

## § VIII. Doctrine of Creation

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## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 1

#### **Creatio ex nihilo**

Today we begin a new section on our survey of Christian doctrine entitled the Doctrine of Creation.

#### ***Creatio ex nihilo***

#### **Scriptural Data**

#### **Genesis 1**

First we want to look at the biblical material pertinent to the Doctrine of Creation. I would invite you to take your Bibles and to turn to the very first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis, the very first chapter and the very first verse. Genesis 1:1, the first verse of the Bible, says “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” With that terse and majestic statement, the author of Genesis 1 differentiated his outlook from all of the ancient creation stories of Israel’s neighbors. The expression “the heavens and the earth” denotes in Hebrew the total of physical reality. Hebrew had no word for “the universe” so when they wanted to express the totality of physical reality, they would use this expression “the heavens and the earth.” So verse 1 says simply “In the beginning God created the universe.”

Notice that there is no preexistent material that is presupposed. We find no warring gods, no primordial dragons, as we do in other ancient creation myths; only God who simply creates the universe. The word for create there is *bara*, a word which is used with only God as its subject and which does not presuppose any kind of material substratum – it does not presuppose a material cause in addition to God who is the efficient cause, who simply creates his effects. So at face value, at least, the opening line of the Bible seems to teach the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, that is to say, creation out of nothing. It was certainly understood in this way by later biblical authors as we will see in a minute. But many modern commentators have denied this face value reading of Genesis 1:1. Usually their claim will be that verse 1 should not be read as an independent clause. Rather, verse 1 is a subordinate clause that modifies verse 2. So the passage should properly be translated “When God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning” or “In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void” and so forth. In that way it might appear that God’s creation of the world was not a creation out of nothing but it was simply fashioning an orderly cosmos out of this preexistent chaotic state which was without form and void. This issue has been long discussed and it seems to me that Claus Westermann,<sup>1</sup> in his very thorough discussion of this text in his commentary on the book of Genesis<sup>1</sup>, has convincingly shown that verse 1 should be understood to be an independent clause rather than a subordinate clause. Let me summarize Westermann’s five main points.

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<sup>1</sup> See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, trans. John Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984)

Number one, the first point that he makes is that there is no evidence that the word *bereshith* – which means “in the beginning”, the verse begins *bereshith bara elohim* or “in the beginning God created” – can’t be used in an absolute state at the beginning of a sentence to indicate a point in time. For example, he says, Isaiah 46:10 appears to use *bereshith* to indicate such an absolute beginning.<sup>2</sup> In Isaiah 46:9-10 it speaks of “I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning” and there it appears to be an absolute beginning that is meant. So a definite article with the word *bereshith* is not necessary in order to indicate an absolute definite beginning point. *Bereshith* can indicate an absolute beginning point in time. Confirmation of this conclusion, Westermann says, comes from the oldest textual witnesses that we have to Genesis 1:1. He speaks here, for example, of the Masoretic punctuation. When the Masoretic text of Hebrew was produced in which the vowel points and the punctuation was introduced into the consonants, they punctuated verse 1 as an independent clause and not as a subordinate clause. Similarly, the oldest translations of the Hebrew text render verse 1 as an independent clause. Undoubtedly he is thinking there of the Septuagint which is the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek which treats verse 1 as an independent sentence. And finally, the New Testament as well took verse 1 as a main clause and *bereshith* as designating an absolute beginning. One thinks, for example, of John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” So the Masoretic punctuation, the oldest translations of the Hebrew text and the New Testament all took verse 1 to be an independent clause with *bereshith* designating an absolute beginning. That is the first point.

The second point Westermann makes is that the syntax of verse 1 does not prove that *bereshith* is part of an adverbial construct chain as it would be in a subordinate clause. He says an argument that is often given in favor of taking verse 1 as a subordinate clause is that you have an identical construction appearing in Hosea 1:2 which expresses such a circumstantial idea. In Hosea 1:2 this same construction is translated “When the LORD spoke at first through Hosea”, etc, etc. Westermann points out, however, that this argument is inconclusive because, after all, Genesis 1 has to be read in the context of the book of Genesis, not of Hosea. The book of Hosea is written by a different author at a different time in history for a different audience and so it is quite illegitimate to impose it upon the book of Genesis. You need to read the book of Genesis in its own context. When we do this he points out that in Genesis 5:1, when the author wishes to express a circumstantial idea, he uses a grammatical form that is called an infinite construct which is the usual form for such circumstantial clauses. In Genesis 5:1 it says, “When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.” So it really is Hosea’s syntax that is unusual and it provides no grounds for re-interpreting Genesis 1:1 in its light. The author of Genesis 1:1, had he wished to express a circumstantial idea, would have used the normal infinite construct just as he did in chapter 5, verse 1. That’s the second point.

The third point that Westermann makes is that theological arguments alone cannot resolve this question simply because that presupposes we already understand verses 1 to 3. So you cannot say that the idea of an absolute beginning or creation out of nothing would have been theologically unintelligible for ancient Hebrews – you can’t avoid an exegesis of these verses in order to determine their meaning. You have to first understand them

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<sup>2</sup> 4:56

before you can decide what is and is not possible theologically. This exegesis has to be carried out within the context of the chapter and then the wider context of ancient creation narratives.<sup>3</sup> That's the third point – theological arguments alone can't resolve the issue.

The fourth point that Westermann makes is when we do carry out such an exegesis within the wider context of ancient creation stories what you discover is that Genesis 1:1 is unique. It is without parallel in ancient creation myths. The usual form of these ancient creation myths according to Westermann was as follows: "When \_\_\_\_\_ was not yet, then God made \_\_\_\_\_." This was the typical way these myths were formulated – "When \_\_\_\_\_ (and you fill in the blank) was not yet, then God made \_\_\_\_\_." The first clause would express the state of affairs prior to God's action and then the second clause would describe God's subsequent activity in making something out of that state. Interestingly enough, we find this very typical narrative form in the second chapter of Genesis verses 5 to 7. Genesis 2:5-7 says, "When no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up . . . then the LORD God formed man," etc, etc. So according to Westermann, this was the more typical form of ancient creation stories. He believes that the author of Genesis 1 took this typical formula "when \_\_\_\_\_ was not yet" and he made this Genesis 1:2 – "the earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." Then he took the typical formula "then God made" and he made that verse 3, "and God said let there be light." So in verses 2 and 3, you have a vestige, or a reflection, of this typical ancient creation narrative formula "When \_\_\_\_\_ was not yet then God made \_\_\_\_\_." But the author then prefixed both of these with his own sentence in verse 1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Therefore, verse 1 is not a temporal subordinate clause. It lies completely outside the typical formula, the typical structure; it is the author's own formulation. Westermann says, "It acquires a monumental importance which distinguishes it from other creation stories."<sup>4</sup> He says,

Verse 1 has no parallel in the other creation stories, while all three sentences of verse 2 are based on traditional material. The tradition history of the creation stories provides us with an answer to the question about the inter-relationship of the first verses of Genesis which is certain.<sup>5</sup>

This fourth point that Westermann makes is that when you compare the structure of Genesis 1:1-3 with the other creation stories then he believes the answer to the question is certain that verse 1 stands outside the typical formulaic structure and is an independent clause formulated by the author.

Finally, the fifth point that he makes, number 5, is that the style of the author of Genesis 1 favors taking verse 1 as a main clause. He says it would be completely out of harmony with the author's style in Genesis 1 to arrange the first three verses into one complete sentence.

Therefore, for all five of these reasons, the most plausible interpretation of verse 1 is that it is not a subordinate circumstantial clause. Rather, it is a main clause and an

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<sup>3</sup> 10:02

<sup>4</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, trans. John Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

independent sentence which asserts God's creation of everything there is.

As important as this conclusion is, it doesn't yet decide the question decisively in favor of *creatio ex nihilo*. For now we have to consider the relationship of verse 1 to verses 2 and 3.<sup>6</sup> Here it might be thought that what verse 1 does is simply describe the raw material out of which the earth and the rest of the world was made. In the beginning, God made the universe – he made the raw material – and then he fashions this into a world in verses 2 and following. But against this interpretation, it has been objected that the expression “heavens and the earth” in verse 1 doesn't designate just sort of raw material but it designates an ordered cosmos. Also, the creation of chaos is a contradiction in terms. God doesn't create a chaos. So the thought is that verse 1 doesn't describe simply the raw material of the universe being created, rather, perhaps verse 1 is to be thought of as a sort of title or heading to the chapter which summarizes the contents of what is described in verses 2 and following. So “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” would be a sort of subheading or a title for what is then described in the rest of the chapter. And, on this understanding, creation itself actually only begins at verse 3 and maybe thought not to entail *creatio ex nihilo*. So we are right back to where we started again if we take verse 1 as simply a chapter title or heading. We are back to thinking of creation as really beginning with the earth in this formless and void state.

How should we assess this question? Against taking verse 1 to be merely a title or a chapter heading, I think it can be objected that the grammatical relationship between verse 1 and 2 then becomes an insuperable problem. For verse 1 is connected to verse 2 by the Hebrew word *waw*, which is the Hebrew word “and.” In the Hebrew it actually says “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and the earth was without form and void.” This “and”, this conjunction, indicates a relationship of connection between God's primary act of creation and then his subsequent acts of creation. What is suggested by the Hebrew grammar has actually been rigorously proved by computer-aided grammatical analysis. My colleague John Sailhammer at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School carried out such a study and he said that the computer analysis shows that in Hebrew, whenever you have a construction that consists of *waw*, this conjunction “and”, plus a non-predicate and a predicate, like a subject and a verb, *waw* plus a non-predicate and a predicate, then the clause that precedes the *waw* furnishes either background information or circumstantial information to what follows, depending upon the relation of this construction to the main verb. Whenever this construction precedes the main verb, as it does in verse 2, then he says it is background information which is being given. So, accordingly, verse 1 is not simply a chapter heading or a title. Rather, it is a historical statement which gives background information to verse 2 so that it does mean that in the very beginning God created the heavens and the earth and then it goes on to describe what he does with the earth.

What about the tension then between verses 1 and 2 that we mentioned before – that heavens and the earth already denotes an orderly cosmos and that the creation of chaos would be a contradiction in terms? I think that when you reflect on the meaning of the Hebrew words here that in fact the tension, I think, really doesn't exist. We could take verse 1 to be universal in its scope and designate God's creation of the entire cosmos and

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<sup>6</sup> 15:02

then what happens in verse 2 is a radical narrowing of the focus down to God's creation of the earth, or some commentators have even suggested the land (that is, the Promised Land).<sup>7</sup> So in the beginning God created the universe and then suddenly the focus dramatically narrows and the earth was without form and void, etc. So we have a general creation of the universe in verse 1 and then what is described in verse 2 and following is what God does with the earth.

As for the problem of chaos, the description of the earth as "without form and void", or in the Hebrew *tohuwabohu*, in Hebrew this doesn't connote a primordial chaos in the Greek sense. That is to say, a state of affairs in which there are no laws of nature in which anything can happen. That is not what is meant by *tohuwabohu*. Rather, it means that the earth was an uninhabitable wasteland or desert waste, a desert wilderness or something of that sort. That is how this word is normally used. In the succeeding verses what is described is God's transforming this uninhabitable waste into a paradise for man to dwell in. So what we have described in verse 2 is not the creation of some sort of a chaos but rather it is the transformation of an uninhabitable earth into a paradise and a habitable place fit for human activity.

Someone might object to this interpretation of the first chapter by saying, well then what about the creation of the heavenly bodies in verse 14 where it says God says "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens" and it describes how God created the sun and the moon? Doesn't that indicate that a more universal creation is in view after all and not simply the transformation of the earth into a habitable place for human beings? Well, that is the question that we will take up next time.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> 20:02

<sup>8</sup> Total Running Time: 22:34 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 2

#### Genesis 1

We began discussing last time the Doctrine of Creation and specifically the topic of creation out of nothing – that God has made the universe and all that is in it without any sort of material cause. He, himself, is the cause of the matter and energy out of which physical things are made.

We began to look at the first chapter of the Bible in Genesis where it says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” We saw that that, at face value, seems to teach creation out of nothing. God alone exists in the beginning and he created the universe. Some have sought to deny this by interpreting verse 1 as a subordinate clause rather than an independent clause, “*When* in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void,” etc. But we saw from Claus Westermann a five point case for taking verse 1 to be an independent clause that, therefore, does teach a beginning of the universe.

We then inquired as to whether or not verse 1 might be taken to be merely a chapter title or a sort of heading – a summary of what transpires in the rest of the chapter. I argued against that because the verse includes, in the Hebrew, “and” – “God created the heavens and the earth *and* the earth was without form and void” indicating a chronological connection between verses 1 and 2. It is not simply a chapter title or a heading. On this interpretation we can take verse 1 to indicate that God, in the beginning, created all the matter and energy in the universe – he created the universe – and then in verse 2 the focus dramatically narrows to the earth and the remainder of the chapter describes how God then transformed the earth from an uninhabitable waste (which is what *tohuwabohu* in Hebrew indicates – an uninhabitable waste) into a paradise fit for human beings.

Someone might object to this interpretation by saying that in verse 14 the creation of the heavenly bodies indicates that a universal creation is in view, after all, in the remainder of chapter 1, not simply the transformation of earth into a habitable place. Genesis 1:14-15 says,

And God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so.

However, it is very interesting that the Hebrew construction used here is not the same as in God’s previous creatural acts such as in verse 3 where it says, “And God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” and verse 6, “And God said, ‘Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters’,” etc. The construction here in the Hebrew is the word *hayah* plus an infinitive. What this literally means is “Let the lights in the firmament *be for* the marking of days and seasons and separation of day and night;” unlike the earlier passages of 3 and 6 where God says “let there be” these things. In verse 14 what it says is “let the lights in the firmament be for this purpose.” So what is described here is not the creation of the lights in the firmament but rather the designation

of the purpose that they will serve marking seasons and times and so forth. It specifies what they are for and thereby already presupposes that they exist. It presupposes that the lights and the firmament are already there and then God declares their purpose.

Someone might say, well, that is well and good but look then at verse 16 and following where it goes on to describe God's creation of these things.<sup>9</sup> It says,

And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

So it might be said that verses 16-19 do countenance here God's creation of the sun and the moon and the stars; we are not talking just about a transformation of the earth. We are talking here about a more cosmic creation. As powerful as this objection is, it overlooks a very interesting and intriguing feature of Genesis 1. That is the sort of duplex nature of the creation narrative in chapter 1. Many commentators have observed that Genesis seems to combine, or interweave, two patterns of creation. One is creation by God's Word; the other is creation by God's action. We see, for example, creation by his creative Word in verses 3, 6, 9 and 11. In verse 3, "And God said, 'Let there be light,'" in verse 6, "And God said, 'Let there be a firmament,'" in verse 9, "And God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens,'" in verse 11, "And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth vegetation,'" and so on. This would be creation by God's powerful Word – he speaks and these things are done. On the other hand, you have this other tradition, or pattern, of creation by his action that appears in verses 7, 12, 16, and 21. In verse 7, "And God made the firmament," in verse 12, "The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed," etc., in verse 16, "And God made the two great lights," in verse 21, "So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves." How do you explain, or what is the explanation, for this odd duplex pattern that kind of duplicates itself in Genesis 1? You have creation by the Word and then creation by God's act. What is the best explanation for this?

One explanation would be that the author of Genesis has taken two independent creation narratives and he has braided them together rather like a rope or a braid where you take these two traditions and you interweave them together. So you have Genesis 1 with a braid of these two traditions. On the other hand, the unity and the coherence of this chapter suggest an alternative explanation which might be more satisfactory in light of its coherence and unity. That could be that this duplex pattern is a pattern of report and the author's commentary on it. For example, in verse 12 when it says, "The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed," etc., it doesn't actually describe something that God does. This is what the earth does; the earth brings forth these things. And verse 12 doesn't really follow temporally on verse 11 because verse 11 says, "Let the earth bring forth vegetation" and it ends by saying "And it was so." It was done. This happened. So verse 12 doesn't follow temporally on what's done in verse 11. Rather, verse 12 is the author's parenthetical commentary on the report given in verse 11. God has said "Let the earth bring forth things" and then the author comments about this. Similarly, look at verse

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<sup>9</sup> 4:52

15. Verse 15 also concludes “And it was so.” God says “Let the lights in the heavens be for the purpose of marking seasons and days and years” and it was so, indicating that this has been done. In that case, verses 16-18 would simply be the author’s commentary on this. He would be saying that it is God who made these things, unlike all of the creation myths of Israel’s neighbors.<sup>10</sup> The sun and the stars and the moon are not astral deities. They are not gods or supernatural entities. They are just things that God made. He is saying God made them. That is all. There is a complete demythologizing here in Genesis 1 of nature that goes on. So it describes how God says, “Let the lights in the heavens be for this purpose” and then he makes the commentary “God made the great lights, God set them in the heavens, they are not deities, they are just things that God made.” This would make sense of what is otherwise the very, very peculiar problem that the sun and the moon would otherwise be created after the existence of day and night. You already have day and night in the first day where it says “There was evening and there was morning. One day.” And then you have the second day and the third day. So how can the sun not be created until the fourth day if there are already days and light and darkness – night and day – prior to this? This would make better sense of verses 16-18 then thinking that it wasn’t until the fourth day that God made the sun and the stars and the moon, because then you have got this inexplicable situation of day and night existing prior to the creation of the sun that the earth is illuminated by. If this is right, that would mean that verses 14 and following do not indicate that God actually created the heavenly bodies on the fourth day. Rather it is on the fourth day that God declares the function of these heavenly bodies in marking days and seasons and times and years which were of course very important for the religious life of Israel given that it followed a Sabbath pattern and there were certain feasts and things of that sort.

If this makes sense then we can understand verse 1 as being universal in its scope. In the beginning, God created the cosmos, the universe, the heavens and the earth. Then verse 2 shifts radically down to the earth, narrows the focus, and the earth was without form and void and the rest of the chapter then describes God’s transformation of the earth into a habitable place for man and thereby the tension between verses 1 and 2 is removed. It seems to me that there is no good reason to interpret Genesis 1:1 any differently than it has normally been interpreted. Namely, it teaches that God alone existed in the beginning and that he created everything else out of nothing. That is the natural interpretation of the verse and it is the interpretation of the New Testament authors. If that interpretation is to be wrong then I think we would need to have some very powerful reasons for thinking otherwise – reasons which I do not think exist.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Does this mean that there was no actual creative act on the fourth day at all? The fourth day was just about declaring a purpose for that which had already been created?

*Answer:* Right. I asked my Old Testament colleague, John Sailhammer, about the Hebrew of this passage. I said, “John, it is never translated that way as far as I know. Are you

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<sup>10</sup> 10:02

absolutely certain that this is the way the Hebrew reads?” And he said, “Yes, there is no doubt. What it says is ‘Let the lights in the firmament be for’, etc, etc.” So it doesn’t need to be understood as an actual creative act on the fourth day.

*Question:* I heard an interesting interpretation of “evening and morning” the other day especially when you compare it to the commentary on this passage in the book of Exodus when they are using it to refer to the Hebrew’s work week. You work during the day and you sleep at night and you work again the next day. The evening and morning was not necessarily a literal evening and morning but saying God did his work then and, like the Hebrews, had an evening period of not working, then he gets back to work the next day and there was evening and morning and so forth. If that were the case – and I am not trying to make an argument for a long period of time between those, it is irrelevant to what I am saying – it would avoid the question of the sun and the moon having to be around from the beginning when God created the light.<sup>11</sup>

*Answer:* Yes. There are a number of interpretations of Genesis 1 that I think are open for the biblically faithful Christian. When we get to this section we will talk about this again more later on when we talk about origins. But my question for that view would be: then what is meant in verses 4 and 5 when it says that God separated the light from the darkness and he called the light day and the darkness he called night? That doesn’t just sound like his ceasing from work and then his beginning work again. It does sound to me there that they are talking about periods of daylight and periods of darkness.

*Question:* When you use the words “made” and “created”, are those words a process or an event?

*Answer:* I don’t think that you can determine the meaning of words apart from the context. You need to see how they are used in the context. For example, it uses the same word “create” not only in verse 1, “For God created the heavens and the earth,” but when it talks about his creation of the sea monsters which is in verse 21, “So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves.” Whereas elsewhere it uses the word “made” – “God made the firmament” and “God made the great lights” and so forth. But he created the sea monsters. I don’t think there the author means to be drawing some kind of significant distinction between “to make” and “to create.” It is not as though the firmament and the stars and so forth were made out of previous material but the sea monsters were created *ex nihilo*. It seems to me that you need to understand it in the context. And in the context it seems to me that verse 1 is talking about creation *ex nihilo* – creation out of nothing. It is the very beginning. But thereafter when he makes these things they could well be made out of material causes that are around that he then fashions into the thing that exists. For example, it says that he gathered the dust of the earth when he made man and then breathed into him the breath of life. He didn’t just make man *ex nihilo*.

*Question:* On the light appearing in verse 3 and then the sun and the moon appearing on the fourth day, some have suggested that God is the light initially and creates this pattern and then subsequently creates the sun and the moon. Can you solidify that?

*Answer:* Yeah, I don’t know. I find that hard to believe because it says in verse 5, “God

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<sup>11</sup> 15:14

called the light ‘day.’” God is not literally photons. He is not radiation. That would be pantheism to suggest that he is literally the light in that way. So while God is certainly a spiritual light in that he illumines our minds and so forth, I take it that Genesis 1 is talking about daylight and nighttime, darkness.

*Question:* Going back to Genesis 1:2, God said let there be light, there was light and he saw that it was good. Do you see the Trinity in that at all?

*Answer:* I don’t. It does mention the Spirit of God – doesn’t it? – moving over the face of the waters. But I think it is dangerous to try to read back into these narratives *ex post facto* too rich a theology. It seems to me you need to read it from the standpoint of the original author and how would an ancient Hebrew who was writing these words think of them. What was his meaning? I am therefore very cautious about interpreting things back into them. I say that, not just about theology, but also about modern science. I think that certain people make huge mistakes when they try to say, “Ah, verse 1 is referring to the Big Bang” and then “This is referring to certain other events that we know through modern biology or science.” That is called eisegesis, rather than exegesis. You are not discerning what the meaning of the text is; you are reading in between the lines and importing things into the text.<sup>12</sup> I think we need to be very cautious about that kind of hermeneutic, which is how you interpret literature. You need to let the author speak for himself in his own terms.

*Question:* God reveals himself in this creation. Verse 1 is a creation of everything in this realm. God has existed well before that so has God always had creations so he could express himself in and, if so, then would this creation have to be metaphorically describing previous ones as well? Maybe that is why you have things written in this way.

*Answer:* It doesn’t tell us in Genesis 1 when God created the angelic realms. We know biblically that in addition to the physical universe also part of creation would be these angelic or spiritual realms. We don’t really have any indication in the text when they were created. Did he create these angelic spiritual realms prior to his creation of the physical universe or was it afterwards? It seems to me that either way that you take it, you don’t want to say that creation is co-eternal with God. God didn’t have to create – creation is the freely willed choice on God’s part and, therefore, there is a state of affairs in the actual world which is God existing alone without creation. We will see some verses that indicate that in a moment – where God talks about “who was with me in the beginning when I made everything?” and the answer is nobody. There was nothing there. So it seems to me that whether you take the spiritual realms to be created prior to the physical universe or at the same time or subsequent to the physical universe, we should not affirm that there is anything that is co-eternal with God. It’s just God himself.

*Followup:* I wasn’t saying anything existed with him co-eternally. What I was saying (this is what was passed on to me from people in the church a long time ago) is that the angelic realms existed before; the first great fall was with them and this last creation, all of this creation, was to resolve that issue.

*Answer:* That I don’t agree with. I have heard this floated as well that somehow the angelic fall was defective and that therefore God has created this physical universe as

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<sup>12</sup> 20:00

some way of doing remedial work on this earlier spiritual creation. I don't see any basis for that in the Scriptures. There is just nothing that I know of to suggest that the purpose of this universe is to rectify some kind of a previous spiritual creation that went wrong. Indeed, just the opposite seems to be the case it seems to me. This creation is something that God made, he saw that it was good and then this creation fell into sin and corruption and the whole project of Christ and the plan of salvation is to rescue this creation, not some sort of prior spiritual realm. It is this creation that is the object of God's salvific plan.

*Question:* First of all a quick comment. In verse 16, "and God made the two great lights," the verb there is *asah*, "to make", not *bara* – *bara* is the making out of nothing. So this is not the creation of the sun out of nothing.

*Answer:* I don't think *bara* has to carry that connotation. Like I said, in the creation of the sea monsters, there the word is *bara*, verse 21. But I don't think that commits you to saying that God created everything else out of material things but the sea monsters popped into existence *ex nihilo* in the water. I think you can't determine the meaning of a word in isolation from its context. In the context here, I think *bara* in verse 21 is used with the same sort of meaning as *asah* – to make something.

*Question:* In verse 14, it says, "And God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years'" is that second part of that verse a subordinate clause or is it an independent clause?

*Answer:* I don't know. I haven't looked at it recently so I couldn't say.<sup>13</sup>

## Other Old Testament Passages

Let me say that many other Old Testament passages confirm this reading of Genesis 1:1 as teaching *creatio ex nihilo*. For example, Isaiah 44:24 says, "I am the LORD, who made all things, who stretched out the heavens alone, who spread out the earth – Who was with me?" This again suggests the idea that God existed alone and it was he, then, who created the world. Isaiah 45:18 says, "For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!): 'I am the LORD, and there is no other.'" God did not create it to be a chaos; he created the world in order to be a habitable place for human beings. In the Psalms we have various creation Psalms and there is no suggestion in any of these that God was confronted with some sort of pre-existing material that he had to work on. Psalm 33:9, for example, says, "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth." Here it is just God's fiat, his declaration by his Word, and the world was created.

God's eternity thus contrasts with the temporality of creation. Psalm 90:2 says, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God." This seems to suggest God's existence alone without any other thing with him. It would have been unthinkable that there was

<sup>13</sup> 24:51

some sort of co-eternal, uncreated stuff existing along side God. Look at Job 26:7, “He stretches out the north over the void, and hangs the earth upon nothing.” For Job, these creatural acts are just a whisper of God’s power.

Finally, I want to look especially at Proverbs 8:22-31. This is God’s creation of the world through his wisdom who is personified as a woman who exists with God in the beginning and she says,

The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth; before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men.

What is especially significant about this is not only did wisdom exist with God before the world was made but notice especially the phrase “when there were no depths, I was brought forth” because it is the depths that are described in Genesis 1:2, “darkness was upon the face of the deep and the Spirit was hovering over the face of the waters.” Even before the depths spoken of in verse 2 were brought forth, God existed with his wisdom and he created everything else. It is God who created the depths, took their measure and then prescribed their limits. So this is a powerful statement reflecting on Genesis 1:1 of the doctrine of creation out of nothing.

Next time we will see how this doctrine emerges even more clearly during the intertestamental period and then on into the New Testament.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Total Running Time: 30:21 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 3

#### **Affirmation of *Creatio ex nihilo* in New Testament**

We have been looking at the biblical testimony to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and I argued that in the Old Testament we have creation out of nothing clearly affirmed. Especially significant is Proverbs 8 which reflects on the creation narrative in Genesis 1 and which says even before the depths were brought forth God's wisdom was with him and created the depths. The depths are mentioned in Genesis 1:2 as the condition of the earth when it was first created by God and God existed with his wisdom even prior to that.

#### **Affirmation of *Creatio ex nihilo* In Intertestamental Period**

In the intertestamental period, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* comes to be literally affirmed. For example, in the book of 2 Maccabees. This is a book that is part of the Old Testament apocrypha. It is in Catholic Bibles but not in Protestant Bibles; it is an intertestamental Jewish writing. In 2 Maccabees 7:28 it says, "Observe heaven and earth and consider all that is in them and acknowledge that God made them out of what did not exist and that mankind comes into being in the same way." So by this intertestamental time, at least, we see an affirmation in Judaism of creation out of nothing.

#### **Affirmation of *Creatio ex nihilo* In New Testament**

The New Testament continues the affirmation that God has created the world out of nothing. Let's look at some passages. First, from Paul in Romans 11:36, "For from him and through him and to him are all things." So everything that exists, Paul says, has its origination with God; it exists through him and he is the goal of everything that exists. He is the beginning and the end of all things that exist. So in chapter 4 of Romans, Paul is able to say the following in Romans 4:17, referring to Abraham, "in the presence of the God in whom he [Abraham] believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist." God is the one who gives life to the dead; he raises the dead. He calls into being the things that do not exist. There is creation out of nothing; God simply brings them into existence.

Also, the book of Hebrews 11:3 says, "By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear." That is to say, what we see around us – the observable world – was not made out of phenomena – things that appear. The world was made by God but not out of things which appear, or phenomena, which is an affirmation again of creation out of nothing.

Finally, Revelation 4:11 is the praise given to God by the blessed in heaven, "Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created." So anything that exists, everything that exists apart from God himself, exists by God's will and was created by him.

So the New Testament continues the pattern of affirming that God is the creator of everything that exists outside himself and that, therefore, the world is created out of

nothing.

The principle contribution of the New Testament to the Doctrine of Creation is its ascription of creation to Christ as the second person of the Trinity.<sup>15</sup> This is what has been called the “cosmic Christ” – Christ, not in his incarnation, but rather in his role as the creator of everything. Let’s look at some passages that refer to this. 1 Corinthians 8:6 is a very interesting verse where Paul says, “yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.” Here we have interesting prepositions characterizing creation. God is the one from whom all things exist and for whom they exist and then Jesus Christ is the one *through* whom all things exist, *through* whom these things come into being. So Christ is the instrumental cause of creation. This is not a doctrine peculiar to Paul. This is clearly expressed in the prologue to John’s Gospel. Look at John 1:1-3, “In the beginning was the Word,” and this will later be identified with Jesus Christ, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” Here Christ, the second person of the Trinity, the Word of God, is described as being in the beginning with God and is the one through whom the world is created. Also Colossians 1:15-17,

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Here we have this image again of the cosmic Christ who is the creator of everything; not only the physical realm, but even the spiritual realms of angels and powers and principalities. All of these things come into being through Christ and were created through him. Finally, Hebrews 1:2-3 says,

In these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power.

Here Christ again is described as the one through whom God has created the world. He reflects God’s glory. The author uses the image of a king who presses the image of his ring into wax, say on a letter or a seal that the king is sending as an official document, and he says that Christ bears the very stamp of God’s nature just as the wax bears the stamp of the king’s signet ring. Upholding the universe by his Word of power, Christ holds the universe in existence. He not only created it but he upholds it as well.

So you have in the New Testament this augmentation of the Jewish doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* by ascribing it to Christ. The fact that this doctrine is found in such diverse authors in the New Testament – in Paul, in John, in the book of Hebrews – shows that this isn’t some peculiar or idiosyncratic doctrine. This is a wide spread doctrine in the early church that Christ is the agent of creation. He is the one through whom the world and all spiritual realms were brought into being.

That completes the survey of the biblical data that I wanted to look at. What we will do

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<sup>15</sup> 4:58

next time is begin to do a systematic summary of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. I will first attempt to define and delineate what the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* affirms and then we will begin to look at philosophical and scientific reasons to affirm this doctrine.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Total Running Time: 10:27 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 4

#### **Systematic Summary of Scriptural Data**

We have been talking about the Doctrine of Creation and in particular we have looked at the biblical material supporting the doctrine of creation out of nothing. Now we are going to look at a systematic summary of this biblical material.

#### **Systematic Summary**

##### **Originating Creation and Continuing Creation**

How should we understand the doctrine of creation out of nothing? Traditionally, Christians have believed that God is the creator of the world in two senses. First, he initially brought the world into being and then subsequently he sustains, or conserves, the world in being moment by moment. These are usually thought to be two species, or types, of *creatio ex nihilo*, which is creation out of nothing. The first is called *creatio originans*, or originating creation. This is bringing the universe, or the world, into being initially – the original creation. But then following *creatio originans* is *creatio continuans*, or continuing creation – God’s ongoing creative activity. *Creatio continuans* was typically divided into two further categories. The first is *conservatio* which is God’s conservation of the world in being – his sustaining the world in existence moment by moment. Were he to withdraw his sustaining power, the universe would vanish; it would be annihilated in an instance. The second aspect of *creatio continuans* was called *concursum*. This is the notion that God concurs with the operation of causes in the world to produce their effects. For example, the fire wouldn’t actually burn unless God concurred in burning the leaves or the paper along with the power that the fire has. God concurs with the secondary causes in the world so as to bring about their effects and without that they wouldn’t have any effects.

We will set aside *concursum* for the time being and we want to ask about these two aspects of creation: *creatio originans* and *creatio continuans*. While this is a handy rubric easily memorized, I think if you begin to press it for precision it quickly becomes problematic. Think about creation. It seems to me that inherent in the idea of creation is that if God creates something at a certain time then that is the first moment at which it exists. It did not exist before that because God had not created it yet. So if God creates something at a certain time that is the first time at which that thing exists. But, what that would mean then is that if conservation of the world in being is a type of creation then everything is re-created anew at every moment of its existence. It would mean that at every moment there is a new thing that is created and therefore nothing really endures through time. Rather, you just have replicas of the previous thing produced at every subsequent moment. So it would imply you are not really the same person who walked into this room, you are just another one who looks and acts and thinks a lot like that person that came in the room. Indeed, you are not even the same person who just heard that sentence a moment ago because at every moment God would be creating something

anew.<sup>17</sup> This leads to a doctrine called *occasionalism*, which has been held by certain philosophers down through history, that nothing endures through time and that, therefore, really there is no causality in the world and everything is determined by God just recreating everything anew at every subsequent moment – which is a very bizarre doctrine I think you’d agree.

How should we elude this problem? We could say, “Alright, creation doesn’t involve something’s existing for the first time at the moment it is created. Something can be created by God even if that is not the first moment at which it exists.” But it seems to me that then you have really lost an essential element of the Doctrine of Creation. Biblically, at least, the Doctrine of Creation certainly does involve this temporal aspect that when God creates something that is the first moment at which it exists. That is when it comes into being. So if you remove that you have really lost something in creation. It seems to me that what we have to do is just break this rubric apart and say in fact that conservation is not really a type of creation. It is a misnomer to speak of *creatio continuans*. Although that is a nice rubric, it doesn’t really work.

### **Creation and Conservation**

Conservation and creation, therefore, are two distinct acts – two distinct concepts. Conservation is not a type of creation, is what I am trying to say. How can we understand these two notions? After all, from God’s point, it doesn’t seem there is any difference between creation and conservation. God produces the effect in being. His action, his power, seems to be exactly the same in creation as in conservation. So what is the difference between conservation and creation if the difference doesn’t lie in God and his action? I think that the difference between conservation and creation lies not in God or his action; rather, it lies in the object of his action. Namely, creation involves bringing something into being so that when God creates some entity, call it *e*, God brings that entity into being at the time at which he creates it.

We can analyze this notion in the following way:

*e* comes into being at a time *t* if and only if:

- (i) *e* exists at *t*. Obviously, *e* has to exist at *t* if it comes into being at *t*.
- (ii) *t* is the first time at which *e* exists. That’s inherent in the notion of creation; that when God creates an entity at a certain time, that is the first time at which that entity exists.
- (iii) *e*’s existing at *t* is a tensed fact.

I will say something more about that in a minute, but if this is an analysis of what it means to come into being – if these are the three conditions that are met for something’s coming into being – then we can say that God creates an entity *e* at *t* if and only if God brings it about that *e* comes into being at *t*. Creation is essentially the act of bringing it about that some entity comes into being. So God creates an entity *e* at *t* if and only if he brings it about that *e* comes into being at *t*. If you want to know what it means to come into being at *t* that is what it means – these three conditions.

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<sup>17</sup> 4:53

God's creating some entity involves that entity's coming into being and notice that, therefore, this is an absolute beginning of existence for *e*. It is an absolute beginning of its existence. It is not a transition of *e* from non-existence to existence. Creation is therefore not a type of change.<sup>18</sup> We should not think of *e* as some entity which first has the property of non-existence and then it trades in that property for the property of existence and so comes into being. Creation is not a change because there is no enduring subject that goes from non-being to being. That is a complete misconception. Rather, creation is an absolute beginning of existence for the entity that is created at that moment.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* [off-mic] You mean this applies to creation *ex nihilo*?

*Answer:* Actually, I think this applies to any kind of creation, even if God is creating something out of prior stuff, but I am thinking primarily in terms of creation out of nothing. So, yes, I am thinking of primarily creation out of nothing but I actually think it would apply even if he creates this thing out of prior stuff because even if the stuff out of which a thing is made pre-exists, the thing itself doesn't pre-exist.

*Question:* I was wondering which of the church fathers came up with these ideas and was Calvin one who believed that creation is continual because it seems like that would fit into his other ideas.

*Answer:* I can't say on Calvin. Certainly this rubric that I shared was one that was popular among post-Reformation Protestant theologians; that is true. The doctrine of creation and coming into being that I am explaining here would be Thomas Aquinas' idea except for the idea of being the first time at which a thing exists. For Aquinas, *creatio ex nihilo* does involve God bringing something into being but he doesn't think that it has a first moment of its existence. There I would side with a later medieval theologian named John Duns Scotus<sup>19</sup> who I think rightly criticized Thomas on this respect. I think Scotus is right in thinking that the idea of creation, biblically, has this temporal notion inherent to it that if God creates something at *t* that is the first time at which *e* exists.

*Question:* What is the definition of an entity? If you look at man, God created man. The discussion about right to life – are those creations? Are those entities?

*Answer:* Yes, by entity here I am using it in a very general sense like the English word "thing." Any "thing" that comes into existence is an entity.

*Question:* So births of individuals are creation *originans*, not *continuans*, right?

*Answer:* Yes, that is right, especially if you think of the soul as something that is created specially by God. But this analysis of something coming into being, as I say, really applies whether the thing has a material cause or not. Because even if, say, the chair is made out of prior material, the chair itself doesn't exist until that material is assembled by a creator in a certain way. When it does then the chair, as such, comes into being and it

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<sup>18</sup> 9:56

<sup>19</sup> John Duns Scotus (c. 1265-1308) was one of the most influential philosopher-theologians of his time.

didn't exist prior to that even if the stuff out of which it is made existed before it. Similarly with the human person at conception, the sperm and the egg pre-existed but that isn't you. That may be the stuff out of which your body came to exist but it is not you.

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For this reason, I think, we can distinguish conservation from creation because conservation does presuppose a subject which is made to persist from one state to the next. In creation, God doesn't act on a subject that is already there so to speak. Rather, he creates the subject. But in conservation God acts on a subject to preserve it to a later time. So the difference between conservation and creation lies not in God's action but it lies in the subject or the object of that action. In creation, there is no presupposed object upon which God acts.<sup>20</sup> That is why creation, as I said, isn't a change. But preservation, or conservation, does presuppose the existence of an object which God preserves to the next moment.

On this basis, we can provide this analysis of what it is to conserve something:

God conserves *e* if and only if God acts upon *e* to bring about *e*'s existing from some time *t* until some later time *t\** through every sub-interval of *t* to *t\**.

In both cases the divine action may be the same, namely, he bestows being. He bestows existence. But I think you can see that they are quite different. In the case of creation, God's bestowal of being can be instantaneous and, moreover, it doesn't presuppose a prior object is there. But in conservation it is an action that takes place over time from one time to another and it presupposed that there is some object already there which God would then conserve to a later time.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* So conservation is that something exists where creation is something new. What about the new creation we are in Christ? We are a conservation of ourselves but we are a new creation with him as Lord. So it is both together. It is not too different from the egg and the sperm but one is God and one is . . .

*Answer:* I think you are quite right that you are the same person when you turn from being a non-Christian to being a Christian. In that sense, you are not a new creation. You are the same person; there is personal identity from being unsaved to being regenerate. What begins there, I think, would be a new relationship that Paul could speak of as a new creation and you are changed. You undergo a radical change at that point, but you are still the same person.

*Followup:* You are right because it is not replacement theology.

*Answer:* Right, you are not replaced with another person.

*Followup:* Right, we still get to live with him. In fact, all we are is we are crowned with his will because we made him Lord and we accept his will as our own.

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<sup>20</sup> 14:57

*Answer:* Yes, and we are changed. We undergo a change when we are regenerated by the Holy Spirit but there is not a new person.

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## **Creation and the Tensed Theory of Time**

Let me just highlight one aspect of this doctrine that I think deserves comment – that is that this notion of creation is committed to the idea of a tensed theory of time, or as we’ve called it in this class, an A-theory of time or a dynamic theory of time. Because if you adopt a tenseless theory of time, according to which all events past, present and future are all equally real, then nothing really comes into being. They just exist at their appointed stations and nothing ever really comes into existence. To say the universe has a beginning on a tenseless theory of time is just to say that there is a front edge to the four-dimensional space-time block called the universe. The universe would begin to exist in no more sense than a piano begins to exist at its edge. It has a front edge to it. But if we say the universe really came into being then I think we are affirming the objectivity, the reality, of temporal becoming and therefore a tensed theory of time. This clause (iii) represents a really essential aspect of the Doctrine of Creation that is often overlooked. I think a serious, robust biblical Doctrine of Creation commits you to a tensed theory of time. On a tenseless theory, I do not think you really have a robust Doctrine of Creation because nothing really comes into being on that view.<sup>21</sup> In fact, the universe just co-exists eternally with God in a relationship of dependency on him. He holds it in being but he never really brings it into being. So a robust Doctrine of Creation, I am suggesting, involves commitment to a tensed theory of time.

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## **DISCUSSION**

*Question:* Can you apply the notion of transition to something that does not exist? You were saying earlier that when something comes into existence, it comes into existence at that particular time but you said that it could not transition from something that did not exist. But the notion of transition – wouldn’t that infer that it has some properties that allowed it to transition from non-existence . . . ?

*Answer:* Transition would but I would reject the language of transition and I would reject the language of change. Creation is not a kind of transition or change from non-being to being. That is why perhaps this expression “comes into being” might be misleading to you. That might sound like a transition, right? Like coming into the room – you came in from outside. But when I am using the expression “comes into being”, these three clauses define what that means. It just means  $e$  exists at  $t$ ,  $t$  is the first time  $e$  exists and  $e$ ’s existing at  $t$  is a tensed fact. That has no language of transition in it. So don’t be misled by the phrase “comes into being” to think that that is like coming into the room. It is not a change or transition; it is an absolute beginning to be of the effect that God creates.

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Next time we will look further at the doctrine of conservation and see to what extent the

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<sup>21</sup> 20:00

doctrine of conservation commits us to a tenses theory of time as well.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Total Running Time: 22:19 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 5

#### Problems With a Tenseless View of Time

We have been talking in recent lessons about the Doctrine of Creation and you'll remember that I tried to distinguish between creation and conservation by saying that in creation this is God's original bringing the world into being and conservation is God's sustaining the world in being moment by moment. I argued that the difference between creation and conservation is not to be found in God or in his action, which is the same in both cases, but rather it is to be found in the object of the action, namely that in creation there is no object. The object is constituted by the act of creation whereas in conservation God acts upon an object which is, as it were, already there to preserve it in being over time.

You'll recall that I argued that to say God creates some entity  $e$  at a time  $t$  should be understood to say that God brings it about that  $e$  comes into being at  $t$ . God creates an entity  $e$  at a time  $t$  if and only if God brings it about that  $e$  comes into being at  $t$ . That then raises the question of what does it mean to come into being and I provided the following analysis of what it means to come into being:

$e$  comes into being at  $t$  if and only if:

- (i)  $e$  exists at  $t$ .
- (ii)  $t$  is the first time at which  $e$  exists.
- (iii)  $e$ 's existing at  $t$  is a tensed fact.

Then I distinguished that from conservation by the following:

God conserves  $e$  if and only if God acts upon  $e$  to bring about  $e$ 's existing from some time  $t$  until some time  $t^*$  later than  $t$  through every sub-interval in the interval  $t$  to  $t^*$ .

I highlighted the importance of a tensed theory of time for this concept of creation. Clause (iii) says that  $e$ 's existing at  $t$  is a tensed fact. That is to say  $e$  doesn't exist at  $t$  in a sort of tenseless way. That is to say  $e$  actually comes into being at  $t$ . This is not just a tenseless existing of  $e$  at  $t$  in a way that, say, an inch exists on a yardstick. Rather, this entity actually comes into being at that moment. This is a tensed fact. So I argued that the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* really does presuppose, I think, a tensed theory of time. That is to say, a theory of time according to which all events in time are not on an ontological par. They are not all equally real. Future events don't, in any sense, exist. Past events no longer exist. What exists is the present. Temporal becoming is a real and objective feature of the world.

#### Problems With a Tenseless View of Time

Let's contrast this with a tenseless view of time. Let's imagine that time is sort of like a block and there are different moments in time that are earlier and later than each other which we can represent by planes that bisect the block. [Dr. Craig draws an

illustration on the board – see figure 1]

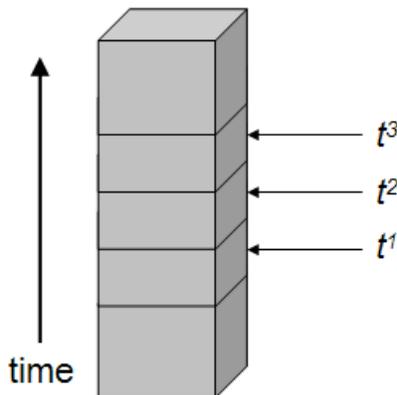


Figure 1- A tenseless view of time

So we can go here from  $t^1$  to  $t^2$  to  $t^3$  and so forth.<sup>23</sup> And on a tenseless view of time, God just exists outside the space-time block. It has a beginning only in the sense that a yardstick has a beginning; namely, there is a first inch, but it doesn't really come into being. God acts on all of the events in time in a sort of tenseless way. So this entity exists co-eternally with God in a sense. There is no state of affairs in the actual world which consists of God alone without the universe. My contention is that is not a sufficiently robust Doctrine of Creation to be biblical. The biblical Doctrine of Creation involves the affirmation that there is a state of affairs in the actual world in which just God alone exists and there is no universe or created order existing with him. But then God acts to bring the universe into being at its first moment at  $t=0$ . That highlights the fact that a robust biblical Doctrine of Creation, I think, affirms a tensed theory of time according to which the distinction between past, present and future is real, not just subjective, and temporal becoming is real, not just subjective.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* First a comment. It seems like, under your view of the B-theory of time, nothing ever comes into being, ever. Because coming into being requires tensed time.

*Answer:* Yes, I think that is right.

*Question:* Secondly, how do you explain the truth value of past statements? What is the truth maker for a fact about a past event on your view, which is presentism – that the present exists and the past and future are unreal or non-existent?

*Answer:* OK, you are asking a very technical question here, philosophically. The view is called *truth-maker theory*. This is a view that some philosophers hold whereby they think that if any proposition is true there needs to be something in the world – something in reality – that makes it true. On a tensed theory of time you can't say, for example, that dinosaurs existing during the Jurassic age make it true that there were dinosaurs during

<sup>23</sup> 5:03

the Jurassic age. Why? Because they don't exist anymore on the tensed theory of time and therefore they can't be the truth makers for that proposition. I would say simply that that is a very good reason to reject truth-maker theory. I don't think it is true that all propositions need to have truth makers. It is not implied by a view of truth that is correspondence. You can give a number of other counter examples of truths that plausibly don't need truth makers either. Ethical truths, I would say. Also, counterfactual truths of certain sorts about what would be the case if something were the case, which isn't the case. A very good book on this, I can't remember the exact title now unfortunately, is a book by Trenton Merricks, who is a very fine young Christian philosopher, who has written a book called *Truth and Ontology* in which he argues very forcefully that this truth maker principle is simply wrong and is a too-restrictive view of truth.<sup>24</sup> So I don't think there needs to be any truth makers of these past tense propositions in order for it to be the case that, for example, there were dinosaurs in the Jurassic age.

*Question:* I went back and forth between the different theories of time and the thing that completely convinced me that God exists within time once He created time was the whole idea that you said in God's view Jesus would always be on the cross and evil would always exist and the devil would always be around. There would be no completion of sin, it would always be there.

*Answer:* Do you see the point that he is making? Let's imagine that the event at  $t^2$  is, say, the crucifixion of Jesus. Well, even if it is true that at  $t^3$  the cross is vacant and the tomb is empty and Jesus is risen from the dead, on this tenseless theory of time Jesus is still ("still" is misleading but you see what I mean) He is still on the cross at  $t^2$ . His crucifixion is earlier than the empty tomb and both of them are equally real.<sup>25</sup> The evil that exists in creation is never really done away with. It is never vanquished. It is always there. It is just the later portions of the block that are free of the stain of evil. But the stain still permeates the first part of the block. So this is a different objection to the tenseless theory of time and I think a very powerful one as you do. I think it is not only incompatible with creation but it is really deeply disturbing with respect to what it implies about things like the crucifixion and the reality of evil and God's triumph over death and evil.

*Question:* Does this tensed view of time necessitate a rejection of the Einsteinian interpretation of relativity in which some objects can reach  $t^2$  before others?

*Answer:* Very, very good question. It does not entail a rejection of Einstein's interpretation of relativity. What it would entail would be a rejection of Minkowski's interpretation. If you remember several weeks ago when we talked about those results from CERN in which they detected neutrinos traveling faster than the speed of light<sup>26</sup>, I pointed out that there are three different physical interpretations of the equations of relativity theory: Einstein's original interpretation, the space-time interpretation of Minkowski and then the interpretation of the Dutch physicist Lorentz. Einstein's view, originally in 1905, is completely consistent with a tensed theory of time. He presumed

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<sup>24</sup> The book is indeed titled *Truth and Ontology* by Trenton Merricks published in 2007 by Oxford University Press.

<sup>25</sup> 10:15

<sup>26</sup> For Dr. Craig's thoughts on this scientific development, see Q&A #233, "The Triumph of Lorentz", found at <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-triumph-of-lorentz>

that objects are three dimensional objects which endure through time. It is essentially a Newtonian view of space and time. It was only with Minkowski in 1908 that he said space and time as separate entities are doomed to fade away and only a kind of fusion of the two will remain which is this four-dimensional, geometrical space-time object. This picture of the block is a Minkowskian picture. It is a four-dimensional object (of course we can only draw three dimensions of it given our limitations, one dimension has to be suppressed) but this would be a four-dimensional block in which time is the vertical dimension of the block. A tensed theory would not be incompatible with Einstein and it would not be incompatible with Lorentz but it would be incompatible with this four-dimensional view of Minkowski. Given my commitment, theologically as well as philosophically, to a tensed theory of time, that is why I would reject a Minkowskian interpretation that is the textbook presentation in most physics books today.

*Question:* If I am understanding it correctly, since God has always existed, then upon creation he created time to which he entered time. Therefore, time would continue infinitely into the future. But it would then be part of time in the future.

*Answer:* That is my view. That would be the position I would hold.

*Followup:* Are you suggesting that time did not exist prior to creation or did it always exist?

*Answer:* That is a different question – whether or not time has always existed. That is a separate question. My own view is that there are good reasons to think that time is not infinite in the past but that time did have an absolute beginning and when God created time he entered into time in order to sustain relations with this changing spatio-temporal world that he has made. But that is a somewhat separate issue.

*Followup:* The timeless of God prior to creation . . .

*Answer:* I would put it this way. I would say the timelessness of God *without* creation because if you say “prior”, that is a temporal word. Then you are implying that there was a time before he created time which is self-contradictory.<sup>27</sup> So the way I like to talk about it is God’s situation *sans* creation or without creation or God alone without creation.

*Followup:* And therefore, given time and his involvement in time, would it not be that the future, after the world and the New Jerusalem, continue to be in the current time spectrum if you will.

*Answer:* That is right. Think of what the Bible promises: to those who believed in him, he gave the power to become children of God so that they might have everlasting life.<sup>28</sup> So this will be everlasting into the future.

*Followup:* It is still tensed.

*Answer:* Yes, that is right. But to draw it back to our discussion of creation, I think you can see why, on the four-dimensional tenseless view, there is no state of affairs of God existing *sans* creation, or without creation. Creation is co-eternal with God.

*Followup:* He is outside of time.

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<sup>27</sup> 15:00

<sup>28</sup> cf. John 1:12; John 3:16

*Answer:* He is outside of time on this model and he just sustains this spatio-temporal block. Given the definition of creation that I've given, I don't think you can characterize this [referring to "the block" in Figure 1] as creation. That is going to be the next point that I am going to get to. Say I am wrong – say the four-dimensional tenseless view is right. In that case, God didn't create the four-dimensional block and yet in some way it depends on him for its being, right? It wouldn't exist without him. So even though he doesn't create it, what is the relation between God and the world then? Well, I am going to talk about that in the sequel here.

*Question:* About the tenseless view – why could God not create the time as a tenseless block? That also implies that time is infinite in the negative direction, so why couldn't God be alone and then create this block with a beginning so to speak?

*Answer:* I think the reason is that what that would do is to posit a sort of hyper-time in which God creates time. So you would have to first imagine God existing alone and then – boom! – God existing with the block. Well, that is a before and after relation so there would have to be a kind of hyper-time in which God created time and then you are back to the same problem again. God would still, then, be in time. So you would be simply kicking the problem upstairs, I think.

*Followup:* (inaudible)

*Answer:* Yes, you still, then, are stuck with the A-theory or the tensed theory in the end. So that would be only if you went this route of positing this time above time which is sort of a useless fifth wheel – it doesn't do anything and it doesn't get you anywhere.

*Question:* It would appear to me that the B-theory of time is perfectly valid but only for God because he has the unique ability to go to any point in eternity past and any point in eternity future and make it equally real for him. We are stuck with temporal becoming and the A-theory. I have another comment. To me, I would define time is what fills in between sequences – sequential events. I don't believe God created time and then entered it. His existence requires time because if He acts or even if He just thinks, those are sequential events and something has to fill in between them and it may be that He has his own system of time, which is unique to him. He can toggle back and forth between his and ours. His has no temporal becoming – it is a B theory – He is not in any way limited in time but we are. He can toggle into our sense of time or his sense of time at his will. What do you think of that?

*Answer:* Well, without wanting to recapitulate everything that we said when we did the attributes of God and talked about God's relationship with time, I would say that while that view is one that many people find attractive, I can't make sense of it. It seems to me that if you say that God is able to see all of time in a block like way and access all of it and it is all equally real for him then it must be all equally real and I just simply can't make sense of how time could be a B-series for God but an A-series for us.<sup>29</sup> It seems to me that that just is to say that we have the illusion of being in a kind of time in which becoming is real and we experience a difference between past, present and future but ultimately – really – it is not. It is really just a human illusion. That just is the tenseless view. In terms of whether time is always with God, that is going to depend on whether or

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<sup>29</sup> 20:14

not you think God is changeless or not. If you do think that God is thinking sequentially, as you put it, then you are absolutely right, there will be time in between God's thoughts. They will be ordered in time. That is a classical Newtonian view. That is Isaac Newton's view of God – that God and time are inseparable and that, therefore, time is infinite in the past; it is the duration of God. But if you hold to the classical doctrines of God's changelessness, or even stronger his immutability, his unchangeableness, then God doesn't experience a sequence of thoughts so you don't have to fill in time in between the thoughts. God's thoughts would simply be timeless. I have real sympathies for the idea of God being timeless, at least without creation. Therefore, I am not inclined to adopt this Newtonian view.

*Followup:* Why would his having a thought mean that He would change? His core would not change. Doesn't that view require that He is different now that He has had thought A before He had thought B?

*Answer:* You had talked about a sequence of thoughts where He thinks one thing and then He thinks something else. For example, the Son says to the Father "I love you" and the Father says to the Son "I love you" and these aren't simultaneous, they are sequential. As you put it, there needs to be time to fill in the gaps. So that would give you a God in time, not a changeless God. That would be a God that is changing.

*Followup:* I just can't see that as a change. Having a thought doesn't really change his core attributes.

*Answer:* Oh, sure it does. That is a stream of consciousness. Think of you – if you close your eyes and you just experience that stream of consciousness in your mind, that is clearly mental change that is just constantly going on and would require time. If you think of God as being changeless – especially without creation – I think it is more natural to think of God as timeless.

*Question:* Being an engineer and not a scientist, I have an application kind of question. How does God see the future? Does God see the future? Or does He create the future?

*Answer:* Very good question. Notice how this question is put. I think there are interesting presuppositions being made. How does God foresee the future? Notice this kind of language – "he foresees what will happen" or "he has foresight of the future" – presupposes that God's knowledge is on the model of sense perception. He looks and sees what is out ahead of us. On a tensed theory of time, it is difficult to make sense of that because the future isn't there to see – it doesn't exist. And so on a tensed view of time, the idea of God foreseeing the future doesn't seem to make sense. I think that that is the correct conclusion to draw – it doesn't make sense. Therefore, we should not think of God's knowledge on the model of sense perception. That is easy and natural to do but I think it is mistaken. We should think of God's knowledge more as a conceptualist model of knowledge. Plato thought that we never really learn anything, we just have innate ideas that we are born with and learning is simply recovering or becoming aware of those innate ideas that we already possess but are submerged in subconsciousness. That may not be a plausible model of human education but I think it is a very plausible model for God's mind. God simply has an infinite store of knowledge of all and only true propositions and He doesn't need to learn anything or to acquire his knowledge; He just

has it innately.<sup>30</sup> So we should think of his knowledge more in this conceptual model rather than a perceptual model. He would know the future simply in virtue of the fact that He knows all future tensed propositions; just as He knows all past tensed propositions and present tensed propositions He knows all future tensed propositions. Or all tenseless propositions. You can make a proposition tenseless by adding in a date, like “Christopher Columbus discovers America in 1492.” There the verb “discovers” is just a tenseless verb – it is neither past, present nor future. “Christopher Columbus discovers America in 1492” – if that is ever true it is always true. Similarly, I think God could have this kind of tenseless knowledge in the state of affairs of his existing alone without creation. If you press this conceptualist model further and say, “but how does He have knowledge of these future tensed propositions” there I think the theory of middle knowledge will provide extra insight into how God knows the future. If you have a doctrine of middle knowledge, foreknowledge of the future just falls out automatically as a consequence. I will simply refer you back to our discussion of divine omniscience when we did the attributes of God and look at the section on middle knowledge. If you weren’t in the class at that time, you can go on [reasonablefaith.org](http://reasonablefaith.org) where the podcasts are all there and available and you can listen to the lessons that were given on divine omniscience as part of our study of the attributes of God.

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I think it has been good to have this discussion to review and clarify what we’ve been doing. Where I want to move next time is to ask the question, “Does the doctrine of conservation also presuppose a tensed theory of time?” I have argued that a robust biblical Doctrine of Creation presupposed that time is tensed, not tenseless. What about conservation – the doctrine that God preserves the world in being from one moment to the next? Does that also presuppose a tensed view of time? That will be the question that we will look at next time.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> 25:00

<sup>31</sup> Total Running Time: 27:38 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 6

#### Conservation and the Tensed Theory of Time

We have been talking about the Doctrine of Creation and last time we simply had a sort of review and, I think, a helpful discussion time of the concept of creation in contrast to the notion of conservation. You will remember last time I argued that a robust, biblical Doctrine of Creation involves commitment to a so-called tensed, or dynamic, or A-theory of time as opposed to a tenseless, or static, or B-theory of time. That is to say, we should not think of time as part of a four-dimensional space-time block or manifold that just exists in a tenseless way co-eternally with God. Rather, things come into being and go out of being as time passes. Therefore, temporal becoming is a real and objective feature of reality and creation involves God literally bringing something into existence which formerly did not exist.

#### Conservation and the Tensed Theory of Time

The question that I want to raise this morning is, does the doctrine of conservation of the world also commit you to a tensed theory of time or is it consistent with a tenseless view of time? At first blush, it might seem that the tenseless view of time would be much more consistent with the idea of time as a sort of four-dimensional space-time entity. [Dr. Craig draws an illustration on the board – see figure 1]

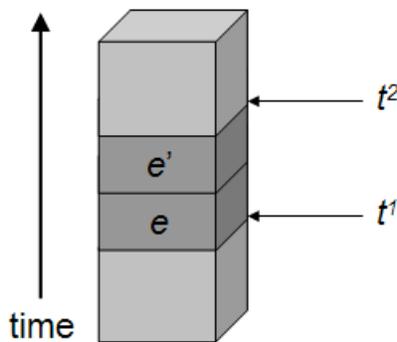


Figure 2- A tenseless view of time

Let's imagine this is the space-time block and time is the vertical dimension of this block and we can imagine that events occur at various places in this four-dimensional space-time block. We can think of God as existing outside space-time and simply maintaining it in existence. He is being causally related to every point in space-time and keeping it in being. So we might think that on this construal of time, God could indeed be thought to conserve some entity, let's say  $e$ , which exists here at, say,  $t^1$  until some later time  $t^2$ . So God simply, tenselessly, sustains  $e$  in existence from some earlier time to some later time. But I think a moment's reflection reveals this to be problematic. On a tenseless theory of time, it is false that  $e$  actually endures from  $t^1$  to  $t^2$ . What you really have is just different slices of  $e$  that exist at these different times. So if you have the slice down here, the

segment of this stick  $e$  what exists up here is really something else,  $e'$  let's call it. It is a different slice. It is sort of like a loaf of bread where one end of the bread isn't the same as the other end of the bread but the bread is just sliced up into different slices. Similarly, on this four-dimensional view of time, it is really false that  $e$  endures from some earlier time to some later time.  $e$  never "moves;"  $e$  is just "stuck" at its location but it is part of an extended space-time worm as we might call it, or four-dimensional object, and it is one initial segment of it in here and  $e'$  is a later segment and these are quite distinct entities. They are not the same at all. So on a tenseless theory of time, God really doesn't conserve  $e$  in existence from some earlier time to some later time.<sup>32</sup>

We can also see the problem with this notion if we think of some entity that exists only at a certain time, say, some entity  $x$  which exists only at  $t^2$ . It just exists for a single instant. Clearly,  $x$  depends upon God for its existence, but he doesn't conserve  $x$  in being, right? Because  $x$  doesn't endure from one moment to another, it only exists at  $t^2$ . It doesn't exist at any other instant; it is simply something that exists at a single instant. So even though it depends on God for its existence, God can't really be said to conserve  $x$  because  $x$  only exists at one instant. Or, what about the whole four-dimensional space-time manifold? What about the whole thing? Clearly this whole thing depends upon God for its existence and yet God can't really be said to conserve it in being because he doesn't preserve it from one moment to the next, it just exists tenselessly, co-eternally with God. Time is just an internal dimension of this block but the whole block just exists, in a sense, timelessly with God. Yet, it is clear that God is the source of being; of all of these entities. He is the source of being for  $e$ ,  $e'$ ,  $x$  and for the whole four-dimensional space-time block.

Similarly, suppose there are objects that exist but don't exist in time? Like what? Well, the number 2. Or the set of all odd numbers  $\{1, 3, 5 \dots\}$ . Or the square root of 9. There might be all sorts of abstract objects that exist timelessly. A serious Doctrine of Creation would have to say that these things depend upon God for their existence if they are real. They can't exist independently of God and yet God can't be said to conserve these in being because they don't exist in time, right? So they can't be preserved from one moment of time to another. Remember, that is how we defined conservation – conservation is God's acting on some entity to preserve it in existence from an earlier time to a later time. That would clearly be inapplicable to timeless entities if there were such things – such as abstract objects like numbers.

It seems to me that what we need here is some third category of how God relates to the world that is different from creation and conservation. What might we call that? Let me just invent a term – why don't we say that God *sustains* these things in being? We are going to characterize *sustenance* as a different property than conservation or creation. So God creates things on a tensed theory of time when he brings things into being, he conserves things in being on a tensed theory of time when he preserves something from an earlier time to a later time. But if a tenseless theory of time is true, or if there are timeless objects like numbers, then God neither creates nor conserves them. Rather, I am saying he sustains them in being. This would be *sustenance*, another category in addition to creation and conservation.

How might we define sustaining? How about this: God sustains  $e$  if and only if either  $e$

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<sup>32</sup> 4:57

exists tenselessly at some time  $t$  or  $e$  exists timelessly and God brings it about that  $e$  exists. I'll repeat that. God sustains  $e$  if and only if either  $e$  exists tenselessly at  $t$  (that would be the case of things like  $x$  and  $e$  and  $e'$ ) or  $e$  exists timelessly (that would be the case with these abstract mathematical objects that don't exist in time) and God brings it about that  $e$  exists.<sup>33</sup> That is what I am suggesting we mean by sustenance. God brings it about that these things exist but they exist either tenselessly in time or they are timeless.

So, what that implies is that the very idea of conservation is also committed to a tensed theory of time. It is not just creation that commits you to a tensed theory of time but, I think, conservation also commits you to a tensed theory of time. Conservation of a being is necessary if the being is to endure from an earlier time to a later time. If that same being is to exist through time then it requires God's conservation. By contrast, on a tenseless theory of time, conservation is not only unnecessary, it is excluded. There cannot be any conservation on a tenseless theory of time; neither is there really creation in a robust sense of the universe. Rather, the proper relationship would be sustenance. God sustains things in being; he sustains the four-dimensional universe in being, he sustains in being everything in it and he would sustain in being anything that exists timelessly.

What that suggests is that if we do hold to a doctrine of creation and conservation that are, I think, robust, biblical doctrines, we are also committed to this tensed view of time – that time is dynamic, temporal becoming is real and we don't exist in just a four-dimensional block universe.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Just looking at that and thinking of a bad analogy of a playwright and a play, why couldn't it be said that God created the universe and then he created a plan for the universe and opened the curtains?

*Answer:* OK, think about what you just said. He created the universe *and then* he did something else. That "then" indicates a temporal relationship.

*Followup:* OK, created a universe which included a plan.

*Answer:* Yes, he certainly could do that. But in that case, I don't think you have real creation. What you have got is simply God sustaining the universe in being with a beginning to the play, or beginning to the drama. This analogy that you have used is one that I think C. S. Lewis tried to use but faultily in my opinion. Lewis said that God is like the author who is outside the novel, or the play, and the novel or the play is what happens in the universe and God is outside of it – he knows the end from the beginning, he has written the whole thing. The difficulty with that is the novel or the play always are co-eternal with God. There is never any point at which God begins to write the novel and brings it into being. Once you say that then you are going to posit a time above time. You are going to have a second-order time. First there is just God alone and then he writes the novel and – boom! – the whole four-dimensional block exists. Then maybe say he is done with the novel and it's just God again or something like that. And that means you have

<sup>33</sup> 9:58

really a higher hyper-time and you are just back to the same difficulty again. God then has to still be in time. He would be in this hyper-time or second-order time.

*Question:* If we build this concept from the verse in Hebrews – that the universe was formed at God’s command, the universe is visible, God’s command is invisible – and if we understand that everything is made by God’s word (the invisible part), then he finished the creation in six days but his command has not yet finished. He continues. So the invisible command actually will become visible as human life lives out according to his purpose. So it is almost like the end of time is complete in God’s mind and then his invisible qualities are communicated with people of faith as Hebrews 11 demonstrated.<sup>34</sup> Each person lives out his function as if it is a mathematical function of time and each person has just one value of time and as they live out their function they actually bring that invisible factor into visibility so we are able to see God’s plan unfold as it goes.

*Answer:* The question is – if I understand you right – is that unfolding of God’s plan that you talk about something that really happens? Does the plan really unfold, do things really happen, or is that just an illusion of human consciousness? If you say it really unfolds, then you are agreeing with a tensed view of time. If you say no, it doesn’t really unfold, it just looks like that then you are agreeing with a tenseless view of time. Like a movie film lying in the can – all of the frames are already existing, they are all in the can already and it just looks like they are happening when it is projected on the screen but in fact, really, it is all there. The difference between the dynamic and static theory of time is very much like the difference between the film as it lies in the can (and all the frames are there) and the movie watched on a screen where there is real becoming that is actually happening. I think you want to say, I hope, that this plan really does unfold, right?

*Followup:* It does because, as Hebrews 11 lists out all the people – the heroes – of faith, what they are doing is making it visible as it unfolds. When Jesus came, he actually showed us how to snap into the equation. He is the equation of the function and if we believe in him and learn to snap into that equation we will be able to live out this function God intended. So as each person, by faith, lives out that function, the picture will unfold with God’s purpose in a clear integrated way.

*Answer:* OK.

*Question:* The part of the problem with grabbing the whole of this greased monkey is a finite mind trying to understand the infinite. My favorite cosmological verse is Romans 4:17 that God calls all things as though they are – the not-being as being. So he is not bound by time, although he gives us a time spectrum to work through. There is a series going on with Brian Greene based on his book on time and space and these types of things and they had one episode on the shooting of the arrow. The arrow goes one way, not back the other way towards the archer and you demonstrate that that’s the way it should be with increasing entropy. You have that in time and space that we are locked into but God, in Romans 4:17, supersedes time and space and I am not sure we can necessarily come to a way that he does that. I always look at God operating in the infinite now.

*Answer:* Romans 4:17, I think, is an affirmation of creation *ex nihilo*. It says, “God gives

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<sup>34</sup> 15:12

life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.” That, to me, is an expression of a tensed theory of time. It’s not that these things tenselessly exist and later on they sort of are visible whereas before you can’t see them. God calls them into existence. It says he calls into being the things that do not exist. So I take that, again, to be supportive of this idea that things really do come into being and therefore this block universe view is theologically unacceptable. You have to be very, very careful in watching these popular scientific programs about time and space because they are almost overwhelmingly physicalistic and reductionistic.<sup>35</sup> I think this identification of time’s arrow, so to speak, with the direction of increasing entropy is a perfect example of that. At the very most, increasing entropy is evidence of the arrow of time but it wouldn’t constitute the arrow of time. There is no reason to treat time in this reductionistic way. Time can exist without the second law of thermodynamics. It can exist without physical space even. Someone mentioned last time that just a series of mental events in a person’s stream of consciousness would generate a before and after. So be very critical when you listen to these programs on scientific understandings of time and space because they are so often reductionistic in a physicalistic way.

*Followup:* I would agree but that supported a tensed view of time and why we need to have one and this was physical support for such a thing.

*Answer:* OK.

*Question:* Could you speak to where the abstract objects do exist or maybe how they exist?

*Answer:* They don’t exist anywhere any more than they exist at any time. If there are these things, they are not in space. Remember, this is space and time here [*pointing to the illustration on the board – see figure 1*] – time is the vertical dimension and space is these lateral dimensions. We have repressed one dimension of space because we can’t picture it here on this blackboard but we suppress one dimension of space and we imagine these two dimensional spatial planes slicing this four-dimensional (three-dimensional in the picture) block. This is space, this is time. So if there are these abstract objects, like the square root of 9, they don’t exist anywhere and they don’t exist at any time. They would just transcend space and time. Now, that is problematic I think. I personally don’t think that these things do exist but a lot of people do so I want to think of how would a doctrine of the world’s dependency upon God look from their point of view even though I don’t agree with that point of view. The mainstream Christian position has been that these sorts of entities exist in God as God’s ideas so that they are not something separate from him. They are concepts in the mind of God. That has been the mainstream Christian position historically.

*Question:* It would seem to me that regardless of whether you look at a tensed or untensed theory of time, we still have this hyper-time problem. Whether God brings the universe into existence as a four-dimensional space-time block or as a linear progression of events there still would need to be a “time before time” in which God exists by himself before he brings the universe into existence.

*Answer:* Let me interrupt at this point. Even if that is the case, it would not need to be a

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<sup>35</sup> 20:02

higher time, or a hyper-time. It would just be an extension of the same time back before creation. So let's imagine, here is the creation event (the Big Bang) and that time goes on from there. The question is: did time begin at the Big Bang or, as you suggest, is it the case that in fact prior to the Big Bang there was God and this just goes back infinitely. I think you can see that here we are not talking about another time dimension; it is just extending the same dimension backwards. To have a higher time dimension, you would have to have the dimensions be at right angles to each other so that if this is our time  $t^0$  and here is  $t^1, t^2, t^3$  and so forth that would have to endure through this hyper-time which is at a right angle to our time [see figure 2].

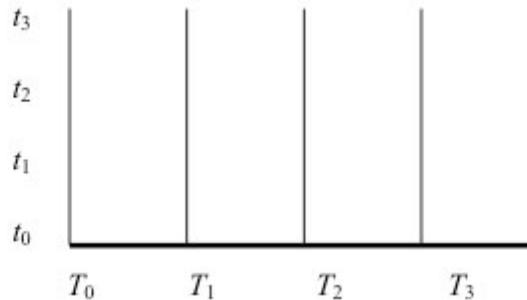


Figure 3- Hyper-time

So here would be the Big Bang [the point at  $(T^0, t^0)$ ] and here would be the same event [the point at  $(T^1, t^0)$ ] and here is the same event [the point at  $(T^2, t^0)$ ] and this block would just endure through the hyper-time. So I think you can see that is very different from just saying time goes back forever just as it goes forward forever.<sup>36</sup> It is not a higher time; it is not a second time dimension. It is just saying there was time before creation. That is an issue that is very much disputed among philosophers and theologians who think that God is in time. I would say most of them who think that God is in time now probably think that time goes back before creation forever. I don't think that but I think that is what most of them would say.

*Question:* If I understand this model of the tenseless space-time continuum, I think one of the things that I don't understand is how does it account for the causal relationship between events? In other words, if  $e$  is a loaf of bread and I decide to eat it at  $t^1$  and it no longer exists at  $t^2$  but if I decide to not to eat it then maybe it still exists at  $t^2$  and where does free will come in?

*Answer:* This has been recently a subject of discussion in the open forum on the Reasonable Faith website. I think you are raising an interesting question. You are saying, in what sense can  $e$  be the cause of  $e'$  because they don't exist at the same time. It seems like causation requires that you would have some kind of influence from one moment to the next. That doesn't seem to exist here in a sense. I think this is going to depend on what you mean by causation. I think that what the tenseless theorist could say is that  $e'$  is caused by  $e$  in something like this sense: if  $e$  didn't exist, or if it hadn't existed, then  $e'$  wouldn't have existed either. The problem is that is not a very good definition of causality but it does seem like they are going to have to think of causation in a different

<sup>36</sup> 25:00

way because on this view things don't really bring things into being. They don't really bring new things in existence.

*Followup:* People make decisions and decisions have consequences and that has an impact on what you see inside the block.

*Answer:* You asked about free will - again, I guess what the person could say is that because there isn't any determinism on this from one earlier event to a later one that it does allow room for free will. I do think that is right. If there isn't determinism then that would allow room for free will even though the future is just as real as the present.

*Question:* On your diagram you have this object *e* and it looks like *e* is, on the B-theory of time, a four-dimensional worm that begins at one point and ends at another. Is *e'*, the later state, is that a different object or is it a different temporal part of the same object?

*Answer:* Both. It is a different temporal part of this whole space-time worm here [Dr. Craig circles the dark grey area in figure 1 – the *e* and *e'* slices]. But what I have labeled here as *e* and *e'* are different parts of it, like different segments. Like a loaf of bread that is sliced into slices and this is one heel and that's the other heel and they are both parts of this whole loaf of bread. But obviously, the one heel is not the same object as the other heel. They are different objects. So *e* and *e'* are different objects. Think of what this implies! If this is supposed to be a person – if this is you – that means that the person who came into this room an hour ago isn't the same as the person that is sitting here now. It is just a later stage of this four-dimensional worm. So nobody endures through time; you are literally not the same person you were a second ago because you are a different object. That really occasions interesting theological problems for, say, divine judgment. Why should the person who appears before the judgment seat of Christ be blamed or punished or rewarded for what some earlier, quite different person-stage did back along time ago? Why are you being punished for something that somebody else did? Yet, that is what that amounts to on this view when persons are these extended four-dimensional objects.<sup>37</sup>

*Question:* In 100 AD, was the apostle John actually looking at future events when he was shown them?

*Answer:* I think that is going to depend on which theory of time you adopt. You could say, if you are a tenseless time theorist, that those events that are happening at the end of the history are actually real and they exist and they are just as real as the events that John in 100 AD was experiencing and somehow he had a vision of those events. On the tensed theory of time, I think what you would say is, no, he wasn't really seeing those events because they don't exist; he was having a foreshadowing of them, a kind of visual image of what would eventually happen but he wasn't seeing them as they actually exist. Remember last week, I think it was, that I said that is why I think the metaphor of God foreseeing the future is very misleading. It implies that God's knowledge of the future is like perception – that he looks ahead somehow and sees what is out there, what is up there. On a tensed theory of time we shouldn't think of God's foreknowledge of the future on the model of perception because there isn't anything there to see.

*Question:* Taking a tensed view, you could actually say that God actually joined creation,

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<sup>37</sup> 29:55

not in the sense of the visible which is temporary, but just like we have a spiritual body that is not seen. Maybe the things in Revelation aren't the end of time but a judgment, a refreshing.

*Answer:* Certainly God joins in creation in the incarnation – doesn't he? – which is a nice segue to this Christmas time of year. In the incarnation, we believe that the second person of the Trinity took on a human nature and actually entered into our physical space-time universe. So he actually existed at a point in time in history in his human nature. So in that sense, God certainly does join in creation in not only creating the universe but actually entering into it in the person of Christ by assuming a human nature.

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I think with that we will draw it to a close. Next time we will look more closely at the doctrine of conservation with regard to the doctrine of concurrence. Does God cause everything that happens in the universe or does he simply allow things to happen to be caused but he is not really the cause himself? We will examine how God concurs with the operations of secondary causes in the universe to bring about everything that happens.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Total Running Time: 33:39 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 7

## God's Existing Timelessly *sans* Creation

### God's Existing Timelessly *sans* Creation

The final objection to creation out of nothing that I just wanted to say a brief word about has to do with God's relationship to time. Sometimes people will say, "If God created the universe – if he created time and space – then how could God have existed before the universe?" If there wasn't any time before the universe you can't say that God existed before the universe and then brought time and space into being because "before" is a temporal relation and that would, therefore, be incoherent and so you cannot have creation out of nothing.

Briefly, I think we've already talked about this problem when we looked at the divine attribute of God's eternity in our section of the class on the attributes of God. The position that I defended, and I think is coherent, is to say that God exists timelessly without creation or, as I like to put it, using the word *sans* which means "without." God is timeless *sans* creation and he is temporal since the moment of creation. That is to say, God existing without the universe exists changelessly and therefore timelessly with a timeless intention to bring a universe into being. The universe comes into being at the first moment of time and in virtue of his causal relationship with the universe God enters into time at that moment as well. So God is temporal – he is in time – from the moment of creation on. His creation of the universe is simultaneous with the beginning of time; they occur at the same moment of time. Without the universe, God is simply timeless.

It seems to me that that makes good sense of the relationship between God and the universe. God is not temporally prior to the universe, he is causally prior to the universe (or he is explanatorily prior to the universe but not temporally prior to the universe). Without the universe, God is simply timeless and then from the moment of creation on God is temporal; he is in time in order to sustain relations with the world that he has made. For those of you who are new to the class, by the word "temporal" I obviously don't mean "temporary." Sometimes people misunderstand the word "temporal" to mean finite in duration. When I say temporal, I simply mean in time – having a past, present and future – experiencing the flow of time. So God is timeless without creation and temporal, or in time, from the moment of creation on.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* I think you've taught us that God is an unembodied mind. So I guess before time he was just a mind, which I guess he still is, right? When I think of a mind, I think of thought processes and thoughts and sometimes, at least in my mind, those are in sequence – I think one thing and then I think another and then I think another. How does any kind of sequence of thoughts in God's mind relate to time?

*Answer:* This is a very good question. You quite rightly perceives that in our minds we

have what some authors have called a stream of consciousness, as one thought occurs after another in a kind of stream of ideas. If God is timeless without creation, what would that imply about God's cognitive state? It would imply he doesn't have a stream of consciousness. He is timeless and unchanging. He has a single, unchanging cognitive state – or mental state – without the universe. I think that the Doctrine of the Trinity can help us make good sense of this. When you think that all of the three persons of the Trinity are equally omniscient – they each know all the truth there is – there is nothing they can learn that is new because God knows everything.<sup>39</sup> It seems that the persons of the Trinity could enjoy a timeless, changeless, love relationship with each other without the universe in which there would be complete transparency and sharing of knowledge, love and will. What the Son knows, the Father and the Spirit know. What the Father loves, the Spirit and the Son love. What the Spirit wills, the Father and the Son will. Just a complete harmony of knowledge, love and will in a changeless, timeless state. I would say that insofar as God exists *sans* creation, there isn't any need for a sequence of thoughts or a stream of consciousness. There is just this single changeless cognitive state that God is in.

*Question:* I would have to disagree with the idea that God existed changelessly and timelessly before creation of the universe. I define emotion as a change and we are told that God certainly has emotions – he is angry and then he is not angry and then he forgives us and so on. I also think that you have to have time if you have thoughts and I think God had thoughts before he had the universe. If you are going to hold to your view, how do you explain emotion? Would you say that God did not have emotion until after he created the universe? Because emotion you would have to say is a change.

*Answer:* If you think of the examples you gave, such as God's anger with sin or his wrath upon mankind or things of that sort, these are in response to changing, temporal creatures and circumstances. I am only talking about God insofar as he exists *sans* creation. Once time comes to exist and God enters into relationship with time, certainly then one can imagine God having changing relationships and emotional reactions to people. But, insofar as he exists as just Father, Son and Holy Spirit alone without any universe, I don't see any reason to think he has to be changing in his emotions – there would be just a complete interchange of love between the three members of the Trinity in perfect harmony with each other.

*Followup:* Can you not envision some circumstance in which he could have emotional changes concerning things beside mankind? Wouldn't that be possible?

*Answer:* Yes, although at this point, remember we are talking *sans* creation – so there aren't any external circumstances. We are talking about God insofar as it is just the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in perfect union with one another. I don't think that thoughts have to involve change. The thought "I am God," "I am eternal," "I am omnipotent," "I am three persons" – none of those thoughts take time to think. Those can all be held in a timeless, changeless way.

*Followup:* One more thing. I think the way you and I have differences on this – I have no idea what an entity such as God who has unlimited power and unlimited time would do

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<sup>39</sup> 4:56

before he created the universe. I would think that his creation of the universe may be a tiny, perhaps even insignificant, thing compared to what he may have done before that. It seems to me that since we don't know what he did before that, because he had unlimited time and unlimited power, it is entirely reasonable to think that there are things associated with that period which could arouse emotion which therefore would be a change.

*Answer:* Alright, let me make one final response to that. We are presupposing here the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. That there is a point at which God brought every created thing into being. That is perfectly consistent, say, with there being angelic realms prior to the creation of this universe, or maybe other universes that he created prior to this one. But the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* affirms that there is a state of affairs in the actual world which is just God existing alone and that creation, in whatever form or shape it takes, is not co-eternal with God. He did not have to create – it is the free exercise of his will that brings into being something other than God. So I am asking us to think about what would God be like in that state of affairs which consists of God existing alone without anything else.<sup>40</sup>

*Question:* Do you believe that God needs to have libertarian free will in order to connect the timeless state of affairs into temporal creation. I have heard some Calvinists argue that libertarian free will is incoherent. I have argued that no theist can ever be a hard compatibilist.

*Answer:* I tend to agree with you. With respect to God – God must have libertarian freedom. He can't be determined to do everything that he does. Particularly, the orthodox Doctrine of Creation – *creatio ex nihilo* – is, as I said, that creation is a free decision of God. He brought the universe into being by the exercise of his will, not by some internal compulsion of his nature. That is neo-Platonism. This was a doctrine that the church fathers confronted that came out of Greek philosophy. Neo-Platonism was the view that God is a sort of undifferentiated, ultimate reality and that the world flowed out of the being of God with necessity; the world emanated out of God. The church fathers rejected any sort of suggestion that creation is a necessary byproduct of God's being. It is the result of his free will. God does have libertarian freedom and could have refrained from creation had he chosen to.

*Followup:* I feel like that the deterministic God sounds more like Spinozian pantheism.

*Answer:* Yes! It is like Spinoza. Spinoza was also one who believed that everything that exists exists necessarily. That is right.

*Question:* One apologetics program I was listening to, they introduced the concept of meta-time that was kind of like God's time before time. I don't know if that was a conventional concept or if that was just something they threw out there.

*Answer:* It is very unconventional. What it would suggest is that maybe there is a kind of hyper-time – that is the way I have usually heard it put, but meta-time would be the same thing. It is a time above time. What would that be like? How can we make sense of this? [Dr. Craig draws an illustration; see figure 1].

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<sup>40</sup> 9:56

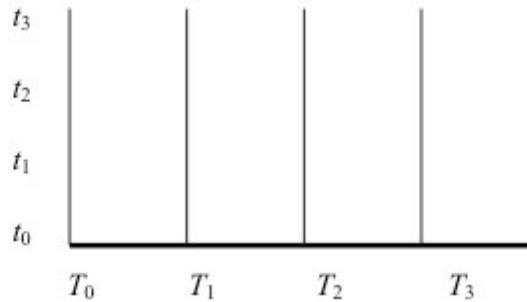


Figure 4: Hyper-Time

Let's suppose that this line represents ordinary time. Time begins at the moment of creation at  $t=0$  [which is  $t_0$  in figure 1] and then it advances up in one moment after another [ $t_0$ ,  $t_1$ ,  $t_2$ , and  $t_3$  in figure 1]. This is the history of our universe beginning at  $t=0$  and then it goes on and we are somewhere up there, up the line. That is our ordinary time. What would it be to say that there is a meta-time? What it would be is to say that there is another time that exists at a right angle to this time and our timeline endures through this hyper-time to later time. So hyper-time here is  $T_0$ ,  $T_1$ ,  $T_2$ , and  $T_3$ .

Our time itself endures through this hyper-time into the future hyper-time, whether that is finite or infinite. That is the idea; that there is this kind of second time dimension at right angles, or orthogonal as they would say, to our timeline and our timeline endures through hyper-time. Well, I think you can see this is a metaphysical extravagance which serves no purpose whatsoever because all the questions will re-arise on the level of hyper-time! Is God in hyper-time or is his timeless? And the whole debate is just replayed again on a second level. So I think that those folks, and I am thinking of someone like Hugh Ross who tries to appeal to a kind of hyper-time, are just inventing a sort of fifth wheel that doesn't do any work and we might as well just stick with ordinary time rather than these sorts of metaphysical extravagances. Indeed, if you press Dr. Ross on this issue, he will admit in conversation that his talk of meta-time or hyper-time is just a metaphor. He doesn't really mean that there is a second time dimension. It is just a metaphorical way of talking about a God who exists timelessly and transcends our temporal dimension.<sup>41</sup>

*Followup:* My second question is: if creation started time and, as far as the theory goes creation will end, will time end?

*Answer:* OK, good question. I don't think time will end once it has started. For one thing, creation never will end. What does the Bible say? It says that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him will not perish but – what will he have? – *everlasting* life.<sup>42</sup> He will live forever, for all time. So the promise of the Bible is that God is not going to annihilate creation. Rather, we will live forever in a new heavens and a new earth that will go on forever. So time will never be done away with even though our physical measures of time in this universe – our clocks – will be done away with as a new heavens and new earth are created. But that new heavens and new earth will still be temporal realities.

<sup>41</sup> 15:06

<sup>42</sup> cf. John 3:16

*Question:* Does time and the physical world start at the same time? What about spiritual worlds? Angels – were they in time?

*Answer:* That's a really good question. I think that you have to say we don't know when God created the angelic realms. It is certainly possible that prior to – and I mean this literally, temporally prior to – the beginning of the physical universe, God created these angelic realms. So time didn't actually begin at the Big Bang, it began earlier than that when God created angels and other spiritual realities. But when you look at the Scriptures, it just is not at all clear when God created these entities. Genesis 1:1 just says “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Therefore, simply for the sake of simplicity, I am assuming that time begins at the moment of the Big Bang with his creation of the space-time universe. But that is just for the sake of simplicity. As you indicate, it is entirely possible that God could have been active doing things earlier than his creation of this universe.

*Question:* To say that God is in time, it sounds like he is becoming restricted. Does this put a limit on God?

*Answer:* This is a comment that people very often have – that this is putting a limit on God; that this somehow is restricting God. I think, frankly, that it is just the opposite. A God who is changeless and timeless is the one who is restricted because he can't do anything different. He can't change. He can't act or react. A timeless being is frozen like an ice statue in immobility. So, in one sense, becoming temporal is liberating. I am speaking anthropomorphically here, obviously, but it means God now can act and react, he can have sequential thoughts, changing emotions, he can know what time it is, things of that sort. I think it is just misconceived to think of God's choosing to enter into relationship with creation as somehow restrictive or limiting. In my opinion, it is not. Even if you do think that it is, well, that would just show that for our sake and our salvation, God is willing to condescend and stoop down to enter our mode of existence in order to have a relationship with us and in the incarnation he stoops even lower and takes on our own human nature in order to redeem us.

*Followup:* It seems like that would put something above God.

*Answer:* No, because it is his own free decision. Think of, for example, his willingness or free decision to create people with free will. That means he is not going to be able to control everything that they do because they have freedom of the will to disobey him and do things against his will. But that doesn't put anything above God. It is up to him whether to create creatures with free will and he has chosen to do so. In the same way, I have emphasized that the decision to create a world – a reality other than himself – is a free decision on God's part that he undertakes.<sup>43</sup>

*Question:* On your view, when God exists without creation you are saying that there was a point at which he decided to create – he was not compelled to create, he didn't have to create. Therefore, don't you have at least two points when God exists without creation? A point when he had not decided to create and then a point afterwards he decided to create. So don't you have the passage of time and change?

*Answer:* I don't think so. The way I conceive of this is that God's decree to create, even

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<sup>43</sup> 20:06

though freely taken, is eternal. It is itself a timeless decision. It is something that God had in his timeless state – a decree to create a world with a beginning. What is required, I think, and is close to what you said is that even though the intention is timeless, there had to be an exercise of causal power in order to bring the universe into being. But I would say that exercise of causal power is simultaneous with the universe coming into being. When else could it be? It is when he exercises his causal power that the universe springs into existence and it would simply be technically incorrect to say that there was a time before he exercised his causal power. That is purely a product of human imagination thinking of, say, one hour before creation. That is just an imaginary product of our minds but there really literally isn't any such moment.

### **Continuing Creation**

Let's now turn to the subject of continuing creation. You will recall that continuing creation involved two aspects. First was what was called *conservatio* (in Latin) or "conservation." Then the other aspect of continuing creation was *concursum* or "concurrence." I've already argued that God's conservation of the world in being should not properly be thought of as a type of creation, otherwise, you get into this weird view that nothing ever endures from one moment to the next but rather at every moment God creates a new thing in its place which would be crazy. It would mean that you are not the same being that came into this room initially; you haven't endured through time. We really should not think of conservation as God's recreation of things at each successive moment. Rather, you will recall I gave the following definition of divine conservation:

God conserves some entity  $e$  if and only if God acts upon  $e$  to bring about  $e$ 's existing from some time  $t$  until some later time  $t^*$  through every sub-interval in the interval  $t$  to  $t^*$ .

In this case, conservation is not a type of creation. The object is there and God acts upon it to preserve it in being until a later time. It differs from creation in that it does not take place at one moment of time; rather, it takes place across time as God preserves something in being and it is not like creation in that it does presuppose a prior subject. In creation, God simply posits the subject in being but in conservation God preserves the subject in being from one moment to the next.

### **Scriptural Data**

What biblical data might be appealed to in order to support a doctrine of conservation? Surprisingly, I think, the biblical evidence for the doctrine of conservation is, to put it honestly, pretty thin.<sup>44</sup> There really aren't very many passages in the Bible that I can find that support the doctrine that God has to conserve things in being from one moment to the next. This is initially surprising because modern theologians are so terrified of bumping up against empirical science that they have abandoned the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* largely in favor of a doctrine of conservation. Creation is re-interpreted to mean that God conserves or preserves things in being, not that a finite time ago God brought everything into being. One theologian, for example, has said that the Doctrine of Creation is not the

<sup>44</sup> 25:02

doctrine that God lit the fuse that ignited the Big Bang. Well, apart from the metaphor, I think that is exactly what the Doctrine of Creation is – that God brought the universe into being at some time in the finite past. Therefore, it is odd that the Doctrine of Creation should be so widely abandoned in favor of conservation when the biblical data for creation is so much more powerful than the biblical data in support of conservation. As I said earlier, the very use of the past tense in the Scripture with respect to verbs of creation indicate that an event at some time in the past is in view, not God’s conserving the world in being moment by moment. It is almost always in the past tense that God created the world or the things that he created. But nevertheless, let me just mention three passages that could be used to support a doctrine of conservation. First, Colossians 1:16-17, talking about the person and work of Christ, says,

for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

It is that last phrase that could be interpreted to mean conservation. He not only brought all things into being – all things were created through him – but in him all things hold together. Christ is the one who upholds the universe, who conserves it, in being. Also Hebrews 1:3, again speaking of Christ, “He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power.” Again it is that last phrase – Christ upholds the universe by his Word of power. Notice the present tense there. This is an ongoing activity – upholding the universe by his powerful Word. That could be interpreted to mean conservation of the universe in being from one moment to the next. Finally, in Acts 17:28, which is Paul’s famous address on Mars Hill, Paul says, “for ‘In him we live and move and have our being’.” We have our very being in God. That might again be interpreted in terms of God’s conserving the world in being. So this would be the biblical data, I think, that could motivate a doctrine of conservation that God is responsible, not simply for creating things in the beginning and then leaving them to run on their own devices, but he upholds or conserves the universe in being moment by moment from that initial moment of creation.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* The theologians that you refer to who hold to a doctrine of conservation in place of *creatio ex nihilo* – would that mean that they believe in an eternal universe?<sup>45</sup>

*Answer:* Some of them might. Some of them may say that the universe has always existed, but it is radically dependent upon God because he conserves it from moment to moment at every moment of its being. So it isn’t pantheism, that’s clear. This is positing a radical contingency of the universe upon God from moment to moment but it would just say those moments go back forever. Not all of them would say that but I think what they would say is this: whether the universe began or not is irrelevant to the Doctrine of Creation. It is just an irrelevant question. Why do they say that? It is because they have collapsed the Doctrine of Creation to conservation and it is irrelevant to the doctrine of

<sup>45</sup> 30:10

conservation whether God's conserving activity had a temporal beginning or not. That can have gone on forever.

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I have already given a definition of continuing creation or conservation and I am not aware of any further problems with that once you get rid of the notion that conservation is a type of creation. What we will do next time is look at this second aspect of so-called continuing creation which is God's concurrence. This is the doctrine that God causes everything that happens to happen in the world.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Total Running Time: 31:53 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 8

## Concurrence and Providence

We have been talking in our class dealing with Doctrine of Creation on *creatio continuans*, or continuing creation. You will remember I said that the doctrine of *creatio continuans*, or continuing creation, had two sub-areas. One was *conservatio*, or conservation, of the world in being – God’s preserving the world and everything in it from one moment to the next. Then the other area is called *concursus*, or concurrence in English. We have now completed our discussion of the doctrine of conservation and so we want to say a word about the doctrine of concurrence.

### Concurrence

According to the doctrine of concurrence, God is literally the cause of everything that happens in the world. This is not to say that God is the only cause of everything that happens. That is a doctrine which is called *occasionalism* which was held to by certain medieval Muslim theologians<sup>47</sup> who said that, in fact, there are no secondary causes operative in the world – God is the only cause of anything that happens and he merely acts on certain occasions to bring about effects. For example, on the occasion of the match being brought into proximity with the gasoline, God causes the gasoline to ignite and explode. The match doesn’t cause it – the flame has no causal power to do anything. It is merely the occasion upon which God causes things. That is the doctrine of occasionalism which says that God is the only cause there is. The doctrine of concurrence is not the doctrine that God is the only cause of everything that happens. Rather, it is the doctrine that God concurs with the operation of secondary causes in the world. And in the absence of God’s concurring with them, nothing would be caused by these secondary effects. Nothing would be produced by them. So everything that happens in the world in a sense has two causes: one is the secondary causes that produce things about us that we see and the other would be God as the primary cause who brings about, or concurs with, the operation of secondary causes to product their effects.

This remarkable doctrine is almost totally neglected in contemporary theology and discussions of God’s relationship to the world. You never hear anyone today (virtually) affirming, or talking about, the doctrine of divine concurrence. Yet, if you reflect upon the doctrine of conservation it seems that the doctrine of concurrence follows, logically, from the doctrine of conservation. As I said last week, the doctrine of conservation is pretty much the only doctrine of creation that most contemporary theologians hold to. They have largely abandoned *creatio originans* – the originating creation – and simply hold to conservation of the world in being by God. Yet, if you have a serious doctrine of conservation, it seems that concurrence follows logically from it. Think about it. If God conserves some event *e* from time *t* to a later time *t'* so that God conserves *e* in being from *t* to *t'* then he must conserve *e* not just in abstraction but he has to conserve *e* with

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<sup>47</sup> Al-Ghazali, who has a strong philosophical influence on Dr. Craig’s *Kalam* Cosmological Argument you will recall, was one such Muslim. He propounded occasionalism in his book *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* written in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

all its particularity – with all its particular properties that it has at those moments.<sup>48</sup> Let's suppose that, at time *t*, *e* is, say, a fluffy ball of white cotton which is brought into proximity with a match or a flame. Let's suppose that, as a result of that, by *t'* the cotton becomes black and smoldering and is no longer fluffy white. If God preserves the cotton in being from *t* to *t'* he doesn't just preserve the cotton in a sort of abstract sense, he preserves it in all of its particularity – its whiteness and fluffiness at *t*, its being black and smoldering at *t'*. In order for the cotton to exist in all its particularity with its particular properties, God must bring about its existing at *t* with its properties at *t* and he brings it about that it exists at *t'* with those particular properties. So conservation would seem to require that God is the cause of the cotton's being white and fluffy at *t* and being black and smoldering at *t'*.

Someone might try to escape this conclusion by saying, "Well, God wills that the cotton be white and fluffy at *t* but he doesn't bring it about that the cotton is fluffy and white at *t*." It seems to me that that would be incompatible with a doctrine of divine providence. Again, think about it. Either God wills that the cotton is fluffy and white at *t* or he doesn't will it. If he doesn't will that it is white and fluffy at *t*, and this is true of any event, then it means God is utterly indifferent to what happens in the world. He conserves it in being but he doesn't have any will with respect to what happens in it. He doesn't care what happens in the world. That would deny God's providence. So I don't think we can say that God is just indifferent to what happens at time *t*. Suppose then that God does will that the cotton is white and fluffy at time *t*. In that case, his will is either directive or it is merely permissive. He either directly wills that the cotton be white and fluffy at *t* or he merely permits it to be white and fluffy at *t*. But again, if his will is directive, if God wills that the cotton be white and fluffy at *t*, but he doesn't bring it about that it is white and fluffy at *t* then God's will is impotent – it doesn't do anything. He wills that the cotton be that way but it isn't that way as a result. So if God's will is directive it would follow that God is impotent, which is unacceptable. If you say it is merely permissive, he merely permits the cotton to be white and fluffy at *t*, then again you seem to be denying God's providence because God doesn't directly will anything to happen at that moment. He is indifferent; he just permits things to happen but he doesn't have any directive will which seems to deny divine providence. So, it does seem that a robust doctrine of conservation of the world in being would imply a doctrine of concurrence. God not only wills that certain things exist and persevere or are conserved from time to time, but he wills that they exist with all of their particular properties at these various times and therefore they do.

It was on the basis of this that classical theologians were able to explain certain miracles in the Bible. For example, in Daniel 3, you have this well known story of King Nebuchadnezzar casting three Israelites, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, into this fiery furnace to be burned alive. Let me read you a portion of the story from Daniel 3:19-25:

Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he ordered certain

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<sup>48</sup> 4:57

mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their mantles, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were cast into the burning fiery furnace. Because the king's order was strict and the furnace very hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He said to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered the king, "True, O king." He answered, "But I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."<sup>49</sup>

Here the flames are so intense, the heat so hot, that it completely roasts the guards that are throwing these three men into the fire but then they are unharmed by the flames. They are walking around inside of this burning fiery furnace unharmed. The way classical theologians explained this was by saying that God withdrew his concurring activity with the power of the flame. So by not concurring with the causal effects of the flame, there was no effect produced on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and so they were unharmed. It wasn't as though God covered them with some sort of invisible asbestos to protect them from the flames. No. He didn't concur with the secondary causes in this regard and so that is how the men were unharmed. So this doctrine of divine concurrence was useful to them in explaining certain miracles that were found in the Bible on the basis of God's concurring activity, or in this case his withdrawal of concurring activity.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Are they saying then that the natural result of fire would be to consume the human body but at that moment God chose to prevent that from happening, which would have been the normal course of events? He intervened into the natural process such as having time stop in another point in Scripture where time literally stopped.

*Answer:* I don't think it is that, if I understand your question. It is not as though God intervened to protect them by doing something. It is more that he just didn't concur with the flames so the effect wasn't produced. In other words, everything that happens in the world according to the doctrine of concurrence has to be produced by secondary causes and by God. And if God doesn't concur with these secondary causes, they are impotent. So the flames just had no power to produce any effects on these men.

*Followup:* So they are saying that this is not just nature alone; that God created the fire and it has certain qualities but he is continually involved in their fulfilling their qualities.

*Answer:* Yes, that is right. You are right here. This is a much more radical doctrine, I think you can see, than saying God gives secondary causes their causal powers – he gives the gasoline the power of combustibility by giving it a certain chemical composition or he gives to other things in the world solidity by virtue of the way they are composed. No, it is much more radical than that. It is that whenever any cause in the world operates, God

<sup>49</sup> 10:51

has to concur by producing the effect along with the secondary cause or nothing happens. This is a very strange doctrine. We are not used to hearing this but that is the idea. Perhaps an example would be two men pulling a boat up onto the shore, each pulling by a different rope. You have here a sort of over-causation. Each man could pull the boat up by himself but together they both cooperate in pulling the boat up to the shore. That is sort of like concurrence except that the doctrine of concurrence says unless God cooperates then the other man (the other cause) has no power whatsoever to do anything. God has to concur in the operation of the other causes in order for these events to take place.<sup>50</sup>

*Question:* I think I understand that this is different from the decree of God, like in the Westminster Confession that everything that happens is decreed by God. But the effect seems to be the same that God becomes causally involved in every event and that is problematic, I think, when you have evil activity. Also, it seems to verge on pantheism. Why do we even need a doctrine of continuing creation?

*Answer:* Ah! Alright, now you are raising a very deep question there. Now, I don't think its pantheism. Let's at least get that off the board. Here God is causally distinct from the world, he conserves it in being, and it is dependent on him for its very existence moment by moment. If God were to withdraw his conserving activity, the world would be annihilated in a moment. That is a good word to add to your vocabulary. The correlate of creation is not destruction, it is annihilation. You see the word *nihil* in annihilate. To annihilate something would be to have it return to nothing. It would be just utterly annihilated; it would just completely cease to exist. If God were to withdraw his conservation of the world in being, the world would just vanish. It wouldn't exist. So the doctrine of conservation is clearly anti-pantheistic in that the world is distinct from God and radically dependent upon him. The question is: does concurrence follow from conservation? I have given an argument for that that I find pretty persuasive to think that it does follow which might then make you want to back up and say, wait a minute, in light of the unacceptable consequences for, say, the problem of evil, I am going to go back and deny conservation – which is exactly what you said. As I indicated last week, the biblical basis for conservation is not as strong, I think, as the biblical grounds for creation *ex nihilo* – originating creation. That would be a view that would be contrary to normal Christian theology and doctrine but, as I say, I think conservation isn't as strongly attested biblically as creation out of nothing and in the beginning. However, when we get to the topic of providence, which is the very next point on the outline, we will talk about whether or not concurrence implicates God in evil. Concurrence has the very uncomfortable consequence that when the murderer plunges the knife into the victim and kills him, God causes the knife to plunge into the victim and kill him. He concurs with the activity of the murderer. Otherwise, the knife wouldn't do anything; it wouldn't hurt anybody. So it does give you this uncomfortableness, as you say, with regard to sinful, evil acts that God is causing these to happen. But what the classical theologians would say is that God concurs in the action of the evil secondary agent in producing the effect that the agent wants to do but he doesn't agree with the agent's evil intentions and volitions to bring it about. So God isn't morally responsible for murder. God doesn't will that that thief murder his victim and God doesn't cause the murderer to murder the victim, but he concurs with the activity of evil persons in order to allow them freedom of

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<sup>50</sup> 15:17

the will and permit them to do these bad things that they do. They would maintain that concurrence just means that God will agree to produce the effect but he doesn't agree with the motive or the intention that the evil person might have in bringing it about.

*Followup:* I guess you are going to get to the point of whether you think this doctrine is necessary to a complete understanding of creation, right?

*Answer:* I am not going to say anything more about that than I do because I don't have very strong views on this one. It does seem to me that there is a good argument for it from conservation and I am very uncomfortable about giving up conservation in view of the history and the tradition behind that doctrine.<sup>51</sup> So I would be more inclined, personally, to go along with the idea that God concurs in producing these effects but he is not morally blameworthy or responsible for these effects because he doesn't will the intention or the evil that the secondary agents will in bringing these things about. He has to concur with the decisions of free agents and not nullify them if he is going to allow significant freedom in the world.

*Followup:* One more comment. It seems like it is hard to swallow that God is sustaining Hitler in existence as he kills the Jews. . . .

*Answer:* I know! I know!

*Followup:* . . . that is the same problem that Westminster Confession creates when it says God decrees everything that occurs but God is not, thereby, the author of evil. That is hard to accept.

*Answer:* See, that is the move I would want to make though. When we get to providence, I think that Molinism, with its doctrine of middle knowledge, will enable us to have a doctrine whereby we can say that God conserves the world in being, he is the cause of everything that happens, he concurs with these effects, and yet he isn't implicated by the evil that secondary agents do because it isn't a deterministic doctrine the way the Westminster Confession is and Calvinism is. Hang onto that point till the next item on the outline which is providence and see if the Molinist can offer a solution to this uncomfortable situation.

*Question:* How does this play in the theory of evolution as it relates to random mutation. It seems like God would have to concur with random mutation. Is there any kind of play in that whole idea?

*Answer:* The doctrine of concurrence would say that God concurs with every effect that is produced by secondary causes in the world, including mutations. They would be random. When biologists use the word "random" – this is very interesting in debates over evolutionary theory – they don't mean that it occurs without some sort of purpose because they couldn't know whether or not there is a God who has allowed these mutations to occur for some purpose. What they mean is that the mutations occur without some sort of natural teleology – some natural goal – for the benefit of the creature to which they are tending. They just happen irrespective of the survivability of the organism which mutates. So it is not what you think it is when they talk about random mutation. It isn't denying that there is some sort of overarching divine plan or supervision for this. It

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<sup>51</sup> 20:10

just means that these things happen without a view toward the benefit of the organism in which they are occurring.

*Question:* How does this play out with the view of natural evil? A good God could deny his concurrence for a hurricane that kills a bunch of people. And this isn't preserving libertarian free will, this is just nature. Because God has concurrence, he can just fail to concur with all these horrendous disasters and still allow the world to work properly.

*Answer:* That is right. God concurs with the earthquake that produces the tsunami that sweeps across the island and kills all these people and he concurs with the flame that burns people or the hurricane or tornado that occurs. It seems to me that anybody who believes in conservation of the world in being is going to have to say, yeah, God conserves the hurricane in being as it happens from one moment to the next and you have to say, I think (boy, this really leads beautifully into the next section on divine providence!) that God has a plan for human history that includes these natural evils as well as moral evils such that ultimately his overriding good purposes for the human race will be achieved through allowing these evils to occur.<sup>52</sup>

*Question:* We do have a cursed world but I think you touched on it when you talked about purpose. I would overlay God's various facets of God's will over this. You have God's absolute will is his purpose. He is going to accomplish that. He has got a permissive will that he allows people to do certain things. That's why you and I have maroon shirts on and we step on the break when people stop in front of us and you have orange juice and like that. God isn't concerned so much if I have orange juice, maybe how much of it, but that is permissive will. Then there is prescriptive will. He has got commandments in the Bible – we don't have to pray about what we aren't supposed to do. Then he has an emotive will. He is not willing that any should perish but some do because this is part of the interchange between free will and his absolute plan. All of these things come together. Even hurricanes produce beneficial effects by having carbon dioxide taken out of the atmosphere.

*Answer:* Right, what you have to do, if you are troubled with the notion of natural evil and God's concurring with these things, is go back to the section of the class dealing with the problem of evil because we've already talked about that in great detail. Even if you don't believe in concurrence, God still allows these hurricanes and earthquakes and fires to happen. He could prevent them, right? He could intervene miraculously. In other words, it is not just withdrawing his concurrence; he could step in and do something. But he doesn't in most cases. So the problem of evil I don't think arises simply from the doctrine of concurrence. That is going to be there for anybody who believes in an omnipotent creator. I think you are quite right to remind us what we saw then – God has a will for this planet and for the persons on it and evil and suffering of all sorts is permitted only with a view toward accomplishing his good purposes for us. With respect to moral evil, he permits this to happen but doesn't will it or intend it to happen. On the contrary, it is contrary to his will. But it is his will to have free agents who can do good or evil and he permits them to do it and the doctrine of concurrence would say when they will to do evil, God concurs in producing the effects that these evil agents try to bring about rather than withdraw his concurrence and not allowing these free agents to do their evil deeds.

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<sup>52</sup> 25:00

*Question:* I prefer to be the optimist and say that God has made this planet to be a special place for life. Look at all the other planets and the storms and the hurricanes that are on Venus or on Jupiter and other places. Sure we have tragedies that happen here; I've been in several earthquakes and I'm sure there are people in this room who have had close brushes with tornadoes and all sorts of other disasters. But God does so many great things and I think we can be thankful. When we get to heaven, I am optimistic about all the times that God will say "I intervened in your health" or "I intervened in the weather" or "I intervened in times that you didn't recognize it."

*Answer:* That is a very good point. People often say, "Why didn't God intervene to stop it?" Well, of course, we don't know all the cases where he did intervene to stop or prevent something from happening. So we may not realize how good we've got it. It could be much worse. That, I think, is a good reminder. Even if God were to prevent a whole lot of the evils in the world that we experience, in a world which he did all that people would still complain about the things that are permitted to happen that are painful. So that is a good reminder, I think.

*Question:* To avoid the problem of evil, people typically refer to God's permissive will when you are dealing with concurrence.<sup>53</sup>

*Answer:* I take it that God's permissive will will have to do with free decisions of libertarian agents – evil decisions that people freely perpetrate. God doesn't will the evil that they perpetrate. On the contrary, it is against his will but he gives them permission to do these evil things and then concurrence would say he concurs by producing the effects that these evil agents will. But he does so – and we will talk about this more when we get to providence – he does so only with a view toward his providential plan for human history in which we will see that these things were wisely allowed to happen for achieving his good purposes.

## ***Providence***

In our closing moments, let us turn then to the doctrine of divine providence. The biblical view of God's providence is that God has sovereignty over the world and human affairs in the world. The doctrine of providence refers to God's governance of the world. The world is not simply a haphazardly occurring sequence of events plunging without reason this way and that. Rather, the world is under the sovereign direction of a provident God who governs the world in such a way as to achieve his purposes.

## **Scriptural Data**

### **Divine Sovereignty**

While the biblical passages supporting divine sovereignty over the world are too many to list much less to read, D. A. Carson, in his book *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* published in 1981, lists these passages under four main headings: (1) passages indicating that God is the Creator, the Ruler and the Possessor of all things, (2) passages in which God is the ultimate personal cause of all that happens, (3) passages

<sup>53</sup> 29:43

dealing with God's election of his people – God sovereignly elects a people to be saved, (4) passages indicating that God is the unacknowledged source of good fortune or success – he is to be praised for anything that is good that happens in your life.<sup>54</sup> I think that nobody who takes these four streams of biblical teaching seriously can hold to a kind of open theism which denies God's providence over the world. The biblical concept of God's providence is a very, very strong doctrine of sovereignty, of God's control and supervision over all things.

### **Human Freedom**

On the other hand, as Carson points out, the Hebrew way of thinking did not imagine people to be puppets or robots in God's hands. Rather, human beings are also free moral agents. Carson lists nine streams of tradition in the Bible that support this conclusion: (1) people face a multitude of divine exhortations and commands, (2) people are said to obey, believe and choose God, (3) people sin and rebel against God, (4) people's sins are judged by God – God holds them morally responsible for their sins and punishes them, (5) people are tested by God, (6) people receive divine rewards for their obedience, (7) the elect are responsible to respond to God's initiative; in other words, God's election is not just unilateral but the elect have the responsibility to respond to God's gracious initiative, (8) prayers are not mere showpieces scripted by God – this is especially evident in the Imprecatory Psalms where the psalmist is crying out in anger to God, (9) God literally pleads with sinners to repent and be saved.<sup>55</sup> It seems to me that these nine streams of biblical tradition would rule out a deterministic understanding of divine providence which would exclude human freedom; a view of providence where God is simply the cause of everything that happens and human beings have no freedom whatsoever. So the question before us is how do you put together these two seemingly incompatible but well-attested biblical truths – the sovereignty of God and the freedom of man? That is what we will grapple with next time when we look at competing views of divine sovereignty.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension*, New Foundations Theological Library (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), pp. 24-35

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-22

<sup>56</sup> Total Running Time: 36:01 (Copyright © William Lane Craig 2012)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 9

#### **Calvinism, Arminianism, and Molinism**

In our lesson, we have been thinking about the Doctrine of Creation and we have now come to the section on divine providence. The Christian teaching about God's relation to the world is that God does more than simply sustain the world in being; he is actively engaged in directing the course of world history toward his provisioned ends. Yet, he does so in such a way as to preserve human freedom and liberty.

You will remember last time we listed the biblical evidence both in favor of divine sovereignty and in favor of human freedom. Let me just review those very quickly. These come from Don Carson's book *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*. He says the biblical passages that support a strong view of sovereignty come under four main headings: (1) passages indicating that God is the Creator, the Ruler, and the Possessor of all things, (2) passages teaching that God is the ultimate personal cause of all that happens, (3) passages dealing with God's election or choosing of his people, and (4) passages in which God is the unacknowledged source of good fortune or success.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, Carson lists nine streams of biblical tradition that support that human beings have liberty and freedom: (1) people face a multitude of divine exhortations and commands, (2) people are said to obey, believe, and choose God, (3) people sin and rebel against God, (4) people's sins are judged by God, (5) people are tested by God, (6) people receive divine rewards for what they do, (7) the elect are responsible to respond to God's gracious initiative, (8) prayers are not mere show pieces scripted by God, and (9) God literally pleads with sinners to repent and be saved.<sup>58</sup> The question is: what view of divine providence can make the most sense out of these seemingly competing streams of biblical tradition of divine sovereignty and human freedom? We are going to examine three such attempts to reconcile these.

#### **Systematic Summary**

##### **Calvinism**

First would be *Calvinism* or *Reformed* theology associated with the Protestant reformer John Calvin but also going back as far as the church father Augustine. According to the Calvinist view, divine providence is based upon God's foreordination of everything that happens. Down to the smallest detail, God has foreordained that this will come to pass. If that is the case then how is this compatible with human freedom? Very typically, Reformed theologians will embrace a form of freedom called *compatibilism*. It has been said that everyone will affirm human freedom whether you are Calvinist, Arminian or Molinist. What everyone will affirm is that human beings have freedom. The question is: is human freedom compatible with it being causally determined. The compatibilists think that human freedom is compatible with your choices being causally determined. Here

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<sup>57</sup> D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension*, New Foundations Theological Library (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), pp. 24-35.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-22

they will differentiate between a choice or an action being voluntary and being compelled. For example, if someone were to grab you and thrust you into an automobile and drive off, you will have been kidnapped. They compelled you to get into the car and they drove you away. They would say that action is not free because it was not voluntary – you did something against your will.<sup>59</sup> But if you voluntarily get into the car and they drive away then that action is free because you did not do it under compulsion. They would say it remains free even if it was causally determined by antecedent causal conditions. For example, it was your wife picking you up from church to take you somewhere and you wanted to go there and you knew it was the time to get in and so you got in and all of those causal factors conspired to determine that you would get into the car and drive away. In that case, they would say even though the action is causally determined it is still free because it is voluntary – it is in accord with your will; it isn't compelled. By contrast, *incompatibilism* would say that causal determinism is incompatible with genuine freedom. If you are determined to do something by the antecedent causes that led up to that action then that action is not really free. Why? Because it is not up to you; it is the product of these causal determinants that came before. Therefore, even though the action isn't compelled in the sense of being non-voluntary, even your will is determined by the prior factors that led up to that and therefore they would say it is not really free because it is not up to you. So, in order for there to be genuine freedom, the incompatibilist says your act cannot be the product of causal factors outside of yourself that lead up to the point of decision. As I say, Calvinists typically endorse compatibilism as their view of human freedom. Why is that? Because they want to say that God determines everything that you do. Calvinism is a form of universal causal divine determinism. It is universal because it is literally everything that happens. It is causal because God makes it happen – he is the one who brings it about. And it is divine – it isn't physical causal determinism, it is divine causal determinism. So on the Calvinistic view, you have freedom and contingency only in the sense that you act voluntarily but nevertheless everything that happens is causally determined by God. It is universal divine causal determinism.

### **Arminianism**

Now, contrast this with the *Arminian* view. The Arminian view would be an example of an incompatibilist view of human freedom. The Arminian would say that if God is the one who makes you do everything you do – if he determines the choices of your will – then you are not really free. In that case it just becomes inexplicable why God would hold you responsible for what you do. If he is the one who makes you do it, including sinful acts, then why should you be held responsible – it wasn't up to you, it was God who made you do it. So to have genuine freedom we need to have incompatibilism. If that is the case, if we do have this affirmation of human freedom – incompatibilistic freedom –, then how will the Arminian explain these passages in the Scripture dealing with divine providence and God's sovereignty over everything in the world?

The original fountainhead of Arminianism was a 17<sup>th</sup> century Protestant theologian named Jacob Arminius. It has been shown by church historians that Arminius himself was actually a Molinist (the next view that we are going to discuss). According to Richard

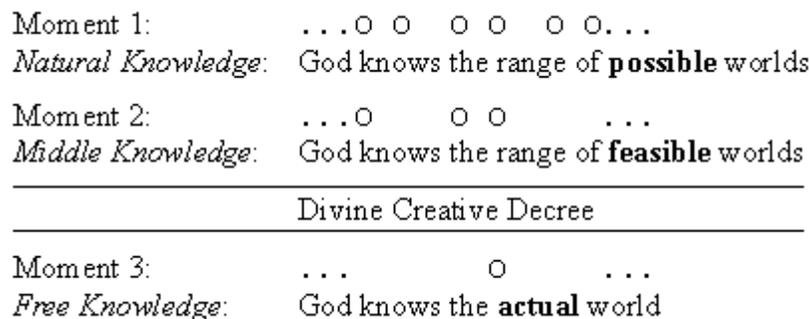
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<sup>59</sup> 4:57

Muller, it is through Jacob Arminius that Molinism entered into Protestant theology.<sup>60</sup> So Arminius was actually a Protestant Molinist.<sup>61</sup> But what has happened over the centuries since Arminius wrote is that a kind of bastardized Arminianism has taken its place – a sort of watered down, distorted Arminianism which explains divine sovereignty and freedom on the basis of God’s foreknowledge. What this bastardized Arminianism says is that God looks into the future by means of his foreknowledge and he sees that some event *e* will take place and knowing by means of his foreknowledge that *e* will take place, God then foreordains, or decrees, that it will take place. So it is the exact opposite of the Calvinist view. The Calvinist view would say that God’s foreknowledge of *e* is based on the fact that he has foreordained it – he knows it will happen because he has foreordained that it has happened. The Arminian turns it around and says, no, he foreordains it to happen because he foreknows it will happen. It is his foreknowledge that provides the basis for his foreordination. So, knowing for example that Wayne will freely receive Christ and become a Christian at some point in his life, God predestines or foreordains that Wayne will become a Christian at that point in time and give his life to Christ. In that way God’s sovereignty and foreordination is compatible with human freedom because it is based upon God’s foreknowledge of human free acts.

## Molinism

Let’s contrast those two views with a third view which is *Molinism*. This is the product of the thought of a 16<sup>th</sup> century Jesuit counter-Reformer named Luis Molina. We’ve already encountered Molina’s thought in our study of divine foreknowledge and divine omniscience. Molina distinguished three moments in God’s knowledge [see figure 1].



*Figure 5 – Molinism’s three moments of God’s knowledge*

First and most basic is what he called God’s *natural knowledge*. This is God’s knowledge of everything that could happen. All possibilities are known to God. So we can imagine this as God’s knowledge of an endless number of logically possible worlds of creatures that he might have created and he knows everything that could happen. So, for example, in this world – let’s call it  $W^*$  – God knows that if Peter were in a certain set of circumstances he would freely deny Christ three times. So he knows that is possible. But in another world – say  $W^{**}$  – in precisely the same circumstances Peter affirms Christ

<sup>60</sup> See Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Baker Pub Group, 1991)

<sup>61</sup> 10:02

three times. That is also a possible world because that choice by Peter is free and so there are different worlds in which Peter does different things and God knows all of these by his natural knowledge. Secondly, there is what Molina called God's *middle knowledge*. It is called that simply because it is sandwiched in between his natural knowledge and what he'll call his free knowledge. By means of his middle knowledge, God knows what any possible creature *would* freely do in any set of freedom permitting circumstances that God might create him. So, for example, he knows that if Peter were in this particular set of circumstances he not only *could* deny Christ three times, he knows Peter *would* freely deny Christ three times. So if Peter were in those circumstances, he would freely deny Christ three times and God knows that by means of his middle knowledge. Now what that means is certain worlds, like  $W^{**}$  where Peter is in exactly those circumstances but he affirms Christ three times, isn't feasible for God to create. He can't create  $W^{**}$ . Why? Because it is not true that if Peter were in those circumstances he would affirm Christ three times. What is true is that if he were in those circumstances he would deny Christ three times.<sup>62</sup> So by means of his middle knowledge, God knows the proper subset of possible worlds which are feasible for him to create based upon his knowledge of these conditional statements "If agent A was in circumstance C, he would freely do action X." On the basis of his middle knowledge of what creatures would freely do in any circumstances, God then decrees to pick one of these worlds to actualize. That then results in what Molina called his *free knowledge*. This is God's knowledge of the actual world including what creatures *will* do. It gives him foreknowledge of the future. So in this case he knows that he has chosen to actualize  $W^*$  and so he knows that Peter will deny Christ three times if in those circumstances and therefore Jesus is able to predict to Peter "before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times."<sup>63</sup>

How does this work itself out in terms of divine providence? Very simply this: since God knows what any possible person would freely do in any possible set of freedom permitting circumstances he might put him in, by decreeing to create just those circumstances with just those people in them, God can bring about a world in which people freely do what will ultimately achieve God's purposes for human history. So God has decreed a world in which, down to every last detail, everything that happens is either directly willed by God or it is permitted by God with a view toward his overriding purposes for human history.

With regard to free acts, this serves to highlight Molina's doctrine of simultaneous concurrence. Remember we talked about the doctrine of concurrence a couple of lectures ago which is the doctrine that God concurs with the actions of secondary causes to bring about their effects. So God is the cause, literally, of everything that happens. The fire would not burn unless God concurred with the action of the fire to produce its effect. Molina's doctrine of simultaneous concurrence is different than the doctrine of his Catholic Dominican predecessors. He was a Jesuit and he disagreed with Thomas Aquinas and the Dominicans as well as the Protestant reformers on this. His view is that God does not act *on* the creaturely will to make it move this way or that, but he acts *with* the creaturely will to produce its effects. Do you see the difference? He doesn't act *on* John's will to move John's will to A or to not-A. Rather, he acts *with* John's will in

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<sup>62</sup> 14:57

<sup>63</sup> cf. Mark 14:30

accordance with what John chooses so that if John chooses A, God concurs with that choice and produces the effect. He doesn't act *on* John's will to bring about A, rather he acts *with* John's will so that both John and God bring about A. Therefore, John is completely free. He is not determined by prior causes. So John has libertarian freedom – incompatibilistic freedom. The circumstances in which John acts are freedom permitting circumstances. But God knows how he would freely act in those circumstances. So by placing him in those circumstances, God knows what John would choose and God concurs with John's free choice to bring about the effect that John would have. So everything that happens is caused by God.<sup>64</sup> In sinful decisions, God concurs with the agent's choice to produce the effect of the sinful choice but notice he does not move the person's will to make that sinful choice. That is different from the Calvinistic view where God is the one who determines the choice of the will. Here what God does is he concurs in the choice by producing the effect of the sinful choice, but he does not act on that person's will to make it choose that way. Therefore, God is not responsible for the sinfulness of the act since he did not move the creature's will to do it. Therefore, God is not the author of sin on Molinism. Out of his desire to permit human freedom, he allows human persons to make evil choices and he concurs in their effects because he wants them to have genuine freedom but he does not make them choose those evil actions. In the case of good actions, God directly wills the things that happen but in the case of sinful or evil acts God merely permits them to happen by concurring in producing the effects of those sinful actions but he does not will directly that they happen and he certainly does not move the creature to make those choices.

Those are the three views.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* On the Molinist view, would you say that humans have some level of middle knowledge as well? For example of what people would do like “If I give a genetic fallacy argument against Dr. Craig, Dr. Craig would accuse me of the genetic fallacy.” The truth of that versus “If I gave the genetic fallacy argument, Dr. Craig would pull out a revolver and shoot me.” There seems to be a difference between the two.

*Answer:* Good question! I think that you are absolutely correct that we often know the truth of these, as they are called, counterfactual statements or subjunctive conditionals. The example I like to give is: if I were to offer my wife a plate of chocolate chip cookies or a plate of liver and onions, I know which one she would choose as certainly as I know almost anything. She likes to use that example because I would choose the liver! *[laughter]* But that illustrates that, yes, we do have knowledge of these kinds of subjunctive conditionals. But, and this is important to understand, that is not technically middle knowledge. Why? Because middle knowledge has to be prior to the divine decree and we don't have that kind of knowledge. So everybody, until recently – Calvinists, Arminians, Catholics – everybody agreed that God has knowledge of these counterfactual conditionals. The only question was *when*, so to speak, does he have them? Is it prior to the decree as the Molinist thought or is it after the decree as the Calvinist thought?

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<sup>64</sup> 19:53

Calvinists agree that God has knowledge of these subjunctive conditionals but because he ordains the choices.

*Followup:* [off mic] What about Arminians?

*Answer:* As I say, the original Arminianism just is Molinism. It would be prior to the decree. But simple foreknowledge types – this sort of bastardized Arminianism – doesn't even have middle knowledge. So you would just erase it from the diagram. That is going to be one of my criticisms of this kind of simple foreknowledge view, which is that prior to his decree, all God knows is the possibilities. All he knows is what *could* happen but he has no idea what *would* happen. So that is going to make it impossible, I think, for God to have significant providence on this kind of simple foreknowledge view.

*Question:* Can you explain where Jonah fits in here with God's knowledge? God makes the statement in X days I will destroy Nineveh and then he doesn't.<sup>65</sup>

*Answer:* Right, good question. There are certain prophecies in the Old Testament that God gives his prophets that don't actually come to pass, like the destruction of Nineveh. "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed" but then Jonah goes and preaches to them and they all repent so God doesn't destroy them. What this shows, I think, is that what God was giving through Jonah was not a piece of foreknowledge.<sup>66</sup> He was not telling the Ninevites what *will* happen; he was giving them knowledge of what *would* happen if they were not to repent. So what Jonah was delivering was not a piece of foreknowledge, it wasn't a prediction of the future. It was a forewarning. He was warning them, "This is what would happen if you don't repent." You have a number of examples in the Old Testament like that. One non-biblical example that I think is so wonderful is in Charles Dickens' wonderful story *A Christmas Carol*. When Scrooge is confronted with the Spirit of Christmas Yet to Come, the Spirit shows Scrooge these horrifying images of his own death and so forth. Scrooge says to the Spirit, "Tell me Spirit, are these shadows of things that will be or are these shadows of things that may be only?" And the Spirit doesn't answer him a word. Why not? Well, because they clearly were not shadows of things that will happen – we know that Scrooge repents and Tiny Tim doesn't die. These are not images of the future. But they weren't simply mere possibilities either. Scrooge could have done anything. What the Spirit was giving him was knowledge of what would happen to Scrooge if he were not to repent. So that would be a non-biblical example of exactly the same kind of thing that God was giving to the people of Nineveh through Jonah.

*Question:* I wonder how each of these views see God's providence over nature? What degree of control does God exert over natural forces as they relate to our choices? Sometimes they force us to do things.

*Answer:* Yes, certainly the Calvinist would see all of nature as under God's divine deterministic activity. So there wouldn't be any difference between human activity and natural activity on the Calvinist view. For the Arminian and the Molinist who affirm incompatibilism, they might see nature as completely determined by natural causes but there would be room here for, say, quantum indeterminacy if you want to affirm that. If

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<sup>65</sup> cf. Jonah 3:1-10

<sup>66</sup> 25:02

you want to say that is not just in your head but that is real, that there are real quantum indeterminate events happening in nature, then what the Arminian would say is that God sees those in advance, too, and then decrees them. What the Molinist would say is in addition to counterfactuals about human free choices, there are also counterfactuals of quantum indeterminacy like if this isotope were placed in these circumstances at this time it would decay at this moment. Even though that is physically indeterminate, God knows the truth of that subjunctive conditional just as he knows the truth of the conditional “if David were to do this experiment, he would get a Nobel Prize in Quantum Chemistry” or something of that sort.

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What we will do next time is look at an assessment of these competing views with a goal of trying to articulate a coherent and biblically faithful reconciliation and account of divine sovereignty and human freedom.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Total Running Time: 29:02 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 10

#### **Calvinism and Universal Divine Causal Determinism**

We have been thinking in our class about divine providence and in particular the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom. We are looking at Calvinism, Arminianism and Molinism. Last time I described these three different attempts to make sense of the biblical data concerning divine sovereignty and human freedom. Today we want to say something by way of assessment of these views.

#### **Assessment of the Different Views on Divine Providence**

##### **Calvinism and Universal Divine Causal Determinism**

Let's begin with a critique of the Calvinist view which you will remember I described as universal divine causal determinism – God determines everything that happens in the world. It seems to me that there are five very powerful reasons for rejecting this view.

First of all, universal divine causal determinism cannot offer a coherent interpretation of Scripture. You will remember we saw that the Scriptural data affirm both a very strong view of divine sovereignty as well as human freedom and contingency and responsibility. Causal determinism simply can't make sense of both streams of biblical tradition. The classical Reformed theologians recognize this. They will typically acknowledge that the reconciliation of Scriptural texts affirming human freedom and contingency with those texts affirming divine sovereignty is simply inscrutable. This is a mystery which we cannot understand. You can reconcile these texts by simply interpreting freedom in compatibilist terms. You will remember we said last time that everyone agrees that human beings are free. The real question is: is freedom consistent with causal determinism or not? Compatibilists maintain that you can be causally determined to do what you do and still be said to be free. If you interpret freedom along compatibilist lines, then there is no problem in reconciling freedom with universal divine causal determinism. Indeed, compatibilism entails determinism. According to compatibilism, if you are free you are causally determined. However, the problem with this solution is that adopting compatibilism achieves a reconciliation of these Scriptural streams of tradition only at the expense of denying what that one stream of tradition seems to affirm; namely, genuine indeterminacy and contingency. Because on compatibilism, there really isn't any contingency or indeterminacy – everything is causally determined. So I don't think that universal divine causal determinism gives a coherent interpretation of Scripture. It affirms divine sovereignty but it is forced to ride roughshod over all of those texts that affirm contingency and indeterminism in the world.

Secondly, universal causal determinism cannot be rationally affirmed. When you think about it – there is a sort of dizzying self-defeating character to determinism. For if you come to believe that determinism is true, then you have to believe that the reason you have come to believe it is simply because you were determined to do so. You haven't been able, in fact, to sift through the arguments and the evidence and to freely weigh them and make up your mind on the basis of the argument and the evidence. It is just that

you have been causally determined to believe in determinism.<sup>68</sup> So, the difference between the person who weighs the arguments for determinism and becomes a determinist and the person who weighs those arguments for determinism and rejects them is simply that the one was determined to believe in them and the other one was determined not to believe in them. So when you come to realize that your decision to believe in determinism was itself determined and even your present realization of that fact – you come to realize that your belief in determinism is itself determined – then there is a sort of vertigo that sets in. Everything you think – even the very thought that you are thinking about that – is itself determined. It is outside your control. You were just determined to believe in it. So while it would be the case that determinism could be true – maybe determinism is true – nevertheless it is very hard to see how it could ever be rationally affirmed. Determinism is literally self-defeating – it is rationally unaffirmable – because its very affirmation would undermine the rationality of that affirmation. In affirming determinism to be true, you are in effect affirming that that decision is not rationally made but simply determined to be true. So universal causal determinism, it seems to me, cannot be rationally affirmed.

Third problem: universal divine determinism makes God the author of sin and denies human responsibility. It is very interesting that the great Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck admits that if you construe divine conservation in terms of God's continual re-creation of the world or of things at every moment then there would be no human freedom. Remember when we talked about divine conservation, I rejected the interpretation that conservation of the world in being is a sort of creation. It has been characterized as continuing creation and I said that is wrong because that would mean nothing lasts through time – nothing endures through time. Rather, at each moment, God recreates something new in the place of the old thing. Bavinck says if you think of conservation in those terms (as God continually recreating the world) he says, "All created beings would then exist in appearance only and be devoid of all independence, freedom and responsibility. God himself would be the cause of sin."<sup>69</sup> So Bavinck thinks that if you construe conservation in terms of continual recreation then God does become the author of sin because human agents have no independence, freedom or responsibility. But think about that. Given determinism, there is no more independence, freedom or responsibility than there is on re-creation. If determinism is true then even if you reject re-creation at every moment there is still no more independence, freedom or responsibility. On the deterministic view, even the movement of the human will is itself determined by God. God causes people to choose evil and they cannot do otherwise. God determines their choices – he makes them do wrong. If it is evil to make another person do wrong then on this view not only is God the cause of sin and evil but he becomes evil himself which is absurd. He would not only be the cause of evil in the sense that he is producing it, but he is making other people do evil. And if you think that is wrong – to make another person do evil, if that is itself evil – then God becomes evil on this view which is absurd. By the same token, all human responsibility for sin is removed on this view because our choices are not really up to us. God causes us to make them. So we can't be responsible for our choices because nothing that we think or do is up to us. It is

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<sup>68</sup> 4:52

<sup>69</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, God and Creation, Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 607.

determined by God. I do think that the oft repeated claim that Calvinism makes God the author of sin and denies human responsibility really does stick.<sup>70</sup>

Number four: universal divine causal determinism nullifies human agency. In other words, there really are no human agents on this view. Since our choices are not up to us but are determined by God, human beings cannot be said to be real agents. Rather, they are like mere instruments by means of which God acts to produce some effect much as a man might use a stick to roll a stone. The stick is a mere instrument of the man who is the causal agent in this case. Of course, secondary causes like the stick will retain all of their properties and powers as intermediate causes and the Reformed divines will often remind us of this. But this is just to say that the stick retains all of its properties and powers which make it suitable for the person who wants to use it to do something like move a stone. The stick has properties like a certain rigidity, a certain weight, a certain density that make it useful as an instrument for the person to push or overturn the stone. So Reformed thinkers don't need to be occasionalists like those Muslim medieval theologians who thought that God is the only cause of everything. There can be secondary causes in the world on the Calvinistic view, but my point is that these intermediate causes are not agents themselves. They are mere instrumental causes. They have no power to initiate action. They are not agents because they have no power to initiate action; they are mere instruments of an agent. So it seems to me that it is dubious on divine determinism that there is really more than one agent in the world. God is the only agent that exists and everything else are just instruments of this single agent. The famous Reformed theologian B. B. Warfield of the old Princeton Seminary insists, “. . . the reality and real efficiency of all second causes . . . as the proximate producers of the effects that take place in the world” is affirmed.<sup>71</sup> He affirms that secondary causes are real and do have power to produce effects as the immediate causes of the event but notice he doesn't answer the objection that, in a deterministic world, there is only one agent. These intermediate causes are mere instruments – lifeless instruments – in the employ of an agent who has the power to initiate action. This conclusion, if it is correct, not only goes against our knowledge of ourselves as agents – I think each one of us senses that he is a causal agent – but it would also make it inexplicable why God would then treat us as agents holding us morally responsible for the things that he caused us and used us to do. The fact that on universal divine determinism there really is only one agent in the world (and that is God) I think makes real nonsense of Christian theology.

Finally, number five, universal divine determinism threatens to make reality into a farce. What do I mean by that? Well, on this view the whole world becomes a vein and empty spectacle. There really are no free agents who are in rebellion against God, no free agents whom God seeks to win through his love, no one who freely responds to that love and freely gives his love and praise to God in return. The whole spectacle is a sort of charade in which the only real actor is God himself.<sup>72</sup> I am reminded in this connection of a really bizarre cartoon I saw once in which there was an audience pictured listening to a lecture and the lecturer was a marionette – you can see the strings attached to his wooden arms

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<sup>70</sup> 10:09

<sup>71</sup> B. B. Warfield, “The Significance of the Confessional Doctrine of the Decree,” in *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. John E. Meeter, 2 vols. (1970-73; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 1:98-99.

<sup>72</sup> 14:50

and his wooden head – and, when you looked at the audience, all of the members in the audience were marionettes as well and the speaker was saying, “Now concerning the logical order of God’s decrees of election” and it just made the whole thing a farce. One Reformed puppet lecturing to other Reformed puppets on the virtues of Reformed theology. It is just a charade. So, far from glorifying God, I am convinced that the Calvinist view really denigrates God for engaging in such a farcical charade as this. I think it is insulting to God to think that he would create beings who are, in every respect, causally determined by him and then treat them as though they are free agents, even punishing them for the wrong actions that he made them do or loving them as though they were not freely responding agents. God, on this view, would be like a child who sets up his toy soldiers on the battlefield and then moves them about in his make believe world pretending that they are real persons whose every motion is not in fact of his own doing and then pretending that these toy people merit praise and blame. So it seems to me that this view of universal divine determinism really turns reality into something of a farce.

For those reasons I think that the Calvinistic view of universal divine causal determinism is one that is unacceptable for Christian theology.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* I believe you really mischaracterize Calvinism. What you are talking about sounds more like Hyper-Calvinism. Because Calvinism actually does affirm free will; I can read chapter 10 of the Westminster Confession of Faith where it actually explains how free will works within that system.

*Answer:* What I am rejecting is universal divine causal determinism. Now, if Reformed theology rejects compatibilism then I have got no quarrel with it. In fact, when I read much of the Westminster Confession, I resonate with it. The problem is that I don’t think that the Reformed theologian can give us a coherent interpretation of Scripture. As I said, the Reformed divines – in my first point – typically say that the reconciliation of these texts is just inscrutable. They can’t put them together; it is a mystery. So I think that the Westminster Confession and that position, if you reject compatibilism, fairly cries out for a Molinist view. So what I would offer to my Reformed brethren is to say if you are going to reject compatibilism and universal divine causal determinism, I am all with you. I am with you one hundred percent. But now let’s consider whether Molinism can enable us to affirm all of these other things in the Westminster Confession but without simply having to punt to inscrutability and mystery.

*Followup:* I would just say that when a Calvinist refers to bondage of the will, they are speaking of specifically of the person’s moral will. That is how I understand it. You don’t agree with that?

*Answer:* I think that is true of the Lutheran view. Luther said we are bound in things above but free in things below. But my understanding of Calvinism – and I get this not only from reading Calvin but talking with Calvinist professors and friends and theologians – is that God’s sovereignty controls everything, even non-moral choices like whether I choose green jello or red jello when I go through the cafeteria line. Otherwise,

you don't affirm sovereignty; you don't have a sovereign God if that escapes his providence.

*Followup:* Again, I would just have to say that is really Hyper-Calvinism.

*Answer:* I got in trouble in Defenders Series 1 for responding to a question like this about Hyper-Calvinism because I did not know at that time, and I will now say something about this, is that actually what I am describing is not Hyper-Calvinism.<sup>73</sup> There is a theological view that is actually called Hyper-Calvinism and it was a tiny splinter movement in the 17<sup>th</sup> century among certain British Baptists which affirmed that we should not engage in evangelism and missions work because that is acting contrary to God's sovereign election of who will and will not be saved. They thought it was presumptuous for us to go out to the mission fields. These are the kind of people that opposed William Cary going to India. So what is often called Hyper-Calvinism just means a sort of extreme determinism but I was corrected on this that that is not what actual Hyper-Calvinism is. The real Hyper-Calvinism was this movement a few centuries ago that thankfully died out that thought of missions work and evangelism as really being contrary to God's sovereignty and freedom in election. But what I am talking about is somebody who is a Calvinist who will explain sovereignty in terms of universal divine causal determinism. If they don't do that, great! Then my critique won't apply.

*Question:* First, I would like to respond. In John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he is quite explicit in stating that there is no autonomous human will apart from the direct causal act of God. He is very explicit about that. So that is not Hyper-Calvinism. That is Calvin's Calvinism.<sup>74</sup> But the question I had here is: if we are determined, why is that not rational? Why is it that a determined decision is not rational? How does determinism undermine the warrant or justification?

*Answer:* That is a good question. It seems to me that a person has to be able to think that he has the free ability to weigh reasons and arguments against each other and then to decide whether or not these meet standards of rationality and logic. If he affirms that he hasn't really been able to do that – that he is just determined to do that – then it seems to me that undermines his warrant for thinking that this gives him rational grounds for affirming this belief.

*Followup:* I was asking, though, how is it not the case that a determined thing can weigh the decisions? What is it about determinism undermining your ability to weigh your options?

*Answer:* The question you are raising is: do you need to have freedom in order to weigh things rationally? It seems to me that you do. Otherwise, you have to say the only reason that you think this argument is better than the other is that you were determined to do so. You haven't been able to rationally reflect upon the pros and cons and see which one meets the better standards of argumentation and plausibility and so forth. You are just determined to do it like water running out of a pipe. It is very difficult for me to see how

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<sup>73</sup> 20:00

<sup>74</sup> The great Calvinist theologian B. B. Warfield would agree: "There is nothing that is, and nothing that comes to pass, that [God] has not first decreed and then brought to pass by His creation or providence." B. B. Warfield, "Predestination," in *Biblical Doctrines*, vol. 2 of *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (1929; rep., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), p. 21.

a purely determined thing can make rational decisions. Determinism could be true, but it seems to me it is very difficult to see how it could be rationally affirmed.

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That is the critique I would have of universal divine causal determinism. Next week I am going to offer a critique of the Arminian view that God's foreordination is based upon his simple foreknowledge of the events foreknown.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Total Running Time: 23:59 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 11

#### **Arminianism and Molinism**

We have been giving an assessment of different views of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom. Last week I offered a critique of universal divine causal determinism and argued that that is not a good, biblical, coherent way of reconciling these teachings of Scripture on divine sovereignty and human freedom. Today we want to look briefly at the Arminian account.

#### **Arminianism**

As I explained when we surveyed the three views, present day Arminianism is really a sort of watered down version of what Arminius, himself, believed. It is really very different from the original Arminian doctrine. Contemporary Arminianism tends to think that what God does is he looks into the future, down the timeline, and he sees some event *e* is going to occur and, therefore, foreknowing that *e* is going to occur, he foreordains *e*'s occurrence. His foreordination, or predestination, is based upon simple foreknowledge of the future. He foreordains what he foreknows what will happen.

I want to suggest that, again, this model of divine providence can make no good sense out of God's providential planning of a world of free creatures because on this view God does not have, logically prior to his creative decree or his choice of a world, any knowledge of what creatures would do under any circumstances. All he knows is all of the possibilities that could happen. He simply knows it is possible that creatures might behave in such and such a way, but he really has no idea whatsoever how they *would* behave. So when he declares to create a world (and he has knowledge of the future and everything that is going to happen) this must come as something of a shock to God. He must find himself in a situation where he thinks he is extraordinarily lucky that this world happened to exist. We can imagine God looking into the future and saying, "Oh! What a break! Herod and Pilate and all those people in Jerusalem did just the right thing in crucifying Christ so that atonement can be made for the world. They just all behaved perfectly." In fact, the situation is really much worse than that because God wouldn't have any idea whether there would even be a Roman Empire or whether any of these people would exist. He must be utterly stunned when he suddenly looks into the future and sees all these things that are going to happen which he hasn't determined to happen and discovering that, lo' and behold, he is going to become incarnate and die on a Roman cross for the sins of mankind as a substitutionary offering for the sins of the world. This would be really quite a surprise to God.

Of course, I am speaking anthropomorphically here. But nevertheless, the philosophical point is that without middle knowledge – without knowledge of how creatures would behave under various circumstances – God cannot know, prior to his creative decree of a world, anything that would happen except what he, himself, determined. So there would be no providential planning at all in such a world. God just finds himself with this world on his hands and the future that he knows will happen. But it is not the result of his providential planning on the simple foreknowledge view.

Moreover, the simple foreknowledge view reduces divine foreordination and predestination to a triviality. If all God does is foreordain what he knows will happen then foreordination becomes a sort of fifth wheel – it doesn't do anything; it doesn't carry any weight. If it's going to happen anyway, what difference does it make to foreordain it to happen? So his foreordination is really meaningless.<sup>76</sup> All it amounts to on this view is that God foreordains that what will happen will happen, which is a tautology. He foreordains that what will happen will happen. Surely, there is much more substance to the biblical doctrine of divine sovereignty and foreordination than the triviality that God decrees that what will happen will happen. So I find this simple foreknowledge view to be just really completely deficient in terms of giving us a robust biblical doctrine of providence and foreordination.

## Molinism

Let's go on, then, to the Molinist view of divine providence.

The original Arminianism was, in fact, Molinism. It was through Arminius (according to church historian Richard Muller) that Molinism entered into Protestant theology.<sup>77</sup> Luis Molina, himself, was a Catholic Jesuit and counter-Reformer in fact. But it was through Jacob Arminius that Molinism entered into Protestant theology. Unfortunately, over the centuries, it became so watered down that, among most contemporary Arminians, it has been reduced to this sort of triviality of God foreordains what he foreknows will happen. It is easy to see how this watering down would occur because the doctrine of middle knowledge is very subtle. It is very easy to see how people would confuse God's knowing what *would* happen under any circumstances with saying God knows what *will* happen and that is how he chooses which world to create (it is based on what he knows will happen). So the distinction is between indicative statements such as "this will happen" and subjunctive conditionals (conditionals in the subjunctive mood) such as "if Jones were in circumstances C he would freely do action A." That is a subtle distinction that isn't easy to grasp and so I think over the course of the centuries Arminianism lost this distinction and became this sort of simple foreknowledge view.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Does he foreordain what he is going to cause to happen?

*Answer:* No, that would be more of the Reformed view. The Reformed view would be that the way God knows the future is that he foreordains or he causes it. He brings it about himself. He can make promises, for example, in prophecies because he, himself, will bring these about. And knowing his own omnipotence and sovereignty, he is confident that he can bring these events to pass. But on the Arminian view, they want to affirm genuine libertarian freedom. They are incompatibilists. Remember that distinction? They are incompatibilists about freedom. So they think that what God knows are these future free acts. For example, that Steve will freely place his faith in Christ. So

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<sup>76</sup> 5:05

<sup>77</sup> See Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Baker Pub Group, 1991)

knowing that Steve will freely do this, God then foreordains that this will happen that Steve will freely place his faith in Christ.

*Followup:* Do they think that God is actively participating but not infringing upon libertarian free will?

*Answer:* Yes. For example, the instance I gave of Steve placing his faith in Christ. They would say that is only in response to the prevenient work of the Holy Spirit. Steve isn't going to come to Christ on his own initiative. But God knows that he, through his Holy Spirit, will draw Steve to himself through his grace and then he knows that Steve will freely respond and be saved and so God decrees then that that will happen. My critique is not, in any way, that the Arminian view is incompatible with human freedom. I think they are entirely correct in thinking that God's foreknowledge of these events is entirely compatible with the libertarian freedom of these events. Indeed, it is just the opposite. What they have done is they've reduced foreordination to just a triviality – that God just declares that what will come to pass will come to pass and doesn't really have any sort of robust providential planning of the world.<sup>78</sup>

*Followup:* Would God be willing to follow someone down any abyss in which he might go in order to bring him back?

*Answer:* Maybe. That is a question of God's grace and universal salvific will and so forth. We don't need to get into that. Again, the point is that on the Arminian view, it is not as though God is uninvolved as we just pointed out earlier. God is involved. He is drawing that person to himself. He is doing things in human history but he just knows what he will freely do and he knows what people will freely do. God knows all of that but what I am saying is that it is not as though there was any kind of plan for that – he just finds himself with this world on his hands without any sort of providential planning prior to his decree. I think this will become clearer when I share the Molinist view and you can contrast it with the simple foreknowledge view.

Let's remember, on the Molinist account of divine providence, it is based upon God's middle knowledge. Logically prior to God's decree to create a certain world, God knows what every creature would freely do in any set of circumstances that he might place that person in. So, by knowing what a person would do in a set of circumstances, God can create those circumstances, place that person in them, and then he knows exactly how that person would freely act. So by creating the circumstances and the person, God sovereignly directs history toward his provisioned ends.

So consider how the Molinist would explain the following passages. Acts 2:23, "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." And then Acts 4:27-28,

for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place.

<sup>78</sup> 10:09

In these two passages, we have a staggering assertion of divine sovereignty over the affairs of men. The writer says that the conspiracy to crucify Jesus – which involved not only the Romans but also the Jews living in Jerusalem at the time and even, by name, Pilate and Herod who sent Jesus to the cross – is said to have happened by God’s plan based upon his foreknowledge. Now, if we take the biblical word “foreknowledge” to encompass middle knowledge, we can make perfect sense of this. For, via his middle knowledge, God knew exactly which persons, if they were members of the Sanhedrin, would freely vote to condemn Jesus to death. He knew which persons, if living in Jerusalem at the time, would freely demand Christ’s crucifixion and favor the release of Barabbas. He knew what Herod, if he were the Jewish king, would do in reaction to Jesus and he knew exactly what Pilate himself, if he held the prefecture of Palestine in AD 30, would freely do under the pressure of the Jewish leaders and the crowd. Knowing all of the circumstances, the persons and the possible permutations of these, God decreed to create just those circumstances with just those people who would freely do what God willed to happen. So the whole scenario unfolded, as Luke says, according to God’s plan.

This is really mindboggling. When you reflect on the fact that the existence of those persons and the circumstances were themselves the results of myriads and myriads of prior free choices on the part of other persons and these agents as well and those in turn were the result of even prior contingencies then I think you can see that only an omniscient mind – an infinite mind – could providentially direct a world of free creatures toward his provisioned sovereignly established ends.<sup>79</sup> In fact, in 1 Corinthians 2:8, Paul reflects, “None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” Isn’t that interesting? None of them understood this because if they had, they would not have crucified Jesus Christ. When you grasp this doctrine, the doctrine of divine middle knowledge issues an adoration and praise of God for so breathtaking a sovereignty. It reconciles divine sovereignty with genuine libertarian freedom.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* [off mic] I actually looked on Wikipedia to find out what Molinism actually is, and the first sentence says “Its major proponent is Dr. William Craig.”

*Answer:* Oh no! OK. Well, poor Molina. That is sort of overlooking Luis Molina!

*Question:* Would you give us a simple definition, to clear up my thinking, what middle knowledge is, leaving everything else aside?

*Answer:* Middle knowledge is God’s knowledge of what every free person would freely do in any circumstances God might place him. So, for example, he knew what you would have done if you had been the prefect of Palestine in AD 30 instead of Pontius Pilate. He knows what you would have done if you had won the presidential election in America in 1964. He knows what you would have done had you been a Chinese peasant living in the Middle Ages in such-and-such circumstances. So the idea here is that God knows not only what *will* happen – he has not only simple foreknowledge – but he has knowledge of

<sup>79</sup> 15:10

what every possible person *would* freely do in any circumstances in which he might be placed.

*Question:* Don't you think an Arminian theologian would believe that God knows counterfactuals? Do you think if I went to Thomas Oden and asked, "Do you believe God knows these counterfactuals?" he would say yes?

*Answer:* I don't know what Thomas Oden would say but I do know some other simple foreknowledge folks (I am thinking, for example, of David Hunt) who would affirm simple foreknowledge but say God doesn't have middle knowledge. Frankly, I haven't heard my Arminian theologian friends, like Thomas Oden or Roger Olson, express themselves on this. So I don't know. If they would affirm it, then I would say "Praise the Lord, they are going back to their genuine roots."

*Question:* I just wanted you to clarify what you mean by *libertarian* free will.

*Answer:* You remember we talked in a previous lecture about different views of free will and we said that everybody affirms free will but the difference will be: is free will *compatible* with being causally determined or is free will *incompatible* with being causally determined? Compatibilists think that you can be free even though you are as determined to do what you do as a tree branch growing a limb. Incompatibilists say that if you are determined in that way causally then you are not really free. Your actions might be voluntary in the sense that you are not compelled against your will but the very will that you have is itself determined by causal factors – it is not really up to you. Those who affirm freedom of the will and incompatibilism are called libertarians. That is not a political designation! This is not to be associated with libertarian politics. This is a philosophical classification of people who believe in freedom of the will and in incompatibilism. Molina was a libertarian in that sense.<sup>80</sup>

*Question:* When the plagues were coming upon Egypt, three times it says Pharaoh hardened his heart, three times it says God hardened Pharaoh's heart and three times it says his heart was hardened without any explanation of how. How would that relate to what we are discussing here?

*Answer:* What it would indicate, I think, is a possible Molinist solution. God knew that if Pharaoh were in the situation of seeing, say the plague of flies or the plague of frogs, that he would harden his heart and resist him. So in a sense, God placing him in these circumstances knew how he would react and that his heart would be hardened. Sometimes the Scriptures will ascribe these events to God as the ultimate source of them. Here is one of my favorite examples. In Samuel and in 1 Chronicles you have two different accounts of the death of King Saul by suicide.<sup>81</sup> He falls on his sword rather than be captured by the Philistines and kills himself. Both of them describe how he falls on his sword and commits suicide but the Chronicler adds this comment, "thus the LORD slew Saul and delivered the kingdom to David."<sup>82</sup> It was under the sovereignty of God; God knew what Saul would do in that situation surrounded by the Philistines. So in that sense he can say "thus the LORD slew Saul and delivered the kingdom over to David."

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<sup>80</sup> 20:00

<sup>81</sup> cf. 1 Samuel 31:1-6; 1 Chronicles 10

<sup>82</sup> cf. 1 Chronicles 10:14

Let me introduce a philosophical term here that can be very useful: the difference between *strong* actualization and *weak* actualization. We can say that God, or someone, strongly actualizes a state of affairs when he causally brings it about. He causes it to happen. But, if God has middle knowledge, he can weakly actualize states of affairs not by causing them to happen but by placing people in circumstances where he knew how they would freely react. So he weakly actualizes certain states of affairs like slaying Saul and delivering the kingdom to David. God didn't slay Saul – he didn't plunge the sword into his belly. Saul did this of his own free will. But this was the means by which God weakly actualized the destruction of Saul's reign and delivered the kingdom over to David. This enables you to explain things like Pharaoh's hardening his heart, Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery in Egypt which are brought about by God but God is not the author of sin. He does not cause these things to happen but he permits them to happen knowing that his purposes will be achieved. So this distinction between strong and weak actualization is very helpful in understanding God's providence especially with respect to sinful acts that he knows will happen.

*Question:* One of those verses you read earlier used the term “predestined.” That is a pretty strong word. Is it correct to say that God predestined it, not in that he caused a certain thing to happen, but that he created a world in which he knew that would happen?

*Answer:* That is what the Molinist is saying. The word there is also translated “foreordain” – I've often used the word foreordination rather than predestination. That is the biblical word, it is *proorizo* – to foreordain something. You are right. He would foreordain it in the sense that he decrees this is going to happen by placing free persons in situations where he knows what they would freely do. In that sense, his foreordination is not universal divine causal determinism as the Calvinists think. The Calvinist only thinks of God's foreordination in terms of strong actualization but once you introduce this distinction of strong and weak actualization it enables you to read these passages in a totally different way that is now compatible with human libertarian free will.<sup>83</sup>

*Question:* When you say that God knows what somebody will do, is this probabilistic knowledge or is it like he knows us better than we know ourselves?

*Answer:* I think he does know us better than we know ourselves. What God knows is not only what a person *will* do – that is simple foreknowledge – but more than that he knows what they *would* do under any circumstances they might be in which is even more radical and something that is completely beyond us. Sometimes we know the truth of certain of these subjunctive conditionals. For example, when we pull out into traffic, we look both ways and we make the judgment, “if I were to pull out now I would make it.” We do have knowledge of some of these counterfactuals. If we were to say, “if I were to ask the boss for a raise, he'd probably chew my head off” so you don't do it. Many times we have this kind of knowledge of these subjunctive conditionals but we are suggesting that God has complete knowledge of what anybody he could create would do in any circumstance in which he might place him.

*Question:* I am not sure but it seems to me that if God knows me because I was woven in my mother's womb and he knows me inside out then if he sets up the circumstances and

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<sup>83</sup> 24:51

situations so that I will react only in the direction that he wants me to go then I don't see why that doesn't make God in control of what I do.

*Answer:* Well, you have to understand that it is not a matter of determinism. We are talking here that you have the ability to do other than what God knows you would do. These are often called counterfactuals of freedom because these are freedom permitting circumstances in which he places you.

*Followup:* But if he designed me in such a way that I am going to react in a particular unique way and he sets those situations up...

*Answer:* No, that is a denial of libertarian freedom. That is really a subtle form of determinism in which you don't really have the ability to do anything other than what you actually will do. That is not the affirmation here of the Molinist. He thinks that you do have the ability to do other than what you will do.

*Followup:* When I was selling real estate one time, I was going through a house that was getting ready to close and it had a cricket in the bedroom on the carpet. I could have easily picked it up and threw it out but what I chose to do was I walked in such a position that I guided the cricket through the door, down the hall, through the living room out to the yard. Now this cricket thought that he was escaping some horrible death but I wasn't going to bother him. But I controlled his every movement by what I wanted to accomplish in the end but he didn't know that. So I think I am like the cricket.

*Answer:* Well, except the cricket doesn't have free will. You were determining which way the cricket would go by what you did whereas when we are talking about free agents here, many times agents will act in ways that God doesn't directly will. God, in any situation you find yourself in, always wills that you do the right thing. His will is never that you sin, that you do evil. But he knows that some people would do evil in certain situations and knowing that ultimately this will redound to his providential plan for human history he permits them to do the evil that he doesn't really will for them to do. It is a very different view of what a human being is than the view that you've expressed. This is the idea that we are not determined by our character, our genetic makeup, our upbringing, but we have genuine freedom that something like a cricket would not have.

*Question:* We have libertarian free will to do what we want, but God can change factors of our situation so we choose to do a certain actualization. He is working a greater work.<sup>84</sup>

*Answer:* I think what you are expressing is that you are saying since the circumstances are under God's control, he could change the circumstances in which you are so that you would do something different. But given that, in the same circumstances, this is how you would freely react, that is not under God's control. On this view, God doesn't determine the truth of these counterfactuals of freedom. Remember on the diagram we did of divine middle knowledge, middle knowledge is prior to God's decree so it is independent of his will – how you would react in any situation that you find yourself. So he can say, "Whoa! He wouldn't act very helpfully in this situation, so I am going to put him in some other situation or I'm going to put somebody else in that situation." Yes, he can do that. But he cannot affect how you would freely choose in those very circumstances because that is

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<sup>84</sup> 29:53

something that is prior to his will and outside his control.

*Question:* Back it up just a little bit for a point of clarification – you use the term Calvinism and also Reformed view and also universal divine whatever that four word thing was. Are those pretty much interchangeable terms?

*Answer:* Pretty much. Yes, generally speaking. Although as we said last week there would be some Reformed theologians who wouldn't perhaps embrace universal divine causal determinism but might simply say it is a mystery. We don't know how to reconcile sovereignty and freedom, we simply affirm both but we are not going to embrace compatibilist views of freedom. So although this is, I think, generally sociologically true that these are the same people we are talking about, it is not always necessarily true that you have to be a universal divine causal determinist to be a Reformed theologian.

In drawing this to a close, let me raise an objection to Molinism that is very close to what has just been raised. I said that God could change the circumstances in which he places a person because then the person might act differently. So it has been objected that really Molinism gives God such sovereign control over creatures that it really becomes indistinguishable from the Calvinistic view. Given that we are talking about nondetermining circumstances, how a person would freely choose in any set of circumstances has to be just an inexplicable brute fact. He is not determined by the circumstances to choose that way, so why he would choose as he does in those circumstances is just an inexplicable, brute fact. But then, couldn't God alter the circumstances in some imperceptible way, say, by causing a different event to occur in Alpha Centauri at the same time in outer space (and there is an infinite number of these other alternative circumstances which, to all appearances, would be identical to the circumstances that the person finds himself in, but there would just be trivial causally irrelevant changes that God could make) and, since it is inexplicable why the person chooses as he does in any set of circumstances, in these other circumstances in this infinite array of other circumstances there would be examples where the person would choose just as God wants him to do.

So what God could simply do is tinker with the circumstances in which a person finds himself in these imperceptible, tiny, causally irrelevant ways and he would be able to get the person to do exactly what he wants the person to do. Thus, the world would be just as strictly under his control as the Calvinist imagines and nothing has been gained by positing middle knowledge or a Molinist account of freedom. This critique would say Molinism is too successful; it gives you such a strong doctrine of divine sovereignty that in fact it really becomes indistinguishable from the Reformed view. What I will do next time is look at this objection and try to answer it.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Total Running Time: 35:03 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 12

#### **An Objection to Molinism**

In our lesson, we have been thinking about a Molinist view of providence. I closed last time by raising a possible objection to the Molinist view. To review, you will remember that, on Molinism, the Molinist maintains that God knows, via his middle knowledge, what any possible person he might create would freely do in any set of freedom permitting circumstances that God might place him in. So he knows, for example, what Dennis would have done if he had been Michele Bachmann's husband during her campaign. Or he knows what Dennis would have done if he had been the aide of Abraham Lincoln that night in Ford's Theatre. God knows what any possible person he might create would freely do in any set of circumstances God might create him.

The objection goes like this: since those circumstances are freedom permitting circumstances then that means that the circumstances don't determine what the agent will do in those circumstances. It is a free decision. So ultimately why that agent chooses as he would in those circumstances must just be an inexplicable, brute fact. It is just that that is how he would choose and there isn't any explanation of why he would choose that way in those circumstances. If that is true, the objection continues, then God could alter the circumstances in some imperceptible way by causing a change in some causally irrelevant event. For example, at the time of Dennis' choosing, God could cause a stellar event in Alpha Centauri to take place and that would make then a new set of circumstances in which Dennis' choice is taken. Given that there would be an infinite number of these alternative circumstances and that why a person chooses as he does in any set of circumstances is just a brute inexplicable fact, in these other circumstances people would act differently. So by choosing to create one of these other circumstances, God could have gotten Dennis to do exactly what God wanted Dennis to do. In effect, everything will happen just as God wants it to happen and by manipulating these circumstances in external ways, God can get the people to do whatever he wants them to do. So he can have any world that he wants.

That is how the objection goes but before we respond to it I think we would do well to pause and ask ourselves: what does the objection really prove if it is successful? Whenever you hear an objection to your view, you always need to ask yourself what is the worst case scenario – let's suppose the objector is right. Let's suppose the objection is true – what would the impact of that be? In this case, what would be the implications if this objection is successful? Well, if you think about it, it really doesn't do anything to undermine the Molinist account of providence as such. It would still follow that God is sovereignly in control of the various circumstances and the agents who are in them and it would still follow that the agents freely act in whatever circumstances they find themselves in. Since the circumstances are freedom permitting and non-determining, how the agent would choose in any of those circumstances is still always free – it is always up to him. If God places an agent in some set of circumstances, let's call it *C*, and these are non-determining circumstances then the agent freely acts in *C* even if God could have gotten the agent to do something different by creating some other set of circumstances,

say  $C^*$ , instead. The fact that the agent would have acted differently had God created some other set of circumstances doesn't do anything to undermine the fact that the agent does choose freely in the circumstances in which he finds himself. So the objection really doesn't undermine the Molinist account of providence as such. People still freely choose in their circumstances and God controls the circumstances and who is in them.<sup>86</sup>

So what is the import of the objection? I think what it threatens to undermine is not the Molinist doctrine of providence as such but what it undermines would be the theological usefulness of middle knowledge. If the objection is correct then it means that there really isn't any distinction between the possible worlds that God could have created (or at least this distinction becomes inconsequential) between the possible worlds known by God via his middle knowledge (all of the possibilities) and that subset of feasible worlds that God can actualize given the truth of these counterfactuals of freedom. The distinction between possible worlds and feasible worlds would just become inconsequential if this objection is correct. Because even if God couldn't bring it about that, say, Peter would freely affirm Christ in circumstances  $C$  he could just alter those circumstances to make them  $C^*$  and Peter would freely affirm Christ in  $C^*$ . So God can actualize whatever he wants just by manipulating or fiddling with the circumstances. In that case, the Molinist account wouldn't be of any help, for example, in explaining the problem of evil. You couldn't say, "Well, God would have preferred a world without evil in which free agents always did the good but it wasn't feasible for him." No, on this view it would be feasible for God to create a world in which everyone freely always did the right thing. So the Molinist would simply have to say with the Reformed theologian that God prefers to have a world with evil in it. Or take the problem of why God doesn't create a world of universal salvation. You can't say that there is no feasible world available to God in which this many people are saved without also this many people being lost. You have to say that God could have achieved a world in which all of these people are saved and nobody is lost but that he chose not to do so. Like the Reformed theologian, the Molinist will simply have to say that this is God's will. So in that sense, the Molinist account of providence wouldn't be of any help in explaining why we have a less than optimal world on our hands. You can't ascribe this less than optimal state of affairs to the fact that certain worlds are infeasible for God because the wrong counterfactuals are true. Nevertheless (and I want to re-emphasize this) the Molinist account would still be preferable to the Calvinist view because it would still allow for genuine human freedom. It still gives you divine sovereignty plus genuine human freedom in whatever circumstances agents find themselves. It just means that you wouldn't be able to exploit middle knowledge for great theological advantages as the Molinist purports to do. So if the objection is successful, while it would undermine the utility of Molinism or middle knowledge, it really wouldn't annul the advantage of Molinism over Calvinism in its affirmation of both divine sovereignty and human freedom.

But is the objection successful? I don't think it is because I think the objection is predicated upon a number of false assumptions or questionable assumptions at least. Let me isolate what some of these assumptions are.

First of all, the objection seems to assume that free choices are just random events. It is

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<sup>86</sup> 5:05

just a random matter how an agent would choose in a certain set of circumstances. But that is incorrect. Free choices are not random events. People don't just choose to do something by chance. Therefore, we shouldn't think of these free choices as just randomly occurring in these various sets of circumstances. On the contrary, free choices are indeterministic events which are done for reasons. People have reasons – that is to say motivations – for what they do. So even though they are causally undetermined by the circumstances, they are not random.<sup>87</sup> They are indeterminate events done for reasons. Therefore, that gives good grounds for thinking that how an agent would choose would not vary widely in these various circumstances that are altered in causally irrelevant ways. Namely, because these other circumstances are indistinguishable from the circumstances in which the agent finds himself, he would not choose any differently in these other circumstances because they look exactly the same as the circumstances he is in. I think you can give empirical evidence for this. Just ask somebody, “Would you have chosen differently if there had been some stellar event in Alpha Centauri that had been different?” And he would say, “Of course not! I would have the same reasons for choosing as how I did. God changing some causally irrelevant event in Alpha Centauri wouldn't have prompted me to do anything differently than how I freely chose.” So the objection is just fundamentally flawed in thinking of free choices as random events which are distributed by chance across these various sets of circumstances.

Second problem: the objection assumes that the circumstances in which an agent finds himself are not limited in any way. It assumes that the circumstances which are mentioned in the antecedent of the counterfactual statement “if the agent were in circumstances *C*” are unlimited. This is, I think, far from obvious. For example, it is universally agreed that circumstances which are later than the time of the choice are irrelevant to how an agent would choose. Why don't we consider events which are in the future? Because they don't have any causal influence on how a person would choose. They are just irrelevant to how a person would choose what would take place after the choice. But, by the same token, events which are sufficiently distant from the agent are equally irrelevant causally because they don't have any causal impact upon the agent's choice. In fact, even events which are simultaneous with the person's choice are irrelevant to how that person would choose at that time. In the Special Theory of Relativity, where light is considered to be the fastest causal signal there is, when any agent *S* is in a certain position, there is what's called a light cone structure from *S* where anything that *S* could influence causally in the future is determined by where a light ray could reach as time goes on. And anything that could influence *S* is determined by a light cone that lies in *S*'s past. This is the past light cone and future light cone [see figure 1].

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<sup>87</sup> 10:00

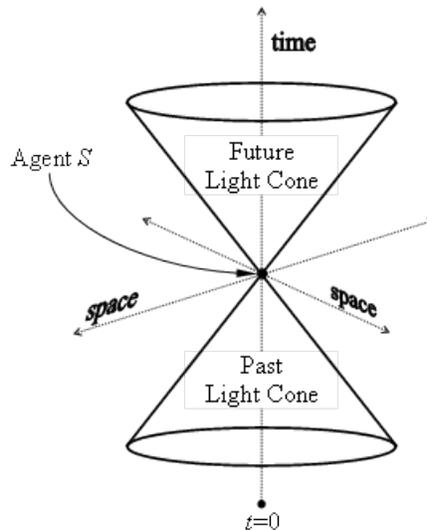


Figure 6- Past and Future Light Cones

Events which are spatially separated from  $S$  are causally irrelevant to what happens at  $S$ . They cannot affect  $S$  because no causal influence travels fast enough to reach  $S$  by that point. Indeed, according to Special Theory of Relativity, anything in this region (the space-like separation from  $S$ ) can be considered to be in  $S$ 's future for some observer at this point. These are, in a sense, like future events. They are just as irrelevant as future events. What that means is that only events which are within the past light cone structure of  $S$  are relevant to the circumstances in which  $S$ 's choice is made. In fact, if the universe began to exist back at  $t=0$ , that past light cone structure is not infinite.<sup>88</sup> It is finite. So really, there are only a finite number of circumstances that are relevant to how  $S$  would choose at this time. So the circumstances are not unlimited. We don't need to consider all these other circumstances. All we need to do is ask, "How would  $S$  choose if you were to alter something in  $S$ 's past light cone and what difference would that make?"

Third: the objection assumes that imperceptible events which are in  $S$ 's past light cone can be altered without significant effect upon  $S$ 's situation. It assumes that you can fiddle with, or alter, these circumstances within the past light cone without appreciably affecting  $S$ 's situation. I think that is false. The lessons of both chaos theory and quantum theory in modern science have taught us that even the alteration of the most insignificant events can, in time, have enormous ramifications. So fiddling with some event in  $S$ 's past light cone that might seem trivial could actually in fact affect  $S$ 's situation so that  $S$  would be in very different circumstances. For example, the indeterminacy in the position of a cue ball on a billiard table – quantum physics says there is a certain indeterminacy in the exact location of that cue ball. It is so tiny it is almost infinitesimal but there is a certain uncertainty in the location of that cue ball on the billiard table. That imperceptible indeterminacy is such that after only a dozen shots the indeterminacy of the ball's location is magnified to the entire table top. It is uncertain as to anywhere the ball would be on the entire billiard table after just a dozen shots because of that quantum indeterminacy. So while you may be able to alter some events in  $S$ 's past light cone without appreciably affecting  $S$ 's situation, it is going to be pure speculation as to

<sup>88</sup> 15:00

whether *S* would choose any differently if you were to alter those. If you were to alter many others then it might well change *S*'s situation in a significant way so that *S* really would not be in the same circumstances anymore in the causal sense.

Finally, the last assumption that this objection makes that I think is wrong is that it assumes that God's concern is only with *S*'s free choice – that God is only concerned with how *S* would choose. But that is obviously false. God is concerned with the whole history of free creatures – a whole world of free creatures on into eternity future. Even if it were true that by substituting some other set of imperceptibly different circumstances God could get *S* to choose differently, that doesn't mean that those circumstances won't radically affect other agents in the world and how they would choose and how this would be magnified into the future. So it is not at all implausible that fiddling around with these circumstances would bring about a very, very different world than the one God intended. What that means, then, is that this distinction between possible worlds and worlds that are feasible for God comes back in again with a vengeance. It may well be the case that there are worlds that might be preferable, all things being equal, but they are infeasible for God given the counterfactuals that are true.

So it seems to me that this objection is not one that is compelling. It is predicated on a number of false assumptions that I think we should reject. In any case, it would not do anything to rob Molinism of its chief advantage, which is its reconciliation of divine sovereignty and human freedom.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* If, in the Molinist view, God has circumstances that he knows a person is going to respond to in a particular way – a way he would like him to. We know the Bible says that God would have not one perish. But we do know that there are people who do perish. It would look to me like there would be a conflict somewhere in there that if God knows these circumstances why would he allow circumstances so, when that choice is to be made, that person says, "No."<sup>89</sup>

*Answer:* This is exactly the point that I was trying to make about the theological advantages of Molinism. I think you could say that, on balance, God would prefer a world in which everyone would freely receive Christ and be saved. But it may be that such a world is not feasible for God, at least not a world that would not have other overriding disadvantages; a world in which this many would freely be saved but no one would freely be lost. The advantage of the Molinist view is you don't have to say that God preferred this kind of world. You can say with the Scriptures that God is not willing that any should perish.<sup>90</sup> His desire is that all should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth but such a world is not feasible for him.

*Question:* That being the case, how would you resolve the fact that God created Judas Iscariot knowing that his role in the salvation of man would be determinant for his loss? Or Pharaoh? Or others that he has created in certain circumstances that they chose what

<sup>89</sup> 20:11

<sup>90</sup> cf. 2 Peter 3:9

they would do but the circumstances were there that supported his overall plan and therefore it seems it determined his destiny?

*Answer:* They are not determined. That is what is important to understand. You used the word “determined.” It is not determined. These are freedom permitting circumstances and God’s will for Judas is that Judas would always do the right thing in whatever circumstances he finds himself. But knowing that Judas would freely betray Jesus, God has permitted him to be in these circumstances so that ultimately his will will be achieved and the crucifixion will take place and all of this will happen. This shows God’s ability to work with human free choice in order to bring about the ends that God desires but without directly willing the sin that he permits them to do.

*Followup:* Where I am having difficulty is that God knew what Judas would do before he did it in the circumstances in which he found himself and we also said that God had control of those circumstances. So God allowed those circumstances knowing that Judas would do what Judas in fact did. Are we saying that even though God would will that Judas do differently, he put in place circumstances in which Judas did what God knew what he would do?

*Answer:* Yes, that is right. This has a strong doctrine of sovereignty even over sin, even over the evil acts that people do. God is sovereignly in control knowing that he can ultimately bring his good purposes out of evil. But God doesn’t directly will the evil that people do. His will for them is always that they do the right thing but, knowing that they often won’t, he creates a world in which he knows that his ultimate purposes will be achieved through the sinful decisions of creatures. Judas didn’t have to betray Christ and he certainly didn’t have to remain unrepentant afterwards. God gives him sufficient grace to resist temptation and, if he has fallen, to come back and repent and be saved. It is entirely up to Judas whether or not he would do that.

*Followup:* But then the circumstances where Judas did what God knew he would do, God put those in place. Which seems to me somewhere along that, Judas, if God didn’t want Judas to deny his Son, those circumstances wouldn’t have been in place.

*Answer:* Right, but what you have to ask yourself is suppose God decided to create a world in which Judas didn’t betray Jesus. How would this have worked out for God’s providential plan for human history? We would just have no idea.

*Followup:* I was just trying to reconcile within myself that it seems to me he is adjusting or manipulating circumstances to fulfill his will.<sup>91</sup>

*Answer:* Yes. God is sovereign over the circumstances and he knows which circumstances to create and he gives people sufficient grace to do the good in whatever circumstances they find themselves and he wills that they do the good in those circumstances. But he can work things through to achieve his good purposes even when they won’t do the right thing and choose to do evil instead. Were he to prevent acts of sin and so forth, well, it may be that that would be a much worse world. We can’t even imagine what sort of a world might have transpired if these things hadn’t taken place. So what we do is we trust that God has so providentially ordered the world as to achieve his purposes in a good and

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<sup>91</sup> 25:03

just and equitable way.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Total Running Time: 26:20 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 13

#### Ordinary Providence and Extraordinary Providence

We have been talking about various doctrines of providence contrasting Calvinism, Arminianism and Molinism with respect to God's governance of the world.

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#### DISCUSSION

*Question:* Since we are talking about objections to Molinism, I noticed you didn't bring up the grounding objection. Could you talk about that objection?

*Answer:* I did not bring up objections to middle knowledge because we discussed that already in the section of the course on the attributes of God. If you look back at your notes to the section on divine omniscience, we went through all of these various objections to middle knowledge. So what I wanted to consider last week was not objections to middle knowledge which have already been dealt with, but objections to a Molinist account of *providence*. Given middle knowledge, does Molinism give us a good account of providence? That was why I limited my discussion to the objection that I did last time.

*Question:* Maybe we are making this whole doctrine of election more complicated than it really needs to be. Suppose there are two groups of people in heaven. The members of the first group are there as a result of their own free choice. The members of the second group are there as a result of God's own free choice, with perhaps the apostle Paul being an example. Similarly, there are two groups of people in hell. The members of the first group have heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ and have rejected it. The members of the second group have not heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ but would reject it if it were presented in an appropriate manner. What would be your comments about that?

*Answer:* The second group in hell that you described presupposes middle knowledge when you said there are people who would have rejected the Gospel if they heard it. That presupposes that God has middle knowledge. So once you give him middle knowledge, then I think a Molinist account of providence is going to follow. And this is not meant to be just a doctrine of election; this is a broader doctrine about how God governs the whole of the world – even things not having to do directly with salvation and election. If you are going to go with that kind of a solution, I think you are already in the Molinist camp.

*Question:* Yes, and I have no objection to that except I believe there are some people that God “zaps” – that is the verb you coined one time. These are people (for example, like the apostle Paul) who, left to their own devices, would have probably spent an eternity in hell but God overrides that choice.

*Answer:* Yeah, I hear what you are saying. I, myself, feel very uncomfortable with that. It does seem like the Lord “zapped” the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus, doesn't it? But then you wonder why doesn't he just zap everybody who rejects him rather than allow them to go to hell forever? Why not just zap them if he really loves them? That

discrimination, to me, seems as bad as Calvinism where God literally wills the damnation of certain individuals. So I would prefer to say that God knew that the apostle Paul would respond in an appropriate way freely to the vision on the Damascus road. It is very interesting – when the apostle Paul is testifying before Agrippa later in Acts, he tells his story and then he says, “Wherefore I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, O King, but I went and did this and that.”<sup>93</sup> So Paul himself seemed to recognize that there was room for disobedience. He wasn’t just “zapped;” he could have refused but he didn’t and God knew that he would respond in an appropriate way. Let me say one other thing about this, to pick up on a question raised last time about God being manipulative. I think that when you reflect on the doctrine of middle knowledge, it is very clear that this kind of knowledge in the hands of a tyrant would be fearsome indeed. If God were a tyrant then having this kind of knowledge would indeed be terrible. But the point I want to emphasize is that God is not like that! He wants the salvation of every person.<sup>94</sup> He wants people to come to know him and to be saved. It says in 1 Timothy 2:4 that God desires that all persons be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. This is his goal for every person. So in Acts 17, when Paul talks about God’s providence over human history, he says, “the Lord who made the heavens and the earth, determined the exact times and places that each person should live and he did this so that they might reach out for him and find him for he is not far from every one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being.”<sup>95</sup> So Paul in Acts 17 seems to describe the world as providentially ordered by God with a view toward achieving an optimal ratio between saved and lost in the world – win as many saved freely as he can to himself. So we must not think of middle knowledge as something in the hands of a tyrant but rather in the hands of a person who loves people and who wants everyone to be saved and who therefore gives sufficient grace to salvation to everyone in order that they can come to know him and find eternal life.

*Question:* These things exist in tension. 2 Timothy 2:25 says “those who oppose must be gently instructed that God will grant them repentance.” So there is granted and the grantees and non-grantees. I share with my men’s group that this issue – Calvinism versus Arminianism versus Molinism – these things exist in tension and you have got to say the Bible teaches them both. I take Ecclesiastes to heart – God is in heaven and you are on earth. We are bound by time and space, God isn’t. And for us to understand this is futile, I think, in terms of trying to have a synthesis of it because we are creatures bound by time and space. A number of things God identifies in Scripture as mysteries, like the mystery of godliness, the mystery of sin . . .

*Answer:* This isn’t one of them, right?

*Followup:* This isn’t specifically defined but I think it falls in this category.

*Answer:* Alright, well, that is where I would disagree. I think that you are certainly right that there is this tension between divine sovereignty and human freedom in Scripture. That is where we began – with Scriptures teaching both of these things. But then we saw that there are different attempts to make sense of this by the Calvinist, Arminian and the

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<sup>93</sup> cf. Acts 26:19-20

<sup>94</sup> 4:57

<sup>95</sup> cf. Acts 17:24-28

Molinist. And I don't see anything about Molinism that doesn't make sense. That doesn't mean it is true but it at least means that it shows that these are reconcilable and that we are not just left with the tension. Unless you can show some sort of problem with this model, it does show – this is especially important to the unbeliever – we are not just left with some sort of a mystery here but you can provide a model that will make sense of it.

*Question:* Just picking up on what earlier was said about the description of the dwellers of hell and how they got there – could this be explained in a way that would say God knows who would choose him given the opportunity and circumstances and who would not so those that would have chosen him he sets in place those circumstances to allow them to do what they would do anyway?

*Answer:* Yeah, if you go back to the section of this class on Doctrine of Christ you will remember the last part of that section was on this problem. I similarly suggested that it is possible that those who never hear the Gospel and are lost are people who God knew would not have responded to it even if they had heard it. So nobody could stand before God on Judgment Day and say, “OK, God, so I didn't respond to general revelation in nature and conscience, but if I had heard the Gospel, then I would have believed in it!” And God will say, “No, I knew that even if you had heard you still would have rejected it and so my judgment of you on the basis of nature and conscience is neither unjust nor unloving.” Indeed, it is possible that those who reject general revelation and are lost would not have been saved in any feasible world that God could have created them in. They might suffer what one might call *transworld damnation* – that is to say, in any circumstances in which God would have created them they would have freely rejected him.

*Followup:* I think it also helps to explain the passage in Scripture where God wants all to respond to him<sup>96</sup> but they don't. So, in essence, he knows with our own free will whether we would or whether we would not. If we would, he puts in place the circumstances to create that environment to which we then respond.<sup>97</sup>

*Answer:* That is what I am suggesting, too. That at least is a possibility that makes sense of this biblical data. So, yes, that is what I would say as well. I refer you back to the section on Doctrine of Christ where we talked about this before and I did propose a similar solution to what you are saying.

## **Miracles**

We've been talking about Doctrine of Creation. We looked at creation out of nothing and then we looked at God's conservation and concurrence in the world as he sustains it in being. Finally, we looked at God's providence over the world – the way he governs the world. And now we want to move on to a new topic, which is the topic of miracles.

## **Ordinary Providence and Extraordinary Providence**

The classical Protestant theologians distinguished two types of divine providence:

<sup>96</sup> cf. 1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9

<sup>97</sup> 10:09

*providentia ordinaria* (ordinary providence) and *providentia extraordinaria*. *Providentia ordinaria* would be God's ordinary governance of the world through natural causes and natural laws – the way things naturally happen in the world. His extraordinary providence would be special miraculous acts of God whereby God intervenes in the nexus of finite secondary causes and causes something to happen that would not take place apart from that divine intervention. So his ordinary providence is his non-miraculous governance of the world but his extraordinary providence is his miraculous interventions in the world to bring about his will.

As nice as this rubric is, I think it can be somewhat misleading because, on a Molinist view, we can imagine God bringing about certain events that I think would be more plausibly classed as extraordinary providence even though they are non-miraculous. That is to say, given his middle knowledge, God could set things up naturally so that at the time when, say, a prayer is offered the natural causes are in place to bring about the response to that prayer. Here is an example. In Joshua 3:16, it describes how the Israelite people pass through the Jordan River into the Promised Land. It says that what happened was, even though the Jordan at that time is normally flooding, that upstream the water is all stopped and heaped up and it left the riverbed dry so that the people of Israel could cross the river just at the moment that the priests stepped into the water. Now, this could have been, as some biblical commentators have suggested, due to a purely natural occurrence upstream. An earthquake, say, could cause a landslide which would block the river upstream so that the bed would dry up just at the time that the Israelites were about to cross into the Promised Land. This would be because God, via his middle knowledge, knew when they would come there, what time they would arrive and where so that the natural causes could be set up from the beginning of the earth without any supernatural intervention on God's part. I am not suggesting that God miraculously intervened and pushed the tectonic plates so that they grated and caused this earthquake. No, the tectonic plates have always been there for billions of years and without any intervention on God's part he just knew that this is when the earthquake would occur that would cause the landslide that would dry up the river so that the people could cross over into the Promised Land.

I think you can see that acts like this are not just ordinary providence. They are really extraordinary because these things wouldn't normally happen apart from God's intending it. You normally would not have a person suddenly be cured of cancer just because someone lays hands on him and prays. But God knew the natural causes that would be in place that would bring that about, say, when someone prayed.<sup>98</sup> So this can encourage us to pray for people when they are sick, for example, or pray for financial straits when we go through them without thinking that we need to have a miracle occur – that God needs to somehow miraculously intervene. We may not have the faith to pray for a miracle but we could pray for a special providence, I think, in many cases.

I would want to distinguish between acts of special providence and genuine miracles. An act of special providence is an event which is extraordinary because of its timing and its place but it is still natural. By contrast, a miracle would involve God's actual causal intervention in the nexus of finite causes to bring about some event that the natural causes

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<sup>98</sup> 14:55

at that time and place would not have cause to happen.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* In the case of the person that has cancer, if the planets have aligned that it is going to happen regardless without direct intervention, why do we pray for it?

*Answer:* It would not have happened regardless – that is the whole point! God, via his middle knowledge, knew that these prayers would be offered and so he set up the natural causes in advance to produce the result – the answer – at the time the prayers happen. But it would not have happened regardless. If the prayers were not to occur then God would have known that in his middle knowledge and not set up the natural causes. Prayer makes a difference! It is just that in order to answer the prayer, it doesn't mean that you have to have a miraculous intervention or backward causation. Let me give one other example. When Jan and I were on staff with Campus Crusades, in 1972 we were preparing for an event called Explo72, a big conference in Dallas, Texas. About the weekend before the conference, nobody was signed up for it – it looked like it was going to be a big dud instead of an explosion! The Crusade staff at headquarters that weekend had a time of repentance and prayer and seeking the Lord and experienced a real revival on the staff. Monday morning – boom! – in came the applications! They just came flooding in. Thousands – tens of thousands – of people attended. The speaker we were listening to reflected on this. He said, “You know those applications had to have already been mailed prior to our time of repentance and revival on Saturday and Sunday. God knew that we were going to have this time, this season of prayer, so he set it up so these applications would come flowing in right afterwards.” If you have got middle knowledge, that makes perfect sense. That is a perfectly reasonable interpretation of how things go. So this, I think, can show you what I am talking about. It is not going to happen regardless. It happens because God knew that these prayers would be offered but he doesn't need to do a last minute intervention to take care of it. Knowing this, he can set it up in advance so that it will take place.

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What we will want to look at next time is how, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the belief in miracles collapsed. We will see how 19<sup>th</sup> century theologians came progressively to doubt, first, the miraculous nature of the events recorded in the Gospels and then, secondly, to doubt that these events even occurred at all and how this has impacted modern historical criticism of the Gospels and the historical Jesus. It is a fascinating story.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Total Running Time: 19:30 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 14

#### **God's Special Providential Acts: Miracles**

We have been talking in our lesson about the doctrine of providence and we looked at God's general providence in governance of the world. Now we are looking at God's special providential acts called *miracles*. You will remember I distinguished between a miracle and what I've called a *special providence*. A special providence would be an extraordinary event which comes about because of God's governance of the world but doesn't involve any supernatural intervention on God's part. Rather, it has completely natural causes whereas a miraculous event will involve the intervention of God into the sequence of natural causes in the world.

#### **Scriptural Data**

Clearly, the Bible is a book of miracles. Over and over again in both the Old and the New Testament, you have stories of God's miraculous acts in history.

In the Old Testament, these tend to center around the Exodus in which God brings his people out of bondage in Egypt and delivers them and then around the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Those tend to be the two foci, as it were, of God's miraculous acts in the Old Testament. The story of Elijah's battle with the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18 is a classic example where Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal to perform a miraculous act and they are unable to do so. Then Elijah calls upon God to reveal himself in this miraculous way and he does so thereby vindicating Yahweh's existence as the true God.

In the New Testament, you have a sequence of extraordinary miracles associated with Jesus of Nazareth. God's self-revelation in his Son, Jesus Christ, is attended with miraculous acts on Jesus' part. The story of Jesus healing the blind man in John 9:30-33 is a great example of the use of miracles in the New Testament in the life of Jesus. You will remember in this story, Jesus heals the man who was born blind and then they keep interrogating him and his parents to see if this was really a miraculous act that Jesus had done. In John 9:30-33,

The man answered, "Why, this is a marvel! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if any one is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

There you see a perfect illustration of how miracles serve to warrant the message and the proclamation of Jesus and his being a special revelation from God.

So, in the Bible, both the New Testament and the Old Testament, we have stories of God's miraculous intervention in history.

#### **19<sup>th</sup> Century Collapse of Belief In Miracles**

Unfortunately, the traditional belief in miracles collapsed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I want

to say a word about what led to the collapse of the belief in miracles in the modern age.

In his *Wahrheit der christlichen Religion* (“On the Truth of the Christian Religion”) which was published in 1758, the Göttingen professor of theology Gottfried Less said that there are two steps in establishing that a miracle has occurred. The first step is to prove that the event occurred – that some event actually took place in history. Then the second step was to show the miraculous character of that event.<sup>100</sup> During the ensuing century, the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the belief in both of these steps laid out by Less came to be regarded with skepticism and that led to a general collapse in the belief in the reliability of the Gospel stories in German theology.

The first to go was actually the second step – the miraculous character of the event. German rationalists in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century were willing, in fact sometimes they were eager, to affirm the historicity of the events recorded in the Gospels. They agreed that these events actually happened. But they went to great pains to explain away these events naturally without any appeal to God’s miraculous intervention. Given that events with supernatural causes do not occur, they felt that there just had to be some natural explanation of these events. So, for example, the theologian Karl Bahrdt – and this is not the same Karl Barth that is the famous 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian, this was an 18<sup>th</sup> century theologian – in his book explains the feeding of the five thousand by saying that Jesus and the disciples had a secret stash of bread that they had concealed and then somebody would hand it out to Jesus who would then keep handing it out to the crowds and this is the way they fed the five thousand people. Jesus walking on the water was explained by a floating platform just beneath the surface of the water so that he appeared to be walking across the surface of the lake. As for his raising certain people from the dead, well, these people were actually simply in comas – they were comatose – and Jesus aroused them back to waking consciousness and thereby prevented them from being buried prematurely.

This last natural explanation provided the key to explaining Jesus’ own resurrection. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the old Conspiracy Hypothesis of the English and German deists – that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus and then lied about the resurrection – had pretty much lost conviction. Nobody really believed in that old conspiracy theory anymore so German rationalists had to come up with some better natural explanation of the resurrection. This they found in the so-called Apparent Death Theory. Jesus wasn’t really dead as a result of his crucifixion. He was merely unconscious – he was comatose – and he was taken down from the cross still alive, placed in the tomb, and there he either revived on his own or sometimes this could be combined with conspiratorial overtones to say that they hoaxed the death of Jesus in order to convince people that he was in fact the Messiah. It is a sad note of history, I think, that the so-called father of modern theology, Friedrich Schleiermacher, actually embraced this theory of the resurrection of Jesus. Yes, Schleiermacher believed in the Apparent Death Theory. He remained rationalistic with respect to the question of miracles. Miracles do not happen and therefore in his lectures of 1832 on the Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History (notice the division there – the Christ of Faith is one thing, the Jesus who actually lived in history is another) he accepts the Apparent Death Theory saying that it is unimportant whether the death and

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<sup>100</sup> 4:58

resurrection of Jesus were real or merely apparent. He thought that Jesus just apparently died, he was resuscitated and then he continued to live with the disciples for some time afterwards. That was the explanation that German rationalists gave for miracles – the natural explanation school of thinking.<sup>101</sup>

Just three years after Schleiermacher's lectures in 1832, a work appeared which sounded the death knell for this natural explanation hermeneutic. This was the book by David Friedrich Strauss called *The Life of Jesus*,<sup>102</sup> 1835. Strauss explained the life of Jesus and the miraculous elements in it as the product of mythology. The application of mythology to the Gospels, as a category, meant that Strauss denied not simply the miraculous nature of these events but he denied that the events ever occurred. So the first step of Less' argument for establishing a miracle was now going by the board as well. The rationalists granted that the events had occurred but sought to explain them naturally. Strauss said that the events never occurred; rather, the Gospel accounts are the result of myth, legend and editorial activity on the part of the evangelists. Strauss rejected both the conspiracy theory of the deists as well as the natural explanation school of the rationalists. But he would not accept the traditional view of the supernaturalists that Jesus was actually raised from the dead. Instead, he said that the Gospel accounts are historically unreliable. The Gospels are not historically accurate records of what happened; rather, they are the product of a long evolution in which the original facts were lost and became overlaid with legend, myth and other editorial additions by the Gospel writers.

It is interesting that Strauss claimed, at least, to operate without any religious or dogmatic presuppositions. He thought that he was a perfectly neutral investigator of the Gospels. He ascribed his neutrality to the influence of his philosophical studies. Because he had studied philosophy he felt he could approach these documents neutrally. When you read Strauss, however, it becomes very apparent that the man obviously did have certain philosophical assumptions which determined the outcome of his work. For example, he presupposed the impossibility of miracles. Strauss was an acknowledged pantheist, that is to say he thought that God and the world are identical – there is no transcendent being, no Creator and Designer beyond the world. In later life, he actually embraced materialism – the material world is all there is. So he proceeded on the same assumption that the rationalists had – miracles are impossible. He said this is not a presupposition that requires proof. You just start with this presupposition; you don't need to give any proof for it. On the contrary, he thought to affirm miracles are possible is a presupposition that requires proof. When it comes to Jesus' resurrection, in particular, Strauss says that the idea that God has intervened in the regular course of nature to bring about some miraculous event is, "irreconcilable with enlightened ideas about the relation of God to the world."<sup>103</sup> If you are enlightened, you will recognize that this is simply impossible. Any supposedly historical account of miraculous events can just be dismissed on the basis of this presupposition. He says, "indeed, no just notion of the true nature of history is possible without a perception of the inviolability of the chain of finite causes, and of

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<sup>101</sup> 10:04

<sup>102</sup> The actual German title of the book is *Das Leben Jesu*

<sup>103</sup> David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot, ed. with an Introduction by Peter C. Hodgson (London: SCM, 1973) p. 736.

the impossibility of miracles.”<sup>104</sup> So, the chain of natural causes he says is inviolable – it cannot be interrupted and therefore miracles are impossible.<sup>105</sup>

Although Strauss rejected the so-called natural explanation hermeneutic of the rationalists, he was no more sympathetic to miracles than they were or the deists. Instead, he adopted the mythological application. This work, *The Life of Jesus* by Strauss, was a watershed in the critical study of the New Testament. The importance of this work simply cannot be exaggerated. Albert Schweitzer, who wrote a history of the Life of Jesus movement during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, says that *The Life of Jesus* by Strauss was a watershed, or a division point, in this movement. He says prior to Strauss the main question that occupied students of the life of Jesus was the problem of miracles – how do you reconcile a historical approach to the Gospels with their miraculous character? But he says, “With the advent of Strauss, this problem found a solution, viz., that these events have no rightful place in history, but are simply mythical elements in the sources.”<sup>106</sup> So by the mid-1860s, Schweitzer says, the problem of miracles has lost all importance. Let me quote from Schweitzer’s book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* as it is translated in English published in 1906. This is what Schweitzer says:

That does not mean that the problem of miracle is solved. From the historical point of view it is really impossible to solve it, since we are not able to reconstruct the process by which a series of miracle stories arose, or a series of historical occurrences were transformed into miracle stories, and these narratives must simply be left with a question mark standing against them. What has been gained is only that the exclusion of miracle from our view of history has been universally recognized as a principle of criticism, so that miracle no longer concerns the historian either positively or negatively.<sup>107</sup>

So as a result of Strauss’ influence, the problem of miracles simply disappeared. He says historians looking at the life of Jesus just assumed that they had to take a naturalistic approach and that miracles were impossible and then the question was just explaining them away. So up until the time of Strauss, it was pretty widely recognized that the Gospels were historically reliable accounts of what had happened. These events actually took place. The question was: how do you explain them naturally rather than supernaturally? But, with Strauss, the miraculous events narrated in the Gospels never really took place – they are just myths. The narratives in the Gospels are therefore unhistorical in character.

I would be remiss if I were to leave it at that and not mention that, although Strauss’ mythological approach to the Gospels remained the dominate viewpoint right up until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, there has now occurred what Craig Evans (a New Testament scholar) has called the eclipse of mythology in New Testament studies. Over the last fifty or sixty years, New Testament scholars have come to realize that, in fact, mythology is the wrong category for interpreting the historical Jesus. This has led to, really, an eclipse or abandonment of Strauss’ mythological approach to the Gospels. It still lingers on in

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>105</sup> 15:02

<sup>106</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 3rd ed., trans. W. Montgomery (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1954) 10.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 110-11.

certain radical left-wing groups like the Jesus Seminar but, among mainstream New Testament scholarship today, it is recognized by the majority of scholars that Jesus was in fact a miracle worker and exorcist.<sup>108</sup> That is not to say that they agree that these events were supernatural. The second of Gottfried Less' steps would still need to be established – the miraculous character of the events. But his first step has been reclaimed, I think, against Strauss. It is widely recognized today that Jesus of Nazareth did carry out a ministry of miracle working however you might want to explain these. In fact, he was also an exorcist who cast demons out of people however you might want to explain that. So we have thankfully seen some reversal of this collapse in the belief of miracles. The events themselves, at least, are back on the table once again as a result of the eclipse of mythology in 20<sup>th</sup> century New Testament studies of the life of Jesus.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* You leapt all the way to the 20<sup>th</sup> century before there was any significant pushback on this. Was there any that you might be aware of that occurred prior to that that was significant enough to make at least a dent in their arguments?

*Answer:* There have always been persons who have defended the historical reliability of the Gospels. Particularly, English or British New Testament scholarship I think has always been less critical than German scholarship. German scholarship, as you can see from these names, has been the dominate mode in theology and New Testament studies. So, yes, there were these minority voices but in Germany this was really the predominate approach right up through Rudolf Bultmann in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. It really began to collapse in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*Question:* Any thoughts on why it is German more than English? Didn't deism come from England and not Germany?

*Answer:* There were deists in Germany as well. One of the very first was the one that I mentioned when I talked about Schweitzer and this was this fellow Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768). Reimarus had written a massive manuscript in the late 1600s criticizing the historicity of the Gospels and advocating the Conspiracy Theory. He thought that the disciples enjoyed the easy life of preaching that they had with Jesus during his lifetime so when he was crucified they stole the body out of the grave and lied about his resurrection so that their easy life could go on that they were enjoying. Well, Reimarus never published his book but there was a librarian at the library in Göttingen named G. E. Lessing and Lessing had this manuscript that had been given to him and he began to publish parts of it in Germany as supposedly a manuscript that he had found in the library when in fact it had been given to him, I think, by Reimarus' daughter. But without letting on who it was by, Lessing was leaking this thing out piecemeal claiming it was something from the library. This caused a huge firestorm in Germany. It was representative of this same deism. You are right – in England that is also true that there was this deist movement. It was also in France. It was really a sort of European-wide phenomenon. There were great responses to these people. The great English apologists at the time wrote responses to the deists and really buried them. But it is an irony of history

<sup>108</sup> 20:03

that it is the critique of miracles by these deists and their progeny that is remembered by history rather than the fantastic critiques of their arguments that were offered by Christian thinkers in these various countries.

*Followup:* Yes, it seems that this shows how important it is for us to have control or dominance in philosophy. This kind of liberalism that we find here is not really the result of faulty exegesis as it is the result of just bad presuppositions.<sup>109</sup> When we lose the philosophical war then who cares what exegetical arguments we have? We start with naturalism and this is what we get.

*Answer:* You know, it is exactly this way with the Jesus Seminar. If you read their book *The Five Gospels* (which is Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and the Gospel of Thomas) their introduction begins by listing the pillars of modern scholarship and the first one is the presupposition of naturalism and the impossibility of miracles! They just take it, like Strauss did, as given that miracles don't occur and therefore any reconstruction of who Jesus of Nazareth was has to be a purely naturalistic account. So you are absolutely right about the importance of philosophical thought and presuppositions. We will look at this a little bit more in detail in the next section.

*Question:* Is this all what is referred to as higher criticism?

*Answer:* Yes.

*Followup:* When you read an article on higher criticism, it begins with Less and goes into this? Or does it begin with something earlier?

*Answer:* It doesn't begin with Less. I used him as my springboard because he so nicely delineates the two steps in giving a defense of miracles. Prove the event occurred then prove its natural character. But, as I say, where the collapse really began was with these deists like Reimarus and then came along these German rationalists that I have described culminating in the work of Strauss in his *Life of Jesus* in 1835. But yes this is the beginnings of so-called higher criticism of the New Testament.

*Question:* How influential was Gottfried Lessing in all of this and his "broad ugly ditch?"

*Answer:* Tremendously influential. Lessing was influential in releasing Reimarus' work which created this firestorm. But he was also very influential in the way in which he attempted to supposedly answer Reimarus in a feeble way so as to undermine Christian orthodoxy. What you mention is Lessing is famous for this expression of the "broad ugly ditch." What is this "broad ugly ditch" that Lessing says he can't get across. He thought that the truths of religion were necessary truths that you had to know with absolute certainty and conviction. The truths of religion require a total commitment of your life and therefore cannot be based upon uncertain, shifting, historically contingent truths. The truths of religions have to be these sorts of *a priori* certainties. But, what we have in the Gospels for the life of Jesus, as shown by Reimarus and others, are these highly contingent historical events for which the evidence is slim or shifting and so how can you base your life and truths of religion upon these contingent, fallible, uncertain truths of history? That is the broad, ugly ditch he said he can't get across – "How can I give a historical justification for these truths of religion?" That was very influential. It

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<sup>109</sup> 25:05

completely undermines the whole project of historical apologetics.

*Followup:* What was Lessing? Was he a deist?

*Answer:* Yes, I think it would be fair to call him a deist. I think that is right.

*Followup:* Did anybody attempt to answer Lessing during his day?

*Answer:* There were lots of replies to him. Less himself would be an example of a prominent German apologist who was writing against him. There were others as well but these have faded from my memory by now so I am not sure whom else one might mention at that early period. Certainly there were very great German historical defenders later, for example, Friedrich August Tholuck (1799-1877) was one of the greatest of these. He was a professor of theology in Halle which was a hotbed of German rationalism when he came along.<sup>110</sup> Tholuck was a champion of Christian orthodoxy and the historical reliability of the New Testament and achieved great fame and success in his work in defending the historicity of the Gospels.

*Question:* I wonder if Strauss or any of these other rationalists presented any evidence or arguments for dismissing the historical accounts. It seems that they sort of vaguely dismiss them and then go on as if they didn't happen. But nowadays the historical arguments are quite strong – it seems like they would need to present some evidence against it.

*Answer:* This is a wonderful segue to the next point to be discussed. You remember Strauss was able to proceed without offering any justification for the impossibility of miracles. He said this is a presupposition that requires no proof. Why did he say that? When you read him, he says David Hume demonstrated the impossibility of identifying any event as a miracle. Here we see the strong influence of this Scottish skeptic, David Hume, and his essay on miracles on Strauss and on subsequent German theology.

In the next section what we will want to look at are these deeper roots for this skepticism that are in Spinoza, in Hume and in the general Newtonian view of the world at that time as a kind of machine that God had made and did not intervene to tinker with. That is what we will look at next time – the roots of the skepticism which came to fruit in German rationalism and the denial of miracles.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>110</sup> 30:02

<sup>111</sup> Total Running Time: 32:14 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 15

#### **The Attack on Miracles**

We have been talking about the problem of miracles and last time we described the 19<sup>th</sup> century collapse of the belief in miracles. First, skepticism with regard to the miraculous nature of the events of the Gospels and then, secondly, skepticism with respect to the very historicity of those events themselves. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, miracles ceased to be believable for modern biblical critics. Strauss, you will remember, was able to proceed in his investigation of the life of Jesus on the presupposition that miracles are impossible. He regarded this as an assumption that did not require any proof; it was just an accepted datum of biblical studies that miracles do not occur.

#### **18th Century Crucible – The Attack on Miracles**

Why did this come about? What are the roots of this 19<sup>th</sup> century collapse? Well, it is what I call the 18<sup>th</sup> century crucible of the discussion with regard to miracles. The skepticism of modernity with respect to miracles arose during the so-called Enlightenment, or the Age of Reason, which dawned in Europe during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Thereafter, for most of the intelligentsia, miracles simply came to be unbelievable. The attack upon miracles was led by the so-called deists. Deists were not atheists by any means. They accepted the existence of God and his conservation of the world in being as well as his general revelation to mankind in nature. But they strenuously denied that God had revealed himself in any special way to mankind and, in particular, they denied that he had revealed himself through miraculous acts in human history. Therefore they were very exercised to demonstrate the impossibility of the occurrence of a miracle or, minimally, the impossibility of identifying any event as a miracle.

#### **The Newtonian World Machine**

I want to look at some of the principle arguments that were employed in the debate over deism during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The most important philosophical opponents of miracles during this time were the Dutch philosopher Benedict de Spinoza and the Scottish skeptic David Hume about whom I will say something in a moment. Although these were the most important philosophical opponents of miracles, the whole debate was really being waged against the backdrop of a view of the world which was the vestige of Sir Isaac Newton's physics. In 1687, Newton published his physics in his book the *Principia Mathematica* and thereby laid the foundations for physics for the next three hundred years. In the *Principia*, Isaac Newton formulates his famous three laws of motion and then together with various definitions he is able to deduce from these laws of motions various theorems and corollaries of his physics. By regarding the world as simply the sum of masses and motions and impersonal forces, Newton's *Principia* seemed to eliminate the need for God in the world and particularly any providential action by God. It gave rise to a view of the world that has been appropriately characterized as the *Newtonian World Machine*. The world came to be regarded as a sort of great machine that

had been made by God and set in operation. This model of explanation that Newton gave was enthusiastically received as the paradigm for explanation in all fields.<sup>112</sup> This undoubtedly reached its height with the claim of Pierre-Simon de Laplace that a supreme intelligence, endowed with Newton's *Principia* and knowing the present position and velocity of every particle in the universe, could deduce the exact state of the universe at any other time in history, past or present, because the world was a deterministic machine operating according to Newton's laws of motion. When the Emperor Napoleon asked of Laplace "Where is God in your system?" Laplace famously replied, "Sire, I have no need of that hypothesis." There is a world of significance in that reply. Given the deist conception of the world as a sort of machine created by God and then set in motion under its own laws of matter and the forces that operate in it, it seemed that God would not interfere in the operation of this machine that he had created. He would simply be the clockmaker God who created this mechanism and then let it run.

In fact, this harmoniously functioning World Machine was actually taken to be the best evidence that God exists. For example, the 18<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher Diderot said the following, "Thanks to the works of these great men, the world is no longer a God, it is a machine with its wheels, its cords, its pulleys, its springs and its weights."<sup>113</sup> Here, Diderot thinks of the world in terms of this great clock that has been built by God and which furnishes evidence of his existence. It was equally thought that it was simply incredible to imagine that God would interfere in the functioning of this fantastic, beautiful machine that he had made. So Diderot's French contemporary Voltaire said that it was absurd and insulting to God to think that he would interrupt the operations of what Voltaire called "this immense machine" since he had designed it from the beginning to operate according to his divinely decreed, immutable laws. So God would not be mucking about in this fantastic and harmoniously functioning machine that he had made. For these 18<sup>th</sup> century Newtonians, miracles, as we see from Voltaire, could only be described as violations of the laws of nature. Therefore, they were impossible; you could not have God violate the laws of nature. It is against this backdrop of this Newtonian World Machine that the controversy over miracles was played out.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* This is what philosophers would call the causal closure of the physical world or the world being a closed system under physics. I think a lot of the philosophers of the mind use this as an argument for Physicalism.

*Answer:* Yes. The world has no transcendent causes operating in it. The only causes that operate in the physical world are immanent causes. So, yes, that is exactly right; that is the product of this sort of Newtonian view of the world.

*Question:* A lot of times people put arguments forth even though they don't believe in it to prove another point. Out of these people, like Voltaire, it sounds like he was a believer in God, but was he?

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<sup>112</sup> 5:07

<sup>113</sup> Diderot, *Pensées Philosophiques*, xviii.

*Answer:* I think so.

*Followup:* Was he a Christian?<sup>114</sup>

*Answer:* No, I would say that the deists in rejecting miracles and special revelation would not accept specific revealed religions like Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Theirs was simply the God of nature – the God of general revelation who had created the world. But I think they were very sincere about that and, as I say, for many of them this Newtonian World Machine was really the best evidence for God’s existence. The design argument was very popular. So I think they were sincere theists. They just didn’t believe in any sort of special revelation of God.

*Followup:* How about Newton and Laplace?

*Answer:* Now, Newton was different. Newton believed in miracles. He was at least a confessing Christian. He seems to have been a Unitarian, unfortunately. He didn’t believe in the Trinity but he did so on biblical grounds. He wrote massive amounts of commentaries on the Bible as well as his own physical, scientific work. These theological commentaries are now becoming more and more interesting to historians of science because it was very important to Newton. So Newton did believe in miracles; it wasn’t Newton who thought that God could not act miraculously in the universe. This is, again, a lesson in the consequence of ideas. Very often ideas will have consequences that are unintended by the original person who broached them. That is certainly the case with this skepticism about miracles that flowed out of Newton’s physics. It wasn’t characteristic of Newton himself.

*Followup:* So Newton believed in the Scriptures and the deity of Christ?

*Answer:* I wouldn’t say he believed in the deity of Christ. As I say, he was a Unitarian – he wasn’t a Trinitarian. But he believed in the Scriptures as he interpreted them and he certainly did believe in miracles. He thought that God did intervene periodically to adjust the machine and to work in the world.

*Followup:* And Laplace?

*Answer:* I don’t know about Laplace’s personal beliefs. What he said to Napoleon doesn’t exclude God or even miracles. It is merely to say you don’t have need of God as a hypothesis in a scientific theory. I think a good many Christian scientists would say the same thing. When they put on their white lab coat then they don’t need to appeal to God in order to do their science effectively. Really, that is all that Laplace said to Napoleon but there is a world of significance in that because it seemed to imply that God was superfluous and that you don’t need him anymore. It did give rise to this sort of view of miracles as being impossible.

## **Benedict de Spinoza**

Let’s now move to Benedict de Spinoza and specifically we want to say a word about a treatise that he wrote called the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, or *Theologico-Political Treatise*, published actually prior to Newton’s *Principia* in 1670. I think two of the

<sup>114</sup> 9:58

arguments that Spinoza gives against the possibility and evidential value of miracles are particularly noteworthy.

His first argument is that miracles are impossible because they violate the unchangeable order of nature. He says nothing happens contrary to the eternal and unchangeable order of nature. What is his argument for this? Well, he says everything that God wills is characterized by eternal necessity and truth. The reason for that is that there is no difference between God's understanding and his will. God's understanding of something is the same as his willing something. Therefore, to say that God knows a thing is the same as to say that God wills that thing. So the same necessity that characterizes God's knowledge also characterizes his will. It is evident here that Spinoza is presupposing some sort of doctrine of divine simplicity – that God cannot have knowledge and will that are distinct but that God is a simple being and all his attributes therefore coalesce and they are all the same. So his knowledge and his will have the same sort of eternal necessity and unchangeability.<sup>115</sup> Since God is the Creator and has created the laws of nature it follows, he says, that the laws of nature flow from the necessity and the perfection of God's nature; they are reflections of his own nature. So if some event were to occur that was contrary to the laws of nature, it would be contrary to God's own nature. Nature would be in conflict with God's divine will and knowledge and that is obviously impossible. So to say that God does something that is contrary to the laws of nature is to say he does something contrary to his own nature which is absurd. Therefore, miracles are impossible. That is the basic objection that Spinoza offers. God cannot act contrary to his own nature, the laws of nature are necessary expressions of God's nature, and therefore God cannot act contrary to the laws of nature. So miracles, which are assumed to be violations of nature's laws, are impossible.

The second argument of Spinoza against miracles that I want to highlight is that miracles are insufficient to prove God's existence. Even if miracles occurred, Spinoza says they are insufficient to prove God's existence. He says that a proof of God's existence must be absolutely certain. For Spinoza, a proof of God, in order to be a good proof (a good argument) has to have a sort of mathematical certainty to it. He says the way we prove and know that God exists is by the unchangeable order of nature. If you admit miracles, he says, then you break the laws of nature and thus you create doubts about the existence of God. So, he says, miracles would actually foster atheism! If you believe in miracles then you are actually going to foster atheism because you will undermine people's confidence in the necessity of the laws of nature and thereby the evidence of God's existence.

With respect to this point, he also develops two sub-points that I want to highlight because I think they will be worth discussing later. First, he says, even if you grant that a miracle has occurred, it wouldn't prove God's existence because a lesser being might have done it. Maybe an angel or a demon – you could have a demonic miracle. So miracles would not prove God's existence. They would just prove a higher order of supernatural beings – realities like angels and demons, for example. The second sub-point is that a so-called miracle is really just a work of nature whose cause has not yet been discovered by man. He points out that our knowledge of nature's laws is limited and if we

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<sup>115</sup> 15:00

confront an event that we can't explain then we should not punt to God and say, "oh it's a miracle! God did it!" Rather, it would simply be that we are ignorant of the natural causes of that event. Our knowledge of nature's laws is limited and therefore having some event that we can't explain naturally doesn't imply that God is the cause of this event as a miracle.

Those are Spinoza's two basic objections to miracles.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* To me, if you define nature to be all that there is, that would include knowledge of God himself so everything he said is correct. But he defined nature to be just materialistic – a subset of the totality including God and all humanity – then you have problems.

*Answer:* Yeah, this is an interesting point. Because Spinoza was actually a pantheist – he didn't think that God is distinct from the world. He thought that God *was* the world. But that doesn't emerge as early as the *Tractatus*. That comes in a later work that Spinoza wrote called *Ethics*.<sup>116</sup> In *Ethics*, he does take a pantheistic view.<sup>117</sup> But the *Tractatus* is a deist work. It is a deistic perspective that assumes that God is distinct from and transcends the world. So when he talks about the laws of nature, he is not including God in the word nature as he does in his *Ethics* later on. In the *Tractatus*, you have a deist conception where nature would be the physical space-time universe which is distinct from God and created by God but, as we saw, he would think that nature's laws flow with necessity out of the divine nature. Therefore, they are as necessary as God's own nature so God couldn't act contrary to the laws of nature – that would be to violate his own nature, he thought.

*Question:* Was Spinoza's transition from deism to pantheism gradual? How did it come about because that is a pretty big leap?

*Answer:* I don't know his personal biography well enough to know whether or not this was an evolution in his thought or whether he merely adopted the pose of a deist in the *Tractatus*. You have got to understand that at that time there wasn't a freedom of thought and freedom of religion in European society. You endangered yourself by taking these sorts of heretical viewpoints. This was dangerous. And it was because he lived in Holland, which was very liberal and open, that Spinoza could write and publish as he did. But it may be that the *Tractatus* simply reflects a deist pose or viewpoint. So when I say it is a deist work, what I mean is that that is the stance that is taken in the work. Whether Spinoza was concealing his true opinions or whether he developed them and evolved I couldn't say.

*Question:* Do you know if Spinoza spoke about the *providentia ordinaria* at all? Because to me that argues against his argument in that miracles cannot exist within the laws of nature.

<sup>116</sup> Spinoza's *Ethics, Demonstrated in Geometrical Order* was published posthumously in 1677.

<sup>117</sup> 20:04

*Answer:* Well, I take it that he thinks that God's ordinary providence does govern the world but that that is in accordance with the laws of nature. God can be conceived here as the one who creates the world, conserves the world in being and regulates it by its immutable and eternal laws. But what it excludes, to use your phraseology, would be *providentia extraordinaria*, that is to say these interventions by God into the world system. So, this is an affirmation of ordinary providence but it is a denial of any kind of extraordinary or special providence of God in the world.

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## David Hume

Let's move on to David Hume, the 18<sup>th</sup> century Scottish skeptic. Spinoza argued against the possibility of miracles but what Hume attacked was the identification of a miracle. Hume doesn't argue that miracles are impossible but what he argues is that we would never be rationally justified in believing that some event is a miracle. Miracles cannot be identified. This is the argument presented in his famous essay *Of Miracles* which was published in 1738. In this work, he presents a sort of two-pronged attack upon the identification of a miracle in the form of what I call an "even if . . . but in fact" argument. What do I mean by that? Well, in the first part of the argument, he argues under certain concessions. He is going to make certain concessions *even if* a miracle were provable. *But then in fact* he is going to get rid of those concessions and argue what he really thinks is the case.<sup>118</sup> We can differentiate these two halves of the argument by referring to the first part as his *in principle* argument and the second part is his *in fact* argument. So "even if – but in fact" – he'll give an *in principle* argument against miracles and then an *in fact* argument against miracles.

Let's talk about his in principle argument about why it is, in principle, impossible to identify some event as a miracle. Hume begins by pointing out that a wise man apportions his belief to the evidence. If the evidence makes a conclusion virtually certain then we may speak of a proof in that case. And the wise man will give whole-hearted assent to that conclusion. But if the evidence only makes a conclusion more probable than not then we do not speak of a proof, we speak merely of a probability and the wise man will grant to the conclusion a degree of belief that is proportional to the probability. If the probability is very, very high then the wise man will give pretty substantial, pretty solid, belief to that conclusion. But if the evidence just barely makes it more probable than not – say 51% to 49% – then the wise man will not give such hardy assent to that conclusion but will give a very reserved and provisional sort of assent to that conclusion. Hume argues even if (this is the first part of the argument) we concede that the evidence for a miracle amounts to a full proof, it is still, in principle, impossible to identify that event as a miracle.

So even if we admit that some miracle has evidence behind it that is so strong that it is a full proof that it has occurred, still the wise man will not believe in that miracle. Why not? Because, Hume says, standing opposed to this proof is an equally full proof for the unchangeable laws of nature which are violated by the miracle in question. So you have proof balanced against proof and as a result you are just left with agnosticism. Hume

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<sup>118</sup> 24:56

seems to imagine, as it were, a scale on which the evidence for and against a miracle is being weighed. On one side of the scale, he places the evidence in favor of a particular miracle. He is going to concede, for the sake of argument, that the evidence for that miracle is so strong that we may call it a full proof. That miracle has evidence that proves that that miracle occurred. The problem is on the other side of the scale is all the evidence of all the people of all the ages for the regularity of the laws of nature. That is also a full proof. That balances out the proof that a miracle has occurred. So he writes,

A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience as can be imagined.<sup>119</sup>

So proof stands against proof and the scales are evenly balanced. Since the evidence doesn't incline either way, the wise man cannot believe in a miracle; he must withhold his assent and remain in agnosticism about any supposed miracle.

In fact, Hume goes on to say, to prove that a miracle has occurred you would have to show that it would be an even greater miracle for the testimony in favor of it to be false. Otherwise, you would believe that the testimony in favor of the miracle is simply false – it would have to be a greater miracle that that evidence is false than that the miracle took place. So, for example, he takes the Resurrection as an illustration. He asks, which would be a greater miracle: that a man should rise from the dead or that the witnesses should be deceived or themselves trying to deceive?<sup>120</sup> He would say a resurrection is obviously a greater miracle and therefore you ought to believe that the witnesses to the miracle are either deceivers or deceived. He gives no doubt about which way he would believe. He gives the example that if all historians agreed that on January 1, 1600, Queen Elizabeth publically died and was buried and her successor installed on the throne but that a month later she reappeared, resumed the throne and ruled England for three more years, Hume said he wouldn't have “the least inclination to believe so miraculous event.”<sup>121</sup> He said he would accept the most extraordinary hypothesis for her pretended death and burial rather than admit such a striking violation of the laws of nature. So even if the evidence for a miracle constitutes a full proof, he says the wise man will not believe in miracles; he will suspend judgment. That is his *in principal* argument.

What about his *in fact* argument that he goes on to present? Well, Hume says, in fact the evidence for miracles doesn't amount to a full proof. In fact, he says, the evidence is so poor it doesn't even amount to a probability and therefore the decisive weight lies on the side of the scale supporting the evidence for the laws of nature. That is a weight so heavy that no evidence for a miracle could ever hope to counterbalance the evidence for the regularity of nature's laws. He gives four reasons as to why the evidence for miracles is so negligible. Let me just list these briefly. First, he says, no miracle in history is attested by a sufficient number of educated and honest men who are of such social standing that they would have a great deal to lose by lying. So he is still thinking of testimony of miracles in terms of conspiracy and deceit. Secondly, he says people crave the miraculous

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<sup>119</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section X, “Of Miracles”, Part I

<sup>120</sup> 30:05

<sup>121</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section X, “Of Miracles”, Part II

and they will believe absurd stories as the abundance of false miracle tales proves. Thirdly, miracles occur only among barbarous peoples. That is a good Enlightenment Englishman speaking here. Only among barbarous people do miracles occur. Finally, fourth, miracles occur in all religions; all religions have their miracle claims and therefore they cancel each other out because they support contradictory doctrines.

So, Hume concludes that miracles can never be the foundation of any system of religion. I indicated that very often these skeptics would posture as believers in order not to incur persecution. Well, Hume does this. He says, “Our most holy religion is founded on Faith, not on reason.” All the while he is laughing up his sleeve while undermining the rationality of faith. He says,

. . . the Christian Religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity: And whoever is moved by Faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.<sup>122</sup>

In other words, Hume is saying miracles still happen today because it is a miracle that anybody could be stupid enough to believe in Christianity! So, that is Hume’s argument against miracles which has been terribly influential, even right down to our day. As I said, David Friedrich Strauss was able to say he had studied philosophy, he had read David Hume, and that is how he knew that miracles were impossible and unidentifiable.

So, while I am sorry to end on this note, nevertheless we have laid out the case and the challenge for us. Next time we will begin to examine critically these objections to see whether or not they really do hold water.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Total Running Time: 35:01 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 16

#### **The Defense of Miracles**

We have been looking at the Doctrine of Creation and particularly the problem of miracles. Last time we looked at the collapse that occurred in Western culture of belief in miracles. We traced this back to a picture of the universe which emerged from Newton's physics. The picture of the universe as a kind of World Machine governed by the laws of Newton's physics which seemed to leave no place for God. You will remember Laplace was able to boast that an infinite intelligence endowed with the knowledge of Newton's *Principia* and the exact position and momentum of every particle in the universe would be able to predict the exact state of the universe at any other time in the past or future. And when Napoleon asked Laplace what place God had in his system, Laplace famously replied, "Sire, I have no need for that hypothesis." God seemed to be extraneous – he was the creator of this great mechanism, this clockwork machine, but then he did not interfere with it or its operation by performing miracles in this machine.

#### **The Defense of Miracles**

I want to say something about this picture of the world as a Newtonian World Machine before going on to look at the objections of Spinoza and Hume to miracles because it will help us to sharpen our definition and understanding of what a miracle is. You will remember that, according to these post-Newtonians, a miracle could only be regarded as a *violation* of the laws of nature. God had established these immutable laws of nature and if a miracle occurred then it was a violation of nature's laws which seemed contrary to God's intelligence and power. Many people have said that the advent of modern physics subverts this picture of the Newtonian World Machine. We no longer live in a sort of deterministic universe that was described by Newtonian physics. Indeed, in quantum physics, there is an element of indeterminacy in the world, in nature, that is ineliminable and inherent to it. We cannot, in fact, know the exact position and momentum of any particle in the universe. There is always a degree of fuzziness; there is always some indeterminacy. Therefore, it is in principle impossible to predict the exact state of the universe at some point in the past or in the future based on nature's laws and the knowledge of the present condition of the universe. The universe has this inherent indeterminacy built into it.

Some have suggested that because this picture of a deterministic world is now gone from contemporary physics that this allows room for miracles on God's part. I think that psychologically the passing away of this deterministic picture of the universe might dispose folks to miracles emotionally but really any event that would be miraculous in Newtonian physics would be so extraordinarily improbable even in quantum physics that it would have to be regarded as miraculous if it actually occurred. In other words, quantum physics could open the door a tiny crack for allowing these anomalous events to occur, but in fact they would be so highly improbable that it really would not allow much scope for the plausibility of identifying some event as a miracle. In fact, by attributing miracles to just quantum indeterminacy, you threaten to turn miracles into freaks of

nature, not acts of God, which are just the result of indeterminate random processes in the world and that surely is not what we mean by a miracle. So while it is true that we no longer live in a universe that is governed by these deterministic laws, I don't think that really goes much distance toward a defense of the possibility and credibility of miracles.

Rather, I think what we need to do is to challenge this idea that miracles are, properly speaking, violations of nature's laws.<sup>124</sup> This is an extremely prejudicial description of a miracle. It connotes the idea of violating a civil law or, even worse, God violating Mother Nature which makes God look like he is engaged in some sort of criminal activity. So psychologically the idea of God violating the laws of nature is one that we could well be rid of psychologically. When you examine what the laws of nature are, I think that in fact it becomes clear that miracles, properly speaking, are not violations of nature's laws. Why? Because nature's laws are statements of what will happen under certain ideal conditions. These are idealizations of what will happen given certain conditions. But very often, those conditions don't obtain. For example, I am told that, I think it is potassium and chloride, naturally combust. That would be a law of nature that when combined they produce combustion. But we have both of those elements in our body and yet our bodies don't combust! Why not? Because there are other natural factors interfering with the combustion of these two elements and so they can both safely be in our body. So what the laws of nature describe are highly idealized conditions of what would happen under those conditions. But, if there are other natural factors interfering then the predicted event won't occur. In other words, the laws of nature have within them certain implicit *ceteris paribus* conditions. That is to say, they describe what will happen "all things being equal" (*ceteris paribus*) under these idealized conditions. But if some natural agent or factor is interfering then the conditions are not equal – everything is not equal; the idealized conditions don't obtain and therefore the predicted event will not occur. The law isn't violated – it doesn't break the law – but it just means the law doesn't apply because the *ceteris paribus* conditions don't obtain. Obviously, in the case of a miracle, if a supernatural agent is involved or interfering, then again the law won't apply. So these *ceteris paribus* conditions must not only include statements about natural agents not interfering but also that there is no interference on the part of any supernatural agents that there might be as well.

So the laws of nature are idealizations that describe what will happen if no natural or supernatural factors are interfering with the idealized conditions stated in the law. So when a miracle occurs, it doesn't violate the law of nature because the law of nature assumes what will happen if there is no supernatural agent interfering with the operation. Miracles should not be considered violations of nature's laws. So what is a miracle on this understanding? A miracle would be an event which lies outside of the causal powers of nature at that particular time and place. At a particular time and place, the natural causes that are operative at that time and place do not have the productive capacity to produce that event. So if that event occurs then that event would be ascribed to a supernatural agent – it would be a miracle. To put it very simply, a miracle would be a naturally impossible event. It is an event which the natural causes at any time and place would not have the capacity to produce.

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<sup>124</sup> 5:04

That means that miracles are relative to the time and place. For example, rain is not in and of itself miraculous relative to the causal factors – at a certain time and place, rain is to be expected.<sup>125</sup> But on another occasion where the weather conditions are not adequate to produce rain, if someone like Elijah prays for rain and all of a sudden it begins to rain, then that would be a miraculous event. At that time and place, the natural causes that are present are not adequate – do not have the adequate capacity to produce rain – so if rain occurs it would be a miraculous event attributed to a supernatural agent.

So it seems to me that this is the correct way in which we ought to understand miracles. Miracles are not violations of nature's laws; rather, miracles are events which lie outside the productive capacity of natural causes at any time and place.

If that is right, the next question would be – then what could make miracles possible? What would be the necessary condition for a miracle to occur? The answer to that question seems obvious – God! If God exists then miracles are possible. If there is a transcendent creator and designer of the universe who has brought all matter and energy into being and who has determined the laws of nature then such a transcendent being would obviously have the capacity to produce events within nature which lie beyond the productive capacity of nature itself. Given the existence of God, miracles, it seems to me, are therefore obviously possible. In order to show that miracles are impossible a person would have to show that atheism is true. You would have to have some sort of an argument for atheism because as long as it is possible that God exists then you have got to be open to the possibility that God has acted miraculously in the universe. Of course, orthodox theists do believe in the existence of God – a transcendent creator and designer of the universe – and therefore our belief in the possibility of miracles is perfectly rational.

So, in response to this Newtonian World Machine, I think what we have to do is to define miracles properly – not as violations of nature's laws but as simply events which are beyond the productive capacity of natural causes at a certain time and place. And if God exists then such events are obviously possible. The question will then be: do we have any good evidence to think that such events have occurred?

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* I look at it as superseding the natural order to do a miracle. When Christ raised Lazarus he didn't stop other people from dying or stop the aging process or anything else. But he intervened and superseded the laws of nature to give Lazarus' life back.

*Answer:* Yes. Superseded the laws of nature – you are using that sort of language. I think that is alright. You are not saying he violated the law in that case but he did something which the causes described by the law could not themselves do. In that sense you say he superseded it. He did something that the laws of nature themselves would not have predicted because the natural causes could not have brought it about. This brings to mind another point. It is important to understand the laws of nature themselves don't cause anything. They don't do anything. The laws of nature are either just mathematical

<sup>125</sup> 9:56

equations or propositional statements. They don't cause anything. The laws of nature don't causally interact with the universe. The laws of nature simply describe the operation of the natural causes in the universe. Things like gravitational force, electromagnetic force, mass, energy and so forth. It is those things that are causally related to one another. The laws of nature are simply descriptions in a certain propositional form of what lies within the productive capacity of nature. So when you say he superseded the laws of nature, I think what you are saying, properly, is he is doing something which the causes as described by nature's laws couldn't have brought about themselves.<sup>126</sup>

*Question:* I find it really interesting the difference between the Newtonian machine and quantum physics. Isn't that a scientific flip-flop?

*Answer:* Yes, it is a huge difference. Because on certain interpretations of quantum physics, this sort of indeterminacy that I spoke of isn't just in your mind, it is actually in nature. The particle literally does not have a precise position and momentum. Let me add quickly that there are interpretations of quantum physics which are fully deterministic. There are about ten different physical interpretations of the equations of quantum physics and nobody knows which, if any of these ten, is the correct physical interpretation. They are all empirically equivalent – they all have the same mathematics – but they are different physical interpretations of what is going on. Some of them are thoroughly deterministic. They are just as deterministic as Newton's physics were.

*Followup:* I guess my point here is – who decides the laws of nature? Who defines the laws of nature? Because when the scientist says we're right and you're wrong, I would like to say, "Well, you were right in 1950 but you are wrong now." Explain that.

*Answer:* It is part of the progress of science is that nature's secrets are disclosed gradually. Nature doesn't wear on her sleeve her structure. It has to be ferreted out. This is especially true on the subatomic level. Newton's physics continues today to be an adequate description of the macroscopic realm for most practical purposes. But it is when you get to the quantum realm, the subatomic realm, that this physics is no longer adequate and needs to be revised. It is true that these quantum effects can be amplified so as to produce differences on the macroscopic scale, that is absolutely correct and I don't want to be misunderstood. So it is a huge flip-flop. The laws of physics that were thought to govern the world from the late 1600s up until the early 1900s are now regarded as obsolete. They are regarded as literally false and a new set of physical laws has replaced them; not only in quantum physics but also in relativity theory. Because in relativity theory you have a different theory of time and space than Newton had. So, yes, there has been a huge, huge revolution in physics that occurred during the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that overthrew over 200 years of Newtonian physics. Now, the laws of nature themselves didn't change – they are independent of our apprehension of them. But what changed was our correct understanding of nature's laws. What we came to see was that Newton's laws hold within certain parameters – low speeds and macroscopic objects. But when you get it to very high velocities and subatomic proportions, then those laws are revealed, in fact, to be inaccurate and you see that in fact we need a new physics. So there has been quite definitely a huge flip-flop, a huge revolution of physics, in the 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> 15:02

century. But what I am suggesting is that, in terms of the problem of miracles, I don't see that it is all that important. I think it gives the defender of miracles some psychological advantage because the World Machine is gone. We no longer live in this deterministic, clocklike universe where you can predict everything as Laplace thought. But, as I say, events that would be regarded as miraculous under Newtonian physics (like walking on water or feeding five thousand people with a couple of crusts of bread) would also be so extraordinarily improbable under quantum physics that their credibility would not be increased under this new physics that exists. So I don't think that the advent of this new physics is of much significance for the defenders of miracles. Rather what I think is significant is what I tried to explain here about a proper understanding of nature's laws and how miracles should not be thought of as violations of those laws.<sup>127</sup>

*Question:* Have you seen the double-slit experiment in quantum physics?

*Answer:* I have not actually seen it done but I am familiar with it.

*Followup:* If you watch it done, it is kind of hard to disprove that as you are looking at it the observer influences the action that happens in the quantum physics world. So we are part and parcel to what is going on.

*Answer:* That idea of observer dependent reality is one of the physical interpretations in quantum theory. It is what Heisenberg thought.

*Followup:* And things can be in two places at once and in no places at once.

*Answer:* That is the idea of indeterminacy that I am talking about. But what I suggested in response to a previous question is that is only one possible interpretation of the physics. I know that that is often presented in popular literature as "the" way modern physics has shown the world to be, but there are interpretations of quantum physics that are not like that – some are fully deterministic. For example, the quantum mechanics of David Bohm are thoroughly deterministic and there is no indeterminism in nature. It is only in our minds that we cannot measure the exact position and momentum of a particle.

*Followup:* But aren't our minds influencing what we are seeing and what we are watching? And perhaps lots of minds have a greater influence?

*Answer:* Not independently – it is not as though our minds casually impact nature and cause, say, the particle to be here rather than there.

*Followup:* How can you say that with any certainty?

*Answer:* Well, as I said, nobody knows which of these ten interpretations is correct. So, we don't know what is going on on that quantum level and that is why we need to maintain a good deal of agnosticism.

*Followup:* So the things that are happening could be ascribed as miracles when they weren't since we don't know what is going on in those ten. Is that at least a possibility?

*Answer:* As I said, it is possible under quantum physics to say that events occur which, under Newtonian physics, would not have occurred. For example, I could suddenly disappear and all of my particles would quantum tunnel and reassemble on the surface of

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<sup>127</sup> 20:00

the moon. And there I would be on the moon in the next instant. That is possible. But even under quantum physics that is so unbelievably incomprehensibly improbable that no one would take that seriously as an explanation of why something happened. Nobody in a court of law would say, for example, that the way the money got in the bank manager's suitcase is that it all quantum tunneled out of the vault and appeared in his suitcase as he was leaving the bank. It is just too highly improbable. That is why I say that, while quantum physics gives some psychological solace to the defender of miracles, it really isn't going to do much in helping us to defend the probability or the credibility of miracle reports. For that, I think we need to have a different understanding of miracles that are not violations of nature's laws but events that are beyond the causal productive capacity of nature.

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Next time we will look at Spinoza's objections and Hume's objections and how one might respond to them.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Total Running Time: 23:34 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 17

#### **Contra Spinoza**

In our lesson we have been talking about the problem of miracles and I discussed the challenge of the Newtonian World Machine and the concept of miracle that accompanied it. You will remember that I argued that miracles ought properly to be understood not as violations of the laws of nature but more simply as naturally impossible events; that is to say, events which could not happen given the natural causes which are operative at any time and place. What would make miracles possible would obviously be the God of classical theism who is the Creator and Designer of the universe.

#### ***Contra Spinoza***

We want to turn to an examination of Benedict Spinoza's objection to miracles which we surveyed in a previous class and give some response to them.

You will remember that his first objection was based upon the immutability of nature. Since nature is an expression of God's will and God's will and his knowledge are identical, God's will must be just as necessary as his knowledge and therefore the laws of nature are immutable and inviolable. To break the laws of nature would be to contradict God's own nature.

It might be tempting to dismiss Spinoza's objections simply on the grounds that Spinoza was a pantheist for whom God and nature were interchangeable terms. In Spinoza's pantheism, God and nature were identical. So of course, on pantheism, a violation of nature's laws would be a violation of God's nature because God and nature are identical. The question we might say is not whether miracles are possible on pantheism; the question is whether miracles are possible on theism. So Spinoza's objections might seem easily dismissed. But I think that this sort of refutation would be far too easy. The work in which Spinoza raises the objections to miracles, namely his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, is not a pantheistic work. Pantheism was characteristic of Spinoza's later work, like his *Ethics*. The *Tractatus* is, by contrast, a deistic work and it thinks of God as distinct from, and the creator of, the world. In particular Spinoza's argument in the *Tractatus* is based upon the classic traditional doctrine of divine simplicity which says that all of God's attributes are really identical. God's knowledge, his will, his goodness, and his power are all really just one single attribute and are identical with his essence. So the question that Spinoza is raising, in effect, is how can God's knowledge be necessary and yet his will be contingent if these are identical – if they are the same thing?

Contrary to Spinoza, classical Christian theology did not claim, in fact, that God's knowledge is necessary. Since creation is a free act of God, God could have created a different world and hence had different knowledge than the knowledge that he has. For example, God has the knowledge that the universe exists. That is a truth which is known to God. But suppose God had decided not to create anything at all and to just remain alone? Then that truth would not have been a truth – that proposition would not have been true and would not have been known to God. According to Christian theology, since

God is free to create any sort of universe he wants – or even no universe at all – it follows that the content of God’s knowledge is not necessary to him. It is necessary that God know any and all truths that there are but the content of what he knows is not necessary. If God had chosen to create a different universe or no universe at all then the content of his knowledge would have been different than what it is.<sup>129</sup> So, in fact, God is perfectly able to have different knowledge than the knowledge that he has. God is free to create a different world and hence he is also free to have different knowledge than he has.

So it follows then that the laws of nature are not known by God necessarily because they depend upon God’s will. If God had created a different universe with different laws of nature then he would have had different knowledge of nature’s laws than what he has. So God could have created a universe operating according to totally different laws of nature by creating things that have different natures than they do. Similarly, miracles could be part of God’s eternal and immutable decree just as much as the laws – just as he has decreed the laws that hold from eternity, he could have decreed the miracles that will occur from eternity past. So there is just no reason to think that when God chooses, or wills, to bring about a naturally impossible event that God’s knowledge and will somehow come into conflict.

Having said that, I do think Spinoza’s objection does raise one important point. Namely, it is very difficult to see how God’s knowledge and will can be contingent and yet be identical with his essence which includes necessary existence. How can God be utterly simple if he is in some respects contingent and in other respects necessary? For example, his existence is necessary but as we have seen his knowledge and will are not necessary – they are contingent. So how could God be utterly simple if certain features of his being are contingent and others are necessary? I think what this calls into question is not, however, the possibility of miracles. What this calls into question is the doctrine of divine simplicity. This is a doctrine which is, frankly, extra-biblical and one which is, I think, rejected by the vast majority of Christian philosophers and theologians today. Therefore, it need not trouble us to simply give up the doctrine of divine simplicity and to maintain that God has both necessary properties as well as contingent properties and therefore there simply is no difficulty about him willing to bring about different events and so knowing differently that he in fact knows.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* So God could contingently create something for a temporal period or he could also create something for eternity?

*Answer:* Well, that is a good point. I wasn’t speaking to that but you are quite right that he could create a universe that exists only temporarily so that the laws of nature would only hold temporarily and then they would cease to hold once the universe was annihilated. That is true. But what I am suggesting is even if God has created an eternal universe operating according to eternal laws of nature that he could have refrained from that. He could have created no world at all, or he could have created a universe operating by different laws of nature and in that case he would have different content of his

<sup>129</sup> 5:04

knowledge.

*Followup:* Could he also do one creation eternal, and then add to it and change it?

*Answer:* I don't see any reason to think that that wouldn't be possible either. He could create this world, annihilate it and then create another world after that that might have different laws of nature. Indeed, there has been some cosmological speculation about models of the universe like that.

*Followup:* I guess what I am saying is he created an eternal world but then he could modify it and add to it and partially seal things.

*Answer:* Yes, I think that is true as well. Since the laws of nature are freely willed, God could actually alter the laws of nature in the sense that he says, "Alright, up until now, I have made gravity attractive but from this point on it is going to be repulsive" and completely turn things around. Indeed, the whole idea in the book of Revelation of God creating a new heaven and a new earth which will be immortal suggests that the new heavens and new earth would involve different laws of nature than the present ones. So the overriding point of all of this is that the content of what God knows and what he wills is not necessary. God is sovereign and therefore these are contingent and based upon his free discretion.<sup>130</sup>

Let's turn to Spinoza's second objection which was based upon the insufficiency of miracles to prove God. You will remember Spinoza's second objection was that miracles are, in any case, insufficient to prove God's existence. As the objection is stated, it was simply irrelevant to classical Christian apologetics because Christian apologists didn't use miracles to try to prove God's existence. Rather, miracles were part of Christian evidences for showing God's intervention in the world in the person of Jesus or in the Old Testament. But they weren't used to prove God's existence. The arguments of Natural Theology, like the Cosmological Argument, the Ontological Argument and the Teleological Argument – those were proofs of God's existence. Then Christian evidences like miracles, fulfilled prophesy and so forth were then used to show that a Christian form of theism was true. So Spinoza's objection really was aimed at a straw man.

Nevertheless, the supporting reasons that Spinoza gave for the objection I think is relevant to the Christian position. You will remember that Spinoza's main point was that a proof of God's existence must be absolutely certain. To prove God's existence you must have absolute, demonstrative certainty. And, he said, since we infer God's existence from the immutable laws of nature, anything that would call into question those laws would cast doubt upon God's existence. Miracles, by casting doubts upon the laws of nature, would therefore promote atheism.

Two assumptions, I think, underlie Spinoza's reasoning. First, notice that he assumes that a proof of God's existence must be demonstrative – that a good argument for God's existence must be absolutely certain. Then secondly he assumes that God's existence is inferred from natural laws. The problem is that Christian apologists denied both of those assumptions. With regard to the first one, the more empirically minded among the

<sup>130</sup> 10:15

Christian apologists were quite willing to say the arguments for God's existence might not be demonstratively certain but nevertheless they were adequate to justify belief in God's existence. Think, for example, of the famous watchmaker argument of William Paley for the existence of a divine Designer.<sup>131</sup> Paley didn't claim that the argument made it absolutely certain that a Designer exists but he said it made it more plausible than not to believe that there is a Designer of the universe. I think contemporary philosophers would agree that if we were justified in accepting only conclusions that were proven with absolute certainty then we would be reduced to near skepticism. We would know very, very little indeed.

The second assumption – that God's existence is inferred from the laws of nature – also fails to take account of the fact that there are other arguments for God's existence not based upon the laws of nature. For example, the 18<sup>th</sup> century British natural theologian Samuel Clark shared Spinoza's concern to have a demonstrative argument for God's existence but Clark held to versions of the Cosmological and Ontological Arguments for God's existence. So even if natural law were utterly uncertain, that wouldn't even faze Clark because he had quite independent reasons for believing in God's existence.

So it seems to me that Spinoza's objection is based upon two critical assumptions, both of which are, I think, very plausibly false. But even given those assumptions, is Spinoza's objection in fact a good one?<sup>132</sup> He seems to think that the admission of a miracle as an event of history would overthrow the law of nature which is violated by that miracle. If the miracle is admitted then you have to throw out the law of nature which is violated by that miracle. I have already argued that, properly defined, miracles are not violations of nature's laws. Nature's laws have implicit in them certain *ceteris paribus* conditions stating "all things being equal" this is what will happen. So the laws of nature are idealizations that assume that no natural or supernatural factors are interfering. Therefore, miracles properly defined do not violate nature's laws and so do not cast doubt upon the truth of those laws.

Maybe Spinoza would retort at this point, "But if you were to prove that a naturally impossible event has actually occurred then we should simply revise natural law so that that event is naturally possible." If you admit that this event has actually occurred then you should say it is not naturally impossible that such an event occurred. You should revise the laws of nature so that that event becomes purely natural. Thus it would force us to simply revise the laws of nature rather than admit that a miracle has occurred. But I think that Richard Swinburne, who is a philosopher at Oxford University, has responded properly that a natural law is not, in fact, abolished just because of one exception. The exception must occur repeatedly whenever the conditions for it are present. If the event will not occur again under identical circumstances then the law will not be abandoned. Natural law will not be abandoned or reformulated unless a new version of the law will yield better predictability than the old law without being more complicated than the original. But if the new version doesn't do any better in predicting future phenomena or explaining the event in question then the natural law will not be revised just because of one exception. Rather, the event in question will simply be regarded as an anomaly –

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<sup>131</sup> See William Paley's *Natural Theology: or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature*, first published in 1802.

<sup>132</sup> 15:02

simply a circumstance that is not explained by that natural law. So I think Spinoza's fear that the admission of miracles would overthrow the fabric of the laws of nature is really quite unjustified. The laws of nature are not going to be revised and abandoned unless these events were to be recurring all the time under identical circumstances. So rather than lead us into the arms of atheism, it seems to me the admission that a genuine miracle has occurred might instead lead us to discern the action of a supernatural agent in that case who is doing something that the natural causes at that time and place are not capable of bringing it about.

You will remember Spinoza also had a sub-point here. He said that miracles would not prove the existence of God; they would at most prove the existence of a lesser being, like an angel or a demon. How do you know God did the miracle rather than an angel or a demon? But again this objection just doesn't strike against classical Christian apologetics because miracles aren't used to prove the existence of God. One isn't trying to prove God's existence by miracles. Rather, having proved God's existence through the arguments of Natural Theology or just presupposing God's existence, the Christian apologist would use miracles to show that a Christian version of theism was likely true.

Still, the Christian apologists of that era were very concerned to show that the source of a miracle was divine rather than demonic.<sup>133</sup> They did want to distinguish between divine and demonic miracles. I think that their answer to this question constitutes one of their most enduring and important contributions to the discussion of miracles. What they held is that the doctrinal context of the event provides the clue to the interpretation of the miracle. It will be the doctrinal context of the event that would be the tip off whether the source of the miracle is divine or demonic. In so saying they drew our attention to the religio-historical context in which an alleged miracle occurs. And this is absolutely vital. An event without a context is inherently ambiguous. Without a context we have no way of knowing whether the event is just a freak of nature or is an act of God or is the result of some demonic influence. Therefore, it is critical that we look to the religio-historical context of the alleged miracle as the key to its interpretation. This is why I think the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth are so significant. His miracles and his resurrection occur in the context of, and as the climax to, his own unparalleled life and teachings whereby he asserted divine authority and put himself in the very place of God himself. And if this man has done miracles or had been raised from the dead, that religio-historical context provides good grounds for thinking that, indeed, this is a divine miracle.

I don't think Spinoza's concern with lesser spiritual beings like angels and demons would probably trouble many modern thinkers because angels and demons are really just part of a broader theistic worldview. Atheists don't believe in the reality of angels and demons. So nobody would seriously say today that the miracles and resurrection of Jesus were historical events but they were brought about by angels or demons rather than God. So I don't think it would be unwarranted to infer that the miracles of the Gospels, if genuine and historical, were in fact divinely wrought by God.

Finally, Spinoza's last sub-point was that a supposed miracle might really just be the effect of an unknown law of nature. We don't have a full acquaintance with nature's laws and therefore what we think looks miraculous might be really a natural event according to

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<sup>133</sup> 19:57

some unknown law of nature. Now, notice that this is not an objection really to the possibility of miracles. This is rather an objection to the identification of miracles. How could you ever identify an event as a miracle? Given that miracles are possible, how could you know that one has actually occurred? This problem has been persuasively formulated in our own day by the late philosopher Antony Flew, at least during his atheistic period. This is what Flew wrote:

We simply do not have, and could not have, any natural (as opposed to revealed) criterion which enables us to say, when faced with something which is found to have actually happened, that here we have an achievement which nature, left to her own unaided devices, could never encompass. The natural scientist, confronted with some occurrence inconsistent with a proposition previously believed to express a law of nature, can find in this disturbing inconsistency no ground whatever for proclaiming that the particular law of nature has been supernaturally overridden.<sup>134</sup>

So Flew is saying that, confronted with a purported miracle, you can never be justified in saying that this event is really miraculous rather than that it has an unknown natural cause or a cause according to some unknown law of nature.<sup>135</sup>

What response might we give to this objection? The Christian apologists of Spinoza's day, I think, argued correctly by saying:

1. When miracles occur at a momentous time (for example, a man's leprosy vanishes when Jesus says the words "Be clean!") . . .
2. When the miracles do not recur regularly in history (when these are singular events that don't keep happening over and over again) . . .
3. When the miracles in question are numerous (when there are lots of them) . . .
4. When the miracles are of various types (different kinds of miracles as you have in the Gospels) . . .

Then the chances of their all being the result of unknown natural causes is pretty minimal. Therefore, I think, since most critics now do agree that Jesus did perform what we today would call miracles, this answer to Spinoza and to Flew, I think, seems to be a cogent defense of the supernatural origin of the Gospel miracles. They occurred at momentous times, they don't recur regularly in history, they are numerous and they are various.

But even if you leave Jesus' miracles aside and focus our attention just on his resurrection alone, I think that a very good case can be made for saying that this event is a miracle. First of all, notice that we are not asking whether or not the evidence for the resurrection can be explained away by some alternative hypothesis to Jesus rising from the dead. What we are asking here is: if Jesus did actually rise from the dead then was that a miracle? Would you be justified in inferring a supernatural cause for such an event? Here the overwhelming majority of people, including scholars, would say obviously yes. Those who argue against the resurrection try to explain away the facts of the empty tomb, the

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<sup>134</sup> *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. 'Miracles,' by Antony Flew.

<sup>135</sup> 25:01

postmortem appearances and so forth without resorting to saying Jesus rose from the dead. But I do not know of any scholar who says that Jesus of Nazareth did rise from the dead but nevertheless that was a purely natural event – it wasn't miraculous. That would be a rather desperate obstinacy to admit the resurrection of Jesus and say, "but it wasn't miraculous."

I think there are two factors that undergird this response. First of all, the resurrection so exceeds what we know of natural causes that it seems most reasonable to attribute it to a supernatural cause. We have a good knowledge, medically, of what happens to bodies and to cells when they die. It has never been heard of in the history of the world that a truly dead man, in Jesus' case someone who had been dead for a night, a day and a night, has been risen from the dead. Given the length of time involved in Jesus' case it would be idle to compare this to the resuscitation of people in the hospital whose heart has stopped and then they are brought back to life. More than that though – the resurrection wasn't just a return to the earthly life. It wasn't just a resuscitation of a corpse. Rather, it was the transformation of Jesus' body to a new mode of existence which Paul described as powerful, glorious, imperishable and spirit directed in 1 Corinthians 15. It is just inconceivable that an event like that could be the result of purely natural causes. We can ask again, if this is just the result of ordinary natural causes then why hasn't it happened again in the history of mankind? Its singular nature in the history of mankind would be inexplicable if this were due to simply natural causes. So in the two thousand years since that event took place, nothing uncovered by biology or medical science has been discovered that would suggest that this could be a natural event.<sup>136</sup> On the contrary, the advance of science only goes to confirm that such an event is naturally impossible. But secondly, the supernatural explanation is given immediately in the religio-historical context in which the event occurred. Jesus' resurrection was not just the resurrection of anybody without a context. It was the resurrection of this man who had been crucified for his allegedly blasphemous claims. As Wolfhart Pannenberg has written:

The resurrection of Jesus acquires such decisive meaning, not merely because someone or anyone has been raised from the dead, but because it is Jesus of Nazareth, whose execution was instigated by the Jews because he had blasphemed against God.

Jesus' claim to authority, through which he put himself in God's place, was . . . blasphemous for Jewish ears. Because of this Jesus was then also slandered before the Roman Governor as a rebel. If Jesus really has been raised, this claim has been visibly and unambiguously confirmed by the God of Israel, who was allegedly blasphemed by Jesus.<sup>137</sup>

So I think the religio-historical context here provides the key to the supernatural character of that event.

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<sup>136</sup> 29:59

<sup>137</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, trans. L. L. Wilkins and D. A. Priebe (London: SCM, 1968), p. 67.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* If you took Spinoza and Flew's point of view then you would be hard put to describe what is natural law, especially if you consider quantum states. What constitutes a natural occurrence and what constitutes as inexplicable except by some yet undefined natural law. I think you could push that back to almost any natural occurrence.

*Answer:* I spoke to that when we talked about the Newtonian World Machine and I am really reluctant to go that route – to say that, in quantum physics, because of indeterminacy anything can happen. I think that really would undermine an argument for miracles because then you could never know whether an event was a miracle or just a freak of nature brought about by some quantum indeterminacy. And as I shared earlier, events which are genuinely miraculous would be, even on quantum physics, so incomprehensibly improbable that I think most folks would say that these are naturally impossible and therefore if they occurred it would be justifiable to point to a supernatural cause of the event rather than to say this is just a result of a quantum freak of nature.

*Followup:* I agree but I was just pushing it back the other way. In the context of Spinoza and Flew, you would be hard put to define what is natural if this were the case.

*Answer:* I would not go that route. I think that we do, even on quantum physics, have a good idea, for example, that people don't rise naturally from the dead. That is naturally impossible to occur – its likelihood of happening is so incomprehensibly improbable that I don't think we'd ever be justified in thinking that something like that, if it occurred, was due to some unknown law of nature.

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Next time we will look at Hume's objections to the identification of a miracle and see what response we can give to him.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Total Running Time: 34:16 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 18

#### **Contra Hume, Part 1**

We have been talking about the doctrine of providence and in particular God's acts of extraordinary providence which are called *miracles*. Last time I dealt with the objections of the 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Benedict de Spinoza to the possibility and identification of miracles.

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#### DISCUSSION

*Question: [The person has a hard time expressing his question here. The question seems to be in regards to a supernatural event that could be attributed to some unknown natural phenomena.]*

*Answer:* I'm not sure I understand the question. If I understand Spinoza right, what he argued was that when we see a purported miracle – or hear of one – that we have no way of knowing whether this was indeed a genuine miracle or something that was simply due to an unknown law of nature. I think that is the reason why most of us would be skeptical about certain miracle reports. We think, well, maybe there is some unknown natural cause. What I tried to do is give some criteria for the detection of a miracle that would enable us to say that this is, in fact, a genuine miracle. In particular I tried to apply that to the resurrection of Jesus and argued that if the resurrection actually took place then in all probability this was a miraculous event. That is, an event that is naturally impossible and therefore wrought by God. I don't understand how your question interacts with that.

*Followup:* If we think about the supernatural event actually occurring – for example you saying Jesus being observable by his disciples in a physical body – wouldn't you say that it could still be some sort of phenomena that God just hasn't revealed?

*Answer:* That's what I was arguing against. I was arguing against that view. I argued in general that when the miracles in question have occurred in a momentous time, when they are numerous and various and do not recur regularly throughout history, then the chances of them being the result of an unknown natural cause are minimal. With regard to Jesus' resurrection in particular I argued that everything that we know about medical science and biology says that it is naturally impossible for a body which is truly dead to come back to life spontaneously. There is nothing in the causal capacities of nature that could do that. Secondly, the miraculous interpretation is given in the religio-historical context in which the resurrection occurs. This isn't a bald anomaly without a context. It comes as the climax to Jesus' own unparalleled life and teachings. It is that religio-historical context, I think, that tips us off to saying that this is indeed a miracle. So those two factors, I think, combine to make it in all plausibility the case that if Jesus rose from the dead this was an act of God.

*Question:* This sounds suspiciously similar to the design argument. You have complexity conforming to an independently specified pattern. It sounds like your *contra*-Spinoza has

a lot of that in it. You have these unusual events but conforming to an independently specified religio-historical context.<sup>139</sup>

*Answer:* That is interesting. I have never thought of it that way. That wasn't at all deliberate. I actually think it is more parallel to cosmological arguments for God's existence. As someone remarked to me once, the cosmological argument for God based on the creation of the universe is sort of an argument from miracles writ large. It is the supreme miracle. So here I don't think that the religio-historical context is meant to rule out the chance hypothesis the way the independently given pattern is designed to rule out chance. Rather, here it is intended to provide some sort of interpretive framework in which it makes better sense to say this is a miracle than this is a product of physical necessity in this case.

### ***Contra Hume***

Now we want to turn to the very influential objections of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Scottish skeptic David Hume. Spinoza argued against the *possibility* of miracles; Hume, by contrast, argues against the possibility of the *identification* of a miracle. In his essay *Of Miracles*<sup>140</sup>, he presents a two-pronged attack upon the possibility of identifying any event as a miracle. This two-pronged attack takes the form of an “even if . . . but in fact” argument. That is to say, in the first part of the argument, he argues under certain conditions that he concedes for the sake of argument: “even if such and such is the case.” And in the second part of the argument, he argues on the basis of what he thinks is, in fact, true. We can call these two parts of his argument his *in principle* argument and his *in fact* argument. He will first argue that even if you concede certain points, it is *in principle* impossible to prove that a miracle has taken place. But, *in fact*, the evidence is not very good and therefore we should not believe in miracles.

Let's start by examining his *in principle* argument against the identification of a miracle. Hume begins by noticing that a wise man proportions his belief to the evidence. If the evidence makes a conclusion virtually certain then we may speak of a full proof in such a case and the wise man will give wholehearted assent to that conclusion. On the other hand, if the evidence simply makes a conclusion more likely than not then we will speak of a probability rather than a proof and the wise man will proportion his belief to the degree of probability of the conclusion. If it is highly probable then he will give a strong assent to that conclusion. If it is just slightly more probable than not then he will give a kind of tentative and light assent to that conclusion. Now, Hume argues, even if we concede that the evidence for a particular miracle amounts to a full proof for a miracle, he says it is still in principle impossible to identify that event as a miracle. Why? Because standing against that testimony is an equally full proof for the unchangeable laws of nature which are incompatible with that event being a miracle. So Hume seems to imagine, as it were, a scale in which the evidence is being weighed. On one side of the

<sup>139</sup> 5:14

<sup>140</sup> This essay is part of a larger work by David Hume titled *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* which you can find in the public domain at <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/9662> - you can find the essay “Of Miracles” at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/9662/9662-h/9662-h.htm#section10> (accessed December 2012).

scale is the evidence for a particular miracle which (he is willing to grant for the sake of argument) amounts to a full proof. So on one side of the scale is the evidence for some miracle which he says is a full proof. The problem is on the other side of the scale stands the evidence of all the people in all the ages of the world for the regularity of nature's laws. And that also amounts to a full proof.<sup>141</sup> He says,

A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature, and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, a proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.<sup>142</sup>

So proof stands against proof and so the scales are equally balanced and therefore the wise man cannot give any assent to either conclusion and therefore the wise man will not believe in miracles on the basis of the evidence. In fact, Hume says to prove that a miracle has taken place, you would have to show that it would be an even greater miracle for the testimony in support of it to be false. So with respect to the resurrection, Hume says, which would be a greater miracle? That a man should rise from the dead or that the witnesses should be mistaken or lying? Hume has no doubt as to which one of those he thinks is the greater miracle.<sup>143</sup> He says even if all historians agreed that on January 1, 1600, Queen Elizabeth publically died and was buried and her successor installed but that a month later she reappeared, resumed the throne and ruled England for three more years, Hume says he would not have “the least inclination to believe so miraculous event.”<sup>144</sup> He said he would accept the most extraordinary hypothesis for her pretended death and burial rather than admit such a striking violation of the laws of nature. So even if the evidence for a miracle constituted a full proof, the wise man should not believe in miracles because opposed to that evidence is an equally full proof for the laws of nature which would be violated by that miracle. That is Hume's *in principle* argument.

What about his *in fact* argument? Well, in fact, Hume says the evidence for a miracle doesn't amount to a full proof. In fact, the evidence for miracles is so poor it doesn't amount even to a probability and therefore the decisive weight lies on the side of the scale containing the evidence for the laws of nature. The evidence for miracles is so negligible it can't hope to outbalance the full proof for the laws of nature which the miracle would allegedly violate.

Hume gives four reasons as to why he thinks the evidence for miracles is negligible.<sup>145</sup> First, he says, no miracle in history is attested by a sufficient number of educated and honest men who are of such social standing that they would have a great deal to lose by lying. Secondly, he says people crave the miraculous and they will believe the most

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<sup>141</sup> 10:05

<sup>142</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section X, “Of Miracles,” Part I.

<sup>143</sup> “When anyone tells me, that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable, that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact, which he relates, should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority, which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous, than the event which he relates; then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion.” (Ibid.)

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., Part II.

<sup>145</sup> These four reasons are found at the beginning of Hume's “Of Miracles,” Part II.

absurd stories as the abundance of false miracle stories attests. Thirdly, he says miracles occur only among barbarous peoples. This is your good Enlightenment Englishman speaking here – miracles only occur among barbarous peoples. And, fourth, he says miracles in any case occur in all religions and therefore they cancel each other out; all religions have their favorite miracles and since they support contradictory doctrines they all cancel each other out. Therefore the evidence for miracles doesn't even amount to a probability much less a proof.

So Hume concludes that miracles can never be the foundation for any system of religion. He says, speaking as a nominal Christian, "Our most holy religion is founded on Faith, not on reason." He says,

. . . the Christian Religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity: And whoever is moved by Faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.<sup>146</sup>

In other words, Hume is saying it is a miracle that anybody could be so stupid as to believe in Christianity! So, that is Hume's argument against miracles.<sup>147</sup>

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Is his assumption that the laws of nature are never violated?

*Answer:* Yes, that is his assumption. He says that a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws. Many people have accused Hume of therefore simply begging the question; that is, to assume that no miracles have occurred. So, in assuming that a firm and unalterable uniform experience has established the laws of nature, he is assuming that, yes, no violations have occurred. Now, I think that his argument could be recast so as not to make that question begging assumption. I think you are quite right that his argument, as he presents it, does beg the question. But I think you can recast the argument so as to not make it too easily dismissed. You could just say we have very good evidence for the laws of nature; even if it is not exception-less, still there is a tremendously powerful amount of evidence for the laws of nature. Then you are going to need to deal with the argument. But you are quite right in saying that, as he presents it, it is really just question begging.

*Question:* Isn't Hume's thinking along the line of the atheist who would say, "as long as your explanation for, let's say, the Big Bang or all the things that would point to a creator doesn't conclude in a God then I'll listen." In other words, you can point to all the evidence that would indicate that God exists but, in an atheist's mind, there is no God therefore, no matter what evidence you might point to, that conclusion cannot be reached.

*Answer:* I don't think that Hume's argument is presupposing atheism because he is not

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> 15:30

denying that miracles are possible. In fact, Hume is really writing in a deist frame of mind. Where the deists are quite willing to grant that there is a creator of the universe – there is a God – they don't think he has acted in history to reveal himself in any special way – there is no special revelation from God, no particular miracles performed by this God. So it is not really atheistic. It is simply saying that we can never have good enough evidence to believe that God, if he is there, has acted in a miraculous way in history.

*Followup:* I guess I was aligning it to that way of thinking because he is saying if there is a God who set in place the laws of nature then there could be no violations of those laws of nature.

*Answer:* That is more Spinoza. That is Spinoza who thinks that God has established these laws of nature and therefore there could be no violations of them. Hume's argument isn't like that. He is willing to grant that God has acted miraculously in history. All the time he could be doing miracles. But what Hume is saying is that you could never know it. You could never know, on the basis of the evidence, that this event is a miracle wrought by God. It is an argument against the identification of a miracle. It is an argument against discerning what is a miracle. How is this relevant to Christian apologetics? It doesn't disprove the resurrection of Jesus or the Gospel of miracles but it would undercut Christian evidences where someone would say, "The evidence for the resurrection or the evidence of Jesus' miraculous life is evidence that the God of nature has revealed himself in history." So this is an attempt to undercut the project of Christian evidences.<sup>148</sup>

*[Q&A: Just asks to repeat Hume's four reasons as to why he thinks the evidence for miracles is negligible.]*

*Question:* It seems to me there are two types of miracles. One involves timing that doesn't violate the laws of nature and the other violates the laws of nature.

*Answer:* You will remember, I stoutly rejected that definition of miracles in favor of saying that a miracle is a naturally impossible event. I think you are right in saying you could have events that are truly miraculous in that they are naturally inexplicable and then you have these, what I prefer to call, special providences. For example, that the landslide occurs blocking the Jordan River and drying it up just as the tribes of Israel are to cross into the Promised Land. I would say that, technically, that is not a miracle. A miracle technically is a naturally impossible event. But these timing events I would call special providences. They are naturally explicable but by, as you say, their coincidental timing it is evident that this is a special providence that God has brought about. I would say he can do that through his middle knowledge. If you remember, middle knowledge enables him to set up the natural conditions so that just at the time the Israelites are ready to cross in the Promised Land, the erosion and so forth produce naturally the landslide that blocks the river.

*Followup:* So curing leprosy and all of the things that have happened, it is just curious that it happened right then.

*Answer:* Well, sometimes of course miracles may occur at propitious times as well. Being at a coincidental time isn't a sufficient condition for saying this is merely a special providence. Miracles can occur at special times, too. It would be simply the difference

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<sup>148</sup> 20:10

between the two would be whether or not it is naturally explicable. We are focusing on events that are properly and strictly miraculous. That is to say, they don't have natural causes that account for them.

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Let me then give some response to Hume's argument. First let's talk about his *in principle* argument. Despite the influence of Hume's *in principle* argument, particularly on biblical scholars like Bart Ehrman for example, Hume's argument is generally recognized by philosophers today to be, in the words of the philosopher of science John Earman, an "abject failure."<sup>149</sup> John Earman is an agnostic philosopher of science at the University of Pittsburg. He is an extremely eminent philosopher of science. He wrote the book *Hume's Abject Failure* on Hume's argument against miracles. By an *abject* failure, what Earman meant was this isn't just a mistake. We all make mistakes as philosophers. Rather, this is an *irredeemable* mistake. The argument is an irredeemable failure; a failure that cannot be corrected. It is an abject failure. So even Hume's admirers today, for example Peter Millican whom I debated at the University of Birmingham and the former editor of the journal *Hume Studies*, recognize the argument doesn't work.<sup>150</sup> They will, at most, try to salvage some nugget from Hume's convoluted discussion, typically Hume's so-called maxim: "That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavors to establish."<sup>151</sup> But even that maxim, it turns out, is trivial if true or, if it's significant, it turns out to be false. So Hume's argument, among philosophers, despite its influence is generally recognized to have failed. Why is that? Well, let's look at it more closely.

His *in principle* argument actually falls into two more or less independent claims. On the one hand, there is this claim that miracles are by definition inherently and utterly improbable. By definition, a miracle is just an utter improbability. That is the one claim. On the other hand, there is this claim that no amount of evidence for a miracle can overcome that intrinsic improbability. A miracle is utterly improbable in and of itself – that's the first claim – and the second claim is no amount of evidence can ever suffice to overcome that intrinsic improbability. As it turns out, both of these claims are mistaken.

Let's talk first about the second claim that no amount of evidence could ever establish a miracle. The so-called probability calculus or modern probability theory didn't exist in David Hume's day. So he was ignorant of it. But stimulated by his discussion of miracles, probability theorists from Condorcet to John Stuart Mill wrestled with the question of what sort of evidence would it take to establish a highly improbable event. What probability theorists soon realized was that if you simply weigh the probability of the event against the reliability of the witnesses then you are going to be led into denying the occurrence of purely natural events which, though they may be very improbable, we reasonably know to have actually happened. For example, suppose on the morning news you hear a report that the pick in last night's lottery was 7492871. This is a report of an

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<sup>149</sup> John Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure: The Argument against Miracles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>150</sup> 25:07

<sup>151</sup> Hume, "Of Miracles," Part I.

extraordinarily improbable event – one out of several million. Even if the morning news’ accuracy is known to be 99.99%, still the improbability of that event will simply swamp the reliability of the witnesses’ credibility so you should never believe such reports on television. In order to believe the report, Hume would say you have to have enough evidence in favor of the morning news’ reliability to counterbalance the improbability of the winning pick. And that is just absurd. You would never have that sort of evidence in favor of the morning news’ reliability. Therefore, we would never be able to believe such reports which we rationally believe all the time.

So probability theorists came to understand you can’t simply weigh the improbability of the event against the reliability of the witnesses. Rather, they saw that you also need to consider the probability that if the reported event had *not* occurred that the witnesses’ testimony would still be just as it is. What is the probability that, if the event had not occurred, you would have the evidence that you do, in fact, have?<sup>152</sup> This is what John Stuart Mill said:

. . . to know whether a coincidence does or does not require more evidence to render it credible than an ordinary event, we must refer, in every instance, to first principles, and estimate afresh what is the probability that the given testimony would have been delivered in that instance, supposing the fact which it asserts not to be true.<sup>153</sup>

You have to consider: what is the probability that you would have the evidence you do if the event had not taken place? So, to go back to the example of the winning pick in last night’s lottery: the probability that the morning news would announce the pick as 7492871 if some other number had been chosen instead is incredibly small. Given that the newscasters had no preference for that number, the probability that they would pick that number and announce it is just incredibly tiny. On the other hand, the announcement of that pick is much more probable if 7492871 were the actual number chosen. So the announcement of the pick is vastly, vastly more probable given that that was the number that was picked than if it were not the number that was picked. This comparative likelihood easily counterbalances the high prior improbability of the event reported. So again, what you have got to consider is: what is the probability that the evidence would be just as it is if the event had *not* occurred? If that is a very low probability then that can outbalance any intrinsic improbability in the event itself.

The realization that other factors had to be considered in estimating the probability of highly improbable events came to be codified in a theorem called *Bayes Theorem* which is the modern probability calculus. Let’s let R represent some miraculous event, say, the resurrection of Jesus. And we will let E equal the specific evidence for that event, such as the empty tomb, the postmortem appearances, the origin of the Christian faith and so forth. Then we will let B represent our general background information. This is our knowledge of the world at large without the specific evidence – you just subtract the specific evidence out of that and that gives you your general background knowledge. So

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<sup>152</sup> 29:48

<sup>153</sup> John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*, 2 vols. (London: 1843), bk 3, chap. 25, §6, cited in S. L. Zabell, “The Probabilistic Analysis of Testimony,” *Journal of Statistical Planning and Inference* 20 (1988): 331.

R will be the resurrection, E will be the specific evidence for that event and B is your general background information without the specific evidence being included in it. What Bayes Theorem states is that we can compare the probability of R given the evidence and background information [ $Pr(R | E\&B)$ ] with the probability of not-R given the evidence and background information [ $Pr(not-R | E\&B)$ ]:

$$\frac{Pr(R | E\&B)}{Pr(not-R | E\&B)}$$

This is the so-called “Odds Form” of Bayes Theorem, where you compare the odds of the event given the evidence and background information with the denial of the event given the background information and the evidence. This is called the total probability of the event. It is total because it considers not only the background information but also the specific evidence. We want to compare the total probability of R with not-R. This will be computed as the product of two other factors that go to make up the total probability.

The first will be the probability of the miracle on the background information alone [ $Pr(R | B)$ ] compared to the miracle not occurring given the background information alone [ $Pr(not-R | B)$ ]. So you look at our general knowledge of the world and you ask how probable is the resurrection of Jesus on that background information compared to how probable is it that he did not rise given the background information?

$$\frac{Pr(R | B)}{Pr(not-R | B)}$$

This is called the *intrinsic probability* of the hypothesis. It is the probability of the hypothesis independent of any specific evidence for it.<sup>154</sup>

So the total probability will be made up, or computed by, the intrinsic probability of the hypothesis. Then it is multiplied by another ratio and that will be the probability of the evidence given the resurrection and the background information [ $Pr(E | R\&B)$ ] compared to the probability of the evidence given that there is no resurrection – that it did not occur – and the background information [ $Pr(E | not-R\&B)$ ]:

$$\frac{Pr(E | R\&B)}{Pr(E | not-R\&B)}$$

And you can see this is the factor that the probability theorist said we need to consider. What is the probability that we would have the evidence we do if the event had not occurred? This is the *explanatory power* of the hypothesis. It tells us how well the hypothesis explains the evidence. Is the evidence more probable given the hypothesis or is the evidence more probable given the negation of the hypothesis? How well does the hypothesis explain the evidence?

So the total probability, in this case, of Jesus’ resurrection will be computed by comparing the intrinsic probability times the explanatory power of R and not-R:

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<sup>154</sup> 35:07

$$\frac{Pr(R | E\&B)}{Pr(not-R | E\&B)} = \frac{Pr(R | B)}{Pr(not-R | B)} \times \frac{Pr(E | R\&B)}{Pr(E | not-R\&B)}$$

Now Hume's mistake, being unaware of the probability calculus, is that the only factor he considers is the intrinsic probability. He says because a miracle is enormously, utterly improbable given our background information that no amount of evidence can ever go to establish a miracle as probable. That is simply mathematically demonstrably fallacious. It is wrong. Imagine, say, the odds here [*Dr. Craig is referring to the intrinsic probability factor*] are something like 1-to-100 in favor of not-R. But suppose the odds here [*Dr. Craig is now referring to the explanatory power factor*] are 100-to-1 in favor of R. Then they just balance each other out and the odds are even. So Hume's argument, by neglecting the probability of the evidence on the hypothesis or its negation, is simply fallacious. Hume never discusses this other ratio. He simply concludes that because the intrinsic probability of a miracle is so low therefore the total probability of the miracle is low. That is simply mathematically demonstrably fallacious.

There is a slogan which is beloved in the free thought culture: "extraordinary events require extraordinary evidence." That sounds so common sensical, doesn't it? Yet, what Bayes Theorem reveals to us is that is demonstrably mistaken. It is simply not true that in order to establish some highly, highly improbable event you need to have extraordinary evidence in any sort of acceptable sense. Think again of the illustration of the pick in last night's lottery. So even if the event is intrinsically, highly improbable, that can be easily outbalanced by the hypothesis having greater explanatory power. What Bayes Theorem shows us is that believing in a highly improbable event on the basis of the evidence doesn't always require an enormous amount of evidence. What is critical is that the evidence should be more probable, given the hypothesis, than it is if the hypothesis is false. So the bottom line is that establishing a miracle doesn't always take a huge amount of evidence.

Well, so much for the second claim of Hume's *in principle* argument that no amount of evidence can go to establish a miracle. As John Earman demonstrates, that is demonstrably fallacious. What we will do next time is look at the first part of Hume's claim where he says that the intrinsic probability of a miracle is very, very tiny. Hume just assumes that the probability of a miracle on the background information is almost infinitesimal. But is that true? Is it really true that the probability of R on B [ $Pr(R | B)$ ] is very small? That will be the question that we will take up next time.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Total Running Time: 40:19 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 19

#### Contra Hume, Part 2

We have been talking about David Hume's argument against the identification of a miracle. You will remember Hume argued that a miracle is so intrinsically improbable given the laws of nature that no amount of evidence could ever serve to establish the historicity of a miracle. Therefore, the wise man will never believe in miracles.

We saw that, as probability theory developed during the centuries after Hume, probability theorists explored what it would take to establish a highly improbable event. As a result of this, probability calculus (or Bayes Theorem) was formulated which allows us to assess the total probability of an event given the specific evidence for it and the background information. We saw that when you apply Bayes Theorem to an event like Jesus' resurrection, which is symbolized by R, that in fact even if R is highly, intrinsically improbable on our background information, that can be outweighed by the superior explanatory power of the hypothesis over its negation:

$$\frac{Pr(R | E \& B)}{Pr(not-R | E \& B)} = \frac{Pr(R | B)}{Pr(not-R | B)} \times \frac{Pr(E | R \& B)}{Pr(E | not-R \& B)}$$

So what Hume focused on entirely was this factor in Bayes Theorem:

$$\frac{Pr(R | B)}{Pr(not-R | B)}$$

He only looked at the intrinsic probability of a miracle and said, for example, the resurrection is so highly, highly improbable on the background information that it follows that the probability of the resurrection on the evidence and background information must also be very low. But that is mathematically, demonstrably incorrect. Hume simply neglected the other factor which is that if the event had not occurred, what is the probability that we should have the evidence for it that we do?

$$\frac{Pr(E | R \& B)}{Pr(E | not-R \& B)}$$

That improbability may well balance out any improbability in the event itself. So we saw that, in fact, Hume's *in principle* argument against identifying a miracle is just demonstrably incorrect. It only focuses on the intrinsic probability of the event and it neglects the explanatory power of the event or hypothesis. That is by way of review.

What I want to do now is look at the question of the intrinsic probability of, say, the Resurrection Hypothesis, on our background information. Is Hume, in fact, correct in saying that the intrinsic probability of the resurrection on our background information is incomprehensibly low – that it is extremely low? Well, I think that will depend upon what you include in the background information and how you characterize the hypothesis R.

You see, the hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead is susceptible to two very different interpretations. One would be that Jesus rose *naturally* from the dead – that somehow the cells in Jesus’ body all spontaneously came back to life again and he resumed living. Jesus rose naturally from the dead. Or there is the hypothesis that Jesus rose *supernaturally* from the dead. In other words, that *God raised* Jesus from the dead. Those are two very different hypotheses, aren’t they? The hypothesis that Jesus rose naturally from the dead is by all accounts incomprehensibly improbable. Any theory – Conspiracy Theory, Apparent Death Theory, Twin Brother Theory, Hallucination Theory – would be more probable than the hypothesis that all of the cells in Jesus’ body spontaneously came back to life and Jesus rose from the dead. This hypothesis – that Jesus rose *naturally* from the dead – is admittedly incomprehensibly improbable.<sup>156</sup> But the hypothesis that Jesus rose supernaturally from the dead or that God raised Jesus from the dead isn’t rendered improbable in light of those facts. The admitted improbability of Jesus coming back to life naturally, given the laws of nature, doesn’t affect the probability that Jesus rose *supernaturally* from the dead. And since the hypothesis “Jesus rose from the dead” comprises both of these, the improbability of Jesus rising naturally from the dead will drag down the probability of R because it will need to be factored in along with a supernatural resurrection. But of course that is not what the Christian believes. So what we can do is simply focus in on the hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead and ask, “What is the probability of that hypothesis given our background information?” So when I refer to the Resurrection Hypothesis, this is what I am talking about – that God raised Jesus from the dead. How improbable is that given our background information?

How we assess the probability of R, so stated, on B [ $Pr(R | B)$ ] will depend upon what information is included in B. You will remember that the classical Christian apologists who were arguing for the historicity of miracles weren’t using miracles to prove the existence of God. They had already given arguments for the existence of God – like the Cosmological Argument, the Ontological Argument, the Teleological Argument and so forth. Miracles were simply used to show God’s action in the world in some specific way, not to prove God’s existence. So, if we include in B (our background information about the world) all of the evidence that goes to establish God’s existence, like the beginning of the universe, the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life, the existence of objective moral values and duties and so forth, then the probability that God would raise Jesus from the dead is not so obviously unlikely given that we have all of this information that God exists.

So, what we can do is calculate the probability of R on B by focusing on the question of the probability of God’s existence and God raising Jesus from the dead:

$$Pr(R | B) = Pr(G | B) \times Pr(R | G \& B) + Pr(not-G | B) \times Pr(R | not-G \& B)^{157}$$

The probability of R on B [ $Pr(R | B)$ ] will be the probability that God exists given our background information (here we are going to use G as the symbol for God exists – [ $Pr(G | B)$ ]) times the probability of R given God and the background information

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<sup>156</sup> 5:00

<sup>157</sup> The form this equation is in is derived from the Total Probability Theorem. The Total Probability Theorem is stated mathematically as:  $Pr(R) = \sum_x Pr(A_x)Pr(R|A_x)$ . In Dr. Craig’s usage of this formula,  $A_1$  is G and  $A_2$  is not-G where G is “God’s existence.” The background information (B) is inferred.

$[Pr(R | G\&B)]$ . That is to say, it will be the probability of God's existence given the background information times the explanatory power of the God Hypothesis – how probable is the resurrection of Jesus given the existence of God and the background information. Given that God exists and our background information, how probable is it that God raised Jesus from the dead? That will be the first factor that will need to be considered. Now, what you add to this, then, would be the negation of that – what is the probability that God does not exist given the background information  $[Pr(not-G | B)]$  and the probability of the resurrection given that God does not exist and the background information  $[Pr(R | not-G\&B)]$ ? That is essentially the atheistic view. So we are asking, given the background information, what's the probability that God does not exist and given that God does not exist what is the probability of the resurrection of Jesus.

Now, think about this second factor. What is R here? R is the hypothesis “God raised Jesus from the dead.” What is the probability that God raised Jesus from the dead given that God does not exist? Zero! If God does not exist, then R is impossible! It has no probability whatsoever that God raised Jesus from the dead if there is no God.<sup>158</sup> So this factor here  $[Pr(R | not-G\&B)]$  is zero and since zero times anything is zero this right side of the equation just cancels out  $[Pr(not-G | B) \times Pr(R | not-G\&B)]$ . This side of the equation can just be eliminated because it is zero. What that does is considerably simplify matters. It means that all we need to consider to calculate the probability of R on B is the probability that God exists given the background information and the probability that if God exists he would raise Jesus from the dead:

$$Pr(R | B) = Pr(G | B) \times Pr(R | G\&B)$$

Well, what are those probabilities? If the arguments of natural theology are good then it seems to me that we are in no position to say that this first probability  $[Pr(G | B)]$  is low. On the contrary, my own view is that this is a pretty good probability. Given the fine tuning of the universe, the origin of the universe, objective moral values and duties in the world and so on and so forth, I think the probability of God's existence on the background information is pretty good. But minimally we could say it is not low. It is not a low probability. So that would not make the probability of the resurrection on the background information low, would it? If  $Pr(G|B)$  is not low, that won't make  $Pr(R|B)$  low. So that would mean then that this  $[Pr(R | G\&B)]$  is going to be the important factor – how probable is it, given the existence of God and our background information, that God would raise Jesus from the dead? Well, how probable or improbable is that? God has never done this before to anybody else. There would be other ways, if he wanted to vindicate Jesus, that he could. So how do we know what God would be likely to do if God existed given our background information? Would he raise Jesus from the dead? How probable is that? It is difficult to say but if we include in B all of the information that we have about the historical Jesus – like his own unprecedented claims to be the Son of Man, the Messiah, the Son of God in a unique sense, his claim to do miracles to usher in the kingdom of God and so forth – then I think we have to say that, given that religio-historical context, we are in no position at all to say that it is improbable that God would want to raise Jesus from the dead. On the contrary, it would seem to fit very naturally that God would want to raise Jesus. So while I am not claiming that we can show this

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<sup>158</sup> 10:01

probability is high, I think minimally we can say there is no reason to think that this probability is low. And that is what Hume or the skeptic would have to show.

It seems to me that the skeptic is in no position at all to say that the probability of R on B is very low. He has got no reason to think that the probability that God's existence is low, given the background information we have. And there is no reason to think it improbable that God would raise Jesus from the dead, given the existence of God and the background information. So it seems to me that we have got no grounds for saying that the probability of R on B is very low. But in that case, we have got no grounds for saying that it is so low that it can't be outbalanced by the superior explanatory power of the Resurrection Hypothesis.

So, in short, it seems to me that Hume's skeptical argument fails on both counts. He completely neglects the explanatory power of the Resurrection Hypothesis compared to its alternative and his assumption that the Resurrection Hypothesis is low on the background information seems to me simply unjustified in light of the arguments for the existence of God and the historical background information we have about Jesus of Nazareth. So it seems to me that Hume's *in principle* argument is simply a failure. The skeptic has not shown that miracles cannot be established by evidence. They haven't shown that the probability of an event like the resurrection given the evidence and background information is so unacceptable low that it cannot be believed.<sup>159</sup>

Having said that, when I present a positive case for the resurrection of Jesus, I don't use Bayes Theorem simply because some of these elements are probably inscrutable. How do we know what the probability of R on G and B is  $[Pr(R | G\&B)]$ ? How can you guess what would God do prior to his doing it? It seems to me that we really don't know these probabilities. But again, what we can show using Bayes Theorem is that we have no basis for thinking these probabilities are low. That is all you need to do in order to defuse the argument. The Humean or skeptic has to show that these probabilities are low and not just low but so unacceptable low that they can't be overcome by the specific evidence. He certainly hasn't been able to do that. So when I present a positive case for the resurrection – if you think back to the section on the Doctrine of Christ when we discussed this – my positive case is not to use Bayes Theorem. This is merely a negative, defensive move to show that the Humean or the skeptic has not shown it to be improbable. Rather, when we present a positive case for Jesus' resurrection, I do so in the way historians normally reason – and that is called *inference to the best explanation*. Historians generally don't use Bayes Theorem because it is very difficult to give values to these various ratios. It is hard to find numbers to plug into them with any confidence. But in inference to the best explanation, what you do (as you may recall) is you assemble a pool of live explanatory options to explain a given body of empirical data. Then you pick which option, if true, would best explain that data. You will weigh these options against each other to determine which is the best by applying to them various criteria like explanatory power, explanatory scope, plausibility, and degree of being *ad hoc* or contrived or artificial. What you can show is that when you apply these criteria to our live options that the Resurrection Hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead is the best explanation of the evidence and therefore the explanation to be preferred.

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<sup>159</sup> 14:54

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Doesn't the R on the left ("God raised Jesus from the dead") have to be different than the R on the right (like "God could have raised Jesus from the dead")?

*Answer:* No, the R is the same. We want to take our hypothesis, "God raised Jesus from the dead" and we want to ask "How probable is that, given that God does exist?" So it is the same hypothesis just as the other letters are the same all the way through the equation. This represents, if you will, the degree of rational expectation a person might have of the resurrection given that God exists on our background information. I think you can see that, given that God exists and given the background information about the historical Jesus, I don't think it is all improbable that God would raise Jesus from the dead. Do you? I mean, given that as your information relative to which you are calculating the probability of your hypothesis, it seems to me you can't at all say that it is improbable "God raised Jesus from the dead" given that God exists and that background information.

*Followup:* So there is no distinction between "would he do it" and "did he do it"?

*Answer:* No, in this case we are just stating the hypothesis "God raised Jesus." Now, when you assess the probability that God raised Jesus given his existence and the background information, the way you might put that in English is to say, "What is the probability that God would raise Jesus from the dead given the background information and his existence?" So, yes, colloquially that is how you would express this.<sup>160</sup> Or you could express this as the explanatory power of the God Hypothesis – how much should we expect R to be true given the God Hypothesis? Does it explain R well? That would be another way of putting it. So don't get hung up on these ways of putting it colloquially. The statement of the hypothesis or the evidence is always the same, but you can just express these ratios in English words by saying things like "how probable is it that God exists given our background information?" or "how probable is it that God would raise Jesus from the dead given that he exists and the background information we have?"

*Question:* How would the evidence be evaluated for the fact that Jesus rose three people from the dead? A young girl – you could say she was really unconscious. Or the widow's son – well, they had to bury within 24 hours so he could have not really been dead. When you come down to Lazarus, he had been in the grave four days and his body was rotting and he was all wrapped up in grave clothes. How would they evaluate those three things?

*Answer:* I agree with you. You are focusing on what we know about the life of the historical Jesus as part of B. New Testament scholars generally recognize that it does belong to the portrait of the historical Jesus that we can reconstruct as ordinary historians, not as bible believing historians but as ordinary historians, that Jesus of Nazareth carried out a ministry of miracle working and exorcisms and according to at least some New Testament scholars that there were claims that he had raised people from the dead and you mentioned the three that are mentioned in the Gospels. Well, that is a historical context that is pregnant with significance, I think. If this is a man who claims to have power over death and to raise people from the dead, I think that that would make his

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<sup>160</sup> 20:08

resurrection from the dead all the more plausible. It fits in beautifully with what we know of the religio-historical context. So, absolutely, that would be very relevant I think. Also, the whole idea of the Jewish hope of resurrection from the dead. We are not talking here about an event like Hume's illustration of Queen Elizabeth who supposedly died and then resumed the throne sometime later, which occurs as just a bald anomaly without any sort of religio-historical context. Here we are dealing with a Jewish context in which resurrection from the dead is the form of immortality. They didn't believe in the immortality of the soul, they believed in the resurrection of the dead. So, once again, the idea that God would raise Jesus from the dead fits in beautifully with this context and this background information.

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All of this has been said in respect to Hume's *in principle* argument. Remember, his *in principle* argument was that even if the evidence for a miracle were a full proof, no one could ever *in principle* believe in the historicity of a miracle. That argument, I think we've seen, is simply invalid because it is based upon an incomplete understanding of the probability calculus and also because I don't think Hume has been able to show that the probability of a miracle on the background information is intrinsically, highly improbable. So his *in principle* argument fails.

What that means is that there is simply no way around looking at the specific evidence in the case to see if in fact Jesus rose from the dead. You can't try to bar belief in the resurrection of Jesus by some sort of *in principle* argument – you have got to look at the evidence in fact. Therefore, Hume's *in fact* arguments that he gives just become irrelevant. Even if, in fact, there has never been other miracles attested by highly educated men and people of great social standing and even if it is true that people crave the miraculous or that miracles occur among barbarous peoples – all of that is simply irrelevant to the specific evidence of this case – the empty tomb of Jesus of Nazareth, the postmortem appearances to various individuals and groups of people, the very origin of the disciples' belief in his resurrection from the dead.<sup>161</sup> These *in fact* arguments are interesting, they might make us cautious in our investigation of the evidence, but they cannot bar an investigation of the evidence. You have no way around getting your fingers dirty and actually looking at the evidence for the empty tomb, the postmortem appearances and so forth and then asking what is the best explanation of this evidence. So once the *in principle* argument fails, the *in fact* argument just becomes trivial. It doesn't carry any weight because it doesn't look at the specific evidence in this case.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* This is sort of an aside but about those three people that Jesus raised – they all died because they are not still living today. But Jesus' resurrection was a completely different kind of resurrection.

*Answer:* It is completely different. I like to speak in the case of these other raisings as being what I call *revivifications*. Jesus revivifies these people. He brings them back to

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<sup>161</sup> 25:18

life. They were genuinely dead and then they are brought back to mortal life. But as you say, eventually they will die again of disease or sickness or accident or whatever. So these are technically revivifications – they are not resurrections in the Jewish sense of the word which involved a transformation to glory and immortality that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 15. Still, I think that the previous question is a good one – given that Jesus revived people (that he brought them back from the dead), that does provide a very charged religio-historical context in which claims of his own resurrection seem quite appropriate. So if you include these revivifications as part of your background information, I think that that does help to generate credibility of the idea that if God exists that he would raise Jesus from the dead.

We looked at the collapse of the belief in miracles during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in biblical studies and traced its roots to the Newtonian World Machine and the arguments of Spinoza and Hume. We have now examined each one of those. We have redefined the notion of a miracle, not as a violation of the laws of nature, but rather as a naturally impossible event and argued that what would make miracles possible is the God of classical theism. If there is a creator and designer of the world who is distinct from the world then obviously he can produce effects in the world that purely natural causes would not be able to produce if left to themselves. Moreover, we have argued against both Spinoza and Hume that we can, on the basis of the evidence, argue that some event is plausibly a miracle and that it can be rational to believe in that event on the basis of historical considerations – specifically with respect to the resurrection of Jesus, I see no reason to think that that could not be the best explanation of the evidence in this specific case.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Do you think it is more logical to believe that the laws of nature and the terms of resurrection were altered in that one specific case or that the laws of nature were embedded to make the resurrection possible in that one given point of time?

*Answer:* This is a good question and I don't think those are the only alternatives. Remember when we talked about the laws of nature – what I said is that the laws of nature represent idealizations. They talk about what will happen under ideal conditions.<sup>162</sup> But they have implicit in them these *ceteris paribus* clauses – that is to say, this is what will happen *all things being equal*. But, if there are interfering natural or supernatural factors, then the law isn't broken; the law just doesn't apply because all things are not equal. So I would say in the case of a miracle God doesn't alter the laws of nature. The laws of nature remain inviolate. The law of nature states what it has always stated – namely, this is what you can predict what will happen under these ideal conditions *ceteris paribus*. That isn't altered by God. Nor do I accept the alternative that somehow God has built into nature the capacity to bring a person back from the dead. I think everything we know about biology and medical science suggests that an event like the resurrection of

<sup>162</sup> 30:04

Jesus is naturally impossible and that is why I said this hypothesis that Jesus rose naturally from the dead doesn't even need to occupy us. So, again, my view would be that when God raises Jesus from the dead he doesn't do anything to the laws of nature; rather, he directly brings about an event through his causal power that the natural causes at the time and place in question don't have the ability to produce.

*Question:* I find a bit of irony in the objections of Spinoza and Hume. Spinoza's objection is based on this idea of fatalism – the idea that everything that happens happens necessary. It may be impossible for Jesus to rise from the dead, but it is equally impossible for me to not have asked this question to you.

*Answer:* Yes, he is a determinist; that is true. And given the laws of nature, just everything is slated to occur.

*Followup:* And Hume was an empiricist who believed there is nothing in the mind or language that isn't first in the sense experience. And he argued from that, then, that you can't even have inductive reasoning. You can't draw generalizations. And now he makes this objection which is, itself, a generalization which he said is impossible on his own view.

*Answer:* Yes, it is in tension with his own empiricism, isn't it? And particularly, his lack of rational justification for the causal principle – for the causal order. He says "I believe in that but I don't have any sort of way of knowing that it is true." And yet he is prepared to rule out, *a priori*, a belief in a miraculous event.

*Followup:* And yet he mocks people who believe in Jesus and don't have any reason for it even though he does the same thing with causality.

*Answer:* Yes, that is true. I suppose Hume would say that the belief in causality is something that is forced upon us by needing to go to the grocery store and fill up your gas tank and so forth whereas belief in God or in Jesus isn't forced upon you by the necessities of everyday life. That would be his justification, I suppose, for his believing certain things despite his skepticism. He recognizes skepticism as unlivable and therefore you are forced to believe in certain things without justification.

*Question:* Would you apply your definition of miracle – an event outside of the causal power of nature at a particular time and place – to creation itself? At the point where God exists without creation, any physical event would, in fact, fit that definition.

*Answer:* I actually did mention this in an earlier session. An argument for God's existence based upon the origin of the universe is really a sort of argument from miracles writ large for the existence of God because the creation, or origin, of the universe would be a grand miracle on a cosmic scale. It would be an event which the productive capacity of nature wouldn't have in it to produce – indeed, there is no nature when you talk about the origin of nature. So this is an event that is literally miraculous given the definition of miracle that I have given.<sup>163</sup>

*Question:* People like Hume and others today say they are hard headed and logical and reject miracles but don't you think that they really can't escape from miracles because on their account of the universe without a God the existence of the universe itself in fact

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<sup>163</sup> 34:43

would be an event that they cannot explain. The appearance of the universe from nothing spontaneously without a first cause and the appearance of the first cell with genetic material transmittable through reproduction would also be an event that happens spontaneously without any cause. And the whole chain of events in Neo-Darwinian evolution by which biological complexity is produced – each of those would be what I would argue are beyond the causal power of nature at a particular time and place.

*Answer:* I haven't taken a position on that but that certainly is a respected position with respect to all of the events that you mentioned. These are events which nature, left to its own devices, would never in all probability have encompassed. Therefore, we need to appeal to miraculous supernatural activity to explain things like the origin of the universe, the origin of life, the evolution of biological complexity and so forth. So this could be again an application of this sort of argument for miracles in effect outside of your normal context where we think of Jesus. You are thinking of it in terms of God's action in nature and that this may well be attended with miracles all the way back to the beginning. I think that that is not an implausible point of view.

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That brings us to a conclusion of our discussion of God's acts of extraordinary providence. We will now move to a different section of the Doctrine of Creation which will focus upon non-human creatures whom God has created, namely, higher orders of spiritual beings – angels and demons.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Total Running Time: 37:29 (Copyright © 2013 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 20

#### **Nature of Angels**

We have been looking at the Doctrine of Creation over the last several sessions so let's just take a step back to get the big picture. We have examined God's creation of the world *ex nihilo*, his conservation of the world in being, and his concurrence with everything that happens in the world. We've looked at his ordinary providence in governing the world and, most recently, at his acts of extraordinary providence – namely his miraculous actions in the world. Now we want to turn to a new facet of the Doctrine of Creation which concerns angels and demons.

#### **Angels and Demons**

When we come to the subject of angels and demons we are dealing with a different order of creation than the physical universe. On the Jewish-Christian view, there is another order of the creative world that is not part of this physical universe which depends upon God for its existence. These are these angelic beings which exist. These are mentioned both in the Old Testament – in Hebrew the world is *malakh* – and in the New Testament where the word in Greek is *angelos*. These beings serve as messengers of God to humanity. This is what the word *malakh* or *angelos* means literally – a messenger. What is described here is this higher order of spiritual beings that dwell in the very presence of God and then serve his purposes as we will see. So we are talking here about incorporeal beings (beings without physical bodies) or minds, as it were, without bodies (unembodied minds) who serve the Lord. In addition to the angels that serve the Lord and are in his presence, there are apparently as well evil angels. Matthew 25:41 refers to these. Jesus is speaking here of the last judgment and he says that God, the King of Heaven, “will say to those on his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” So there is a devil – a spiritual being of intense evil as we will see – who has angels that serve him as well. So we are talking about this higher order of spiritual reality that is not part of the physical universe but nevertheless is a part of the created order.

#### **Angels**

##### **Reasons for Angels**

We might ask, “Why do angels exist?” Why would God create this higher order of spirit beings? Why are they there? The primary reason seems to be to serve God. They are servants of God. In Hebrews 1:14, speaking of the angelic beings, the writer of Hebrews says, “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?” So the angelic beings are created as ministering spirits who serve God for the purpose of the plan of salvation for humanity.

A second reason that has been suggested for these angelic beings is that they are mediators between God and the physical world. God is a transcendent being – beyond time and space. He is immaterial; he is pure spirit. The idea here is that in order to

communicate with and work in the natural, physical world God has created these angelic beings to serve as mediators between the transcendent, immaterial, non-spatio-temporal realm and the material, spatio-temporal realm which we inhabit.<sup>165</sup> I think, however, this is not technically correct as a good reason for thinking that angels exist because this is susceptible to what is called the “third man argument.” What is that? Well, Plato similarly thought that there needed to be some sort of a liaison or mediator between the realm of the Forms (the abstract, eternally existing objects) and the physical world. So he posited a sort of demiurge or intermediary who would be the mediator between the immaterial, timeless forms and the material, physical world. But the problem is that that raises this third man argument, namely, “Then who is the mediator between the timeless, spiritual reality and these beings?” You would still need to have another mediator between God and those beings, and so on and so on *ad infinitum*. In other words, it launches into a kind of infinite regress. So there is no reason to think that God cannot, and often does not, act immediately in the spatio-temporal world. Indeed when we looked at miracles we saw that that is exactly what miracles are. So there is no need of having some sort of a mediator between God and the universe in order for God to act in the universe. He would need to have some sort of a mediator between him and the angels to explain how he could act upon them. So I think it is better to refer to the angels, not as mediators between God and man, but rather as manifestors of God to man. God is a transcendent, spiritual reality and can use angels as a way of manifesting his presence in the universe. So they manifest God’s being to us in many cases.

Related to this might be a similar rationale for the existence of angels that was prominent in medieval theology and this is often referred to as the “Great Chain of Being” in the words of the author Arthur Lovejoy.<sup>166</sup> Lovejoy points out that, for medieval theologians, creation imitates God and God as an infinite being is manifested in the world in all sorts of ways in which the creation imitates his goodness and power and attributes and so forth. So there is this Great Chain of Being descending from God as the ultimate spiritual reality down to the lowliest non-sentient physical things in the world. And in between that we find beings which are sentient beings – beings which are composites of a spirit and a physical body (that’s where human beings would lie in the Great Chain of Being, we are both physical and spiritual) – and then higher than that would be the pure spirits like angels who are finite spirit beings and then finally God would be an infinite spiritual being. So it is true that there is a kind of chain of being here that descends from the pure spirit down to the purely material in which angels occupy a different position in that chain of being. We are spirits which are corporeally embodied. They would be spirits which are pure spirits – pure minds that are not embodied in any sort of a physical way. The problem here isn’t that they need to exist in order for God to mediate himself to creation – I am not suggesting that. But rather they simply express the fullness of creation in imitating God and reflecting his greatness.

Finally, the third purpose which angels can be thought to serve is the purpose of glorifying God. According to Scripture, the throne of God is surrounded by angelic beings who constantly worship him singing “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of

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<sup>165</sup> 5:03

<sup>166</sup> see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*, (Harvard University Press, 1936)

Hosts.”<sup>167</sup> Indeed, one of the names of God in the Scriptures is The Lord of Hosts – referring to these enumerable angelic beings that worship God and glorify him. So even in the absence of human praise and worship there is this incomprehensible horde of angelic beings that constantly glorify and worship God.<sup>168</sup>

Those would be reasons for which angels might be created by God: to be servants for him for the sake of human beings who he is bringing to salvation, as manifestors of his presence in the universe, and simply to glorify and worship him.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* You said angels are incorporeal but there are examples in the Bible where – whether they had a body or not – they certainly appeared to have a body. One example I can think of is where they are in Sodom with Lot.<sup>169</sup> That is one of the better examples.

*Answer:* We will discuss this later. You are quite right – there are quite a number of stories (and I will read a couple of them) in Scripture where angels do have bodily form and they are presented and described in bodily terms. Hang onto that and we will get to it.

*Question:* If they are referred to as ministering spirits, how you would differentiate that from God as spirit?

*Answer:* Only in their finitude I would say. It seems to me that angels, as spiritual beings without bodies, are likened to God except that he is infinite in his intelligence, his power, his eternity, and so forth whereas angels are created beings. I’ll emphasize that in a moment. They would not have attributes like necessity and aseity which are essential to God as an uncreated being who exists in all possible worlds. There would be possible worlds where there are no angels at all because these are created beings. But insofar as they are spirits, I would say they are like God.

### Nature of Angels

Let’s go on to talk about the nature of angels and my first point is that they are created beings. Angels are not eternal; they are not metaphysically necessary in their being. They are part of the created order. They are just not part of the spatio-temporal universe; they represent this higher, spiritual sphere of reality that exists in addition to the universe. Colossians 1:16 speaks of this sphere of reality. Paul is talking about how all things are created in Christ and he says, “in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities – all things were created through him and for him.” So in differentiating between the visible and the invisible, the things in heaven and the things on earth, Paul is talking about these two spheres of reality – the spiritual, invisible, heavenly sphere and then the physical, visible, tangible sphere. These thrones and dominions and principalities and authorities that he speaks about would be these spiritual realities; not simply physical rulers or

<sup>167</sup> cf. Isaiah 6:1-4

<sup>168</sup> 9:57

<sup>169</sup> cf. Genesis 19:1-17

governments here on Earth but this host of angelic beings which are the principalities and powers that God has also created.

Secondly, these beings are innumerable. That is to say, there are so many of them that no human being can count them. In Daniel 7:10, we have Daniel's vision of God as the Ancient of Days described and the presentation before him of the Son of Man. In chapter 7, verse 10 he says of God, "A stream of fire issued and came forth from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened." Here Daniel sees this angelic horde that is just beyond description in its multitude – thousands and thousands, ten thousand times ten thousand – more than Daniel can even count.<sup>170</sup> Also in Hebrews 12:22 we have this adjective used to describe the angelic plenitude: "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering." Here in the vision of the heavenly city there is also this host of angels – innumerable angels – in festal array. So there aren't just a few of these things. There are a plenitude that is beyond human comprehension and counting.

Moreover, thirdly, these angelic beings are of different orders and ranks. They are not all the same apparently. Rather, there are some that are more powerful and apparently more authoritative than other weaker or subordinate angelic beings. We see this in Daniel 10:13, a very peculiar passage where Daniel has been praying for a certain request and the answer to his prayer is delayed. Then he receives this angelic visitor who says in Daniel 10:12-14a,

Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, so I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia and came to make you understand what is to befall your people in the latter days.

So in this really interesting story, the angel says to Daniel, "Don't think that your prayer hasn't been heard because of the delay. Your prayer has been heard right from the beginning. But for three weeks I have been held up by doing battle with the prince of the kingdom of Persia." This is clearly not talking about some earthly prince. This is talking about some sort of angelic being connected with the kingdom of Persia. He says fortunately Michael, who is labeled one of the chief princes (which shows again this is not an earthly prince or ruler but we are talking here about an angelic being), came to help him and so this angel was able to escape and he left Michael to fight against the prince of the kingdom of Persia so he is now able to come to Daniel and answer his prayer. This makes it very evident here that we are dealing with a sort of hierarchy of these spiritual beings who are vested with different degrees of power and authority. We also see this in the New Testament in the little book of Jude just prior to the book of Revelation. If you look at the ninth verse of the book of Jude, it refers again to this same angel named Michael. It says, "But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgment upon him, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you.'" This is interesting because here

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<sup>170</sup> 14:53

we have this same person mentioned, Michael, and he is referred to as not simply an angel but as an archangel. So he is higher in rank as we saw in Daniel. He was a powerful spiritual being who could do battle with this prince of the kingdom of Persia – he is an archangel. And yet, in contending with Satan, he did not dare to pronounce a reviling judgment upon Satan. Rather, he said, “The Lord rebuke you” to Satan. Why? Because he was himself subordinate and inferior to this powerful spiritual being called “the devil.” So even Michael wouldn’t presume to rebuke the devil or contend with him in his own authority but appeal to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Lord, in rebuking him. So we are not dealing here simply with a plenitude of finite spiritual beings all on the same plane; rather, they are ranked in hierarchies of power and authority.<sup>171</sup>

Fourth, we have already seen but we will emphasize here that these beings are extremely powerful – they are very powerful. 2 Thessalonians 1:7 – Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonian church – speaks of Christ’s return and he says, “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire.” The adjective “mighty” is the one I want you to focus on. He refers to these angels as powerful, mighty beings who will accompany Christ at the time of his second return. 2 Kings 19:35 gives us some indication of their power. When God delivers the armies of Israel from the army of Assyria we read, “And that night the angel of the LORD went forth, and slew a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.” So in one night this destroying angel attacked the camp of the Assyrians and killed one hundred and eighty five thousand of these men. That gives you some indication of the extraordinary power of these angelic creatures. Finally, Psalm 103:20 says, “Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his word!” So here again the angels are referred to as the mighty ones indicating their extraordinary power.

Next, these are, as I have already said, spirits without material bodies. These are spiritual beings who do not have properly material bodies. Hebrews 1:14, to look at that verse one more time, “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve?” So these are spiritual beings; just as God is spirit, these beings are spirit. They are not corporeal entities. 2 Kings 6:8-18 gives a very dramatic story about the reality of this unseen spiritual realm.

Once when the king of Syria was warring against Israel, he took counsel with his servants, saying, “At such and such a place shall be my camp.” But the man of God sent word to the king of Israel, “Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are going down there.” And the king of Israel sent to the place of which the man of God told him. Thus he used to warn him, so that he saved himself there more than once or twice. And the mind of the king of Syria was greatly troubled because of this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, “Will you not show me who of us is for the king of Israel?”

*[Who is the one that is leaking this information? Who is the spy among our midst?]*

And one of his servants said, “None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedchamber.”

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<sup>171</sup> 20:03

*[So he says the prophet of Israel has this kind of clairvoyant knowledge – he knows what you speak in the privacy of your own rooms and is able to disclose it to the king of Israel. It is not a spy, there is no one leaking information; it is through this divine clairvoyance.]*

And he said, “Go and see where he is, that I may send and seize him.” It was told him, “Behold, he is in Dothan.” So he sent there horses and chariots and a great army; and they came by night, and surrounded the city.

*[So they have come to seize Elisha with the forces of Syria.]*

When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was round about the city. And the servant said, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” He said, “Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

*[The servants probably think “What are you talking about? There is nobody with us, we are here by ourselves!”]<sup>172</sup>*

Then Elisha prayed, and said, “O LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see.” So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. And when the Syrians came down against him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, and said, “Strike this people, I pray thee, with blindness.” So he struck them with blindness in accordance with the prayer of Elisha.

So here there is this invisible horde of the hosts of God, the armies of Yahweh, who are doing battle for Elisha and preserving his life even though to the young man with Elisha, to the Syrian soldiers all around them, it appeared like there was nobody there at all. These were spiritual beings who were present and powerful but they could not be seen because they don’t have bodies and so they don’t reflect photons that could enter someone’s eye and impinge on their retinas so that they could be seen. He had to have a spiritual vision from God to see the hosts of God and the armies of Yahweh that were surrounding them and protecting them. So when you think about that, we simply don’t know what spiritual hosts might be even with us in this room right now protecting us and warding off evil and powers of darkness that would otherwise want to attack and undo us.

Next, these angels, precisely because they are pure spirits and are incorporeal, are not bound by physical limitations. They are not bound by the limits of material, spatial dimensions or obstacles. Acts 12:5-10 gives us a good indication of this. This is the story of Peter’s miraculous release from prison:

So Peter was kept in prison; but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. The very night when Herod was about to bring him out, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison; and behold, an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, “Get up quickly.” And the chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, “Dress yourself and put on your sandals.” And he did so. And he said to him, “Wrap your

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<sup>172</sup> 25:12

mantle around you and follow me.” And he went out and followed him; he did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened to them of its own accord, and they went out and passed on through one street; and immediately the angel left him.

Now here Peter is locked into this prison, chained and guarded. There is no way a physical angel could get in to him. But what happens is the angel just appears in the room. He doesn't pass through the walls; he doesn't go through the doors. He just appears at this point in space. Then, after miraculously freeing Peter, he just disappears. It is very similar to the way Jesus could appear and disappear in his resurrection body. He seemed to have the ability to just step in and out of this space-time manifold as he willed. He could just come into it at this point and then go out of it and come back into it at another point without having to traverse the distance in between. As spiritual beings, these creatures are not bound by these kinds of spatial, physical limitations. So the angel can just appear in the locked cell and when his work is done he can just vanish and disappear again.

These angelic beings are not simply very powerful, however. They are also apparently very wise.<sup>173</sup> 2 Samuel 14:20b – the woman is speaking back to the king and she says to David, “my lord has wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God to know all things that are on the earth.” Here she speaks of the angel of God as incredibly wise as knowing everything that is going on and she flatters David by comparing David's knowledge to the knowledge of God's angel.

Finally, as we have already seen, these spiritual beings are capable of assuming human form. Even though they are immaterial spirits, they can, as it were, materialize and take on a human body or some other sort of corporeal form. An example of this would be Judges 13:8-20. This is the story of Samson. There is an appearance of an angelic being to Manoah and his wife who were to be the parents of Samson. In Judges 13:8-20, we read the following:

Then Manoah entreated the LORD, and said, “O, LORD, I pray thee, let the man of God whom thou didst send come again to us, and teach us what we are to do with the boy that will be born.” And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman as she sat in the field; but Manoah her husband was not with her. And the woman ran in haste and told her husband, “Behold, the man who came to me the other day has appeared to me.” And Manoah arose and went after his wife, and came to the man and said to him, “Are you the man who spoke to this woman?” And he said, “I am.” And Manoah said, “Now when your words come true, what is to be the boy's manner of life, and what is he to do?” And the angel of the LORD said to Manoah, “Of all that I said to the woman let her beware. She may not eat of anything that comes from the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, or eat any unclean thing; all that I commanded her let her observe.” Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, “Pray, let us detain you, and prepare a kid for you.” And the angel of the LORD said to Manoah, “If you detain me, I will not eat of your food; but if you make ready a

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<sup>173</sup> 29:53

burnt offering, then offer it to the LORD.” (For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD.) And Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, “What is your name, so that, when your words come true, we may honor you?” And the angel of the LORD said to him, “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?” So Manoah took the kid with the cereal offering, and offered it upon the rock to the LORD, to him who works wonders. And when the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar while Manoah and his wife looked on; and they fell on their faces to the ground.

Here the angel appears in human form to Manoah and his wife and he looks so ordinary that Manoah doesn’t even realize he is an angel. He looks just like a flesh and blood human being – a stranger who has happened their way and given them this prophecy and he wants to prepare a meal for him and honor him in this way. He has no idea that he is dealing with the angel of the Lord. In fact, look at what it says in Hebrews 13:1-2, “Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” Maybe the author is thinking of this case with Manoah and his wife. He says “Show hospitality; you never know who it might be. This stranger that you are entertaining could well be an angel.” So, although these are spiritual beings, they can assume different forms; sometimes like human beings so that they would look just like an ordinary person. Other times you have them described in the Scriptures, in the book of Revelation for example, as having wings or other sorts of appendages to describe the bodily form that they took.<sup>174</sup> So, although they are spirit beings, they can take on a material form in this universe and then do things in the physical, spatio-temporal world. So, by assuming a human form, they could move objects or destroy things or open doors or things of that sort.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* I may have misheard you when you were giving the definition but I thought you said that angels were spiritual beings with minds. Wouldn’t it be more accurate to say minds and wills?

*Answer:* I think what I said was that they are spiritual beings who are minds. I would not say they *have* a mind – I would say they *are* a mind. By a mind I mean a soul, except they are not a soul of a body they are a soul without a body. They are spirits or minds. So certainly they have will; they have volition as well as self-consciousness.

*Followup:* So you are including will?

*Answer:* Yes, a mind would include the will as one of its faculties.

*Followup:* Is Aquinas’ ranking of the nine orders of angels purely speculative or is there any foundation for it?<sup>175</sup>

<sup>174</sup> 35:10

<sup>175</sup> Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica*, drew on passages from the New Testament, specifically Ephesians 1:21 and Colossians 1:16, in an attempt to develop a hierarchy of angels. As Dr. Craig mentions, the Bible is relatively silent on the subject and thus it can be said that these hierarchies of

*Answer:* I don't know how you could delineate nine specific orders. The most that I see in Scripture would be references to archangels and angels. And Satan is thought to be even higher than the archangels but beyond that, it would seem to me that it would be conjectural – I don't know of any Scriptural grounds for differentiating levels.

*Followup:* When you were talking about Daniel 10:13 – about the angel saying he couldn't come for three weeks because he was battling the king of Persia – would that kind of indicate that in the spiritual world there is time?

*Answer:* Yes. That is a good point. I think it would. It is not just three weeks of Daniel's time, is it? Because there is a delay on the part of this angelic visitor that would indicate, I think quite rightly, that although these beings are not in space, nevertheless, they are temporal because they do things. They act and react. They come in history at different points and so I think it would be quite right to say that they are in time.

*Followup:* That wouldn't be considered a physical limitation?

*Answer:* I don't think it is a physical limitation because I don't think time is physical. I know that in physics there are measures of time that are physical – what clocks say. But my own view would be that time itself is a metaphysical quantity or dimension of reality, not simply a physical one. I say that precisely on the basis of the mental. We could imagine that before creating the physical universe, God created, say, angelic realms that were acting and interacting with each other. In that case there would clearly be time prior to the beginning of the universe. It wouldn't be physical time; it would be a kind of metaphysical time. So given that mental events also occur one after another, it seems to me that time doesn't require space in order to exist.

*Question:* You were mentioning that angels were incorporeal but would they still have a locale, say, in heaven or on earth?

*Answer:* This is a very good question. The question is would they still have some sort of locale? When they materialize they seem to do so at certain locales in this universe. If the angel is here then he seems to have a location and in that sense it is connected very closely with the question "Does your soul have a locale?" Does your mind have a locale? Your mind is not an extended entity – it doesn't have certain dimensions. It's not like it's the shape of your body. And yet, there seems to be a clear sense in which your mind is here and not, say, on the steeps of Patagonia in South America. So this is very difficult to understand and I think we need a good philosopher of mind to help us here. This is not my area of specialization. So it would seem that here we have an example of something that doesn't have spiritual extension – doesn't have size or dimensions – but it could have a locale in the sense that it is there.<sup>176</sup> Now, whether you think angels have a locale in heaven I suppose would depend on whether or not you think that heaven is a kind of place. I don't think it is. It seems to me that there will someday be a new heavens and a new earth where God will recreate the universe and we, in our physical bodies, will inhabit this new creation. But heaven I take to be not a physical kind of place – not like another spatial dimension. It is more like a realm. It is the spiritual realm where God is supreme and there are these other spiritual beings in that realm. But it is not spatial

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Aquinas are highly speculative.

<sup>176</sup> 40:06

because God isn't a corporeal being either, right? God is spirit. So it is not as though God is some place in heaven and there are these angels that are literally around him. It seems to me that what you have here are pictures – these are word pictures – that represent in anthropomorphic terms God's majesty, greatness, supremacy, beauty and so forth. But these are not to be taken literally or you are going to get a Mormon view of God where God is some kind of humanoid entity seated on some big chair someplace with all these physical, weirdo monsters around him full of eyes and things like that. That, I think, is not what the authors intended when they described the throne room of God. These are word pictures or symbolic pictures or they are visions of God. But I don't think either God or the angels are located in some sort of a place. That would require space and it seems to me that we are the ones who are located in space in virtue of our bodies and when angels enter into space then they would be like us in having a locale perhaps but they are not spatial beings apart from their entry into this universe.

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Next time we will look at the work of angels. But I hope this might increase your consciousness and awareness of the unseen realms that surround you, protect you, and guide you and that this can give you confidence and courage to face the obstacles that you do.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Total Running Time: 42:49 (Copyright © 2013 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 21

#### Questions on Angels

We have been talking about angels and their nature. We shared last time that angels are created beings. They are not eternal but they are part of God's creation, though not part of the physical world. They are multitudinous in their number. They apparently exist in different orders and ranks. They are extremely powerful beings. They are spiritual beings – beings without material bodies – though they can materialize and take on human form. They are capable of assuming human form or material form and therefore they are not bound by the same physical limitations that we are. They, as it were, can step in and out of this four-dimensional space-time manifold without traversing the distances in between. They also possess great wisdom.

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#### DISCUSSION

*Question:* I just happened to notice that when you described the nature of angels that you did not mention that they have free will. When we think of Satan being an angel and chose to reject God with his followers, does that not indicate that they are not puppets? They can be messengers and they can be leaders but they still have that ability, as man does, of exercising free will. Do you agree with that?

*Answer:* Yes, I would. I am going to say something more about that when we get to the section on Satan and the demons. We will look at the subject of so-called fallen angels or demonic beings momentarily. But I think you are right in reminding us that these aren't just robots or puppets. These are persons without bodies. Therefore they are endowed with self-consciousness and, I think, freedom of the will. That is a good reminder. We are not dealing here with things but with other persons like ourselves, though persons of a much higher rank and nature than we are.

*Question:* Is it worth mentioning, since there is so much about angels in popular culture, some things that angels are not? For example, they are not dead people turned into something else.

*Answer:* Right, yes. Many people think that when you die you go to heaven and become an angel. You remember *It's a Wonderful Life* with Jimmy Stewart about the angel getting his wings and that sort of thing. There really is a lot of popular mythology and that is important to remember. You do not become an angel when you die and get a harp and wings and live in the clouds. These are these enormously powerful beings that have existed from the moment of the creation of the universe. They don't even all have wings. Sometimes they appear in the Bible with wings but other times, as we saw, they could just appear as a normal human being and you would never suspect that this was an angelic being. So, yes, I think that is worth saying.

*Question:* I wanted to follow up on something you mentioned last time toward the end.

You were talking about Jude 9 where you have the dispute between Michael and Satan.<sup>178</sup> I think I see that a little differently than you. I just want to get a clarification on that. You seem to indicate that Satan is more powerful than Michael but if you look at Revelation 12:7 you see where Michael is the one who kicks Satan out of heaven along with all of his demons. Another thing, too, is you don't see Michael pulling out a sword or anything like that, he just says "The Lord rebuke you" – you have another example of this in Zachariah 3:2 where it says "And the LORD said to Satan, 'The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?'" You see that Satan is being resisted in the same way.<sup>179</sup> I don't know which person the Trinity is involved and I don't think it really matters but my bottom line is I do believe that Michael is actually the equal of Satan and is every bit as powerful or even more so. It is quite obvious that all he has to do is speak a word and Satan is immediately vanquished.

*Answer:* With respect to God, himself, – the members of the Trinity – obviously yes. When you think of Satan or these angelic beings as contingent beings, God could simply annihilate them by refusing to sustain them in existence. But the question I think you raise is whether or not the passages that you mention – Revelation 12:7 and Zachariah 3 – give reason to think that Michael is as powerful as Satan. I am not sure that is true. Let's look at Revelation 12:7. It says,

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world – he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

It is not clear to me that Michael is, himself, more powerful than Satan. It says that he and his cohorts were able to cast out Satan and his cohorts. But it is not obvious to me, at least, that if they were in a one-on-one contest that Satan would not be the more powerful of the two. In the Jude passage, how would you interpret it when it says that he was "contending with the devil" and "he did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgment upon him." That seems to me to suggest a kind of deference on Michael's part. He wouldn't presume to do this but instead said "The Lord rebuke you." That is why I understood it that way. Now the Zachariah passage is very interesting, too, where you have exactly the same thing where it says "The LORD rebuke you." That is in Zachariah 3:2. That is interesting because it has the angel of the Lord there and this could even be the passage that Jude is thinking of, I think. Oh, no, because he says he is disputing about the body of Moses, I guess. But it is very similar where you would have an angel of the Lord rebuking Satan in the name of the Lord – saying "The LORD rebuke you." I don't know; to me, it seems there is a kind of deferential behavior that Michael shows.

*Followup:* Since Jude, though, is citing an apocryphal work, do we know that that actually happened or is that simply being used as a way to describe how Satan can be

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<sup>178</sup> "But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgment upon him, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you'" (Jude 9).

<sup>179</sup> 5:01

resisted or should be resisted?

*Answer:* OK. I give you that. That is a very good point. What you are pointing out here is when you have examples of something in apocryphal literature cited by these New Testament documents, we have to be very careful in thinking that the New Testament document is committing us to the truth or the historicity of these events rather than just using them as illustrations. For example, I might say to you, “Just as his man Friday was a loyal servant to Robinson Crusoe, so John Herring has loyally served Bryant Wright in preparing for the Southern Baptist Convention.” No one would think that I am committing myself to the historicity of Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday, right? It is just an illustration. So, in that sense, I think you are making a very good point here that we can’t just automatically assume that, as you put it, this really happened and that this really is an event just because Jude refers to it. But, again, having said that, look at the context. He is talking about these unbelievers and he says they defile the flesh, they reject authority and they revile the glorious ones and then he uses Michael as a contrast to this to say Michael was deferential, I think, to Satan and didn’t reject authority, didn’t revile him, but said “The Lord rebuke you.” It does seem to say that in the mind of Jude that Satan has some sort of upper position above Michael here. But I think the point you are raising is good and worth reflecting on.<sup>180</sup>

*Question:* I was wondering, in the Jude passage, when it is talking about Michael would not presume to bring a judgment upon Satan, maybe it is not so much presuming an authority over Satan as it is God’s area and he is not presuming to take the part of God instead of presuming to have authority over Satan.

*Answer:* What about the context, though – the context about rejecting authority and reviling the glorious ones and not being presumptuous. Don’t all of those seem to suggest that Michael wasn’t being uppity; he wasn’t trying to do something that would be inappropriate. All of those things in the context, to me, seem to suggest this kind of deferential behavior. Then look at verse 10, too. He says, “These men, though, revile what they do not understand.” Whereas Michael, I think, is the contrast – he wouldn’t presume to revile Satan on his own. So I guess I am not persuaded that this isn’t an indication that Michael was behaving deferentially toward Satan.

*Question:* It is not a question of power but who is in a position of authority. It is like you honor our president even if you don’t agree with him politically; you honor the office. But an interesting question is if the princes of this world were cast out then who rules the power there now?

*Answer:* Satan is called the Prince of Demons in Scripture, right? So, this suggests he is the highest being, the highest authority, and that would also give reason to think that Michael is being deferential here because Satan as the Prince of Demons is the highest of these.

*Followup:* I agree he had that position and why Michael was honoring him. I was asking another question to ponder and that is, Christ said now the prince of this world is cast out so now who rules the power of the air now?

*Answer:* Don’t you think it is still Satan? He has been cast down but as we will see he

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<sup>180</sup> 10:10

still has power over this world.

*Followup:* But somebody is in that office.

*Answer:* Yes.

*Question:* There is a passage, 2 Peter 2:10-11, that warns against slandering celestial beings. “Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord.” So, it may be (and I don’t necessarily disagree with you about being deferential) that since they were both celestial beings, there may be a kind of code of honor among these celestial beings that it’s the Lord’s providence or the Lord’s role to judge them, even evil ones like Satan.

*Answer:* Yeah, maybe so. Although you do have these ranks like “archangel” compared to an ordinary angel. And notice again, this passage is very similar to the Jude passage – the people that he is rebuking in verse 10 are those who despise authority. They despise authority and they are not afraid to revile these glorious beings where angels who are “greater in might and power” than these men do not pronounce these kind of reviling judgments the way these foolish people do. They respect authority even when that authority is evil.

*Followup:* It may be some sort of unwritten law in heaven that these celestial beings do not slander each other but rely on the Lord to do it and that might be what he is talking about rather than deference.

*Answer:* That could be but there is this authority element here that is just inescapable in these passages. There is a deference, a respect, being given to those who are in authority that we shouldn’t miss out on, I think.

*Question:* What do you think the very general nature of the soul or the mind of an angel is? Can it take a physical form? Do they exist at all outside the space-time continuum, do they enter this world at some certain time at creation? Are they disembodied minds like we are?<sup>181</sup>

*Answer:* “Unembodied minds” is the way I would put it. It is not that they are disembodied because they never were originally bodied. We, when we die, become disembodied souls for a time until the resurrection at the end of the age. I take it that angels are just like that except that they are unembodied rather than disembodied. In the same way that our soul can be conjoined to a human body, so an angelic mind or, if you will, soul could be conjoined to a body as well. Sometimes, they do appear in bodily form. But the body is not natural to them in the way that it is to us. They are naturally unembodied spiritual beings which don’t live in this universe, though they can come into it.

*Followup:* So would they inhabit an existing body? Is one created for them? Is it completely physical?

*Answer:* It is not entirely clear. Sometimes in the Scripture, I think, what you would have is a mere vision of an angel where he wouldn’t actually be physically present. But other

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<sup>181</sup> 15:18

times it seems pretty clear that the angel is actually physically there. He could move objects and things. I remember when studying the resurrection appearances of Jesus, I found that in early Rabbinic Judaism, they actually would differentiate between an angelic vision and an angelic appearance on the basis of whether or not, for example, the food that was seen to be consumed by the angel was really gone or not after the experience was over. If it was still there then it was just a vision but if the food was gone, if it was eaten, then it was an actual bodily appearance. So, I don't know how God would make the bodies for these angels. Obviously, Scripture doesn't speculate on that. Does he create them *ex nihilo*, does he assemble material here in the room, atoms, and make a physical body? I think we have no idea at all how it is done. But it would be to, in some way, incorporate or incarnate this essentially spiritual being in a physical form.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Total Running Time: 18:09 (Copyright © 2013 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 22

#### Work of Angels

Last time we completed our discussion about the nature of angels. And I think our discussion last time highlights an important hermeneutical point – namely, it reminds us that in interpreting various biblical passages, context is all important. It is not enough just to read your favorite interpretation into a passage. You need to look at the context for clues as to how to interpret it. So, for example, in the passage about Michael disputing with Satan<sup>183</sup>, I think there are quite a number of clues there that indicate that what we have here are a different hierarchy of ranks. Jude and 2 Peter<sup>184</sup> are rebuking people who despise authority and who are not afraid to revile the glorious ones in contrast to the angel Michael who did not presume (again, notice that word) to give a reviling judgment to Satan. So, look to the context as you try to interpret a passage. That will be the key.

#### Work of Angels

Let's talk a little bit about the work of angels.

*First of all, angels seem to guide the destiny of nations.* In the book of Daniel, it appears that there are angels which are peculiarly linked to various nations and influence those nations. In Daniel 10:13-20, this is the angel speaking to Daniel,

“The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, so I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia and came to make you understand what is to befall your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come.” When he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and was dumb. And behold, one in the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke. I said to him who stood before me, “O my lord, by reason of the vision pains have come upon me, and I retain no strength. How can my lord's servant talk with my lord? For now no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me.” Again one having the appearance of a man touched me and strengthened me. And he said, “O man greatly beloved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage.” And when he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, “Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me.” Then he said, “Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I am through with him, lo, the prince of Greece will come.”

So here you have angelic beings mentioned in connection with three nations. You have the prince of Persia, you have the angel associated with Israel, and then you have this prince of Greece who is doing battle with the angel. So it would seem that in these unseen realms these angels, or angelic beings, have connections with the various nations and

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<sup>183</sup> Dr. Craig is referring to Jude 9

<sup>184</sup> Dr. Craig is referring to 2 Peter 2:10-12

actually do battle with each other.

*Secondly, the angels minister to the people of God.* Hebrews 1:14, which we've read before, the author asks, "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?" That is us – that is the church. Angels are ministering spirits which are meant to serve the people of God. 1 Kings 19:5-8 gives an illustration.<sup>185</sup> This is Elijah's fleeing. It says,

And he lay down and slept under a broom tree; and behold, an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise and eat." And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the LORD came again a second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise and eat, else the journey will be too great for you." And he arose, and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

Here the angel ministers to Elijah in the very practical way of providing him with food and drink. The same thing happened in the life of Jesus. Matthew 4:11. This incident comes upon the end of the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness where he has fasted for forty days and forty nights. In Matthew 4:11, it says, "The devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him." The word "ministered" there is typically used as "to serve drink and food." It is what a servant does at tables. So, in the same way that Elijah was ministered to by the angel, so Jesus, having fasted for forty days and forty nights and been tempted by the devil, is ministered to by angels. Then in Luke 22:43, we have the story of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane in which an angel ministers to him. This may not be in your text; it may be in the footnotes to your text because this appears in certain ancient manuscript traditions which are very likely authentic and actually should be part of the Gospel of Luke. It says in Luke 22:43, "And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." There you have again the angel ministering to Jesus in the time of his greatest need in the Garden as he was facing the cross. Psalm 91:9-12 gives a general promise:

Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your habitation, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.

So here the angels are protecting the people of God, perhaps from spiritual warfare from these demonic beings that would seek to do us harm.

*Thirdly, the angels execute God's justice.* We see an illustration of this in 2 Kings 19:35, "And that night the angel of the LORD went forth, and slew a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies." Here God metes out his destruction upon these enemies of Israel, not immediately, but through the process of this destroying angel. In the New Testament, you have an example in Acts 12:23. This is the death of Herod. Acts 12:21-23 says,

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<sup>185</sup> 5:00

On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and made an oration to them. And the people shouted, "The voice of a god, and not of man!" Immediately an angel of the Lord smote him, because he did not give God the glory; and he was eaten by worms and died.

So that would be another example of God's justice being meted out upon the enemies of God's people.<sup>186</sup> 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8 speak of the final judgment which will be involving angels. Paul is speaking here of the righteous judgment of God and he says God will "grant rest with us to you who are afflicted, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." Here the angels will be involved in the second coming of Christ and his meting out judgment upon those who do not believe the Gospel and reject God. Finally, Revelation 16:1 says, "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, 'Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.'" Then it describes how the first angel, the second angel, and the third angel each went out and poured out these bowls of God's wrath which are symbolic of God's judgment upon the earth. So the angels are the instruments of God's justice and judgment upon unbelief.

I have already alluded to the fourth point but we will separate it here. That is that *angels will gather and accompany Christians at the second coming of Christ*. The angels will gather living Christians and also accompany those Christians who are deceased and in the Lord at the time of Christ's return. Look, for example, at Matthew 24:29-31:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Here the angels at the return of Christ go out and gather the living Christians at the time of Christ's return into the new kingdom. Turn over to Matthew 25:31 which says, "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne." So that, again, describes the angels who will accompany Christ at the time of his return. 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 is Paul's disquisition on this. Paul says,

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord.

Notice here it is not simply that the angels gather the elect who are living at the time of

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<sup>186</sup> 10:22

Christ but he says those who have already died in Christ – who have fallen asleep – they will precede us in being gathered into the kingdom with Christ.<sup>187</sup> The Lord will come with the archangel's call and with the dead in Christ and then those who are alive shall be transformed and ushered into the kingdom. Similarly, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8, just to read this verse again, he says that God will “grant rest with us to you who are afflicted, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” So that is just indication again of the involvement of angels at the time of the second coming of Christ and in this case meting out God's justice upon unbelief.

That is some of the work of angels. What we will do next time is look more closely at two angels mentioned by name in both the Old and the New Testaments – namely, Gabriel and Michael. Then we will begin to look at this figure of Satan and try to understand him and the demons in relation to these angelic beings.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> 15:26

<sup>188</sup> Total Running Time: 16:57 (Copyright © 2013 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 23

#### **Satan and the Demons**

We have been talking about the Doctrine of Angels and we are about to bring this section of the lesson to an end. We want to look in our final section at two angels that are specifically named in Scripture – namely, Michael and Gabriel. Out of all of the myriads of angelic hosts that exist, only these two are actually named – Michael and Gabriel. They are named several times in Scripture, both in the Old Testament and again in the New Testament.

Let's take a look first at the angel Michael who is mentioned first in the book of Daniel – Daniel 10:13, 21. In Daniel 10:13, Daniel receives this revelation from the angel that comes to him and he says, "The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, so I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia." Here this angel was contending with this apparently evil spirit associated with Persia and Michael is identified as one of the chief of these angels – one of the chief of the princes – who is extremely powerful and therefore able to do battle with the prince of Persia. Then in Daniel 10:21, "But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince." There Michael is mentioned for a second time as the prince who is associated with Daniel and presumably his people, the people of Israel. In Daniel 12:1-2, Michael reappears:

At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time; but at that time your people shall be delivered, every one whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

There it speaks again of Michael associated with the kingdom of Israel and the final resurrection of the dead. So Michael is already known in the Old Testament as one of the chief of the angelic beings and he is mentioned again, as we've read in previous lessons, in Jude 9 in the New Testament. It says, "But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgment upon him, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you.'" Remember in the book of Daniel he is referred to as one of the chief princes of the angels and here he is referred to as an archangel indicating his higher rank and he is contending with Satan himself in the ninth verse of Jude. Those are the passages that refer specifically to Michael in the Bible.

The other angel that is mentioned specifically is the angel named Gabriel. He also appears in the book of Daniel. Daniel 8:16-17:

And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision." So he came near where I stood; and when he came, I was frightened and fell upon my face. But he said to me, "Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end."

So here he has an angelic vision of this person that is identified as Gabriel.<sup>189</sup> This angel also appears again in the next chapter in Daniel 9:20-22 where he says,

While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God; while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. He came and he said to me, “O Daniel, I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding.”

Here, Gabriel appears to him in some sort of a human form although “in flight” indicating that we are talking about an angelic being.

This same angel named Gabriel pops up again in the New Testament in the Gospel of Luke in the story of the Enunciation, both announcing the birth of John the Baptist and then also of Jesus himself in his appearance to Mary. Luke 1:19 is the first of these. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, has this vision and he said to the angel in verse 18, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” How can we have a child he asks? Then in Luke 1:19-20:

And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.”

Here again we see, as in the case of Michael, the very exalted stature of this angel. Gabriel is described here as one who stands in the very presence of God. So evidently both Michael, an archangel and one of the chief princes, and Gabriel are angels who are of enormous stature and rank before God.

Then in Luke 1:26-27, it says in the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy with John the Baptist, “the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.” Then you have the story of the Enunciation of the birth of Christ.

So I think it is quite remarkable that we have these two angels both mentioned in the book of Daniel carrying out various functions and then they reappear in the New Testament. These are the only references to them, or to any other angel, by name. But at least the identity of these two extremely powerful, exalted angels is made known to us in the Scripture.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* In Revelation 12:7, I think you referenced that before, I like that because it kind of speaks to that Jude passage.

*Answer:* You are correct – I left out one of the verses that refer to Michael. Revelation 12:7-8 says, “Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the

<sup>189</sup> 5:28

dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.” So, you are right, I forgot to mention that passage that also refers to the archangel Michael, in this case, as a warrior warring against Satan and Satan being cast out of heaven.<sup>190</sup>

*Followup:* When we look back at Jude and 2 Peter<sup>191</sup>, Michael backs off from reviling and leaves that to the Lord, but here we see he is in total control and it’s like Satan gets his comeuppance from Michael!

*Answer:* Right, here Satan is finally cast down and thrown down from heaven down to Earth.

*Question:* Until that happens, Satan is the prince of the power of the air. God gave him permission to touch Job and the archangels didn’t get involved with that. Then when he comes back in Revelation, he has Jesus doing this as well. They have all this empowerment, but Satan is very strong and he is not to be underestimated. He, right now, is the prince of the power of the air.

*Answer:* Yes, we will say more about that in just a moment when we begin to look at Satan and the demons. But in the very passage that we were just talking about in Revelation 12:7 – yes, they are cast down out of heaven but where are they cast? Down to the Earth where they wreak havoc and cause all sorts of misery and pain and suffering as we will see!

*Question:* I want to back up a little bit to the end of the last lecture where we were talking about the works of angels. I noticed that I didn’t see you make any mention of one of the works that they did and that was they were givers of the law in the Old Testament. There are four references that I found in the Bible to that: Galatians 3:19, Deuteronomy 33:2, Acts 7:53 and Hebrews 2:2.

*Answer:* Yes, let’s look at a couple of those. In Acts 7:53, with respect to the angels being involved in the giving of the law, Stephen says to the Jews who were about the stone him, “You who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.” So angelic beings were involved in giving the law to Moses on Sinai. Then Hebrews 2:2-3 also mentions this, “For if the message declared by angels was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” So you are right in pointing out that another of the works attributed to angels in the Scripture is the giving of the Old Testament law.

*Question:* I was thinking that this whole discussion of whether Satan or Michael has more power is almost a moot point. Either one is going to have as much power as God allots to them. So if Michael retreated from Satan and allowed God to take over is because God said this is how much power Michael has. If Michael defeats Satan at the end of time it is because God is behind him and giving him the power to do it. So saying which one has more absolute power is almost a non-question.

*Answer:* Well, I think that it isn’t a matter of these beings being just channels of God’s power. It is not as though they don’t have any intrinsic powers themselves. But just as

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<sup>190</sup> 10:00

<sup>191</sup> This is referring to Jude 9 and 2 Peter 2:10-12.

one person, say who is a weightlifter, has more inherent strength than somebody else who isn't, it seems to me that these angels have rank as we've seen and that they don't pull rank on each other. They recognize that some have a higher rank and authority than each other. But in the end, ultimately Satan is defeated. We'll see when we come to Satan, which we are going to do now, that he is called the prince of the demons. He is the chief of these evil, angelic beings. So I think there is grounds for saying what I said before that Satan had a higher rank than Michael even as great as Michael was. Michael wouldn't revile someone in authority like these foolish people to whom 2 Peter and Jude were written who were reviling these glorious beings, these angelic beings. Michael wouldn't presume to do that. But in the end, the angelic forces led by Michael and others eventually do win out.<sup>192</sup>

*Question:* I think it is interesting to see what they are fighting for. What they are fighting for is the worth defined by God. Angels are trying to uphold the worth that God defines even including authority and Satan in his rebellion is trying to destroy the worth so he is trying to bring people into an artificial system that is against everything that God established of higher worth. That is the thing that they are fighting for.

*Answer:* Yes, I think that is right. The whole satanic *modus operandi* is anti-authoritarian in that it is destructive; it is trying to tear down the kingdom of God and God's reign and rule in the hearts of people and over his creation. It is a part of creation in rebellion against God.

## Satan and the Demons

We have been talking around this over and over again – when you talk about angels you can't help but to start talking about demons and Satan as well. So let's now move to that section of the lesson and to that part of the outline dealing with Satan and the demons. We have been talking about angels but not all angels are good. You also have this spiritual being referred to as Satan and these demonic hordes that serve his destructive purposes. So let's talk first about the names of this person or beings.

### Names of Satan

The principal name given to this spiritual force that opposes God is *Satan*. This is a transliteration of a word both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Both in Hebrew and in Greek you have this name Satan which is applied to this spiritual being that is opposing God. The word "Satan" is the word for "adversary." So sometimes you will see in the Bible the word translated with the definite article "the Satan" meaning "the Adversary" who is opposed to God. So, for example, look at 1 Peter 5:8 in the New Testament for an illustration of this usage. "Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour." There the devil, or Satan, is described as someone who is opposing God and his work.

The word for "devil" in the Greek is *diabolos*. Sometimes Satan is given another name in the Scripture – *Beelzebub* or variants thereof like *Beelzebul*. For example, Matthew 10:25 says, "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they

<sup>192</sup> 15:10

malign those of his household.” And this word Beelzebul (or Beelzebub) comes from a name for the Philistine God “Baal.” Baal-Zebub meant “the Lord Prince.” So the people of Israel regarded the Philistines as worshipping, not the same God that they did, but they were in effect worshipping Satan.<sup>193</sup> So much for religious pluralism! Similarly, just as in the New Testament, Paul thought of the Greco-Roman religions, not as worshipping God, but he said what these pagans worship are in fact demons rather than God. So these Old Testament believers and people at the time of Christ thought that the Philistine God, which was worshipped by these Canaanite people, was in fact Satan. So one of the names for Satan is also Beelzebub or Beelzebul. Here is an example of that – Matthew 12:24, “But when the Pharisees heard it they said, ‘It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.’” So they thought that Jesus was acting in casting out demons under the authority of Beelzebul, whom they identify as the prince of demons. So the chief authority over this realm of demons was thought to be this figure Satan – the Adversary, the devil, *diabolos* or Beelzebul.

He is called *a liar* and *the devil* in John 8:44. Jesus says,

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

So here he is referred to as a liar and as the devil. Revelation 20:2-3a gives a whole series of titles to Satan: “And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more.” Here he is referred to as the dragon, that ancient serpent (perhaps a reference back to the serpent in the Garden of Eden deceiving Adam and Eve), the devil and Satan; so quite a number of names are mentioned here in Revelation 20:2.

In Ephesians 2:2, he is called *the prince of the power of the air*. Ephesians 2:1b-2 says, “When you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.” So here you have him referred to as a prince much like the angels are sometimes referred to as princes.

He is called *the ruler of this world* in John 14:30-31; Jesus says, “I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.” Here Satan is described by Jesus as the ruler of this world, which is a very sobering title for Satan. We often think of God as the ruler of this world, but at least in a sort of immediate sense it is really Satan who is the ruler of this world and who has the authority over this world in which we live.

He is called *the god of this world* in 2 Corinthians 4:4. Speaking of unbelievers, Paul says, “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God.” Here Satan is called the god of this world. So we have seen he is called the ruler of

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<sup>193</sup> 19:57

this world; here he is actually referred to as the *god* of this world who blinds the minds of unbelievers to prevent them from receiving the Gospel of Christ.<sup>194</sup>

In 1 Thessalonians 3:5, he is called *the tempter*. Paul says, “For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent that I might know your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labor would be in vain.” So Satan is also one who tempts Christians with a view toward destroying them and bringing about their lapse.

So I think you can see that this adversary, or Satan, is referred to in Scripture by quite a number of names. He is called Beelzebub, the devil, the liar, the prince of the power of the air, the ruler of this world, the god of this world, your adversary, the dragon, the ancient serpent, Satan and the tempter. All of these go to describe the person that is this spiritual being that is bent upon the destruction of God’s work in his kingdom in this world.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* The devil – is that also translated “slanderer?”

*Answer:* Not to my knowledge. I don’t think *diabolos* means “slanderer.”<sup>195</sup>

*Followup:* And Beelzebub – is that “Lord of the Flies?”

*Answer:* Yeah, this is interesting. Beelzebub, as I said, comes from this word for Baal – Baal-Zebub meaning “Lord Prince.” But in 2 Kings 1:2, it gives a variant of the word Beelzebub as Beelzebul, which means “Lord of the Flies.”<sup>196</sup> It is probably an attempt to ridicule Baal-Zebub – he is not the “Lord Prince,” he is just the “Lord of the Flies” and so not really a significant person at all. So probably that is an attempt by the writer to ridicule this foreign deity. And of course, William Golding named his incredible novel *The Lord of the Flies* after this title which describes so poignantly the inherent sinfulness and wickedness of man where even these little English schoolchildren marooned on that island degenerate into savagery and chaos in the absence of the accoutrements of civilization which restrain human nature. It is a very, very powerful novel and film based upon this title, “The Lord of the Flies.”

*Question:* What about Lucifer?

*Answer:* Yes, we will say something about Lucifer in a moment. That comes from one of these passages in the Old Testament, Ezekiel I believe.<sup>197</sup> Some people think this applies to Satan. However, I am skeptical about that. We will look at that in a minute.

<sup>194</sup> 25:06

<sup>195</sup> Strong’s Concordance #1228 *diabolos* is “(adj. used often as a noun), slanderous; with the article: the Slanderer (par excellence), the Devil.” See <http://concordances.org/greek/1228.htm> and <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G1228>

<sup>196</sup> See Manfred Lurker, *The Routledge Dictionary of Gods and Goddesses, Devils and Demons* (London: Routledge, 2004) p. 31 where it says “Rabbinical texts interpreted the name [Baal-zebub] as meaning ‘Lord of the dunghill’; the word *zabal* = to dung, is used in rabbinical literature as a synonym for idolatry.” Thus, it is thought *zabal* could be the origin of this alternate name “Beelzebul” that Dr. Craig mentions. Since flies are normally found on dunghills, hence “Lord of the Flies.”

<sup>197</sup> cf. Ezekiel 28

*Question:* In 1 John 5:19, it says the whole world is in the sway of the wicked one – so he is called the wicked one. But then 1 John 3:8, it says the reason Jesus came was to defeat the works of the devil. So that gives the whole answer of why Christ came – it was to defeat his works.

*Answer:* I just want to underline the verse you mention – 1 John 5:19 where he says, “We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one.” This goes right along with what Paul had said about being the god of this world and what Jesus said about Satan being the ruler of this world. 1 John says the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. So we live in enemy territory in effect – we are behind enemy lines being here in this world.

*Question:* The question on slanderer – the verse is 2 Timothy 3:2; it uses the word “slanderous.” So it translates the Greek for “the devil” to “slanderer.”<sup>198</sup>

*Answer:* Are you sure? I think a previous questioner was quite right that Satan is referred to as the Slanderer in Scripture but I didn’t think the word is *diabolos*. I’ll have to check, but I thought it was a different word that was translated Slanderer.<sup>199</sup>

*Question:* Also, the title of Satan is Accuser. In Revelation 12:10, it relates back to Zechariah 3:1. It doesn’t necessarily call him that there but Zechariah says, “Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.” So it is not necessarily a title but it explains what he is doing.

*Answer:* Would you want to read Revelation 12:10 as well?

*Followup:* “And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.’”

*Answer:* And that is right after the passage about Michael and the angels casting Satan out of heaven. So the accuser of the brethren could be listed as another one of the titles of Satan.

*Question:* In 1 Chronicles 21:1 – is that Satan this Satan? Is it the same Satan who stood against Israel and then incited David to number Israel? In another book, it says God incited David to take a census and that seems strange. What is your opinion?

*Answer:* Let’s look at 1 Chronicles 21:1 where it says, “The Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to number Israel.” Here it would suggest that it is Satan. This is one of the few references in the Old Testament to Satan. There are a couple of others, but this is one of the few. From what I read in preparation for this lesson, this was taken to be a genuine reference to this spiritual adversary or spiritual being that has moved David to conduct this census. The difficulty is in the parallel passage, it says that God moved David to conduct the census.

*Followup:* That is in 2 Samuel 24:1 where it says, “Again the anger of the LORD was

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<sup>198</sup> 29:59

<sup>199</sup> The verse is actually 2 Timothy 3:3, which says, “heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good.” The word “slanderous” was translated from a form of the word *diabolos*; specifically, the word in the Greek is *diaboloi* (διάβολοι).

kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, ‘Go, number Israel and Judah.’” Is “he” God or is that implying Satan?

*Answer:* This is what one would call a biblical difficulty – we appear to have a contradiction! My own view of this would be to take a middle knowledge perspective. There is a difference if God has middle knowledge between strong actualization of a state of affairs and weak actualization of a state of affairs. God would strongly actualize a state of affairs if he brings it about through a direct exercise of his causal power. For example, he parted the Red Sea. He raised Jesus from the dead. These would be an example of God’s strongly actualizing a state of affairs. But weak actualization can occur by God creating a free agent in circumstances in which he knew that agent would freely do something. Therefore, God is the one who, in one sense, ultimately brings it about but he does it through the free agency of some created being. He knew how that person would freely act in that circumstance. I think this would be the case, for example, with Pharaoh hardening his heart where Scripture says that God hardened his heart<sup>200</sup> but other Scripture says Pharaoh hardened his heart.<sup>201</sup> I think we can understand that by saying that God knew that Pharaoh would freely harden his heart if confronted with these ten plagues upon Egypt. Another prime example would be the suicide of King Saul.<sup>202</sup> In the version that is described in both Samuel and Chronicles, Saul sees the Philistines are about to take him and so rather than be taken by the enemy, he falls on his sword and commits suicide.<sup>203</sup> But in the passage in Chronicles, the author comments “thus, the LORD slew Saul and delivered the kingdom to David.”<sup>204</sup> Now, Saul’s suicide was his own free act. He fell on the sword himself. But in the mind of the Chronicler, he could see this as the means by which God brought about the deliverance of the kingdom to David. I think in exactly the same way we could say that God knew what Satan would freely do in these circumstances – he would incite David to conduct this census and thus the census is brought about. So, in an ultimate sense, God is the one that is sovereign – he is in control – but he is working through free agents to weakly actualize certain states of affairs without bringing them about directly. So I think if we have this kind of middle knowledge perspective, it can help to understand passages like this.

*Question:* This is analogous to Job. God allowed certain things to happen to Job and still allows today. There are many things that God doesn’t bring an immediately halt to, although he could, in accomplishing his purposes. But that is not an endorsement of that. It was in David’s heart and arrogance to want to number Israel and Satan took advantage of that and God allowed it.

*Answer:* Yes, I think that is right. And that is, by the way, one of the other passages in the Old Testament where Satan appears – in the trials of Job where God gives him reign to torment Job to a certain degree but then no farther.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> “But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them; as the LORD had spoken to Moses” (Exodus 9:12).

<sup>201</sup> “But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart, and would not listen to them; as the LORD had said” (Exodus 8:15).

<sup>202</sup> 35:01

<sup>203</sup> 1 Samuel 31:3-4; 1 Chronicles 10:3-5

<sup>204</sup> 1 Chronicles 10:13-14

<sup>205</sup> Job 1:6-12; Job 2:1-7

*[Q&A: a comment about how God leaves people alone to make their own choices but still sustains the world in being.]*

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Clearly, Satan is presented as this tremendous adversary of the work and kingdom of God with whom we have to contend. This raises the question as to the origin of this being. Since God is not evil and does not create evil, how is it that there could be such a creature as this? How could there be such a being as Satan? When God created in Genesis 1, it says he looked at the creation and saw that it was very good; everything was good. So how do you explain the origin of someone like Satan and these demons?

One thing that is very clear that we need to insist upon is that Scripture does not teach a sort of dualism. It does not teach that there is God and anti-God who is equally opposed to God; that there is light and there is darkness and these are equally opposed to each other. The dualistic view is completely foreign to both Judaism and Christianity which think of God as the source of all reality outside of himself. Anything that exists other than God is due to God's creation. There isn't any reality that exists apart from God that is uncreated. So dualism is simply out of the question.<sup>206</sup> To give a Scripture on this, look at Colossians 1:15-16. Speaking of Christ, it says, "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth." And now he begins to mention specifically some of these realms, "visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities – all things were created through him and for him." Now Paul will talk elsewhere about these principalities and powers – these authorities – in reference to these demonic realms that exist as well as the angelic realms. He is quite clear in Colossians that these things do not exist independently of Christ; they are all created through him. So dualism is simply out of the question. If there is such a being, such a person, as Satan and his demons then these are part of the created order. They are part of creation. They were made by God. That is the clear implication. But then we have this very difficult question – how could God create something which seems to be so intrinsically evil and opposed to God. That will be the question that we will explore next time.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> 39:43

<sup>207</sup> Total Running Time: 41:37 (Copyright © 2013 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 24

#### Origin of Satan and Nature of Demons

We have been talking about angels and demons and last time we began by looking at various names given to the chief adversary of God in the demonic world: Satan or the Devil. We saw that the name Satan, which is used in both the Old and New Testaments, means adversary. Also, the word *diabolos*, or devil, is used synonymously in the New Testament. Someone asked if this couldn't also mean slanderer and that is correct; I found that that is another way to translate *diabolos*. That gives us some clue or indication of the character of this person, the adversary, the slanderer. We saw various other names that are applied to this evil, spiritual person who is opposed to God and his work.

#### Origin of Satan

We come, then, to the question of the origin of Satan or the Devil. I emphasized last week that Christianity and Judaism are not dualistic in their worldview. There is not a sort of dualism between an ultimate evil principal and an ultimate good principal – Satan and God. Rather, we saw from Colossians 1:15-16 that all of these various principalities and powers, these spiritual realms, are created by God. So he is the source of their reality.

They are contingent beings. They are part of the created world. They are not co-equal and co-eternal with God. Just to underline the point, Isaiah 44:24 says, “Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: ‘I am the LORD, who made all things, who stretched out the heavens alone, who spread out the earth – Who was with me?’”

The question is purely rhetorical; the answer is, of course, no one. “I, the LORD, alone, am the one who made all things, including Satan and the demons.” That raises, then, this very puzzling question – how is it that there could be this realm of evil, spiritual creatures made by God? God is not the source of evil. He creates good so how is it that there exists these evil minions? Unfortunately, this is not an issue which is addressed explicitly in the Bible. We have to simply put together various clues and intimations and try to draw some conclusion about this. Some people have said that Isaiah 14:12-17 are a reference to the origin of Satan. Let's read that together; here Isaiah says,

How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.’ But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit. Those who see you will stare at you, and ponder over you: ‘Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world like a desert and overthrew its cities, who did not let his prisoners go home?’

Some have said that this language could not be used to describe any human person – this is a description of Satan as he was an angelic being who, through pride and ambition,

opposed himself to God and so fell away.<sup>208</sup> While I think that that suggestion is probably very close to the truth – that indeed this probably is something by way of the origin of Satan – I don't think that is what this passage is about. I think that is reading into this passage. As you can see from the beginning of this chapter, this is a taunt against the king of Babylon. It is directed against the king of Babylon. That is why in verses 16 and thereafter it says, "Is this the man . . . who shook kingdoms, who . . . overthrew its cities, who did not let his prisoners go home?" It is clearly talking about an earthly king. It is using a hyperbolic language to describe his vaunting ambition and pride where he sets himself against God. So while I do think that the suggestion here about the origin of Satan might be correct, I am very skeptical that that is what this passage is about.

Similarly, Ezekiel 28 has a similar sort of condemnation. Ezekiel 28:12-19 says,

. . . You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, carnelian, topaz, and jasper, chrysolite, beryl, and onyx, sapphire, carbuncle, and emerald; and wrought in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. With an anointed guardian cherub I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.

There, again, the suggestion is that this is a description of Satan and how he was originally created good but then fell away and became evil. But the context, once again, doesn't support this. If you look at verse 11, it says, "Moreover the word of the LORD came to me: 'Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord GOD'" and then the passage follows. This is a lamentation over the city of Tyre, an earthly city. So, similarly, in verse 16 it goes on to say, "In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and the guardian cherub drove you out from the midst of the stones of fire." It goes on to condemn the other things this king did wrong. So here it is condemning him for unfair trade practices in the commerce that was conducted by the king of Tyre, which wouldn't be applicable to Satan. So while, again, the suggestion may be theologically correct, I think it is eisegesis. It is not reading out of the passage this interpretation; it is reading it into it. It finds these passages in Isaiah and Ezekiel and in effect says these would be very nicely interpreted if we interpret them in terms of Satan and the devil's fall. But there is nothing in the context to suggest that that is in fact the case.

What other indications in Scripture would there be about the origin of Satan from which we might make some intelligent conjectures? Look at the book of Job chapter 1 for example. This is one of the places in the Old Testament where Satan is mentioned. Job 1:6 says, "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them." Then it goes on to tell the rest of the story. Here it seems to be talking about these angelic beings who are presenting themselves before God. This is in heaven evidently because when God asks Satan "Where have you come from?" he says "I've come from going to and fro upon the earth." This is not

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<sup>208</sup> 4:53

something that takes place on the earth, this is in the heavenly throne room and here Satan seems to be included among the Sons of God who are there. So he seems to be a sort of angelic being who has now set himself against God in opposition to God.<sup>209</sup>

Turn over to the New Testament to Luke 10:17-18. This is when the disciples go out on their mission of preaching the Gospel that Jesus has sent them on. And when they return, verse 17 says, “The seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!’ And he said to them, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.’” Is he talking here about an angelic fall that he saw perhaps in a pre-creation state? That he saw Satan fall from heaven? Or is he merely talking here about the way in which the demons were cast out by the disciples and Jesus is reflecting on the triumph of their mission in saying “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven in what you did.” It is unclear; we don’t know the interpretation. But at least we do have here this idea of a satanic fall from heaven which is mentioned by Jesus.

Turn back to 2 Peter 2:4. Here we have something a little more specific. The author says, “For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment . . .” – if he did not do that then how will he spare you, he goes on to say. What is indicated clearly here is that there are angels who have sinned. There was evidently some sort of an angelic fall – angels sin. And it says that these have been incarcerated in the underworld in some kind of nether darkness. But at least we have here some indication of this idea of an angelic fall that could be relevant to the origin of demons.

Also in Jude 6 this is mentioned. He says, “And the angels that did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling have been kept by him in eternal chains in the nether gloom until the judgment of the great day.” Here, again, is an indication that there are angels who have sinned and fallen away and God has now imprisoned them in this underworld until the judgment of the great day. These fallen angels seem to be incarcerated. They seem to be quarantined. They are not let out. But the speculation is perhaps there are others that are free to roam upon the earth and that Satan and his minions are part of these. Satan also appears to be one of the company of angels – we saw that in Jude. Jesus talks about Satan falling from heaven like lightning. So it could be that the origin of Satan and the demons lies in this angelic fall and that some of them are still free within limits to work their wrath upon the earth even though there are these others that are kept in this underworld.

Also, another verse that might be relevant is 1 Timothy 3:6 which might tell us something about the sin of Satan. This is giving the qualifications for someone who wants to be a bishop in the church.<sup>210</sup> Paul is warning against pride here; he says that the candidate “must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil;” The question is how you interpret that phrase “the condemnation of the devil.” Does it mean that this recent convert who gets puffed up with pride would then be condemned by the devil? That the devil’s condemnation would fall on him? Or does it mean that he would fall into the condemnation that the devil fell into, namely from being puffed up with pride and arrogance setting himself up against

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<sup>209</sup> 10:00

<sup>210</sup> 14:54

God? So if you interpret the phrase in that way, this would suggest that the devil's sin was indeed a sort of pride or arrogance whereby he raised his heel against his creator, against God, and so fell away.

Also 1 John 3:8 is relevant. It says, "He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." So here, again, we have indication of sins that have been committed by Satan, by the devil, which would result in a sort of fall obviously if he has sinned. So we have evidence in Scripture of an angelic fall and then of sin on the part of Satan as well which would bring him into condemnation.

Finally, 1 Timothy 5:21 says, "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without favor, doing nothing from partiality." The phrase we want to notice here is that of "the elect" angels. There are certain angels who are elect to salvation or to glorification just as we are. We are among the elect, the chosen ones, here on this planet among human beings. But there are also elect angels which implies that there are other angels that are not elect and that would be fallen away and would be condemned and be under God's condemnation.

So all in all I think there are Scriptural hints, or indications, that the traditional understanding of the origin of Satan and the demons is very plausible, namely that originally God created a realm of angelic beings who are created good – there is no evil, they are not created evil – but through an exercise of free will, they rebel against God and so fall away and are condemned. And the earth now lies under the power and sway of these demonic angels. The fallen angels, some of them at least, become what we would call demons. We will talk in a moment about some of the work that demons do and their nature here in this world.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* To go along with that Scripture you were quoting about Satan sins from the beginning – we know that God did not create anybody to sin; therefore, it sounds like there is a name change when the fall occurs and you see he is, from the beginning, of Satan.

*Answer:* I don't think that there has to be a name change. I think what we need to avoid thinking is that Satan was created sinful because what we have in the rest of Scripture is that there is no co-eternal being with God. Satan has not always been there. He was originally created by God and then he sinned. Whether the beginning here means the beginning of the universe or what is not clear but it would seem to me that what John is saying is that Satan had this kind of sin, has fallen away and from then on now he has been the source of sin and evil in the world.<sup>211</sup>

*Followup:* From the beginning if you reference that to the universe then, correct, the fall occurred prior. Or you can just view it from the beginning of Satan is sin.

*Answer:* Yeah, and I don't think we want to say the latter in the sense that he was created

<sup>211</sup> 19:57

evil. I would say that it would mean from, say, the beginning of the universe or something of that sort that Genesis 1:1 talks about.

*Followup:* That's why I say he got a new name when he sinned.

*Answer:* Yeah, I don't see that.

*Question:* The first two Old Testament verses, I think, are a parody for Satan although they are talking about an earthly ruler in context. God is using that as a parody because there are some qualities and situations that can't possibly apply to a man – like “you were in Eden.”

*Answer:* That is what is usually said by those who interpret those as being references to Satan. But I think that underestimates the degree to which some Jewish literature uses really hyperbolic language to describe things. Certainly you are right in no literal sense could these things be applied to a human being but I think in using poetic or hyperbolic language it is applied to these people like the king of Tyre. So I think we just have to be very cautious about reading things in without justification.

*Question:* I guess in defense of the “it is Satan” position, which is my position, I would say in Ezekiel 28, the context begins with a prophesy against the prince of Tyre. And all of the wording used, for example, “You are a man and no God”, it all applies to humans. It is very much human terms. But as soon as we get to verse 11, the whole literature changes. It is like we go from human terms to these terms that just seem bizarre to apply to any sort of human. For example, “You were in Eden” or “You were anointed as a guardian cherub” or “You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created.” Was a pagan king blameless in all of his ways from the day he was created? That doesn't seem proper to apply to any human, especially a non-Israelite king. And yet this is supposed to be the villain. It looks more like this: the prince of Tyre is the human king, but the true king is Satan. He is the actual king who regulates trade. So that is just what I have to say in defense.

*Answer:* In verse 11, the one you mentioned, it says, “raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre” and then verse 16 also where it condemns the unfair trade practices of Tyre and in the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence and you sinned. It is certainly hyperbolic – we all agree that this kind of language couldn't literally be true of a human being. But is there anything else, other than just the extremeness of the language, that would suggest that Ezekiel is thinking here about Satan?

*Followup:* Is there any contrary reason to balance out the scales? I don't think there is.

*Answer:* Alright, well, I have already said my peace.

*Question:* Right from the beginning in the garden Satan wanted dominion over the earth. That is what he was after. If he could kill Adam and Eve then he could have dominion. That has always been his major purpose. So if you get to the sixth chapter, when you see the Sons of God going in making women their wives and giants resulting, angels have permeated the whole with the purpose of trying to take over the earth. When you see the king of Tyre, you also see the prince of Persia, the prince of Greece; these are demonic strongholds that are trying to take over every area of the earth. I may be wrong on that but I really believe it all started in the Garden with Satan trying to destroy Adam and Eve to take dominion.

*Answer:* We did talk about the angels that seem to be assigned to various nations when we looked at angelic beings. We talked about the battle between Michael and the prince of Persia and then he is going to do battle with the prince of Greece. If we had a passage like that in Ezekiel where it says, “Say of the prince of Tyre” or something like that . . .

*Followup:* I was just thinking that the king of Tyre may be the head stronghold even over these princes because it is satanic; there are layers of satanic rulership.<sup>212</sup>

*Answer:* Yeah, I understand you there but I don’t see anything in the context to make us think that the king of Tyre is an angelic being rather than this human king who engages in these unfair trade practices and other things.

*Question:* It seems to me like a lot of times prophesy has a short term fulfillment and then a long term promise. I see it as being kind of both because, yes, it is talking of the king of Tyre but then there is this longer term fulfillment. So we have the short term history that gives us confidence that the long term view will come true.

*Answer:* Yes, and that would be what those who take these passages to be about Satan would say – yes, of course it is about the king of Tyre and it is about these earthly rulers, but there is this deeper meaning to it as well as a kind of second layer of significance that they would see in these passages.

*Question:* I would like your thoughts on this: if Satan is the ruler or Satan is the highest of this order, is there Scriptural defense to say that Satan, prior to his fall, was of a higher order like an archangel like Michael and therefore being of a higher realm everyone that went with him was subject to him or he was just the first and others followed? Was he of a higher or more powerful being than the demons and so forth that then followed?

*Answer:* There are hints. He is called the prince of demons which would be that he is over them, right? It is not as though he is just one of them or the first. He is the head of them. Then also when it describes him as the ruler of this world, the prince of this world, again that could suggest that just as though there is a prince of Persia, there is a prince of Greece, there is prince assigned to Israel, there is this angelic beings assigned to each of these nations – the whole earth is assigned to this one.

*Followup:* So he was of the highest order, shall we say, of angels and prior to his decision to leave God’s realm and enter into his own evil position?

*Answer:* That would be a plausible inference, I think, especially from Michael’s deference to him in not rebuking him. Jude says that in contrast to Michael’s behavior, these foolish people revile the glorious ones – they dispute authority and Michael wouldn’t do that. This suggests to me that we have here not just some humdrum angel but perhaps the most powerful of all of them.

*Followup:* Yes, and maybe being in that position is how he got puffed up – he saw himself in such high esteem that he would try to counter and step away from God and therefore setup his own kingdom.

*Answer:* Yes, the more gifted a person is, the more tempting I think it is to have pride and arrogance. One could imagine a being like this falling into that kind of sin.

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<sup>212</sup> 25:15

*Question:* Who do you think the Sons of God were?

*Answer:* It depends on the passage. In Job, it sounds like it is the angels. I don't know about this passage in Genesis where it talks about the Sons of God that mated with the human females.<sup>213</sup> That could be, as you say, angelic beings that came down and copulated with human females. I don't know.

*Followup:* God didn't punish his sons supposedly, but he punished mankind on the earth because he brought forth the flood because of the indiscretions of what his sons did to the earthly women.

*Answer:* You are talking about the Genesis passage. I would have to look at that again but certainly the angels that fell are being punished by God and will be punished by God. Remember we saw that some of them have been incarcerated in this nether world of darkness where they are being kept in chains until the judgment until the last day. So even when God allows certain evils to take place that doesn't mean that ultimately judgment isn't coming and that they won't get their just desserts.<sup>214</sup>

*Followup:* But these sons are not the same sons you find in other books of the Bible is what you are saying?

*Answer:* I don't know – I haven't studied that passage in Genesis enough to have an intelligent opinion about it.

*Question:* We all know that humans never stay as a neutral being. We either subject to God or subject to Satan. In the beginning, Satan imposed his will through deception. That is probably how he rules the earth – through his deception. So it is not surprising to see how his will is imposed upon the king of Tyre and all those kings. That is how he subjects himself to the willing bodies to carry out his purpose.

*Answer:* Sure, I, of course, agree with that. Satan can deceive people, earthly powers, and rulers to do his will. Clearly, that is correct. That is a nice segue to the next point on the outline, which is the nature of these beings.

## **Nature of Demons**

Let's say something about the nature of these demonic beings. First of all, they clearly have intelligence. Acts 16:16-18 indicates these are intelligent and personal beings. Luke writes,

As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by soothsaying. She followed Paul and us, crying, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul was annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

Here we see that this girl had a demonic spirit of divination (able to tell the future or to

<sup>213</sup> cf. Genesis 6:1-4

<sup>214</sup> 30:03

tell people's fortunes) so obviously this is an intelligent spiritual being.

Also 2 Corinthians 11:3, 13-15 – this is especially relevant to the point that someone earlier was just making.

But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. . . . For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

So here, again, we see the deceitfulness and the cleverness of Satan in deceiving people and leading them astray which obviously implies that he is an intelligent being who is able to deceive people and turn them away from the truth.

Finally, Revelation 12:9: “And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world – he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.” Here, again, Satan is referred to as the deceiver of the whole world which indicates his intelligence, cunning, craftiness and so forth.

Secondly, as I have already indicated, these are spiritual beings. They are spirits; just as angels are spirits so demons are spirits as well.<sup>215</sup> Matthew 8:16: “That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick.” Notice the synonymy of the word “demons” and “spirits” in this passage. They were possessed with demons and Jesus cast out the spirits. So these are spirits just as angels are.

Luke 10:17-20, we have already looked at this passage:

The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Here, again, we see the synonymy between the spirits which are subject to the disciples and the demons which they were casting out in their mission.

Finally, Revelation 16:14a, referring to the bowls of wrath, it says of the things that he saw, “for they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world.” So here the demons are called demonic spirits – that is what they are.

So there are angelic spirits and then there are demonic spirits and both of them are of the same nature; namely, they are minds without bodies. They are unembodied, spiritual beings.

These beings, of course – and this is the next point – are malevolent. That hardly needs to be said but we will read a couple of Scriptures anyway. Matthew 12:43-45, Jesus says,

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<sup>215</sup> 34:50

“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest, but he finds none. Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and brings with him seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. So shall it be also with this evil generation.”

Here we see that these are referred to as evil spirits who oppress and possess this man who underwent exorcism. So this shows that they are malevolent or evil spirits.

Mark 1:27: “And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.’” Here they are referred to as unclean spirits. Mark 3:11 is a similar reference: “And whenever the unclean spirits beheld him, they fell down before him and cried out, ‘You are the Son of God.’” Acts 8:7: “For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.” Again, the same name given to these is unclean spirits. 1 John 3:8, again this is one we have read already, “He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning.” This indicates the evilness of Satan and these spirits. Two more passages – John 17:15, Jesus says, “I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one.” The word here can be translated as just evil – keep them from evil – or it can mean “the evil one,” that is Satan. Jesus is praying, “keep them from the evil one.” This may be the way the Lord’s Prayer is to be understood in Matthew 6:13 as well.<sup>216</sup> Look at Matthew 6:13; in my translation [*Revised Standard Version*] it says, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” That could equally be translated, “deliver us from the evil one.” Deliver us from Satan in other words. This would again indicate the nature of these demonic beings; namely, they are evil, they are unclean, they are malevolent, and they seek to destroy God’s work.

So we have these angelic spirits, we also have these demonic spirits. Next time we will say some more about their nature, there are some more points I want to make on this, before we look at their work.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> 40:15

<sup>217</sup> Total Running Time: 41:20 (Copyright © 2013 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 25

#### **Nature of Demons Continued**

We have been talking about angels and demons and last time we discussed some of the nature of these demonic beings. They have intelligence and seek to deceive believers. They are, like angels, spiritual beings; that is to say, they are minds without bodies. They are, however, malevolent. They are called unclean spirits; they are extremely evil.

In addition to that, they also, like the angels, form supernatural dominions and levels of authority. We see this in Ephesians 6:12. There Paul says, “For we are not contending against flesh and blood.” That is an idiom for mortal creatures – human beings. He continues, “. . . but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Wow! When you read that, it makes you realize what we are up against. We are not just fighting against human beings or human persecution or obstacles but this whole panoply of spiritual powers and dominions that are arrayed against God and against his church.

Also in Jude 8-10, a verse that we have come back to again and again, is the story about Michael which says,

Yet in like manner these men in their dreamings defile the flesh, reject authority, and revile the glorious ones. But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgment upon him, but said, “The Lord rebuke you.” But these men revile whatever they do not understand, and by those things that they know by instinct as irrational animals do, they are destroyed.

Here, again, we have an indication of this sort of authority structure (I believe) that exists even with these demonic beings.

Also 2 Peter 2:10-11 says something very similar. He speaks of “those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. Bold and willful, they are not afraid to revile the glorious ones, whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a reviling judgment upon them before the Lord.” So these foolish human heretics are not reluctant to revile what they don’t understand and to speak out against authority where angels, even though they are greater in strength than these human beings, are more circumspect in being careful to not speak out against these demonic principalities and powers that are over them.

Finally, 1 John 5:19 says, “We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one.” This indicates Satan’s authority over this planet. The whole world lies within his sphere of authority.

So there is this supernatural realm – dominions, powers, principalities, rulers – that are arrayed against God and his church and seek to undo God’s work.

The next point is that these demonic creatures can possess people and exhibit

supernatural strength. Mark 5:1-4 is the story of the Gadarene demoniac.<sup>218</sup> Mark says,

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had come out of the boat, there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who lived among the tombs; and no one could bind him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been bound with fetters and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the fetters he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him.

Here you see this demoniac who has as a result this incredible superhuman strength that was a result of his being possessed by this demon.

Another example would be Acts 19:13-16. Here Luke says,

Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to pronounce the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits,

[So they tried to imitate Paul by casting out spirits in Jesus' name even though they weren't believers in Jesus!]

saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, mastered all of them, and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

This is just another illustration of the kind of superhuman strength that comes as a result of demonic possession.

The next point is that these demons must submit to the authority of Jesus' name. Mark 5:7-13 – this is the sequel to the story of the Gadarene demoniac. The demoniac sees Jesus,

and crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." And he begged him eagerly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside; and they begged him, "Send us to the swine, let us enter them." So he gave them leave. And the unclean spirits came out, and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

In this encounter, you have the practice of naming someone as an attempt to control them. If you know the person's name then you are in the position of authority. So the demon says, "What have you to do with me" and he identifies Him, "Jesus, the Son of God, I adjure you, don't torment me." He tries to have a one-upsmanship on Jesus. Why? Because Jesus had said to him, "Come out of the man" and then Jesus turns the tables and says, "What is your name?" And the demon says "Legion, for we are many." He was possessed by multiple demons. Then Jesus casts them out. Here we see the authority of

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<sup>218</sup> 5:07

Jesus' name over the demons and his authority to cast them out.

Take a look also at Luke 10:17 for another example. Here the seventy go out on their mission to heal and cast out demons and proclaim the kingdom. Luke 10:17 says, "The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!'" So with the name of Jesus they have the power to cast out these evil spirits.

Now this doesn't mean that there is something magical about the name of Jesus. After all, the name "Jesus" is different in different languages, right? Jesus is the English pronunciation of the name.<sup>219</sup> It is not as though this is an incantation or a magic formula that just anybody could utter to cast out demons. That is the lesson of Acts 19:13-16. If you turn back to that passage again, these Jewish exorcists don't believe in Jesus but they try to use the name of Jesus like a sort of formula or an incantation. "I adjure you by the Jesus that Paul preaches to come out" and the demon just mocks them and overpowers them and beats them up. Why? Well, because they didn't really have the power of Jesus' name. When we talk about the power of Jesus' name, whether it is praying in Jesus' name or casting out demons in Jesus' name, it doesn't just mean the verbalization of some kind of a formula or an incantation. It means doing it in the power of Jesus' name with his authority. These Jewish exorcists didn't have that sort of authority. For them, these were just empty words. But of course Jesus and his disciples did it in the authority of Christ and with his power to rule the demonic realm.

Finally, these demonic creatures know their own end. Look at Matthew 8:29. Here the demoniacs say to Jesus, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" *Before the time*. What are they talking about there? They are talking about that time when, on the Judgment Day, they will be judged and eternally cast into hell. We see this in Matthew 25:41 where Jesus says, "Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" This is their fate – the eternal fire has been reserved for them. I think this is interesting, too, because you notice this eternal fire isn't prepared for human beings. This is prepared for the devil and his angels. In one sense, it is a travesty that any human being should ever go there. This isn't designed for them. This is designed for the devil and his angels. The only reason that some people end up in hell is because they consciously reject God's grace, the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and his every effort to save them. The Scripture says that God is not willing that any should perish but all should reach redemption.<sup>220</sup> God wants all persons to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. So this eternal fire is not prepared or intended for human beings. No human beings should be there. It is intended for the devil and his angels and their punishment and not for human beings. The demons know ultimately that they will be consigned there at the end of the age.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Would you comment about the Pentecostals who say that Christians can have the devil in them? They will say you have the devil of this or the devil of that or the spirit

<sup>219</sup> 10:01

<sup>220</sup> cf. 2 Peter 3:9

of evil.

*Answer:* I thought you were speaking about whether or not a Christian can be demon possessed.

*Followup:* I am.

*Answer:* There is also the tendency on the part of some Charismatics to identify demons of something – like a demon of fear or the demon of inferiority complex or something of that sort. I don't see any basis in Scripture for that latter characterization where whenever anything goes wrong you identify it as being demonic. I don't see that at all. We live in a fallen world that is full of natural evils and all sorts of suffering and there is no reason to think that all of this is demonic in nature. Now the more difficult question would be: could a genuine Christian be possessed by a demon?<sup>221</sup> It seems intuitively crazy that a person who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and regenerate could be possessed by a demon. Yet, folks who deal with these kinds of ministries will tell you over and over again that they have encountered this. They have encountered Christians who need to be exorcised and have these demonic beings cast out. It is difficult to find anything in Scripture that would say a demon could not possess a Christian. That is an inference that is naturally made from his being indwelt by the Holy Spirit and being regenerate. The inference would be that he couldn't also, then, be possessed by a demon. But that is an inference. I don't find anything in Scripture that says this is impossible. When you look at the Scripture, though, and it talks about these demons, it doesn't really say that they are possessed by a demon or that the demon has somehow taken control of them. Sometimes it will call them *demonized* – they are demonized people. So some people have found it useful to distinguish between demon *possession* and demon *oppression*. What one could say in the case of a Christian who is having problems with demonic forces in his life that maybe he is demon oppressed but not demon possessed. Maybe that would help. I think as Christians we have to be extremely circumspect in this area. For example, I think we ought to shun any connection with occult activities whether this be seemingly innocent like Ouija boards or going to fortune tellers or being involved in Spiritism. We ought to keep that at arms length – just stay away from these kinds of occult activities. Because if there are demonic beings involved in these then even though you are a Christian you could maybe get yourself linked up with one of these demonic beings in a way that begins to be oppressive and could really hurt you and impair your personality. I don't know the answer to your question, I guess, is the result but from what I read of folks who have these kinds of ministries, whether you call it oppression or possession, it is certainly true that there are born again Christians who have become entangled somehow with these sort of demonic beings and who need to have a ministry of casting these out, rebuking them in Jesus' name and ridding them of these sorts of creatures.

*Question:* From the Mark 5 passage, what do you make of the demons requesting to go somewhere else and he casts them into the swine? What do you make of that request? It almost seems like they needed a home.

*Answer:* Yeah, I don't know. They wanted to be embodied, didn't they? Even in the animals it was better than being somehow just cast out. I don't know what to make of

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<sup>221</sup> 15:01

that. But it is very clear that, for some reason or other, they felt they needed to be somehow in some sort of embodied living creature. In a sense, Jesus tricks them by sending them into the swine but then they are destroyed and so they wind up being unembodied anyway.

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That brings us to the end of that section. We will close out next time by talking a little bit about the work of demons and their destiny and how we as Christians ought to respond to them.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Total Running Time: 19:11 (Copyright © 2013 William Lane Craig)

## § VI. DOCTRINE OF CREATION

### Lecture 26

## **Christian Response to Demons**

We come to the end of our lesson on Satan and demons. We have been talking about angels and demons and, more specifically, about Satan and his minions. We looked at the names that Satan, or the devil, goes under in Scripture. We talked a little bit about the origin of Satan. We saw that this is largely speculative but that there are good grounds for thinking that he was once an angelic being of enormous power and authority who, with other angelic beings, fell away from God and now find themselves in opposition to God and his angels. We looked at their nature and saw their power, their spirituality, and their ability to harass and demonize people to oppose the work of God.

We looked at their work, talking about how they try to destroy the servants of God, blinding unbelievers' eyes to the Gospel and seeking to nullify the preaching of the kingdom of God, accusing believers before God, and harassing God's servants.<sup>223</sup>

### **Destiny of Demons**

Finally, we want to finish out by saying a word about their destiny. What will happen to these demonic creatures and to Satan himself?

The first point to be made is that they are defeated creatures. Satan and his minions have been defeated decisively through the cross of Jesus Christ. Look at John 12:31-32. As Jesus prepares to go to the cross, he says, "Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." So Satan is a defeated being, though he is still on the loose and still given freedom to wreak havoc upon this planet. But nevertheless he has been judged by God and, through the cross and death of Christ, decisively defeated.

Colossians 2:15 is Paul's reflection upon the victory over Satan that occurs in the cross. In Colossians 2:15, Paul says of God, "He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him." The pronoun there that is translated "him" in my translation could also be translated "it" referring back to the cross where it says in verse 14, "canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross." It is ambiguous whether that pronoun refers to the cross or to Jesus Christ but the idea, I think, is the same. Namely, through the crucifixion of Jesus, God has disarmed the principalities and powers; he stripped them of their fundamental power and he has humiliated them publicly. The word there in the Greek refers to the way in which a Roman emperor returning from battle victorious would bring in his train the captive, defeated generals and authorities over which he had triumphed. They are publically displayed. One way to translate this might be to say, "He disarmed the principalities and powers leading them in triumphal procession on the cross" or "in Christ." The point of both of these verses, I think, is clear that Satan has

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<sup>223</sup> Dr. Craig actually hasn't talked about the work of demons yet – he will cover these points later on in this lecture.

been defeated. He is still on the loose; he is still wreaking havoc upon this world. But in the cross he has been decisively beaten.<sup>224</sup>

So what is their ultimate destiny? Well, it is the lake of fire. Revelation 20:10 speaks of this. Revelation 20:10 says, “the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” So this is the final defeat of the devil where he will be thrown into this lake of fire where he will be punished forever.

Jesus also refers to this in Matthew 25:41, a verse that we read a couple of lessons ago. It says, speaking of the last judgment, “Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” Here the damned are cast into this lake of fire that is prepared and is the destiny of the devil and his angels. That will be the ultimate fate of these demonic creatures.

### **Work of Demons**

Let me say a word about their present activity or the work of demons.

First of all, *they seek to destroy the servants of God*. That is to say, these creatures are out to destroy you! They hate you intensely; they will do anything they can within their power to destroy you. In 1 Thessalonians 3:5, Paul writes to the Thessalonians, “For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent that I might know your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labor would be in vain.” Here Paul’s fear was that Satan would have tempted the Thessalonians so that they would have apostatized and all of their labor would have gone down the drain and been for nothing because they had lapsed and been destroyed by Satan. So this would be an example of the work of the devil in destroying Christians.

Also 2 Corinthians 2:11, Paul says that his forgiving of the people in Corinth was “to keep Satan from gaining the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his designs.” Satan’s design is to destroy these Corinthian Christians – to gain advantage over them – and Paul is not ignorant of that and so he is careful to exercise the grace of Christian forgiveness.

Finally, 1 Timothy 3:6-7, speaking here of the qualifications of being a bishop in the church, says “He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil; moreover he must be well thought of by outsiders, or he may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.” Another example of where the devil is trying to undo Christians. He is trying to snare them – to capture them – and ruin their work.

So, one of the activities of these demonic beings is to destroy God’s servants, destroy Christians, and render them as ineffective as they possibly can.

These demonic creatures do not simply work, however, with regard to believers; they also, secondly, blind unbelievers’ eyes. *They are responsible for blinding unbelievers to the truth of the Gospel*. In 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, Paul writes,

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In

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<sup>224</sup> 4:56

their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God.

That is a sobering thought, isn't it? When you encounter some hostile unbeliever who resists the Gospel and doesn't want anything to do with it, Paul says that Satan has blinded their minds to keep them from seeing the light of Christ's Gospel.<sup>225</sup> So he is responsible for keeping people in unbelief and resistant to the Gospel.

In 2 Timothy 2:24-26, Paul says,

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

So these unbelievers are already in the snare of Satan; they have already been ensnared and captured by him to do his will. He prevents them from believing the Gospel and from coming to Christ; they are in his snare. The prayer is that as we are exercising the graces and the fruit of the Holy Spirit in evangelizing unbelievers, God may grant them repentance so that they can escape that snare and come to believe the Gospel and find eternal life.

Thirdly, *these demonic beings and Satan seek to nullify the preaching of the kingdom.*

Mark 4:15, this is the familiar parable of the sower. Notice what Jesus says in verse 15 in interpreting the parable. He says, "these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown; when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word which is sown in them." So the seed that is sown beside the path rather than falling on the fertile ground is symbolic, or represents, unbelievers who hear the Word of the kingdom – that is what this is about, the parable is the kingdom – but Satan comes and snatches away that Word so that they cannot respond to it. Satan seeks to nullify, or abrogate, the preaching of the kingdom of God.

Fourthly, *these demons can harass and possess people.* Look at the example of Judas Iscariot in John 13:27. We don't often think of Judas as demon possessed, but when you read John 13:27, that seems to be what it indicates. During the Last Supper it says, "Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, 'What you are going to do, do quickly.'" And Judas went out to betray Christ. So he was apparently demon possessed at that point. He had given himself over to Satan.

Mark 1:32 gives another example. It says, "That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons." So this would be an example of Jesus' ministry as an exorcist in casting out demons.

Luke 9:42 just gives another example. This is an example of the epileptic boy: "While he was coming, the demon tore him and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father." This would be an example of Jesus' ability to exorcize demons and thereby show the in-breaking of God's kingdom in his ministry.

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<sup>225</sup> 10:11

Fifth, *they accuse believers*. That is Revelation 12:10 which I believe we read before:

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.”

Here is the reference to Satan as the accuser of believers before God and how he is finally vanquished.<sup>226</sup>

Finally, *Satan harasses God’s servants*. If he can’t destroy you, if he can’t possess you, he will at least harass you. 1 Thessalonians 2:18, Paul says to the Thessalonians, “we wanted to come to you – I, Paul, again and again – but Satan hindered us.” Here Satan is throwing obstacles in Paul’s path, preventing him from carrying out the mission that he desired to.

1 Peter 5:8 says, “Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour.” That talks about his harassing God’s servants.

### **Christian Response to Demons**

Finally, my last point is how should Christians respond to the devil? Should we worry about him? Should we tremble? Should we be afraid? What should we do? Three points briefly from Scripture.

Number one, *we should submit to God and resist the devil*. James 4:7 says, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” So first submit yourself to God – you can’t do this in your own strength – then be resistant. The prime example of this is, of course, Jesus in his temptations by Satan where again and again he resisted Satan’s temptation by bringing, and opposing to it, the truth of God’s Word in taking a stand on what God’s Word said and following that.

Second would be to *watch and pray*. Jesus says in Matthew 26:41, “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Because our flesh is weak and Satan can get at us through the flesh, we need to be watchful and prayerful on an ongoing basis so that we won’t be weak and fall.

Finally, number three, *we need to clothe ourselves with the full armor of God*. Ephesians 6:11-18:

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray at all times

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<sup>226</sup> 15:04

in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

I think the overriding point that Paul is making here is that you need to be prepared for spiritual warfare by being involved in these spiritual disciplines like prayer, studying the Word of God, developing righteous virtues in your life. Dallas Willard has rightly said, I think, that it is not enough simply to ask yourself, “What would Jesus do?” in some situation. Because he says we don’t have the character often that Jesus had so as to do what Jesus would do in that situation. What we need to do is to try to develop that Christ-like character through these disciplines. Being clothed with the armor of God so that when we are in that situation we have the ability to do what Jesus would do. But apart from these preparations that Paul talks about, we will be weak and easily vanquished.

That gives us some Scriptural admonition about how we can be prepared for spiritual warfare.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Total Running Time: 20:06 (Copyright © William Lane Craig)