

Better Beliefs for Nonbelievers

Paul VanRaden

Presented at University of Maryland, College Park

November 18, **1996**

5pm in the Student Union

Explanation

- The University of Maryland – College Park had an Atheist Student Association that started in 1995.
- Their club had about 60 members, but fewer than 20 attended my talk.
- November 18, 1996 was the only time I spoke on Atheism.
- I was not trying to convert them, instead I was “preaching to the choir” so to speak.

Topics

- Can you prove that Santa does not exist?
- Belief theory
- Our place in the universe
- Values and goals

Student categories	Believers in God
English majors	67%
Economics majors	84%
Blacks	90%
Whites	64%

Statistics on belief in God from
U.S. News and World Report,
April 12, 1993

Separation of Church and State

- Thomas Jefferson, 1786:
- “To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves, is sinful and tyrannical.”
- Susan B Anthony was an agnostic.
- Why is she saying
IN GOD WE TRUST?



\$ \$ Win The Lottery \$ \$

(St. Petersburg Paradox)

Pick a Prize	Probability	Payoff
No gain	1 / 1	\$ 1
Small gain	1 / 100	\$ 100
Huge gain	1 / 1,000,000	\$ 1,000,000
Infinite gain	1 / ∞	\$ ∞

Solution: The infinite prize does not exist.

Please explain to me:

- **What Does God Do?**

- Create the universe
- Provide souls for babies
- Keep the souls in heaven happy
- Forgive your sins
- Battle with the devil
- Heal the sick, comfort the poor
- OR, NOTHING

- **Where Might God Be?**

- Roaming our universe
- Hiding in a 5th or 6th dimension
- Disguised as an angel
- Appearing as himself
- Vacationing with other gods
- Sleeping or deceased
- OR, NOWHERE

How Big is the Universe?

- **Finite**

- In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth
[Genesis 1:1]
- The universe began with a big bang
- God is a mathematician *[Albert Einstein]*

- **Infinite**

- The universe has 4 infinite dimensions
- X: North-South
- Y: East-West
- Z: Up-Down
- T: Past-Future
- No end in any direction (Cartesian)

View of the Universe

- Masses circle, collide, explode
- [Edward R. Harrison,](#)
[*Cosmology*](#)

Objects	Visibility
Local (earth, sun, moon)	Visible
Distant (Pluto, etc.)	Invisible
Big Bang	Bright, local
Matter far away	Dim, distant

Bibles vs. Knowledge

- **Old Testament**

- “God knows very well that the instant you eat [the fruit] you will become like him, for your eyes will be opened – you will know good from evil” *[the serpent, Genesis 3:5]*
- “It was there [Babel] that Jehovah confused them by giving them many languages.” *[Genesis 11:9]*

- **New Testament**

- “Don’t get involved in arguing over unanswerable questions.” *[Titus 3:9]*
- “But if you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to have a large millstone tied around your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea.” *[Matthew 18:6]*



Paul VanRaden (left) on Mommy's lap in front row at church, 1963

THE CONGREGATION

Have You Sold Your Soul?

- What was it worth?
 - How old was it?
 - Where was it before?
 - Is it recyclable?
 - What is its function?
 - Is it useful without a body?
 - Does body or soul go to heaven?
- “Jesus then began rising into the sky, and went on to heaven”
[Luke 24:15]

Atheism Lets You

Discover new truths

Exceed old limits

Be more accepting

Have more fun

Do more good

Do more evil

Play God

Charles Darwin

John Lennon

Paul VanRaden

Ted Turner

Thomas Paine

Joe Stalin

Adolf Hitler

My Goals

- Establish the right to migrate
 - (Desegregate the world)
- Make atheism respectable and popular
- Help people to choose better genes for their children

Conclusions

- An infinite universe requires no creation, no **God**, no **Santa**, no doubt.
- Knowledge and truth are better than faith
- Good **Christians** are better than bad **atheists**
- Good **atheists** are the best...
- until better **atheists** evolve