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Tuesday, November 18, 2003 | [Print-friendly version](#)

Stephen Unwin probes the Big question

By [Allyson Jacob](#)

I wish Stephen Unwin had been my math teacher in high school. Not that I'm faulting any of the poor souls who had to deal with me, a verbal and visual learner, in a classroom full of theories, numbers and equations. But Unwin has an innate ability to mix humor and knowledge together in a way that makes math interesting and almost fun. Almost fun for me, since math and I have never gotten along. Definitely fun for others who like numbers and watching the way they work.

Unwin has written a book called *The Probability of God*. In it, he uses probability and more specifically, Bayes' Theorem, to prove God's existence. It's heady stuff, proving the existence of God. But Unwin is up to the challenge.

"I've always been intrigued by the way beliefs work," Unwin states matter-of-factly in a voice that betrays his Manchester, England upbringing. "So many people are absolutely certain that [God] does exist. So many people are absolutely certain that [God] doesn't exist. So I used the absolutes of mathematics to look into it."

Unwin came to writing by way of a PhD in theoretical physics, with specific work in the realm of quantum gravity. Quantum gravity, he explained to me in a way that my astronomy professor in college never could, is an attempt to reconcile two theories that "don't like each other. Quantum theory and the theory of gravity don't work together." Kind of like oil and water, or kids and liver.

The process of writing out his ideas and working through the probability of God's existence only took Unwin six or seven months, which, he acknowledges, is a short amount of time in the long term. "But I've been thinking this way my entire life," he says.

Unwin's style is amusing; he litters his chapters with pop culture references and even uses Bill Clinton's famous "I did not have sexual relations with that woman" to help readers understand why the language of mathematics is so much more precise than English or any other spoken language. In short, he makes probability and the major theological question at stake accessible in a way that, say, Thomas of Aquinas never could.

"This type of book can sound daunting," Unwin allows, "but if you can balance a checkbook you can get through the mathematics in the book." Uh-oh. A checkbook? Is that with or without the aid of Quicken? "I don't want folks to be daunted by the fact that it has numbers in it."



What: Stephen Unwin signs *The Probability of God*

Where: Joseph-Beth Booksellers, 2692 Madison Rd, Cincinnati 45208

Date: Monday, Nov. 24

Time: 7 p.m.

Cost: Free

Contact: (513) 396-8960 or <http://www.josephbeth.com/>



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For this math-phobe, it's a little daunting. But Unwin makes it palatable and truly interesting at the same time. If only he'd been there when I was struggling through logarithms and imaginary numbers.

Stephen Unwin will discuss and sign copies of *The Probability of God*, Monday, November 24 at 7 p.m. at Joseph-Beth Booksellers in Hyde Park.

[Allyson Jacob](#) is a freelance writer and playwright living just outside of Cincinnati.

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