

Life is a Gamble

Most students of religion know of Pascal's wager. The French philosopher argued that belief in God is a good bet, inasmuch as there's an eternity to be gained, and little to be lost, if one bets on God. But there's an eternity to be lost and at most some passing temporal gains if one bets against God.

I suspect the wager was never altogether compelling; it certainly has lost punch today. The idea of eternity is too elusive, while temporal circumstances have the power of immediacy. Pie in the sky by and by no longer cuts it, if it ever did.

The fact is, there are various arguments for and against the existence of God, some more persuasive than others, but no compelling proof exists one way or the other. You bet your life, and you take your chances!

What's at stake? I don't know about eternity. It's beyond me what happens when I die. I do know that I don't want my life to be a lie. I don't want it to be meaningless, or worse, contrary to what is good, beautiful, and true. So the question is, what can I know with sufficient confidence to bet my life on it? What is true, as far as I can see?

I could always be wrong, but I'm not going to bet my life on anything that lacks some evidence, some coherence, some experiential confirmation, that in at least a provisional way I find to be true. The word "provisional" is helpful here. I seek that which sustains and provisions me, mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, on the mysterious, wonderful, perilous journey of life. Every day in all kinds of ways I wager my time, my energies, my resources, in the conviction that I am not utterly deceived, that I have some purchase on the truth.

There is no meaning to life, it seems to me, if there is nothing that transcends the temporal, no reality that purposefully perdures. Simply put, if God does not exist, life is meaningless. All will ultimately turn to dust and ashes, or cosmic noise.

Indeed, to speak of cosmic noise is oxymoronic; the word "cosmos" echoes a sense of the order that sustains our existence. It is the antithesis of "chaos." "Cosmos" denotes the universe as an ordered, harmonious whole. Maybe the world is so ordered, maybe not. I'm betting my life that it is.

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