

Pascal's Wager (published in 1670)

Yes; but you must wager. It is not optional. You are embarked. Which will you choose then? Let us see. Since you must choose, let us see which interests you least. You have two things to lose, the true and the good; and two things to stake, your reason and your will, your knowledge and your happiness; and your nature has two things to shun, error and misery. Your reason is no more shocked in choosing one rather than the other, since you must of necessity choose. This is one point settled. But your happiness? Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is.

From **Pascal's Pensées number 233**

PREMISES

1. Reason cannot prove God's existence
2. We need to decide: Should we believe or not?
3. If we believe: nothing to lose, everything to gain (eternal life in heaven)
4. If we don't believe: everything to lose (hell?)

CONCLUSION

The sensible option is therefore to believe

Problems

- 1) It is simply an appeal to crude self interest. Would God be persuaded of our belief?
- 2) Can we really believe something simply because it is in our interest to do so?
- 3) It is based on the assumption that God rewards belief (with infinite life). This assumption may not be correct
- 4) Why not take the “atheist wager”? Act in a good way. If God does not exist, you will be remembered by people. If God exists, perhaps you may be rewarded by Him anyway?
- 5) The wager only says why we should believe. It cannot prove that God exists