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The Top 5 Reasons You Aren't Going to Heaven But Shouldn't Lose Hope



By Clay Farris Naff

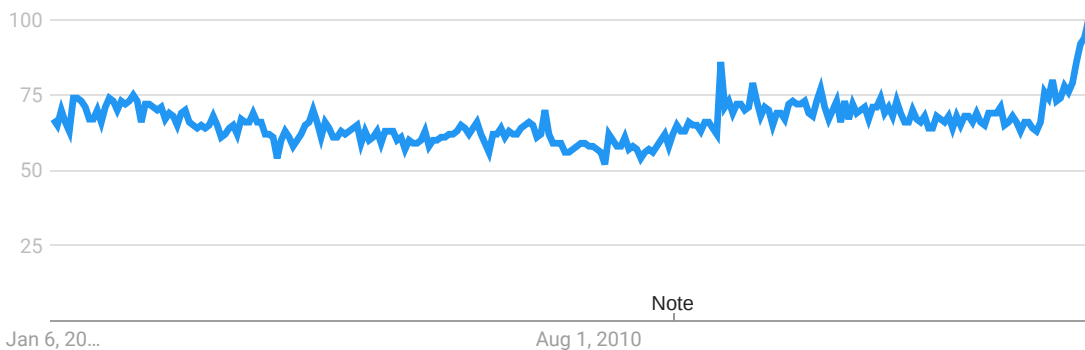
Oh, what a heavenly year was 2012. I don't mean to say that it was especially pleasant, ending as it did in a series of gruesome massacres and a tiresome political quadrille over taxes. Yet, late in the year "heaven" rose by 29 percent on Google Trends to a five-year high.

Interest over time

Google Trends

United States. 1/1/08 - 12/31/12. Web Search.

heaven



United States. 1/1/08 - 12/31/12. Web Search.

The chief reason for the renewed interest is [a scurrilous book by Dr. Eben Alexander](#), a neurosurgeon who bumped [poor little Colton Burpo](#) off the front of the bus as America's leading tourguide to heaven. [Like dozens before them](#), both claim to have been through the pearly gates and back, and both are profiting immensely from that claim. The difference is that, while Burpo is a child whose dad happens to be a minister, Alexander is a self-styled "man of science" who ought to know better — and perhaps would if there were not a fortune to be made from the credulous.

Of course, it is possible that each of these bestselling authors actually has made a round-trip to heaven, expressly arranged so that they could take in the sights and let us all know what we have to look forward to. But it is also possible, and far more likely, that each of them experienced a culturally fostered hallucination of heaven.

Why do I say hallucination is more likely? Apart from a scientific inclination to adopt the simplest explanation that fits the facts, it seems to me that the whole idea of heaven is an incoherent hodgepodge of false comfort and delusion. I have no wish to hurt anyone's feelings, but in my observation those who believe in heaven grieve just as much at the loss of a loved one as those who do not. What's more, worry over who will or won't go to heaven creates needless anguish.

With that in mind, here is my top five list of reasons why you won't go to heaven:

5. You don't know how to get there.

The majority of the world's believers are either Christian or Muslim. However, the doctrines of each claim privileged access to the afterlife for followers. Worse yet, within each religion there are deep divisions over how to punch your ticket to heaven. Some Sunnis believe that [Shiites are damned heretics](#). Within Christianity, there are numerous splits over the one true path to heaven: Is it grace? Is it acceptance of Jesus Christ as your personal savior? Good works? Membership in the correct denomination? Predestination? All of these and more are claimed as unique solutions.

4. It will take too long to get there.

People habitually point straight up to heaven. It's a carryover from ancient times, when folk naively assumed a flat earth under their feet. Now that we know we live on a sphere, we must realize that each of us points up in a slightly different direction. What's more, each of us points

distant heaven, figuring that it would take 30 years to get there. He would be shocked to learn how far short of the mark his reckoning fell.

3. You wouldn't like the people there.

Estimates of the number of people who get to heaven vary. At one end of the range, the Jehovah's Witnesses tell us that only 144,000 people will be admitted. If you happen to be among the fortunate few, you'll find that the majority are first-century Christians whose language and culture are completely alien to your own. But not to worry: the odds are at least 1,000,000-to-1 against. At the other end of the range, Universalists tell us that everyone will be admitted. If that's true, then unless St. Peter practices rampant housing discrimination once again the odds are that you'll find yourself among strangers with whom you have almost nothing in common. Even worse, you just might run into Stalin or Hitler. Who wants to spend eternity with them?

2. The very idea of eternal life is incoherent.

OK, let's get serious. Conscious life is memory plus experience on a journey of continual change; eternity is infinite time. The two cannot meaningfully combine. In the first place, what unchanging version of you enters eternal life? Is it the you at the moment of death? For infants, Alzheimer's patients, and many others that would be absurd. But even assuming an idealized you, an eternity of experience inevitably leads to infinite loops. Think of the movie "Groundhog Day." Now, imagine watching it nonstop a million times in a row — and you're only beginning to grasp eternity. That's not heaven, it's hell.

1. A just God would never create such a system.

The main reason you are not going to heaven is that the idea makes no sense. A God capable of making creatures deserving of life in paradise would never, if He were just, make any other kind. (An unjust God may exist but is not worth believing in. It's a no-win proposition.) Some theologians attempt to explain it all away with free will. But that's no solution: a just God who wished to endow his creatures with free will would never make them so liable to temptation. In any case, why not put creatures with free will directly into heaven? Unless you think that evil and free will are inseparable, there is no justification for the painful prelude on Earth. But to claim *that* is to claim God created evil, which is to contradict his perfect nature. Heaven makes no sense.

This is a good thing to recognize. All too many people worry needlessly about the fate of those they love. Parents of a young person who has committed suicide have plenty of cause for grief without the added agony of whispers that their child is now in hell.

Does this leave us without any hope? No. While I firmly believe we should live our lives as if every day is precious, I cannot say with any certainty what happens to consciousness after death. Science is full of surprises, and speculations about the universe as a simulation or a holograph leave open almost unimaginable possibilities. But this much I know: if some sort of justice follows death, it cannot punish anyone who does their best to live kindly and ethically simply because they failed to subscribe to the “correct” set of beliefs. So, relax, do good and live well.

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 **Clay Farris Naff** 
Science and Religion Correspondent for the Humanist Magazine

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