

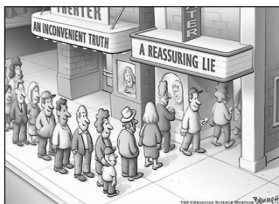
PHIL 110A  
**Week 7: Truth & Wagers**  
 Paul Thagard

Coherence

Truth

Betting on God

Please turn off and put  
 away all electronics.



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## Explanatory Coherence

1. Explanation. Hypotheses cohere with what they explain. Oscar Pistorius.
2. Data priority. Observed evidence has a degree of coherence.
3. Contradiction. Contradictory and competing hypotheses are incoherent with each other.
4. Acceptance. Propositions are accepted if doing so maximizes coherence.

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## What is Truth?

1. Truth is coherence (Hegel). Problem: many coherent systems, but not all can be true.
2. Truth is correspondence to reality (Aristotle). Coherence is a criterion of truth, not truth. Problem: how can you know reality independent of the representation of it?
3. Truth is an illusion, relative to particular individuals ("true for me") or societies ("social construction").

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## Scientific Realism

1. Scientific realism is the view that science aims for the truth and to some extent succeeds.
2. Alternatives:
  - a) Instrumentalism: science is just a tool.
  - b) Empiricism: science only knows truths about what is observable.
  - c) Social construction: science is a social process and has no access to truth, which is also social.

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## Scientific Realism: Argument For

1. Scientific realism is the best explanation for:
  - a) Technological success of science.
  - b) Cumulative nature of science.
  - c) Intersubjectivity of science.
  - d) Resistance of evidence to theoretical manipulation.
2. Therefore, science achieves (approximate) knowledge of the truth.

Responses: science makes mistakes.

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## Pascal's Wager

1. Decisions should be made on the basis of what choice provides the greatest expected utility, i.e. the biggest payoff.
  2. Believing in God has more expected utility than not believing in God, because of the prospect of eternal reward.
  3. Therefore, we should decide to believe in God.
- Immediate payoff: religious people are happier.

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## Pascal's Payoffs

	<b>God Exists</b>	<b>No God</b>
Believe in God	Infinite gain (reward)	Small loss
Don't believe in God	Infinite loss (punishment)	Small gain

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## Problems with Pascal's Wager

1. You can't choose what to believe.
2. You might choose the wrong religion out of dozens available, so your chances of choosing the right god are slim.
3. Atheist's wager: rather than worrying about what religion is right, enjoy this life.
4. Beliefs ought to be formed by evidence and reason, not by wishful thinking.

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