argue that there is zero probability of anything actually being incomparably valuable (though in light of section 4.2's point that salvation need not, strictly speaking, be an incomparable good, this response is not by itself decisive against the wager).

It is worth remarking just how resolutely skeptical these options are, for the assignment of zero probability has some nonobvious, striking

44. But see Quinn 1994 for objections to this claim. Let me here note too that I believe this option requires one to take an *extremely* skeptical stance toward the New Testament and the Qur'an since these are replete with passages that for all the world appear to endorse salvific exclusivism (see above note 25). This is significant in light of my concluding remarks in section 8.

implications. The first implication follows from the probability axioms, which entail that logical falsehoods have probability zero. Thus anyone who takes one of Options 3A(1)–(4) commits himself or herself to the claim that it is just as likely that an exclusivist god exists as it is that the statement “ p and not- p ” is true. There is no more resolute denial than this. Finally, according to the personalist interpretation of probability, which understands a person’s probability assignments in terms of the gambles he or she is willing to make, a person assigns zero probability to some proposition p if and only if he or she is willing to bet *everything* that p is false, in return for *nothing* if he or she is right (Skyrms 1986, 194–95). That is a very resolute sort of skepticism indeed.

3B. *Argue that all exclusivist gods have equal nonzero probability of existing.*⁴⁵ A consequentialist might reason that inasmuch as the various religious scriptures comprise conflicting sources of information—and sources, moreover, that seem to be on an epistemic par with one another—the most natural way of proceeding is to assign equal nonzero probability to each, enough so that the sum of these, together with the probability that there is no exclusivist god, is equal to 1.⁴⁶

While this line of reasoning may be a natural one, it is not immune to challenge. First, there is the worry that this line of reasoning implicitly relies on the notorious “principle of indifference,” which says that absent evidence to the contrary, one ought to treat all possibilities as equally likely.⁴⁷ For does not the reasoning implicitly rely on the assumption that the conflicting sources cancel each other out, leaving us with no evidence one way or another? Second, I wonder whether it really is the case that the conflicting scriptures are all on an epistemic par with

45. It might be questioned whether this option is properly called a “skeptical” option; is it not instead a case of *overconfidence* in one’s ability to assign probabilities rather than a case of *doubt*, inasmuch as one is confidently assigning exactly equal probabilities to the various hypotheses? Perhaps, but for two reasons I will stick with the “skeptical” label. First, I suspect (as I go on to say below) that the assignment of equal probabilities is driven by an application of the principle of indifference, bespeaking a judgment that we are in conditions of uncertainty. Second, and more importantly, to assign equal probabilities is to concede we have no reason at all for preferring one hypothesis to any other, thereby leaving suspension of judgment as surely the only rational response. Inasmuch as this option, then, insists that it is not possible rationally to believe in any form of exclusivism, “skeptical” seems an apt label to apply to it.

46. Special issues arise when the number of exclusivist gods considered is infinite. For more on this, see note 54 below.

47. I call this principle “notorious” in light of the numerous well-known problems that arise with its application (for examples, see Hájek 2003a, sec. 3.1).

The Persecutor's Wager

one another. Perhaps some make more demonstrably false claims than others, or have more questionable provenance, and so forth.

All the same, I will not pursue these challenges further. Instead I am content to point out that like Option 3A above, Option 3B too is a resolutely skeptical option—for it amounts to saying that a would-be persecutor in fact has absolutely no more reason to believe in any given one of the exclusivist gods than he does in any of the other remaining exclusivist gods.

3C. *Argue that the case is one of choice under uncertainty.* So far we have been assuming the choice at hand to be a “choice under risk” in the decision-theoretic sense—that is, a choice in which the probabilities of the various possible states of nature are known. This assumes that we have at least *some* evidence (a priori or a posteriori) regarding the sort of fate that awaits people in the next life, if there is such a life. Absent any such evidence of this sort, however, one might argue that a rational person will assign no probabilities to the various possible “exclusivist hypotheses” relative to one another;⁴⁸ one might then conclude that the Persecutor's Wager is really a “choice under uncertainty” in the decision-theoretic sense. If this is the case, then religious liberty is the best option. Intuitively, the idea is that if we are genuinely “completely ignorant” of the otherworldly consequences of our actions,⁴⁹ then a consequentialist has little choice but to decide between options only on the basis of this-worldly well-being, and religious liberty is surely superior to religious enforcement in this regard. (For a more formal demonstration of this conclusion involving the various candidate principles for rational choice under uncertainty, see appendix B of this essay.) Significantly, Option 3C, like Options 3A and 3B, is resolutely skeptical by any measure, inasmuch as it insists we are completely ignorant of something that a great many religions purport to know, namely, the nature and existence of salvation.

48. The qualifying phrase *relative to one another* is included in recognition of the fact that one may rationally be able to assign low probability to exclusivist hypotheses when they are disjoined together. This will be so, for example, if (as I am inclined to think) there are powerful philosophical arguments against the existence of an afterlife (a useful collection in this regard is Edwards 1997). A rational person, however, can surely assign low probability to a disjunction while claiming to be ignorant as to how the probability of each disjunct compares to the others—that is, while claiming to be ignorant of the probability of the disjuncts, “relative to one another.”

49. I take the phrase “completely ignorant” from Luce and Raiffa 1957, 278.

8. Concluding Remarks

The upshot of this essay is that so long as consequentialists remain within the framework of standard rational choice theory, they can in a significant range of cases defend religious liberty only by resolutely denying that there is any reason whatsoever to believe in one exclusivist god rather than another. Does this matter? Yes, it does. This is not because I believe the necessary sort of religious skepticism is unwarranted; indeed, as I have said, I have considerable sympathy with those who insist we are completely ignorant as to the nature of the next life, should one exist. Instead, the fact that consequentialist defenders of religious liberty must be resolute skeptics regarding exclusivist gods matters for three other reasons—one nonthreatening, the other two potentially threatening to consequentialism.

The first, nonthreatening reason stems from a philosophical ideal. Philosophers rightly prize rigor in argument, and rigor in argument requires that one be aware of all the premises upon which one is relying. I claim that consequentialist defenders of religious liberty have so far been less than rigorous by not recognizing (or at least not stating explicitly) that their argument depends in a significant range of cases upon a categorical sort of religious skepticism.

The second, threatening reason is this. Intuitively (to me at least, and I invite you to agree), it seems incorrect that the merest “intimation of immortality”—more specifically, the merest speck of evidence that one type of person is more likely to be saved than others—should morally license religious persecution. This is especially so when we recall that the persecution in question simply dismisses this-worldly costs in terms of human anguish as irrelevant. Yes, a consequentialist could reply by insisting that the Persecutor’s Wager simply shows how dangerous and obnoxious the superstition of exclusive salvation is. Surely, though, the moral reasons that genuinely favor religious liberty (whatever they are) are not nearly so susceptible to a “heavenly hijacking” as the Persecutor’s Wager implies. Here is another way of putting the point: Even those who think that, say, Christians have at least a slightly better chance than others do of getting to heaven surely still have moral reason, quite apart from the risk of backfire, not to persecute others. No gun with a “heavenly hair-trigger” should threaten religious liberty.

I believe, then, that the Persecutor’s Wager describes yet one more counterintuitive implication of consequentialism to be added to the list of counterintuitive implications with which consequentialists must con-

tend. If the Persecutor's Wager seems too fanciful an exercise to yield this important conclusion, consider that it is *much less* fanciful than the so-called St. Petersburg Paradox, which has received very serious attention from decision theorists from its formulation in the eighteenth century to the present day.⁵⁰ I say that the Persecutor's Wager is much less fanciful, for as the opening quotations by Calvin, Aquinas, and Beza suggest, something like it has moved real people to act in really horrible ways.

Finally, the need for a categorically skeptical premise matters for a third reason. Other things equal, one would like the case for religious liberty to have premises acceptable to the religiously devout as well as the religiously skeptical.⁵¹ It is the religiously devout who are most wont to persecute in the name of religion, after all—salvific exclusivists perhaps most of all. Of course, no argument for religious liberty is going to be acceptable to *all* devout people, regardless of how fanatical or prejudiced or otherwise crazy their beliefs are. Still, other things equal, it would be desirable to possess an argument whose premises are compatible with as wide a range of religious devotion as possible, and in this regard I find it significant that the consequentialist case for religious liberty depends upon a premise of categorical skepticism. The consequentialist argument for religious liberty, in short, is hardly an ecumenical argument. As a result, I believe that the consequentialist argument is an argument of last resort, to be adopted only so long as all others fail. Liberals, in other words, should pray that liberalism can somehow be shown to rest on nonconsequentialist foundations.⁵²

50. See Martin 2001 for an overview of the St. Petersburg Paradox. For consequentialists who are open to revising standard rational choice theory in order to escape the Persecutor's Wager, the literature on this paradox could prove illuminating. See, for instance, the proposed revisions in Gorovitz 1979 and Weirich 1984 (but see Martin 2001 for criticism). It is certainly a direction in which consequentialists are well advised to explore.

51. Here I echo Thomas Nagel (1991, 156), who (giving voice to a view shared among "political liberals") writes that "Liberalism purports to be a view that justifies religious toleration not only to religious skeptics but to the devout." Nagel, of course, is not a consequentialist. But consider the case of John Stuart Mill (1957, 28), who is keen to defend utilitarianism against the charge that is a "*godless* doctrine." Consider too that many of the thinkers whose moral theories are regarded as forerunners of utilitarianism (for example, William Paley) believed their theories to be compatible with Christianity. (For an anthology of writings by "religious utilitarians," see Crimmins 1998.)

52. For one attempt to supply such foundations, see my defense of "democratic liberalism" in Duncan and Machan 2005.

Appendix A: The Many Gods Case

In this appendix, I will examine a case that is more realistic than the Three Gods Case. I will define religious sects in a mutually exclusive fashion and represent them by the variables $s_1, s_2, s_3,$ and so forth. This requirement of mutual exclusivity means that one could not, say, define sect₈ as “Methodists” and sect₁₄ as “Christians,” with the latter encompassing the former. (This will not prove restricting, as will shortly be seen. Nor should it be thought to imply that every citizen believes in some sort of god or another, for one sect could be defined as “atheists” and another as “agnostics.”) Next, the variable $G_{1,2}$ will represent a god who saves all and only members of sect₁ and sect₂; $G_{5,8,9}$ will represent a god who saves all and only members of sect₅, sect₈, and sect₉; and so on. The variable $p_{4,7}$ will represent the probability that god $G_{4,7}$ exists. $E_{1,3}$ will be shorthand for enforcing membership in either sect₁ or sect₃. And so on. The rest of the variables will retain the meanings assigned to them in previous matrices.

I will first consider a case in which society is partitioned into three sects; I will then generalize the results we achieve in this case. Restricting our attention to three sects permits us to define seven different gods: $G_1, G_2, G_3, G_{1,2}, G_{1,3}, G_{2,3},$ and $G_{1,2,3}$. Instead of mapping out this unwieldy matrix in its entirety, I will trust that you are by now able to see that in such a matrix the following identity would hold:

$$\begin{aligned} EV(E_1) - EV(L) = & S \left[p \frac{\Delta}{E_1} d + p_1 \frac{\Delta}{E_1} s_1 + p_2 \frac{\Delta}{E_1} s_2 + p_3 \frac{\Delta}{E_1} s_3 \right. \\ & + p_{1,3} \left(\frac{\Delta}{E_1} s_1 + \frac{\Delta}{E_1} s_3 \right) + p_{2,3} \left(\frac{\Delta}{E_1} s_2 + \frac{\Delta}{E_1} s_3 \right) \\ & \left. + p_{1,2} \left(\frac{\Delta}{E_1} s_1 + \frac{\Delta}{E_1} s_2 \right) + p_{1,2,3} \left(\frac{\Delta}{E_1} s_1 + \frac{\Delta}{E_1} s_2 + \frac{\Delta}{E_1} s_3 \right) \right] \end{aligned}$$

Simplifying this yields:

$$\begin{aligned} EV(E_1) - EV(L) = & S \left[p \frac{\Delta}{E_1} d + \left(p_1 + p_{1,2} + p_{1,3} + p_{1,2,3} \right) \left(\frac{\Delta}{E_1} s_1 \right) \right. \\ & + \left(p_2 + p_{1,2} + p_{2,3} + p_{1,2,3} \right) \left(\frac{\Delta}{E_1} s_2 \right) \\ & \left. + \left(p_3 + p_{1,3} + p_{2,3} + p_{1,2,3} \right) \left(\frac{\Delta}{E_1} s_3 \right) \right] \end{aligned}$$

Next, observe that the quantity $(p_1 + p_{1,2} + p_{1,3} + p_{1,2,3})$ is equal to the probability that there is a god of *any* sort who saves members of sect₁.⁵³ In contrast to p_1 (the probability that there is a god who saves all *and only* sect₁ members), I will denote *this* probability as $p_{(1)}$. Exactly parallel remarks apply to the coefficients of $(\frac{\Delta s_2}{E_1})$ and $(\frac{\Delta s_3}{E_1})$, so that with further manipulation the identity above can be rewritten as:

$$EV(E_1) - EV(L) = S \left(p_{\frac{\Delta d}{E_1}} \Delta d + p_{(1)\frac{\Delta s_1}{E_1}} \Delta s_1 + p_{(2)\frac{\Delta s_2}{E_1}} \Delta s_2 + p_{(3)\frac{\Delta s_3}{E_1}} \Delta s_3 \right)$$

Since sects are defined in a mutually exclusive fashion, it remains the case that $\frac{\Delta s_1}{E_1} = -\frac{\Delta s_2}{E_1} - \frac{\Delta s_3}{E_1}$. Substituting this into the identity above yields:

$$\begin{aligned} EV(E_1) - EV(L) &= S \left[p_{\frac{\Delta d}{E_1}} \Delta d + p_{(1)} \left(-\frac{\Delta s_2}{E_1} - \frac{\Delta s_3}{E_1} \right) + p_{(2)} \frac{\Delta s_2}{E_1} + p_{(3)} \frac{\Delta s_3}{E_1} \right] \\ &= S \left[p_{\frac{\Delta d}{E_1}} \Delta d + (p_{(1)} - p_{(2)}) \left(-\frac{\Delta s_2}{E_1} \right) + (p_{(1)} - p_{(3)}) \left(-\frac{\Delta s_3}{E_1} \right) \right] \end{aligned}$$

From this we can conclude:

$EV(E_1) > EV(L)$ if and only if

$$(p_{(1)} - p_{(2)}) \left(-\frac{\Delta s_2}{E_1} \right) + (p_{(1)} - p_{(3)}) \left(-\frac{\Delta s_3}{E_1} \right) > p_{\frac{\Delta d}{E_1}} \Delta d$$

Moreover, were we to divide society into four, five, and so forth sects, we could reason in an exactly parallel fashion, so that we may generalize the above result to a case of n sects as follows, resulting in what I will call Theorem A.1.⁵⁴

53. Here I use the disjunction rule familiar from probability theory. (I assume, as seems reasonable, that the occurrence of any one god is independent of the occurrence of any other god.)

54. Note that we could let n diverge to infinity, and in doing so consider a case of a countably infinite number of possible gods. Doing this gives rise to some interesting technical issues. For example, if we accept Kolmogorov's "countable additivity" axiom (according to which the sum of the probabilities assigned to a countably infinite collection of mutually exclusive, collectively exhaustive propositions must equal 1), then for purely a priori, logical reasons we cannot assign equal nonzero probability to each of the countably infinite exclusivist hypothesis, for then the sum of these (plus p_N and p_p) would exceed 1. Barring an ad hoc appeal to a convergent series of probabilities ($1/2, 1/4, 1/8, \dots$), a consequentialist would thus have to fall back on the remaining skeptical options, that is, the option of assigning zero probability to each exclusivist hypothesis (provided the remaining probabilities sum to 1) or assigning no probabilities at all. However, revisions to Kolmogorovian probability so as to permit infinitesimal probabilities may

$EV(E_1) > EV(L)$ if and only if

$$\left(p_{(1)} - p_{(2)}\right)\left(-\frac{\Delta s_2}{E_1}\right) + \left(p_{(1)} - p_{(3)}\right)\left(-\frac{\Delta s_3}{E_1}\right) + \dots + \left(p_{(1)} - p_{(n)}\right)\left(-\frac{\Delta s_n}{E_1}\right) > p_P\left(-\frac{\Delta d}{E_1}\right)$$

A glance back at the Persecutor’s Theorem in section 5 reveals Theorem A.1 to be an analogous result. The quantity $-\frac{\Delta s_i}{E_1}$ can be thought of as the “conversion result of enforcement option E_1 with respect to sect_{*i*} depletion,” since if this quantity is positive, then the number of sect_{*i*} members has gone down, whereas if it is negative, the number of sect_{*i*} members has gone up. As we did in the Three Gods Case, from Theorem A.1 we can define the following *sufficient* (but *not necessary*) condition for the superiority of enforcement option E_1 over liberty. IF (1) God is more likely to save sect_{*i*} members than he is members of any other sect; (2) at least one of the conversion results is positive, while none is negative; and (3) enforcement option E_1 does not lead to a net decrease in the number of minimally decent individuals, THEN the expected value of option E_1 is greater than the expected value of option L.

Suppose we were next to compare enforcement option E_1 with some other enforcement option E_x (where x can represent “1” or “1,2” or “2,3”, and so on). Were we to do the by-now familiar algebraic substitutions and simplifications, the end result would be the following, which I will call Theorem A.2:

$EV(E_1) > EV(E_x)$ if and only if

$$\left(p_{(1)} - p_{(2)}\right)\left(\frac{\Delta s_2}{E_x} - \frac{\Delta s_2}{E_1}\right) + \left(p_{(1)} - p_{(3)}\right)\left(\frac{\Delta s_3}{E_x} - \frac{\Delta s_3}{E_1}\right) + \dots > p_P\left(\frac{\Delta d}{E_x} - \frac{\Delta d}{E_1}\right)$$

It is interesting to explore some of the implications of Theorem A.2. For instance, suppose sect_{*1*} = Lutherans and sect_{*2*} = Methodists, and suppose you were to compare enforcement option E_1 (attempting to convert everyone to the Lutheran sect) with enforcement option $E_{1,2}$ (attempting to convert everyone to *either* the Lutheran or Methodist sect). Theorem

rehabilitate the option of assigning equal nonzero (infinitesimal) probability to each exclusivist hypothesis. (See Oppy 1990 for an application of infinitesimals to Pascal’s Wager. For a discussion of the debate over countable additivity, see Williamson 1999.) In any case, I do not believe that consideration of an infinitely large decision matrix is necessary, for the number of gods that any one person is capable of taking seriously is certainly finite. Surely a realistic rational choice theory must respect the limits of human deliberative capacities. (After all, even in many *this-worldly* real-life decision scenarios, a “countless” number of things can go wrong, but we must cut deliberation off at some point rather than build each of these into a decision matrix.)

A.2 implies that were you to believe that Lutherans have even a slightly greater chance of being saved than others do, then in all probability it is the case that you should enforce Lutheranism exclusively—that is, you should pick enforcement option E_1 rather than enforcement option $E_{1,2}$. For so long as you believe that Lutherans have a greater chance of being saved than Methodists, you must agree that the quantity $(p_{(1)} - p_{(2)})$ is positive. You should also agree that the quantity $(\frac{\Delta s_2}{E_{1,2}} - \frac{\Delta s_2}{E_1})$ is positive. This, after all, can be rewritten as $(-\frac{\Delta s_2}{E_1}) - (-\frac{\Delta s_2}{E_{1,2}})$, which represents the difference between the two conversion results with respect to sect₂ depletion. Hence it can be thought of as “the conversion advantage of option E_1 over option $E_{1,2}$ with respect to sect₂ depletion.” This is very likely to be positive inasmuch as option $E_{1,2}$ does not even aim to deplete sect₂'s membership. Furthermore, since it is unlikely that option $E_{1,2}$ has any significant conversion advantage over option E_1 with respect to the depletion of sect₃, sect₄, and so forth, it is likely that all things considered the left-hand side of the inequality in Theorem A.2 above is positive. The right side of the equation, by contrast, represents the conversion advantage of option E_1 over option $E_{1,2}$ with respect to the depletion of the minimally decent (an “advantage” the persecutor ideally wants to be negative). As a result, we can conclude that so long as option E_1 does not create any more grossly indecent people than option $E_{1,2}$ does, it will very likely turn out that option E_1 has the greater expected value. (As before, this is a sufficient rather than a necessary condition.) In such a case, Theorem A.2 implies that one should enforce Lutheranism exclusively rather than adopt the more “ecumenical” policy of enforcing membership in either the Lutheran or Methodist sect. In short, the Many Gods Case implies that in choosing between alternative enforcement options, one should only be “as ecumenical as one dares.”⁵⁵

Needless to say, this is hardly an encouraging result for supporters of religious liberty. I conclude that moving from the Three Gods Case to the Many Gods Case is of no assistance to a consequentialist supporter of religious liberty; if anything, it appears to make matters worse.

Appendix B: Choice under Uncertainty

In the main text (section 7, option 3C) I argued that if we are completely ignorant of otherworldly consequences of various religious beliefs, then the best option to choose is that of religious liberty. That argument was

55. I borrow this phrase from Lycan and Schlesinger 1999, 121.

intuitive; here is a more formal presentation showing that the various candidate principles for rational choice under uncertainty favor liberty in the Three Gods Case.⁵⁶

(i) *The principle of indifference.* As we saw in the main text, this principle says that in conditions of ignorance about a range of possible outcomes, one ought to assign equal probability to the outcomes. As noted in the main text above, if one regards no single sort of exclusivist god as any more likely than any other sort, then religious liberty emerges as the superior option.

(ii) *The maximin principle.* This principle says to choose the option with the least bad worst-case scenario. Which option is this, with respect to the Three Gods Case? As far as otherworldly well-being goes, the worst-case scenario occurs for each option when not a single person is saved—as happens, for instance, when no god exists. Hence each option (liberty, Christian enforcement, Islamic enforcement) has the same worst-case scenario with respect to otherworldly well-being; thus the maximin principle so far favors no option over any others. With respect to *this-worldly* well-being, however, religious liberty surely has the least bad worst-case scenario; thus it would be chosen by the maximin principle.

Interestingly, though, if we were to include the possibility of hell in the Persecutor's Wager (as we ought to for the sake of thoroughness), God's nonexistence is obviously no longer the worst-case scenario for each option—for example, the worst-case scenario for Christian enforcement is now the existence of an exclusivist non-Christian god. In fact in this case the maximin principle applied to the Three Gods Case would recommend using religious enforcement to *equalize* the numbers of Muslims and Christians, since in the Three Gods Case the worst that could happen as a result of enforced equalization is that half the population ends up damned, whereas in every other option more than half the population could end up damned. This enforcement-friendly result, however, is purely an artifact of the Three Gods Case. In a wholly general Many Gods Case, each option carries the *same* otherworldly worst case scenario: that there exists a god who damns *all* the citizens. (This is so because in the general case there are more possible gods than there are citizens; hence, it is always possible that there is an exclusivist god who is worshipped by no one, and who as a result damns everyone.) Thus

56. I have based this appendix on Luce and Raiffa 1957, chap. 13, which contains a classic discussion of choice under uncertainty that describes the principles used below. Resnik 1987, chap. 2, contains a highly accessible discussion of the same topic.

the maximin principle would direct us to choose the option with the least bad *this-worldly* worst-case scenario, namely, liberty.

(iii) *The minimax regret principle.* With respect to each option, the principle directs one to ask, "What is the most regret I might experience as a result of choosing this option?"; it then directs one to choose the option with the smallest possible amount of regret. With respect to the Persecutor's Wager, the worst regret the liberal consequentialist might experience as a result of choosing liberty comes with the existence of an exclusivist god, for then the liberal will contemplate with regret the lost souls he or she might have saved with the enforcement of belief in that god. But with each enforcement option even greater regret is possible than is possible with the liberty option. For example, in the Three Gods Case the worst regret one might experience as a result of choosing Christian enforcement comes with the existence of an exclusivist Islamic god. Once the existence of an exclusivist Islamic god is known, the Christian enforcer will regret leaving Christians unmolested. This regret he will of course share with the liberal, who also left Christians unmolested. But the Christian enforcer will experience *more* regret all-told than the liberal, for unlike the liberal the Christian enforcer in the case of an Islamic god will *also* contemplate with regret the formerly saved Muslim souls that via enforcement he turned into lost Christians. The liberal, by contrast, left these Muslim souls unmolested and hence saved.

(iv) *The optimism-pessimism principle.* This principle directs one to compute, for each option, a weighted average of that option's best-case scenario and worst-case scenario (the weight of the average being determined by where one personally falls on an optimist-pessimist spectrum); one is then to choose the option with the highest such weighted average. We have already seen that liberty has the best worst-case scenario; it also has the best best-case scenario, namely, the existence of a god who saves all citizens as they are, without any ordeal of religious enforcement. Hence liberty will have the highest weighted average, and an optimism-pessimism principle will select it as the superior option.

Since all of the candidate principles for rational choice under uncertainty agree that liberty is the superior option, I think we can be extremely confident that liberty is the rational choice if no probabilities whatsoever can be assigned to the various possible exclusivist gods.

References

- Adams, Marilyn McCord. 1993. "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians." In *Reasoned Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology in Honor of Norman Kretzmann*, ed. Eleonore Stump, 301–27. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- . 1999. *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Ali, Abdullah Yusuf. 1946. *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Singapore: Muslim Converts Assoc.
- Allinson, Mark. 2000. *Politics and Popular Opinion in East Germany 1945–68*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Arnauld, Antoine, and Pierre Nicole. 1662. *The Port Royal Logic*. 10th ed. Trans. Thomas Spencer Baynes. Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons (n.d.).
- Bainton, Roland. 1953. *Hunted Heretic*. Boston: Beacon.
- Barry, Brian. 1989. *Theories of Justice*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1990. "How Not to Defend Liberal Institutions." In *Liberalism and the Good*, ed. R. Bruce Douglass, Gerald M. Mara, and Henry S. Richardson, 44–58. New York: Routledge.
- Blackburn, Simon. 1999. *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brandt, R. B. 1959. *Ethical Theory: The Problem of Normative and Critical Ethics*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- . 1998. [1979] *A Theory of the Right and the Good*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus.
- Brighouse, Harry. 2000. *School Choice and Social Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Calvin, John. 1960 [1559]. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill. Philadelphia: Westminster.
- Castellio, Sebastian. 1965 [1554]. *Concerning Heretics, Whether They Are to Be Persecuted and How They Are to Be Treated*, trans. Roland Bainton. New York: Octagon.
- Curley, Edwin. 1999. "Castellio vs. Spinoza on Religious Toleration." In *Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy*, vol. 7, ed. Klaus Brinkman, 89–110. Bowling Green, OH: Philosophy Documentation Center.
- . 2004. "Sebastian Castellio's Erasmian Liberalism." *Philosophical Topics* 31: 47–73.
- Crimmins, James E., ed. 1998. *Utilitarians and Religion*. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine.
- Duff, Antony. 1986. "Pascal's Wager and Infinite Utilities." *Analysis* 46: 107–9.
- Duncan, Craig. 2000. *Equality for Infidels: The Moral Foundations of Modern Liberalism*. PhD diss., University of Michigan.
- Duncan, Craig, and Tibor Machan. 2005. *Libertarianism: For and Against*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

The Persecutor's Wager

- Edwards, Paul, ed. 1997. *Immortality*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus.
- Fletcher, William C. 1971. *The Russian Orthodox Church Underground, 1917–1970*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fulbrook, Mary. 1995. *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949–89*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gibbard, Allan F. 1987. "Ordinal Utilitarianism." In *Arrow and the Foundations of the Theory of Economic Policy*, ed. George R. Feiwel, 135–53. New York: New York University Press.
- . 1990. *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gorovitz, Samuel. 1979. "The St. Petersburg Puzzle." In *Expected Utility and the Allais Paradox*, ed. Maurice Allais and Ole Hagen, 259–70. Dordrecht, Holland: Riedel.
- Gruzalski, Bart. 1981. "Foreseeable Consequence Utilitarianism." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 59: 163–76.
- Hájek, Alan 2001. "Pascal's Wager." In the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter ed., ed. Edward N. Zalta. At plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2001/entries/pascal-wager.
- . 2003a. "Interpretations of Probability." In the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer ed., ed. Edward N. Zalta. At plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2003/entries/probability-interpret.
- . 2003b. "Waging War on Pascal's Wager." *Philosophical Review* 112: 27–56.
- Hare, R. M. 1981. *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Method, and Point*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Holmes, Larry E. 1993. "Fear No Evil: Schools and Religion in Soviet Russia, 1917–1941." In Ramet 1993, 125–37.
- Hsia, R. Po-chia, and Henk F. K. van Nierop. 2002. *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hume, David. 1998. *Principal Writings on Religion, including Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and The Natural History of Religion*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* orig. pub. in 1779]
- Jackson, Frank. 1991. "Decision-Theoretic Consequentialism and the Nearest and Dearest Objection." *Ethics* 101: 461–82.
- Jordan, Jeff, ed. 1994. *Gambling on God: Essays on Pascal's Wager*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Kagan, Shelly, and Peter Vallentyne. 1997. "Infinite Value and Finitely Additive Value Theory." *Journal of Philosophy* 94: 5–26.
- Lecler, Joseph. 1960. *Toleration and the Reformation*. 2 vols. Trans. T. L. Westow. New York: Association Press.
- Lewis, David. 1989. "Mill and Milquetoast." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 167: 152–71.

- Locke, John. 1983 [1689]. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. Ed. James Tully. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.
- Luce, R. Duncan, and Howard Raiffa. 1957. *Games and Decisions: Introduction and Critical Survey*. New York: John Wiley.
- Lycan, William G., and George N. Schlesinger. 1999. "You Bet Your Life: Pascal's Wager Defended." In *Reason and Responsibility*, 10th ed., ed. Joel Feinberg and Russ Shafer-Landau, 118–24. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Mackie, J. L. 1982. *The Miracle of Theism*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Martin, Michael. 1983. "Pascal's Wager As an Argument for Not Believing in God." *Religious Studies* 19: 57–64.
- Martin, Robert M. 2001. "The St. Petersburg Paradox." In the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall ed., ed. Edward N. Zalta. At plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2001/entries/paradox-stpetersburg.
- McClennen, Edward F. 1994. "Pascal's Wager and Finite Decision Theory." In Jordan 1994, 115–37.
- Mill, John Stuart. 1957 [1863]. *Utilitarianism*. Ed. Oskar Priest. New York: Macmillan.
- . 1991. *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. John Gray. Oxford: Oxford University Press (*On Liberty* orig. pub. 1859).
- Moore, G. E. 1912. *Ethics*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Nagel, Thomas. 1991. *Equality and Partiality*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nelson, Mark T. 1991. "Utilitarian Eschatology." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 28: 339–47.
- Nettler, Ronald L. 1995. "People of the Book." In the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito, 3:307–8. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart. 2004. *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. 2000. *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oppy, Graham. 1990. "On Rescher on Pascal's Wager." *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 30: 159–68.
- Parfit, Derek. 1984. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Pascal, Blaise. 1966 [1670]. *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer. New York: Penguin.
- Peris, Daniel. 1998. *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Polishook, Irwin H. 1967. *Roger Williams, John Cotton, and Religious Freedom: A Controversy in Old and New England*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Powell, David E. 1975. *Antireligious Propaganda in the Soviet Union: A Study of Mass Persuasion*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

The Persecutor's Wager

- Quinn, Philip L. 1994. "Moral Objections to Pascalian Wagering." In Jordan 1994, 61–82.
- Rachels, James. 1997. "God and Moral Autonomy." In *Can Ethics Provide Answers?* 109–24. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Railton, Peter. 1984. "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 13: 134–71.
- Ramet, Sabrina Petra, ed. 1993. *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Raz, Joseph. 1986. *The Morality of Freedom*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Resnik, Michael D. 1987. *Choices: An Introduction to Decision Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Russell, Bertrand. 1957. *Why I Am Not a Christian, and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- . 1966. *Philosophical Essays*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Rust, Carol. 2006. "Yates Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity." *Washington Post*, July 27.
- Ryan, John K. 1994. "The Wager in Pascal and Others." In Jordan 1994, 1–19.
- Saka, Paul. 2001. "Pascal's Wager and the Many Gods Objection." *Religious Studies* 37: 321–41.
- Sanders, John. 1992. *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Sherif, Faruq. 1995. *A Guide to the Contents of the Qur'an*. Rev. ed. Reading, England: Garnet Publishing.
- Skyrms, Brian. 1986. *Choice and Chance: An Introduction to Inductive Logic*. 3rd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Smart, J. J. C. 1973. "An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics." In *Utilitarianism For and Against*, ed. J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, 3–74. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sorenson, Roy A. 1994. "Infinite Decision Theory." In Jordan 1994, 139–60.
- Sullivan, Francis A., SJ. 1992. *Salvation outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response*. New York: Paulist.
- Timmons, Mark. 2002. *Moral Theory: An Introduction*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Van Rooden, Peter, and Joke Spaans. 1997. "Religious Toleration in the Dutch Republic, ca. 1570–1796." Paper presented as part of the University of Michigan Advanced Study Center's 1997–1998 lecture series "Theories and Practices of Religious Toleration/Intolerance."
- Waldron, Jeremy. 1988. "Locke: Toleration and the Rationality of Persecution." In *Justifying Toleration: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Susan Mendus, 61–86. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Walters, Philip. 1993. "A Survey of Soviet Religious Policy." In Ramet 1993, 3–32.

- Weirich, Paul. 1984. "The St. Petersburg Gamble and Risk." *Theory and Decision* 17: 193–202.
- Williamson, Jon. 1999. "Countable Additivity and Subjective Probability." *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 50: 401–16.
- Young, Glennys. 1997. *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia: Religious Activists in the Village*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Zimmerman, Michael J. Forthcoming. "Is Moral Obligation Objective or Subjective?" *Utilitas*.