something that still has not been decided, but believing in it might help bring about the desired state of affairs (the case of the mountain climber is an example of this type). Should we have a different attitude about each of these types of cases?

You may also consider whether pragmatic justification allows one to believe decisively in an absolute way. Many think that such belief is necessary for authentic religious faith, but pragmatic grounds alone seem to prevent complete confidence in what is asserted to.

VII.B.1 The Wager

BLAISE PASCAL

In our first reading, the renowned French physicist and mathematician Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) argues that if we do a cost-benefit analysis of the matter, we find that it is extremely reasonable to get ourselves to believe that God exists regardless of whether we have good evidence for that belief. The argument goes something like this: Regarding the proposition God exists' reason is neutral. It can neither prove nor disprove it, but we make a choice on this matter, nor to choose for God is in effect to choose against him and lose the possible benefits that belief would bring. Since these benefits of faith promise to be infinite, and the loss equally infinite, we must take a gamble on faith.

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The justice of God must be vast like his compassion. Now, justice to the outcast is less vast, and ought less to offend our feelings than mercy towards the elect.

We know that there is an infinite, and are ignorant of its nature. As we know it to be false that numbers are finite, it is therefore true that there is an infinity in number. But we do not know what it is. It is false that it is even, it is false that it is odd, but the addition of a unit can make no change in its nature, yet it is a number, and every number is odd or even (this is certainly true of every finite number) So we may well know that there is a God without knowing what He is, is not a most substantial truth, seeing there are so many things which are not the truth itself.

We know then the existence and nature of the finite, because we also are finite and have extensio. We know the existence of the infinite, and are ignorant of its nature, because it has extension like us, but not limits like us. As we know neither the existence nor the nature of God, because He has neither extension nor limits. But by faith we know His existence; in glory we shall know His nature. Now, I have already shown that we may well know the essence of a thing, without knowing its nature.

Let us now speak according to natural light. If there is a God, He is infinitely incomprehensible, so not having neither parts nor limits, He has no affinity to us. We are then incapable of knowing either what He is or if He is. This being so, who will dare to undertake the decision of the question? Not we, who have no affinity to Him. Who then will blame Christians for not being able to give a reason for their belief, since they
profess a religion for which they cannot give a reason. They declare, in exposing it to the world, that it is a foolproof, infallible, and the only system of religion. Why, if you call this a religion, you are in error. It is not a religion. It is a superstition, it is a delusion, it is a Falsehood. It is a delusion, it is a delusion, it is a Falsehood. It is a delusion, it is a delusion, it is a Falsehood. It is a delusion, it is a delusion, it is a Falsehood. It is a delusion, it is a delusion, it is a Falsehood. It is a delusion, it is a delusion, it is a Falsehood. It is a delusion, it is a delusion, it is a Falsehood. It is a delusion, it is a delusion, it is a Falsehood. It is a delusion, it is a delusion, it is a Falsehood. It is a delusion, it is a delusion, it is a Falsehood. It is a delusion, it is a delusion, it is a Falsehood. It is a delusion, it is a delusion, it is a Falsehood. It is a delusion, it is a delusion, it is a Falsehood. 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"I confess it, I admit it. But still it is no means of saying the faces of the cards."—Mrs. Grundy and the rest, &c. —"You, but I have my hands tied and my mouth closed. I am forced to wager, and I am not free. I am not released, and am not made that I cannot believe. What then would you have me do?"

"True. But at least learn your inability to believe, since reason brings you to this, and yet you cannot believe. Endeavour then to convince yourself, not by increase of proof of God, but by the abstention of your passions. You would like to attain faith, and do not know how you would like to earn yourself of unbelievers, and ask the remedy for it. Learn of those who have been bound like you, and who have taken all their possessions. These are people who know the way by which you would follow, and who are cursed at an ill of which you would be cured. Follow the way by which they began, by acting as if they believed, taking the body water, having overgesaid, &c. Even this will naturally make you believe, and lessen your audience."—"But this is what I am afraid of."—

And why: What have you to risk?

But to show you that this leads you, there this which will lessen the passion, which are your disturbing-blooms.

The end of this discourse—Now what harm will it be if you believe in this idol? You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, generous, a sincere friend, truthful, certainly you will not have those poisonous pleasures, glory and luxury; but will you not have others? I will tell you that you will therewith gain in this life, and that at each step you take in this road, you will see so great certainty or gain, so much nothingness in what you risk, that you will at least recognize that you have wasted for something certain and infinite, for which you have given nothing.

"Ah! This discourse transports me, claims me," &c. If this discourse pleases you and seems impressive, know that it is made by a man who has in all, both before and after it, in prayer so that thing, infinite and without parts, before whom he lays all his acts, for you also to lay before Him all you have for your own good and for His glory, so that strength may be given to lowliness.

VII.B.2 The Ethics of Belief

W. K. CLIFFORD

In this reading the British philosopher W. K. Cliffford (1845-1899) considers reasons to believe in pragmatism, or "wagering" justifications for religious belief of the sort Pascal proposes. Clifford argues that there is an ethics to belief that makes universal all believing without sufficient evidence. Pragmatic justifications are not justifications at all but commitments of genuine justifications, which must always be based on evidence.

Clifford illustrates his thesis with the example of a ship owner who sends an immigrant ship to sea. He knows that the ship is old and not well built but he has to have the ship repaired. Dismaying from his mind all doubts and suspicions that the vessel is not seaworthy, he trusts in Providence to care for his ship. He acquires insurance and carriages, and he is insured with the Government and with the ship's owner for all the passengers on board. Clifford argues that although the ship owner is convinced that all was well with the ship, his insecurity in no way excites him because he had no right to believe on such evidence as was before him. One has an obligation to get oneself in a position in which one will believe propositions only on sufficient evidence. His general conclusion is that it is always wrong for anyone to believe anything or insufficient evidence.
A shipowner was about to send out an emigrant ship. He knew that she was old, and not over-well built at the first; that she had seen many seas and climates, and often had needed repairs. Doubts had been suggested to him that possibly she was not seaworthy. These doubts preyed upon his mind and made him unhappy; he thought that perhaps he ought to have her thoroughly overhauled and refitted, even though this should put him to great expense. Before the ship sailed, however, he succeeded in overcoming these melancholy reflections. He said to himself that she had gone safely through so many voyages and weathered so many storms that it was idle to suppose she would not come safely home from this trip also. He would put his trust in Providence, which could hardly fail to protect all those unhappy families that were leaving their fatherland to seek for better times elsewhere. He would dismiss from his mind all ingenious suspicions about the honesty of contractors and merchantmen. In such ways he acquired a sincere and comfortable conviction that his vessel was thoroughly safe and seaworthy; he watched her departure with a light heart, and benevolent wishes for the success of the exiles in their strange new home that was to be their and the home of his insurance money when she went down in mid-ocean and told no tales.

What shall we say of him? Surely this, that he was verily guilty of the death of those men. It is admitted that he did sincerely believe in the soundness of his ship but the sincerity of his conviction can in no wise be used to help him, because he had no right to believe on such evidence as was before him. He had acquired his belief not by honestly earning it in patient investigation, but by stifling his doubts. And although in the end he may have felt so sure about it that he could not think otherwise, yet inasmuch as he had knowingly and willingly worked himself into that frame of mind, he must be held responsible for it.

Let us alter the case a little, and suppose that the ship was not uncourted after all, that she made her voyage safely, and many others after it. Will that diminish the guilt of her owner? Not one jot. When an action is once done, it is right or wrong forever, no accidental failure of its good or evil fruits can possibly alter that. The man would not have been innocent, he would only have been not found out. The question of right or wrong has to do with the origin of life, not the matter of it; not what it was, but how he got it: not whether it turned out to be true or false, but whether he had a right to believe on such evidence as was before him.

There was once an island in which some of the inhabitants professed a religion teaching neither the doctrine of original sin nor that of eternal punishment. A suspicion was abroad that the professors of this religion had made use of unfair means to get their doctrines taught to children. They were accused of wresting the laws of their country in such a way as to remove children from the care of their natural and legal guardians, and even of stealing them away and keeping them concealed from their friends and relations. A certain number of men formed themselves into a society for the purpose of agitation the public about this matter. They published grave accusations against individual citizens of the highest position and character, and did all in their power to injure those citizens in the exercise of their professions. So great was the noise they made, that a Commission was appointed to investigate the facts; but after the Commission had carefully inquired into all the evidence that could be got, it appeared that the accused were innocent. Not only had they been accused on insufficient evidence, but the evidence of their innocence was such that the agitators might easily have obtained, if they had attempted a fair inquiry. After these disclosures the inhabitants of that country looked upon the members of the agitation society, not only as persons whose judgment was to be distrusted, but also as no longer to be counted honorable men. For although they had sincerely and conscientiously believed in the charges they had made, yet they had no right to believe on such evidence as was before them. Their sincere convictions, instead of being honestly owned by patient inquiring, were stolen by listening to the voice of prejudice and passion.

Let us vary this case also, and suppose, other things remaining as before, that a still more accurate investigation proved the accused to have been
really guilty. Would this make any difference in
the guilt of the accused? Clearly not; the question
is not whether their belief was true or false, but
whether they entertained it on wrong grounds. They
would not doubt say, "Now you see that we
were right after all; next time perhaps you will
believe us." And they might be believed, but they
would not thereby become honourable men. They
would not be innocent; they would only be not
found out. Every one of them, if he chose to exam-
mine himself in face consciousness, would know that
he had acquired and nourished a belief, when he
had no right to believe on such evidence as was
before him; and therein he would know that he
had done a wrong thing.

It may be said, however, that both of these
supposed cases it is not the belief which is judged
to be wrong, but the action following upon it. The
shipowner might say, "I am perfectly certain that
my ship is sound, but still I felt it my duty to have
her examined, hoping thus to do good to so many
to people to her." And it might be said to the agitator,
"However convinced you were of the justice of
your cause and the truth of your convictions, you
ought not to have made a public address upon any
man's character until you had examined the evi-
dence on both sides with the utmost patience and
care."

In the first place, let us admit that, so far as it
goes, this view of the case is right and necessary;
right, because even when a man's belief is so fixed
that he cannot think otherwise, he still has a choice
in regard to the action suggested by it, and so
cannot escape the duty of investigating on the
ground of the strength of his convictions, and nece-
nary, because those who are not yet capable of
controlling their feelings and thoughts must have a
place rule dealing with even acts.

But if this being conceived as necessary, it
becomes clear that it is not sufficient, and that our
previous judgment is required to supplement it.
For it is not possible so to sever the belief from
the action it suggests as to condemn the one without
condemning the other. No man holding a strong
belief on one side of a question, or even wishing to
hold a belief on one side, can investigate it with
such fairness and completeness as if he were really
in doubt and unbiased; so that the evidence of a
belief not founded on fair inquiry will hardly for
the performance of this necessary duty.

Nor is it that truly a belief at all which has not
some influence upon the actions of him who holds
it. He who truly believes that which prompts him
to an action has looked upon the action so just
after it, he has committed it already in his heart. If
a belief is not realized immediately in open deeds,
it is stored up for the guidance of the future. It goes
to make a pan of that aggregate of beliefs which is
the link between sensation and action at every
moment of all our lives, and which is so organized
and compartmented together that no part of it can be
isolated from the rest, but every new addition
modifies the structure of the whole. No real belief,
however trivial and fragmentary, it may seem, is
ever truly insignificant; it prepares us to receive
more of its like, confirms those which resembled it
before, and withdraws others; and so gradually it
takes a steady train in the immensity of time, which,
may some day explode into overt action, and
leave its stamp upon our character forever.

And no one man's belief is in any case a pri-
ivate matter which concerns himself alone. Our
lives are guided by that general conception of the
course of things which has been created by society
for social purposes. Our words, our opinions, our
forms and processes and modes of thought are
common property, fashioned and perfected from
time to time by the action of all. We live in an
environment which every succeeding generation
inherits as a precious deposit and a
sacred trust to be handed on to the next age; not
unchanged but enriched and purified, with some
clear marks of its proper handiwork. Into eyes, for
good or ill, is woven every belief of every man
who has speech of his fellows. An awful privilege,
and an awful responsibility, that we should help to
create the world in which possibly we'll live.

In the two supposed cases which have been
considered, it has been judged wrong to believe
on insufficient evidence, or to nourish belief by
suppressing doubts and avoiding investigation.
The reason of this judgment is not far to seek; it
is that in both these cases the belief held by one man
was of great importance to other men, first for as
much as no belief held to one man, however
to know all about anything, and to be capable of doing what is fit in regard to it, we naturally do not like to find that we are really ignorant and powerless, that we have to begin again at the beginning, and try to learn what the thing is and how it is to be dealt with; indeed anything can be learned about it. It is the sense of power attached to a sense of knowledge that makes men desirous of believing, and afraid of doubting.

This sense of power is the highest and best of pleasures when the belief on which it is founded is a true belief, and has been fairly arrived at by investigation. For then we may justly feel that it is common property, and holds good for others as well as for ourselves. Then we may be glad, not that I have learned secrets by which I can change and strengthen, but that we have got mastery over more of the world; and we shall be strong, not for ourselves, but in the name of man and in his strength. But if the belief has been accepted on insufficient evidence, the pleasure is a stolen one. Not only does it deceive ourselves by giving us a sense of power which we do not really possess, but it is sinful, because it is stolen in defiance of our duty to mankind. That duty is to guard ourselves from such beliefs as from a pestilence, which may whet our own appetite and spread to the rest of the town. What would be thought of one who, for the sake of a sweet fruit, should deliberately run the risk of bringing a disease upon his family and his neighbours? And, as in other such cases, it is not the risk only which has to be considered; for a bad action is always bad at the time when it is done, no matter what happens afterwards. Every time we let ourselves believe for unworthy reasons, we weaken our powers of self-control, of doubting, of judicially and fairly weighing evidence. We all suffer severely enough from the maintenance and support of false beliefs and the fatally wrong actions which they lead to, and the evil born when such belief is entertained is great and wide. But a greater and wider evil arises when the insidious character is maintained and supported, when a habit of believing for unworthy reasons is fostered and made permanent. If a steel money from any person, there may be no harm done by
the mere transfer of possession, he may no feel the loss, or it may prevent him from using the money badly. But I cannot help doing this great wrong toward Man, that make myself dishonest. What truth society is not that it should lose its property, but that it should become a den of thieves; for then it must cease to be society. This is why we ought not to do evil that good may come.

For any man this great evil has come, that we have done evil and are made wicked thereby. In like manner, if I let myself believe anything on insufficient evidence, there may be no great harm done by the mere belief, it may come to light after all, or I may never have occasion to exhibit it in outward acts. But I cannot help doing this great wrong toward Man, that make myself credulous. The danger to society is not merely that it should believe wrong things, though that is great enough; but that it should become credulous, and lose the skill of testing things and inquiring into them, for men must slip back into savagery.

The harm which is done by credulity in a man is not confined to the fostering of a credulous character in others, and consequent support of false beliefs. Habitual want of care about what I believe leads to habitual want of care in others about the truth of what is said to me. Men speak the truth to one another when each receiveth the truth in his own mind and in the other's mind but how shall my friend reverse the truth in my mind when I myself am careless about it? when I believe things because I want to believe them, and because they are comforting and pleasant? Will he not learn to cry, "Peace," to me, when there is no peace by such a course I shall surround myself with a thick atmosphere of falsehood and fraud, and in that must live. It may matter little to me, in my closed castle of sweet illusions and darling lies, but it matters much to Man that I have made my neighbor ready to deceive. The credulous man is father to the liar and the cheat; he lives in the bosom of the family, and it is no marvel if he should become even as they are. So closely are we united together, that whose shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

To sum up it's wrong always, everywhere and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.

If a man, holding a belief which he was taught in childhood or persuaded of afterwards, keeps down and evades away any doubts which arise about it in his mind, purposely avoids the reading of books and the company of men that call in question or discuss it, and regards as impious those questions which cannot easily be asked without disturbing it—(the life of that man is one long sin against mankind).

If this judgment seem harsh when applied to those simple souls who have never known better, who have been brought up from the cradle with a horror of doubt, and taught that their eternal welfare depends on what they believe, then it leads to the very serious question, Who hath made Israel to sin . . .

Impain into the evidence of a doctrine is not to be made once for all, and then taken at finally settled, it is never lawful to stifle a doubt: for either it can be honestly answered by means of the inquiry already made, or else it proves that the inquiry was not complete.

"But," says one, "I am a busy man; I have no time for the long course of study which would be necessary to make me in any degree a competent judge of certain questions, or even able to understand the nature of the arguments." Then he should have no time to believe . . .