

Week 12 Summary: Applications: I. Pascal's Wager. II. Discounting. III. The value of life.

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Yustynn Panicker

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1 Pascal's Wager

1.1 Main Arguments

These are just the arguments meant to favor Pascal's Wager, without the counters. Personally, I think the arguments aren't great, but I'm probably also biased against them since I'm an atheist.

1.1.1 Argument from Superdominance

You lose nothing by believing, but you stand to gain a lot. Therefore, you should believe.

1.1.2 Argument from Expectation

As believing in God when God is real gives infinite utility, this act will always have a higher expectation

1.2 Some Premises and Attacks on Them

1.2.1 Positive probability for the existence of God

- Full atheists may maintain the claim that $P(God) = 0$

1.2.2 For the other three outcomes other than the (believe, God exists) outcomes, the utility values are finite

- Many Gods Objection
- Notion of infinite utility is suspect
- Would God really be unforgiving?

1.2.3 Being rational, you must maximize utility

- (point to Allais paradox, Ellsberg paradox) Maximizing expected utility may not be sufficient

1.2.4 The decision matrix is the same for everyone

- No it's not
 - E.g. people lose different things by restricting themselves to believing in God (e.g. if I were already living a relatively Christian life, it would cost me less to believe in God than someone who embodies Satanistic beliefs)

1.3 Attacks Against Validity

1.3.1 Mixed Strategies

- You could perform a random choice (between believing and not believing). The expected utility would still be infinity

1.3.2 Definition: Regularity of Probability Function

Probability function is **regular** iff it assigns probability 1 to logical truths, and 0 to contradictions

1.3.2.1 My Confusion I don't really get what this has to do with anything. I think he's arguing that one should stay open-minded, or else that one cannot be dogmatic about beliefs (e.g. dogmatically believe in God, as Pascal suggests) and still be rational.

The point here is that (assuming rationality necessitates regularity) you must regard any choice as a gamble. Not sure why. Something to do with not being dogmatic?

1.3.3 All Actions Have Infinite Utility

This is a bit of a weird one.

The idea here is that if you believe any act will *eventually* result in a non-zero chance that you believe in God, then *any* act (including choosing not to believe in God when presented with the wager) has the same expected utility of ∞ (because probability of eventually believing in god $\times \infty$ reward)

1.4 Meaning of Belief

It seems strange to think that a perfunctory belief in God satisfies the condition allowing you to go to heaven.

2 Qalys and Discounting

2.1 Qalys

Quality-adjusted life years. These are used by doctors to determine actions for people's lives The primary question is *should* future goods be discounted. Generally speaking, we do discount them. But *should* we?

2.2 Discounting

The thrust of the issue here is whether discounting *should* be done. Obviously, it often is done (in RL, in economics, etc).

2.2.1 Misc

- Economists are generally concerned with commodities (and tend to discount)
- Philosophers are generally concerned with well-being (and tend to be against discounting)

Author assumes that future well-being should not be discounted, and that this view is the norm.