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Criticism of Pascal's Wager

Pascal's wager is an application of decision theory to prove that it is always better to believe in god than not believing in god. He argued that it is always beneficial to believe in God, because the expected value to be gained from believing in will always be greater than the expected value derived from non-belief. Holistically it wasn't an argument for existence of god but a mere emphasis that as per decision theory, taking a decision of believing in god is always more fruitful than otherwise.

The wager is primarily based on two assumptions one it is based on that god rewards or punishes as described in Christian theology and secondly god doesn't exist.

The wager does not take into account the possibility of god started behaving differently than what it is mentioned in bible, what if he starts rewarding skepticism and punishing dogmatism, or rewarding honest reasoning and punishing feigned faith, or what if he does not punish belief or disbelief at all.

Secondly if there is more than one god like in case of Hinduism, then the wager doesn't hold good as one doesn't know which god will reward and which one will punish. Or taking it even on other extreme that only the non Christian gods exist and they punish the Christians for following the belief.

The wager also failed to mention any financial cost relating to beliefs. Today when most of the religious practices are somehow associated with donation and money spending activities, financial consideration is quite crucial in deciding for belief. In fact most of the missionary money in late nineteenth century and mid twentieth century is spent on making people follow Christianity in vast areas of Africa and Asia.

Permissibility of following beliefs

In his essay 'The ethics of belief', W.K.Clifford wants us to believe that forming our beliefs is the correct way is a matter of true ethical importance. Clifford argument were that all beliefs influence action in one way or another and actions which are based on unjustified beliefs either cause harm directly or will promote credulity leading to broader social ills so therefore it is always wrong to hold unjustified beliefs.

If we look broadly both of his premises are questionable – first objection is not with evidence but with the falsity of beliefs and secondly his entire examples involve beliefs that have consequences for welfare of others. To counter his stand he made no differentiation between action which is intrinsically wrong rather than instrumentally wrong. Instrumental actions are not wrong in themselves but they do cause harm. So if unsupported belief is intrinsically wrong then it is clear that it will always be wrong and if they will always be wrong then it can't be believed without sufficient evidence and thus raises the questions over permissibility of complete faith.

Problem of Evil

We all believe god is omnipotent and omnipresent, and then the question is why evil happens in our world. If the ontological argument of god is true then we all have justifying reasons for beliefs in god's existence. But here lies a contradiction – the problem of evil.

1. If god exists then she'd be omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent – this is believer's beliefs.
2. If god is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent then there is no evil

Taking both in same context, if god exists then there is no evil. But as we all know there is evil so does it prove that god doesn't exist.

This is the problem of evil for theism, unless there is a way around it should provide theists to give up their beliefs based on pain of irrationality.

Few arguments do come up to find solution of this problem but they fall short on proving the base hypothesis of omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent god.

A) Evil is essential as a counterpart to good as there can't be no good without some evil – this raises the questions on god's powers so he/ she is not perfect as theist assume it to be. Secondly if we only need a little bit of evil to contrast to good then why are horrors like tsunami in East Asia in 2004?

B) Evil is not due to god but to human free will – then the question arises why god provided us with free will when so much misery results. Secondly lots of evil aren't related to free will at all like earthquakes etc. so why do they occur if god is good and he protects innocents.

Thirdly why not god just give all of us excellent characters so that we all can choose the best possible way for betterment of society on a whole. If we take this argument to the extreme than free will in long run will result in god's action depends upon us than vice versa as theist want us to believe. So free will is incompatible with god's omnipotence and omniscient.