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Intended audience, college students.

## *Introduction*

I have been informally engaged in apologetics for thirty years and have dealt with all kinds of questions. For the last fifteen years I have worked closely with college students and professors as an academic librarian. The most common question has been whether there is proof for God's existence. This paper will demonstrate that the kalam cosmological argument provides excellent evidence that God exists.

### *Kalam Cosmological Argument*

According to the kalam cosmological argument, every event that comes to be has a cause, the universe came to be, therefore the universe has a cause. It is the basic principle of causality, that for every effect or event, there is a prior cause. Dr. William Lane Craig summed it up succinctly as “the argument assumes something exists and argues from the existence of that thing to the existence or a First Cause or a Sufficient Reason of the cosmos.”<sup>1</sup> The kalam argument at its core is basic common sense. Human history is replete with the relationship of cause and effect in place.

There are many critics of the kalam cosmological argument. The criticism entails every part of the syllogism. I will begin with the first premise, every event that comes to be has a cause. The atheist J.L Mackie said, “There is a priori no good reason why a sheer origination of things, not determined by anything, should be unacceptable, whereas the existence of a god with the power to create something out of nothing is acceptable.”<sup>2</sup> Mackie never refutes the notion that whatever begins to exist has a cause. He is basically saying there is no good reason before-

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, Illinois: Harper & Row, 1983), 96.

<sup>2</sup> J.L Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1982), 94, As quoted in William Lane Craig *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, Illinois: Harper & Row, 1983), 112.

hand (a priori) to accept the kalam reasoning that every event that comes to be, including the universe, has a cause.

*Response to Counter-Argument 1 Everything that begins to exist has a cause*

Human history provides no example of something coming into existence uncaused out of nothing. Mackie offers no sound rationale or evidence for accepting the premise that nothing produced something. I would argue Mackie has a priori assumed there is no first cause as he specifically stated, “There is no good reason why a sheer origination of not determined by anything should be unacceptable.” Mackie’s claim here violates the notion in philosophy and logic that you cannot prove a universal negative (i.e. there is no good reason). Mackie’s propositional truth claim is coming across as claiming to be omniscient in that he would have to have all knowledge to know with one hundred percent certainty there is no good reason to believe the universe is uncaused from nothing. In other words, if one makes a universal declaration, (there is no reason), one would have to possess an infinite understanding (i.e. omniscience) to make that claim. How does Mackie know with one hundred percent certainty there is no good reason? He never tells us how he concluded it is not unacceptable to reject a cause for the universe. Since no evidence is offered by Mackie, the default position seems to be he wants us to take his statement on faith alone. Moreover, the absurdity of Mackie’s thinking is underscored by a series of questions that Craig proposed. Craig asks “Does Mackie sincerely believe that things can pop into existence, uncaused out of nothing? Does anyone in his right mind really believe that, say a raging tiger could suddenly come into existence uncaused out of nothing, in this room right now?”<sup>3</sup> It is highly illogical to assume that nothing produced the universe. If Mackie were to be consistent, he

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<sup>3</sup> Craig, 113.

would have to answer Craig's questions in the affirmative. It is absurd to believe a tiger can just appear uncaused in a room.

Another denial of the first premise in the kalam argument comes forth from skeptics in the area of quantum physics. Skeptics who hold to quantum physics are contending that some particles are uncaused. Quentin Smith is the chief proponent of this view. John J Park noted, "For instance, Smith contends that the first premise that everything begins to exist has a cause is false since quantum mechanics allows for the uncaused emergence of certain particles."<sup>4</sup> According to Smith the universe's existence is "not caused by any or all of its instantaneous states and is not caused by any external cause."<sup>5</sup> Smith contends that the universe is not caused by something external to it. The basic argument is postulating that sub-atomic particles are uncaused.

*Response to Counter-Argument 2 Everything that begins to exist has a cause*

Craig points out that "This objection, however, is based on misunderstandings. In the first place, not all scientists agree that sub-atomic events are uncaused. A great many physicists today are dissatisfied with this view (the so-called Copenhagen Interpretation) of quantum physics and are exploring deterministic theories like that of David Bohm."<sup>6</sup> This supports the kalam argument because particles, all by themselves cannot just come into existence out of nothing if the law of cause and effect is true. Smith wants us to exercise faith that the particles were just there. The particles would be an effect which needs a prior cause. There is no scientific rationale for holding to the assumption that particles are uncaused and eternal. It is just wishful thinking.

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<sup>4</sup> John J. Park, "The Kalam Cosmological Argument, the Big Bang and Atheism" *Acta Analytica* 33.1 (2016): 323-335.

<sup>5</sup> Quentin Smith, *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* (ed Michael Martin) *Cambridge Companions to Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007), 189, As quoted in William Lane Craig *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, Illinois: Harper & Row, 1983), 112.

<sup>6</sup> Craig, 114.

However, there is strong evidence that the universe began to exist. In fact, it is impossible for the universe to go back in time forever. Dr. Norman Geisler and Ron Brooks illustrate this concept quite well. They contend,

But beyond the scientific evidence that shows the universe began, there is a philosophical reason to believe that the world had a starting point. This argument shows that time cannot go back into the past forever. You see it is impossible to pass through an infinite series of moments...If the universe had always existed without a beginning, then we could never have passed through time to get to today. If the past is an infinite series of moments, and right now is where that series stops, then we would have passed through an infinite series.<sup>7</sup>

What Geisler and Brooks are advocating, is if the world never had a beginning, we could not have arrived at today. But we have arrived at today, so the view of an eternal universe is false. In other words, if time goes back forever, in order to get to today, one would have to pass through an infinite amount of time and that is impossible. One can pass through a finite amount of time but not an infinite amount.

However, Carl Sagan, the late famous astronomer suggests that the universe is eternal in terms of time. This view is known as the steady state theory. Sagan believes the universe is uncaused for all eternity. He contends, "The cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Norman Geisler, Ron Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask*: Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1990), 17.

<sup>8</sup> Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York, Random House, 1980), 4, as quoted in Norman Geisler, Ron Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask*: Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1990), 16.

*Response to Skeptic Counterargument 1 The universe began to exist*

Sagan's notion that the universe did not have a beginning is patently false. Geisler and Ronald Brooks explain how the second law of thermodynamics refutes Sagan's belief that the universe existed forever:

The second law of thermodynamics says that the amount of usable energy in any closed system (which the whole universe is) is decreasing. Everything is tending toward disorder and the universe is running down. Now if the overall amount of energy stays the same, but we are running out of usable energy, then what we started with was not an infinite amount. You can't run out of an infinite amount. This means that the universe is and always has been finite. It could not have existed forever in the past and will not exist forever into the future.<sup>9</sup>

If the universe went back in time forever, we would have run out of energy by now. It is impossible for the universe to be in the process of running out of energy for all eternity past. What is noteworthy is how inconsistent a skeptic like Sagan is when he can accept an eternal uncaused universe, but the theist is wrong for suggesting the cause of the universe (i.e. God) is eternal and uncaused.

Another argument against the second premise of the kalam cosmological argument is presented by former University of Colorado professor of philosophy Wes Morriston. He argues that nobody knows enough about the early universe to make the claim that the second law of thermodynamics was in operation from the beginning of the universe. Morriston questions Craig's reasoning and offers the following suggestion:

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<sup>9</sup> Geisler, Brooks, 220.

. The problem with this argument is (once again) that we don't know enough about the so-called "early" universe to say just how far back the second law reaches. Consequently we are unable to say how long the universe might have been in that mysterious "early" state. The most we are therefore entitled to conclude is that the history of entropy has a beginning.<sup>10</sup>

*Response to skeptic counterargument 2 the universe began to exist*

Morrison's counterargument is extremely weak. It is tantamount to hypothetical, wishful thinking. It fails to deal with any scientific sources regarding the second law of thermodynamics. Contrast Morrison's hypothetical suggestions with Craig's assessment of the importance of the second law of thermodynamics. Craig contends, "It's clear that life would not be possible in a world in which the second law of thermodynamics did not hold."<sup>11</sup>

It is interesting to note in Craig's analysis, life would not be possible in a world without the second law of thermodynamics. In other words, if the second law of thermodynamics is necessary for life as Craig contends, how could the universe after its inception, continue to expand and exist without the second law in effect? Also, does Morrison believe that other laws of science such as the first law of the conservation of matter and energy were not in effect from the beginning of the universe? The late Vaclav Havel, former statesmen and member of the French Academy of Science said regarding the second law, "Just as the constant increase of entropy is the basic law of the universe, so it is the basic law of life to be ever more highly structured and to struggle against entropy."<sup>12</sup> If the second law is basic, then it must have been there at the beginning.

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<sup>10</sup> Moreland, James Porter, Chad V. Meister, and Khaldoun A. Sweis: *Debating Christian Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21, Kindle.

<sup>11</sup> Craig, 140.

<sup>12</sup> "Second law of thermodynamics." In *50 Physics Ideas You Really Need to Know*, by Joanne Baker. Quercus, 2014.

Another complex issue is the last part of the kalam cosmological argument the universe has a cause. This is a logical conclusion based not only on the scientific evidence, but the deductive reasoning of the syllogism. Geisler and Brooks summarize the deductive reasoning as follows: “The basic idea of this argument is that, since there is a universe, it must have been caused by something beyond itself. It is based on the law of causality, which says that every limited thing is caused by something other than itself.”<sup>13</sup> This is common sense. We see the law of causality all through life. It is saying the universe is limited in that it had a beginning, and everything that has a beginning has a cause.

Atheists have several ways they deal with the last part of the kalam syllogism, namely the universe has a cause. For example, philosopher Daniel Dennett argues the universe created itself out of nothing (ex-nihilo). Dennett argues, “What does need its origin explained is the concrete universe itself, and as Hume long ago asked... Why not stop at the material world?... It ...does perform a version of the ultimate bootstrapping trick; it creates itself ex-nihilo. Or at any rate something that is well-nigh indistinguishable from nothing at all.”<sup>14</sup> Dennett is claiming that universe caused itself to exist!

#### *Response to skeptic counterargument 1 the universe has a cause*

Dennett’s view is full of ambiguity. It is not crystal clear what “something” is that is hardly “indistinguishable from nothing.” Theists who postulate a cause for the universe, are criticized for believing somebody (God) made something from nothing. Now Dennett is telling us

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<sup>13</sup> Geisler, Brooks, 16.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, (New York, Viking, 2006), 120, as quoted in William Lane Craig *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, Illinois: Harper & Row, 1983), 151.

nobody made something from nothing. That is the pinnacle of irrational belief. I am not the only one who finds ambiguity in the writing of Dennett as Craig contends; “There is no third thing between being and non-being, if anything at all exists, however ethereal, it is something and therefore not nothing. So what could this mysterious something be? Dennett does not tell us.”<sup>15</sup> Dennett does not tell us because it does not exist!

Another argument against the second premise of the kalam cosmological argument is presented by former evangelical preacher and now famous champion of atheism Don Barker. He cannot accept the last premise of the kalam syllogism, the universe has a cause. When it comes to the notion of the universe having a cause, Barker accuses theists of circular reasoning. Barker argues

Another attempt conceives of a contingent cause of the universe, resting at the top of a pyramid of relationships rather than at the beginning of a chain of temporal events. But this a priori tactic of exempting the conclusion (Creator) from the causality required of everything else--with no evidence that any special "causeless" or "noncontingent" objects actually exist--makes the Creator a part of the definition of the premise, which is circular reasoning.<sup>16</sup>

What Barker means by “circular reasoning” is that he believes the theist begins with what he is trying to end with, namely God.

*Response to counterargument 2, the universe has a cause*

There are several problems inherent in Barker’s logic. First, when he says there is “no evidence” for “causeless” or “non-contingent objects” he conveniently gives the skeptic the op-

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<sup>15</sup> Craig, 151.

<sup>16</sup> Don Barker, *Godless: How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of America’s Leading Atheists* (Wheaton, Illinois: Harper & Row, 1983), 130.

tion to say to the theist who offers a plethora of evidence, “nope, not good enough, no such evidence exists.” Second, Barker’s notion “the Creator is part of the definition of the premise” is patently false. Craig destroys Barker’s misunderstanding of the premise when he argues, “Rather the operative causal principle is whatever begins to exist has a cause. Something that exists eternally and, hence, without a beginning would not need to have a cause. This is not special pleading for God, since the atheist has always maintained the same thing about the universe: it is beginningless and uncaused.”<sup>17</sup> Barker is the one who begins with the premise that “causeless” or “noncontingent objects” cannot exist. He ignores the rational conclusion the deductive logic inexorably leads one to in the kalam syllogism.

In conclusion, after giving considerable thought to the scientific and philosophical evidence and common sense, I find that the logic of the kalam cosmological argument does provide strong evidence for God’s existence. The skeptics have failed to demonstrate how something can either come from nothing, or how the universe can be eternal. Human history is replete with the constant conjunction of cause and effect. In fact, it was David Hume who argued that when it comes to the relationship between cause and effect, their constant conjunction is the basis of all rational thought.<sup>18</sup> It therefore is the height of irrational thinking to assert the universe did not have a cause.

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<sup>17</sup> Craig, 155.

<sup>18</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects* (Auckland: Floating Press, 2009), 147, accessed September 26, 2018, Proquest Ebrary.

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