

# PASCAL'S MODIFIED WAGER

by  
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Pascal's now-famous wager is as follows: it pays to believe in a God, because if you do so, your worst possible position is as good as the non-believer's best possible position.

	God exists	God doesn't exist
I believe in God	Infinite reward	Neither reward nor loss
I don't believe in God	Infinite loss	Neither reward nor loss

Fig. 1: a graphical representation of Pascal's Wager

This is an elegantly simple and pragmatic reason to believe in a God. However, those pesky *philosophes* did their best to ruin such a beautiful theory with an ugly fact – the “argument from inconsistent revelations” – that is, that since salvation in many religions is dependent on exclusive devotion to those religions, Pascal's mathematical advantage is reduced practically to zero.

	God A exists	No God exists
I don't believe in God	Infinite loss	Neither reward nor loss
I believe in God A	Infinite reward	Neither reward nor loss
I believe in God B	Infinite loss	Neither reward nor loss
I believe in God C	Infinite loss	Neither reward nor loss
And so on, <i>ad infinitum</i>	"	"

Fig. 2: a graphical representation of why belief in any one God only marginally improves one's chances of attaining Paradise, assuming each God is as likely as any other.

This, however, demonstrates a lack of vision on behalf of those 18<sup>th</sup> century wannabes. The argument from inconsistent revelations does not overturn Pascal's Wager: on the contrary, in making full use of our faculties of calculation and reasoning, we can use the Wager to determine not only that we *should* believe in a God, but also *which* God we should believe in.

The first proposal (that we should believe in a God) is easy to establish. Even though there may be a Pantheon of 100 or 1,000 jealous Gods, of which only one really exists, whose identity is not discernible before death, it is still clear that the person who believes has a very small chance of infinite reward, while he who does not believe has none. The Wager still holds, in that (no matter which of the Pantheon you choose to believe in) you are better off than he who believes in none of them.

The second question (*which* God we should believe in) is more difficult. In order to decide which religion is objectively the best (according to the subject of the article, my proposed Pascal's Modified Wager), we must create a ranking, in which those religions which punish non-believers more harshly are promoted (so that we are less likely to excite the wrath of one of the more vengeful Gods, should he or she turn out to be the true God), while particularly implausible religions are relegated (since implausible beliefs are, we assume, less likely to be correct). Points should also be rewarded for the quality of the Paradise in question, for security of tenure once it has

been reached, and so on. In this way only can one logically decide which religion is best. The table below demonstrates my attempt at a reasonable marking scheme for religions, hammered out after many long hours of research.

Quality	Point score	Justification
Eternal damnation for non-believers	+250	Less chance of being damned
Personal God	-175	Implausible
Any mention of dragons, etc.	-325	Highly implausible
Virgins in Paradise	+1 (per virgin)	Higher quality of paradise
Reincarnation opportunities	+250	Sounds like fun
Denies orthodox history/science	-150	Implausible
Salvation based on faith alone	+350	Easy to fulfil
Worship required on a weekly basis	-100	Inconvenient
Deathbed confessions acceptable	+300	Back-door access to Paradise
<i>Alternatively, potential for repentance post mortem</i>	+350	Back-door access to Paradise
Limited number of people in paradise	- (10 <sup>15</sup> / people)	Less chance of salvation
Eternal and irrevocable Paradise	+250	Relatively little effort
Prohibition of consumption of meats	-100	Cruel
Provision for Sabbath/day of rest	+75	Quite pleasant

Fig. 3: an exposition of a scheme for allocating points to religions in order to rank them in order of utility/quality/desirability. Please send all comments and objections to Lambeth Palace, London SE1 7JU, enclosing a self-addressed stamped envelope and two 50p pieces.

Totting up the scores, we come to the following fascinating conclusion – although China and India follow close behind, the English have it.

Religion	Total Score	Notes
Baha'i	+225	
Buddhism	+400	
Catholicism	+125	Foiled by their own guilt
Anglicanism	+450	
Calvinism	+250	Perhaps deserved greater implausibility penalties
Hinduism	+375	
Islam	-197	Virgins were ultimately insufficient
Jehovah's Witnesses	-6.9 × 10 <sup>9</sup>	Suffered on literal interpretation of the Bible
Judaism	+75	
Pastafarianism	+350	

Fig. 4: the final tallies for many of the world's major religions. Owing to s. 14 of the Data Protection Act 1998, we are not at liberty to publish the calculations which produced the above statistics. Enquiries and corrections should be submitted in the same way as stipulated in the note to Fig. 3.

The following master-stroke shall serve as my conclusion. I have searched long and hard for a deeper meaning to these statistics. The following graph represents the result of hours of toil and mathematical and theological research. In it, a cubic function of  $x$  is superimposed on a graph of the religions' scores, plotted against the number of wives of the religions' founders.

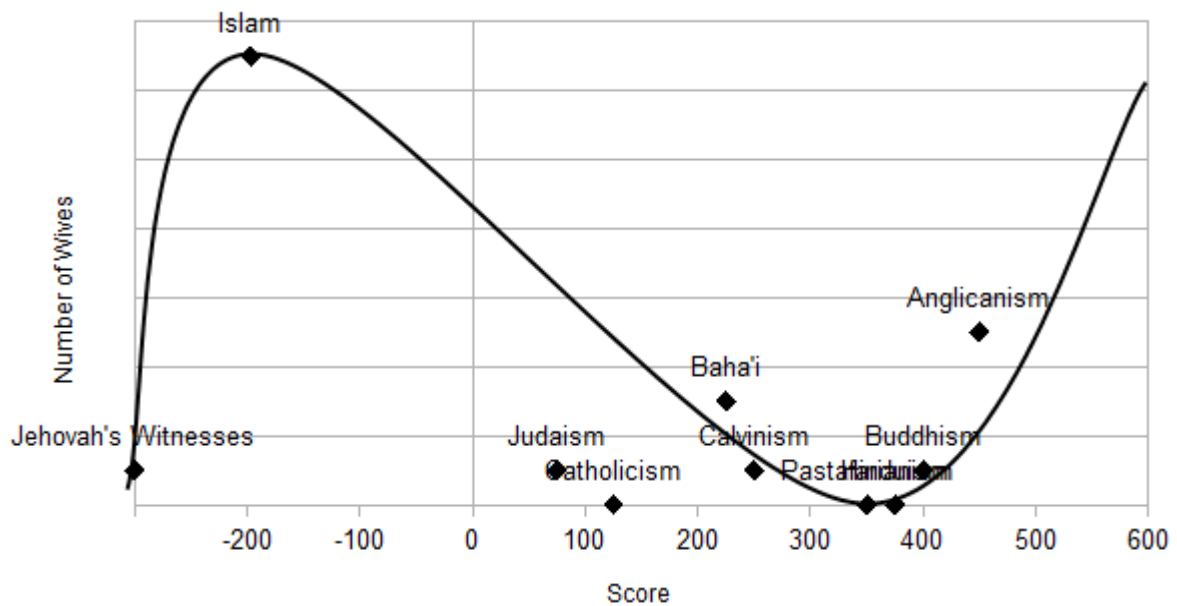


Fig. 5:  $x^3 + 6.9 \times 10^9 x^2 - 4.8 \times 10^{12} x + 8.48 \times 10^{14}$ , superimposed on a graph of religions' scores against the number of wives of their respective founders.

The implication, I think, is as obvious as it is ground-breaking.