

Wagering on God's Existence

some thoughts on the rationality of faith by

Ken Chant

Neither the theist nor the atheist positions are susceptible to unarguable proof. Both propositions (that there is a God or that there is no God) must be accepted or rejected on the basis of faith alone. That is, it is no more an offence against reason to say that God exists as it is to say that he does not exist. In the end, reason cannot help us here, for we can neither absolutely prove nor disprove the existence of God. It is finally just as much an act of faith to say, "There is no God!" as it is to say, "There is a God!"

But the consequences of those two affirmations differ enormously! If I **deny** the existence of God, I strip life of any purpose and value. Death becomes the only end and the grave, corruption, and total obliteration our only destiny. If I **affirm** the existence of God, then suddenly life takes on real purpose and measureless value. Death is no longer a thing to fear, the grave becomes only a temporary bed. Indeed, the aspect of all creation is changed –

*Heaven above is softer blue,
Earth around is sweeter green,
Something lives in every hue,
Christless eyes have never seen;
Birds with gladder songs o'erflow,
Flowers with deeper beauties shine,
Since I know, as now I know.
I am his, and he is mine.*

WAIT AND SEE?

Still, someone may say that the most reasonable stance is to "wait and see". But that is a piece of self-delusion, for we cannot help but choose either to accept or deny that God exists. This is because we are already on the journey to the grave when it will be too late to discover that we were wrong!

Suppose you are incurably ill and an unproved medicine is offered to you that has a good chance of making you well. Would either a neutral attitude or rejection be a rational choice?

Or again, an unconfirmed report reaches you that your house is on fire, would you just ignore it or reject it? Would you not "play it safe" and act on the report? Or again, either God is, or he is not. If I accept him, and then find at the moment of death that I was wrong, what have I lost? Except for a foolish dream, I have lost nothing as I slip into eternal oblivion and the cessation of all existence.

WHAT IF YOU ARE WRONG?

But if I reject God, and find when I die that I was wrong, it will then be too late to rectify my folly! I must then bear the consequences of scorning all the evidence that does indeed point towards his existence!

Given that I have nothing worthwhile to lose by believing, but may face irretrievable and awful loss if I do not believe, then atheism seems like an absurdly risky gamble!

So here then is a wager where, if I win, I win everything; but if I lose, I lose nothing!

If such a wager truly does exist, and it seems that it does, then only a fool would refuse to enter it! But we have already entered it! None of us can avoid it. Whether we like it or not, to make a choice against believing in God is to risk an appalling loss.

So once again, if God does not exist then it doesn't matter what I believe, for there is nothing either to gain or lose after death.

But if God does exist, then by not believing I squander the only chance I will ever have of eternal happiness.

WHY SUCH A PENALTY?

But why will atheism attract a dread penalty? Because if God is indeed Creator then he deserves my utmost love, obedience, worship, and trust. Therefore, failure to offer him these things is the direst crime and merits the worst penalty.

Any reasonable pondering of these things must lead to the conclusion that faith is the only safe path to take. There is nothing to lose but everything to gain by believing; but everything to lose and nothing to gain by not believing.

Further, every unbeliever should face the fact that he or she cannot be sure that God is a fairy tale. At the very least it must be acknowledged that God may indeed be real, if unproven.

RISKING EVERYTHING TO GAIN NOTHING!

To delay this discovery until it is too late is to risk everything while gaining nothing that is truly worthwhile.

But someone might say that the risk is worth it because the cost of being a Christian is too high!

But what does a Christian lose that is worthwhile when measured against the marvellous benefits of a Christian life? How can I lose when I wager the finite on the chance of winning the infinite?

Of course, we have many greater and higher reasons to believe in God than a mere fear of being right or wrong! But this is nonetheless a strong reason to believe and highlights the folly of deliberate unbelief.