

# **Desert Interviews**

**or, how to jump off  
the roof  
and not hit  
the ground**

**Piero Golia**

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	God exists (G)	God does not exist (-G)
Living as if God exists (B)	+∞ (heaven)	-N (none)
Living as if God does not exist (-B)	?? not specified perhaps -N (purgatory/spiritual death) or -∞ (hell)	+N (none)

This book is composed of artists talking to one another. The artists here speak to history for themselves, and this snippet of writing shouldn't be allowed to interrupt them. A critic's proper place would normally be a plump introduction to frame history, but not this time. Instead I am slipped into the interstices, snuck in through the backdoor, and relegated to the margins. Ghosting the artists' voices with my own, my role is subsumed by theirs.

Critics (along with historians slumming for catalogue essays) are often charged with placing the work of an artist in the constellation of history. The canon shifts; the rules change. Artemisia Gentileschi, a footnote until the 20th century, became an "Old Master" after; Jan Vermeer was never recognized in his own lifetime; no one remembers the medal winner at the 1874 Paris Salon, only that the Impressionists, angry at being shut out, formed their own salon. No one forgets them anymore.

Time passes, and critics are often wrong. Their authority is dubious. But authority is still authority.

I present to you a decision theory model for Pascal's Wager, which as defined by the (also dubious, but widely trusted) authority of Wikipedia as "a suggestion posed by the French philosopher Blaise Pascal that even though the existence of God cannot be determined through reason, a person should wager as though God exists, because living

life accordingly has everything to gain, and nothing to lose."

Piero Golia's work is always about this wager of authority, and the conclusion that most come to about it is as cleanly absurd as the logic of Pascal's Wager—you have nothing to lose by trusting. But implicit in Pascal's Wager is that doubt prompts its creation.

So within Golia's book, I serve as a critical wraith whose spectral presence is only that which makes the rest real. Rather than frame what follows with the authoritative imprimatur of the critic writing the introduction, I must slip between the lines of the colophon page, placing my doubtful position in a doubtful position. Rather than being the main attraction, my words merely form a footnote to what the artists say. Like other spooks, I can't really affect the living, though I may play tricks, infect with mischief, and prompt infidels back into the warm embrace of belief. As compromise and doubt are built into my position, so this text must have those qualities built into its form. It may be fugitive, but it isn't unhappy to inhabit the shadow of doubt; to be disallowed from living in the light lends itself a freedom. Though untrustworthy, I can still possibly be a poet and a tour guide. Disingenuous escort to dubious locale... perhaps.

Even if this is so, should Dante doubt Virgil when he says, "Therefore, for your sake, I think it wise you follow me"?

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