Pascal's Wager

In his famous Wager, Blaise Pascal (1623–62) offers the reader an argument that it is rational to strive to believe in God. Philosophical debates about this classic argument have continued until our own times. This volume provides a comprehensive examination of Pascal's Wager, including its theological framework, its place in the history of philosophy, and its importance to contemporary decision theory. The volume starts with a valuable primer on infinity and decision theory for students and non-specialists. A sequence of chapters then examines topics including the Wager's underlying theology, its influence on later philosophical figures, and contemporary analyses of the Wager including Alan Hájek's challenge to its validity, the many-gods objection, and the ethics of belief. The final five chapters explore various ways in which the Wager has inspired contemporary decision theory, including questions related to infinite utility, imprecise probabilities, and infinitesimals.

Paul Bartha is Professor and Head of the Department of Philosophy, University of British Columbia. He is the author of By Parallel Reasoning: The Construction and Evaluation of Analogical Arguments (2010).

Lawrence Pasternack is Professor of Philosophy at Oklahoma State University. His publications include Kant's Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: An Interpretation and Defense (2014).
Classic Philosophical Arguments

Over the centuries, a number of individual arguments have formed a crucial part of philosophical enquiry. The volumes in this series examine these arguments, looking at the ramifications and applications which they have come to have, the challenges which they have encountered, and the ways in which they have stood the test of time.

Titles in the series
The Prisoner’s Dilemma
Edited by Martin Peterson
The Original Position
Edited by Timothy Hinton
The Brain in a Vat
Edited by Sanford C. Goldberg
Pascal’s Wager
Edited by Paul Bartha and Lawrence Pasternack
Pascal's Wager

Edited by
Paul Bartha
University of British Columbia, Vancouver
Lawrence Pasternack
Oklahoma State University
Contents

List of Figures and Tables page vii
List of Contributors ix
Acknowledgments x

Introduction 1
Paul Bartha and Lawrence Pasternack

Part I Historical Context and Influence 25

1 Pascal's Wager and the Origins of Decision Theory: Decision-Making by Real Decision-Makers 27
James Franklin

2 The Wager and Pascal's Theology 45
William Wood

3 Pascal's Wager and the Ethics for Inquiry about God 64
Paul Moser

4 Pascal and His Wager in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries 84
Adam Buben

5 The Wager and William James 101
Jeffrey Jordan

Part II Assessment 121

6 The (In)validity of Pascal's Wager 123
Alan Hájek

7 The Many-Gods Objection to Pascal's Wager: A Defeat, then a Resurrection 148
Craig Duncan
vi Contents

8 The Wager as Decision under Ignorance: Decision-Theoretic Responses to the Many-Gods Objection 168
Lawrence Pasternack

9 Rationality and the Wager 187
Paul Saka

10 The Role of Pascal’s Wager in Authentic Religious Commitment 209
Joshua Golding

Part III Extensions 223

11 The Arbitrary Prudentialism of Pascal’s Wager and How to Overcome It by Using Game Theory 225
Elliott Sober

12 Pascal’s Wager and the Dynamics of Rational Deliberation 236
Paul Bartha

13 Infinity in Pascal’s Wager 260
Graham Oppy

14 Pascal’s Wager and Imprecise Probability 278
Susanna Rinard

15 Do Infinitesimal Probabilities Neutralize the Infinite Utility in Pascal’s Wager? 293
Sylvia Wenmackers

Bibliography 315
Index 329
Figures and Tables

Figures
11.1 Winding Road  page 231
11.2 Hill Climbing  232
12.1 Infinite Relative Utility  243
12.2 Equal Relative Utility  243

Tables
1.1 Dominance Reasoning  3
1.2 EMV Reasoning  4
1.3 EU Reasoning  5
1.4 Pascal’s Wager  7
1.5 Pascal’s Wager  10
1.6 Pascal’s Wager with Probabilities  14
1.1 Pascal’s Wager  37
1.2 Pascal’s Wager with Huge Payoff  40
1.3 Contemporary Wager  42
6.1 (Super)Dominance Wager  124
6.2 Wager with Probability ½  127
6.3 Damnation Has Negative Infinite Utility  133
6.4 Infinite Surreal Utility  137
6.5 Vector-Valued Utilities  139
6.6 Long-Run Average Utilities  140
6.7 Finite Utility  141
6.8 Negative Infinite and Positive Finite Utilities  142
6.9 Relative Utilities  144
6.10 Superduperdominance  146
7.1 Pascal’s Wager  149
7.2 Two-God MGO  150
7.3 Three-God MGO  151
7.4 Three-God MGO with Finite Utilities  155
8.1 Pascal’s Wager  169
8.2 MGO  171
8.3 Trickster Deity  175
8.4 Universalism  177
8.5 Evil Deceiver  179
8.6 Our Judgment Flawed  180
9.1 Metaphysical Wager  189
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure/Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Mundane Wager</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>Hybrid Wager</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>Tragedy of the Commons</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>Wagerer's Dilemma</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>Strategies Compared</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>Wager Assuming P-Theology</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>Wager Assuming X-Theology</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>Wager Assuming God Does Not Exist</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>Wager with No Constraints on Prudentialism</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>Winding Road</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>Conjunctive Wager</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>Pascal's Wager</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>Many Jealous Gods</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>Canonical Wager, Relative Decision Table</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>Many Jealous Gods, Relative Decision Table</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>The Pantheon</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>Jealous and Grouchy</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>Jealous and Universalist</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>Jealous and Nice Cartel</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>Finite Utilities</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.10</td>
<td>X-Theology</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.11</td>
<td>Grouchy Cartel</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.12</td>
<td>Jealous and Grouchy Cartel</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.13</td>
<td>Grouchy and Nice</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.14</td>
<td>Grouchy, Nice, and Jealous</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.15</td>
<td>Jealous and Virtuous</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>Pascal's Wager</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>Relative Utilities</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>Mixed Strategies</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>Jealous and Nice</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>Grouchy and Nice</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>Jealous, Nice, Indifferent, and Perverse</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>Jealous, Nice, Perverse, and a Cartel</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>Jealous and Virtuous</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>Pascal's Wager</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>Pascal's Wager</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contributors

Paul Bartha is Professor and Head of the Department of Philosophy, University of British Columbia.

Adam Buben is Assistant Professor of Comparative Philosophy at Leiden University in the Netherlands.

Craig Duncan is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Ithaca College.

James Franklin is Professor at the School of Mathematics and Statistics, University of New South Wales.

Joshua Golding is Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Bellarmine University.

Alan Hájek is Professor at the School of Philosophy, Australian National University.

Jeffrey Jordan is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Delaware.

Paul Moser is Professor of Philosophy at Loyola University Chicago.

Graham Oppy is Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Graduate Program in Philosophy at Monash University.

Lawrence Pasternack is Professor of Philosophy at Oklahoma State University.

Susanna Rinard is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University.

Paul Saka is Professor at the University of Texas, Rio Grande.

Elliott Sober is Hans Reichenbach Professor and William F. Vilas Research Professor at the University of Wisconsin (Madison).

Sylvia Wenmackers is Research Professor at the Institute of Philosophy at KU Leuven.

William Wood is a Fellow and Tutor in Theology, and Associate Professor of Philosophical Theology at Oriel College, University of Oxford.
Acknowledgments

The co-editors would like to thank the contributors for providing a diverse and engaging set of perspectives on Pascal’s Wager. We are immensely grateful to UBC PhD candidate Sina Fazelpour, who created the combined Bibliography and edited all fifteen chapters for consistency of citations. We thank our many colleagues and students who read and commented on draft material; they are acknowledged in the individual chapters. Finally, we would like to thank Hilary Gaskin for her patience, advice, and support.