

# Pascal's wager

Late last year, the famous polemist Christopher Hitchens died after a long battle with cancer. Hitchens generated a great deal of controversy with his writings assailing the existence of God and the impact of religion. His book, "God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything," was a bestseller and earned him a place among the leaders of the new atheism.

Only God knows his final resting place, and as Catholics, we hope that he saved his soul. While not judging him, we can examine his philosophical positions. From a purely logical position, he has either learned that he was wrong or he no longer exists, with his former body being a lump of unconscious matter.

I often considered the notion that atheists can never enjoy the moment that would prove them right. Empirical evidence proving there is no afterlife is impossible.

Hitchens' dilemma reminds me of Pascal's wager, an argument I learned while I was an undergraduate philosophy major. Pascal speculated that believers have a lot to gain in the afterlife if they are right and little to lose if they are wrong. On the other hand, atheists have much to lose after death but little to gain. A betting person should then be a theist with its high reward / low risk position.

Religion is best not based on a wager. Belief should be tied to love and trust, but Pascal's wager is a pleasant reassurance for believers.