

Pascal's Wager

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Blaise Pascal
(1623-1662)

“Either God is or he is not.’
But to which view shall we be
inclined? Reason cannot
decide this question. Infinite
chaos separates us. At the far
end of this infinite distance a
coin is being spun which will
come down heads or tails.
How will you wager? Reason
cannot make you choose
either, reason cannot prove
either wrong.”

[*Pensées*, §418)]

Pascal's Memorial

The year of grace 1654, Monday, November 23, day of Saint Clement, pope and martyr, and others in the martyrology. Vigil of Saint Chrysogonus, martyr, and others.

From about ten-thirty in the evening to about half an hour after midnight. Fire. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and savants. Certitude, certitude; feeling, joy, peace. God of Jesus Christ.

Deum meum et Deum vestrum.

“Thy God shall be my God.”

Forgetting the world and everything, except God. He is found only by the paths taught in the Gospel. Grandeur of the human soul.

“Just Father, the world has not known you, but I have known you.”

Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.

I separated myself from him:

Dereliquerunt me lantern aquae vivae.

“My God, will you abandon me?”

May I not be eternally separated from him.

“This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ.”

Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ.

I separated myself from him; I fled him, renounced him, crucified him.

May I never be separated from him!

He is only kept by the paths taught in the Gospel. Total and sweet renunciation. Total submission to Jesus Christ and to my director. Eternally in joy for a day of trial on earth.

Non obliviscar sermones tuos. Amen.

Types of Religious Experience

Public Sensory Object

- (1) **Common**: a common object experienced as supernatural (e.g., experiencing a dove as an angel)
- (2) **Uncommon**: experiencing a supernatural object (e.g., Moses sees the burning bush, Joseph Smith sees Moroni)

Private Sensations

- (3) **Describable**: e.g., Peter's sack lunch, Jacob's ladder
- (4) **Indescribable**: mystical experiences

Without Sensations

- (5) **A mental seeing/experiencing** (e.g., St. Theresa)

[Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (1978)]

What do you think?

Do you agree with Pascal?

Is it reasonable to wager on God's
existence?

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God...

...exists.

...does not exist.

Believe	(1) Infinite bliss	(3) I'm still a better person.
Don't Believe	(2) Infinite misery	(4) No reward, no punishment.

$$1/2(\infty+5) = \infty \text{ bliss}$$

$$1/2(\infty+0) = \infty \text{ misery}$$

Pascal's Wager

	Heads	Tails	
Choose Heads	(1) Win \$100	(3) Win \$2.	$\frac{1}{2}(100+2) = +\$51$
Choose Tails	(2) Lose \$100	(4) No win, no loss.	$\frac{1}{2}(-100+0) = -\$50$

Extra Hypotheses

What you do with your life: What you find upon dying:	Wager on: God Exists	Wager on: Agnosticism & Skepticism
God Exists ...And rewards only agnostic skeptics!	Infinite Loss	Infinite Gain
God Exists ...And is content to reward all theists regardless of their particular religion.	Infinite Gain	Infinite Loss
God Exists ...And loves all humans and rewards them all!	Infinite Gain	Infinite Gain
God Exists ...And rewards all but those that followed false gods.	Infinite Loss (Unless you happened to pick the right religion)	Infinite Gain
God Exists ...And sends all people who lack the right beliefs to eternal hell.	Infinite Loss (Unless you happened to pick the right religion)	Infinite Loss
There is no God, or God doesn't care	Mortal Life Wasted Finite Loss	Mortal Life Unwasted Finite Gain

Wagering Just Once

	Heads / Tails
Choose correctly	(1) Win \$10 million
Choose incorrectly	(2) Lose \$1 million (or 20 years labor)

With multiple plays, you will win on average
\$9 million per play.

But: If you were allowed to play just once, would you play?