

# Introduction to Philosophy

Philosophy 110W  
Spring 2012  
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Class #24 - Moral Motivation

# Morality and Religion

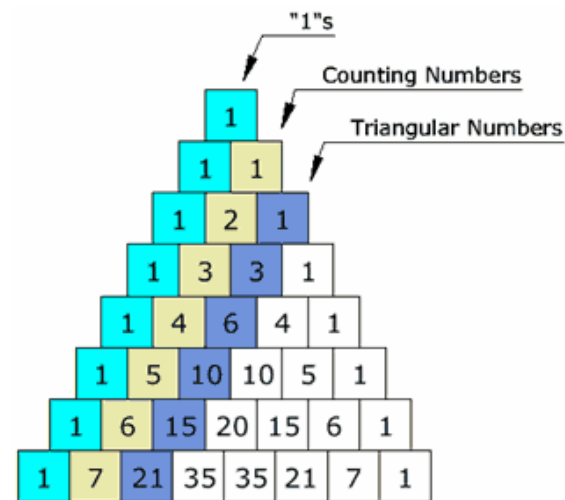
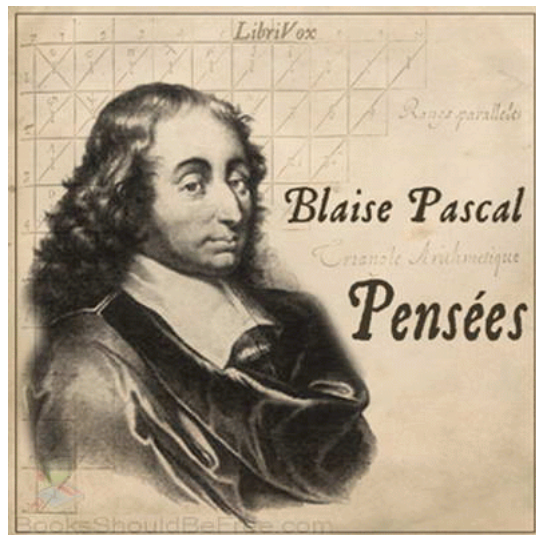
Can we justify morality without appeal to religion?

- Two views about morality
  - ▶ The religious moralist
  - ▶ The secular moralist
- Some people believe that we must appeal to God to support moral beliefs, to motivate personal sacrifice.
  - ▶ By punishing wrongdoers and rewarding those who do good, the idea of God creates moral motivation.
  - ▶ Without God, some people argue, life has no meaning and there is no reason to be good.
- The nihilist and the religious moralist worry that secular morality is incoherent.
  - ▶ If so, we have to choose between nihilism and religious morality.



# Pascal's Wager

- Some people hesitate to embrace religious morality in the absence of what they deem to be compelling proof of the existence of God.
- The seventeenth-century philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal argued that we need not have decisive proof of God's existence in order to adopt a religious morality.
- We should act as if we believe in God, whether or not we do.
- A mathematical argument





# Expected Value

- The expected value of a bet
  - ▶  $EV = (\text{Payoff} \times \text{Odds of winning}) - (\text{Cost of the Bet} \times \text{Odds of losing})$
- Imagine that you bet six dollars that you will roll a one or a two on one roll of a fair die.
  - ▶ If you roll a one or a two, you get six dollars.
  - ▶ If you roll a three, four, five, or six, you lose six dollars.
  - ▶ Your odds of winning are  $1/3$ ; your odds of losing are  $2/3$ .
  - ▶ So, your expected value is  $(6 \times 1/3) - (6 \times 2/3) = -\$2$ .
  - ▶ This means that on average, you will lose \$2 for each time you make this bet.
  - ▶ If you play this bet a thousand times, you are likely to lose about two thousand dollars.
- Imagine, instead, that you get 2 to 1 odds.
  - ▶ If you roll a one or a two, you get twelve dollars.
  - ▶ If you roll a three, four, five, or six, you lose only six dollars.
  - ▶ Now your expected value would be  $(12 \times 1/3) - (6 \times 2/3) = \$0$ .
  - ▶ The bet is even and you can expect to break even, within predictable ranges of deviation, over any number of chances.

# Four Possibilities

- In Pascal's wager, we are wondering whether or not to act as if God exists.
  - ▶ We do not know whether God exists or not.
  - ▶ We can act as if God exists, or we can act as if God does not exist.
- Four possibilities

	God exists	God does not exist
Act as if God exists	Finite Sacrifice + Infinite reward = <b>Infinite reward</b>	<b>Finite sacrifice</b>
Act as if God does not exist	Finite Reward + Infinite Punishment = <b>Infinite Punishment</b>	<b>Finite reward</b>

# Expected Value and God's Existence

- The expected outcome of acting as if God exists:
  - ▶  $EV = (\text{Payoff} \times \text{Odds of winning}) - (\text{Cost of the Bet} \times \text{Odds of losing})$
  - ▶  $EV = P(G) \times \text{infinity} - P(N) \times \text{some finite value}$
  - ▶ The expected value of acting as if God exists will be infinitely large on any finite value of  $P(G)$ .
  - ▶ An infinite number minus a finite number is an infinite number.
  - ▶ So, the expected value of acting as if one believes in God is infinitely positive.
- The expected value of acting as if God does not exist is infinitely negative.
  - ▶  $EV = P(N) \times \text{some finite value} - P(G) \times \text{infinity}$
  - ▶ The expected result of acting as if God does not exist is infinite punishment.
- So, Pascal argues, purely on a rational basis, in the absence of knowing whether God does or does not exist, we should act as if she does.

# The Problem of Egoism

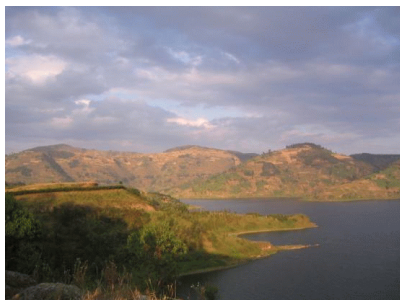
- It seems that the religious moralist has an easier solution to the problem of egoism than the secular moralist.
- But the fear of God does not seem to work as a moral motivation.
  - Even religious people act immorally.
- More importantly, respecting persons out of fear of God is mere egoism, and not morality.
- Further, there are secular answers to the problem.
- We can find moral motivation in the abilities of humans to suffer and feel happiness, and in our desire to live in a world in which people are moral.
- Socrates argues that we should be moral because it is in our interests.

# **Socrates' Account of Moral Motivation**

Logan

# Relativism and Nihilism

- Both anti-absolutist positions entail that we can neither truly praise nor criticize other cultures.
- Words of praise (“That’s good”)
  - ▶ Nihilism: they are empty
  - ▶ Subjectivism: they refer only to my own preferences
  - ▶ Conventionalism: they refer to adherence to my cultural standards



# Rwanda 1995

- Encouraged by political and civic leaders, the massacring of Tutsis spread from region to region. Following the militia's example, Hutus young and old rose to the task. Neighbors hacked neighbors to death in their homes, and colleagues hacked colleagues to death in their workplaces. Priests killed their parishioners, and elementary-school teachers killed their students. Many of the largest massacres occurred in churches and stadiums where Tutsis had sought refuge - often at the invitation of local authorities, who then oversaw their execution. In mid-April, at least five thousand Tutsis were packed in the Gatwaro Stadium, in the western city of Kibuye; as the massacre there began, gunmen in the bleachers shot zigzag waves of bullets and tossed grenades to make the victims stampede back and forth before militiamen waded in to finish the job with machetes.
- Throughout Rwanda, mass rape and looting accompanied the slaughter. Militia bands, fortified with potent banana beer and assorted drugs, were bused from massacre to massacre. Hutu prisoners were organized in work details to clear cadavers. Radio announcers reminded listeners to take special care to disembowel pregnant victims. As an added incentive to the killers, Tutsis' belongings were parceled out in advance - the radio, the couch, the goat, the opportunity to rape a young girl. A councilwoman in one Kigali neighborhood was reported to have offered fifty Rwandese francs apiece (about 30 cents at the time) for severed heads, a practice known as "selling cabbages". (*The New Yorker*, December 18, 1995)

# Objectivity and Reasons

- Moral objectivity allows us to consider objective reasons for morality.
- Appeals to reason-giving seem essential to the establishment of a moral position.
- We can talk about the reasons that an act is right or wrong.
- The reasons can be used as the basis for a universal morality.
- Objectivity means that there are morally correct answers to ethical questions.
- It does not mean that everything that one might think is a moral question is in fact a moral question.
- Objectivity should also not entail dogmatism.
- There are hard moral questions.