

1 Pascal's Wager (1623 – 1662)

Blaise Pascal and Pensees

2 Reason is insufficient to find certainty

- Reason is also insufficient in proving God's existence
- Faith should be seen as a Wager since no proof can be given
- The wager was only claimed to be a means to find a belief in the Christian tradition

3 The Visible World

- It is only an atom in the wide infinite Universe
- Imagination can not fathom the universe
- What is Man in comparison to the infinite?

4 Man is between nothing and infinite

- Man cannot really understand his place nor the relationship between the mind and body (108)
- Pascal is critical of Descartes conception of God
- Imagination is the deceitful part in man
- Pascal also like Bacon talks of deceptive powers in addition to imagination (108)

5 Everything deceives man

- Nothing shows him the truth
- Neither reason nor senses provides an adequate guide
- All unhappiness arises from on source or fact
 - The dissatisfaction of what we have
 - The reason for it is natural poverty of our feeble condition

6 Most men are not interested in Philosophy or Science

- Man is made to think but will do anything to avoid it
- He or she would rather dance and sing and play in games
- We think of always the past and future and scarcely ever about the present
- Hence we never live (in the present)

7 Religion and God

- God should not force religion on others this would be terror instead
- Pascal thinks one should make religion lovable because most hate it and fear it is true

- God has provided a church
- God is hidden unless one searches with all his heart

8 The Condition of Man is bad

- Imagine (analogy) men are chained and are going to be executed and each one goes and our death is ultimately coming
- Setting the stage for the wager (110)
 - It would be easy if there were clear signs of God
 - It would be easy if saw no evidence of a creator – negative would be only answer

9 Pascal's Lists some contradictions before wager

- It is incomprehensible that God should exist and it is incomprehensible that he should not exist
- It is incomprehensible that the soul exist and It is incomprehensible that should should not exist
- It is incomprehensible that the world be created It is incomprehensible that the world not be created
- It is incomprehensible that to have original sin and It is incomprehensible that it should not be

10 Pascal's Wager

- The first step is to consider the persons the wager is being suggested to
- A person that is neither convinced that God exists or convinced that God does not exist
- The first premise assumes that Either God does not exist or that the God of the Christian church exists

11 Pascal puts it this way

- God is or God is not , Which way should we incline?
- There is no deductive certain proof – so we are dealing with probabilities
- Some will claim that in a game one can decline to play – but alas not this game
- One cannot not play this game

12 The Argument

- You either act with indifference to God or you act in a way that accepts his edicts or way
- Logic of belief – Pascal realizes that one cannot just decide to believe in God
- But one can act in such a way that is conducive to belief or not being indifferent

13 Possible worlds and possible choices - Dominance

- You suppose both possible courses and weigh the courses of action
- Suppose God does not exist
 - In this case, both actions are on a par
 - You live your life with no bad effects in either case from supernatural intervention
- Suppose God exists
 - One course leads to eternal damnation
 - One course leads to eternal salvation

14 Pascal's idea of faith

- Pascal assumes that even if one is in some doubt acting in a pious way can ultimately remove doubt
- What if one challenges the presupposition that one gives up little in lifestyle to adopt a Christian life
- Then the Dominance argument is challenged and expectation is offered

15 Pascal's expectation is given

- Perhaps I sacrifice too much
- Pascal offers the policy of maximizing expectation
- Take a bet on heads or tails if it is equal then one bet is indifferent to another
- So suppose God exists = $\frac{1}{2}$ and God does not exist = $\frac{1}{2}$
- On the other hand if heads plays twice as much then it is wise to bet on heads

16 Argument from expectation (continued)

- If it is an equal chance that God does not exist, then the choice is obvious
 - Eternal Damnation versus a worldly life of pleasures
 - A worldly life of pleasure is not as valuable as eternal damnation
 - So, a pious life should be taken

17 Criticism of expectation

- Pascal offers another argument that may be called argument from dominating expectation
- It starts off with a new premise
- Suppose someone argues that the probability of God existing is not equal to $\frac{1}{2}$
- Suppose God exists probability is non-zero

18 Argument from Dominating expectation

- A new assumption
- Suppose one rejects that the probability is equal to $\frac{1}{2}$
- Pascal then assumes that at least it is non-zero
- If it is non-zero, then the finite infinite factor addresses this issue
- A set of finite pleasures obviously does not compare to a life of eternal damnation
 - One is infinite and the other is finite

- 19 Pascal offers hope
- When you act in a non-indifferent way the belief will come
 - The pleasures you were afraid of losing will soon be realized to be a pale substitute for the new life
 - Pascal assures you that it is true in his own experience (112)
- 20 A new approach through the heart
- We feel through the heart
 - Heart experiences God not reason
 - Faith is a gift of God
 - Truth can be known through the heart
 - Intuitive knowledge of space and time and mathematics
 - Nature excludes a true skeptic
- 21 Christian Religion teaches two truths
- Two truths
 - There is a God we can know
 - That there is a corruption in his nature which renders them unworthy of him
 - Man must know his state of wretchedness
 - The Christian God is God of the love
 - The Christian God is the only redemption
 - Deism and Atheism both lack the light of Jesus Christ
 - Grace and not reason is the true road