The question of James’s seriousness in proposing his thesis on the “will” to believe might eventually have surfaced on its own, but the fact is that John Hick’s astringent criticism of this lecture brought it dramatically to the fore. Crucial to Hick’s case are his view of Pascal’s Wager argument and what he presumes was James’s attitude toward that argument.

Hick begins his study of James’s lecture by instituting a brief “pilot study” of Pascal’s Wager. This way of proceeding, however much encouraged by James himself, already supposes a kinship between the Wager and James’s “will” to believe; in any case, it may have served to highlight, for Hick, features in James’s argument which naturally send the mind back to its family resemblances with the Wager. It is striking, for example, how tirelessly Hick worries the objection that James had an “essentially sporting” attitude toward the ultimate issues of belief (p. 40); that he regards faith as a “prudent gambler” would, whereas the ordinary religious believer brings to faith an attitude “entirely different from that of the gambler” (p. 42). References abound to “risk” and “risking,” “winning” and “losing,” “staking” and “backing,” and it is symptomatic of Hick’s perspective that his only reference (p. 40) to another of James’s popular lectures is to the passage in “The Sentiment of Rationality” where James speaks of the “total game of life” in which we are obliged to “stake our persons all the while.”

This preferential stress, I suggest, may initially have arisen from James’s introductory allusions to Pascal’s
Wager; but it may also have been exacerbated by Hick's own estimate of that passage in the *Penseés*. He assures us that the Wager assumes a view of our cognitive capacities such that the problem of God's existence must be dealt with in the same way as we would deal with the question whether "a coin will fall head or tail at a particular throw."

Pascal, therefore, has likened the option to believe or not believe to a "game of chance"; we all live in a "cosmic gambling den" and are forced to wager one way or the other, and Pascal advises us to make the wager which may gain us everything but which, if we have bet on the wrong side, will lose us virtually nothing (p. 34).

Conceive of God, Hick goes on, after the model of some "touchy Eastern potentate," invisible, but publicly advertised as "inordinately jealous for homage," and Pascal's argument might well be a "rational form of insurance." It costs us nothing to make a reverence to his apparently empty throne, even if he does not exist; whereas if he does exist, we may have "saved our lives" by thus placating him! These "barbarous earthy terms" into which the Wager "translates so readily," Hick sums up, betray its "essentially non-religious character." The conception of the deity which it implies has "shocked many readers" since Pascal first published it (p. 34).

Thus far Hick's formal presentation of Pascal's Wager. Granted: his introductory remarks warn us that Pascal himself seems to have proposed the Wager, not as a "normal path to belief in God," but rather as a "final and desperate attempt" to move the "almost invincibly apathetic unbeliever." It does not, then, represent Pascal's own "central thinking" about belief in God, and, Hick speculates, the *Penseés* in the finished form they never came to assume would have seen Pascal hedge his Wager with all manner of "safeguards and qualifications" (pp. 33–34). One wonders, though, whether Hick himself has kept these caveats in mind, for he soon goes on to charac-
terize the Wager in the bald and repellent terms quoted above.

More to my point here, however, is the fact that Hick seems not to have credited James with any great awareness that such caveats might be in order. He solemnly intones that the Wager's "implied conception of the deity" is rightfully shocking, and adds, without a break, that "William James has used the same basic idea" of God, as though it were "consonant with Christian theism" (pp. 34–35). Then, with spectacles so tinted, Hick turns to a discussion of James's lecture.

With that set of lenses, it is not altogether surprising that Hick caught in his sights the "sporting," "gambler" James he was predisposed to see. There is, of course, more to Hick's criticism of James than I have summarized here; the other points he makes will occupy our attention further on. My purpose now is to focus on that precise aspect of his critique which springs from the kinship, as he sees it, between James's argument and Pascal's Wager. The point I hope to make is this: a more careful study of the Pensées, combined with a wider and more sensitive appreciation of James's attitude toward that work, warrants our drawing conclusions quite the reverse of those which Hick would urge upon us.

It is worth noting, to begin with, that James seems to have enjoyed a lifelong familiarity with the Pensées, a familiarity that strikes the reader as warmly sympathetic, on the whole. That kind of familiarity one would expect of anyone educated in a French culture; its absence would surprise almost as much as an American's ignorance of Tom Sawyer or of the Gettysburg Address. It comes, then, as less than startling that James, who received so much of his early education abroad, and notably in Geneva, can allude to Pascal, even quote him, as easily and naturally as he does. Malgré les misères qui nous tiennent par la gorge: he cites the phrase in the most unforced fashion,
especially when ruminating on the "greatness and misery of man." For that was the Pascalian context in which it occurred in Charles Louandre's edition of the *Pensées,* a copy of which, annotated—so the editors of his *Works* assure us (254n16.6, 259n29.7)—with a series of marginal comments and cross-references, was found in his personal library. The above quotation occurs in a letter of 1869, during James's famous period of depression, and was penned only shortly before he set himself to reading Charles Renouvier's *Deuxième Essai.* That historical context is significant, as we shall see very shortly.

James had, therefore, a more than ordinary familiarity with Pascal's *Pensées* and a lively interest in that work. And yet, we may guess that he felt a certain resistance to Pascal as well. For James's entire religious orientation was anti-orthodox and anti-institutional, while Pascal was pleading for the inflexible orthodoxy of that superbly institutionalized religion, Roman Catholicism. James's religious set was staunchly Protestant, and here was Pascal, defending the religion of "masses and holy water." Such stuff might do for his Irish maid and Italian grocer, but a Harvard type of the 1890s could recognize benightedness when he saw it; James fully expects that same acknowledgment from those satellite luminaries at Yale and Brown. Why, one would as easily succumb to the seductions of the Mahdi.

And yet, Pascal has gotten into his blood; he cannot overcome his fascination for the man. His thoughts volleyed forth like flaming arrows, scarlet with passion yet crystalline with intelligence; his style, so unequivocally "the man," admirable, endearing, pathetic, was so much what the Jamesian style would become; and here was a mathematician of genius depreciating, or at least severely calling into question, the primacy of a form of thought which James found so alien to his own personal bent. For the "reasons" that move the human being in matters of
great moment are, Pascal declared, not reasons of head or brain so much as reasons of the “heart.” This was one of the most cherished and frequently proclaimed insights of that prophetic character Henry James, Sr.; it was a conviction that deeply marked his son—so deeply that one is tempted to view his philosophical career as one sustained endeavor to codify what his father had intuitively seen.

James’s ambivalence toward Pascal translates into a profound ambivalence toward his Wager argument. In his first treatment of it, in fact, he is quite as searingly critical as Hick is. The context of that early treatment is important, however: James is preparing his auditors’ minds to question their own conviction that our volitional natures should never be permitted to influence our acceptance of any truths, whatever their nature. The precise point he concedes to them, momentarily, is the contradictory of what he will eventually prove; after summarizing the Wager, he concludes that all such Pascalian talk of “believing by our volition seems, then, . . . simply silly” (WB 7).

His description of the Wager is, in part at least, a deliberate caricature, calculated to encourage that false conclusion. Pascal is trying to “force” us into believing by reducing our concern with truth to a gambler’s interest in a “game of chance”; for “A game is going on between you and the nature of things which at the day of judgment will bring out either heads or tails” (WB 5). He has anticipated Hick’s metaphors, and they cut with the same critical edge. His audience must feel, James goes on to observe, that this gambling metaphor implies that the apologist for belief has been put to his “last trumps”; a faith adopted on the basis of so mechanical a calculation would “lack the inner soul of faith’s reality.” His final observation is devastating: if we were God, we should rightly take a mordant delight “in cutting off believers of this pattern from their infinite reward” (WB 6). Can this be the man who, Hick assures
us, "used the same basic idea," the same "touchy Eastern potentate" conception of God as Pascal's Wager? Indeed, is Hick's criticism of the Wager, when all is said, any more acid than James's was before him?

But it must be conceded, perhaps in Hick's favor (but only perhaps), that James now slues off and aims his critique at Pascal's religion of "masses and holy water"; this, he assumes his auditors will agree, is no longer a "live" option for enlightened Protestants like themselves, any more than the Mahdi's appeal for their trust and worship would be. Hick makes some reasonably solid points against this phase of James's argument, which I shall deal with further on. But what may have faintly encouraged Hick in setting up his hasty equation between James and Pascal is the series of more sympathetic remarks James later comes to make on the Wager argument.

Having conceded to his audience as much as he thought was their due—that allowing our volitional nature to influence our acceptance of truth would be, in the number of instances at least, either "silly" or even "vile"—James goes on to argue that there are other instances in which our volitional nature does, in point of fact, wield such an influence. There are, therefore, "passional tendencies and volitions which run before . . . belief" (WB 11; emphasis added), he concludes. In the light of that conclusion he now reverses his field and admits that "Pascal's argument, instead of being powerless, then seems a regular clincher. . . . The state of things," therefore, "is evidently far from simple . . ." (WB 11).

At this precise point in his lecture, James gives formal expression to the thesis he means to defend in the remainder of his talk. One of the central points of that thesis comes down to affirming that "Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must," in certain instances at least, "decide" matters for us (WB 11; emphasis deleted). Not only does our passional nature de facto intervene in the
formation of certain beliefs, but there are instances in which it must so intervene, and therefore lawfully, de jure, may so intervene. Perhaps, after all, there was some validity in Pascal's way of arguing!

This brings us to the other, more sympathetic side of James's ambivalent attitude toward the Wager, and to Pascal more generally. And here, again, he anticipates Hick to a remarkable degree. The Wager, James knew well, was by no means all that Pascal had written even in his *Pensees*. Pascal's own personal belief, he avows—even if it be in masses and holy water!—must have had different roots; hence, the Wager must have been an argument aimed at others, a "last desperate snatch at a weapon" forged against hardhearted unbelievers.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, when at a pivotal juncture in his lecture, James appeals (WB 21) to that celebrated Pascalian adage "The heart has its reasons, of which reason knows nothing." For to compare the worth of things, he goes on to say, "we must consult not science, but what Pascal calls our heart. Science herself," in fact, "consults her heart" when judging that factual knowledge is worth our having, indeed, is one of the "supreme goods" humans can strive for (WB 22).

"The heart has its reasons": that phrase has often been used to justify wishy-washy sentiment, mindless love-conquers-allism, anarchic feeling as arbiter on any and every question. Indeed, there are instances where one suspects that some such understanding commands James's own interpretation of the phrase. But James knew better; I hope it will come clear further on in this essay that he did so. To make that clear, however, one is well-advised to begin with what Pascal himself meant by the "heart" and by its "reasons."

This is the very tack, it would seem, that James himself took: his personal copy of the *Pensees* shows that he wrote in page references to three additional occurrences of the
term *coeur* (*Works* 259n27.9); one may surmise that he saw the term as important for Pascal, that it caught his interest, and that he may well have been trying to find some common thread of meaning running through these various uses of it.

It would be idle to pretend that Pascal had any single *technical* meaning for the term: he was not that kind of writer. But it is still possible to locate a “field” of meanings, and with enough accuracy to exclude what he did not mean and to divine what a reader like James might find him suggesting.

Pascal’s spiritual kinship with St. Augustine is a matter of record. One would fully expect, then, to uncover analogies between his *coeur* and Augustine’s *cor*; thus, it is not surprising that for both of them the “heart” is the seat from which the “inner man” beholds and responds to the higher world whence God addresses his call to fallen human creatures. But to hearken to that call fallen creatures must recognize both their “grandeur” and their “misery,” the wretchedness into which they have been plunged, and (in the phrase we have already seen James use), despite the “miseries” which “clutch us by the throat,” the “irrepressible instinct which raises us upward.” That recognition carries a feeling-charge, but it is a recognition; it has genuine noetic character and value. “Reason” functions, not in opposition to, but alongside, the heart, or, more exactly, subordinated to it; reason functions at its best, in fact, when directed by and responsive to the urgings of the heart. Reason is unable, for example, to prove the “first principles” which guide it in its operations: the heart alone can intuit and approve of them. So, in one of the passages James lists in his annotations, “it is on the knowledge supplied by the heart and instinct that reason depends, founding thereon all its utterances.” Or, in another phrase that caught James’s attention, “We know the truth not only through reason, but also by the heart.” How, then, to
translate the phrase from this same context “C'est le coeur qui sent Dieu, et non la raison”? The usual translation runs, it is the heart that “feels” God, not reason, and surely Pascal is intimating the feeling-charge that accompanies that apprehension, when the heart is properly sensible, “sensitized” to God’s call. But sentir is just as much a noetic term; it expresses an apprehension, but the kind of loving apprehension of which reason is incapable. This is the meaning to be given to the famous phrase “the heart has its reasons, of which reason knows nothing.” Those “reasons of the heart” are the farthest thing from blind and mindless sentiment.

So Pascal can pen that lapidary pensée that says merely “heart, instinct, principles.” The heart’s intuition of “principles” is an “instinctive” grasp, as “natural” as the heart’s “love” for both itself and the Universal Being. The Pyrrhonian skeptic, whom Pascal brings repeatedly into his sights, is capable of questioning even that fundamental intuition; he can argue that our lives may be merely a dream, that space, time, motion may not be real. But this merely reminds us that humans can fight against their basic God-given “instincts”; for “nature” is fallen, and the “heart” itself can be corrupted.

Heart, nature, instinct: Pascal adds another member to this family of terms. He speaks of the will directing (and legitimately directing) the operations of the mind, somewhat as “heart” is entitled to do. At this juncture we come very close to James’s own “will” to believe. “The will,” writes Pascal,

is one of the principal agents of belief; not that it creates belief, but because things are true or false according to the side from which we look at them. The will, preferring one aspect to another, turns the mind away from contemplating the qualities of things which possess qualities it does not care to see; and so the mind, walking in step with the will, stops to look at the aspect it likes; it comes to a stand before the aspect it prefers, and so it forms judgment by what it sees therein.
Compare that proposition with this one, from James’s personal notebook: “‘Free will,’” he writes, means “‘the sustaining of a thought because I choose to, when I might have other thoughts’” (quoted in Letters i 147). That phrase James entered into his notebook in 1870; he had just come across it while reading Charles Renouvier’s Deuxième Essai. That reading made him credit Renouvier with his “rebirth” from the fearful depression that had held him under for two long years! The sentiment is, however, remarkably Pascalian in import.

But the context from which James drew it is even more remarkably Pascalian. To quote Perry’s elegant summary of the matter: Renouvier was an empiricist who recognized the empiricist’s “narrow and momentary certainty in the immediate presence of particular facts,” and went on to stress “the discrepancy between this dubiousness of knowledge and the assurance of belief.” Only the will, he argued, can ensure the “consummation of belief” that reason itself cannot ensure. But how to justify this leap to belief, this “premature and hazardous self-commitment,” with its “excess of assurance over evidence”? The only justification possible is a moral one: “where experience and logic are not decisive, and where there is at the same time a practical need of belief, there belief may and should be dictated by moral and religious considerations.” Perry goes on to relate Renouvier’s claim that “As a matter of fact . . . all of the great philosophical systems are expressions of the temperaments and inclinations of their authors, however much they may profess to submit only . . . irresistible proof”—a contention that James cited in his notes, and then went on to incorporate into his personal thinking.16

Pascal, Renouvier, James: even if we do not subscribe, to the letter, to all Perry’s interpretations, the genealogical traces are strikingly suggestive. Did James refresh his acquaintance with Pascal while working on “The Will to Believe”? There is excellent reason for thinking so. But
quite aside from that historical question, the ineffaceable family resemblance between Pascal and James runs deeper than any suggested by Hick’s polemics.\(^\text{17}\)

That kinship only makes James’s ambiguity toward Pascal’s Wager all the more intriguing. His summary (WB 5–6) of the central portion of Pascal’s argument is careful and fair enough;\(^\text{18}\) but, even given the argumentative context, to say that Pascal is striving to “force” us into Christianity by encouraging us to equate our concern for truth with a gambler’s concern for the outcome of a coin-toss is as unjust to Pascal as Hick is to James. But James goes on to make Pascal’s argument conclude in this fashion: “Go, then, and take holy water, and have masses said; belief will come and stupefy your scruples,—Cela vous fera croire et vous abêtira. Why should you not? At bottom, what have you to lose [WB 6]?” Now this, one must protest, is entirely too offhand. Nor is the unfairness of James’s characterization sufficiently offset by his admission that Pascal had concocted his argument for others than himself, for hardhearted unbelievers. Hick, we saw, uses almost identical language, except that, in one of his few departures from James’s estimate, he describes the unbeliever as “apathetic” rather than as hardhearted.

Hick is closer: for Pascal is addressing,\(^\text{19}\) not hardhearted unbelievers, but the torpid, rather, the unreflective, who day by day plod onward toward their death, without ever a sidelong thought to how that death will affect them. They live “distracted by distraction from distraction” as it were, or, in Pascal’s own words, “indifferent to the pursuit of the truth of a thing so vital, and touching them so closely”; “unreflecting, undisturbed, they live without a thought of the final end of life . . . as if they could annihilate eternity by turning their thoughts away from it.”\(^\text{20}\) Men like this “must have lost all feeling” when they do not even “take the trouble to inquire” about a question so vitally important to them.
Add a few centuries, and Pascal’s estimate of his audience is not all that different from the one James levels on his own: “I wish,” he writes to John Jay Chapman, “you knew a few of the intellects at whom that speech was delivered.” His lecture is “only calculated for the sickly hotbed atmosphere of the philosophico-positivistically enlightened scientific classroom,” for “the victims of spinal paralysis which these studies superinduce.” Chapman had implied that the “faith” James had challenged them with was not robust enough, and James agrees; but for patients of the sort he had to deal with, only a dose of “homeopathic treatment” would do them any good. It must have seemed to Chapman a “poor little razor-like thin edge of the wedge” which your academic personages twiddle between their fingers,” but even such a mild cathartic “really does good.”

One does not, James is contending, try to catapult such victims of “spinal paralysis” from the anemic state they are in, in one unbroken arc, into the fullness of “robust” faith. But this was exactly Pascal’s own view; it was buttressed by his orthodox conviction that Christian faith was a gift from God. That theological consideration need not have troubled James, but Pascal was also calling upon a psychological realism that should have appealed to him.

His method would have appealed to Chapman, for it is far less gentle than James’s own. Pascal feels that such “spinal paralysis” victims as he is dealing with must be shocked, awakened out of their “strange insensibility to things of gravest import”; he must make them sentir, both “see and feel,” the “extravagance and stupidity” of their benumbed condition, literally “confound them by making them see what madmen they are.” The language of a “wager” is one they will at least understand.

But once Pascal’s audience has been more accurately identified, it becomes clear that the Wager was neither the “last” nor the “final” argumentative tactic that James and
Hick, respectively, maintain that it must have been. It was much more, as James thought of his own lecture, a first step—more energetic and determined than James dared take, but only a first step. Pascal implies this when he writes: "Before embarking on the proofs of Christianity, I think it necessary to point out the wrong-headedness of men who live indifferent to searching out the truth of a matter so vital..."22 All he hopes to accomplish, even by this shock therapy, is to wake them up, get them to see that the question is there and that it concerns them dreadfully, jolt them into a reflective mood. Facing them with the "proofs" of Christianity before ensuring that attitude would be woefully premature. This is a long chalk from hoping that his Wager will "force" them to believe in God, as James puts it, or provide an argumentative "path," in Hick's milder term, toward such belief. Pascal is theologically too orthodox for that, and psychologically too astute.

But he does end his "wager" gambit with the recommendation James quotes: take holy water, hear masses. What does he mean by this? Pascal's auditor has protested that he is still "not free, not released" from the desires that turn his life into a round of mindless pleasure-seeking; "I am so made than I cannot believe. What am I to do?" "At least," Pascal replies, "acknowledge your impotence toward believing. . . . Do your best to gain conviction, not by an increase of divine proofs, but by a decrease of human passions." Follow the route others have taken before you, he counsels: they did everything "as if they believed—took holy water, heard masses, and so forth. Even naturally, that will make you believe, will stupefy you. . . ."23

"Even naturally": Pascal is convinced that faith is essentially a supernatural affair, a gift from God. But the human being's "natural" dispositions have something to do with the receptivity which normally provides the soil for that gift. Yet humans are a strange amalgam: of soul
and that body which Descartes, and Pascal after him, regard as a "machine." Surely the dispositions of the "soul" are alone relevant in preparing the ground for God's gift of faith? A strict Cartesian might agree, but not Pascal. The gestures, actions, postures of the "machine" can pave the way for analogous gestures and postures of the soul. Genuflect, and you may think that only the bodily machine has assumed this attitude of humility and adoration. But no, the soul is humbled too and, from that posture of abasement, begins to sense that adoration may not, after all, be so unnatural an attitude for it to take on. This is not adoration yet, any more than hearing masses or taking holy water is tantamount to full enjoyment of Pascal's Catholic faith; but for someone whose life has been a tumult of passionate desires, it "stupifies" both soul and body, and places him in the stillness where the "heart" may hearken to the call of God that conveys the gift of faith. "To look for help from this outward act is superstition; to refuse to combine it with the inward is pride." Not bad theology, that; not bad psychology either. As for the latter, one could have hoped that the man who wrote the ageless chapter on "Habit" in his Principles of Psychology might have done it greater justice.

One final analogy: neither Pascal in his lengthy section on the Wager, nor James in his entire lecture, deals directly with the "content" and "grounds" of the decision to believe. Pascal intended to postpone his "proofs" for Christianity to a later portion of his "apology"; James restricts himself to a highly abstract definition of "religion," and never directs his audience's attention to the matters they might mull over in coming to a faith-decision. Does finite being entail the existence of an Infinite? Do the evils of our universe argue against the reality of a God? Does our world evidence traces of teleological design? We know that James himself dwelt long amid such questions, and that he found himself generally disaffected toward the
“traditional” proofs for God’s existence. Was he merely reluctant to air such “content” issues?

The answer to that, I submit, is a clear “no.” For James shows no reluctance, in the other popular lectures of this period, to invite his hearers to probe into the features of our human world—freedom, morality, the hunger for happiness—that he came to think spoke most eloquently for God’s existence. But he had been brought to realize how decisively the attitude we bring to such considerations inevitably influenced the conclusions we draw from them. A good lecturer sets out to make one main point, and James was a master of the art. So, from beginning to end, he resists the urge to expatiate on what we might believe, and severely confines himself to showing, as he hoped, that matters of religious faith are peculiar in this respect: they may, and even lawfully must, be approached with a “heart” attuned to its own kind of reasons, with a predisposing “will” to believe. A limited point, when all is said, but one which, if valid, is well worth making.

To conclude, then: John Hick would have us read “The Will to Believe” in the light of Pascal’s Wager argument, but as he himself interprets that argument for us. Look more carefully at Pascal, and at the relationship between Pascal and James, and Hick’s counsel becomes darkly suspect. He has failed to bring into play the profound ambivalence James manifests toward both the Wager and Pascal’s Pensées more generally. James’s summary of the Wager’s substance is surprisingly parallel to Hick’s, and his initial estimate of its value, even if we allow for its contextual intention, is so acidly critical as almost to be unfair. But he is bending over backward to show his auditors how well he can understand their prejudice against all such volitional views of belief; it is only when he has softened, and then corrosively attacked, that prejudice that he unveils the more sympathetic view of Pascal’s fundamental contention he has been backing the whole while.
Was Pascal, then, trying to "force" us into belief? It would be chancy to take this as James's last word on the matter; but it is mildly ironic that he characterizes the Wager as a "last desperate snatch" when close study shows it was more in the nature of an opening gambit. For the Wager, like James's entire lecture, was designed to shake and even shock self-complacent apathetics into adopting the attitude of "will" or "heart" which both men saw is required as the predisposition for sanely reflecting on the question of belief. All this is clear from the *Pensées* even as they stand; there is no warrant for Hick's speculation that in their finished form we might have seen Pascal hedging his Wager with all manner of "safeguards and qualifications." Indeed, that suggestion may well come from Hick's having unreflectively accepted James's suggestion that the argument is, as Hick puts it, a "final and desperate attempt," and not a predisposing shock treatment to get serious reflection underway.

But there is even less warrant for claiming—in fact, it is seriously unjust to characterize James's lecture as supposing—the same sort of barbarous deity as Hick finds implied in his skewed interpretation of the Wager, for James would have us, in his deity's place, quite cheerfully cut off such gaming-table believers from their ultimate reward!

James, then, is quite as critical of Pascal's Wager, and of the deity it might (taken out of context) be thought to imply, as Hick would have us be. Further, in reducing Pascal's religion to one of "masses and holy water," he is positively unfair: it should have been clear to him, with a little more attention, that a religion which came down to such posturings of "man the machine" would have little or no appeal for Pascal himself. But that dismissive caricature is probably symptomatic of James's resistance to a broader image of Roman Catholicism; it should not blind us to the lifelong sympathy, the lively fascination he
brought to the study of the *Pensées*. For there is good reason to conjecture that Pascal’s “heart” eventually translated into James’s “will” and “passional” natures, and that the powerful charge which James attributed to Renouvier’s *Deuxième Essai* was the more easily detonated because of the subterranean influence Pascal’s *Pensées* had long been wielding on the deeper reaches of his mind.

Despite his surface disagreements, and one hasty moment of unfairness, James does greater justice to the deeper implications of the *Pensées* than he may consciously have intended. In the words Perry uses to characterize James’s estimate of John Stuart Mill, he “builied better than he knew.”25 For, in a real sense, a sense quite different from the one Hick would have us countenance, he succeeds in reproducing a Pascal in modern guise. Addressing a contemporary version of Pascal’s own audience, he treats them to a dose of homeopathic medicine, shocks their apathetic hostility toward believing anything beyond what the evidence clearly warrants, and makes a similar appeal to the “heart” and “will” as commanding and directing the work of reason. One could point to phrases in Pascal which foreshadow James’s insight into the special character of options that are “forced” and “momentous”; one might even speculate on whether his appreciation of Pascal’s persuasive powers did not prompt him to reflect on why this religion of “masses and holy water” held such minimal plausibility for his mind—why, in the term he invented to cover such a case, it was not a “live” option for him. But dealing with such issues would bring us far afield. We have seen enough to substantiate the view that, *pace* Hick, the “sporting” language of risk and wager veiled, for both Pascal and James, the passionate conviction that the game of life man plays out with God is deadly serious.

But if the relationship of James, Renouvier, and Pascal traced here is even approximately accurate, it raises a sur-
prising question. Admit for a moment that the Wager argument was Pascal’s technique for exploding an affective bomb that would predispose his apathetic reader to reflect; admit that the Pascalian “heart” directs and commands the workings of reason; assume, further, that James intends the same predisposing effect and that his notion of the passional side of our nature runs parallel with Pascal’s notion of heart, and it becomes distinctly possible that the influence of heart, will, or passional nature would not follow upon, but actually precede and command, the operations of reason’s reflections on the “evidence” for God’s existence. Could anything more irrational be imagined—and could this be what James is seriously advocating?

NOTES

1. Page references to Hick’s *Faith and Knowledge* (cited in chap. 2, note 6) will, henceforth, be given in parentheses in both the text and the notes.

2. The French and French-speaking Swiss had some firm notions, in James’s time at least, about required curriculum; some acquaintance with Pascal’s classic would have been expected of every lycéen, a presumption that James’s easy familiarity with the *Penseés* serves to confirm.

3. (Paris: Charpentier, 1861), p. 137. References to the *Penseés* here are given to the now definitive edition by Louis Lafuma (Paris: Garnier–Flammarion, 1973), which I abbreviate to L, with Lafuma’s paragraph numbers; in this case, see L 227. James’s memory has elided the phrase somewhat. The original reads: “Malgré la vue de toutes nos misères, qui nous touchent, qui nous tiennent à la gorge . . .” and occurs on p. 137 of the Louandre edition, pp. 117 to 135 having treated of the “greatness and misery of man.”

4. TC I 472.

5. TC I 149.

6. The series of sorites James later elaborates to defend the “will” to believe (TC II 242–43) would at first suggest this interpretation, and it remains a possible way of reading those particular soritic arguments. I find, however, the repeated presence of the term “ought” in those sorites suggesting a deontological middle term that is essential
to the understanding of James's more authentic thought on these matters; see below, chaps. 7 and 8.

7. The references are to pp. 225, 374, and 237 of the Louandre edition. For more on these, see below.

8. L 227, already mentioned above, at note 3.


10. L 214 and Louandre, p. 224; see note 7, above.

11. L 225 and Louandre, p. 224; see note 7, above.

12. L 331.


14. L 214; for the context, see note 9, above.


17. James's summary of the Wager, including the quotation, exactly rendered (WB 6), suggests he reviewed it while composing this lecture. Note also that to Renouvier, an empiricist-voluntarist-fideist like James, Pascal must have been philosophical mother's milk; he would have been ideally chosen to reinforce, or bring to the surface, whatever latent Pascalian tendencies James might have hoarded from his earlier education.


19. See the note to this effect, written by Pascal's advocates from Port-Royal, at Pensée 434 in the edition by Léon Brunschvicg (Paris: Hachette, 1897); cf. L 246.

20. L 12; see also L 11.


22. L 12 (see also L 11). This, then, was Pascal's strategy, the “program” he laid down for himself in the Pensées. It is also unmistakably reflected in the first chapter of Louandre's edition (pp. 105–17), which immediately precedes and colors the reading of this passage.

23. See the illuminating note Brunschvicg includes (at the Pensée he numbers 233) to explain this cela vous abêtira; Pascal is playing richly on the term. The adoption of these pious external practices will both “tame” and “stupefy” Pascal's skeptics, reduce their pretensions that they are only being “reasonable” to the “stupidity” they really amount to, thereby making them the “children” they must become before any conversion is possible. For the true nature of their condition is that they are already both stupefied and stupid!

24. L 722 and Louandre, p. 239. Observe, in this connection, that the p. 237 to which James refers in his personal annotations (see note
7, above) is the finale of Pascal's argument on the body–soul interaction in the growth of belief, an argument that runs over to p. 238. James's reading of p. 239, accordingly, was more than likely conditioned by this context.

25. TC 1561.