

'No God' debate brings in packed house, questions

By Jarrod Yeo
Panther Post

Does God exist? The question mankind has grappled with since the earliest of times took centre stage as UPEI professors Joe Velaidum and Malcolm Murray

engaged in an hour-long debate before a packed house at McMillan Hall Feb. 27.

The highly anticipated debate, organized by UPEI's political studies society, pitted Velaidum, UPEI's religious studies buff against Malcolm, an atheist and philosopher. Each candidate de-

livered an opening statement and wrangled a few surprise questions submitted by students and faculty members.

Velaidum said while the idea of God as an "old man with a gray beard" is outdated and not accepted by Christian theologians but that we owe it to ourselves to un-

derstand we are not merely a product of evolution.

"We are not solely a product of slime that crawled out of the water.

"We are endowed with the capacity for sacrificial love that goes well beyond our biological necessities."

Murray's argument compared proving the existence of God to the challenge courts face when prosecuting someone.

"People are generally considered innocent until proven guilty.

"The challenge is to prove guilt. Absent that, the default position is innocent. Ditto with belief in any kind of existence."

One predetermined question, frequently posed in the God debate, asked how evolution could possibly explain incredibly complex organic structures such as the eye, flagellum and human brain without the help of a designer. Murray said evolution easily debunked the design argument.

"What we know is that 99 per cent known fossils are extinct. Just think of that in terms of the probabilities, so evolution explains that lack of very well, it's exactly what we predicted: Things that don't fit die off.

A submitted question from UPEI philosophy professor Neb Kujundzic asked both men to define their idea of existence, resulting in two very different answers.

Malcolm compared the existence of God to the concept of a unicorn.

"The question is whether or not anything satisfies that concept in the world. Ditto with God. There's nothing that actually satisfies the concept of a unicorn, but the concept exists which is perfectly fine."

Velaidum was critical of Murray's answer, saying he missed the point he made earlier in the debate about God not being an old man with a gray beard

"The very first thing I said when I got up here is God does not exist like other objects exist. It's as simple as that.

"A unicorn is something you can kind of picture. I don't know what God looks like, nobody knows what God looks like.

"There's a fundamental difference between that and trying to prove the existence of something that doesn't have existence because existence only exists for things in space and time."

Wave...from front page

He said his strictness was something his co-workers didn't respect.

"They started noticing I wasn't hiring their friends, I wouldn't let them get drunk on the job, I wouldn't let their underage friends in and I didn't favour members of sports teams."

MacDonald claims the problem is that staff members generally form a clique, and often colluded to override his decisions.

"I needed time off once due to an injury. By the time I got back, I noticed the guy who had replaced me had removed all of his friends off my barred list."

The barred list became a contentious issue for MacDonald.

One night, he said he barred a "hockey player" for assaulting one of his co-workers, and wanted to bar him for life.

"I wanted to bar him for good, but my supervisor [Kirk] Dingwell, to bar him for a month because of favours he had done for him.

"If they were good for business, profits came before regulations."

MacDonald was eventually let go as tensions grew between him and co-workers, after he allegedly roughed up a patron.

So why does this problem exist in the first place? MacDonald thinks it's because UPEI's campus is too small and there are too few students applying for the jobs.

"There is a constant flow of students coming in and out so they cannot be properly trained. The jobs are poorly advertised so it usually means the only people who hear about the jobs are friends of people who work there. Then there are issues with the hiring board."

In order to work for the student union, one policy states you must be a full-time student.

That is something the hiring board works very hard to ensure, Douglas said.

"If there are staff [who aren't] they'd fall under an exceptional category that there is work that needs to be filled. Certainly, if it comes to the process where we have enough applications to fill all the jobs with full-time students, the full-time student will always be hired ahead of the non-student."

Douglas prefers to let the record speak for itself.

"Given our ability to have wet/dry events with 700 people, when there's alcohol involved, things will happen, just like any other bar.

"But I think the PEILCC records have only been glowing and they speak for themselves."

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