

## § IV. EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

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## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § I. CONTINGENCY ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 1

### **Contingency Argument**

We now want to interrupt our study of Christian doctrine and take a little excursus, a little side trip, to look at some apologetic issues raised by the subject of God's existence.

Up to this point, what we have been doing might be called "revealed theology." We have been studying the nature and attributes of God on the basis of his revelation in Scripture. But what I would now like to do for several weeks is what is called "natural theology," that is to say, arguments and evidence for the existence of God that are not taken from Scripture but are taken from the data of human experience independent of God's self-revelation in Scripture. Natural theology was once the high point of much of medieval philosophical thought. But since the Enlightenment, natural theology, as a project, has been largely eclipsed until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Now it has started to enjoy a renaissance of interest. One manifestation of this would be the recent *Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, published in Oxford by Blackwell. It contains defenses of some 11 different arguments for God's existence. Among contemporary philosophers, there is a tremendous movement in natural theology to re-defend and refurbish various arguments for the existence of God. What I would like to do is to look at five such arguments for God's existence that I have worked on myself and that I find persuasive. I think these are good reasons to believe that God exists.

#### ***What Makes For A Good Argument?***

Before we begin to do that, however, let me say a word about what makes for a good argument. By an argument, I don't mean a quarrel or a fight. Rather when philosophers talk about an argument, what they mean is a series of statements, or premises, which logically lead to a conclusion. The arguments that I am going to be giving are deductive arguments. What are the conditions for an argument to be a good deductive one?

First of all, a good argument must obey the rules of logic. That is to say, its conclusion must follow from the premises by the rules of logic. If it doesn't, then it is not a good argument; the premises don't prove the conclusion. A good argument would be one in which the conclusion follows from the premises by the rules of logic.

Secondly, the premises need to be true. It is not enough to have good logic; you also need to have true premises. Those are the two conditions for an argument being a "sound" argument. A sound argument will be one that has true premises and obeys the rules of logic. If the premises are true and the argument obeys the rules of logic, then the conclusion will follow necessarily from the premises.

But it is not enough for an argument to be sound. There is one more factor that needs to be included. The premises need, in some way, to be evident to us. They need to be, in some way, supported by the evidence, so that they are not simply true, but we somehow know them to be true or we have good reason to think that they are true. If they are true,

but nobody has any idea that they are true, then this isn't really a good argument. So the third condition that is required is that the premises are more plausible than their opposites or negations. In other words, the premises are more plausibly true than false. That is important because it means that in a good argument, the premises do not need to be certain; you don't need to have 100% certainty that the premises are true. The premises simply need to be more plausible than their negations. Even if it is just, say, 52% versus 48%, you should go with the one that has the greater plausibility.<sup>1</sup> That would be a good argument.

The arguments that I am going to share with you, I believe, meet all three of these conditions. They are logically valid, they have true premises and, I think at least, that the premises are more plausibly true than their negations. You can feel free to disagree with me. Unlike revealed theology, natural theology doesn't fall from heaven. These arguments are human constructs. I could be wrong. I may have made a mistake. If the argument is unconvincing to you, that is just fine. I think they are good arguments, and I hope you will, too. But feel free to assess them in your own right, and if you think that one fails to meet one of these conditions, then you can say that it is not a good argument.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Isn't it a problem that the non-believer or atheist doesn't follow this notion of plausibility but instead puts the test on it that it has to be 100%? If it's 52% vs 48%, then it's nothing because it is not 100% certain.

*Answer:* That is true, that very, very often unbelievers do that. But what you could point out to them is that, insofar as they hold knowledge to that high a standard, they will be sceptical about virtually everything. There is virtually nothing that we know with that kind of certainty. When you think about it, we don't even have 100% certainty that the external world is real. You could be a brain in a vat of chemicals wired up with electrodes by a mad scientist to think you are here listening to this lecture. The scientist could even be stimulating your brain to think that it would be crazy for you to think that you are a brain in a vat! That kind of standard is simply unrealistic, and the unbeliever doesn't hold himself to that standard. For example, these sorts of arguments work in everyday life. Here would be an argument: If it is Sunday, the library is closed. It is Sunday. Therefore, the library is closed. That would give you a good reason for not going to try to return your book today to the library, knowing that it is Sunday. And yet it is not absolutely certain that it is Sunday. Maybe somehow you got mixed up on the days, or maybe the library is having a special opening on Sunday. So maybe it is not true that it is closed. So everything that we do is going to be based upon weighing the evidence for and against something and then making a judgment. Rationality would require us to go with the judgment that is the more plausible of the two. It would be irrational to go with the less plausible judgment. We simply need to help the unbeliever to see that this is not something that we are constructing just for arguments for God's existence. These are general conditions for living life. There is no special pleading about this for natural theology.

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<sup>1</sup> 5:10

*Question:* Why do you need #2 and #3? It seems that if you got #2 covered, then why do you need more than that?

*Answer:* Because the premises could be true, but it would be true unbeknownst to you. For example, it may be true that on April 5, 1805, Napoleon Bonaparte spat in a puddle. That could be true, but I have absolutely no idea whether it is true or not. It is not enough just for the premise to be true; you have to have some kind of warrant for believing the premise in order for the argument to be a good one. That's the idea. Now how much warrant does it need to be? Does it need to be 100% certain? Obviously not; then we would be sceptics about everything – we couldn't even live life. Does it need to be plausible? I don't think it even needs to be plausible. It simply needs to be more plausible than its negation. It needs to be more probably true than false. That would give you warrant for believing that it is true. That would be why you need both of those.<sup>2</sup>

*Question:* Restating this, we are setting up what ought to be convincing; we are not going for 100% certainty.

*Answer:* This is meant to be practical and realistic and has nothing to do with theology. These are just general conditions for a good argument. It can be an argument for having a BBQ, an argument for going to the grocery store, or watching a movie. If our lives are to be guided by reason, then we can't set the standard so unreasonably high that we don't have good reasons for doing anything. We need to have realistic standards for rationally guiding what we believe and how we behave. I think this provides that.

### ***Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?***

With that in mind, let's turn to the first argument that I would like to talk about, which is a version of the Cosmological Argument for God's existence. Sometimes this is called the Argument From Contingency. When I was a boy growing up in a little town in Iowa, you could look up at the sky at night and see the stars brightly lit against the black sky. As I would look up at the stars, I had a deep sense inside that all of this had to come from somewhere. As I looked at the universe, I thought, "Why does this exist? Where did it come from? There must be an explanation for why all of this exists." Therefore, for as long as I can remember, I have always believed in God as the Creator of the universe. It was only many, many years later, as I began to study philosophy, that I discovered that my childish insight was one that is also shared by many of the world's greatest philosophers. For example, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who was a prodigious intellect of 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe – he was the inventor of infinitesimal calculus and one of the world's great thinkers – Leibniz said, "The first question which should rightly be asked is, 'Why is there something rather than nothing?'" This is the most fundamental question in Leibniz's view. Why is there something rather than nothing? In other words, why does anything at all exist? Leibniz, like me, came to the conclusion that the answer is to be found, not in the universe of contingent things around us, but rather in God. God exists necessarily and is the explanation for why anything else exists.

We can put Leibniz's thinking into the form of a very simple argument that goes like this:

<sup>2</sup> 9:55

1. Every existing thing has an explanation of its existence.
2. If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is God.
3. The universe is an existing thing.

Now what follows from these simple premises? If everything that exists has an explanation of its existence, as premise (1) states, and the universe exists, as premise (3) states, then it follows that the universe has an explanation of its existence. From that statement, along with premise (2), it therefore follows that:

4. Therefore, the explanation of the existence of the universe is God.

From this very simple argument, we derive the existence of God as the explanation for the existence of the universe. This is a logically airtight argument. That is to say, it obeys the rules of logic. If the premises are true, then the conclusion follows necessarily. It doesn't matter if you don't like the conclusion; it doesn't matter if you have other reasons for thinking the conclusion is false. As long as the premises are true, it follows logically and necessarily that God is the explanation of the existence of the universe. The whole debate comes down to the question, are the premises true? Are they more plausibly true than false?<sup>3</sup>

Premise 3 is undeniable for anybody who is a sincere seeker after truth. Again, we are not talking about academic scepticism; we are talking about someone who is really wanting to find out the truth about the world. That the universe exists is obviously true. So it comes down to premises (1) and (2). Are premises (1) and (2) more plausibly true or false? If you think they are more plausibly true than false, then this will be a good argument for God's existence.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* In premise (1), doesn't that still leave open the possibility that the universe exists just because of its own nature?

*Answer:* Yes, and I will talk about that later on. We will explore that possibility.

*Question:* With the talk about plausibility, it seems you are avoiding absolute truth. Are you dealing with absolute truth here or not?

*Answer:* I am dealing with absolute truth in the sense of objective truth. Something is either true or it is false, independent of whether you think so or not. But when I am talking about something being plausibly true, I am talking about what we have good reason to think is true. For example, if Dave were to write some quantum mathematical equation on the whiteboard, it might be true, but we wouldn't have any idea whether or not that equation is true. We might not have a clue. You can have objective truth but be ignorant of it, and you might say, "Well, if Dave says it's true, that makes it plausible that it is true because he would not say otherwise, and he is skilled at mathematics. So if he says it is true, that gives me a good reason to think that this is true. Therefore, it is plausibly true." Obviously, that is not to say that the truth isn't objective; it is to say you

<sup>3</sup> 15:41

have some plausible reasons for thinking that it is true. Maybe we could reword it: instead of saying, “It is plausibly true,” we can say, “Plausibly, it is true.” That is what I mean. I do not mean to say that it is a different kind of truth. The adverb there, when we say, “Plausibly, it is true,” is modifying the word “is” not the word “true.”

*Question:* How would you respond to a sceptic that says #2 begs the question?

*Answer:* We will get to that. I am going to look at the objections to each of these premises and then attempt to answer how the typical atheist would respond to this argument.

*Question:* I can imagine Richard Dawkins turning up his nose at #2.

*Answer:* Well, I think you might be surprised at that. I think you might be surprised to learn that Dawkins would likely agree with #2. I will hold off on that.

*Question:* From the argument’s standpoint, why aren’t #3 and #2 reversed? It looks to me that the sequencing is off.

*Answer:* Very good question! In an argument, it doesn’t matter what order you present the premises in. So you could start off with premise (3), then present premise (2). The order is irrelevant. I probably did it this way simply because premise (3) is so obviously true that you just kind of throw it in at the end, and the real debate is going to hang on these first two. But the order is irrelevant. The rules of logic will simply say, “From (1) and (3) it follows that (4)” or “From (2) and (3) it follows that (5)” or something of that sort. It doesn’t matter what order they are in. You just apply the rules to the premises, and you derive your conclusion.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Total Running Time: 21:16 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § I. CONTINGENCY ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 2

### **Necessity and Contingency**

We began last time by looking at a new section on natural theology or arguments for the existence of God that do not appeal to God's special revelation. We started off with the Argument from Contingency that Leibniz developed. It was very simple and goes something like this:

1. Everything that exists has an explanation of its existence.
2. If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is God.
3. The universe exists.

And we saw that from the premises it follows that:

4. The universe has an explanation of its existence.
5. That explanation is God.

This is a logically airtight argument – the conclusion follows according to the rules of logic. The only question is the truth of the premises. Premise (3) is undeniable for any sincere inquirer after truth, so the question is premises (1) and (2) – are these more plausibly true than false?

### **Necessity and Contingency**

At first blush, premise (1) seems open to a very obvious objection. The skeptic might say, "If everything that exists has an explanation of its existence, what about God? God exists, according to you Christians at least, so it would follow that God has an explanation of his existence. But that is impossible – there can't be something higher than God that explains why God exists. By definition, God is the greatest being, so it is impossible for God to have an explanation of his existence. Therefore, premise (1) must be false." And if the Christian or the theist says that God just exists with no explanation of his existence, the skeptic would then say, "Why not just stop with the universe? That is, the universe just exists inexplicably. If you can say God exists without an explanation, then why can't you just say the universe can exist without an explanation? Why go to God?" Thus, we reach a stalemate between the theist and the atheist at this point.

How might one respond to that objection? The objection is, in fact, based upon a misunderstanding of what Leibniz meant by "an explanation." In Leibniz' view, there are two kinds of things. On the one hand, there are things that exist necessarily. On the other hand, there are things which are produced by some external cause. Let me explain this.

First of all, things which exist necessarily simply exist by a necessity of their own nature. It is impossible for them not to exist. They must exist. What would be examples of things like that? Many mathematicians think that numbers and sets and other mathematical objects exist in this way. If these things exist, they just exist necessarily by a necessity of

their own nature. There isn't any cause of the existence of these mathematical entities; they just exist by a necessity of their own nature.

By contrast, things that are caused to exist by something else don't exist necessarily. They exist because something else has produced them in being. Examples would be things like chairs and people and planets and galaxies. These all have causes of their existence that explain why they exist.

So, when Leibniz says everything that exists has an explanation of its existence, the explanation may be found either in the necessity of the thing's own nature or else in an external cause.<sup>5</sup>

So premise (1) could actually be reworded or expanded more perspicuously (precisely) in this way:

1. Every existing thing has an explanation of its existence, *either in the necessity of its own nature or in an external cause.*

Once we understand the premise in its fullness, then the objection that we are considering falls immediately to the ground because, in this case, God does have an explanation of his existence, namely, God exists by the necessity of his own nature. God exists necessarily – it is impossible for him to fail to exist. Even the atheist recognizes that it is impossible for God to have an external cause – it is impossible for God to be caused by something outside of him. The explanation of God's existence must be that he exists simply by a necessity of his own nature.

So Leibniz's argument is really an argument for the existence of God as a necessary, uncaused being. It connects very nicely with the section we did on the attributes of God where we talked about God's aseity (or self-existence) and necessity. Leibniz's argument is precisely for the concept of an uncaused and necessary being. Therefore, far from undermining Leibniz's argument, the atheist objection to premise (1) actually clarifies and magnifies who God is. If God exists, he is a necessarily existing, uncaused being.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Can you give an example, other than God, for something that would exist necessarily?

*Answer:* As a Christian, I think that God is, in fact, the only necessarily existing being. So I think he is unique in that sense. But I can say to you that certain philosophers have thought that things like numbers exist necessarily. Others have said things like propositions exist necessarily. A proposition is the information content of a sentence. For example, the sentence "Snow is white" and the sentence "Der Schnee ist weiß" are two different sentences. They have no words in common, and they aren't even in the same language, but they both express the same proposition, namely that *snow is white*. So some philosophers would say that propositions exist necessarily. Others would say properties exist necessarily. Things like the brownness of the dog, or the hardness of the surface of the table are necessary entities. There are all sorts of entities that philosophers have

<sup>5</sup> 5:03

identified as existing necessarily. Obviously, these are rather exotic sorts of entities, but that is simply because by the nature of the case most things we are familiar with in the physical world don't exist necessarily. So I am sorry that the examples are exotic, but that's just the nature of the case.

*Followup:* I agree with this – I see God is just because he is. I can't see that for anything else. For example, in the case for numbers, you have to have something to count. If I were to count 1, 2, 3, I would need something to count.

*Answer:* I appreciate that. You are getting into the question whether numbers exist or not. Let me just say that there are a good number of philosophers in the history of thought who disagree with that. They think that even if there are not three concrete objects, like three pebbles or three stars or three atoms, they would say nevertheless the number 3 exists. This is because mathematical truths are necessary – for example, “ $2+1=3$ ” is a necessary truth. So they would say that numbers are abstract, necessarily existing things. Again, these are exotic and strange examples. But that just underlines the fact that the things with which we have daily intercourse are physical, contingent things that have external causes. So when you look for examples of necessary beings, you are looking at rather unusual sorts of things.<sup>6</sup>

*Question:* Can you give some examples of why the universe can't be necessarily existing?

*Answer:* We will talk about that later on. Hang on to that question.

*Question:* Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins like to bring up the question of “How do you explain where God came from?” Do you think they don't understand this, or they are deliberately trying to fool the masses?

*Answer:* I am quite convinced that they don't understand it. You have to grasp that a person can be a specialist with a profound knowledge of his narrow area of specialization and yet have a superficial grasp of things outside his area of expertise. I am sure these fellows have never even thought about the difference between necessary being and contingent being. Once you understand the idea of something that exists by a necessity of its own nature, the question of “Where did God come from?” or “What's the cause of God?” becomes just a lame question. It becomes obviously misconceived. I think it is just that they are ignorant of these distinctions.

*Question:* I believe that is the point of God's name being “I AM.” He is the only one that can say “I AM.”

*Answer:* Historically, that has been the Bible verse that theologians have used to connect with this idea of God as a necessary being. Thomas Aquinas would quote Exodus 3:14, “Tell them I AM that I AM.” “I AM has sent you.” This expresses God's self-existent, necessary being. So you are absolutely right – that is the point of contact between the biblical tradition and this philosophical tradition.

*Question:* It seems to me that explaining God's existence is far more difficult than proving his existence. The answer that something exists, namely God, simply because it has to – that seems a bit glib to me. What if God never created anything at all? Now how are you going to explain his existence? Also, this concept of propositions or mathematical

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<sup>6</sup> 10:25

objects existing independent of some other intelligence of some type, that seems way over the top to me. That means we are kind of surrounded by the number 4 just kind of out there.

*Answer:* I have sympathy with your view about the nature of numbers. That is the view I tend to as well. But I am just using this as an illustration to say that a good many people did and do think that numbers exist necessarily in this way. Even if there were no universe at all, as you say, if there were no realm of concrete objects, no matter, no energy, you would still have these necessarily existing mathematical truths and numbers and so forth. Similarly, with respect to God, I would appeal to your thought experiment actually in support of this. Even if there were no contingent objects, no physical objects, no space, no time, no matter, no energy, God would still exist by a necessity of his own nature. He simply exists because he is a logically necessary being whose non-existence is impossible.

*Followup:* How can you say God is logically necessary? Let's say you had an atheist here asking, "How is he logically necessary?" There could be nothing. Didn't Leibniz start with the idea "Why is there something rather than nothing?" There could be nothing – isn't that a possibility? A logical possibility – not God, not anything?

*Answer:* Boy, these are deep questions that you are asking! Leibniz did start off with that question – why is there something rather than nothing? But the conclusion to which Leibniz was driven is that, in fact, it is impossible that nothing exists. There must be a necessary being. What is correct to say is that there is no strict, logical contradiction in saying nothing exists. You are not uttering an explicit contradiction. But when philosophers talk about necessity and possibility, they are not talking about what is called "strict logical necessity (or possibility)," they are talking about what is called "broadly logical necessity (or possibility)."<sup>7</sup> Some examples might serve to bring this out. There is no explicit contradiction in talking about an unmarried bachelor, as there would be if you said he is a married, unmarried man – that would be explicitly contradictory. But nevertheless, there is no such thing as a married bachelor – that is broadly logically impossible. Or to give another example, the statement "The Prime Minister is a prime number" doesn't involve a logical contradiction. There is no self-contradiction. But nevertheless, there is no possible world in which the Prime Minister is a prime number because prime numbers are not the sort of things that can be office holders in a political system. You can't have a Prime Minister who is a prime number. So there are all kinds of necessary truths the negation of which is not a strict logical contradiction. So don't be misled by thinking that because there is no strict logical contradiction in saying "Nothing exists," that means it is really possible for nothing to exist. If this argument is right, in fact it *is* impossible in this broadly logical sense that there be nothing. There has to be something necessarily existing. I hadn't planned on getting into this deeply, but when you ask questions, obviously, you begin to unearth a lot of these profound concepts.

*Question:* You always use the examples of married bachelors or Prime Ministers' not being prime numbers, but I am curious if anyone has ever objected to that by saying, "A married man's name is 'Bachelor'" or "The Prime Minister is a member of a group called the *Prime Numbers*." What do you say to people who object to this in such a ridiculous

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<sup>7</sup> 15:16

way?

*Answer:* What I would say is that they are not understanding the example. When you talk about a prime number, you are referring to numbers like 3, 5, 7 or 11, you are not talking about members of a club. Obviously, human beings belonging to a club called the *Prime Numbers* could be the prime minister. But that is just irrelevant, you are not dealing with the example.

*Question:* Since the concept of a necessary being is so hard to explain by way of examples, couldn't it be easier to do so via a deductive argument? Such as saying that anything that exists through causality has to originally been caused by something that exists of its own nature otherwise nothing could exist?

*Answer:* Yes, I think that is fair. Your argument is saying that you look at things that have external causes and that, ultimately, you have to get back to a first, uncaused cause which simply exists by the necessity of its own nature and isn't caused by anything else. You can deduce that. But what that will involve you in, though, is arguing against the possibility of an infinite regress of explanations. Why does the chain of explanations have to have an end? Why can't it just go back and back and back and never have a final member? You would have to deal with that. Thus, I would prefer to do it this way, so as to avoid those types of infinite regress arguments. But if it helps you to grasp the idea of a being that exists by a necessity of its own nature, then, yes, this is a good way to think of it. It would be the being that terminates the series of contingent explanations and is the ultimate reality that explains why anything at all exists.

*[Q&A: Just a comment about how an idealist redefines the word "exists" as meaning "being in the mind of God." Dr. Craig just leaves this comment to the side]<sup>8</sup>*

*Question: [A long comment about how most people don't think about the consequences of how it is we have the objects all around us.]*

*Answer:* Fair enough! That is what we are trying to get folks to do – to think about “Why does anything at all exist?” – such as these things around us. I don't think the difficulty here is grasping the idea of things that have external causes. That seems to me to be fairly easy to understand – a thing exists because it has a cause that produced it. If there is anything that is difficult to understand, it would be this idea of things that exist by the necessity of their own nature. And I am not sure what more to say about that than to give these examples that I've given and to say that this is a thing which is uncaused and which simply has a nature which is such that if this being is possible then it exists. It exists necessarily and cannot fail to exist. Notice in offering this premise (1), maybe there isn't anything like that! We are not committing ourselves in saying that there *is* a necessary being yet. So the atheist can't really object to it on that basis. Maybe everything that exists is what exists by an external cause. So in offering premise (1) in this expanded way, we are simply saying there are two ways of existing, necessarily or contingently, and everything that exists does so one way or the other. Really, that is all that is being said here.

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<sup>8</sup> 20:03

*Question:* Hasn't there been a history of denial of the category of "necessary" being applied to existence in philosophy?

*Answer:* Yes, although that seems to have been overtaken by now. Certain skeptics in the past, like David Hume, thought that whereas truths could be necessary (for example, "2+1=3" is necessary), they didn't think that beings could be necessary. But these folks were ignoring this great Platonic tradition that says there are all kinds of things that exist necessarily. And I think in contemporary philosophy, you almost never hear anybody object to the idea of a thing's being necessary in its existence. This would be a thing that exists in every possible world, and these old Hume-like skeptical doubts don't seem to be voiced anymore. It does seem to be a coherent idea.

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We've got to the point now that we understand premise (1) as saying that everything that exists is one of two types – either it exists contingently and has a cause that explains why it exists or it exists necessarily by its own nature. That is what premise (1) says.

### ***Defense of Premise (1)***

Now the question is, what defense might be offered for premise (1)? Why think that premise (1) is true? Let me share an illustration from the philosopher Richard Taylor that I find very persuasive in favor of thinking premise (1) is true. Taylor says, imagine you are walking through the woods on a hike and you come across a translucent ball lying on the forest floor. You would naturally wonder where that ball came from – what is the explanation of its existence? If your hiking buddy said to you, "Don't worry about it – it just exists, inexplicably!" you would think either that he was crazy or that he wanted you to keep on moving. But you wouldn't take seriously the idea that this ball just exists without any explanation of its existence. Now suppose that the ball, instead of being the size of a basketball, were the size of an automobile.<sup>9</sup> Merely increasing the size of the ball would not do anything to remove or satisfy the demand for an explanation of its existence, would it? Suppose it were the size of a house? Same problem! Suppose it were the size of a planet or a galaxy? Same problem! Suppose it were the size of the entire universe? Same problem! Merely increasing the size of the object does not do anything to remove or satisfy the demand for an explanation of its existence. And so I think it is very plausible to think that everything that exists has an explanation of why it exists.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* It seems like you can make that argument in the context of the forest where the ball seems out of place. When you get all the way to the universe, you are outside of the context of the ball seeming out of place.

*Answer:* That forms a nice segue to the next point that I am going to talk about. Let me try to address this question in that respect.

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<sup>9</sup> 25:00

## Objection: Universe Has No Explanation

Sometimes atheists will say, about premise (1), that this premise is true of everything *in* the universe but it is not true *of* the universe as a whole – which sounds kind of like this last question, where it is true of the ball in the forest but it is not true of the ball if it is the whole universe itself. Everything in the universe has an explanation of its existence but the universe itself just has no explanation of its existence.

This response commits what one contemporary philosopher has aptly called the “taxi cab fallacy.” This is based upon a remark by the 19<sup>th</sup> century atheist philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer pointed out that you cannot dismiss this principle enunciated in premise (1) like a hack when you have arrived at your desired destination. That would be arbitrary. You cannot say that everything has an explanation of its existence and then suddenly exempt the universe from this demand. That would be simply arbitrary. It would be arbitrary to say that the universe is an exception to premise (1).

Recall that Leibniz does not make God the exception to premise (1). So this isn’t special pleading for God. The premise on Leibniz’s view has universal applicability – it even applies to God! But it would be arbitrary for the atheist to say that the principle is true until you get to the universe and suddenly think you can dismiss it like a taxi cab because you have arrived at the universe. In fact, the illustration of the ball shows that merely increasing the size of the object until it becomes the size of the universe as a whole doesn’t do anything to remove the need for an explanation. That is, in effect, what the atheist is saying – that when the object is very, very big, then it doesn’t need an explanation.

Also notice how unscientific this response to the argument would be. Modern cosmology, which is the study of the large scale structure of the universe, is devoted precisely to an explanation of the existence of the universe. The whole project of cosmology is to explain why the universe exists. So that attitude toward premise (1) would actually cripple science – it would cripple the field of cosmology.

Trying to say that this applies to everything in the universe but not to the universe as a whole is simply arbitrary and unjustified. They would have to have some sort of justification for suddenly exempting the universe.

One way to think about it is this: this premise (1) is not a *physical* principle like the law of gravity or the laws of thermodynamics that operate in the universe; rather this is a *metaphysical* principle that applies to all things that exist – to being as being. Therefore, it simply supersedes or transcends any sort of distinction like “in the universe” or “of the universe as a whole.”<sup>10</sup>

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Shrink your example down to the very small world of atoms and quarks and things. The quantum mechanics field has been a playground for all sorts of strange and

<sup>10</sup> 30:01

unproductive theological commentary. What are your comments on things coming in and out of existence like quarks and photons?

*Answer:* The argument would imply that merely shrinking the size of an object would not exempt it from needing an explanation of its existence either. I think that is quite correct. The closest you would have to something that looks unexplained would be these so-called virtual particles which can come out of the vacuum temporarily and then disappear back into the vacuum within a certain limit of time. But what you need to understand in this case is that the vacuum is not nothing – the vacuum is a sea of fluctuating energy endowed with a rich physical structure governed by physical laws. So it does constitute an explanation of these virtual particles. They are fluctuations of the energy within the vacuum. So it simply is not true that these things, if they exist, exist without any explanation of their existence. They do have an explanation for their existence.

*Question:* If we boil it all down, I believe that God always existed, and he is the Creator. Atheists may choose to believe that molecules and atoms always existed based strictly on nothing, but that is the side they choose to believe. There is no evidence to that fact. I cannot imagine an atheist wanting to argue about this if he doesn't believe in God anyway.

*Answer:* Let me say this to answer the last part of your question. There are different kinds of atheists. There are the really hardcore types, and you are right – you can argue with them until you are blue in the face, and they wouldn't be persuaded. But on the other hand, I meet lots of students whose atheism is very nominal or are struggling and searching. Or, for example, when I have spoken in the former Soviet Union or in China where they absorbed a kind of doctrinaire atheism from their Marxist propagandists, this atheism isn't very deeply held or held with great conviction. In a case like that, an argument like this can dislodge them from their atheism. This view that there is a God who is the explanation of why everything exists really can make a difference in helping them to come to faith. So the Holy Spirit can use this.

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To summarize, what I have basically argued is that premise (1) has a kind of self-evidence about it when you think about it, think about examples of things. And it is arbitrary to try to exempt the universe – that represents the taxi cab fallacy, of thinking you can just dismiss this metaphysical principle when you get to the universe. And, moreover, this would actually cripple science, because science seeks to find an explanation of the existence of the universe in modern cosmology. For those reasons, I think premise (1) is more plausibly true than false, and what the atheist would have to come up with is a justification for thinking the universe is an exception to premise (1).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Total Running Time: 34:42 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § I. CONTINGENCY ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 3

#### **Objection: Universe Is Exempt**

We have been looking at premise (1), *Every existing thing has an explanation of its existence, either in the necessity of its own nature or in an external cause*. And we saw that typically the atheist will want to deny this first premise and say the universe is an exception to this principle. The universe just exists inexplicably without any explanation of its existence. And I argued that that move is arbitrary and, indeed, commits what one person has called the taxi cab fallacy. This is thinking you can just dismiss the causal principle like a hack when you arrive at your desired destination. On the contrary, this principle would apply to anything that exists. And we do not say that it fails to apply to God either. As theists, we won't make him an exception to the principle; on the contrary, we would say that God does exist by the necessity of his own nature. So the atheist is really being quite arbitrary when he applies this principle everywhere else in life but tries to exempt the universe.

#### **Objection: Universe Is Exempt**

Some atheists do try to justify making the universe an exception to premise (1). Sometimes they will say it is *impossible* for the universe to have an explanation of its existence. Why is that, you might ask? Basically, they reason as follows: an explanation of the universe would have to be a prior state of affairs in which nothing exists. Since the universe is just everything there is, if there is an explanation of the universe, it would have to be in a prior state of affairs in which the universe did not yet exist. But that would just be nothingness. And nothingness can't explain anything. So therefore the universe cannot have an explanation of its existence – the universe must exist just inexplicably.

I hope you can see that that line of reasoning is just obviously fallacious. It is circular. It assumes that the universe is all there is, so that in the absence of the universe, there would be nothing. That assumes that the universe is everything. In other words, it assumes atheism is true. So the atheist is arguing in a circle, begging the question, in assuming that in the absence of the universe there would be nothingness.

By contrast, Leibniz would agree that the explanation of the universe must be in some sort of prior state of affairs – not chronologically prior, but explanatorily prior – there would have to be some prior state of affairs in which the universe did not yet exist. But that state of affairs would not be nothingness. It would be God and his will, and these would furnish the explanation of why the universe exists. That attempt to justify the universe as an exception to premise (1) is simply question-begging.

In conclusion with regard to the first premise, I think this premise is certainly more plausibly true than its opposite. Think of the illustration that Richard Taylor gives of finding the ball in the woods. It would obviously need an explanation of why it exists, and merely increasing the size of the object, even until it becomes co-extensive with the

universe, neither explains its existence nor removes the need of an explanation of its existence.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Why doesn't the necessity of its own nature explain the universe for someone who wants to take this premise and simply say it is necessary?

*Answer:* We will get to that point later on. But most atheists don't take that tack. By far and away, almost everybody who is an atheist will simply say the universe is a brute fact and it has no explanation for why it exists; it just exists. But you are right; they could take that tack, and we'll have to look at that in a moment.<sup>12</sup>

*Question:* When God created the world in the beginning, there was water. Water was not part of his creative process. The Spirit hovered over water. How do you explain that?

*Answer:* I think that water is part of the creation. In [Genesis 1,] verse 1 it says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." That is his creation of the universe. In ancient Hebrew there is no word for "the universe." When the ancient Hebrew wanted to express "the universe" he would use this idiom "the heavens and the earth" – that meant everything that was. So that is what God creates in the beginning. Then in verse 2 the focus suddenly narrows dramatically, and it says, "and the Earth was without form and void." And then what is described is how God turns the Earth into a habitable place. But that has already been created in verse 1. Similarly, in Proverbs 8, Wisdom personified as a woman says, "When there were no depths" – that is mentioned in Genesis, the Spirit hovering over the depths – "I was brought forth." God and his Wisdom precede the existence of any sort of physical reality on Earth or in the heavens.

*Question:* Age old question – when my atheist friend asks, "Who created God?" or "How was God created?" I have no answer.

*Answer:* O.K., look at premise (1). How would you answer that question based on premise (1)? Look at premise (1). Which alternative would you pick? If you look at premise (1), you will see the obvious answer to the question, "What created God?" God cannot have an external cause – even atheists admit that – because that would be something greater than God, which is impossible. That thing would be God. So God, if he exists, exists by the necessity of his own nature. He has no cause. So the question, once you understand the premise, is very easy to answer.

*[Q&A: Question about the meaning in Genesis of the term "void." Dr. Craig refers back to the doctrine of creation discussions from Defenders 1 course.]*

*Question:* My response to the answer of who created God – the way I have explained it – is God can exist on his own because he has a mind. But the universe doesn't have a mind and the creative power that comes with that. That is why God is more reasonably the terminal being. Does that work?

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<sup>12</sup> 4:59

*Answer:* I do not feel comfortable with that because having a mind does not mean you exist by a necessity of your own nature. We have minds, and yet we also have external causes. And we should not think of God as a product of his own creative power either. Notice that this does not say, “Every existing thing has an explanation, either by an external cause or its self-cause.” The idea of being self-caused is a contradiction. It is not that God created himself, that he somehow used his creative power to bring himself into being. He would have to be explanatorily prior to himself – and that would really be a problem. Rather, the idea is simply he exists necessarily.

*Followup:* The universe could not have created God, but God could have created the universe.

*Answer:* Clearly, that is right. There is clearly an asymmetrical situation there that makes it much more plausible to think of God as the cause. That is right.<sup>13</sup>

*Question:* Of the two explanations for existence, is it safe to say that necessity only applies to God, and everything else has an external cause.

*Answer:* In my opinion, as a Christian, I think it only applies to God. But historically philosophers have identified many different sorts of necessary beings. I mentioned numbers, for example – they are a classic case. Plato and other followers of Plato think that numbers exist necessarily. Other mathematical objects like sets and functions and geometrical figures have also been historically considered necessary in their existence. Also propositions and properties, too. There are all kinds of things that historically different philosophers have identified as being necessary of their own nature. Out of theological convictions, I think that, in fact, only God exists necessarily. But that is a theological conviction that doesn’t enter the argument at this point. Here we are having an open mind and entertaining the possibility there could be many such things.

*Question:* Was it Nietzsche that tried to define what nothingness was and how it existed?

*Answer:* That was Sartre, the existentialist. We are not using nothingness in a sort of existential sense of despair or meaninglessness and things like that. We are just meaning the absence of anything that exists. It is the common sense, ordinary word in which we say, “nothing” – we mean there isn’t anything.

*Question:* Can you comment how important it is, with the rise of Eastern mysticism, thought and pantheism, how they attach the necessity of God to the actual physical universe and that “he is all?” We really need to understand this. That is a growing belief system that is entering the Western world.

*Answer:* You are right in pointing out that in pantheistic religions, like Hinduism, Daoism, and certain forms of Buddhism, there is an identity between God and the universe. So the universe takes on the attributes of God, and certainly as Christians we need to have good reasons why we think that God is distinct from the world and is its creator rather than identical with the world. These arguments, as you will see as they unfold, will do that for you. If these arguments are valid, they will narrow down the range of the world’s religions to the great monotheistic traditions like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and perhaps Deism but will exclude these pantheistic religions.

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<sup>13</sup> 10:05

*Question:* You spoke about numbers and functions. If these were not created by God, would he not be subject to those things?

*Answer:* That is the problem and that is why I said, on theological grounds, I do not believe that numbers exist. So, yes, I share your concern.

## ***Defense of Premise (2)***

Let's go to premise (2). What about the second premise? *If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is God.* Is this premise more plausibly true than false? At first you might think that no atheist is going to agree with this; that this is going to be the controversial premise. In fact, what is really awkward for the atheist is that premise (2) of this argument is logically equivalent to the typical atheist response to Leibniz's argument.

What do I mean that two statements are logically equivalent?<sup>14</sup> What I mean by that is that it is impossible for one of them to be true and the other one to be false. They stand or fall together. If two statements are logically equivalent, they are either both true or they are both false. But you can't have one be true and the other one false. So logically equivalent statements share the same truth value.

With that in mind, what does the atheist almost always say in response to Leibniz's argument? As we have just seen, what the atheist typically asserts is:

A) If atheism is true, the universe has no explanation of its existence.

The universe just exists as a brute fact. It just exists inexplicably; it is just there, and that is all. This is what the atheist typically says in response to premise (1).

But this is logically equivalent to:

B) If the universe has an explanation of its existence, then atheism is not true.

If atheism is true, the universe has no explanation – that is (A). But that is logically equivalent to (B) – if the universe has an explanation, then atheism is not true. They are just the flip side of one another. They are logically equivalent statements.

So you cannot affirm (A) and deny (B). If you affirm (A) you also have to affirm (B). But (B) is virtually synonymous with premise (2) – just compare them!

Thus, in replying to premise (1), the atheist has implicitly admitted to premise (2). If the universe does have an explanation of its existence, then God exists.

## **DISCUSSION**

*Question:* Couldn't they just say we haven't discovered enough or science hasn't advanced far enough to know if there is anything outside of our universe?

*Answer:* That is fine. This is not a scientific argument. This is a metaphysical argument.

<sup>14</sup> 15:03

So for whatever realms of reality that might exist outside of our observable universe, say, it is part of a multiverse, Leibniz would simply ask the same question of the multiverse. We could ask, “Why does the multiverse exist?” It must have an explanation of its existence and it will either be in an external cause or in the necessity of its own nature. So the size of the universe really is quite irrelevant to this argument. You could say it exists necessarily, but as I say, atheists are very, very loathe to say that. I do not know of any atheist philosopher on the contemporary scene who thinks that the universe exists necessarily. The typical response is to say there just is no explanation – it is just there. And that is equivalent to affirming premise (2).

*Question:* I have heard the argument that we should humbly acknowledge that there is no explanation and you should be humble, too, in that acknowledgment.

*Answer:* Yes, I have heard that, and that is a red herring. Arguments do not have personalities. Arguments aren’t arrogant or prideful or humble – people are. The validity or the soundness of this argument depends on two things – the truth of the premises and whether or not it is logically valid, that is, it must obey the laws of logic.<sup>15</sup> Apart from those two tests, these other sorts of things are irrelevant. The question is, “Which premise will you deny, and why, Mr. Atheist?” It seems to me that he is committed to the second premise and his denial of the first premise is arbitrary. So I think he is in an awkward spot.

Let me say, in addition, I think premise (2) is very plausible in its own right, wholly apart from the fact that it is logically equivalent to what the atheist typically says. Think of what the universe is – it is *all* of space-time reality. That would include any other multiverse hypothesis that would encompass ours. It is *all* matter and energy. So it follows that if the universe has a cause of its existence, that cause must be a non-physical, immaterial being beyond space and time. Just imagine that! If there is going to be an explanation of space, time, matter and energy, this is going to have to be a transcendent cause beyond space and time and therefore immaterial and non-physical in its nature.

There are only two kinds of objects that can fit that description of an immaterial object beyond time and space. The first is abstract objects like numbers (numbers are immaterial and they are typically thought to exist beyond space and time). The second is an unembodied mind. Minds are immaterial and a mind can be timeless if it is not changing. But abstract objects cannot cause anything. The number 7 has no effects whatsoever. Numbers do not stand in causal relationships – that is definitive for what it means to be an abstract object, as opposed to a concrete object. An abstract object is an object that does not stand in any causal relationships. Therefore, the cause of the existence of the universe cannot be an abstract object. It must be a transcendent, unembodied mind. This is precisely what theists take God to be.

So, as I say, premise (2) seems to be very plausible in its own right, wholly apart from what the atheist admits. Just to repeat what I just said, the cause of the universe would have to be beyond time and space and therefore immaterial and non-physical. There are only two kinds of things we know of that can be like that – either an abstract object or a

<sup>15</sup> 20:06

mind. Abstract objects cannot cause anything. Therefore, the cause of the universe must be a transcendent, unembodied mind.

I hope you begin to grasp the power of Leibniz's argument. If it is successful, it proves the existence of a necessary, uncaused, timeless, spaceless, immaterial, personal creator of the universe. This is not some ill-conceived flying spaghetti monster postulated to fill up our gaps in our knowledge. Rather, this is an ultra-mundane or transcendent being with many of the properties of traditional theism that we looked at in our study of the attributes of God. So this is really a mind-blowing argument, if it is successful.

## DISCUSSION

*Question: [comment on how the mind actually controls things]*

*Answer:* When you think about causation, what is the most intimate causal mechanism that you are familiar with? What is the causal process with which you have the most intimate knowledge? Is it things in the external world moving about, bumping each other, as you observe them and their effects? Not really. The cause with which you are most intimately acquainted with is yourself. You have volitions in your mind. You will to do something, such as to lift your arm or to take a step or to utter words, and, lo and behold, those effects ensue as a result of your causal activity – you exert your will, and your causal power will produce these effects.<sup>16</sup> This is an example of the mind's ability to control physical things. In the same way that my mind exerts causal influence upon my body, God exerts immediate causal influence upon the world. He causes effects in the world in the same way that my mind causes effects in my body. Now I am not saying that the world is the body of God. Clearly, that is not what I am saying. The world is a creation; that is the whole argument here. It is caused by God, but God has the ability to act in the world through his mind in the same way that our minds work in our bodies. So it is a nice analogy, I think, that helps us to understand God's relation to the world.

*Question: [explain the characteristics that this argument leads to]*

*Answer:* Necessary – because it exists by the necessity of its own nature. Uncaused – because it has no external cause. Timeless – because it must be beyond time to create time. Spaceless – because it must be beyond space to create space. Immaterial – because it is spaceless and timeless, it cannot be material. Personal – because only a mind can account for the existence of the universe. Those are the implications of the conclusion of Leibniz's argument.

*Question:* You said there are only two things that can be outside of the universe. Abstract objects or minds. How can the mind affect the universe if it is outside the universe? Wouldn't this same argument prove idealism, that we are all spirit?

*Answer:* I don't think so. I think you and I have a different understanding of idealism. It sounds to me like you are talking about some kind of "pan-psychism," where there is some sort of psyche that permeates the world. And I think my answer earlier answers your question about how could a mind, which is distinct from the world, exercise its

<sup>16</sup> 25:16

causal ability in the world. It would be the same way that my mind exercises causal powers in my own body. I don't think that God needs to be in space in order to produce effects in space. If somebody had an argument for that, I would want to see it, but I have never seen a good argument for that. Seems to me that a timeless, spaceless being can exert effects such as producing the existence of the space-time world.

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Let me say this to conclude. I think both of these premises are plausibly true, and, given the obvious truth of premise (3) that the universe exists, it therefore follows that the explanation of the universe is God. What can the atheist do at this point? He does have a more radical alternative open to him. He can retrace his steps, go back to premise (1), withdraw his objection to premise (1) and say, "All right, yes, the universe does have an explanation of its existence, and that explanation is that the universe exists by a necessity of its own nature. The universe is a necessary being." Thus, for the atheist, the universe can serve as a sort of God substitute which exists by a necessity of its own nature. That will be the objection to be dealt with in the next lesson.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Total Running Time: 29:36 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § I. CONTINGENCY ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 4

#### **Objection: Universe Exists Necessarily**

We have been talking about the Cosmological Argument for God's existence, and we've seen that the first premise of that argument ("Everything that exists has an explanation of its existence, either in the necessity of its own nature or else in an external cause") is an intuitively plausible premise and that the atheist attempt to make the universe an exception to the rule is arbitrary and unjustified. Moreover, we saw that the second premise ("If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is God") is logically equivalent to the typical atheist response to the argument, namely, that if atheism is true, then the universe has no explanation of its existence. And we saw, moreover, that that second premise is very plausible in its own right. Given, then, that the universe exists, it follows logically from those premises that God exists.

#### **Objection: Universe Exists Necessarily**

The reason for the reluctance of atheists to say the universe exists necessarily isn't hard to see. When we look out at the universe, none of the things that the universe is composed of seems to exist necessarily. Planets, stars, comets, dust, radiation, galaxies – none of these things seems to exist necessarily. They could all fail to exist. In fact, at some point in the past, none of them did exist, when the universe was in a very dense state and those things had not yet formed. Since none of these things that make up the universe seem to exist necessarily, why think that the universe exists necessarily?

The atheist might say at this point, "Well, O.K., none of those things exists necessarily, but the matter of which those things are composed exists necessarily. Matter exists necessarily. And these different things are just different configurations of matter, just different shapes and formations of matter. None of them exists necessarily, but the matter itself is a necessarily existent thing." Let's think about that suggestion. One of the problems with this suggestion is that according to the standard model of subatomic physics matter itself is composed of tiny particles, like quarks, for example. And the universe is just a collection of all of these particles arranged in different ways. Think about those quarks of which things are composed. Couldn't the universe have been composed of a different collection of quarks than the collection that exists today? Does each and every quark in the universe exist necessarily? Is every quark in the universe a necessary being that has to exist? I think it would be crazy to say that each and every quark in the universe exists necessarily by a necessity of its own nature and that therefore this is the only collection of quarks that could possibly have existed.

Notice what the atheist cannot say at this point. He cannot say, "Well, those quarks are all just different configurations of matter, and you could have a different set of quarks, but it would be the same matter." He can't say that because quarks aren't made of anything else; they just are the basic units of matter. So if quarks don't exist, then matter doesn't exist. It is not as though the quarks are composed out of something else; they just are the

basic units of matter. So if there aren't these quarks, then matter doesn't exist.

But it seems obvious that a different collection of quarks could have existed than the collection of quarks that forms our universe today. And if that is the case, then a different universe would have existed. To see this point, I want you to think about your shoes that you are wearing right now and ask yourself the question, "Could these shoes have been made of steel?" I am not saying, "Could you have had a different pair of shoes made out of steel that were in the same shape and size as the shoes you are wearing?" I am asking, "Could the very shoes that you have on, *those very shoes*, could they have been made of steel?"<sup>18</sup> I think the answer is, obviously not! That would be a different pair of shoes that just was in the same shape and size as the shoes that you have on, but it wouldn't be that very pair of shoes. And the same is true of the universe. A universe which is made of a different collection of quarks wouldn't be the same universe. It would be a different universe.

Somebody might say at this point, "Wait a minute, think of the matter that composes my body. Every seven years or so, I am told, all of the matter, or virtually all of the matter, in my body is recycled, so that the body that I have now is made out of completely different matter than the body I had when I was 14 years old or younger. And yet, it is the same body. I still have an identical body, even though it is made out of new stuff. So in the same way, couldn't the universe be identical across possible worlds even though in one possible world it is composed of one collection of quarks and in some other possible world it is composed of a different collection of quarks? Couldn't it still be the same universe just as my body is the same body even though it is composed out of different stuff that it used to be?"

I think there is a crucial disanalogy between these two cases. In the case of the universe, the difference across possible worlds is not a matter of intrinsic change. It is not as though the universe changes from one to the other by replacing quarks until you get to the other one, whereas in my body, you have material, historical continuity of my 14 year old body to my present body. Therefore, my body can be identical over this intrinsic change as the matter is replaced. But the difference between universes in different possible worlds isn't a matter of change at all. There is nothing that endures from one possible world to another. This is more like talking about the matter that composes my body and the matter composing another person's body – and those are two different bodies. Or, again, the example of the shoes made out of steel's being a different pair of shoes than the leather shoes that you have now. I think that this gives us good reason to think that the universe, if it could have been composed of a different collection of quarks, wouldn't be the same universe. Therefore, this universe does not exist necessarily.

The point that I am making here becomes all the more obvious when you reflect on the fact that it is possible that there could be a universe governed by completely different laws of nature that doesn't even have quarks in it. They could have different sorts of particles or substances, maybe strings are the basic units of material objects, and they are governed by different laws of nature. To think that in that case, that would be the same universe as this one would be like thinking that a pane of glass would be the same pane of glass if it were made out of steel instead of made out of glass that it is made out of. That

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<sup>18</sup> 5:10

would just be a different substance; it would be a different thing with different properties. It is very plausible to think that the universe doesn't exist necessarily. You could have had a different collection of quarks and therefore a different universe or a universe that is composed of totally different sorts of substances with different laws of nature and different properties.

I don't think any atheist is going to be so bold as to assert that some quarks exist necessarily but others don't – that there are certain quarks in the universe, a subset or a select number, that have this occult property of existing necessarily while the other quarks exist contingently. That is completely implausible. It is all or nothing – either they are all necessary in their being, they all exist by a necessity of their own nature, or none of them does. I also don't think anyone would say that every single quark in the universe exists by a necessity of its own nature. Therefore, it would follow that a universe which is composed of such quarks doesn't exist by a necessity of its own nature either.<sup>19</sup>

Notice that this is the case whether or not you think of the universe as an object in its own right. Think about a statue made out of marble being different from another statue that is made out of another different block of marble. They would not be the same statue. They would be different. Similarly, if you think of the universe as an object in its own right, it would be a different object than one made out of different stuff. What if you think of the universe, not as an object, but just as a collection of objects or just a group of the things in the universe? This would be analogous to a flock of birds' not being the same as a different flock of birds if it is composed of different birds. A flock isn't an object in its own right; it is a collection of objects. But if the collection is made up of different members, if one is a flock of pelicans and the other a flock of crows, it is not the same flock. Even if you think of the universe as just being nothing over and above the objects that are in it, still, if it is composed of different stuff, then you have a different universe. And in all of these cases, it would give us good reason for thinking that the universe doesn't exist by a necessity of its own nature, that it exists contingently.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Modern string theorists like Brian Greene have posited that string theory shows that strings are even smaller than quarks and compose everything. Many have proposed that these theories show the universe is in an endless cycle and the universe exists necessarily.

*Answer:* Let's clarify a couple of issues. First of all, if strings turn out to be the fundamental building blocks of nature, then I will just substitute that for what I said about quarks. In other words, the identity of these things doesn't make any difference. You can run the same argument whether the fundamental building blocks are strings or quarks, it doesn't make any difference. With regard to these cosmological models that you are talking about, what those models attempt to show is a universe which is eternal in the past and is constantly recycling and going on into the future. But that doesn't show that it exists necessarily, nor does it claim it exists necessarily. Leibniz's argument is not that there has to be an eternal thing – it is that it has to be a logically necessary thing and there

<sup>19</sup> 10:04

isn't any logical necessity that these sort of string models have to exist. I mean, it is logically possible that they are all wrong and that quarks are the fundamental building blocks of matter. So don't equate the eternity of the universe with its necessity – that is an error. Leibniz is quite willing to admit that the universe never had a beginning. This is not an argument for the beginning of the universe. You'll notice in the premises that is nowhere stated. So if the universe has always existed, Leibniz would say, "Gosh, why does an eternal universe exist instead of just nothing?" Or "Why does *this* eternal universe exist?" That question can still be asked.

*Followup:* But the equations and the basic fundamental laws could actually be necessary because if you imagine each equation a puzzle piece in this massive puzzle, they may all fit together and they couldn't have fit any other way. If the equations do all work out, doesn't this necessitate one another and thus necessitate that the universe exist?

*Answer:* I understand there are these five different versions of string theory that can all be reduced to this one theory called M-Theory that is a simpler reduction of these disparate theories.<sup>20</sup> But that doesn't in any way show that what the theory postulates is logically necessary. You could have a universe that operates according to totally different laws of nature. All that would show is an internal coherence. That internal coherence could be replaced by a totally different picture that is also logically coherent. So you can't say that because something is internally coherent and logically bound up with itself that that whole scenario can't be replaced by another scenario.

*Followup:* I suppose I can't really think of an alternate to this full theory. Wouldn't we need to come up with another possible set of laws to show another set is possible?

*Answer:* That would be a very complex task to do. But I think that even those that develop these theories don't show that the universe exists logically necessarily. What you are talking about is the internal coherence of the laws with each other. And Leibniz would be quite happy to grant that the internal coherence of the laws necessitate each other. That doesn't mean that the whole scenario exists with logical necessity. You can't judge from the internal coherence of something that the whole picture is logically necessary.

*Question:* If the universe is not necessarily existing in its own nature, it has an external cause. Did you just postulate the external cause is quarks?

*Answer:* No, not at all! What I was saying was, "Is the universe something that exists by a necessity of its own nature?" And I was suggesting that not very many atheists, if any, hold to that view because when you look out at the universe you see the stuff that it is made up of doesn't exist necessarily. And then I was using quarks as being the ultimate constituents of which the universe is composed. One could have used strings as an alternative. But they are the stuff that the universe is made of. The universe is just either a collection of all these quarks or it is an object that is composed or constituted by these quarks like a marble statue is made up of the marble. My argument is that if the marble doesn't exist necessarily, then the statue can't exist necessarily because if you had different marble you'd have a different statue. In the same way, you could have different quarks, and so you would have a different universe. And that means the universe doesn't exist necessarily. Think of the analogy of your shoes made of leather versus steel. They

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<sup>20</sup> 15:15

are not the same shoes. That is a different pair of shoes with the same shape and size.

*Question:* When you talked about the atheist that said he believes that the universe is inexplicable and contingent. By contingent, does he mean dependent?

*Answer:* Not exactly. What he means is, it doesn't exist necessarily, that it could have failed to exist. Its existence isn't necessary.

*Followup:* I was thinking, how can you be an atheist and think the universe is contingent?

*Answer:* If you think of contingency in the sense of dependency, that would automatically imply some higher reality on which it depends. But what he wants to say is that it exists, it is not necessary that it exists, but it just exists inexplicably. There just is no explanation for why there is a universe. And that is the typical response to this argument. But to cover all of our bases, we are looking at this hypothetical response that says, "Yes, the universe does have an explanation, namely, the necessity of its own nature."<sup>21</sup>

*Question:* You are saying there are only two choices. Isn't the atheist stating it is neither? Doesn't the argument fall apart if you can't agree with the first premise?

*Answer:* That is correct, he denies the truth of the first premise. He would say the universe just exists inexplicably. He would deny that everything that exists has an explanation for its existence.

*Followup:* Can you use this for an argument for the existence of God in your position if the people can't agree on the argument? Where does this leave us?

*Answer:* Let's think about what the purpose of an argument is. For any argument, if you want to deny the conclusion, all you have to do is deny one of the premises. You can't force anybody to adopt your conclusion. All they have to do is pick one of the premises, and they can deny it and escape the conclusion. What you do in a successful argument is to try to raise the intellectual price tag of denying one of the premises, so the person sort of compromises his intellectual integrity to a degree by denying a premise which, in every other case, he would think is extremely plausible. And you begin to see that the only reason they deny it is to avoid the conclusion at the end that he doesn't want to believe in God. If you can do that, you have been successful. You have shown him what it is going to cost him to be an atheist. And some people will be persuaded. Some people will say, "Gosh, I guess I do think that everything that exists has an explanation. That does seem plausible. So I am going to change my mind, and I am going to agree that, yes, God exists."

*Followup:* Atheists seem to take the position that we don't know. One day we will know but what we do know is there is no God. Therefore, anything you try to say to me that is proof there is a God, I am going to say that is fallacious because the sheer existence of God is an impossibility.

*Answer:* What they have just done there is they have assumed an enormous burden of proof. They have just shouldered the burden of proof for the claim that God does not exist. And now you need to let them start giving their arguments and say, "O.K., give me your proof that God does not exist!" And that is very, very difficult to do. That is a very

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<sup>21</sup> 20:14

heavy burden to bear. In the absence of some overwhelming argument for atheism, I think their denial of premise (1) is just borne out of stubbornness and a refusal to accept the conclusion. Otherwise, I think the premise is more plausible than its contradictory, and that is all you need for a good argument. It doesn't need to be certain, just more plausible than its negation.

*Question:* Explain how the intelligent design movement would interface with what we are talking about?

*Answer:* The third argument that we talk about will be an argument for a cosmic Designer of the universe. This is not based on the design of the universe but just the very existence of the universe cries out for some kind of a transcendent cause.

*Question:* It appears the atheist worships the great lucky rabbit's foot in the sky!

*Answer:* In the sense that he thinks that the universe is just there and there is no explanation for it. I can sympathize with that comment.

*Question:* I think when you bring in the fine-tuning arguments, it just becomes absurd.

*Answer:* This is a good point. We are building a cumulative case here. It will not be any single argument that bears the full weight. It will be the cumulative arguments. And you start general with an argument like this, and then you get more and more specific. And I think the case becomes more and more powerful.<sup>22</sup>

*Question:* Is there anybody out there crazy enough to deny premise (3), that the universe exists, like it is an illusion?

*Answer:* I suppose in one sense, in Eastern philosophy like Hinduism and Daoism, there is a belief that the universe around us is ultimately illusory. But at least there is the illusion of the universe's existing. And, therefore, I don't think you can get away from the fact that there is the existence of something, and this requires an explanation. I don't think even that will work. But for people that we are apt to encounter in the western world, people will agree that the universe exists.

*Question:* Romans 1 says God's invisible attributes and divine nature are clearly seen and people have been futile to their response to that. Do you think the resistance you see to these arguments are an example of that?

*Answer:* I think some of it is. With regard to certain people who are willing to believe almost anything rather than theism, I think that there is clearly a kind of stubbornness there and simply an unwillingness to come to God. I don't want to say that everyone who resists these arguments does so, but I have met certain atheists who are willing to say that the universe just popped into being uncaused out of nothing and that that is better than believing in a transcendent cause. To me, that is far too high an intellectual price tag to pay to retain one's intellectual credibility.

*Question:* I know of a very bright atheist who is truly seeking whether or not God could exist. What is the very best book that I could give him to read? He is highly educated.

*Answer:* That would depend on the level of his education. I would direct him to the

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<sup>22</sup> 25:07

*Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* if he is very highly educated.

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## Cosmological Evidence That The Universe Is Contingent

I want to go to my second point because that is not the only reason for thinking the universe doesn't exist by a necessity of its own nature. I think a second reason for thinking that the universe does not exist necessarily is that we have strong astrophysical evidence that the universe began to exist. An essential property of a necessary being is eternity, that is to say, it exists without beginning and without end. Anything that comes into being at a certain time doesn't exist necessarily because it could fail to exist. So something that is necessary in its existence has to be eternal.

In one of the most startling developments of modern science, we now have pretty good evidence that the universe is not eternal in the past but had an absolute beginning about 13 billion years ago in a cataclysmic event called the Big Bang. And what makes the Big Bang so startling is that it represents the origin of all matter and energy, even physical space and time itself, *out of nothing*. The physicist P. C. W. Davies writes, "the coming into being of the universe, as discussed in modern science . . . is not just a matter of imposing some sort of organization . . . upon a previous incoherent state, but literally the coming-into-being of all physical things from nothing."<sup>23</sup> Now, of course, alternative theories have been proposed over the years in order to avoid the absolute beginning of the universe predicted by the standard Big Bang theory. But none of these theories has commended itself to the scientific community as more plausible than the Big Bang theory. In fact, in the year 2003, the cosmologists Arvind Borde, Alan Guth, and Alex Vilenkin were able to craft a theorem which shows that *any* universe which is, on average, in a state of cosmic expansion throughout its history cannot be eternal in the past but must have an absolute beginning.<sup>24</sup> Vilenkin pulls no punches. He says,

It is said that an argument is what convinces reasonable men, and a proof is what it takes to convince even an unreasonable man. With the proof now in place, cosmologists can no longer hide behind the possibility of a past-eternal universe. There is no escape, they have to face the problem of a cosmic beginning.<sup>25</sup>

So the beginning of the universe shows that the universe doesn't exist by a necessity of its own nature. It is contingent; it came into being at some point in the finite past. But not only that, the beginning of the universe shows the universe to be contingent in a very special way, namely, it came into existence from nothing. This is significant because it not only undermines the claim that the universe exists by a necessity of its own nature, but it also puts the atheist into a more difficult position. Against Leibniz, the atheist could say the universe has existed from eternity past without any explanation. And you can give the atheist a run for his money there. Essentially, he says, the universe is not necessary but it is eternal, it has always existed, and it just exists inexplicably. But this evidence

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<sup>23</sup> ABC Science Online, "The Big Questions: In the Beginning," Interview of Paul Davies by Phillip Adams, <http://aca.mq.edu.au/pdavies.html>, as quoted on ReasonableFaith.org at <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/does-god-exist-1>

<sup>24</sup> 30:20

<sup>25</sup> Alex Vilenkin, *Many Worlds in One: The Search for Other Universes* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), p. 176

requires us to say that the universe is contingent in the sense that a finite time ago, it just popped into existence for no reason whatsoever, with no explanation at all! And it seems that that is so outlandish that theism looks like a welcome alternative compared to that. So this second argument gives us not only good reason to think that the universe doesn't exist by a necessity of its own nature but that it is contingent in a very special way that points to its ground in a transcendent, external cause.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Three things. One, could you talk about the problems of dismissing premise (1) and just say, "I don't know; isn't that more humble?" Two, could you talk about when somebody offers the retort, "Just give us time. Science will figure it all out, and we'll answer all these questions at some point in the future." Three, could it be possible that nothing exists necessarily?

*Answer:* Actually, the third and the first question are the same. There I simply appeal to the intuitive obviousness of premise (1) when you think about it. I like the illustration that Richard Taylor gives of finding the ball in the woods. It just obviously needs some sort of explanation for why there is this ball lying on the floor of the forest, and merely increasing the size of the ball until it becomes the size of the universe doesn't do anything to remove the need for the explanation of the universe. So the atheist needs to give me some *reason* for thinking that the universe is an exception. And when we looked at the reasons the atheist gives, we saw they were question-begging. And therefore it seems the first premise is plausibly true and more plausibly true that its opposite. I'm not saying it is certain; but you don't need certainty for an argument to be a good one. As for the materialist retort, I do not think that that is relevant because we are not saying here that matter hasn't always existed or that it always will exist. We haven't even said that everything in the universe isn't composed of matter. The question is, does matter itself exist necessarily? That isn't a scientific question, that is a metaphysical question. There isn't any further research you could do to show that matter exists necessarily. That is a metaphysical point.<sup>26</sup>

*Question:* If the universe is all that exists and the bang is the beginning of some period of time, what is the argument for what is before?

*Answer:* Let's be very careful here. Did you notice how you defined the universe? You said, "if the universe is all there is." That already is smuggling in atheism through the back door. That *is* atheism! You are reasoning in a circle if you say that. You are assuming there is nothing beyond the universe. That is arguing in a circle. The question is, is that true, that the universe is all there is, and does it exist necessarily? That is the whole question we are exploring.

*Question:* I have heard R.C. Sproul say that if the universe is a finite system with beginning and end, it could have been brought about by another finite system, and that could keep going for a long time but not forever. At some point, there has to be an infinite that spawned a finite.

<sup>26</sup> 34:54

*Answer:* That does seem to be the implication of the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem. There are theories of the universe which are called multiverse theories in which our universe is just a bubble in a wider reality which is composed of many bubbles, many universes. What the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem shows is not simply that each universe must have a beginning, but that this entire multiverse system cannot be eternal in the past but must have a beginning. So you can't escape the beginning of the universe and its contingency through simply saying our universe is part of a wider reality that is greater than it. The Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theory requires that even that greater reality has a boundary at some point in the past and therefore came into being and therefore doesn't exist necessarily but is contingent.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Total Running Time: 38:37 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § I. CONTINGENCY ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 5

### **Objection: Universe Is Contingent But It Is Necessary That Something Exist**

We are going to finish up our discussion of Leibniz's Cosmological Argument. We have been talking about the question of why anything exists. And we saw that anything that exists has an explanation of its existence, either in the necessity of its own nature or else in an external cause. We then argued that if the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is God. Given, then, that the universe exists, it follows that the explanation of the universe is God.

We have looked at the principal objections that atheists or detractors of the argument might raise. There is one last way that the atheist might try to escape this argument that I want to talk with you about today by way of wrap-up. This is very subtle, so I am going to go slow, so that you can get it.

### **Objection: Universe Is Contingent But It Is Necessary That Something Exist**

What the atheist might say at this point is that there are no beings that exist necessarily. We have argued that there has to be something that exists by a necessity of its own nature. The atheist will say that is not true; nothing exists necessarily. Nevertheless, he might say, it is still necessary that something or other exist. There is nothing that exists necessarily, but it is necessary that something or other exist. So he will agree with the theist that the existence of nothing is impossible – something must exist. The existence of nothingness is simply impossible, but the conclusion he draws from this is not that, therefore, there is a necessary being but that, necessarily, some contingent being or other exists.

This would be sort of like saying, "Necessarily, every physical object must have a shape, but there is no particular shape which it is necessary for everything to have." In the same way, the atheist can say it is necessary that something or other exist, some contingent being or other has to exist, but there isn't any particular thing that exists necessarily. On this view, premise (1) turns out to be false. The universe just exists contingently and inexplicably. Something has to exist, it just happens to be our universe, and it just exists inexplicably. Some universe must exist, and there is no explanation why this universe exists.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Does that, then, refute evolution?

*Answer:* No, it has nothing to do with evolutionary theory.

*Followup:* I ask because, if it is necessary that something exists, but nothing exists necessarily, then they would suggest there is no hierarchy or consequence time line. In other words, would this mean they would not put any relationship between things?

*Answer:* That doesn't follow. Why can't the atheist say it is necessary that something exists and, given that this universe does exist, it just happens to evolve and life develops by chance and so forth? It seems to me this just doesn't have any implications for biology or evolutionary theory. But I did like the way you summarized it. You summarized it better than I did. "It is necessary that something exists, but nothing exists necessarily." It was very nicely put, very pithy.

*Question:* I noticed you didn't say that given that *we* exist, something necessarily exists. They are saying that even if we weren't here, something must exist, correct?<sup>28</sup>

*Answer:* That is correct. This is a very strange and radical view. It is not saying, conditionally, given something exists, something necessarily exists. This is a view that says, "It is logically impossible for there to be nothingness, and yet there isn't anything that exists necessarily." It is just necessary that something be there, and it happens to be us, but there is no explanation for that.

*Question:* Doesn't this tie back into the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument in that they can't deny the premise in this argument if they deny the *kalam*, right?

*Answer:* Let's review here. Remember last time we talked about why should we think that our universe is not necessary. One reason I said is because it is not eternal. It began to exist. That shows that the universe doesn't exist necessarily. These folks would say that that is right – this universe doesn't exist necessarily. So they will agree with that. They will agree that there is nothing about this universe that makes it a necessary being. But they would say, nevertheless, it is necessary that some universe exists. Why this one rather than any other is just inexplicable. Think again of the analogy of the shape. It is necessary that any physical object have a shape, but there isn't a particular shape that is necessary that everything have.

*Question:* Do the guidelines for whether something is necessary or not have any resemblance to the debate on dynamic time versus static time?

*Answer:* We have talked about that issue a little bit, and we will do so again. But I don't think that plays into this, though. Whatever view of time you have, the question is just why is there something, why is there anything? This view says it is logically necessary that there be something, there has to be something, but what it is, is just inexplicable.

*Question:* Isn't this position tantamount to saying we can't refute your position but we are just going to say "because" because we don't want to believe it?

*Answer:* Yeah, I am sympathetic to that response. It is just sort of helping oneself to the logical necessity of something on an atheistic view. That will actually be the second point that I am going to make in a moment. It is sort of *ad hoc*, that is to say, it is contrived to just assert this without any grounds for it. The theist has a reason why he thinks it is logically impossible for there to be nothing, namely, there is a necessary being – and therefore it is impossible that there be nothing. But on the atheist view, there is no

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<sup>28</sup> 5:05

explanation for why it is logically necessary that something exist. So it does seem contrived.

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Let me give some response to this. Again, this response is subtle and therefore I will take it slow. Alexander Pruss is a brilliant young philosopher formerly at Georgetown University but now recently at Baylor University. Pruss has pointed out that this view has an extremely implausible consequence. The thrust of his argument here is that if something has an extremely implausible consequence, then the view that entails that is itself implausible. If you can show that this view has a very implausible consequence, that suggests that the view itself is very implausible.

So what is this? Pruss says that there is no conjunction of claims about the non-existence of various things that would plausibly entail that, say, a unicorn exists. Think about it – how could the fact that certain other contingent things do *not* exist entail that a unicorn exists?<sup>29</sup> But on this atheistic view, the conjunction, “There are no mountains, there are no people, there are no planets, there are no rocks, there are no books, *etc., etc.,*” (keep going until you list everything in the universe except for a unicorn) entails that a unicorn must exist! This is because if there *has* to be something, and this conjunction says none of these other things exist, then it follows that the only thing left is a unicorn. And so a conjunction about the non-existence of all these other things entails that a unicorn exists, which just seems absurd. That suggests that this view is itself absurd and implausible.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* What if they say this view entails some amount of ignorance, and you can’t list everything because you don’t know everything that could exist?

*Answer:* I would just say that becomes even more *ad hoc*. I can’t see any reason why you couldn’t give a list of everything that doesn’t exist. Obviously, no human being could do it, but we are talking about a proposition that would be a conjunction like “Not-P and not-Q and not-R and . . .” out to infinity that is a listing all of these things that don’t exist. If that conjunction is true, that entails that a unicorn exists, if the unicorn is not one of the things in the conjunction. Of course, the unicorn is just arbitrary, you can pick the tooth fairy or leprechauns or anything. You have a conjunction of claims about things that do not exist, and that would entail that that thing exists. That just seems crazy.

*Question:* I don’t see why anyone would ever claim that nothing exists but a unicorn. What argument are we getting this from? Why argue that nothing exists except for one thing?

*Answer:* The unicorn is chosen arbitrarily. We would do this to refute this argument. We are trying to refute the view that necessarily something exists but there isn’t anything that exists necessarily. This view says it is necessary that there be something, but there isn’t any particular thing that has to exist necessarily, as the theist thinks. So if, necessarily, there has to be something, and none of these other things exist, then the only thing left

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<sup>29</sup> 10:03

over is this entity you picked, like a unicorn. So a conjunction of claims about the non-existence of other things would entail that this particular entity exists, which seems really strange. How can the fact that tables and chairs and people don't exist entail that the tooth fairy exists? And yet that is the consequence of this view! So that suggests that this view is very implausible.

*Question:* The atheist would say that a rational explanation does exist, but we just do not yet know what it is. Therefore, as time progresses and science progresses, we learn more and eventually get answers to all these questions through science, and God will not be necessary.<sup>30</sup>

*Answer:* That response is very different from the response we are considering now. That person *grants* the truth of premise (1), that everything that exists has an explanation – we just don't know what it is, but everything has an explanation. What you are describing is a person who *denies* premise (2), “If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is God.” Then, you remember, I gave a two fold response to that. I pointed out that that is logically equivalent to the typical atheist claim (though not the one you are rehearsing). Secondly, I gave some reasons for thinking premise (2) is plausible in and of itself. I think once the atheist starts down the road of saying everything has an explanation, he is really going to be backed into the corner on this argument because, for something to explain why *anything* exists, it is going to have to be a necessary being that transcends time and space and all the rest.

*Question:* When they say something must exist necessarily, do they. . .

*Answer:* Now, wait! I know this is confusing, but it is so important to say this right, otherwise we get mixed up. What we want to say is [they say,] “Necessarily, something exists,” not that something exists necessarily.

*Followup:* O.K., you are right. When it says that, do atheists give any attributes to that something at all? Do they call it a universe?

*Answer:* I think you can use the word “universe” just in the sense of “reality.” But there isn't anything specific here because it is contingent, and so it could be pellets that exist, it could be, I suppose, even abstract objects maybe, as long as they think they are contingent.

*Question:* I want to clarify Pruss' response. Is the response that you can't have this conjunction of non-existent things or is it a conjunction of things that don't exist necessarily? I could imagine if it is things that just don't exist, it is hard to see how this could be a good response because we know things do exist, like atoms, chairs, and tables. It is hard to see how that argument would follow.

*Answer:* It is not your first alternative. He does think that it is possible to have such a conjunction, theoretically. It is logically possible, though no human could obviously enumerate it. But you could have a proposition that would be the conjunction stating everything that doesn't exist. Now you are quite right, that proposition won't be true in *this* world because there are things that exist. He is not saying this proposition is true, but what he is saying is that from the truth of such a proposition it would follow that unicorns

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<sup>30</sup> 15:35

exist, on this atheist view. And that is just very implausible, to think that a conjunction of claims about how other things don't exist would entail that a unicorn exists. That is the argument. So it is not meant to be a true proposition about this world.

*Followup:* I think I follow that, but it just seems like it is not a big deal if no such proposition could be true. On the other hand, I can see how it does make sense if the argument is “P doesn't exist necessarily, Q doesn't exist necessarily, and so on. Yet something has to exist necessarily.”<sup>31</sup>

*Answer:* That is not the argument. Yes, it could be true so long as it omits something. So long as it omits unicorns, that proposition could be true, right? That is the whole point. If you had something that enumerated everything, then that couldn't be true. But so long as it omits something, that proposition can be true and would entail that that other thing exists, which seems very, very implausible.

*Followup:* I guess it could be true in principle.

*Answer:* And that is what we are talking about. It is logically possible for that proposition to be true, and so you would have a conjunction of statements about other things that don't exist and that would entail that some arbitrarily chosen entity exists, which seems really odd.

*Question:* The whole argument seems more philosophical panic – “I don't care what you do, just do something.” In a sense, something has to exist, but they don't care what it is. If something has to exist, but that something doesn't necessarily have to exist, what happens if you destroy that something? Does something else have to pop into being?

*Answer:* That is an interesting point! Yes, that is right because it is logically necessary that something exist. I grant you that. And yet this view is taken by some atheists. For example, this view is expressed in a book by a philosopher named Bede Rundle on this question of why does anything at all exist. And I have heard other philosophers orally say this as well. They say it is logically necessary that there be something but there isn't any particular thing that has to exist. So this isn't just airy-fairy; this view is out there in some philosophical circles. But again, remember the point of an argument is to raise the price tag of denying the conclusion, and here we see the kind of price the atheist has to pay to avoid the force of this argument.

*Question:* What if the atheist decides to pay that price tag? Is there anything left to say to that?

*Answer:* I have one more point to make in defense of this. But remember that with a deductive argument, you can always avoid the conclusion by denying one of the premises. If you are just willing to bite the bullet and deny one of the premises, you can avoid the conclusion. So the question will be, what intellectual price tag are you willing to pay? We are not suggesting that we can force atheists to become theists. That obviously is not true.

*Followup:* What if the atheist said something like, “Since we can't conceptualize any possible universe where all these things don't exist because we only know of a universe with matter and humans, perhaps in a universe devoid of all those things except unicorns

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<sup>31</sup> 20:17

perhaps it would be logical unicorns could exist?”

*Answer:* Yes, it is logical! It *has* to be that way. And if he is willing to pay that price, then he is welcome to it, but that is a pretty high price to pay, I think.

*Question:* If God is a necessary being, but he can be temporal at any point, then could the universe also be necessary if it is temporal?<sup>32</sup>

*Answer:* Yes, I don't see why not. I don't think that necessary existence implies timeless existence. I just don't see any reason to think that because something exists necessarily it has to be timeless.

*Question:* This came to mind when someone asked what would happen if this something that exists was destroyed and something else necessarily has to take its place. It seems logic is being elevated to some impersonal God because logic is requiring something to spontaneously pop into existence – it is happening just to fit with this abstract concept of logic. It seems strange that an atheist would take that step. They would be acknowledging something existing necessarily, that being logic.

*Answer:* On this view, the atheist isn't willing to say something exists necessarily. He wants to say there is nothing that exists necessarily. You are pressing a question about the status of logic itself and its laws and whether there is an explanation for the necessity of logic. That raises a whole different issue that we are not pressing here, but is a good question to raise. If the atheist ultimately has to abandon logic in order to save atheism, then I think the debate is over because then it is the theists who are the logical, rational ones.

*Question:* “Something” and “no thing” are concepts. Could it be that God is more than a concept and has relationships with other things? There are logical absurdities. To say there are no unicorns is an absurdity because you just created the construct, or the concept, of a unicorn when you say that.

*Answer:* Understand that a unicorn here is a flesh and blood animal that has hair and spatial dimensions and weight. You are talking about the concept of a unicorn, not an actual unicorn, so there is no absurdity in saying that this concept isn't instantiated. There isn't any real unicorn even though there is a concept of it.

*Followup:* Doesn't that hit to the very issue of the absurdity of humans trying to define God or not-God?

*Answer:* I don't think so. Whatever God is, I don't think that we would want to say he is not something. We are using the word “something” in a very generic sense to just mean an entity that exists.

*Followup:* Of course, as Christians we believe that God is omniscient and omnipresent and omnipotent. But if you take the premise that God is omnipresent, but the humans construct that there is this state of nothingness and that that is simply a human construct, that God in reality exists as relationship with himself or as a Trinity God, that he speaks into existence relationship, he speaks us into relationship.

*Answer:* This argument does not try to prove the omnipresence of God, though it would

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<sup>32</sup> 25:15

show that God is a being which transcends time and space. So in that sense he is not spatially limited. God can exist in relationship with himself. I think that God is relational in the Trinity, for example. That would not require the existence of a universe of physical beings or space. God could exist and be in relation with himself without any spatial reality at all, even without any temporal reality. I do not think time and space exist necessarily; at least I have not seen any good reason to think that.<sup>33</sup>

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Let me give a second response to this objection. On this view, there is nothing which would account for why there exists contingent beings in every possible world. There is no explanation for why there would be contingent beings in every possible world. In other words, I am raising the question, “Why is it logically necessary that something exist?” Since there is no necessary being, there is nothing that could cause contingent beings to exist in every possible world. There is no explanation why every possible world includes contingent beings. There is no strict logical inconsistency in the concept of a world that is devoid of contingent beings. What accounts for the fact that in every logically possible world contingent beings exist? Given the infinity of broadly logically possible worlds, the odds that in all of them contingent beings would just happen to exist inexplicably is infinitesimal. If you can think of all the logically possible worlds there are, the odds that in all of them contingent beings would just happen to exist is literally infinitesimal. So the probability for the atheist hypothesis is effectively zero. There is zero probability that contingent beings would just happen to exist by chance in every possible world. So it seems to me that this viewpoint also fails; it has a probability of effectively zero.

By contrast, I might say, on the theist view there is a good reason why there are contingent beings. Actually, there aren't contingent beings in every possible world on the theist view because there are worlds in which just God alone exists. But on the theist view there is a good explanation for why it is logically necessary that something exists, namely, there is a necessary being. And that is why it is necessary that something exists: because there is a necessary being. But on the atheist view, there is just no explanation for why it is necessary that something exists.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Back to premise (1), is it the atheist view that nothing has an external cause? Is that the foundation they have?

*Answer:* No.

*Followup:* This whole argument you are presenting today seems to be based on the premise that there can't be an external cause for anything.

*Answer:* You are misunderstanding something here. Most things have external causes. I do – I was conceived by my parents. Our automobile has an external cause – it was manufactured in Ohio. This building has an external cause. Most of the things that we are familiar with have external causes. In fact, you remember, some of you were pressing me

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<sup>33</sup> 30:00

the other day to give some examples of things that exist by a necessity of its own nature, and I was hard pressed to do so, apart from mentioning things like mathematical objects or propositions, things like that. So most things have external causes, and everybody, atheists and theists alike, agree with that. The question is, does everything that exists have an explanation of its existence? That is the issue in premise (1).

*Question:* I really didn't understand what you were trying to say there. Something about the atheist view is illogical because it just can't happen statistically?

*Answer:* Let's imagine all of the different possible worlds there are. Just think of all the different possible worlds there could be. It is endless and infinite. In every one of them, contingent beings exist. Contingent beings would be beings whose existence is not necessary – they don't exist by the necessity of their own nature. If there is something that exists by a necessity of its own nature, it would hardly be surprising that in every possible world, something exists.<sup>34</sup> But that is not the atheist view on this objection. The atheist is saying, in all of these possible worlds, there just happens to exist something contingently, and there is no explanation for why that is the case. It just happens to be that way. As I said, the odds of that happening, by chance, are just infinitesimal, that there would be contingent beings in every single world. And yet that is what the atheist has to say. He has to bit the bullet and affirm that, which seems implausible.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

Given the truth of the three premises, the conclusion is that God is the explanation of the existence of the universe. What sort of God concept do we get here? What kind of being are we concluding to? This argument implies that God is an uncaused, unembodied mind who transcends the physical universe and even space and time themselves and who exists necessarily.

This is a very rich concept of God. It doesn't give you omniscience or omnipresence, but it does give you some of the central attributes of God. Certainly it gives us enough of the attributes of this being to say that it is incompatible with any serious form of atheism.

*[At this point, Dr. Craig hands out an "argument map" like the one in his book On Guard.]*

How does this argument map work? Everything in blue is what the proponent of the argument says. If the arrow goes down, that means that is a supporting argument for the argument above it. If it is in red, that is the atheistic response to the argument. And if the arrow goes up, that means it is in resistance to the premise.

Look at premise (1): Everything that exists has an explanation of its existence, either in the necessity of its own nature or in an external cause. The atheist says, "Then God must have a cause to explain him." But then the theist says, "No, God exists by a necessity of his own nature." And that terminates that line of discussion.

Why think that premise (1) is true? Because this is a self-evident principle. Think of the story of finding the ball in the woods and imagine the ball is then the size of the universe.

<sup>34</sup> 35:07

That gives good grounds for thinking premise (1) is true. The atheist response could be, “The universe is an exception to this principle.” The theist can then respond, “Making the universe an exception to this principle is arbitrary and commits the taxi cab fallacy.” The atheist can then respond, “It is not arbitrary, since it is impossible for the universe to have an explanation.” The theist then can respond, “You are assuming the universe is all there is, which begs the question in favor of atheism. You are reasoning in a circle.” And that ends that line of discussion.

## DISCUSSION

*Question: (inaudible)*

*Answer:* Right! The concept of God that this argument gives us is a being who is an uncaused, unembodied mind who transcends the physical universe and even space and time themselves and who exists necessarily. All of those attributes emerged in the course of our discussion of this argument.

*Question:* In your experience doing these debates, do you see that the actual atheist’s heart is being changed at all in going through these arguments or is it mostly people in the audience that you are trying to reach whose hearts potentially are soft to the Holy Spirit?

*Answer:* It is the latter. I have no illusions about trying to convince my debate opponent. Someone who is willing to get up in front of hundreds and even thousands of students and denounce God and denounce Christ is not apt to change his mind in the course of a debate. But there are lots of students in the audiences who are really agonizing and really searching and who are open to argument, and something like this is designed to reach them.

I want to add, too, on what I thought you might ask but you didn’t, and that is, “Do you get these sort of responses in the debates?” And the answer is “No!” What I have done here is to give the atheist every benefit of the doubt. I tried to think of every good objection the atheist might raise. They never raise most of these. They’ve never even thought about most of these things! You can’t believe the superficiality of the interaction on some of these issues. So I am really bending over backwards here to try to give the best objections that the atheist can raise and then how you might respond to these.

What I cannot do – and I have learned this through the website – is anticipate every *bad* objection to these arguments! That is just impossible. Some arguments and objections are so flaky and so off the wall that you just can’t possibly anticipate them. There you are going to have to think for yourself. But at least I think these are the most important substantive responses that atheists have given to this sort of argument in professional journals and books on the subject. I think that the argument survives those attacks intact and emerges from that acid bath very, very strongly and is a good argument for belief in God.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Total Running Time: 42:29 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § II. *KALAM* COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 1

### ***Kalam* Cosmological Argument**

Let's step back for a moment and get an overview of where we are. We have been doing the Doctrine of God in this current section of the class, and we spent many weeks—months actually—studying the attributes of God. And now, having completed that section, we've come to what is called Natural Theology, that is to say, the attempt to give evidence or argument for God's existence without appealing to special revelation, but simply using human reason and evidence alone. So we are taking a kind of excursus here through Natural Theology before we come back to looking again at what the Bible has to say about the Doctrine of God, particularly the Trinity.

Our first argument that we surveyed was the Contingency Argument developed by such thinkers as Leibniz. Today we want to turn to a different argument, which is the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument.

#### ***Introduction***

What is the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument? The word "*kalam*" is an Arabic word that denotes medieval Islamic theology. Muslim theologians, when Islam swept over Egypt in North Africa, absorbed the Christian thought that had been in those areas, like in Alexandria, which was the center of Christian learning. They picked up these arguments for the creation of the world that Christians had been using against Greek materialists and other philosophers. They began to develop these arguments in highly sophisticated ways for the existence of God as the creator of the universe.

So let me appeal to one of the greatest of these medieval thinkers whose name was al-Ghazali, a medieval Muslim theologian from the 12<sup>th</sup> century who lived in Persia, or modern day Iran. He was concerned that the Muslim theologians of his day were being highly influenced by Greek philosophers. They denied the creation of the universe by God. Instead these philosophers held that the universe just flows necessarily out of the being of God and is therefore eternal and beginningless and, in fact, just as necessary as God is. The world is a sort emanation out of the being of God.

After thoroughly studying the writings of these philosophers, al-Ghazali wrote a withering critique of their views in a book entitled *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. This is a fascinating book, which I think repays reading today – it is just a very stimulating book! In this book, he argues that the idea of a beginningless universe is absurd. He argues that the universe must have had a beginning, and since nothing comes into being without a cause, there must be a transcendent creator of the universe. Al-Ghazali frames the argument very simply; here is a quotation from him, "Every being which begins has a cause for its beginning. Now the world is a being which begins.

Therefore, it possesses a cause for its beginning.”<sup>36</sup> We can summarize al-Ghazali’s argument by means of three simple steps:

4. Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
5. The universe began to exist.
6. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

This little argument is so marvelously simple that anybody can memorize it and share it with another person. It just consists of those three short steps.

Notice that it is also a logically airtight argument. If the two premises are true, then the conclusion follows necessarily. Anybody who wants to deny the conclusion that the universe has a cause of its beginning has to deny one of the two premises. He has to say that either premise (1) or premise (2) is false, and so the whole question comes down to that – are these premises more plausibly true than false?<sup>37</sup>

What we want to do is examine each of the premises in turn.

### ***What Ever Begins To Exist Has a Cause***

The first premise is that *whatever begins to exist has a cause*. I think that this premise is virtually undeniable for any sincere seeker after truth. For something to come into being without any causal conditions of any sort would be to come into being from nothing. That is surely impossible. Let me give three reasons in support of this first premise.

First, *something cannot come from nothing*. To claim that something can come into being from nothing is worse than magic, when you think about it. When a magician pulls a rabbit out of a hat, at least you’ve got the magician – not to speak of the hat! But if you deny premise (1), you have got to say that the whole universe just appeared at some moment in the finite past for no reason whatsoever. But I do not think that any sane person sincerely believes that things, say, a horse or an Eskimo village, can just pop into being out of nothing without a cause.

This isn’t rocket science or high level metaphysics! Remember the *Sound of Music* when Captain von Trapp and Maria finally reveal their love to each other after trying to deny it for a long time? What does Maria say? “Nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could!” Well, we don’t normally think of philosophical principles as romantic, but in this case here I think Maria was expressing a fundamental principle of classical metaphysics. She had no doubt been very well trained in the convent school in Thomas Aquinas and classical metaphysics. So I think this is an obvious truth that we recognize, that nothing comes from nothing or something doesn’t come from nothing.

Very many times, skeptics will respond to this point by saying that in physics, subatomic particles, virtual particles as they are called, come into being from nothing. And, therefore, in subatomic physics, you do get something from nothing: these virtual

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<sup>36</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-Iqtisad fi’l-I’tiqad*, cited in S. de Beaurecueil, “Gazzali et S. Thomas d’Aquin: Essai sur la preuve de l’existence de Dieu proposée dans l’Iqtisad et sa comparaison avec les ‘voies’ Thomiste,” *Bulletin de l’Institut Francais d’Archaeologie Orientale* 46 (1947): 203.

<sup>37</sup> 5:09

particles pop into being from nothing. Or certain theories of the origin of the universe are sometime described in popular magazines as getting something from nothing. Very often the universe will be described as the proverbial “free lunch.” Milton Friedman, the economist, says, “There ain’t no free lunch.” Sometimes people will say that the universe is the exception to the proverb “There ain’t no free lunch” because the universe came into being from nothing.

I think that this response represents a deliberate abuse of science, to be frank. The theories in question have to do with particles’ originating as fluctuations of the energy in the vacuum. And you need to understand that in physics, the vacuum is not what the layman means by a vacuum, namely, nothing. In physics, the vacuum is a sea of fluctuating energy, a sea of violent activity, having a physical structure and governed by physical laws. Similarly, in these models of the universe, the universe comes into being out of the vacuum; it doesn’t come into being from nothing. The vacuum is definitely something, which is this sea of fluctuating energy. And to tell lay people that in this case something comes from nothing is simply a distortion of these theories and, as I say, an abuse of science by those who appeal to them.

There is, by the way, a lesson that is very, very important in this, namely, you have got to be very leery of articles in popular magazines and shows on television purporting to describe current scientific theories.<sup>38</sup> In order to communicate these highly technical theories to laymen, the authors of these articles and television shows inevitably have to appeal to metaphors which are highly misleading and inaccurate. This is a case in point, where it is said that contemporary physics shows that something can come from nothing. They are using the word “nothing” in an inaccurate sense, philosophically. The quantum vacuum is not nothing. So be very careful and skeptical on what you hear on these popular programs and in these popular articles.

Nothing, or nothingness, is not just empty space. Nothing is the absence of anything whatsoever. As such, nothingness literally has no properties because there is nothing there to have the properties. So nothingness has no properties, and therefore you can see how silly it is when popularizers say things like nothingness is unstable to quantum fluctuations or the universe tunneled into being out of nothing. They are using these words in a philosophically inaccurate and misleading way. Nothingness is non-being. It is the absence of being – the absence of anything – and as such has no properties and therefore cannot be unstable to fluctuations or produce universes or anything of this sort.

When I first published my work on the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument as a result of my study at the University of Birmingham in England, I figured that atheists would attack the second premise of the argument (“The universe began to exist”) because that seemed to me clearly a more controversial premise. I never dreamed that atheists would go after this first premise. It seemed to me that to attack the first premise would simply expose one as a person who isn’t really sincere about finding out the truth about reality but is just looking for an academic refutation of the argument – just looking for any sort of loophole to try to escape the conclusion. You can imagine my surprise, then, in finding atheists denying premise (1) in order to avoid the conclusion to the argument! For example, my friend and colleague Quentin Smith, who is a philosopher at the University of Western

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<sup>38</sup> 10:05

Michigan, responded to this argument by saying that the most rational position to hold is that the universe came *from* nothing, *by* nothing, and *for* nothing – sort of a good close to a Gettysburg Address of atheism! But it seems to me this is simply the faith of an atheist. In fact, I think it represents a greater leap of faith than to believe that God exists as a cause of the universe because, as I say, to reiterate, it is literally worse than magic to hypothesize such a thing. If this is the alternative to the belief in God, namely, to think that the universe just popped into being uncaused out of nothing, then I think atheists need to simply be forever silent in their denunciation of theists as being irrational because what could be more irrational than this – to think that the universe just popped into existence uncaused out of nothing?

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Would the atheist then have any explanation of why things don't spring into existence from nothing anymore?

*Answer:* That was going to be my second point! Very nice anticipation of my second point! Let me go on to the second point, since you have done that.

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My second point is: *if something can come into being from nothing, if that is possible, then it becomes inexplicable why anything and everything doesn't come into being from nothing.* Think about it. Why don't bicycles and Beethoven and root beer pop into being uncaused from nothing? Why is it only universes that can spring into being from nothing? What makes nothingness so discriminatory? There can't be anything about nothingness that favors universes because nothingness has no properties.<sup>39</sup> Nothing can constrain nothingness either because there isn't anything to be constrained. I think this point is a very persuasive one, namely, it becomes utterly inexplicable why just anything and everything doesn't just pop into being out of nothing, if this can happen.

I have heard atheists respond to this argument in the following way. "Well, premise (1) is true of everything *in* the universe, but it is not true *of* the universe." I think you can see that this is just the old Taxi Cab Fallacy again that we talked about with regard to Leibniz. You cannot dismiss the causal principle like a cab once you have arrived at your desired destination. Premise (1) isn't just a physical law of nature, like the law of gravity, which only applies in the universe. Rather, it is a metaphysical principle which applies to being as being – it applies to being as such. Therefore, it governs all of reality, all of being. And it would be arbitrary to say that the principle does not apply to the origin of the universe – that the universe can somehow spring into being without a cause.

At this point the atheist is likely to retort, "All right, if everything has a cause, then what is God's cause?" And, I must say, I am surprised at the self-congratulatory attitude that accompanies this question many times on student's lips. They imagine that they have said something really profound here and really offered a knock down argument, when in fact all they have done is misunderstand the first premise. Premise (1) does not say *everything has a cause*. It says *whatever begins to exist has a cause*. Everything that comes into

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<sup>39</sup> 15:05

being has a cause. But something that is eternal would not need a cause because it never came into being.

And notice this isn't special pleading for God. This is what the atheist has always said about the universe, right? The universe is eternal and uncaused and therefore there is no cause of the universe existing. So this isn't special pleading for God, this is exactly what the atheist has typically said about the universe, or about matter and energy. But the problem is, as we will see, we now have strong evidence that the universe is not eternal in the past, but that the universe did have a beginning. And so the atheist is backed into the corner of having to say that the universe just sprang into being uncaused out of nothing, which, I think, is absurd.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* As to the response that the principle applies for things in the universe but not of the universe – I still don't think that gets them out of the dilemma of why other universes aren't popping into being all the time.

*Answer:* That is a good point, actually, because in contemporary cosmology, where it will often talk about other universes as bubbles that form in a sort of sea of energy, you could have a universe that would form right in our midst and annihilate us. There could be a universe that would pop into being in our universe. And yet that hasn't happened. Why not? So, yeah, that is a point that still would need to be asked. But I want to question it at this even more fundamental level because I think that their thinking of the causal principle as being a physical law of nature rather than as a metaphysical principle is wrong and just a fundamental misunderstanding.

*Question:* I have encountered arguments from atheists, and they claim that the universe as we know it had come into being but that not all matter and energy was initially bundled up in the singularity.

*Answer:* Right, and that question will be addressed when we come to premise (2). Did the universe really begin to exist, or was there just a relative beginning but there were material constituents prior to the Big Bang out of which the universe was made? But right now, even if premise (2) is false, we are just considering this causal principle, which is a religiously neutral principle and has nothing to do with God or whether the universe ever began.<sup>40</sup> We are simply asking, can things come into being without any causal conditions? That is the question.

*Question:* Can you comment on the retreat to quantum considerations. This seems to be a common move these days.

*Answer:* I think on the popular level it does represent a sort of refuge of ignorance on the part of people who don't understand quantum mechanics and so can appeal to this mysterious and bizarre realm where anything can happen. It really does become a kind of veil, where you can say, "What's behind the curtain?", so to speak. But what we need to do is pull away the curtain and try to understand these theories. And when you do, as in

<sup>40</sup> 20:08

this case, you can say it is simply not the case that virtual particles are instances of things coming into being out of nothing. Notice that I might add that this premise doesn't say that *every event has a cause*. This would be consistent with quantum indeterminacy, to say that events like, say, the decay of a radioactive isotope, isn't precisely determined causally. It is consistent with saying events can be without a cause; but what it is claiming is that things cannot come into being without some kind of causal conditions.

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The third point in support of this first premise is that *common experience and scientific evidence confirm the truth of premise (1)*. Premise (1) is constantly verified and never falsified. So it is hard to understand how any atheist, who is committed to modern science, could deny, in the light of the evidence, that premise (1) is more plausibly true than false. Even if it is not certain, surely the evidence makes it more plausibly true than false. It is never falsified, it is always verified, and that gives us good inductive grounds for accepting this premise.

In my opinion, the first premise of the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument is clearly true, and if the price of denying the argument's conclusion is to deny premise (1), then I think that atheism is philosophically bankrupt.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Total Running Time: 23:12 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY  
§ II. *KALAM* COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Lecture 2

**The Universe Began to Exist:  
First Philosophical Argument**

We have been talking about the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument for God's existence, and last week we looked at the first premise of that argument, that *everything that begins to exist has a cause*. And I gave three reasons as to why I thought this premise is more plausible than its opposite.

DISCUSSION

*Question:* Can you explain what the word "*kalam*" means?

*Answer:* It is an Arabic word, and it literally means "word" or "speech." During the Middle Ages, during the high tide of Islamic theology, *kalam* came to have a more extended meaning to mean any statement or position of doctrine. The whole movement of medieval Islamic theology came to be called *kalam*. This is still used today. When I was in Turkey this spring speaking at the University of Ankara, I spoke at the Department of *Kalam*. These were practitioners of *kalam*, to whom I was speaking on the incarnation. It was just a wonderful experience. One of the gentlemen, after I finished, said, "You are a better practitioner of *kalam* than most of our philosophers!" So that was an encouragement to me. The reason why I called this the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument is because, although it has its roots in Christian theology, when Islam conquered North Africa it absorbed the Christian theological traditions that existed in places like Alexandria in Egypt. This argument was taken up into medieval Islam, and then it was highly developed, so some of the most sophisticated forms of this argument were on the part of these Muslim medieval theologians. So for that reason, the honorific title is well deserved.

The argument, however, also was defended by Jewish medieval theologians who rubbed shoulders with the Muslim theologians in Spain, while Spain was under Muslim control. And through the Jewish theologians, this in turn was mediated to the Latin-speaking, Christian, European West where people like St. Bonaventure adopted this argument and defended it. So the argument has a broad appeal having been propounded by Jews, Muslims, and Christians both Protestant and Catholic. It started with the Christians and their attempts to refute the Greek doctrine of the eternity of matter and the eternity of the universe. These early Christians wrote works against Aristotle. And when Islam took over North Africa, they absorbed this tradition. Since Muslims also believe in creation out of nothing, they found these arguments congenial. It is a nice bridge-building argument for sharing your faith with the Muslim, I must say, because you are on common ground here. Muslims just love it when I come and talk about this argument, but I usually then will try to transition to talking about Christ as well.

*Question:* “*Kalam*” is also daily used to refer to the Scripture – to the Qur’an. So Muslims, whenever they refer to *kalam*, they all know it refers to the Qur’an.

*Answer:* Ah-ha! So in the same way that we call the Bible “The Word!” Very interesting! Thank you!

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## ***The Universe Began To Exist***

Let’s go to that second premise, which is more controversial, that is, *the universe began to exist*. And what I want to do is present two philosophical arguments in support of this premise and then two scientific confirmations. So we have philosophical grounds or metaphysical grounds for believing this premise, and then we have scientific confirmation of those arguments from empirical evidence.

### **First Philosophical Argument**

Let’s talk about the first philosophical argument, which is the argument based upon the impossibility of the existence of an actually infinite number of things. Remember we took as our point of departure the medieval Muslim theologian al-Ghazali’s statement of the argument.<sup>42</sup> And he argues that if the universe never began to exist, then there must have been, prior to today, an infinite number of previous events. The series of events just goes back and back without beginning, and therefore the number of events that have transpired prior to today is infinite. But he argues an actually infinite number of things cannot exist because this will lead to various absurdities.

In order to understand al-Ghazali’s argument, it is very important that we grasp a distinction concerning the infinite, namely, the difference between an *actual* infinite and a *potential* infinite. Let me say something about the potential infinite first, as I think this is the more familiar usage. Al-Ghazali had no problem with the idea that there could be a potentially infinite number of things. What he wants to deny is that there can be an actually infinite number of things. When we say that something is potentially infinite, infinity serves merely as an ideal limit, which never actually exists but which one can endlessly approach. For example, any finite distance can be subdivided into one-half, then one-fourth, then one-eighth, then one-sixteenth, on to infinity. But you will never arrive at an “infinitieth” division. This infinity is merely potential – it serves as the ideal limit which you endlessly approach, but you never actually get there. The symbol for this sort of infinity is the so-called lazy-eight symbol, “∞.” That signifies of the idea of a potential infinite.

Now by contrast with this, an actual infinite is not growing toward the infinite as a limit – rather it *is* infinite. It is a collection having a number of members which is in excess of any natural number 1, 2, 3, 4 . . . . Any finite number you can think of, the number of members in this collection is greater than that. It is complete; there are an actually infinite number of things existing in the collection. The symbol that is used for this type of infinity in modern mathematics is the Hebrew letter aleph “ℵ.”

Al-Ghazali has no problem with the idea of a potentially infinite number of things

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<sup>42</sup> 5:06

because this just means an ideal limit – you just go on and on and on, and you never actually get there. But he wants to argue that an actually infinite number of things cannot exist because various absurdities would result. So there could not be an actually infinite number of coins, or an actually infinite number of chairs, or an actually infinite number of particles, or something of that sort. That would mean that if you cannot have an actually infinite number of things, you couldn't have an actually infinite number of events. The number of past events would have to be merely finite. If the number of past events is finite, then the universe cannot be beginningless. Rather the universe must have begun to exist, which is the second premise of the argument.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Would you call a numbering system an actual infinite because you could theoretically keep on counting forever?

*Answer:* This is disputed by philosophers of mathematics. Some mathematicians think that the natural numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 . . . are merely potentially infinite in the sense that you construct the numbers by adding 1 and that could go on potentially infinitely. But other mathematicians say, no, the set of all natural numbers just exists – it is just complete, and they are all there. Therefore, there are an actually infinite number of natural numbers. That is a disputed question. The vast majority of mathematicians would say that there are an actually infinite number of natural numbers, but there is a minority called “intuitionists” or “constructivists” who would say, no, it is merely potentially infinite.<sup>43</sup> But the majority view would be that the number of numbers is actually infinite.

*Question:* What would be another example of an actual infinite?

*Answer:* Right! This is a very good point – it is hard to think of any examples in physical reality and nature of anything that is actually infinite. But I think we can imagine, say, that the universe goes on forever spatially and that per unit-area there is one star. If there is an infinite number of areas, there would be an actually infinite number of stars. It is not as if you are adding new stars all the time, but you can imagine, if the universe is spatially infinite, that there would be an actually infinite number of stars. Now there is no evidence that that is the case. In fact, I think the contrary is true. But that would give you at least an idea of what we are talking about when we say an actual infinite. But I certainly agree with you that it will be futile to try to refute this argument by saying to al-Ghazali, “Look, here is an actual infinite!” I think in every case he will be able to re-interpret that and say, no, that is merely potentially infinite or finite. I think it would be futile to try to refute him by finding a counter-example and saying here is an example of something that is actually infinite.

*Question:* Since this seems to be concerning an infinite number of things, would this apply to God, then? Could we say that God is infinite?

*Answer:* OK, this is a good question that is often asked. This argument is worded in such a way as to stave off this misunderstanding: “An actually infinite number of things cannot exist.” If we think of God as infinite, he isn't a collection that is composed of an actually

<sup>43</sup> 10:13

infinite number of things. So the infinity of God, as that phrase is used by theologians, isn't a mathematical concept. It is not a *quantitative* concept, if you will; it is a *qualitative* concept. The infinity of God means that God is, for example, eternal, necessary, morally perfect, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent; he has all of these superlative attributes. But the infinity of God is not a quantitative, mathematical concept. So it simply doesn't fall under the case of an actually infinite number of things' existing.

*Question:* Would time be a potential infinite?

*Answer:* This is a really good question! Al-Ghazali is going to argue that time is finite in the past because otherwise we are going to have an actually infinite number of past hours or days or whatever. But what about the future? Is the future actually infinite? This depends upon your theory of time. In this class, we have differentiated two different theories of time which we called the A-Theory and the B-Theory. You may remember that the A-Theory is the view that the future does not exist in any sense. The future is pure potentiality. It is not as though your supper tonight is sort of existing up ahead out there, and you are waiting to get to it somehow. Rather on the A-theory things come into being, and they go out of being. On the A-Theory, if the future should go on forever, it would be an example of a purely potential infinite, so time would be potentially infinite. For any point in time you pick toward the future, there will only be a finite number of events that have occurred, but you keep adding new events every day or every second or whatever, so that the future is potentially infinite. That is not problematic. On the B-Theory, this is the view that everything in time exists. Whether past, present, or future, everything is equally real.<sup>44</sup> Now if time goes on forever in the B-Theory, then you would have an actually infinite future; you would have an actually infinite number of future events and an actually infinite number of past events. So what this argument would require on the B-Theory is that time would come to an end. Time would have to have a beginning, and time would have to have an end. It would have to be like a yardstick that has the first inch and a thirty-sixth, or final, inch, and that is the end of the yardstick. On the A-Theory, time can go on forever because it is merely potentially infinite. On the B-Theory, time could not go on forever, if this argument is correct. It would have to be finite in the future.

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It is frequently alleged that this sort of argument has been invalidated by developments in modern mathematics: it was fine for al-Ghazali's day in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, but today it has been overtaken by today's modern math. For example, the use of infinite sets in modern mathematics is commonplace. Things like the set of natural numbers  $\{0, 1, 2, 3 \dots\}$  is said to be an infinite set. It has an infinite number of numbers in it. The number of members in the set of natural numbers is not merely potentially infinite; rather in modern set theory, the number of members in the set of natural numbers is actually infinite. There is an infinite number of numbers in the set. And many people will say that these developments have undermined al-Ghazali's argument because now we see that it is perfectly reasonable to talk about an actually infinite number of things.

However, I think this objection is misconceived. What these developments merely show

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<sup>44</sup> 14:55

is that if you adopt certain axioms and certain rules, then you can *talk* about actually infinite quantities in a perfectly consistent way without contradicting yourself. And all this accomplishes is showing that you can set up a certain universe of discourse about infinite quantities. By a universe of discourse, I simply mean you can talk about these things in a self-consistent framework. But this does absolutely nothing to show that mathematical entities really exist or that an actually infinite number of things can really exist. If al-Ghazali is right, this universe of discourse that is employed in set theory and modern mathematics is just a sort of a fictional realm. It is like the world of Sherlock Holmes. In that fictional world, Holmes lives on Baker Street, has a companion Dr. Watson, does all sorts of exploits, has a housekeeper named Mrs. Hudson, and so forth. Those are all true in that fictional world created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. But none of those things actually exists. And similarly, all that modern mathematics shows is that if you set up certain axioms and rules, you can talk about this universe of discourse in a consistent way without contradicting yourself. But it doesn't show that it is something that exists in reality rather than just something that exists in your mind.

Moreover, it is worth pointing out that al-Ghazali's argument is not that the existence of an actually infinite number of things is a logical self-contradiction. He is not claiming that to talk about an actually infinite number of things is somehow self-contradictory. Rather his argument is that the existence of an actually infinite number of things is really impossible. To give you an analogy, take the statement, "Something comes into being uncaused out of nothing." There is no *logical* contraction in that statement. There is no self-contradiction in saying, "Something came into being uncaused out of nothing." Nevertheless, I think it is plausible to say that that statement is *really* impossible. It is really impossible for something to come into being uncaused out of nothing, even though there is no strict logical contradiction in saying so. Al-Ghazali is not claiming that the concept of an actually infinite number of things is a self-contradictory concept; he is simply arguing that it is really impossible for an actually infinite number of things to exist.<sup>45</sup> We will see why in a moment.

These modern mathematical developments, far from undermining al-Ghazali's argument, actually can support it. It can help it by giving us insight into the nature of the actual infinite and helping us to see what it would be like if an actually infinite number of things really could exist. Far from undermining his argument, these modern mathematical developments actually are quite helpful and give insight into his argument.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* About the idea of an actually infinite number of things' existing, you gave the example of the stars. For it to be actually infinite, would that mean that all the space in the universe would have to be taken up by the stars?

*Answer:* No, it wouldn't mean that all the space had to be taken up because you would just need to have one star for every, say, cubic million miles or something like that. For every cubic million miles, there is one star in it. Well, if you have an infinite number of those cubic volumes, you have got an infinite number of stars. But obviously, there is a

<sup>45</sup> 20:09

lot of empty space, too, because you could put more things in them. So don't think it would be just jam-packed. That is one of the paradoxes of infinity, in fact. It doesn't really fill up everything, even though you might have an infinite number of things. Here is another example. Think of a wall that has an infinite number of bricks in it. The wall just goes off to infinity, and it has an infinite number of bricks in the wall. Does that mean it would fill all of reality? Well, no – you can have another wall going in the other direction that would also have an infinite number of bricks in it, too. The two walls could come to a kind of doorway, and on the left is one infinite wall and on the right is another one. You would have two infinities there. It would not fill up everything, even though an infinite volume would be occupied by each wall.

*Question: (inaudible)*

*Answer:* That is in dispute. In a sense, this is an argument to try to show that the past is not actually infinite – that the past had a beginning, is finite, and therefore there must be something that brought the universe into being. Now in terms of future time, think again what I said about the difference between the A-Theory and B-Theory. Someone like al-Ghazali, I think, would be an A-Theorist, and so he would think that time is infinite in the future, but only in the potentially infinite sense, which is unobjectionable.

How would al-Ghazali show the real impossibility of the existence of an actually infinite number of things? It will be by imagining situations in which an actually infinite number of things do exist and then drawing out the absurd consequences from such a thing. Let me share with you one of my favorite illustrations, which comes from the great German mathematician, David Hilbert, who was perhaps the greatest mathematician of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This concerns a thought experiment that Hilbert developed that has been called Hilbert's Hotel.

Hilbert first invites us to imagine an ordinary hotel with a finite number of rooms. Let's suppose that all of the rooms are full. There is a guest occupying every room in the hotel. If a new guest shows up at the desk asking for a room, the hotel manager says, "Sorry, all the rooms are full," and the new guest is turned away. But now, Hilbert says, let's imagine instead a hotel with an actually infinite number of rooms. Let's suppose once again that all the rooms are full. This needs to be clearly understood. There is not a single vacant room throughout the entire, infinite hotel. Every room in the hotel has a flesh and blood person living in it. There is no vacancy; every room is already occupied. Now suppose a new guest shows up at the hotel asking for a room.<sup>46</sup> "No problem!" says the manager, and he moves the person who was in room 1 into room 2. He moves the person who was in room 2 into room 3. He moves the person who was in room 3 into room 4, and so on out to infinity. As a result of these transpositions, room 1 now becomes vacant, and the new guest is easily accommodated. And yet, before he arrived, all the rooms were full!

Now, Hilbert says, let's press this a little further. Suppose an infinite number of new guests show up at the desk asking for a room. "No problem!" says the proprietor. And he moves the guest who was in room 1 into room 2. He takes the guest who was in room 2

<sup>46</sup> 25:03

and moves him into room 4. He takes the guest in room 3 and puts him in room 6. He takes the guest from room 4 and puts him in room 8. He moves every person into the room number that is double his own – 1 into 2, 2 into 4, 3 into 6, 4 into 8, and so on, out into infinity. Since any natural number multiplied by 2 (or doubled) is always an even number, all of the guests wind up in even-numbered rooms. As a result all of the odd-numbered rooms now become vacant, and the infinity of new guests is easily accommodated! And yet before they arrived, *all* of the rooms were already occupied!

In fact, the proprietor could do this an infinite number of times and always be able to accommodate more guests by these sort of transpositions. And yet, each time, the hotel is already full. As one student remarked to me upon hearing this in class, “If Hilbert’s Hotel could exist, it would have to have a sign posted outside saying, ‘No Vacancy. Guests Welcome’.”

But Hilbert’s Hotel is even stranger than the great German mathematician made it out to be. Ask yourself this question, which occurred to me as I thought about Hilbert’s Hotel: what would happen if some of the guests started to check out? What would happen then? Suppose all of the guests in all of the odd-numbered rooms checked out – 1, 3, 5, and so on, out to infinity. In this case, an infinite number of people have left the hotel. Indeed as many people have left the hotel as still remain in the hotel in the even-numbered rooms. And yet, according to the mathematicians, there are no fewer people in the hotel. The same number of people is still in the hotel, namely, just an infinite number.

Now suppose the manager doesn’t like having a half-empty hotel – it looks bad for business, having half the rooms vacant. No problem! By moving the guests in the reverse order than he did before – 2 into 1, 4 into 2, 6 into 3, etc. – he turns his half-empty hotel into a hotel that is completely booked and every room is full, bursting at the seams.

You might think that by these maneuvers the manager could keep this strange hotel always fully occupied, so that he would never have empty rooms. But in fact you would be wrong! Suppose, instead, this is what happens. Suppose the guests in rooms 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and so on, out into infinity, check out. In that case, the hotel will be virtually empty. There will be only three guests left in the hotel – in rooms 1, 2, and 3. The guest register will be reduced to but three names, the infinite will have been converted to finitude. And yet, in this case, exactly the same number of people have left the hotel as when all of the odd-numbered guests checked out!

Could such a hotel *really* exist? I don’t think so. It seems to me that Hilbert’s Hotel is absurd. Since nothing hangs on the illustration’s involving a hotel, you could substitute any sort of physical reality for it. I think the argument could be generalized to show that the existence of an actually infinite number of things is absurd.<sup>47</sup>

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* It seems like you have to keep adding more people at the end when you do this. I don’t quite get it.

<sup>47</sup> 29:50

*Answer:* I know that is what it seems. We think of the hotel as being a potential infinite, don't we? But what happens when he moves these people from 1 into 2, 2 into 3, 4 into 6? It seems as though somewhere out there, at infinity, somebody is falling off the edge, or there is a new room being created. But that is not it! That would be like a potential infinite. But in an actual infinite – and this is unimaginable – those rooms just go on forever, there is no end room, they are all occupied, every room in the hotel is full, and yet, just by moving people around, you can magically create more space or fill up space just by moving people from room to room.

*Followup:* I must be missing something. If you are saying that in the beginning the thing is totally full out to infinity, then that means there is nothing left that is open.

*Answer:* Yes, that is right! You are *not* missing something; you are just seeing the very, very paradoxical nature of the actual infinite that Hilbert meant you to see by developing this illustration. He wants you to feel uncomfortable with this illustration. The person who just sort of blows it off, I think, hasn't really thought about it in the way you have. There isn't any more room for people, where did these people go? Well, they just go into the rooms that we've said and just by moving them around, somehow it works out. The question is – could such a thing really exist?

*Followup:* I think this argument is kind of a fallacy. It doesn't make too much sense. It seems like it contradicts itself.

*Answer:* No, it is not contradictory. That is what I want to emphasize. There is no *logical* contradiction here, except with regard to the subtraction business, where I said you subtract the people when they check out. As I will say in a minute, there you really do get a live contradiction. But at least on the other ones, I think what it suggests is that it is just metaphysically, or really, impossible for this to happen. But there isn't any sort of self-contradiction, at least in the first part of the story, as Hilbert tells is.

*Question:* I have to say I am confused in general with the examples you are using. You used an example with space, and you refer to time. Space has volume, but time has nothing to do with volume. What is the relationship there? I do not understand.

*Answer:* I guess it would just be that things in time or in space can be counted. Therefore, we can talk reasonably about, for example, how many U.S. Presidents have held office. We can talk about what day of the month it is. Or how old you are. All of those involve counting things, which are things that have existed in time. Or we can count how many chairs there are in this room, or how many particles there are in the universe. Things of that sort. It seems to me that whether things exist in time or in space, the key here is that these things can be enumerated and that, therefore, we can talk about there being an actually infinite number of them. Have there been, for example, an actually infinite number of past U.S. Presidents? Well, no, obviously not! It is merely a finite number.

*Question:* Are we saying that space is an actual infinite? Or is there a limit to the outer boundaries of space?

*Answer:* If al-Ghazali is right, he would say space is finite. There is a limit; but this is a delicate question. Either there would be a limit or, what modern cosmologists would say, the shape of space is such that it is finite but doesn't have a boundary. Think of the surface of the Earth – it is finite, but there is no boundary. If you start at the North Pole

and go in one direction, you come back to your starting point again. Physicists say that it is perfectly plausible that our three-dimensional space is finite but unbounded in the same way. There is not a limit, but it is not infinite; it is finite.

*Question:* Mathematically, to be able to take an infinite set of anything, cut it in half or multiply it by two and get the same number, seems to imply something to do with creating and destroying matter. Does that make sense or am I in left field?<sup>48</sup>

*Answer:* In the example that we gave from Hilbert, there is no creating of new matter because we just imagine that there is a hotel that already has an infinite number of people in it, and there is a crowd of people outside the door waiting to get in, and there is an infinite number of people in the crowd. What Hilbert shows is how the manager can accommodate that infinite crowd into his hotel, even though the hotel is already fully occupied. So it is not a matter of creating new matter in this story at least.

Sometimes students or laymen will react to Hilbert's Hotel by saying these absurdities result because the concept of infinity is beyond us and we don't understand the nature of infinity. We can't grasp it, and that is why we get these absurdities. But that reaction is just quite frankly naive and mistaken. As I said a moment ago, infinite set theory is a highly developed and well-understood branch of modern mathematics. These paradoxes result, not because we *don't* understand the infinite; they result because we *do* understand the nature of the actual infinite. Hilbert was a very smart guy, and he knew how to illustrate very well the bizarre nature of an actually infinite number of things. Do not think that these absurdities result from a lack of understanding. Quite the contrary, as I say, modern mathematics can give us insight into the nature of the actual infinite, so that we understand how these sorts of things would result.

Really, the only thing that the critic of the argument can say at this point is to just bite the bullet and just say, "Well, Hilbert's Hotel is not absurd after all. I guess you can have a hotel that is fully occupied with an actually infinite number of rooms that can always be occupied by more people!" Sometimes critics will try to justify this move by saying, if an actual infinite could exist, then these sorts of situations are exactly what you ought to expect. If an actual infinite number of things could exist, then you should *expect* that it will be like this. But I think that justification is inadequate. Of course, Hilbert would agree that *if* an actual infinite number of things could exist, then you could have a hotel such as he described. The hotel wouldn't be a good illustration if that weren't the case! In order to be a good illustration, it has to be the case that if an actual infinite number of things can exist, then this is what would happen and what it would look like. That is not the question. The question is, is such a hotel really possible?

Moreover, the critics can't simply bite the bullet when it comes to the guests' checking out of the hotel because here, you really do have a logical contradiction. Namely, you subtract *identical* quantities from *identical* quantities and you get *self-contradictory* answers. In the one case, infinity minus infinity is infinity, and in the other case, infinity minus infinity is three. The former case is when you subtract all the odd numbers from all the natural numbers, and you get the even numbers left. The latter case is when you

<sup>48</sup> 35:06

subtract all of the numbers 4 and greater from the natural numbers, then you get three left over. In fact, you can get any answer from 0 to infinity for infinite minus infinity. That is why these operations are prohibited in mathematics: because they lead to self-contradictions. You subtract *identical* quantities from *identical* quantities and you get *non-identical* answers. Therefore you do have a bona fide contradiction here.

In mathematics, you can slap the hand of the mathematician who tries to perform subtraction with infinite quantities. But you can't stop people from checking out of a real hotel if they want to. If you bar the door, they will jump out the windows! We are talking about *real* people and *real* hotels. And there you cannot simply say, "That is against the rules! You can't do that or a contradiction will result!" It seems to me, in that case, you do have a genuine contradiction as a result. So it is not enough simply to say that this hotel is not impossible because if an actual infinite could exist then this is what we ought to expect.<sup>49</sup>

That really is the only response that a critic can give, and yet I think it falls short.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Isn't it a fact that infinity is not a member of the set of all natural numbers?

*Answer:* That is correct. That is a very good point. Nor is it a successor to that, the series of natural numbers 0, 1, 2, 3 . . . . Don't think of infinity as being the last number of that series. Don't think that infinity is in some way connected to it. If you will, infinity stands outside the series, over and above it and is the number of members in the series. Aleph ("ℵ") is a number. It is an infinite number just as natural numbers are finite numbers.

*Followup:* I would say that it is a symbol for the number of members. It is not a number itself. That is the important thing, isn't it?

*Answer:* You are making a correct distinction, but it is the distinction between a *number* and a *numeral*. What I have written here on the board, "ℵ" is a numeral, that is, a symbol. And you can have different numerals; for example, Roman numerals I, II, III, IV. Those are different numerals, but those numerals are symbols for the same numbers as 1, 2, 3, 4. So when I say infinity is a number, I am talking about the quantity that is the number of members in the series. But the use of "ℵ" is just a symbol. It is a numeral. But, as I say, the question is, do numbers and things like that really exist? Well, I don't think so; it seems they are just fictions or concepts, if you will.

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Therefore, in conclusion, al-Ghazali's argument is a good one. There are no actually infinite quantities of things existing in reality.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> 40:09

<sup>50</sup> Total Running Time: 42:41 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY  
§ II. *KALAM* COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Lecture 3

**The Universe Began to Exist:  
Second Philosophical Argument**

We have been talking whether or not an actually infinite number of things can exist. You remember the Muslim medieval theologian al-Ghazali argues for the creation of the universe and the existence of a Creator by saying that if the universe is beginningless, if the universe never began to exist, then there has been an infinite number of past events prior to today. But he argues an actually infinite number of things cannot exist – that leads to absurdities. That, therefore, implies that the number of past events must be merely finite, and therefore the series of past events doesn't go back forever. There must have been a beginning. And given that whatever begins to exist has a cause, it would therefore follow that there is a transcendent cause of the universe that brought it into being.

DISCUSSION

*Question: (inaudible)*

*Answer:* The dates of when he lived? I do not know his birth date, but I think he died around 1111. He was a 12<sup>th</sup> century Persian who lived in what is modern day Iran.<sup>51</sup>

**Second Philosophical Argument**

Al-Ghazali has a second, independent argument for the beginning of the universe. If one wants to maintain that the universe is eternal in the past, he'll have to refute, not only his first argument, but this second one as well because this is an independent argument. It doesn't depend on the first one for its cogency.

This argument goes like this. Al-Ghazali says the series of past events, going back in time, has been formed by adding one member after another. The series of past events is like a series of dominoes falling one after another until the last domino, which is today, is reached. But, he says, no series which is formed by adding one member at a time, one after another, can ever be actually infinite because you cannot pass through an infinite number of things one member at a time.

Sometimes this is called the impossibility of counting to infinity. In the case of trying to count to infinity, it is very easy to see that, no matter how high you count, you will never reach infinity because there is always another number first that you would have to count before you would get to infinity. There is no finite number which, + 1, will land you at

<sup>51</sup> He was born c. 1058, and he died in 1111.

infinity. You can always count higher. So it is impossible to count to infinity.

But think about this – if you cannot count *to* infinity, how could you count down *from* infinity? This would be like someone’s claiming to have counted down all of the negative numbers: . . . , -3, -2, -1, ending at 0. This seems crazy – for somebody to say that you could count down all of the negative numbers, one at a time, ending at 0. Because before he could count -1, he would have to count -2; but before he could count -2, he would have to count -3; but before he could count -3, he would have to count -4, and so on, back and back. Before any number could be counted, an infinity of prior numbers would already have to have been counted first. So you just get driven back and back into the past, so that no number could ever be counted or reached. But then the final domino in this series could never fall, if an infinite number of prior dominoes had to fall first. So today could never be reached. But that is obviously absurd because here we are! We are at today; it has been reached. So this shows that the series of past events must be finite and have a beginning. That is the argument.<sup>52</sup>

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* If there cannot be an infinite past, can there be an infinite future?

*Answer:* Remember we talked about this recently and said this depends upon your view of time. If you hold to the view of time which is often called the A-Theory (according to which the future does not exist; it is pure potentiality), then the future can be infinite in the sense that time can have a beginning and the series of future events can go on forever. It is potentially infinite. So it would be infinite in the sense we talked about: potential infinity. In this case it will never arrive at infinity; there will never be a future event that is the “infinitieth” event at which you will arrive. So, no, the future will not be infinite in that sense. It will be merely potentially infinite. From any point in time you pick, it will be a finite distance to the beginning, and the distance going forward will be finite but potentially infinite in the sense that infinity serves as a limit. If you adopt the B-Theory of time, according to which past, present, and future are all real and they are stretched out like a line, then, in that case, this argument would imply that time must have a beginning and an end because you couldn’t have an actually infinite amount of time.

*Question:* Which is more plausible, the A-Theory or B-Theory?

*Answer:* Well, al-Ghazali holds to an A-Theory of time. The people that hold to this argument hold to an A-Theory because they think that the way the past has been formed is not just by existing like a line, but rather it comes into being one event at a time, as one event occurs after another. And that is certainly the common sense view of time. This is the way we experience time, and I see no reason to think that that experience is illusory. I do not think we are suffering under some sort of gigantic delusion that temporal becoming is real, when in fact it is not. So I am a pretty ardent supporter of this so-called A-Theory of time which says that temporal becoming is a real and is an objective feature of reality. When we talked about divine eternity, we talked about this a little bit, too, and I pointed out there are certain theological problems with the B-Theory that the A-Theory

<sup>52</sup> 5:04

doesn't share. So look back at that section of the class when we talked about God's attributes and his eternity. This will directly impinge on how we understand God's relationship with time.

*Question:* Can you go over the B-Theory again?

*Answer:* The B-Theory says that the difference between past, present, and future is illusory in the sense that it is just a feature of human consciousness. For the people in the year 2000, 2000 is "now" and 2010 is "future." But for the people in 2010, 2000 is "past" and 2010 is "now." And for the people in 2050, both 2000 and 2010 are "past" and 2050 is "now." So on this view what is past, present, or future is just a subjective point of view. It is very analogous to space when talking about what is "here." There is no objective place that is "here." It is just your subjective standpoint. If I were in Turkey, I would say Istanbul is "here;" but if I am in Atlanta, I would say Istanbul is "there" and Atlanta is "here." But there isn't any objective "here" or "there;" there are just these spatial locations. Similarly, B-Theorists would say all of the moments in time are just stretched out like a line, they are all equally real, and what you say is "now" is just the point where you are on the line, and the future is what is later than that, and the past is what's earlier. There is no privileged "now." Everybody thinks that his point is "now." So it treats time very much like space. It thinks of time as just kind of there as a whole, like a spatial line, and what is "now," or "present," is very much like what is "here." So there is a very close assimilation of time to space on this B-Theory.<sup>53</sup>

*Question:* With the B-Theory of time, if every time exists equally all at the same time. . .

*Answer:* Yeah, see, you can't say "all at the same time" – your language trips you up. But, yes, they are all equally real and existent.

*Followup:* Exactly! O.K., so, does that mean I existed in 2000, and I am a different person, or am I the same person?

*Answer:* You are raising a very profound question about personal identity over time. What these B-Theorists, I think, have to say is that you are not a three-dimensional object that exists now. You are a four-dimensional object which is spread out through time. Sometimes this is called a space-time worm. You have temporal extension. What we see now is not really you. We see just a three-dimensional slice of you. You are actually stretched out through time, and we see just a slice of you right now. But that is not the same slice that exists, say, two hours from now – that is a different slice of you. The difficulty is, if that is true, that means you are not the same person that came in here a few minutes ago. You are somebody else. That slice is still back there, and you are someone else. So if we say that what we are seeing now is persons – in other words, you that I am seeing now are a person –, then it follows that no person endures over time. I said this creates theological problems – how can God judge the slice that exists at judgment day for the deeds done by some other slice earlier on in time? Why should he get the rap for what that earlier slice did? This is a really serious problem. If you say that, no, persons are not these three-dimensional slices, but rather the person is the whole four-dimensional worm, then that means that persons are not conscious, they don't do anything, and they have no will. This is because that worm doesn't have any self-consciousness; just the

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<sup>53</sup> 10:12

slices do. That is not what we mean by a person. So you have pulled a thread here in the fabric that really makes this B-Theory difficult to hold.

*Question:* I read a book by Brian Greene where he talks about how relativity theory creates a space-time “loaf,” and he brings up questions such as the idea of linking different times and how Newton’s absolute space doesn’t seem to work in modern theories.

*Answer:* What this is raising is the argument that many B-Theorists give, and that is relativity theory requires that we have this B-Theory of time – as you put it, a loaf that can be sliced up, which is the same as the worm metaphor, where you slice the loaf into different slices. What I would argue, and what I have argued in my written work, is a number of things. There can be a privileged reference frame in relativity theory – that is, a “preferred frame” – which does record the absolute time, and these other measurements of moving observers are simply due to the distortion of their instruments. Moving clocks run slow, measuring rods in motion shrink up, and therefore they do not detect the true time, which can only be given by someone who is at absolute rest. I think that interpretation of relativity theory is entirely adequate, and there are a number of physicists who hold to it. The other thing is to say that this whole debate is academic because the special theory of relativity is transcended by the general theory of relativity anyway. The special theory just deals with objects in uniform motion, but it doesn’t deal with accelerated motion or rotational motion. That is the general theory. And when you talk about the general theory of relativity, then what happens is that a preferred time, called cosmic time, does come suddenly into place. Cosmic time is the time that scientists use to measure the duration of the universe as a whole. When you hear scientists say that it has been about 13.7 billion years since the Big Bang, what they are talking about is cosmic time. That is the time that measures the duration of the universe. Fortunately for us, cosmic time coincides very nicely with Earth time. So our clocks do provide a very good measure of cosmic time. We can say it has been about 13.7 billion years since the Big Bang. Since this is a side track from the current discussion, let’s end it with that.<sup>54</sup>

*Question:* When you think of God being omnipresent in time, he is involved in the whole universe at any point in time. On the A-Theory, is it that he entered time so that there was a sequence of events? The God that was there before Jesus’ birth to the God at his point in death to the God today is omnipresent, and he didn’t change in the sense that he wouldn’t have in some way been a different entity. In other words, he is the same at each point in history. Yet he did take on a bodily form and enter time at that point.

*Answer:* That is the view that I defend. If you think back again to the section of the class when we did the attributes of God and we talked about God’s eternity, the view that I defended is that God existing alone without creation, without the universe, is timeless. And he creates the universe at the moment of the Big Bang, and in so doing he enters into time in order to have relationships with the creation that he has made. So the way I put it is that God is timeless without creation, and he is in time since the beginning of creation.

*Followup:* And this is consistent with the A-Theory?

*Answer:* That is consistent with the A-Theory because time would have a beginning, and

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<sup>54</sup> 15:20

we could go back to the first event of time. There is a finite number of events that takes you back to the first event, the first moment of time. Then beyond that – not before, but causally beyond that – would be God in his timeless eternity and he would be the Creator of time and space.

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Let's consider a possible objection to this argument. Some critics have responded to this argument by saying that in an infinite past there is no event infinitely distant from the present. It is not as though you have to traverse the distance between an infinitely distant event in the past and today. Rather, there is no beginning point at all, not even an infinitely distant one. But every event in the past is only a finite amount of time from the present. You can give the analogy of the negative numbers. In the negative number series, there is no number that is minus infinity. But every number you pick is only a finite distance to zero. So whether you pick -10 or -1000000, there is only a finite distance to the present, or to zero, and that can be easily traversed. If the past is infinite, these critics say, there is no infinitely distant event from which you have to reach the present. From every point in the past, it is only a finite distance to the present, and therefore there is no problem.

It seems that this objection commits a logical fallacy, which is the fallacy of composition. What is that? The fallacy of composition is the fallacy of equating the property of a part of a thing to the whole thing. It is saying that because a thing's parts have a certain property, therefore the whole thing has that property. For example, it would be like saying that because every little part of an elephant is light in weight, therefore the whole elephant is light in weight. That is obviously a fallacy. Every little piece of an elephant that you might pick might be light in weight, but that doesn't imply that the elephant as a whole is light in weight. The fallacy of composition is ascribing the property of a part to the whole. That is fallacious reasoning.

What about the case in hand? Just because every finite part of the series can be crossed, or counted down, doesn't mean that the whole infinite series can be crossed or counted down.<sup>55</sup> These philosophers have committed an elementary logical fallacy. They think that because every part can be counted or traversed, therefore the whole can be counted or traversed. That commits the fallacy of composition. The question, after all, is not how can any finite part of the past be crossed to reach today; the question is how can the whole, infinite, beginningless past be crossed in order to reach today.

Let me share two more absurdities with the idea of an infinite past that al-Ghazali gave to round out this argument. Al-Ghazali tried to show that you cannot form an actually infinite past by adding one member at a time. But suppose it could be done. He gives this illustration. Let's imagine that for every one orbit that Saturn goes around the Sun, Jupiter goes around two times as many. The longer they orbit, the farther and farther Saturn falls behind.<sup>56</sup> If Saturn goes around two times, Jupiter has gone around four times, if Saturn goes around a million times, then Jupiter has gone around two million times. They are in a two-to-one ratio. The longer they orbit, the farther and farther Saturn falls behind. In

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<sup>55</sup> 20:09

<sup>56</sup> Dr. Craig misspeaks here. The transcript corrects the mistake and has Saturn fall behind Jupiter, not the other way around.

fact, if they were to orbit forever, Saturn would approach a limit in which it would be *infinitely* far behind Jupiter. Now, says al-Ghazali, turn the story around. Let's suppose that they have been orbiting the Sun from eternity past. Which one would have completed the most orbits? The answer is: the number of orbits is exactly equal – namely, infinity. They both have completed an infinite number of orbits. Don't let somebody try to get out of this by saying infinity isn't a number. Infinity is a number; it is the number of elements in the set  $\{0, 1, 2, 3 \dots\}$ . Infinity in modern mathematics is a number, and it would be the number of orbits completed by each of these planets. But yet that seems absurd because the longer they orbit, the farther Saturn falls behind. How are they now magically equal in virtue of the fact that they have been orbiting for an infinite amount of time from eternity past?

Here is another illustration al-Ghazali gives. Suppose we meet someone who claims to be counting down from eternity past and he is now finishing: . . . , -3, -2, -1, 0. Phew! He's done with his infinite countdown. Al-Ghazali thinks, "Why did he finish his countdown today? Why didn't he finish yesterday or the day before that or the day before that?" If he is counting at a rate of, say, one number per second, at *any* time in the past he has already had an infinite number of seconds to finish his countdown. So why did it take him so long until today to get through? He should have already finished. In fact, at any point in the past you pick, he already had infinite time to finish his countdown, so he should have already finished. But that means no matter how far back in time you go, you'd never find the man finishing his countdown. And that contradicts the hypothesis that he has been counting down from eternity, which again just shows the absurdity of trying to form an infinite past by adding one member after another.

These illustrations really underline al-Ghazali's claim that, in the case of a series which is formed by adding one member after another, you cannot do this and have an actually infinite series. This is only possible with a finite series.<sup>57</sup>

I think those give us good grounds for, again, the second premise of the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument, that *the universe began to exist*. So now we have two philosophical arguments for the finitude of the past: one based on the impossibility of the existence of an actually infinite number of things and the other based on the impossibility of forming an infinite collection by adding one member after another (if it is *actually* infinite). So for both of these reasons, I think we have good grounds for thinking the second premise is true.

Next, we will look at the remarkable scientific evidence in support of this second premise that *the universe began to exist*. In the Middle Ages, al-Ghazali only had philosophical arguments. What has breathed new life into the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument is that we now have pretty strong astrophysical evidence that the universe is not eternal in the past, but had a beginning a finite time ago.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> 24:57

<sup>58</sup> Total Running Time: 26:21 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY  
§ II. *KALAM* COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Lecture 4

**The Universe Began to Exist:  
First Scientific Confirmation**

We have been talking about the beginning of the universe, and I have shared with you two philosophical arguments that have been defended by the great medieval Muslim theologian al-Ghazali. They are the argument based on the impossibility of the existence of an actually infinite number of things and the argument based on the impossibility of forming an actually infinite collection by adding one member after another, one at a time.

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DISCUSSION

*Question:* Do those philosophical arguments apply in our universe?

*Answer:* It would apply to all space-time realities. So if our universe is just a part of a big multiverse, it would apply to the multiverse as well. These philosophical arguments would even apply to God. There couldn't be an infinite regress of events in God's life either, which is why you get back to a timeless, changeless being in which there are no events occurring.

*Question:* Does this apply outside of space-time?

*Answer:* The first argument would apply outside of time. If you had, say, an actually infinite number of things that existed not in time but that were countable, the first of the two arguments would count against even that. The second argument would only count against things that are in time because it has to do with how a collection is formed by adding one member after another, and that implies change in time. So the first of the two arguments would apply to anything that exists, even if it is non-spatio-temporal. The second argument could apply to things that are not in space, like God himself, but it would only apply to things that involve time.

*Question:* Would the first argument apply against an infinite set?

*Answer:* If you are a Platonist – I see now where you are going with this – suppose you think that numbers really exist, that numbers are objects that exist independently of our minds out there. Then, yes, it would apply against that. It would show that you cannot have an actually infinite number of numbers. Fortunately, I don't think we are forced to accept a Platonistic metaphysics, which thinks of numbers as sort of abstract objects existing independently of human cognition. You will remember right at the beginning of that argument, I talked about Cantor's theory of infinite sets, and I suggested this is simply a universe of discourse that is governed by certain axioms and conventions, and they show us how to construct this universe of discourse to talk about infinity in a logically consistent way without contradicting ourselves. But that doesn't mean that this universe actually exists anywhere. As my wife likes to say, just because you can draft it

on paper doesn't mean that it is actually in reality or descriptive of reality.

*Followup:* Unless you are an idealist?

*Answer:* Not an idealist – rather a Platonist. A Platonist is somebody who thinks that there are these abstract objects. And this would be consistent with there being a finite number of abstract objects, but not an infinite number. But if you are so deeply committed to Platonism that you don't like the first argument then you still have the second argument.

*Question:* What actually limits the number system from being infinite?

*Answer:* This would be a good question. If you do think that numbers really exist independently of human minds, but that they are not infinite, then you would probably be some kind of a constructivist. You would think that numbers are constructed by adding 1. The way you get 3, is you add 1 to 2, and the way you get 4 is you add 1 to 3, and so forth. Numbers are therefore a sort of human construction, much the way fictional characters are, or musical works or novels. You could say that they exist, but they are just potentially infinite because you can keep on adding 1 and construct them in that way. That is not the route I go; I see no reason to go down that road. But if you did want to hold to a sort of marriage of Platonism and finitism, you would adopt a philosophy of mathematics which is called Constructivism or Intuitionism, which would think of numbers as constructs that are not discovered but rather constructed.<sup>59</sup>

## First Scientific Confirmation

During the Middle Ages, people had no scientific evidence for the beginning of the universe. Al-Ghazali appealed to philosophical arguments in order to support the second premise. But in one of the most remarkable developments of modern science, there has emerged in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century pretty strong evidence that the universe is not eternal in the past but, in fact, had an absolute beginning.

All through history, people assumed that the universe as a whole was unchanging. Of course, things in the universe were moving about and changing in various ways, but the universe as a whole was just there, so to speak. This was also Albert Einstein's assumption when he crafted the General Theory of Relativity, or his theory of gravity. In 1917, Einstein began to apply his theory of gravity to the universe as a whole. When he did so, he found that there was something terribly amiss. His equations predicted a universe which was either blowing up like a balloon or else collapsing in upon itself. Not knowing what to do with this problem, Einstein "solved" it by fudging his equations. He added a new term to his equations in order to enable the universe to walk this tight rope between exploding and imploding. But the Einsteinian universe was incredibly unstable. Even the transportation of matter from one part of the universe to another would upset the balance and cause the universe either to expand or to implode in upon itself.

During the 1920s, the Russian mathematician Alexander Friedman and the Belgian astronomer Georges Lemaitre, by taking Einstein's equations at face value, were able to craft, independently of each other, models of the universe which predicted an expanding universe. In 1929 the American astronomer Edwin Hubble, through tireless observations

<sup>59</sup> 5:13

of the heavens at the Mount Wilson Observatory, made a remarkable discovery which verified Friedman and Lemaitre's theory. He found that the light coming to us from distant galaxies appears to be redder than it should. This redshift in the light from distant galaxies was most plausibly explained by the fact that the light sources, the stars, are moving away from us, and therefore the light rays emanating from them are stretched so that they appear to be redder than if the objects were stationary. Wherever Hubble trained his telescope in the night sky, he discovered this redshift in the light from the distant galaxies. It appeared that we exist at the center, at the very heart, of a cosmic explosion and that everything else in the universe is flying away from us at fantastic speeds.

According to the Friedman-Lemaitre model, we are not really at the center of the universe. It just appears that way. Any observer associated with any galaxy would look out from his vantage point and see this redshift in the galaxies around him. So any observer will feel as though he were at the center of the expansion. The reason for this is that it is space itself that is expanding. The galaxies are actually at rest in space, but they move away from one another as space itself stretches and expands.<sup>60</sup>

To get a picture of this very difficult idea, imagine a balloon with buttons glued to the surface. The buttons are stuck in place. They are at rest with respect to the surface of the balloon. Nevertheless, as you blow up the balloon, the buttons will get farther and farther apart because the balloon is getting bigger and bigger. Because the surface of the balloon is stretching, the buttons will move away from each other in the sense that the distance between them increases, even though they are themselves at rest with respect to the surface of the balloon. Notice that there is no center to the balloon's surface. Any observer located on one of these buttons will look out and see the other buttons receding from him, moving away from him. There is no center to the balloon's surface. Someone might say, "But there is a center inside the balloon." Ah, but then you are forgetting we are talking just about *the surface* of the balloon. Just the two-dimensional surface of the balloon has no center.

Those buttons are just like the galaxies in outer space. The two-dimensional surface of the balloon is the analogue to our three-dimensional space. The buttons represent the galaxies in space. The galaxies are actually at rest in space, but they move away from one another as space itself expands or stretches. Just as there is no center to the balloon's surface, so there is no center to the universe.

Eventually, the Friedman-Lemaitre model came to be known as "the Big Bang Theory" of the origin of the universe. You can see by what I have said that that title, though catchy, is somewhat misleading. For to think of the expansion of the universe on the model of an explosion is misleading because we might think, then, that the galaxies are moving out from a central point into some pre-existing empty space. That would be a complete misunderstanding of the model. The model is not that the galaxies were once located at some central point and are now moving out into a pre-existing, empty space. The model is much more radical than that. The Big Bang did not occur at some point in a pre-existing space. Rather, it is *space itself* that is expanding. Again, you might say, "What about the point in the interior of the balloon? If the balloon shrinks down, wouldn't it collapse down to that point?" Here, again, you are forgetting that the analogue

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<sup>60</sup> 10:04

to space is just *the surface* of the balloon. The balloon surface happens to be embedded in a third dimension, a higher dimension, so that there is depth as well as breadth and length. But on the Big Bang theory, our three-dimensional space is not embedded in some higher fourth dimension. So there just is nothing that corresponds to the space inside the balloon or outside the balloon. Our three-dimensional space is the analogue, or is like, the two-dimensional surface of the balloon, which has no center. Don't be misled into thinking of the Big Bang as the explosion of a super-dense pellet which has been around from eternity and then a finite time ago suddenly blew up. That is *not* the theory!

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Regarding the *Privileged Planet* movie, it talked about our special location in our universe. Wouldn't that go against the idea of centrality of our placement in the universe?

*Answer:* What that movie is talking about is our location as a planet in one of the spiral arms of our galaxy so that we can make visual observations of the universe rather than have the heavens be obscured.<sup>61</sup> But that is just within our galaxy. What we are talking about with the Big Bang model is all of the galaxies and the galactic clusters, a much larger scale than just our location in our galaxy. Here we are abstracting to really, really big scales, where you think of the galaxies scattered all across the universe. And it is these galaxies and clusters of galaxies that are fleeing apart from one another at fantastic speeds. But within our Milky Way, our galaxy, things are hanging together in this spiral arm structure.

*Question:* How does this relate to the biblical perspective, as God described mankind's creation and the Earth's creation, in the grand scheme of things?

*Answer:* I think that what we have to say is that mankind is not the center of the universe in any sort of physical sense. But I don't think that is ever taught in the Bible. Nowhere does it suggest that we are physically located at the center of the universe. Rather the Bible presents human beings as the apex of creation, the crown of creation, in view of their being created in the image of God. That is what makes them special. That is independent of their size. You don't have to be big to be morally worthy or to be intrinsically valuable. Human beings are intrinsically valuable because they are created in God's image. In fact, biologists tell us that the human brain is the most complex structure in the entire universe. So the fact that we are dwarfed by the universe's size doesn't speak to our intrinsic worth or our importance in creation. It is not based on our size or location.

*Question:* So not a super dense pellet but a formerly non-existent, flat balloon?

*Answer:* I will say something more about that in a minute. What it would mean is that this geometry shrinks down to a boundary point before which it doesn't exist. I will say something about that in just a minute. But you shouldn't think of this pellet as existing in some big vacuum or big empty space, lying there from eternity, and then inexplicably blowing up a finite time ago. That is not the idea. It is time and space themselves that come into being at the beginning of the universe.

<sup>61</sup> 15:07

*Question:* How does this theory relate to Genesis 1:6: “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters. God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. God called the expanse heaven.” Of course, we are told later that the stars themselves were placed within the expanse of the heavens. And so would you say that, if this theory is true, that that would mean that from the perspective of any planet, it would appear as though an expanse had been placed in the midst of the waters?

*Answer:* I am very loathe, very reluctant, to try to read modern science into the Bible and in particularly into Genesis 1. I think that is what’s called eisegesis – that is, you are reading *into* the text, you are reading between the lines – rather than exegesis, which is allowing the text to speak to us in the way that an ancient Hebrew writer would have thought and read about these things. So I respectfully disagree with my friend Hugh Ross, who would quote verses like that one, or Isaiah when it says, “He spread out the heavens,” and interpret this as a biblical prediction of the expansion of the universe. I think that rather, in its original context, what this ancient Hebrew writer was thinking of was of the heavens on the analogy of a tent that God has constructed, and you see the lights in the firmament, or in the expanse. But that is purely a phenomenal description; that is, it is a way things appear to us. We should not think that he is trying to give some sophisticated, astronomical theory.

*Followup:* Even if things are being described in phenomenological terms, wouldn’t you say that those terms still represent something, that they represent something in reality even though they may have been described from the perspective of the biblical writer?<sup>62</sup>

*Answer:* Fair enough, I think that is right. I would take Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth” to be a statement of the origin of the universe. That would be what *we* would call the Big Bang, that God created the Big Bang. And then in verse 2 it says, “and the Earth was without form and void.” There the focus has suddenly narrowed in a dramatic way to this planet. What is then described is how God transforms this planet from an uninhabitable waste to a place suitable for human beings to live and thrive. He creates an ecosystem in which they can flourish. So you are right; I think it does correlate. I am just reluctant to try to look at words like “expanse” and think of those in terms of, say, the expanding universe or try to read modern cosmology into those things. But I think you are quite right in saying this isn’t meant to be poetry; it does mean to describe real things.

*Question:* Since the Earth is the center of God’s creative purpose, but yet if we look at just the solar system from the Earth’s perspective, the solar system will seem very complicated. But we have to get out of our perspective to see where everything will fit together.

*Answer:* I think you are right in saying there are different perspectives from which to look at it. But I would think that it is not so much a physical perspective as what I was saying in response earlier that you look at humanity from the perspective of its ethical and spiritual importance. It is in that sense that human beings are the crown of creation and

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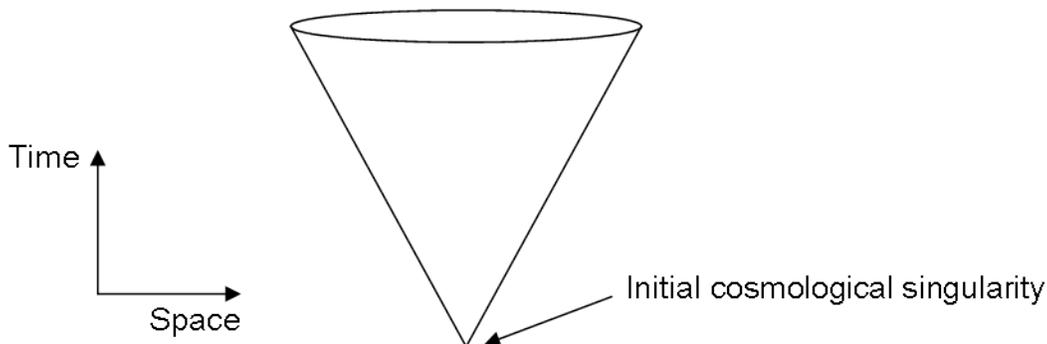
<sup>62</sup> 20:00

the center of creation, in the sense that they are created in the image of God and, therefore, they are intrinsically valuable, so that God would send his Son to die for them. But our planet, considered from this sort of third-person, physical perspective, is this little speck of dust that is just lost in the Milky Way, and the Milky Way is just lost in this enormous universe. But that doesn't say anything about the importance of human beings because importance, as I say, isn't determined by size. That is the fallacy of some atheists or agnostics who, because we are so small, think that therefore we are insignificant. That is a fallacy based on thinking that significance is determined by how big something is.

As we trace this expansion back in time, in reverse, that means that everything gets closer and closer together. If our balloon had no minimum size but could just keep shrinking and shrinking, then eventually the distance between any two points that you pick on the balloon would shrink to zero. If it could just keep on shrinking, then eventually the distance between any two points on the surface of the balloon would shrink to zero. It would have, in effect, zero circumference, as it is measured.

According to the Friedman-Lemaitre model, that is what happens as you trace the expansion of space back in time. Eventually, the distance between any two points in space becomes zero, and you can't get any closer than that. At that point you have reached the boundary of space and time. Space and time cannot be extended back any further than that. It is literally the beginning of space and time.

We could portray our expanding universe geometrically by means of a cone [see Figure 1].



*Figure 1 - Conical Representation of Standard Model Space-Time. Space and time begin at the initial cosmological singularity, before which literally nothing exists.*

If we let a disk represent the three dimensions of space [where the disk is a slice of the cone] (one dimension we have to suppress because it is on paper), with the vertical dimension being time, then as you trace the expansion of the universe back in time, the universe shrinks down to a point at which point the distance between any two points in space is zero.<sup>63</sup> That marks the beginning of space and time [in Figure 1, this boundary point is labeled the "Initial cosmological singularity"].

What is significant about this is that the geometry of a cone is such that the cone can be

<sup>63</sup> 25:28

extended indefinitely in one direction. You can keep adding to the cone going up, but in the other direction, a cone has a boundary point and cannot be extended any further. The cone can only be extended geometrically in the one direction. In the other direction it has a boundary point. Since that direction represents time, that means that at some time in the past, space began to exist. There is a boundary point before which nothing existed. What this implies, therefore, is that the past is finite and that time and space had a beginning.

Because space-time is the arena in which all matter and energy exist, this means that all matter and energy also came into being at this point. It is the beginning of the universe. Notice that there is simply nothing prior to the beginning of space and time. Let's be philosophically careful, so we are not misled by words. When I say there is nothing prior to the beginning of space and time, I do not mean there is a prior state and it is a state of nothingness. What I mean is that, at the beginning point, it is false that there was anything prior to the universe. It is false that there is something prior to that point. That is what one means when one says there is nothing prior to the beginning.

The standard Big Bang model, as the Friedman-Lemaitre model came to be called, thus predicts an absolute beginning of the universe at some time in the finite past. If this model is correct, then we have amazing scientific confirmation of the second premise of the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Is there anything that theoretically prevents the cone from being an hourglass?

*Answer:* Yes. If this [*the point of the cone*] is what is called a singularity, then it represents a boundary point to space and time, and you cannot extend space-time through a singularity. A lot of the project of current cosmology is to try to get rid of this singularity at the very beginning, so as to extend the universe through. We can talk about that later on. But right now, insofar as we are talking about the standard model, the Friedman-Lemaitre model, it does feature a singularity and therefore has a boundary point and cannot be extended like an hourglass. That would be a different geometry than a cone geometry.

*Question:* What about the argument that the singularity simply results from a breakdown of the mathematics and because you are not actually at zero when you reach the singularity, you are at  $10^{-43}$  second and there is still a fraction of time before the universe hits 0.

*Answer:* Actually, the singularity is at  $t=0$ . If the universe begins as the standard model has, it is at  $t=0$ . It is not prior to that.

What we need to discuss then is, "Is the standard model correct?" The standard model unequivocally predicts a beginning of the universe. The question is, is this model correct or, more accurately, more importantly, is it correct in predicting a beginning?<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Total Running Time: 30:35 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)



## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § II. *KALAM* COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 5

### **Big Bang Cosmology**

We have been talking about the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument. We looked at philosophical reasons to believe the key second premise that *the universe began to exist*. Last time we looked at the evidence for the beginning of the universe from contemporary Big Bang cosmology, which suggests that as you go back in time, the past is not infinite, but rather the past is finite and comes to a boundary point before which the universe literally did not exist. We ended by asking ourselves the question, “Is this standard model of the universe correct?” Or, more importantly, “Is it correct in predicting an absolute beginning of the universe?”

There is powerful evidence in favor of the Big Bang theory of the universe. We already mentioned the redshift in the light from distant galaxies, which indicates that the universe is expanding, so that as you extrapolate that back in time, it goes back to this point of beginning, as the universe was denser than it is today. In addition to that, the abundance of certain light elements in the universe, like helium, for example, which is very abundant in the universe, indicates that these light elements were formed very, very early in the history of the universe, when the universe was very dense and very hot. So the abundance of light elements like helium is supportive of the Big Bang model. Finally, in 1965, it was discovered that the entire universe is bathed with a background of microwave radiation – the same kind of radiation that operates in your microwave oven at home. This radiation background is a vestige of a very early, hot, dense state of the universe. So on the basis of the redshift, the abundance of the light elements, and the microwave background radiation, we have good grounds for thinking that the universe is in a state of cosmic expansion and that it goes back to a beginning such as what we have in the standard model.

Nevertheless, we also note that this standard model is going to have to be modified in certain ways. The model is based on Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity – which is his theory of gravity. The problem is that Einstein’s theory breaks down when the universe shrinks down to subatomic proportions. This is usually referred to as the Plank Time. This refers to the very early period of the universe during which the universe must be described by subatomic physics, not simply by Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity. The only problem is, nobody knows how to do that yet. We don’t know how to marry general relativity with quantum physics, or subatomic physics, in order to have a unified theory of gravity. That will need to be done. Moreover, the expansion is probably not constant as in the standard model. It is probably accelerating and may have gone through a super-rapid expansion in the past during a brief period of time.

But none of those adjustments, which do need to be made, need affect the fundamental prediction of a beginning of the universe. In fact, since Friedman and Lemaitre’s work back in the 1920s when the standard model was first proposed, scientists have proposed scores of alternative theories over the decades which were aimed at trying to avert the

absolute beginning of the universe. We've seen the Steady State model, Oscillating models, Vacuum Fluctuation models, Inflationary models, Ekpyrotic models – all of these have been tried and failed to avoid the absolute beginning of the universe. Put more positively, what we can say is that any non-standard model which is viable, which is tenable, involves an absolute beginning of the universe, not an infinite past.<sup>65</sup> That beginning may or may not be a beginning *point*, but even in theories like Stephen Hawking's No Boundary proposal, in which the beginning is rounded off, the past is still finite, not infinite. The universe still comes to exist at some time in the finite past, even if it doesn't do so at a sharply defined point.

In a sense, the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century cosmology can be seen as a series of failed attempts, one after another, to try to avert the absolute beginning predicted by the standard model. Unfortunately, the impression arises as a result in the minds of laymen that the field of cosmology is in constant turnover with no lasting results. It seems as though every other month features a new cosmological model on the cover of *Scientific American* magazine. But what the lay person doesn't understand is that this parade of failed theories only serves to confirm the prediction of the standard model of an absolute beginning of the universe. That prediction has now endured through over 80 years of incredible advances in observational astronomy and creative work in theoretical astrophysics.

In fact, something of a watershed appears to have been reached in the year 2003 when three very famous cosmologists, Arvin Borde, Alan Guth, and Alexander Vilenkin were able to prove a theorem which shows that *any* universe at all which is in a state of cosmic expansion on average throughout its history cannot be eternal in the past but must have a past space-time boundary or beginning of its existence. What makes the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem so remarkable is that it is independent of any description of the universe prior to the Planck time. That is to say, it doesn't depend on having a quantum theory of gravity for its validity. Because we do not yet have a physical description of this early era of the universe, it has been fertile ground for speculations. In fact, one scientist has compared this to the regions on ancient maps which are labeled "Here there be dragons!" – you can fill in all sorts of imagined fantasies. But the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem implies, whatever physical description we come up with for that early era of the universe, the universe must have a beginning at some time in the past. In fact, the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem implies that even if our universe is just one of many universes as part of a grand multiverse, still the multiverse itself must have an absolute beginning. So even on the multiverse theories, it turns out that the universe began to exist.

Vilenkin is very blunt about the implications – here is what he writes on page 176 of his book *Many Worlds in One*:

It is said that an argument is what convinces reasonable men and a proof is what it takes to convince even an unreasonable man. With the proof now in place, cosmologists can no longer hide behind the possibility of a past-eternal universe. There is no escape; they have to face the problem of a cosmic beginning.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> 5:08

<sup>66</sup> A. Vilenkin, *Many Worlds in One: The Search for Other Universes* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), p. 176.

We can fully expect that new theories will be proposed attempting to avoid the absolute beginning of the universe, and these theories are to be welcomed. We welcome attempts to falsify the prediction of the standard model. But we have no reason to think they will be any more successful in falsifying that prediction than their failed predecessors.<sup>67</sup> Of course, it hardly needs to be said that scientific results are always provisional. But nevertheless, it is pretty clear which way the evidence points. Today the proponent of the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument stands squarely within the scientific mainstream in affirming the second premise of the argument that *the universe began to exist*.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Can someone go to your book and look at commentaries on these failed hypotheses.

*Answer:* Yes, these are discussed in the book *Reasonable Faith* in the chapter on the existence of God, where I go into more detail. If you want really extensive discussion, look at the article that Jim Sinclair and I did in the *Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*. Sinclair is an expert in the area of cosmology, and he surveys an even wider range of models and more recent models attempting to avoid the beginning and shows how these cannot be extrapolated back to the infinite past. So *Reasonable Faith* and then also the *Blackwell Companion* article.

*Question:* On the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem, I have some friends I talk to about this and, of course, the first question is, “Show me the article and show me the proof!” I have looked all over our databases, and I cannot seem to find their writings. I can’t find it even in the physics database. What articles are these in?

*Answer:* You can find the citation in *Reasonable Faith* of the article. It is in the arXiv on the web<sup>68</sup>, or it will be in the *Blackwell Companion*, where there is an extensive bibliography. Most of these are on the web. Scientific results are so current that published paper journals now serve only archival purposes. The most recent work is always put out on these internet archives. So the web addresses are given where you can find this. I have read the article myself. It is footnoted in *Reasonable Faith* or the *Blackwell Companion*.

*Question:* I have an article I had in my Bible for a few years. It says:

New Theories Stars Exploded Into Universe - In the most distant observations made yet, some astronomers think that they are seeing evidence that the universe emerged from its initial darkness in a dawn of light that came up like a thunderbolt across the cosmos. A lot of the first stars apparently did not come into existence gradually here and there – that had been the accepted theory. Instead the new and surprising view is the first starlight burst forth in a spectacular profusion. If this proves to be true, many theories of the early history and evolution of the universe may have to be revised.

It is very interesting that these scientists look and say, “Gosh, what we said don’t work!”

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<sup>67</sup> 10:02

<sup>68</sup> <http://arxiv.org/abs/gr-qc/0110012>

It is amazing to me that they are so smart, but they won't just check what is written in the Book. They ought to read the instructor's book as to this is how he did it.

*Answer:* Well, I think it is important to understand the Bible is not a science textbook. It doesn't intend to teach science, though I think it is consistent with science. In that article, I am not sure what they are getting at because starlight doesn't appear until later in the history of the universe, once the stars have had a chance to form. We are talking about the very beginning of the universe, before there were any stars, so the stars would come some time later, after they had a chance to form.

*Question:* Consider the trillions and trillions of stars in the vast cosmos. Since the revealed Word of God says we are the crown of his creation, then, in all of that space out there, then that must be it. Would you agree?<sup>69</sup>

*Answer:* This is an interesting point to which theists and non-theists react differently, I have found. Non-theists look at the enormity of the universe, and humankind in comparison to it seems an insignificant speck, just nothing. So it means that man is worthless. He is just an ephemeral dot on the history of the cosmos. The theist, by contrast, looks at the enormity of the universe and thinks with the Psalmist, "What is man that you are mindful of him, human beings that you care for them?" (Psalm 8:4). It gives you a sense of the condescension of God that he would care about us and send his Son onto this little tiny planet to die for us. So, for me, when I contemplate the enormity of the universe, it magnifies my sense of the greatness of God and the extent of this condescension in reaching down to save even me – that little, insignificant dot down there named Bill Craig. Maybe people have concepts of God that are far too small. Maybe the enormity of the universe can help to expand our concept of God in a way that is more worthy of his greatness and his majesty and to realize how condescending he is to care about us and to save us.

The other thing, though, that needs to be said is what I mentioned a while before – the worth of mankind is not measured by size. You do not measure the moral worth of something by how big it is. If we are made in the image of God, as the Bible teaches, we are persons just as God is personal. Therefore, one human person is worth more than the entire material universe taken together because it is just matter. Now that is an awesome, incredible thought. One single human person, the most ignorant peasant, or homeless person, or little baby – that one person is worth more than the entire material universe taken together. Because that individual is a person in God's image, rather than just a collection of atoms. We are not just a bag of chemicals on bones. We are persons. Therefore, as Jefferson says, we are endowed by our Creator with intrinsic, inalienable rights and moral value. So I see the greatness of the universe as something that can expand our vision of God but also something that is really quite irrelevant to our worth, which is determined on moral grounds, not on one's size.

The last thing that one might want to say about that is that the human brain is the most complex structure in the entire universe. When you take all of those trillions and trillions of galaxies together, there is nothing in the universe as complicated as a single human brain. That is how complex and well designed we are. So that intricacy, that complexity

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<sup>69</sup> 15:21

in a microcosm is awe-inspiring as well and sets us apart from the rest of creation.

*Question:* We hear about all the science and how the evidence for creation occurred and yet trying to get that into textbooks as even a possibility is under attack. There seems to be a disconnect between what we hear out in the world and what the facts are.

*Answer:* I don't think so. What you are thinking of there is the creation-evolution controversy, which cannot get into textbooks. But that is talking about the origin of life on this planet and the evolution of biological organisms on this planet. What we are talking about here is astronomy and the origin of the universe. And this is in the textbooks. If you pick up any textbook on modern astronomy and astrophysics, you will see a discussion of these various theories of how the universe originated, and they will talk about Steady State and the redshift and the expanding universe and things of that sort.<sup>70</sup>

*Followup:* But not intelligent design.

*Answer:* No, and I have not argued here for an intelligent designer. That is important to see. Although this is a Sunday School class, what I have been talking about the last couple of weeks isn't religious. The statement "The universe began to exist," the second premise of the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument, is a religiously neutral statement that you can find in any astronomy and astrophysics textbook. This isn't creation science or intelligent design or anything of that sort. Now I think it has theological implications, which we will draw later on. But the fact that the universe began to exist is a theologically neutral, scientific claim that doesn't presuppose the existence of God or anything like that. Therefore, it ought not to be objectionable in textbooks – although I noted with some amusement a few years ago in the Arkansas Creation Trial, Judge Overton's decision said that the statement of the creation of the universe out of nothing is an inherently religious statement and therefore cannot be taught! I was amused at that because that is precisely what modern cosmology teaches, the creation of the universe out of nothing – unless you think that "creation" is a loaded term theologically. But it is often used in a neutral sense in astronomical discussions. That judge simply got it wrong.

*Question:* You said on this theory that the universe is accelerating. Why?

*Answer:* Yes, the most recent evidence shows that the expansion is actually speeding up rather than slowing down.

*Followup:* It seems logical it would be slowing down; why is it accelerating?

*Answer:* It is because there is a kind of anti-gravitational or reverse-gravitational force that kicks in at a certain point that, rather than pull things together the way gravity does, it pushes them apart. And this force becomes operative when the density of the universe drops to a certain level; then this kicks in and the acceleration takes place. The expansion actually speeds up! This is a discovery that has only been made since about 1998 and really was quite unexpected.

*Question:* Who first coined "Big Bang"?

*Answer:* This name "the Big Bang" was a derisive term for the Friedman-Lemaitre model

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<sup>70</sup> 20:10

which was coined by Fred Hoyle, the famous British astronomer. Hoyle was the proponent of the Steady State Theory, and he thought that to say that the universe originated out of nothing implied the existence of God, which Hoyle, as an atheist, just could not have. He thought if you had a Big Bang, you had a Big Banger, and that was unacceptable. So he propounded the Steady State Model, and he derided the Friedman-Lemaitre model by saying it teaches that a universe originated in a “big bang.” The name stuck, and that is what everybody refers to it as, even though, as I explained, it is really a misleading term because it makes it seem as if the universe came from an explosion from a central point out into nothing, and it is not that at all.

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We have been looking at the evidence for the beginning of the universe from the expansion of the universe. As if this weren't enough, there is a second scientific confirmation that the universe is not infinite in the past but had an absolute beginning. This comes from the field of thermodynamics and in particular the second law of thermodynamics. We will look at that evidence next.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Total Running Time 24:24 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY  
§ II. *KALAM* COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Lecture 6

**The Universe Began to Exist:  
Second Scientific Confirmation**

We have been talking about scientific arguments for the beginning of the universe, which is the second premise of the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument. Today we are going to turn to a second scientific confirmation of the beginning of the universe, which is the evidence from thermodynamics.

**Second Scientific Confirmation**

According to the second law of thermodynamics, processes going on in a closed system tend to a state of disorder. For example, if we had a bottle with a closed vacuum inside and we were to introduce into the bottle some molecules of gas, the gas would spread itself evenly throughout the bottle. It would be impossible, virtually, for all of the molecules to cluster down into one corner of the bottle and remain, for example. The reason for this is simply because there are far many more ways for the gas molecules to be disorderly in their distribution than for them to be orderly in their distribution. Thus, according to the second law, if you have a closed system, that system will tend toward a state of disorder.

Already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was realized that the second law of thermodynamics implied a grim prediction for the universe. According to atheism, the universe is just one, gigantic, closed system, since it is all there is and there is nothing outside of it feeding more energy into it. What that seems to imply, then, is, given enough time, the universe will eventually run down, so that matter and energy will diffuse themselves evenly throughout the universe. The universe will become a featureless soup in which all matter and energy are evenly distributed and no life is possible. Once the universe reaches such a state of thermodynamic equilibrium, no further significant change is possible. Scientists call this the heat death of the universe.

But this unwelcome prediction raised a further puzzle. If, given enough time, the universe eventually *will* reach a state of heat death, then why is it not *now* in a state of heat death if it has existed for infinite time, from eternity past? If, in a finite amount of time, the universe will arrive at a condition of heat death, then given infinite past time it should have already arrived at such a state and should exist in thermodynamic equilibrium.

The German physicist Ludwig Boltzmann proposed a daring hypothesis to try to avoid this conclusion. Boltzmann suggested that perhaps the universe as a whole *does* in fact exist in a state of equilibrium; that there is overall in the universe an equilibrium state of heat death. Nevertheless, he suggested, perhaps by chance alone there would occur random fluctuations from equilibrium at various places that would produce little pockets of disequilibrium in the overall sea of equilibrium. Boltzmann referred to these pockets of disequilibrium as “worlds,” and he suggested that perhaps the universe we observe is one

of these worlds. We are just a little pocket of disequilibrium in an overall sea of equilibrium, and eventually, in accord with the second law, these little pockets will dissipate and everything will revert back to an overall state of equilibrium again.

Contemporary physicists have universally rejected Boltzmann's Many Worlds hypothesis as an explanation of the observed disequilibrium in the universe. Its fatal flaw is that if our world is just a chance fluctuation from an overall state of equilibrium, then we ought to be observing a much smaller world,<sup>72</sup> that is to say, a much smaller pocket or region of disequilibrium, a much smaller ordered universe. Because a small fluctuation from equilibrium would allow us to exist and observe the world, and yet it would be overwhelmingly more probable than a huge fluctuation from equilibrium such as we observe in our universe. So it would be vastly more probable that we would be observing a much tinier region of disequilibrium than the vast universe that we see. In fact, Boltzmann's hypothesis, if consistently carried out, would lead to a very strange sort of illusionism. It would be more probable that we do in fact live in a very tiny pocket of disequilibrium and that the stars and the planets that we observe are all illusions, as it were, just pictures on the heavens, and not real stellar and planetary bodies out there. They are just images on the sky, so to speak. They are illusions because that sort of illusory universe would be vastly more probable than a universe which has declined in entropy from a state of equilibrium over the course of 15 billion years to produce the world that we see. So Boltzmann's hypothesis would result in a sort of insane kind of illusory reality in which everything we observe in the heavens turns out to be unreal. Therefore, it has been rejected by physicists today.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* These theories are quite old now, but how would the dark energy and dark matter that has recently come to be known to exist figure into this?

*Answer:* I will say something about that in a couple of minutes. Right now we are surveying the historical background in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and what we will see is how more recent discoveries have affected these predictions.

*Question:* Wouldn't Boltzmann's theory, as well as other Many Worlds theories, run into the same difficulty, where if it all existed from eternity past, would any fluctuation have already dissipated?

*Answer:* What would be required to say is these fluctuations are constantly forming, so that they are random fluctuations from an overall state of equilibrium and therefore they never cease. They would just go back infinitely. Not that any one would go back infinitely, but they would dissipate and pop up again and again, and ours would just be a recent fluctuation.

*Question:* I'll just add that Boltzmann was so disturbed by the second law and frustrated that no one else would buy into his attempt to get around it, that ultimately he committed suicide.

<sup>72</sup> 5:04

*Answer:* Oh my! Really? I didn't know that. Well, that comes from a person who is a quantum chemist at Georgia Tech.

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The expansion of the universe that was discovered in the 1920s, which we surveyed in recent classes, modified the sort of heat death that was predicted on the basis of the second law, but it didn't fundamentally alter the question. If the universe will expand forever, then it will never actually arrive at equilibrium because as space expands, there is generated more and more room in which energy and matter can diffuse themselves. They have more space in which to spread out, and therefore the universe never actually arrives at a state of equilibrium. But, nevertheless, as the universe expands, in accordance with the second law its available energy is used up, and it grows increasingly cold, dark, dilute, and dead. (I was inspired in that description by Thomas Hobbes' description of man's life in a state of nature – “mean, nasty, brutish, and short.” Similarly, the universe's fate will be one that is cold, dark, dilute, and dead.) It will simply become a thin gas of subatomic particles ever expanding into absolute darkness, no light, no life, no heat, just a universe in ruins.<sup>73</sup>

That is if the universe is expanding forever. Suppose, by contrast, that the universe is not expanding fast enough to overcome the internal pull of its own gravity. In that case, the expansion will grow slower and slower until finally it will come to a halt, and then with increasing rapidity, everything will come together again into a catastrophic Big Crunch. Everything in the universe will eventually coalesce into one gigantic black hole which is coextensive with the universe and from which the universe will not rebound. So the universe will perish in this inferno of gravitational self-collapse.

Whether its end will be by fire or by ice, the fundamental question still remains the same – if, given sufficient time, the universe will reach such a state, then why is it not now in such a condition, if it has existed for infinite time?

As we move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, very recent discoveries have indicated that the cosmic expansion is actually accelerating, that is to say, it is speeding up. This is a result of this dark energy that we mentioned earlier. There is a kind of anti-gravitational force or cosmological constant that causes the universe to accelerate in its expansion. In an accelerating expansion, because the volume of space is increasing so rapidly, the universe actually gets farther and farther away from equilibrium because the volume of space is growing so quickly. But, although it grows farther and farther away from a state of equilibrium in which matter and energy are evenly distributed, nevertheless the acceleration of the universe's expansion only hastens its demise. Because now what happens is that different regions of the universe become increasingly marooned, or causally isolated, from other regions of the universe so that each marooned region becomes cold, dark, dilute, and dead and suffers thermodynamic extinction. So again, the question arises, why isn't our region in such a state, if the universe has existed already for infinite time?

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<sup>73</sup> 10:10

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* What role does the dark energy play in accelerating the universe?

*Answer:* That would be the force that causes the expansion to proceed more rapidly. It is related to the inflationary expansion in the early period of the universe that makes the universe expand in an exponentially fast rate. Then it slows down to its more leisurely rate that we have been experiencing. Then when it reaches a certain density this cosmological constant kicks in again and causes the expansion to accelerate more rapidly.

*Question:* Do any of these conflict with the Bible and revelation? Isn't it possible that what the Bible is saying is the end is the end, and there is a new beginning?

*Answer:* I think we talked about this in the section of the class called the Doctrine of the Last Things. And if I recall, I contrasted the predictions of physical eschatology with those of theological eschatology, that is to say, what physicists say will be the final things and what the Bible says will be the final things. And they are certainly different in that it is clear that Christ will return before humankind reaches a state of thermodynamic extinction or even extinction as a species. Christ will return while there is still life on this planet. What we have to say, as Christians, is that these predictions of physical cosmology or physical eschatology are projections of present trends into the future. They describe what would happen under the condition "all things being equal," that is to say, there is no outside interference by any other supernatural factors. But as Christians we believe, of course, there will be interference. God will roll up the scroll of human history and bring the universe to an end.<sup>74</sup> These are at best projections based upon the laws of nature and present conditions of what would happen, all things being equal.

*Question:* I have noticed the fascinating trend in science programs where astrophysicists will speak of an evolutionary theory of the universe, but they will give it the kind of overall evolutionary sort of meaning that life has. In other words, as if the universe is a living entity.

*Answer:* If we remember that the word "evolution," taken strictly, simply means descent with modification, then what that would mean is, for example, that galaxies begin as more nebulous clouds of gas and dust and then condense into stars and then into different shapes and forms. So there is a whole study in cosmology of galaxy formation – the morphology of galaxies and how they form. This could be called galactic evolution. But there is nothing corresponding to the mechanisms of genetic mutation and natural selection with respect to these things. There have been some speculative theories proposed for cosmic evolution by people like Lee Smolin, but they have been largely discredited. For the most part, the word "evolution," when it is used of non-living things, has to simply mean that things change over time and go through a process of alteration. That is not significant, I don't think.

*Followup:* . . . they were speaking in a tone and inflection in what they were saying. . .

*Answer:* That would be a faith commitment, as you know, because there isn't any good evidence that the universe is infinite in the past. Quite the contrary, that is very problematic, and nobody knows how to craft a model of the universe that could be

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<sup>74</sup> 15:11

extended infinitely into the past. And the present problem, the laws of thermodynamics, is just one reason for that difficulty.

*Question:* Present eschatological doctrine doesn't really see the end of the universe, it merely sees a replacement. The end of Revelation we read about the new heavens and the new Earth. And as you say, this doesn't contradict science because whatever is going on here God just simply intervenes.

*Answer:* Right, which science can't contemplate. It can't contemplate the intervention of a supernatural deity. It simply takes present conditions and the laws of nature and extrapolates them out into the future.

*Followup:* These doctrines are a conservative view but even the more liberal eschatologists have no problem. Most of Christianity have no problem with a new heaven and a new Earth.

*Answer:* Right, the point is that we would have to say, on a Christian view, the human species on this planet is not going to become extinct. Before that can happen, Christ is going to return and bring about the end of history, whereas if there were no end of the world, eventually life on Earth would become extinct, and eventually life throughout the universe would become extinct. There would be nothing left. And that is not going to happen.

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What we want to do now is look at some attempts to avoid the beginning of the universe that is implied by the second law of thermodynamics. We will begin to do that next time and show why all of these attempts to avoid the beginning of the universe thus far have failed.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Total Running Time: 19:46 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § II. *KALAM* COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 7

### **Attempts to Avoid the Beginning of the Universe**

To set the context, we have been talking about the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument for the existence of God. That argument, you will remember, goes like this:

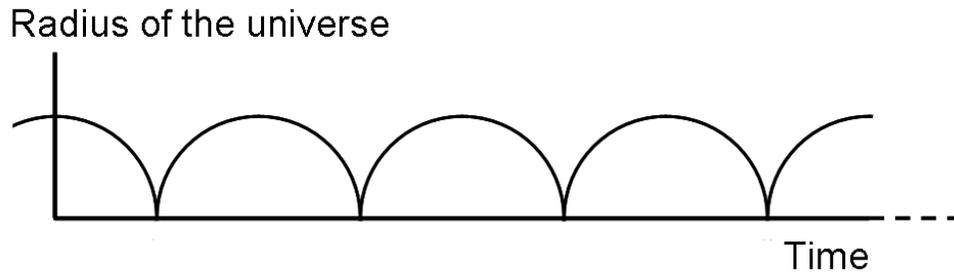
1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

We have been looking at evidence for that controversial second premise that *the universe began to exist*. We looked at philosophical arguments, and then we looked at scientific confirmation of this premise. We most recently have been looking at the confirmation of this premise from the second law of thermodynamics. You'll remember we saw that the application of the second law of thermodynamics to the universe as a whole implies that given a sufficient finite amount of time, the universe will reach a state in which it becomes cold, dark, dilute, and dead. The question then arises: if, given a finite amount of time, the universe will arrive at such a state, then why is it not now in such a state, if it has already existed for infinite time? If the past is infinite, then the universe should have already reached a condition of being lifeless, dark, dilute, and dead. And yet it has not.

All of this seems to raise the implication that the assumption behind the problem is wrong. Namely, this assumes that the universe has existed forever. If the universe began to exist, then it has simply been a finite amount of time since the initial energy was put in at the beginning of the universe, and it is now winding down toward some sort of thermodynamic heat death, which it will arrive at in the future. The application of the second law to the universe as a whole implies that the universe began to exist, which is the second premise of the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument.

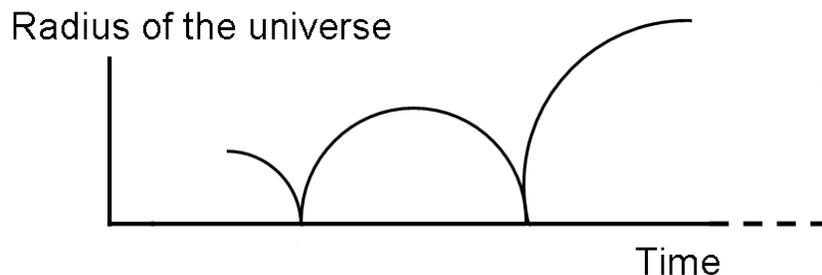
### **Attempts to Avoid the Beginning of the Universe**

Of course, attempts have been made to try to avoid the beginning of the universe which is implied by the second law. But so far, none of these has been successful in avoiding the beginning of the universe at some time in the finite past. For example, during the 1960s, a number of scientists suggested that perhaps the universe is in an eternal process of oscillating, that is to say, it expands and then it contracts and then it expands again, and then re-contracts, over and over again in a sort of concertina-like fashion. This process of oscillating has been going on from eternity past, so if you were to trace the history of the universe back in time it would look like a series of humps, which represents the cycles of expansion and contraction going back in time (where the vertical axis is space and horizontal axis is time). In this way, the beginning of the universe would be avoided. [*see Figure 2*]



*Figure 2 - Oscillating Model. Each expansion phase is preceded and succeeded by a contraction phase, so that the universe in concertina-like fashion exists beginninglessly and endlessly.*

Ironically, however, the thermodynamic properties of the universe imply the very beginning of the universe that these theorists sought to avoid. For it has been shown that entropy, or thermodynamic disorder, is conserved from cycle to cycle. That is to say, the energy is not completely recycled each time it contracts and expands again. Rather any thermodynamic disorder that accumulated in one cycle is pulled through to the second, where it accumulates even further and then is pulled through to the one following that. So over time the thermodynamic disorder will continue to accumulate from cycle to cycle. This has a very interesting effect upon the behavior of an oscillating model. This entropy accumulation causes each cycle to be larger than the cycle before it and to have a longer duration [see Figure 3].



*Figure 3 - Oscillating Model with Entropy Increase. Due to the conservation of entropy each successive oscillation has a larger radius and longer expansion time.*

So as you trace the expansions back in time, they would get smaller and smaller until one comes to a first oscillation and an absolute beginning of the universe.<sup>76</sup> So, ironically, the thermodynamic properties of the oscillating model implied the very beginning that its proponents sought to avoid.

In fact, since entropy is accumulating from cycle to cycle, if the past were infinite, you would have an infinite amount of entropy in the universe. But astronomers have estimated on the basis of current entropy levels in the universe that even if the universe were oscillating, it could not have gone through more than 100 previous oscillations before you reached the first oscillation and the absolute beginning of the universe.

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<sup>76</sup> 5:12

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* The last few *Scientific American* magazines had articles on a variant on this where they talk about some kind of convergence and also on a Big Bounce where you accumulate density and then it repulses much like when you put two poles of magnets together. But it seems very (*inaudible*)

*Answer:* It sounds like it. I have not read those specific articles. But one of the other problems with the oscillating models that I didn't even mention is that up to now there hasn't been any known physics that would cause a re-contracting universe to bounce back to an expansion. The physics seem to predict it would just collapse into a black hole from which it would never emerge. So physicists are looking for some sort of mechanism that would cause this kind of oscillating behavior. But what this argument shows is that even if this were possible for the universe to be oscillating, the thermodynamic properties imply that it still has to have a beginning of the process.

*Question:* You mention that the energy is not always reserved going from one cycle to another, correct?

*Answer:* What I said was that the energy isn't completely recycled in the sense that you begin with a new low entropy level. It is not as though entropy builds up to a certain quantity here, and then in the next cycle you start again with zero entropy all over again. What I am saying is that whatever accumulates in the first cycle gets passed through to the second. This is called the conservation of entropy from cycle to cycle.

*Followup:* Why would that cause it to be . . . ?

*Answer:* The effect of this increased entropy is that each cycle will be longer than the previous one and the radius will be greater of the expansion. So that causes this behavior of diminishing cycles as you go back in time.

*Question:* Wouldn't this make it for an atheist less probable that if there had been many previous cycles that the universe could rise again each time from purely natural processes?

*Answer:* I think what you are raising here is the question of the fine-tuning of the universe for life. One of the problems with this oscillating model is that in order to get a universe that would oscillate from eternity like this, so that each cycle would be exactly similar to its predecessor, it involves a kind of infinitely precise fine-tuning of initial conditions in order for this to take place. Moreover, this fine-tuning would have to be of an extraordinary sort because it would have to be set at infinity past, which is kind of crazy – how can you have initial conditions be set at past infinity? The model, even on its face, involves a really bizarre form of fine-tuning in order to have a cyclical behavior like this that would allow universes to exist each time that would be characterized by observers like us.<sup>77</sup>

*Question:* How popular is this model among cosmologists?

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<sup>77</sup> 10:18

*Answer:* According to Stephen Hawking, this was popular back in the 1960s, especially among Russian physicists. But, with the enunciation of the Hawking-Penrose singularity theorems, it fell into disfavor because what those theorems showed is that any universe collapsing toward a singularity simply ends at that point – there is no way to bounce back. In recent days, there have been some attempts to resuscitate oscillating models by figuring out ways to avoid collapsing down to a singularity and to try to have the universe bounce back before it reaches a singular state. The problem is that those models, even if they succeed in avoiding the singularity, have not been able to be extended into infinity past. You still cannot have an infinite past with such models, even if you can avoid collapsing down to a singular point at the end of a cycle.

*Question:* What could I point someone to who is questioning whether or not entropy is conserved between cycles?

*Answer:* If you look at the article in the *Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, it is extensively footnoted with the scientific literature, so I would recommend looking at that. Also, this is really a very well-known feature of these models. This isn't some esoteric fact; this has been known for decades that entropy is conserved. But you can look at the literature that is footnoted there. I may have it in *Reasonable Faith* as well.

*Question:* When you first started talking here, I envisioned just pulsing like a heartbeat – expanding and contracting but not to the extreme of a single point.

*Answer:* That gets into what I was just talking about. The Hawking-Penrose singularity theorems showed that a universe which is under gravitational self-collapse just goes right down to a singularity, like a black hole. It just collapses down to a boundary point. By exploiting quantum theories of gravity and trying to marry those with general relativity, scientists are trying to show how you can maybe have a pulsating model where the universe wouldn't collapse all the way down to a singularity, but you can get down to some prior state. But, as I say, these models still can't be extended to infinity past. So even if the universe didn't begin with a singular state, as in the standard model, the problem of extrapolating it to infinity remains. That is the real issue. That is important to understand. The real issue is not whether the universe had a beginning in a singular point. The issue is whether the universe began to exist – whether its beginning was singular, as in the point of a cone, where you have a singular point, or whether it is non-singular, as in the Hartle-Hawking model, where it is rounded off at the beginning. In either case, the past is still finite not infinite. And that is what the second premise of the argument is. It is not that the universe began as a singular point, but that *the universe began to exist*. So don't be misled by folks who say, "Well, the singularity may not have been real; the singularity is just an artifact of the standard model, but we can adopt theories of the universe that avoid the singularity." That is not really the issue. The issue is: Did the universe begin to exist? Is the past finite or infinite? The question is not, "Was the beginning state a singular state or not?" By a singular state, one means a state at which space-time curvature, density, and temperature become infinite. That is what one means by that – it would be like a point of a cone.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> 15:00

Let me talk about another more recent attempt to avoid the beginning of the universe. That would be by saying that our universe is not, in fact, the entire universe. Our universe is just a pocket universe, which is part of a much wider reality, sometimes called the multiverse. So our universe is just a bubble in a sea of similar bubbles, and each of these is expanding, as well as the sea of energy in which these bubbles exist. Our universe has a beginning, but that doesn't mean the multiverse as a whole has a beginning. The multiverse as a whole can still be eternal and infinite in the past. The second law of thermodynamics, it would be claimed, only applies to our bubble universe, not to the multiverse as a whole.

Whether or not the second law of thermodynamics applies to the multiverse as a whole is a moot point. That is a controversial point. If the second law does apply to the whole multiverse, then it implies that the multiverse itself must have a beginning and cannot have existed for an infinite time. But in any case, even that aside, we've already seen that the theorem developed by Borde, Guth, and Vilenkin implies that even the multiverse itself cannot be extended into the infinite past but must have a beginning point. So even this foam of bubbles that is forming is something that must have begun to exist, which is again the second premise of the *Kalam* argument.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* What if someone were to claim that the multiverse itself, as a whole, is a static entity that is not expanding or contracting and that there is just this sort of existent sea of energy?

*Answer:* This is very similar to a kind of model that developed during the 1970s that I have called Vacuum Fluctuation Models. This says that there is a mother vacuum, which is a sort of womb in which these baby universes are formed, and it is a static and eternal entity. These baby universes are expanding into this great quantum vacuum in which they exist. This model ran into a very serious problem, namely, at any point in the quantum vacuum, there is a non-zero probability that a universe would form at that point by a quantum fluctuation. But given infinite past time, universes will have come into being at every point in the quantum vacuum because given any non-zero probability and enough time, eventually that probability will be actualized. But then those universes will have by now so expanded as to fill the entire quantum vacuum and so will run into each other, coalesce, and form one infinitely large, infinitely old universe – which contradicts observations that we exist in a relatively young universe. So it is not enough to have the bubble universes expanding in this static mother universe; the mother universe has to be expanding as well. But once you do that, then it falls under the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem which says any universe which has, on average, been in a state of expansion throughout its history cannot be infinite in the past but must have a beginning. So the static model was tried, and more recently these multiverse inflationary models have been tried, but what scientists have discovered is once again they cannot be extrapolated to infinity past.

*Question:* Are you saying there are scientists that believe these things always were?

*Answer:* There is a good number of people who believe that the universe is eternal in the

past and is uncreated and has always existed.<sup>79</sup>

*Followup:* And those people struggle with the thought that there could be a deity who always was?

*Answer:* Let's put it this way: not necessarily! Thomas Aquinas, for example, the great medieval theologian, thought the universe could be eternal in the past but still be created by God. It just wouldn't be created at some beginning point. It would just be eternally dependent on God in the way that, say, a heavy weight that is dependent on a chain hanging from the ceiling is always dependent on the chain, even if they have been hanging there from eternity past. So it is not an argument for atheism or against the existence of God, but it would be simply a way of undercutting the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument, which has a premise in it that says *the universe began to exist*. If you could undercut that premise, then that would make that argument unsound.

*Followup:* It amazes me that people can think that something can exist without having a starting point. At one time an oak tree was not an oak tree.

*Answer:* That gets into those philosophical arguments we talked about – whether or not the series of causes can regress infinitely into the past. I tried to show that that is a very, very difficult notion and very problematic. What we are finding now is that we have not simply philosophical reasons that the past is finite, but actual scientific reasons as well.

*Question:* It seems that many of the people that I talk to that use this are actually trying to avoid the fine-tuning of the universe. Should we point out that that is their real motive?

*Answer:* Your point is well-taken in that today there is another argument for the existence of God, the design argument, that is based on the fine-tuning of the universe. And the odds of this fine-tuning occurring by chance are so astronomically low (that would be an understatement), they are so incomprehensibly improbable, that the only way to save the chance hypothesis is through the multiverse. If you can't get the roulette wheel to land on a certain number in one spin, then you posit an infinite number of spins and an infinite number of roulette wheels, and then that way, by chance alone, the improbable will happen. So if our universe is improbably fine-tuned for the existence of intelligent life, the way you get it to happen by chance is you have an infinite number of other universes, most of which are dead and unobserved. So this same multiverse hypothesis is the principal means by which the design argument is refuted today. The whole debate between practitioners or proponents of design versus skeptics of design is whether or not we live in a multiverse like this and whether or not that will eliminate the fine-tuning. But as I tried to explain, it has some relevance as well to the *Kalam* argument in that the proponent of the multiverse would agree that our bubble had a beginning but not the whole thing.

Let me go into one final attempt to avoid the implications of the thermodynamic properties of the universe. This is the speculation that has been floated in some quarters that perhaps our universe is the baby of some prior mother universe which has spawned it. And the idea here is that perhaps black holes are really portals through which energy

<sup>79</sup> 20:12

can tunnel to some other unobservable universe. As the energy goes into the black hole, it goes through the worm hole and then is ejected into this other space-time region.<sup>80</sup> The speculation is that, with time, the worm hole gets thinner and thinner until finally it pinches off and the baby universe becomes a separate entity in and of itself [see Figure 4].

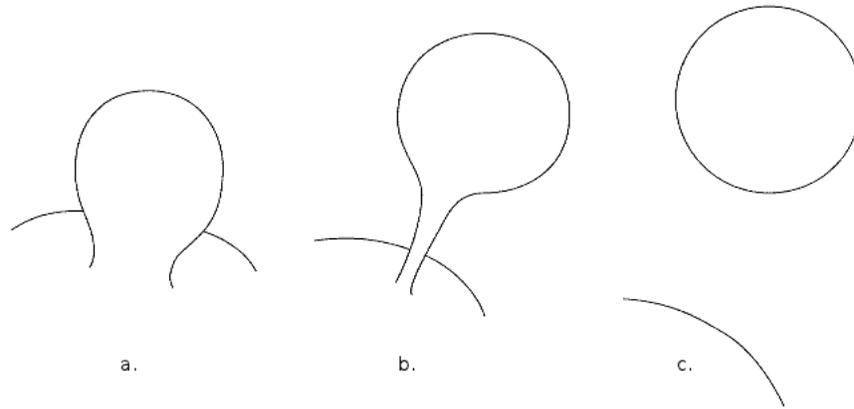


Figure 4 - Baby universe spawned from a mother universe via worm hole

The idea here might be that perhaps this process has been going on from eternity past – that our universe is simply the product of some prior universe which was itself the product of some prior universe, and so on *ad infinitum*, so that the universe which began to exist is merely the product of an infinite series of prior universes, each spawning baby universes through black hole production.

Could this scenario be extended into the infinite past to avoid an absolute beginning? Well, sorry – it won't work. It has been shown to contradict the laws of subatomic physics, or quantum physics. What physicists have discovered is that the information that goes into a black hole remains in our universe. It cannot escape our universe and go to another universe. So this scenario postulating that this baby universe could pinch off and thereby isolate the information that went into the black hole into another world is physically impossible.

This scenario was the subject of a bet between Stephen Hawking and an American physicist named John Preskill. Preskill held that this scenario is impossible and that it contradicts the laws of quantum physics, whereas Hawking was espousing this idea. Hawking, who was one of the last holdouts, admitted in 2004 that he had lost the bet. Offering his apologies to science fiction fans everywhere, Hawking admitted there is no baby universe branching off and the information remains solidly in our own universe. So once again this attempt to avoid the beginning of the universe through very speculative cosmological conjectures was shown to be a failure.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Given all these failed attempts to explain our universe and its beginning, where

<sup>80</sup> 25:02

do cosmologists today hold their faith? What model or what idea? Are they still searching or is there some credible model that is being considered?

*Answer:* It is wide open. There are all sorts of competing research programs to try to develop cosmological models of the beginning of the universe. Some of these will involve a beginning in the finite past. Others will be attempts to avoid the singular beginning and extrapolate back to a pre-Big Bang condition, for example. But none of them has succeeded in extrapolating to infinity past, so as to restore the eternal universe and avoid the prediction of the standard model that the universe began to exist.

*Followup:* So is the Big Bang the current one that has yet to be disproved and the one being taught in school?

*Answer:* I think what one would say would be that the standard model is taught as describing accurately the history of the universe right back to very close to the beginning. But then before you get to that point, prior to that Planck time, then they would say we don't have a physics to describe that early region of the universe, and so we don't really know. We don't have a theory that will allow us to discover what it was like. That is where it is wide open, and there are all sorts of speculations and different models. But remember, as we shared earlier, the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem applies *regardless* of your physical description of that era. And the second law of thermodynamics is a scientific theory that is in a field of science that is so well understood that it is almost a closed field of science. So the prospects of avoiding or revising that second law in some way as to avoid the beginning are pretty remote.<sup>81</sup>

*Question:* What were you trying to explain in (*unintelligible*)?

*Answer:* If I understand your question, the second theory that I was talking about was the multiverse model that says our universe is just a bubble in an expanding, wider universe: while our bubble may have begun to exist, the whole universe didn't begin to exist. The third one here is based upon black hole production of baby universes.

*Followup:* I was talking about [Vacuum Fluctuation models].

*Answer:* That was a response to another question about how we could perhaps adjust the model so that the wider mother universe in which these bubbles are formed is not itself expanding, but it is just static. And I said that ran into the problem that then the bubbles would run into each other and coalesce. But if you make it expanding, so that it expands more rapidly than the bubbles do, so the bubbles can't run into each other, which is the multiverse model – the vacuum is expanding so quickly that it outpaces even the expansion of the bubbles, so they can't coalesce – but if you say that, then the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem applies to the multiverse, and you have to have a beginning.

In conclusion to this section of the argument, the scientific evidence of thermodynamics confirms the conclusion that we already reached based on the expansion of the universe, that we have good grounds that the universe began to exist. And this evidence is especially powerful because the field of thermodynamics is so well understood that it is virtually a closed field. That makes it highly unlikely that these findings are going to be

<sup>81</sup> 30:06

eventually reversed.

So then, on the basis on both philosophical argument and scientific evidence, we have good reason for thinking the second premise of the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument is true: *the universe began to exist*. In conjunction with the first premise, that *whatever begins to exist has a cause*, the conclusion therefore follows with logical necessity: *therefore, the universe has a cause*.

What we will now do is explore the theological implications of there existing a cause of the universe, and we will see that a striking number of divine attributes can be deduced from a conceptual analysis of what it is to be a cause of the universe.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Total Running Time: 33:49 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY  
§ II. *KALAM* COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Lecture 8

**If the Universe Has a Cause . . . A Conceptual Analysis**

We argued that whatever begins to exist has a cause and that both philosophical argument and scientific evidence suggest the universe began to exist. From those two premises, it follows that the universe has a cause.

What we want to do is unpack the theological significance of this conclusion that *the universe has a cause*. It would seem to point toward some sort of reality beyond the universe, a transcendent reality which brought the universe into being. But is that in fact the case? Well, not according to the prominent atheist philosopher Daniel Dennett! Dennett says, yes, the universe has a cause – he would agree with the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument that the universe has a cause. But he says the cause of the universe is: itself! Yes, the universe brought itself into being. He’s serious! He says, in what he calls “the ultimate bootstrapping trick,” the universe created itself.<sup>83</sup> That is a reference to the famous Baron von Münchhausen who tried to pull himself up by his own bootstraps. He says this is similar to what happened with the beginning of the universe. The universe, in the ultimate bootstrapping trick, created itself.

I think it’s time for somebody to say that the Emperor is wearing no clothes. This view is simply nonsense. Notice what Dennett is *not* saying. He is not saying that the universe is self-caused in the sense that it has always been there, that it is eternal, and it is self-existent. No, he is saying the universe began to exist, it came into being, but it created itself. It came into being by creating itself. That is simply nonsense because in order to create itself the universe would have to already exist. It would have to exist before it existed in order to bring itself into existence, which is simply a self-contradiction. So Dennett’s view is really just logically incoherent. He is saying that the universe would have to exist before it existed, which is a self-contradiction.

It follows that the cause of the universe must be some sort of transcendent cause which is beyond the universe.

DISCUSSION

*Question: (inaudible)*

*Answer:* As far as I know, in his [Dennett’s] writings, I have never seen him say anything else than this in addressing this argument. Moreover, when I was at a conference in New Orleans at which he spoke on atheism and I presented this argument in refutation against

<sup>83</sup> “It [the material world], we have seen, does perform a version of the ultimate bootstrapping trick; it creates itself ex nihilo, or at any rate out of something that is well-nigh indistinguishable from nothing at all.” from Daniel Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1995) p. 185

him and he had a chance to get up and respond verbally, he didn't give any further refutation. This did seem to be the extent of his response to the argument. It is remarkable, but that is as deep as it goes, it seems.

*Question: (inaudible)*

*Answer:* I think it is a metaphysical question, if you are talking about an absolute beginning of the universe. Those who would want to continue science through the Big Bang to some earlier state are really denying that the universe began to exist. They are really denying the second premise and saying this wasn't an absolute beginning. But once you say that there is an absolute beginning of space and time, matter and energy, then you have reached the threshold of science. Science investigates the natural world, and if the natural world comes into being at that moment, then it is a supernatural explanation that is needed – something that is not scientific but *metaphysical*, beyond physics. So I think you are quite right in saying that if you agree that nature begins at that moment – the natural world begins at that moment – , then science, which only studies what is in the natural world, has reached its threshold, or its limit, which is eternity.

*Question:* On Dennett's argument, couldn't you then say the universe could uncreate itself?<sup>84</sup>

*Answer:* I suppose so, though he might not disagree with that. And that wouldn't then solve the problem that we are getting at here, and that is to try to see if there is some theological significance in the cause of the universe. And I want to maintain that there is, and that [response] would leave that unrefuted. So I think we need to ask ourselves, is this an adequate explanation – that the universe created itself? I think it is just plainly self-contradictory.

*Followup:* He is trivializing it in saying anything is possible. But that is not science. The evidence doesn't indicate that the universe can create itself.

*Answer:* But it is worse than that! It is not just that this isn't science; it is that this is self-contradictory. So it is not possible. This is impossible. That is what a self-contradiction entails – that this is logically impossible.

*Question:* When you started with the Leibniz discussion, you explained the definition of an argument is 51% versus 49% certain.

*Answer:* What I said was, for the argument to be a good one, the premises do not need to be known with certainty. They just need to be more plausible than their opposites, or as you put it 51% to 49%. And you go with what is more plausible, the premise or its opposite.

*Followup:* Do your opponents buy into that?

*Answer:* Yes, I think so, by and large. That is a religiously neutral standard of argument.

*Followup:* But it sounds as if Dennett, to make that statement, can't possibly be giving any weight whatsoever to the idea of a Creator. He isn't even considering it.

*Answer:* Yes, I think you are making a very good point. What you are saying is that

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<sup>84</sup> 4:58

Dennett offers one interpretation of what the cause of the universe might be but that doesn't show that it is the correct interpretation. What about there being a transcendent Creator? He doesn't say anything to weigh the two against each other. He just simply throws this one out as a possibility, and in that sense I guess you are right. He says, "Here is a possible explanation – the cause of the universe is that it created itself." But he gives no argument in favor of it. In fact, I like the way you are thinking. This is very, very good. See, what he is saying is, "It is not enough, Mr. Atheist, for you to give a possibility – give us an argument for why your view is right." You are so correct to be thinking that way, to say, "You have the burden of proof to show why your alternative is better than mine." It is not enough to throw out a possibility, if the idea of a Creator is a more plausible explanation. What I am arguing is that Dennett's view isn't even a possibility; it is nonsense. So there has to be some sort of a transcendent cause of the universe. But you are quite right in saying that he just sort of throws out possibilities and thinks that is enough to refute the argument; and that is not true.

*[Q&A: Asks about the universe and reality's just being an idea in the mind of God; rather than go off on a rabbit trail, Dr. Craig doesn't answer this.]<sup>85</sup>*

*Question:* A defining feature of a number of these people is that they *a priori* want to exclude anything other than a naturalistic argument on anything. As you talked about when you say science deals with the natural world and uses the five senses, they want to equate that as the only elements of truth. What they do is they identify science with materialism, and that is a philosophical position, not a scientific one. That is why he won't let anything in.

*Answer:* Yes, quite right! I think you are right that, for many of these folks, the idea of a supernatural reality is just impossible, and therefore such an explanation cannot even be entertained. They would regard it as nonsensical as I regard his explanation. But then they owe us an argument. They need to give us a reason to think that a transcendent Creator of the universe is a self-contradiction or cannot be real. And until such an argument is forthcoming, that is not an objection; that is just a psychological bias against the supernatural.

### ***If the Universe Has a Cause... A Conceptual Analysis***

If we are compelled to conclude to a transcendent cause of the universe, what properties must this cause possess in order to be the transcendent cause of the physical space-time world?

First of all, this cause must itself be uncaused. It must be an uncaused First Cause. Why? Because we have seen that an infinite regress of causes is impossible. Remember that the philosophical arguments in support of the beginning of the universe were that you cannot have an infinite regress of causes, and, therefore, the series of causes must terminate in an absolutely first, uncaused cause.

Secondly, this being must transcend space and time because it created space and time. As the creator of space and time, it must exist beyond space and time because it brought

<sup>85</sup> 10:05

space and time into existence. What does that have for further implications? That means that this being, therefore, must be a non-physical, or immaterial, being. This must be a spiritual reality; an immaterial, nonphysical being. Why? Because physical things exist in space – they have dimensions. Moreover, physical things exist in time. Physical things are always changing, at least at the atomic level, where there is just constant motion and change going on. So if you get back to an absolutely first, spaceless, timeless being, it must be an immaterial, non-physical, changeless reality.

Obviously, we can also infer that this being would have to be unimaginably powerful, if not omnipotent. Why? Because it created all of physical reality from nothing. It created the space-time material universe without any sort of material cause. So it is the efficient cause of the universe – it brings matter and energy, space and time into being, but it does so without any sort of stuff, or material, because it creates the universe out of nothing. So it would have to be unfathomably powerful, if not omnipotent.

Finally, this is plausibly a personal being. In our discussion of the Leibnizian Cosmological Argument that was mentioned a moment ago, we already saw one reason why a cause of the universe must plausibly be a personal being.

You remember that I said that there are only two kinds of things that we are aware of that can fit the bill of being an immaterial, timeless, changeless reality. One is an abstract object, like a mathematical entity such as a number or a set. Numbers are not material, physical things; if they exist, they are immaterial realities. They don't exist in space – the number 7 isn't hiding under a table here in the room or any place else in the universe.<sup>86</sup> They are timeless as well – it is not as if the number 7 endures through time. So abstract objects, mathematical entities, can be immaterial, changeless, spaceless, timeless objects. The other candidate would be a mind. That is to say, an unembodied consciousness or self. The mind is not a material entity, and it need not be constantly changing as long as its thoughts are changeless and focused on a single intuition of reality. And a mind isn't something that exists necessarily in space.

So we can either have an abstract object or an unembodied consciousness as a cause of the universe. And I argued that it cannot be an abstract object because abstract objects do not stand in causal relationships. This is part of the very definition of what it means to be an abstract object. The number 7 doesn't have any effects, it has no causal impact upon the universe, nor do any other mathematical entities. So the defining property of abstract objects is their being causally impotent. They do not stand in causal relations. Therefore, it follows that the cause of the origin of the universe must be an unembodied mind – a personal self.

That was the reason I gave when we talked about the Leibnizian argument. Let me now share a different reason for the personhood of the first cause that was given by our friend al-Ghazali, who was the Muslim philosopher that propounded the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument during the Middle Ages. Al-Ghazali argued that the first cause must be a personal being because otherwise it is impossible to explain how you can get a temporal effect with a beginning from a changeless, eternal cause.

Here is the problem. If a cause is sufficient to produce its effect, then if the cause is there,

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<sup>86</sup> 15:02

the effect should be there. Otherwise, the cause isn't really sufficient for the effect – you would need something else, and then *that* would be the cause. So if the cause is sufficient to produce its effect – if the cause is there in all its glory – , then the effect must be there as well. The cause cannot exist without its effect once the sufficient conditions for the effect are given.

Let me give you an illustration. Suppose that the cause of water's freezing is the temperature's being below 0°C. If the temperature were below 0°C from eternity past, then any water that was around would be frozen from eternity. It would be impossible for the water to just begin to freeze a finite time ago. Once the cause is given, the effect must be given as well. The problem is, if we have a transcendent and timeless cause that is there, why isn't the effect also permanent as well? Why did the effect only begin a finite time ago if the cause is eternal? How can you have an eternal cause but an effect that only has a beginning a finite time ago?

Al-Ghazali's ingenious answer to this dilemma was to say that this is possible only if the cause is a personal agent who is endowed with freedom of the will and who can therefore freely will to create spontaneous, new effects that aren't determined by any prior antecedent conditions. The cause of the universe can be a personal agent who freely wills to create a universe with a beginning. This act of creating is a freely willed act that doesn't have any prior determining conditions, so it can be something that is spontaneous and new. For example, to return to an illustration, let's imagine a man who has been sitting from eternity, and he suddenly wills to stand up. You would have an effect with a beginning, namely, his standing, arise from a cause which is eternal and has always been there.<sup>87</sup> Philosophers cause this kind of causation "agent causation." The cause is a free agent who, through an exercise of his free will, can bring about a new effect. So we are brought not simply to a transcendent cause of the universe, but to its personal Creator.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Two things: One, how would you respond, in a very quick and accessible way, when someone asks what created God. Two, what do you do when someone says they don't even know what you mean when you talk about a disembodied existence – they don't know how that is even plausible.

*Answer:* With respect to the first one, I would say that because an infinite regress is impossible, there has to be a first, uncaused cause. If every cause has a prior cause, then you see you immediately generate an infinite regress. But the whole point of those two philosophical arguments for the beginning of the universe was to show that an infinite regress of events or causes is impossible. So those arguments apply not just to the universe, they would apply to anything, even to God. You cannot have an infinite regress of causes if those arguments are correct. You have to get back to a first, uncaused cause. That would answer the question, "What is God's cause?" – there is no such cause. He is an eternal being. Notice that doesn't violate the first premise, which says whatever *begins* to exist has a cause. That doesn't exclude that something that exists eternally can exist without a cause. In fact, that is what philosophers believe about, say, numbers and other

<sup>87</sup> 20:03

abstract entities that exist timelessly – they don't have causes; they are just eternal. That is what the atheist has traditionally believed about the universe – that it is just eternal and therefore uncaused. But in light of the evidence for the second premise, that is not tenable. So, I would say that the quick answer is just an infinite regress of causes is impossible.

Now the second part of the question is more difficult. I have encountered this again and again on college campuses when I speak. People have absolutely no idea what you are talking about when you talk about a consciousness or a mind without a body. We have become so materialized in our culture, so reductionistic, that people equate the mind with, say, the brain, which is an organ that sits in your cranium, rather than understanding the mind as a self. Theism cannot even get off the ground if you can't conceive of a person without a body because that is what God is. So I think we would have to say something about ourselves as immaterial selves who happen to be connected with a body but point out that on reductive materialism, there are a number of problems. For example, the brain is not joyful, or happy, or cheery. Those are mental states and would not characterize a physical organ. Those are mental properties that could only characterize an immaterial self. You could also point to the phenomenon of intentionality, which is the idea of having thoughts *about* something. I think "about" lunch, or I think "about" my house or my pet. Physical objects don't have intentionality; they don't have "aboutness" – these are properties of mental states which cannot be reduced to the brain. Finally, freedom of the will is also something that we ourselves experience deeply, and yet that is not something that would characterize a physical entity that is simply the product of antecedent determining causes. To have freedom of the will you need an immaterial self that has the ability to influence brain states. Otherwise, if the causation is all one way – if it is just from brain to mind – , then everything you think is determined. But if you think you can actually cause things to happen in your body, like willing to lift your arm or willing to write with a marker or willing to take a step, then you have causation that goes from the mind to the brain – it is a two way street. It is not just brain-to-mind; you have mind-to-brain causation.<sup>88</sup> That implies this non-reductive view of the self, and it implies that you are an immaterial entity that is conjoined or correlated with a physical brain but not reducible to it. Therefore, I think in our deepest introspective knowledge of ourselves, we already have acquaintance with an immaterial self. Many of us believe that when our physical bodies die, that immaterial self continues to exist. This has certainly been the majority view among the peoples of the world; this is hardly an obscure view. I think the atheist would need to give us some kind of argument as to why it is impossible to have an immaterial self without a body. But I think you are certainly right in saying that this is an obstacle that increasingly we, as Christians, are going to confront in our culture because of this reductive, materialistic view of human persons that seems to be so prominent.

*Question:* Can you conclude that there is only one mind? If there was more than one mind, then you'd have to re-introduce time.

*Answer:* This argument does not prove that there is only one self or one mind that has caused the universe. Here I would simply appeal to Ockham's Razor, which says, "Don't multiple causes beyond necessity." Ockham's Razor says you are only justified in

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<sup>88</sup> 25:16

inferring those causes which are required to explain the effect. What is required to explain the effect here, that being the origin of the universe, is an immaterial, transcendent, personal Creator. It would be unjustified to infer that there is more than one of these. So Ockham's Razor will simply shave away these additional entities. On the basis of this argument alone, it doesn't *prove* monotheism, but on the other hand, I think Ockham's Razor would say that you would be unjustified in inferring anything more than one personal Creator of the universe.

*Question:* I found the easiest way to explain the personal nature of the cause of the universe is with the example of the person walking into the kitchen with a pot of water boiling and you ask why the water is boiling. You can get two answers, one is the scientific (how water boils) and one is the personal ("I wanted some tea").

*Answer:* This is an argument that Richard Swinburne, the Oxford philosopher, has developed for the personhood of the cause of the universe.<sup>89</sup> Swinburne says that there are two kinds of explanations. There are scientific explanations which are given in terms of laws of nature and initial conditions. On the other hand, there are personal explanations which are given in terms of an agent and his volitions, what he wills to do. Both of these are legitimate sorts of explanations, and in some contexts it would be totally inappropriate to give one rather than the other. When you walk into the kitchen and see the kettle boiling and ask "Why is the kettle boiling?", clearly you are looking for a personal explanation, not a scientific one. It doesn't mean a scientific one couldn't be given, but the personal one is what is being asked for here. What Swinburne points out is that the first state of the existence of the universe, its beginning, cannot have a scientific explanation because there aren't any laws of nature or initial conditions from which that first state could be explained because it *is* the first state – there is no antecedent state. For the first state of the universe, a scientific explanation is ruled out, and thus it has to be a personal explanation. And that will get you to a personal Creator of the universe. So I think we have three good arguments for the personhood of the Creator. One would be the argument from the dilemma: either an abstract object or a mind; not an abstract object; therefore a mind.<sup>90</sup> The second would be al-Ghazali's argument that it is only by a personal agent that you can explain how an effect with a beginning could arise from an eternal cause. And the third argument would be the Swinburne argument that you cannot have a scientific explanation of the first state of the universe, and therefore it has to be a personal explanation.

*Question:* In your book, you argue against an infinite regress of events as well as causes with the idea that would constitute an actual infinity. But if we consider God's thoughts as events, which I don't believe is much of a stretch, couldn't you use that argument as God himself would have to have a beginning?

*Answer:* No, what you would have to argue is that God's successive train of thoughts would have to have a beginning. And that is what I would affirm. I would say God existing alone, without creation, without the universe, isn't in a stream of consciousness or of thinking one thought after another. He is in a changeless state, in which he has an intuition of all truth without change. This is one of the classical attributes of God – his

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<sup>89</sup> Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, rev. edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 32-48.

<sup>90</sup> 29:58

changelessness or immutability – which means God doesn't have a mental life that is characterized by succession. I think you are quite right that this argument would apply to God as well, and it would give you a concept of God's mental life that is right in line with classical Christian theology about God's immutability.

*Question:* I can believe that we have an uncaused Creator. But I have trouble thinking that the Creator had a cause to create the universe. Did he not have a cause in mind when he created the universe?

*Answer:* This is a very good question that requires us to draw a distinction between a cause and a reason. We want to distinguish between a cause and a reason. What I am saying is that there is no cause that made God create the universe. He freely brought the universe into being. There is nothing that caused God to create the universe. But that doesn't mean he didn't have a reason for creating the universe. When we use "reason" here we are thinking of something like motivation or goal or something of that sort. And certainly God had a reason for creating the universe, namely, to create finite persons in his image and invite them into the intra-Trinitarian fellowship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as adopted sons and daughters of God. So he bestows on creatures this incredible gift of knowledge of himself – the supreme Good, the source of infinite goodness and love. Certainly God had a reason for creating the universe, but I do not think he had a cause that made him create the universe because God is a free being and he didn't have to create the universe – it was a free act of his will.

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With that we will close the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument. This argument is very powerful because it gives us grounds for believing in the existence of a beginningless, uncaused, timeless, spaceless, immaterial, enormously powerful, personal Creator of the universe, which is the core concept of what theists mean by "God."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Total Running Time: 34:29 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § III. TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 1

### **Teleological Argument**

We have been talking about arguments for God's existence. We have just finished the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument, and are now going to discuss the Teleological Argument.

Let's take a step back and get the big picture of where we are. We began the survey of Christian doctrine with the Doctrine of Revelation. Then we moved to the Doctrine of God, and we first had a lengthy examination of the attributes of God, in which we talked about what God is like. Then we began a section on what is called Natural Theology, which explores what we can know about the existence and nature of God apart from divine revelation in Scripture but through human reflection and human reason alone.

In our excursus on Natural Theology that we have embarked upon, we first looked at the Contingency Argument for God's existence that G. W. Leibniz defended. Then after the Contingency Argument we looked at the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument, which has a rich Jewish and Muslim history as well as a Christian background. Having now completed the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument, we are ready to turn to our new argument, which is the Teleological Argument.

#### **Introduction**

This comes from the Greek word "*telos*" which means "purpose" or "end" or "goal." This is the famous argument for design – it is an argument for a cosmic Designer of the world. This is one of the oldest arguments for God's existence. The ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle each defended versions of the Teleological Argument. According to Plato, there are two things that lead people to believe in God: the argument from the existence of the soul, which we have not looked at, and then, he said, the argument from "the order of the motion of the stars and of all things under the dominion of the mind which ordered the universe." Plato referred to this mind that orders the cosmos as "the maker and father of all," "the King," who is the source of the rational cosmos in which we live.

His pupil Aristotle has an even more splendid statement of the argument for design. Aristotle imagined what it would be like if there were a race of men who lived underground all their lives in a cave and who suddenly, through an earthquake or something, managed to escape and come out and see the external world. This is how Aristotle describes the impact that seeing the world would have upon these men:

When thus they would suddenly gain sight of the earth, seas, and the sky; when they should come to know the grandeur of the clouds and the might of the winds; when they should behold the sun and should learn its grandeur and beauty as well as its power to cause the day by shedding light over the sky; and again, when the night had darkened the lands and they should behold the whole of the sky spangled and adorned with stars; and when they should see the changing lights of

the moon as it waxes and wanes, and the risings and settings of all these celestial bodies, their courses fixed and changeless throughout all eternity – when they should behold all these things, most certainly they would have judged both that there exist gods and that all these marvelous works are the handiwork of the gods.<sup>92</sup>

In his book *The Metaphysics*, Aristotle goes on to argue that there must be one, First, Uncaused Cause, a Prime Mover, a First, Uncaused Cause which he refers to as “God” – “a living, intelligent, immaterial, eternal and most good being” who is the source of order in the cosmos.<sup>93</sup>

As you read the works of these ancient Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle you cannot help but think of Paul’s letter to the church in Rome, where in Romans 1:20 he says, “ever since the creation of the world, God’s invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.”<sup>94</sup> From the earliest times, men who were totally ignorant of biblical revelation have looked at the order and beauty in nature and inferred that there must be a designer and God who has created the universe.

### ***The Fine-Tuning of the Universe***

Today many astronomers are coming to a similar conclusion. Scientists used to think that, whatever the initial conditions of the universe might have been, eventually, given enough time and some luck, intelligent creatures like us would evolve somewhere in the cosmos. But, in fact, as a result of discoveries over the last 40 or 50 years, what has happened is that we now know that that assumption was wrong. In fact, the exact opposite turns out to be true. What astronomers have discovered is that the initial conditions of the universe in the Big Bang had to be finely tuned to a precision and delicacy that literally defies human comprehension if intelligent life forms are to evolve anywhere in the cosmos.

This delicate balance of initial conditions present in the Big Bang has come to be known as the “fine tuning of the universe.” From its earliest inception, the universe appears to be fine tuned for the existence of intelligent life with a precision and delicacy that are literally incomprehensible. There are two kinds of fine tuning. The first involves what are called the constants of nature, and the second involves certain arbitrary quantities that characterize the universe. Let me say a word about each of these.

### **Constants of Nature**

First, the constants of nature. What is a constant? When the laws of nature are expressed as mathematical equations, you find appearing in them certain symbols which stand for unchanging quantities. For example, the force of gravity – the gravitational constant. Or the electromagnetic force. Or the subatomic weak force. Take Newton’s gravitational law. To calculate gravitational force, you take the gravitational constant  $G$ , and you multiply this by the masses of the two bodies that are attracting each other. If you have two masses, say,  $m_1$  and  $m_2$ , to figure out the gravitational force between them, you take the

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<sup>92</sup> Aristotle, *On Philosophy*

<sup>93</sup> 5:01

<sup>94</sup> Dr. Craig mistakenly referred to this as Romans 1:19

gravitational constant times the mass of those two objects divided by the distance between them squared, which we can symbolize as  $r^2$ . This can be written as  $G(m_1m_2/r^2)$ . Of course the masses of the objects may vary. They may be two planets, two billiard balls, or a billiard ball and a planet. Those can vary. The distance obviously varies depending on how far apart the objects are. But  $G$  is a constant. It always has the same value.

The values of these constants are not determined by the laws of nature. There could be universes that are governed by exactly the same law – you can have the same force law –, but  $G$  could take some other value. The value of  $G$  is independent of the law of nature in which it occurs.  $G$  could have any of a wide range of values, and the law would still be the same. You would have a different kind of universe, obviously, if you changed the value of  $G$ . So you can have universes which are governed by the same law but have different values of the constants. And these universes would look very different from our universe. So the actual value that  $G$  has is not determined by the laws of nature. It is independent of the laws of nature. Depending on what value these constants take, the universe will look very different.<sup>95</sup>

### **Initial Conditions of the Universe**

In addition to these kinds of constants there are also these arbitrary quantities that are just put in as initial conditions on which the laws of nature operate. You have certain initial conditions, and then you apply the laws of nature to them to predict certain outcomes. Because these quantities are arbitrary, they are also not determined by the laws of nature. You could have different initial conditions, and then the laws of nature would predict different outcomes. For example, one quantity would be the amount of thermodynamic disorder, or entropy, in the early universe. You remember when we talked about the second law of thermodynamics, we talked about how it predicts that entropy will increase over time as things become more and more disordered thermodynamically? The amount of entropy is just put in the Big Bang as an initial condition. Then the laws of nature take over and determine how things will develop from there. If the initial quantities had been different, then the universe would look very different today. It would predict the evolution of a quite different universe if you alter the initial conditions.

As I say, initially, and for a long time, scientists thought it doesn't really matter what the initial conditions and constants were; they could take a wide range of values, and things still might evolve to produce complex life forms. Instead what they have been stunned to discover is that these constants and quantities must all fall into an extraordinarily narrow range of life-permitting values in order for complex life forms to evolve and exist anywhere in the universe. This is what is meant by the term the "fine tuning of the universe." It refers to the fact that these constants and quantities have to fall into this very narrow range of life-permitting values if life is to exist.

It is important to understand that the term "fine tuning" does not mean "designed." Otherwise, the argument from fine tuning would be question-begging if you said the universe was fine tuned for our existence and that means it was designed for our existence. No, design is one of the *explanations* of fine tuning. But fine tuning doesn't

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<sup>95</sup> 10:02

mean designed. It is meant to be a neutral term. Fine tuning just means that the range of life permitting values of these constants and quantities is exquisitely narrow. If the values of these constants and quantities were to be altered by even less than a hair's breadth, the life-permitting balance would be destroyed, and the universe would be life-prohibiting instead of life-permitting.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Is it safe to say that fine tuning is fact? Is it universally accepted that the universe is fine tuned?

*Answer:* Yes, I think that this is really uncontroversial among those who understand the term. I will say something more about this and give some examples of fine tuning. But as a neutral term, that is, not a synonym for design, fine tuning is just a fact. It is just a scientific fact that the constants and quantities have to fall into this very narrow range or the universe would not be life-permitting.

*Question:* It is a little hard to ponder how fine tuning of the constants and the arbitrary quantities can be embedded into a singularity. For example, it is a little hard to imagine how a singularity could have any entropy at all. Have astrophysicists gotten far in how this works?

*Answer:* No. In fact, what we are talking about here, when I talk about the early universe, I do not mean the singularity. Some of these constants and quantities result from quantum phase transitions that the universe goes through very, very early. You have first this unified theory – some sort of a quantum theory of gravity – in which there are not separate gravitational particles or electromagnetic forces and so on. You just have a unified force. Then you have this so-called “GUT Era”<sup>96</sup> where you have a grand unified theory where gravity breaks loose from the other three fundamental forces of nature, and that will then involve this fine tuned gravitational constant. Then you have it break down further into the fundamental forces of nature like gravitation, electromagnetism, the weak force, and the strong force. As the universe goes through these quantum phase transitions, what happens is these finely tuned values just fall out one after another – inexplicably because these are supposed to be *indeterminate* phase transitions. When I said “from the beginning,” I didn’t mean from the singularity. I meant from the very, very early universe; but in fact they do fall out serially as the universe goes through these phase transitions.

*Question:* Why the difference between fine tuning and design? Didn’t these constants and these quantities have to be part of a design also?

*Answer:* We will see that these are not synonymous terms at all. This isn’t just a quantitative difference. There are other explanations for the fine tuning. For example, chance would be one. The Many Worlds hypothesis – there are parallel universes where the constants and quantities take every possible value in some universe. Or some people will try to bite the bullet and say it is physically necessary that the universe exists with these values of the constants and quantities. So there are other explanations for the fine

<sup>96</sup> 15:03

tuning than design, which underlines the fact that it isn't synonymous with design. Design will be one explanation of the fact that in order for life to evolve and exist in the cosmos, these constants and quantities all have to fall within this very, very narrow range.

*Question:* Wouldn't the fact that you can represent these quantities and constants mathematically be evidence for design?

*Answer:* I do not think that simply the ability to represent them mathematically requires design. For example, take this constant G. Suppose you could show that G could take any of a wide range of values and life would still exist. That wouldn't really be finely tuned in that case. So it is not just that it can be represented mathematically, but it is the precision of these values for life that is really at issue here.

*Question:* Victor Stenger says this is not very imaginative. We can only observe our local area of the universe, but we need to contemplate that it is possible these constants could be different in other parts of our own universe. How would you respond?

*Answer:* These constants and quantities characterize the early universe. These are cosmic values; they are not local to our galaxy or the Earth or our galactic cluster. These are cosmic conditions. Therefore, this completely evacuates of any force an appeal to the size of the universe as an explanation for how life could exist somewhere by chance. These are cosmic conditions that must be present for life to evolve and exist anywhere in the universe. The only way to get around that would be to posit other universes. We will talk about that later on – that is the so called World Ensemble hypothesis or multiverse hypothesis. But when you are just talking about the size of the universe, this argument circumvents that because we are talking about cosmic initial conditions.

*Question:* I noticed you said “necessary for life;” you don't say “life as we know it.” Are there other forms of life that could exist?

*Answer:* I will address that question in a minute, and you are correct and very perceptive to see that. When you say, “life as we know it” people then go, “Oh well, then if the constants and quantities had been different, little green men with pointy ears might have evolved!” – or slime molds or something of that sort. That would be totally misleading.<sup>97</sup> It is *life* that would not exist in this universe if the constants and quantities were different. As we will see, if these constants or quantities are altered even a little, what happens is you wouldn't even have chemistry or matter, much less planets and stars that could serve as places for life to evolve. That kind of response simply doesn't understand the catastrophic consequences of altering these constants and quantities.

*Followup:* Is life defined as some living, breathing, biological form?

*Answer:* Right; again I will say something more about that in a little bit. But by life, scientists just mean something like this: the ability of an organism to take in energy, metabolize it, and reproduce after its own kind. Anything that can do that is called life. It doesn't have to be anything of a form familiar to us. It just has to fill that very generic definition of being able to do something of that sort.

*Question:* Is this particular issue specific to one particular cosmogony, or is it something

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<sup>97</sup> 20:01

that basically any cosmogony model needs to address?<sup>98</sup>

*Answer:* It is one that any cosmological model needs to address. These finely tuned conditions are independent of whether you are talking about the standard Big Bang model, or an inflationary model, or some ekpyrotic model, or even a steady state model. These conditions are conditions that are necessary for life to exist in the universe.

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Let me give some examples of fine tuning because physics abounds with examples of fine tuning. But before I do so, let me give you some numbers to give you a feel for the delicacy of the fine tuning because otherwise the numbers are so large they become meaningless to us. The number of seconds in the history of the universe, from the very beginning of the universe, is about  $10^{17}$ . That is a 1 followed by 17 zeroes. Just an incomprehensible number – but that is the number of seconds in the universe. The number of subatomic particles in the entire known universe is around  $10^{80}$ .

With those numbers in mind, consider the following. The atomic weak force which operates within the nucleus of the atom is so finely tuned that an alteration of even one part out of  $10^{100}$  would have rendered the universe life-prohibiting. In order to permit life, the weak force has to be fine tuned to one part out of  $10^{100}$ . Similarly, the so called cosmological constant, which drives the acceleration of the universe, has to be fine tuned to within one part out of  $10^{120}$  in order for the universe to be life-permitting. Here is a real corker: Roger Penrose of Oxford University has estimated that the initial entropy condition – the entropy level of the early universe – has to be fine tuned to one part out of  $10^{10^{123}}$  – a number which is so incomprehensible that to call it astronomical would be a wild understatement.

It is not just one of these numbers that must be fine tuned but all of them. So you multiply these probabilities together until our minds are just reeling in incomprehensible numbers. Having an accuracy of even one part out of  $10^{60}$  would be like having a range the size of the entire visible universe – 20 billion light years across – and in order for life to exist, a randomly thrown dart would have to land in an area one inch square. And that is just one part in  $10^{60}$ ! We are talking about numbers that are just unimaginably greater than that.<sup>99</sup>

These are just some of the examples of fine tuning. The examples of fine tuning are so many and so various that they are unlikely to disappear with the further advance of science. Like it or not, the fine tuning of the universe for life is just a scientific fact which is well-established.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* At what number does it cease to be a probability and become a certainty?

*Answer:* That is a very, very interesting question actually. When do probabilities become so great that you say this is an impossibility? It is meaningless to talk about one chance out of  $10^{10^{123}}$ . William Dembski is an expert in mathematics and probability theory. He

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<sup>98</sup> A “cosmogony” is defined as a theory of the origin of the universe.

<sup>99</sup> 25:25

wrote a book called *The Design Inference* in which he raises this question to try to determine what is a reasonable probability bound. Dembski takes the number 1 chance out of  $10^{80}$  to be the probability bound beyond which things are impossible. Anything that has a probability that is less than one out of  $10^{80}$  becomes impossible and will never happen. So that is the bound that Dembski adopts in that book.<sup>100</sup>

*Question:* How exactly is that value determined? It seems arbitrary.

*Answer:* It wasn't arbitrary. The reason why Dembski picked it is because it is the number of all subatomic particles in the universe, so you couldn't have any more events, in a sense, than that. Therefore anything that exceeds that in terms of its improbability is, for all intents and purposes, impossible. He bases it on the number of particles in the universe.

*Question: (inaudible)*

*Answer:* You are asking if the strong force is fine tuned? I do not recall seeing anything in the literature about the strong force. Not all of these constants and quantities are fine tuned to the same exquisite degree. Some of them have a greater range. For example, gravity doesn't need to be as finely tuned as the weak force. You could alter the gravitational constant somewhat and still have life. But after a while it would get too strong, and animals would collapse because they could not sustain themselves; their bodies would collapse if gravity gets too strong. If gravity gets too weak, then matter would never coagulate into planets, and everything would just drift apart. So gravity has to have a finely tuned range; but it is not nearly as exquisitely narrow as some of these others. I do not remember where the strong force falls. You might take a look at a book on this question like Barrow and Tipler's book *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* where they discuss these various fundamental forces of physics. I do not think that the strong force is one that is used as a typical illustration of an exquisitely fine tuned constant.<sup>101</sup>

*Question: (inaudible)*

*Answer:* They do talk about that. Barrow and Tipler's book is primarily a discussion of these constants and quantities, but they also have sections in which they look at the nature of water and the extraordinary properties that water has that enable the universe to be life-permitting. They do talk a little bit about those, but not to the same degree that they talk about the constants of physics. People who are proponents of the Teleological Argument will often go beyond the fine tuning of the cosmos to talk about how special the Earth is as well. You need to have a moon, for example, to create tides. You need to have a Jupiter in your solar system to act as a kind of vacuum cleaner that will pull away meteors, asteroids, and comets to keep them from pummeling Earth and destroying it.

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<sup>100</sup> Dr. Craig's memory fails him here; he corrects himself in the next lecture.

<sup>101</sup> Robin Collins does list the strong force as an example of a finely tuned constant. See <http://home.messiah.edu/~rcollins/Fine-tuning/FINETLAY.HTM> (accessed April 11, 2012). In fact, he references Barrow and Tipler's book when he states, "Calculations indicate that if the strong nuclear force, the force that binds protons and neutrons together in an atom, had been stronger or weaker by as little as 5%, life would be impossible." This is footnoted with John Leslie, *Universes* (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 4, 35, as well as John Barrow and Frank Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 322.

You need to be a certain distance from the star in order to have the right heat that permits life without incinerating it, but not be so cold as to prohibit life. There are any number of those things as well. But this argument from fine tuning alone just does an end run around all of that, and it goes right back to the very initial conditions. If this argument works, then all of those other things will simply layer on more improbability and more evidence for design.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Total Running Time 31:15 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

## § III. TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

## Lecture 2

**Fine-Tuning Due to Physical Necessity?**

Last week we launched into our discussion of the argument for design based upon the fine tuning of the universe. We saw that from its very inception, the universe has been fine tuned for the existence of intelligent life. “Fine tuning” does not mean “design.” Fine tuning, as I explained, means that the range of the fundamental constants and quantities that describe the universe must fall into an extraordinarily narrow life-permitting range if intelligent life is to exist. These constants and quantities can take any of a wide range of values, but, in fact, unless they all fall into this unfathomably narrow life-permitting range, life would be impossible and would not exist anywhere in the universe.

Someone asked last week, “When does something become so improbable that it becomes impossible?” And I answered that question from memory by saying that William Dembski had set a probability bound of  $10^{80}$ , which is the number of subatomic particles in the universe. Checking Dembski’s book, *The Design Inference*, I see I had a memory lapse and therefore need to correct this. You don’t consider simply the number of particles in the universe; you also need to consider the number of seconds in the universe which he generously places at  $10^{25}$ . So you would consider those states of the universe all through its history. Then he multiplies this by  $10^{45}$  as the number of events, or reactions, that could take place per second. On this basis, he arrives at a probability bound which is one half times one out of  $10^{150}$ . Anything that falls beyond that probability bound, he says, is not different from impossibility. That would be the answer to that question about when does something become so improbable as to be impossible.

## DISCUSSION

*Question: (inaudible)*

*Answer:* That is a generally accepted figure – that there are around  $10^{80}$  [subatomic particles in the universe]. That is obviously an approximation. The same with the number of seconds in the history of the universe. That is given by the age of the Big Bang. These are not really controversial figures. He is the only person I know of who addresses the question that was put to me, so I simply give you his answer. I am not a mathematician, so I don’t know whether this is the best answer or not, but this is an answer given by a prominent design theorist to that question. I don’t think anything in the argument depends upon it, because what the argument is, is that design is the best explanation of the fine tuning of the universe. We are not going to argue that it is so improbable that it is impossible. Ours is going to be an argument for the best explanation, and we’ll look at the alternative explanations for the fine tuning, and I’ll argue that the best explanation is that it was due to design.

Some people will object to an argument of this sort by saying, “If the universe had different laws of nature, then maybe a change in the constants and the quantities wouldn’t be so disastrous. If there were different laws of nature, then the universe wouldn’t be fine tuned for life, and we might not have these sort of disastrous results from changing them.” This objection displays a misunderstanding of the argument that is very common. In the fine tuning argument, we are not concerned with universes governed by *different* laws of nature. We don’t have any idea of what universes would be like that are governed by wholly different laws of nature. That is pure speculation.<sup>103</sup> Rather, what we are concerned with in this argument is universes that are governed by the *same* laws of nature, but with *different values* of the constants or the fundamental quantities. The laws are the same, but you alter the values of the constants or the quantities of the universe.

John Leslie is a Canadian philosopher who gives an excellent illustration of this point. Leslie says, imagine a solitary fly resting on a large blank area of the wall. He says, suppose a single random shot is fired, and the bullet pierces the fly and kills it. Even if, outside the blank area, the wall were covered with flies, so that a randomly fired bullet would probably strike a fly, nevertheless it still remains highly improbable that within the large blank area, a randomly fired bullet would strike the fly. It is vastly more probable that the bullet would hit someplace else in the blank area. If the shot does strike the fly, then it is probable that that was not the result of chance, but it was in fact aimed, and the fly was targeted by the shooter, and that is why the bullet struck the fly – not by chance, but by design.

In exactly the same way, let our universe be like the fly, and this large blank area would be other possible universes described by the same laws of nature as ours, but with different values of the constants and quantities. What you find is that they are almost all life-prohibiting. Even if there are universes outside [*the blank area*] which are governed by different laws of nature and in those there is not the sort of fine tuning as existing in our universe, nevertheless the probabilities would still be that a universe governed by our laws of nature ought to be life-prohibiting rather than life-permitting. We only need to be concerned with universes governed by the same laws of nature in this argument. We do not look at, and are unconcerned about, what would take place in universes governed by different laws of nature.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Given sufficient time with sufficient universes out there, wouldn’t life occur somewhere?

*Answer:* Here we are only talking about there being one universe. These others [*outside of the blank area*] are just possibilities. It is not that they actually exist. We will see that in order to defend the hypothesis of chance, its defenders have been forced to resort to the Many Universes hypothesis – that there is an infinite number of parallel worlds or other universes – so that by chance alone the constants and quantities would fall into the life-permitting range in some of them. We will deal with that later on. Right now we are

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<sup>103</sup> 5:00

talking just about one universe.

*Question:* The parameters that we are talking about define the laws of the universe. So are you talking similar universes?

*Answer:* No, they *don't* define the laws of the universe. That is the point that I am trying to make. Remember I gave the example of Newton's gravitational law. You can have universes governed by that same law, but with a different value of the gravitational constant. Governed by different laws would be where you have a different equation – say, instead of multiplying the two masses together you'd subtract them from each other or something of that sort. That would be a different law of nature. What we are talking about here are universes that have the same laws, but the values of these constants and quantities are different.

The question that we are facing is what is the best explanation of this cosmic fine tuning? An increasing number of astronomers and scientists think that the best reason for the fine tuning of the universe for life is that the universe is designed to be life-permitting. But design is not the only alternative. There is also physical necessity and chance.<sup>104</sup> On the outline, you have the simple form of the design argument stated in terms of those three alternatives.

It is very simple in its fundamental structure. It goes like this:

2. The fine tuning of the universe is due to either physical necessity, chance, or design.
3. It is not due to physical necessity or chance.
4. Therefore, it is due to design.

This is a logically valid argument. That is to say, if the two premises are true, then the conclusion necessarily follows. The only question is: are those two premises more plausibly true than false?

This is a very simple and easy-to-memorize argument.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* What is law? I know what chance and design means, but what is the “law?”

*Answer:* The idea there is that the universe is physically necessary – that these constants and quantities have the values that they do. It is kind of like what an earlier questioner asked: the laws of nature determine that these constants and quantities have the value that they do, that it is physically necessary for them to exist. It is saying that there is no other kind of physical universe possible – it had to be this way. That is what physical necessity means.

*Followup:* But the universe does not exist because there is some kind of law floating out there and it generated the creation. Is that what you are saying?

<sup>104</sup> 10:05

*Answer:* No, that isn't what I meant. That is a good clarification. What I meant was simply that the values and the quantities are physically necessary – they could not have been any other way. The universe had to be like this.

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### ***Our Choices: Physical Necessity, Chance, or Design***

Take the first premise that *the fine tuning of the universe is due either to physical necessity, chance, or design*. This premise simply lists the three alternatives that are available for explaining the fine tuning, and therefore this is uncontroversial. If somebody has a fourth alternative, he is welcome to add it to the list, and we would have to consider that when we come to premise (2). But I do not know any other alternative than these three: physical necessity, chance, or design. Therefore, the first premise does seem to be true; it simply lists the possible explanations for this extraordinary fine tuning.

Notice that by focusing on the fine tuning, this argument does an end run around the whole emotionally loaded question of biological evolution and Darwin's theory of biological complexity. The argument from fine tuning, if it goes through, will show that even if life is the product of random mutation and natural selection of a blind evolutionary process, nevertheless, even that still depends upon these finely tuned initial conditions of the universe which cry out for some sort of cosmic Intelligent Designer. You can just do an end run around all of the negative emotions and baggage that are connected with the creation-evolution controversy that exists in biology. Any design arguments that you do want to construct on the basis of things like the origin of life, or the origin of mind, or the development of biological complexity will simply layer more improbability on top of the fine tuning, which will just make the design argument all the stronger and will show that it is all the more improbable that life and consciousness can be explained apart from a cosmic Designer.<sup>105</sup>

### ***Support for Premise (2)***

That means that the really crucial premise of this argument is the second one: *the fine tuning is not due to physical necessity or chance*. Let's examine each of these alternatives one at a time.

#### **Physical Necessity**

First, let's talk about physical necessity. As I just explained, according to this alternative the universe has to be life-permitting. The constants and the quantities had to have the values that they do. It is literally physically impossible for the universe to be life-prohibiting. It is physically necessary that the universe be a life-permitting universe.

#### **Implausibility**

On the very face of it, this is an extraordinarily implausible explanation of the fine tuning. It would require us to say that a life-prohibiting universe is physically impossible – such a thing could not exist. And that is an extremely radical view. Why take such a radical position? The constants, as we have seen, are not determined by the laws of

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<sup>105</sup> 15:13

nature. Nature's laws could hold, and the constants could take any of a wide range of values, so there is nothing about the laws of nature that require the constants to have the values that they do.

### **Arbitrary Quantities**

As for the arbitrary quantities, remember those are completely independent of the laws of nature – they are just put in as initial conditions on which the laws of nature then operate. Nothing seems to make these quantities necessary in the values they have. The opponent of design is taking a very radical line which would require some sort of evidence, some sort of proof. But there isn't any proof that these constants and quantities are physically necessary. This alternative is just put forth as a bare possibility; and possibilities come cheap. What we are looking for is probabilities or plausibilities, and there just isn't any evidence that the constants and quantities are physically necessary in the way that this alternative imagines.

### **Theory of Everything**

Sometimes scientists do talk about an undiscovered or yet to be discovered "Theory of Everything" or, as it is abbreviated, a "TOE." This would supposedly explain everything. But like so many of the colorful names which are often given to scientific theories, this label is very misleading. The purpose of a successful TOE is to unify the basic four forces of nature – which are gravity, electromagnetism, the strong force in the atomic nucleus, and the weak force in the atomic nucleus. These four forces, according to a Theory of Everything, will be unified into one fundamental force which is carried by one fundamental particle. But a Theory of Everything which manages to unify these four forces of physics obviously doesn't explain everything – the idea that this is a theory of everything is just a misunderstanding. This is just a colorful name, which doesn't purport to explain everything. It just seeks to unify these four fundamental forces of nature into one force.

Indeed, the most promising candidate for a TOE to date is M-Theory, which is a super-string theory. Instead of thinking of the fundamental bearers of these forces as little particles, it thinks of them as one-dimensional strings of energy. According to M-theory, or super-string theory, there has to exist exactly 11 dimensions: 10 dimensions of space and 1 dimension of time. Otherwise, the theory won't work. There has to be exactly 11 dimensions. But M-Theory itself doesn't explain why there are 11 dimensions. That remains just a sort of basic assumption of the theory.<sup>106</sup> It doesn't do anything to explain why that particular number of dimensions should exist. So even M-Theory involves fine tuning of a geometrical sort, namely, there has to be exactly 11 dimensions for the theory to work.

You can see that this so-called Theory of Everything that scientists are on the pursuit of isn't literally an attempt to explain everything. Indeed the best candidates for it have certain unexplained features of it themselves. Moreover, M-Theory doesn't predict a life-permitting universe. In fact, it has been shown that M-Theory permits around  $10^{500}$  different possible universes which are all consistent with the same laws of nature but

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<sup>106</sup> 20:07

which would vary in their fundamental constants. Almost all of these possible universes in this range are life-prohibiting. The values of the constants would be such that life could not exist in those worlds. This has come to be called the “cosmic landscape.”

The cosmic landscape has become something of a phenom in its own right in recent years. I think it is important to understand that this cosmic landscape of  $10^{500}$  different possible universes is not real. These are not real universes; this is just a description of the range of possibilities. It is the range of values that these constants could take allowed by M-Theory. Some people have misinterpreted the cosmic landscape to mean these different universes actually exist, that they are really out there. And they therefore think that the argument for design is undermined by the cosmic landscape because some of these  $10^{500}$  worlds will be life-permitting and therefore there would have to be life-permitting universes like ours in the cosmic landscape. But you have to keep in mind the cosmic landscape isn't real; it is just a range of possibilities. It just describes the range of values that M-Theory allows for all of these different constants of nature. It describes the range of possible universes that are consistent with M-Theory.

So, far from undermining the argument of fine tuning, it actually reinforces the argument by showing that a life-permitting universe is not physically necessary. In fact, the range is so huge –  $10^{500}$  – that some explanation is required for why, out of this vast range of universes, a life-permitting universe should exist. The life-permitting universes are just an infinitesimal part of the landscape, like that solitary fly on the wall that Leslie talks about. A randomly fired shot would probably hit a life-prohibiting universe not a life-permitting universe. So you cannot say that a life-permitting universe like ours is physically necessary because at least according to the best theories of physics that we have today, that is simply not true, but clearly false. The values of the constants are not determined by the fundamental physical theory. The fundamental physical theory is consistent with a vast, vast range of values for those constants, and all but an infinitesimal portion of worlds are life-prohibiting. So there is really no evidence at all to support this first alternative, that the fine tuning is due to physical necessity. The best evidence indicates that it is far from physically necessary that these constants and quantities should have the values that they do.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Does M-Theory predict how many different membranes do exist that are real – not just those that are possibilities?<sup>107</sup>

*Answer:* There you are talking about how many actual universes there would be. I don't know whether or not that theory is consistent with just any number of actual three-dimensional universes.

*Followup:* Could it then be, theoretically, at or near infinite?

*Answer:* Yes, and we will talk about this when we get to the Many Worlds hypothesis. Both the earlier question and this one is pushing us ahead to talk about the chance hypothesis. The defenders of chance will say that given the reality of these many, many

<sup>107</sup> 24:57

other worlds – these other universes such as membranes or other bubbles universes – that by chance alone somewhere in this multiverse or World Ensemble there will appear these finely tuned universes. We are going to deal with that question later, when we get to the alternative of chance. But it is important to understand that here we are not talking about chance; we are talking here about physical necessity. Scarcely anyone defends physical necessity. There are certainly lots of theorists who want to because many of them feel uncomfortable with these appeals to the multiverse – it seems to be smuggling in metaphysics. But, on the other hand, the prospects for physical necessity are extremely dim. So hang on to the question about the other universes, we will get to it.

*Question:*  $10^{500}$  – is that 1 followed by 500 zeroes? That is a minuscule potential.

*Answer:* Yes, remember the number of subatomic particles in the universe is only about  $10^{80}$ , so this is a number of which we can form no conception whatsoever.

*Followup:* The scientists still have to wonder where all these rocks and planets and material came from.

*Answer:* Absolutely, and that was the argument that we looked at before we looked at the fine tuning argument. Remember, in this series we are looking at a number of different arguments for God's existence. The first one is the Argument from Contingency. Then the next one we spent several weeks on was the argument based on the origin of the universe.<sup>108</sup> But now we are talking about the design argument. So you are right; you can always go back to the cosmological arguments. But we don't need to go back there, unless there is some reason to. We can let this argument stand on its own merits for a Designer. But you are certainly right to remind us of that.

*Question:* (inaudible)

*Answer:* It is a cumulative case that one is presenting here. We are presenting a cumulative case in which all of these pieces of evidence come together to build a powerful case for a Creator and Designer of the universe. It is like a lawyer attempting to build a case against the accused where he will interview many witnesses and bring many pieces of independent data. If the data are independent, if the witnesses are independent, that makes his case all the more powerful. That is why I do not want to collapse this argument back on to the cosmological arguments. If we can show independent arguments for God, that would make it stronger than if we would have to fall back on the earlier argument to be sustained. I do not think it does have to fall back.

*Question:* You have told us that M-Theory still permits at least  $10^{500}$  possible universes consistent with our given laws of physics. So, clearly, M-Theory isn't reducing the physical constants to some certain set that they have to be. Does it do anything to even take a step in that direction? Do any of these string theories relate some constants in terms of others or are they all just completely arbitrary?

*Answer:* It does have a delimited range. This number isn't infinite – there is a delimited range here: around  $10^{500}$ . But many theorists were hoping that it would enable us to predict these constants, that from the theory the constants would fall out as a prediction. And what happened instead is that the specific values didn't fall out, but it turned out

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<sup>108</sup> The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument.

there is this vast range that are compatible with the theory. That is the focus here. Although it does have a finite range, it is still so large that the question arises, why do we have these life-permitting values, when it is such an infinitesimal part of the cosmic landscape? That is the question.<sup>109</sup>

*Question:* It would seem like we could take this further back – if any of these things could be represented mathematically, then that is evidence for design. If everything is random and chaotic, no matter how many universes you want to look at, if it's possible to represent anything mathematically in these, this is evidence for design.

*Answer:* This is an independent argument that you are offering here. Some have offered this based on what has been called the “uncanny effectiveness of mathematics.” Eugene Wigner, a very famous physicist, often spoke of how uncanny it is that mathematics works. Why is it that someone sitting at his desk should be able to work out these mathematical equations, and, lo and behold, these experimental physicists go out and find that it really describes the way the world is! The universe is mathematically structured in such a way that makes it possible. Some have argued for the existence of a kind of supreme mathematical Mind which has structured the universe. I do think that that is a very intriguing argument. I haven't worked on it myself, so I cannot comment any further on that; but it is an independent argument from this one that I think is well worth exploring and thinking about.

As I think about the different possibilities of mathematics existing as separate entities or as being simply creations of the human intellect, it does seem that the most satisfying view of mathematics would be that these are reflective of a supreme Mind which thinks in these categories and has built a universe on the blueprint of the plan that is in the mind of the Cosmic Architect. That is a sort of Platonic idea – that is what Plato believed, that God fashioned the world on the pattern of these mathematical ideas. As Christians, we would say these ideas exist in the mind of God, not independently of God, but as part of the thought of God. He is like an architect who has built a universe that reflects this mathematical blueprint that he has imposed on it. I do think that that is a very intriguing argument. But here we are not concerned with the mathematical structure of reality so much as the fact that out of all the possible universes in this cosmic landscape, what should exist but a life-permitting universe, when the vast probability – inconceivable probability – is that a life-prohibiting universe ought to exist, if it is just by chance.

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What we will do next time is turn to the alternative of chance, which several of you have been pressing me on already. That is where the real debate lies today. The real debate lies with this question of whether the fine tuning can be explained away simply as a result of chance, or do we need to infer a transcendent Cosmic Designer for the origin of the world?<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> 30:25

<sup>110</sup> Total Running Time: 34:07 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § III. TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 3

### **Fine-Tuning Due to Chance?**

We have been looking at the alternatives for explaining the remarkable fine tuning that characterizes the initial conditions of the universe. We saw last time that these cannot be plausibly attributed to physical necessity. The constants and quantities are independent of the laws of nature, and the best Theories of Everything, so to speak, that are on offer today allow for a vast multiplicity of different possible universes consistent with nature's laws but having different values of the constants. So the question is, what about the alternative of chance? Could the fine tuning be simply due to chance alone?

#### **Chance**

According to this alternative, it is just an accident that the constants and quantities all fall into the life-permitting range. We basically just “lucked out” and are lucky to be alive. The fundamental problem with this alternative is that the chances of all of the constants and quantities' falling into the life-permitting range by chance alone are just so improbable that these odds cannot be reasonably faced.

#### **Improbability**

Sometimes people will object to this sort of argument by saying it is meaningless to speak about the probability of a life-permitting universe existing. Why? Because there is, after all, only one universe. So what does it mean to speak about the probability of a life-permitting universe existing? It is not as if you can say, “One out of every ten universes is life-permitting.” Therefore, the fact that the universe is life-permitting isn't highly improbable because you don't have ten universes to pick from. There is only one universe, so to talk about the probability of a life-permitting universe is meaningless.

However, the following illustration from the physicist John Barrow can help us to understand the sense in which the existence of a life-permitting universe is improbable. Let's imagine we have a large blank sheet of paper or whiteboard, and on it we place a single dot, and let that dot represent our universe. Now alter slightly one or more of the fundamental constants or quantities that has been the subject of our discussion. That would then describe a new universe – a universe that is characterized by different values of the constants and quantities. If that is a life-permitting universe, then make that a red dot; and if it is a life-prohibiting universe, then make it a black dot. Do that again and again until your paper or whiteboard is filled with dots. What you discover is that, except for a few pin pricks of color, the sheet will be completely covered with black dots – that is to say, life-prohibiting universes. That is simply what is meant when we say that the existence of a life-permitting universe is unfathomably improbable. Out of the local group of possible universes that could exist, the vast, vast majority of them are life-prohibiting, not life-permitting. I think this is a very graphic and easy way to understand what we mean when we say that an existing life-permitting universe is enormously

improbable.

Very often you will hear a different objection to this claim based upon the illustration of a lottery. People will say that in a lottery in which all the tickets are sold, it is fantastically improbable that any one person you pick would win. The odds may be millions to one that any individual person would win the lottery. But if all the tickets have been sold, then *somebody* has got to win!<sup>111</sup> It would be illegitimate for the winning person to say, “Wow! The odds against me winning the lottery were 20 million to 1. And yet, I won! The lottery must have been rigged! I won by design, not by chance.” It would be illegitimate for him to think that the lottery was rigged and that his winning wasn’t simply the result of chance. In exactly the same way, these critics will argue, *some* universe had to exist. Just as it would be illegitimate for the winner of the lottery to think the lottery was rigged because he won, so for us, as well, it would be unjustified for us to think that the universe “lottery,” so to speak, was rigged just because our universe exists. It wouldn’t follow that it was a result of design. All of the universes are equally improbable. Think of all those dots on the whiteboard: they are all equally improbable. But some dot had to be picked; some universe had to exist. So it would be illegitimate to claim that the universe that exists is therefore highly improbable and a result of design.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Can you clarify how the Barrow illustration helps here?

*Answer:* The idea there is the critic says it is meaningless to talk about the probability of a life-permitting universe existing because there is only one universe. But I think Barrow gives a very clear sense in which we can talk about that, namely, all of these different possibilities are equally probable. They are all possible universes that could have existed instead of ours, and yet a life-permitting universe exists. That is enormously improbable because almost all of the universes on the sheet of paper are black, not red. A randomly chosen universe ought to be a black one, that is to say, a life-prohibiting one.

Now this new objection is: but *some* dot has to be real, and so it would be illegitimate for the people in that universe to say “Gee, we are so improbable, yet we exist! It must have been rigged!”

Actually, this lottery analogy is very helpful to us because it enables us to see exactly where the critic has misunderstood the fine tuning argument and then enables us to offer a better and more accurate analogy in its place. Contrary to popular impression, the design argument is *not* trying to explain why *this* universe exists. It is not trying to explain why this particular dot exists. The analogy of the lottery was misconceived because the lottery analogy focused on why a particular person won. But in this case, we are not asking why this particular universe exists. Rather, what we are asking is why a life-permitting universe exists.

The correct analogy would be like this: imagine a lottery in which billions and billions of

<sup>111</sup> 5:02

white ping pong balls were mixed together with a single black ball. You are told that a random drawing will be made, and if the ball is black, you will be allowed to live. But if the ball is white, then you will be shot. Notice that in this lottery, any particular ball that rolls down the chute is equally improbable. Nevertheless, it is overwhelmingly more probable that whichever ball rolls down the chute, it will be white rather than black. That is the analogy with the universe. Even though every particular ball is equally improbable, it is overwhelmingly more probable that it will be a white ball rather than a black ball.<sup>112</sup>

Similarly, out of all of the universes that might exist, any one is equally improbable; but it is overwhelmingly more probable that whichever one exists, it will be a life-prohibiting one rather than a life-permitting universe. So in the case of the lottery, if, to your shock, the black ball rolls down the chute and you are allowed to live, you ought to definitely think that it was rigged because it is overwhelmingly more probable that a white ball should have rolled down the chute. And if you still don't see the point, then sharpen the analogy and imagine that the black ball had to be picked randomly five times in a row in order for you to live. That really would not affect the odds appreciably if the odds against choosing the black ball even one time were sufficiently great. But, nevertheless, I think everyone of us would see that if that happened five times in a row, you know that the lottery was rigged to let you live.

In the correct analogy, we are not interested in why you got the particular ball that you did – any ball you get is equally and astronomically improbable. What we are interested in is why you got a life-permitting ball rather than a life-prohibiting ball. That is not addressed by saying, “*Some* ball had to exist or be picked, and any ball is equally improbable.” In exactly the same way, we are not interested in why this particular universe exists. What we are interested in is why a life-permitting universe exists. That question is not answered by saying that *some* universe has to exist and every universe is equally improbable. We still need to have an explanation for why a life-permitting universe exists.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Why must any universe exist?

*Answer:* I suppose you could say that there could just be nothing. But we are granting this point to the critic. We are saying, “All right, let's assume some universe has to exist.” We are going to agree to the lottery analogy. We are going to have a universe lottery, and we are going to agree that some universe is going to exist. But you are right – if you want to press this at a deeper level, you can ask why anything exists. But let's grant the critic that some universe or other is going to have to exist and that any universe that exists is enormously improbable. You can do that, and the argument still goes through because the question isn't “Why does this universe exist?”, contrary to popular impression. The question is “Why does a life-permitting universe exist?”

*Question:* Does it require that there be an infinite number of universes?

*Answer:* No, even a finite number is O.K. If you remember the figure that we saw with

<sup>112</sup> 9:57

string theory – we said that there are around  $10^{500}$  possible universes with different values of the constants consistent with the laws of nature. This is an inconceivably large number, but it is not infinite. The proportion of these universes that are life-permitting is just virtually infinitesimal – it is so tiny it is incomprehensible. Again, it would be like the lottery in which the single black ball is mixed in with billions and billions of white balls, and one of them is randomly chosen, and, lo and behold, it is the life-permitting ball!

*Question:* When you say life-permitting, do you mean life-permitting for humans and the conditions we require?

*Answer:* No, I did address that earlier. When we talk about life here, we are using a very general definition that scientists use – life is the ability of an organism to take in food, process it, grow and develop, and reproduce after its kind. Anything that fits that definition counts as life. That is what we mean by a life-permitting universe. That is why it is not a good objection to say, “If the constants and quantities had different values, there might be different kinds of life that would have evolved.” We are not talking about the forms of life that exist, but just life – period! In order for life in any form to exist, on this definition, you have to have this exquisite fine tuning of the constants and quantities.<sup>113</sup>

*Question:* You made a statement about five black balls in a row. I’m not sure where you are going with that. Are you going to have an analogy for that later on?

*Answer:* I wasn’t going to push that. But remember when we talked about the oscillating universe where the universe expands and then re-contracts, then expands again, then re-contracts? That would be perhaps the analogy to having the black ball picked five times in a row. Namely, imagine five oscillations, and each one, by chance, was fine tuned for the existence of life in it. That would cry out for some sort of a Designer. That wouldn’t happen by chance. I think we all see that intuitively. The point of the illustration is simply to say that if the odds of getting one black ball are sufficiently small, then it doesn’t make all that much difference if you get it one time or five times in a row. It is just that we see the problem more clearly when we think five times in a row; but in fact even getting it once is improbable enough to say something is fishy with the lottery, that this was in fact designed. That is the point of the new analogy and the proper lottery analogy for fine tuning.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> 14:58

<sup>114</sup> Total Running Time: 17:16 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § III. TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 4

### **Anthropic Principle?**

We have been talking about the fine tuning of the universe for intelligent life, and we saw that there are three possible explanations for the fine tuning of the cosmos: either physical necessity, chance or design.

We saw that physical necessity is highly improbable because the values of these constants and arbitrary physical quantities are independent of the laws of nature. The laws of nature are consistent with a wide range of values for these constants and quantities. There is not any physical necessity that the universe should exhibit this kind of fine tuning.

Then we began to look at the hypothesis of chance. We argued that the odds of all of these constants and quantities' falling, by chance alone, into this incomprehensibly narrow life-permitting range are so infinitesimal that these odds cannot be reasonably faced. In response to that, you will remember, we encountered a couple of objections to try to save the chance hypothesis. For example, the appeal to a lottery in which all of the tickets are sold and yet someone has to win, no matter how improbable that might be. We saw why that analogy was flawed. The proper analogy would be a lottery in which billions and billions of white balls are mixed together with one black ball, and you are told that unless the black ball is picked, you are going to be shot and killed. But then, lo and behold, a random ball is picked, and it turns out to be the black one, and you are allowed to live. You ought to think that the lottery was rigged. Why? – not because the black ball is any more improbable than any other particular white ball. Each ball is equally improbable. – but because it is overwhelmingly, incomprehensibly more probable that, whichever ball is picked, it will be white rather than black. Similarly, our universe is no more improbable than any other universe. But it is overwhelmingly more probable that whichever universe exists, it will be life-prohibiting rather than life-permitting. We still need some sort of explanation as to why a life-permitting universe exists against all probability to the contrary.

### **Anthropic Principle**

Some people have argued that no explanation is needed for why we observe a life-permitting universe such as we do. They say that we can observe only a life-permitting universe because if the values of the constants were not life-permitting, we couldn't be here to observe it! We can observe only life-permitting universes because the ones that aren't life-permitting are inconsistent with our existence. This is the Anthropic Principle. The Anthropic Principle says that we can observe only properties of the universe that are consistent with our existence. That is obviously true. It is necessarily true – if the fundamental properties of the universe were inconsistent or incompatible with our existence, obviously we couldn't be here to observe it! So the only kind of universe we can observe is a life-permitting universe. That is obvious. That is the only kind of universe we can observe. From this obvious truth, they infer that therefore no explanation

is needed for why a life-permitting universe exists.

This reasoning is logically fallacious. From the fact that we can observe only life-permitting universes, it does not follow that no explanation is needed for why there is a life-permitting universe – why it does exist.

Again, an illustration can help us begin to see the point. Imagine that you are traveling abroad in some third world country and you are arrested on trumped-up drug charges and convicted, and you are dragged in front of a firing squad of 100 trained marksmen, all with rifles aimed at your heart to be executed. And you hear the command given, “Ready! Aim! Fire!” You hear the roar of the guns! And then – you observe that you are still alive! All of the 100 marksmen missed! Now what would you conclude?<sup>115</sup> Would you say to yourself, “I guess I really shouldn’t be surprised that they all missed. After all, if they hadn’t all missed, I wouldn’t be here to be surprised about it! Given that I am here, I should have expected them all to miss”? Of course not! You would immediately suspect that they all missed *on purpose* and that the whole thing was a setup, engineered by someone for some reason. From the fact that you shouldn’t be surprised that you don’t observe that you are dead, it doesn’t follow that you shouldn’t be surprised that you do observe that you are alive. Do you see the point? You should not be surprised that you don’t observe that you are dead. You can’t observe that. You should not be surprised that you do not observe you are dead. But it doesn’t follow from that that you shouldn’t be surprised that you do observe that you are alive, in light of the enormous improbability of their all missing by accident. Given that enormous improbability, you should be very surprised that you are alive. In fact, you would probably think that the whole thing was designed – that the reason the marksmen all missed was because it was intentional, and this was brought about not by chance, but by design.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* It seems like there are two possibilities. You could say it was designed or there was an infinity of other people in front of firing squads, and one of them was missed by all marksmen.

*Answer:* Very good! That is exactly right. What you could say instead is, it is not that they all missed on purpose; it is that, unbeknownst to me, there is an infinite number of other people standing in front of firing squads being shot at, and by chance alone somewhere in that ensemble of firing squads, all of the 100 marksmen would miss by accident. And for the person to whom that happens, he shouldn’t be surprised at being alive, it was just by chance. This other explanation is that they all missed by chance because there is an infinite number of other firing squads that I don’t know about and can’t see. That would be the other explanation. That will form a nice segue to the Many Worlds hypothesis to explain away fine tuning. But it is a helpful illustration because I think we see how absurd that would be for someone to conclude such a thing. Clearly, the better explanation would be to think that the marksmen all missed on purpose than to think that you are just one of an infinite ensemble of other victims in front of firing squads.

<sup>115</sup> 5:04

*Question:* If you expand your probabilistic resources in this way, then you can explain anything away, and it becomes ridiculous.

*Answer:* I do think that is a good point. If you cannot get, say, double-sixes on one throw of the dice, then you can imagine 25 throws of the dice, or 100 throws of the dice. And then you are probably going to get double-sixes at some point. You have expanded your probabilistic resources in order to explain the chance result. The point that you are making is, if you expand your probabilistic resources by saying, “This isn’t the only universe there is. There are all these other parallel universes that we cannot see where things are going on,” then you can explain virtually anything away. Somebody playing cards, who gets four aces every time he deals, could reply, “Well, there is an infinite number of poker games going on in this World Ensemble, and in some of them, every time I deal, I get four aces! What are you complaining about?” No protest could be made because you can explain anything by chance. And yet that would be absurd. If you were sitting at the table playing with that guy, would you sit down for another round of cards? I should hope not! You wouldn’t make any life decision based on this kind of reasoning. It would make rational behavior literally impossible because everything could be attributed to chance.

*Question:* I bring this up because that is what some physicists are saying.

*Answer:* That is exactly right and forms a nice segue to our next point.<sup>116</sup>

### **Anthropic Principle With a World Ensemble**

Theorists have come to recognize that the use of the Anthropic Principle cannot eliminate the need for an explanation of the fine tuning *unless* you posit this World Ensemble of parallel universes which are real and just as actual as this one and which are randomly ordered in the values of their constants and quantities. According to the World Ensemble hypothesis, or Many Worlds hypothesis, our universe is just one member of a World Ensemble, preferably an infinite World Ensemble, of other universes, and these are all randomly ordered in their constants and quantities, so that by chance alone somewhere in the World Ensemble one or more life-permitting, finely tuned worlds will exist. Since only the finely tuned universes have observers in them (the other ones are life-prohibiting, so it is only the finely tuned worlds that have observers in them), the observers in the World Ensemble will naturally observe their universe to be finely tuned. So there would not need to be any explanation of this. You would not need to appeal to design to explain fine tuning; it is purely due to chance.

## **DISCUSSION**

*Question:* The first thing that comes to my mind is the skeptic apparently does not present any mechanism for having all of these universes. There is one popular idea where you have multiple universes because every time a choice is made, both ways actually cause universes to split off.

<sup>116</sup> 10:11

*Answer:* You are raising a question on the mechanisms. I will comment on that in a moment.

*Question:* Can you distinguish between many worlds and multiverse, or are they the same?

*Answer:* I am using them as synonyms. The Many Worlds hypothesis takes different forms. This one that the first question just discussed is the Many Worlds Interpretation of quantum physics, which says that every time a quantum measurement is made by a classical apparatus, the universe splits in two and the correlated values of the measurement both exist, and the universe sort of forks. It is a fantastic interpretation of reality to think that, as one person put it, a mouse, by observing something, could split the universe. That would be one. Another interpretation would be inflationary theories of the universe where our universe is just a bubble of true vacuum in a broader false vacuum that is expanding at fantastic speed, and within this false vacuum there are lots of other bubbles, too. That is another way the multiverse scenario plays itself out. That is probably the most popular today. But then there are others as well, as to how you might have many worlds. Dawkins, in *The God Delusion*, suggests an oscillating theory of the universe, where the universe expands and contracts repeatedly from eternity past, and each time the constants and quantities are recycled and get new values. That would be another form of the Many Worlds Hypothesis. I am not distinguishing between multiverse and other World Ensemble theories. They are all basically trying, as was said, to multiply our probabilistic resources. If we cannot get it in one throw of the dice, we will posit an infinite number of throws, and then you are sure to get your chance result.<sup>117</sup>

*Question:* We talk about having a possible universe where it is life-permitting. Are we being gracious that that is necessarily a certainty that life would develop, or is there a conditional probability within that where you have life-permitting, but not necessarily the development of life?

*Answer:* The latter. We are saying that these constants and quantities which are finely tuned are merely prerequisites for life, but they are not sufficient conditions for life. You would still need to have a planet that is situated at a certain distance from its star, it would need to have a moon to affect the tides, you would need a Jupiter in the solar system to serve as a vacuum cleaner to suck in asteroids and comets that would otherwise bombard the planet and destroy life. There are all kinds of conditions that would need to be fulfilled as well in order to have a life-permitting planet. But here we are talking just about these bare initial conditions that would be prerequisites for life. That is why theorists use the language of “life-permitting” and “life-prohibiting.” They are not, by any means, “life-guaranteeing.”

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I want to pause to reflect on what is happening in this debate. The current debate over the fine tuning of the universe has become a debate over the Many Worlds Hypothesis. This is, in fact, the cutting edge of the discussion today. This is at the heart of the discussion of fine tuning. In order to explain the fine tuning of the universe, we are being asked to believe not merely that there are other universes, unobservable by us, but that there is an

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<sup>117</sup> 15:07

infinite number of other universes and, moreover, that they are all randomly ordered in their constants and quantities, so as to guarantee by chance alone that some of them will be finely tuned. All of this is needed to guarantee that a life-permitting world will appear somewhere by chance in the ensemble.

When you think about it, this is really extraordinary. Otherwise hard-headed, sober scientists would not be flocking to embrace so metaphysical a hypothesis unless they felt absolutely compelled to do so. This recourse to the World Ensemble is a kind of backhanded compliment to the power of the design argument. It shows the lengths that people will go to in order to avoid a Designer of the universe. The odds against a life-permitting universe are so incomprehensibly great that in order to explain it away, you have got to recur to metaphysics and do the postulation of this World Ensemble in order to save the chance hypothesis. If somebody says to you, “Well, it could have happened by chance!” or “It was just dumb luck!”, then what you should say to them in response is, “If that is the case, then why is it that scientists feel compelled to embrace the Many Worlds Hypothesis in order to explain it away?” They would not be embracing so extravagant a metaphysical hypothesis unless they felt compelled to do so. So this very alternative is itself a testament to the fact that chance alone won’t explain the fine tuning. The odds against it are just too great unless you appeal to the World Ensemble in order to guarantee that the chances will be fulfilled somewhere.

How might one respond to the Many Worlds Hypothesis? We might just leave it there and say, “Take your pick: a divine Designer or else a Many Worlds Hypothesis. It is up to you to think which is more plausible.” But we can actually say more than that. Let me add three comments by way of response to the Many Worlds Hypothesis.

One way to respond to the Many Worlds hypothesis would be to show that the multiverse itself also involves fine tuning. In order to be scientifically credible, the Many Worlds Hypothesis has to posit some sort of mechanism for generating these many worlds. But this mechanism had better not be fine tuned itself, or all you have done is kicked the problem upstairs! You still have the same problem. Like a stubborn bump in the carpet, you depress it in one point only to have it pop up somewhere else.<sup>118</sup> If the fine tuning is to be explained away by the Many Worlds Hypothesis, the mechanism that generates the many worlds had better not be fine tuned. If it is, the problem still persists and arises all over again. The proposed mechanisms for generating the World Ensemble are, frankly, so vague that it is far from evident that the physics governing the multiverse will be free of fine tuning. These explanations pretty much amount to hand waving at this point, and so there is no way of knowing that they are going to be free from fine tuning. For example, if M-Theory is the physics of the multiverse, then it remains unexplained why there exists only and exactly 11 dimensions. The theory itself does not explain why that particular number of dimensions exist. So fine tuning still exists in the theory of the multiverse. The mechanisms that actualize all of the various possibilities permitted by M-Theory in the cosmic landscape – that  $10^{500}$  possible universes – also may well involve fine tuning. There are some pretty specific conditions that have to be met in order for this to work. Merely postulating a World Ensemble is not in and of itself enough to explain away fine tuning because it is not at all clear that the World Ensemble itself doesn’t involve fine

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<sup>118</sup> 20:05

tuning, and then you haven't solved anything.

Here is the second response. A good many theorists today are quite skeptical of the Many Worlds Hypothesis itself. Why, after all, think that a World Ensemble of universes actually exists? Is there any independent evidence, apart from fine tuning, for the existence of such a thing? Remember when we talked about the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument, we saw that the theorem developed by Borde-Guth-Vilenkin in 2003 applies to the multiverse as a whole. This theorem shows that even a multiverse of expanding bubble universes cannot be infinite in the past but must have a beginning. If that is the case, that means that the mechanisms that generate the many worlds has been chugging away for only a finite amount of time. Therefore, it may well have only generated a finite number of universes in the World Ensemble, in which case there is no guarantee at all that a finely tuned universe will have come to exist yet in the World Ensemble. There is really no evidence that an Ensemble, which is required by the Many Worlds Hypothesis, actually exists. By contrast with that, we do have independent reasons for thinking that a Designer of the cosmos exists. Remember al-Ghazali's argument for the beginning of the universe and the need for a transcendent Creator who brought the universe into being, including all of the laws of nature. Remember Leibniz's argument for a Sufficient Reason for the existence of the universe, a reason which, again, must be found in a transcendent, personal Mind who is the ground of being for why there is something rather than nothing. So we have independent reasons already to think that there is a Designer of the universe but no independent reasons for thinking that a World Ensemble exists.

Finally, third, the Many Worlds Hypothesis faces what may well be a devastating objection. You remember that when we talked about the thermodynamic properties of the universe, we talked about Boltzmann's Many Worlds Hypothesis? Boltzmann thought that the universe as a whole exists in a state of equilibrium, but throughout the universe there will be little pockets of disequilibrium that occur by chance alone, and we are just one of those pockets of disequilibrium in a sea of equilibrium.<sup>119</sup> And remember what sank Boltzmann's hypothesis was that if our world is just a random member of a World Ensemble, then it is vastly more probable that we should be observing a much tinier region of order than we do? A tiny region of disequilibrium is unfathomably more probable than the vast universe we see, and yet it would be sufficient for our existence. Therefore, Boltzmann's hypothesis has been rejected by contemporary physics. Well, it turns out that an exactly parallel problem to Boltzmann's Many Worlds Hypothesis also faces the modern Many Worlds Hypothesis as an explanation of cosmic fine tuning.

This objection has been very forcefully stated by Roger Penrose of Oxford University, for example, in his book, *The Road To Reality*. Penrose points out that the odds of our universe's initial low entropy condition are just incomprehensibly small – one chance out of  $10^{10(123)}$ . This is an incomprehensible number. By contrast, he says the odds of our solar system's just falling together by accident by a random collision of particles (imagine particles swarming around, and all of a sudden they just fall together to form our solar system!) would be about one chance out of  $10^{10(60)}$ . That is a huge number, obviously, but nevertheless, Penrose says this is “utter chicken feed” in comparison with  $10^{10(123)}$ . What does that mean? It means that if we are just a random member of a World

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<sup>119</sup> 24:59

Ensemble, then we should be observing an [orderly] universe no larger than our solar system. Why? Because this sort of universe is vastly, vastly more probable than one that is finely tuned for our existence. There are simply many, many more observable universes in the World Ensemble which are small, like the size of our solar system, than which are large like the finely tuned universe that we observe. If we are just a random member of the World Ensemble, we should be observing an orderly world no larger than, say, our solar system. That is unfathomably more probable than a finely tuned universe because most of the observable universes in the World Ensemble are these small ones.

In fact, we can carry the argument farther. We actually wind up with the same sort of illusionism that plagued Boltzmann's hypothesis. You see, a small [orderly] universe with the illusion of a wider universe is vastly more probable than a real, wider universe. Carried to its logical extreme, this has led to what some theorists have called, in language reminiscent of grade-B horror movies of the 1950s, "the invasion of the Boltzmann Brains." What is a Boltzmann Brain? A Boltzmann Brain is a brain that just pops into being through a thermal fluctuation in the equilibrium. Like the solar system's falling together by chance, it is vastly more probable than 1:  $10^{10^{60}}$  that just a single brain would fall together by chance with an illusion of the external world that we observe. That is vastly more probable! The vast majority of observable universes in the World Ensemble will be worlds that just have a Boltzmann Brain in them. If you are going to accept the Many Worlds Hypothesis to explain fine tuning, you are rationally obligated to believe that you are a Boltzmann Brain and that your friends, this room, the external world, are all illusions of your projected consciousness. Well, no sane person believes that he is a Boltzmann Brain. Therefore, on atheism, it is highly improbable that there exists a randomly ordered World Ensemble. Given atheism, it is vastly more probable that there is no World Ensemble. The fact that we observe this wide, orderly universe disconfirms the Many Worlds hypothesis.

Ironically, the best hope for the partisans of a multiverse theory is theism.<sup>120</sup> This is because, if God exists, he could create many worlds and plan them to have life in them according to his design. They would not be randomly ordered – they would be designed. God could give preference to worlds which are cosmically fine tuned. So in order to be rationally acceptable, it turns out that the Many Worlds Hypothesis requires God. I think that if you are going to be a Many Worlds theorist, you need to be a theist. Otherwise the evidence heavily disconfirms the multiverse hypothesis.

With the failure of the Many World Hypothesis, the last ring of defense for the hypothesis of chance falls away. Neither physical necessity nor chance seems to give a good, plausible explanation for the fine tuning of the universe. The question will be, does design fare any better? Is the design hypothesis equally implausible or is it superior as an explanation? That will be covered next.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* That last sub-point about it being a better theistic worldview. Can you explain that further?

<sup>120</sup> 30:00

*Answer:* The idea there is that the finely tuned universes would not appear in the Ensemble by chance, but it would rather be that they are designed by God. So God makes a World Ensemble in which he creates worlds that would not result by chance, and therefore you could have these finely tuned worlds among them, and it wouldn't simply be a matter of randomness.

*Question:* Would the multiverse theory fall into the category of the gambler's fallacy?

*Answer:* The question here is whether or not this commits what is called an "inverse gambler's fallacy." [According to the gambler's fallacy], because I have won at roulette, I therefore conclude that there must be a lot of other roulette wheels spinning in other rooms, and that is why I can explain my winning by chance alone. The inverse gambler's fallacy is concluding that because there are many other roulette wheels spinning, that explains why the roulette wheel came up with my number. I do not think that it commits an inverse gambler's fallacy because of what I said last week. We are not trying to explain why *this* universe exists, or why this particular constellation of constants and quantities exist. What we are just trying to explain is why any life-permitting universe exists and not why this particular one does. This one is just as improbable as any other one; but what is more probable is that a life-prohibiting world rather than a life-permitting world would exist. So I do not think it commits that fallacy. But that is a very good question you are raising.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Total Running Time: 33:35 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § III. TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 5

### **Who Designed the Designer?**

Today we are going to wrap up our discussion of the Teleological Argument or the argument for design based upon the fine tuning of the universe.

Remember the big picture here. We are doing a survey of Christian doctrine, and we are currently on the section of the Doctrine of God. We looked at the attributes of God, and now we are doing an excursus, or a side journey, looking at Natural Theology – arguments for God’s existence. We talked about the Contingency Argument of Leibniz for God’s existence. We talked about the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument for God’s existence. And now we have been dealing with the Teleological Argument or the argument for design for God’s existence. And I have argued that the best explanation for the fine tuning of the universe is neither physical necessity nor chance but rather design. The design hypothesis will be the preferable explanation unless it can be shown to be equally implausible as physical necessity or chance. That is what we want to conclude with – what objections might be raised to the hypothesis of design as an explanation of the fine tuning of the universe.

#### ***Objection: Who Designed The Designer?***

Sometimes detractors of design will raise the objection that this argument leaves the Designer himself unexplained. What caused the Designer or what designed him? In fact, this objection is what Richard Dawkins calls “the central argument of my book” (namely the book *The God Delusion*). The central argument of his book is precisely this objection. This is how Dawkins summarizes his argument:

1. He says, “One of the greatest challenges to the human intellect has been to explain how the complex, improbable appearance of design in the universe arises.” (So one of the biggest problems confronting us is, how do you explain the undeniable appearance of design in the universe.)
2. He says, “The natural temptation is to attribute the appearance of design to actual design itself.” (The reason the universe appears to be designed is because it is designed.)
3. He says, “This temptation, however, is a false temptation because the designer hypothesis immediately raises the larger question of who designed the designer.” (So he says, don’t go down that road of saying that the appearance of design is due to design because then you are stuck with the question of who designed the designer.)
4. He says, “The most ingenious and powerful explanation of the appearance of design is Darwinian evolution by natural selection.” (The best explanation, he would say, of the appearance of design is Darwinian evolution.)

5. He admits that “we do not have an equivalent explanation for physics.” (In other words, this Darwinian explanation applies only in the field of biology, but it doesn’t apply in the field of physics, which is what we’ve been talking about. We have been talking about the fine tuning of the universe. We did an end run around biology by going right back to the very initial conditions of the universe and asking, “Why are the physical constants and quantities fine tuned for the existence of life and its inexplicable complexity and delicacy?” Dawkins admits in this step 5 that we do not have any explanation for that in physics. Darwinism only explains biology and the appearance of design there. It says nothing about physics.)
6. He says that “we should not give up a hope for a better explanation arising in physics – something as powerful as Darwinism is for biology.” (So this is kind of an encouragement to hold fast and don’t give up! We don’t have an explanation in physics, but let’s hold on and hope that a better explanation can arise for the fine tuning which will be just as powerful as the Darwinian argument is for biology.)
7. “Therefore,” he says, “God almost certainly doesn’t exist.”

The conclusion for this argument is rather jarring. It comes out of left field. There is nothing in those previous six statements that would lead to the conclusion that “Therefore, God does not exist.” There is no rule of logic that would allow you to derive that conclusion from those six statements.<sup>122</sup>

At the very most, all that would follow from Dawkins’ argument about “Who designed the designer?” would be that you should not infer the existence of God on the basis of the appearance of design in the universe. If his argument were entirely successful, if we conceded everything, that is the most that would follow – that you should not use a design argument like I have given as a basis for believing in God. But, of course, that conclusion is quite compatible with God’s existence. It doesn’t follow from the failure of somebody’s argument for God, that therefore there is no God. It doesn’t lead to atheism in any way. In fact, it doesn’t even show belief in God is unjustified. Maybe we should believe in God on the basis of Leibniz’s Contingency Argument. Or maybe we should believe in God on the basis of the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument. Or maybe on the basis of the Moral Argument. The failure of the design argument doesn’t show at all that belief in God is unjustified. In fact, maybe we shouldn’t believe in God on the basis of arguments at all – maybe we should just believe in God on the basis of revelation and the witness of the Holy Spirit, as some theologians think. There is nothing here in this argument to show either that God does not exist, as Dawkins claims, or that belief in God is unjustified. I think here we see Dawkins’ lack of philosophical depth in this sort of argument.

But why should we concede the truth of the premises in this argument? Is it true that his argument actually succeeds even in undermining the argument from the fine tuning of design? I don’t think so at all! Remember we saw that step 5 of his argument, which says that we don’t have an explanation in physics, refers to the fine tuning of the universe that

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<sup>122</sup> 5:12

we have been talking about. And Dawkins has nothing by way of a good explanation for the fine tuning of the universe, in either chance or necessity. So the hope that he holds out in step 6 (let's hope that some explanation will arise) really just represents the faith of a naturalist. It is just sort of naturalistic faith that eventually we will have an explanation, but there isn't any real grounds for it. There is nothing here in the argument that would suggest that we have hopes for, or prospects for, chance or necessity as a better explanation of the fine tuning than the idea of an intelligent Designer.

What about step 3 of his argument? If you propound a design argument based on fine tuning, then you are going to be confronted with the problem of who designed the Designer. Does that objection subvert the design argument? I don't think so for at least two reasons.

First, in order to recognize an explanation as the best, you do not need to have an explanation of the explanation. This is an elementary point in the philosophy of science. For example, suppose some archaeologists were digging in the earth and they came across entities that looked for all the world like tomahawk heads and arrowheads and pottery shards. They would be rational in inferring that these artifacts are not the result of the chance processes of sedimentation and metamorphosis. They would be rational in inferring that these were, in fact, artifacts that are the products of intelligent design. They would be rational in drawing that explanation, or that conclusion, as the best explanation even if they had no explanation at all of who these people were or where they came from. They might have no explanation at all of who these designers were, but clearly the best explanation for the arrowheads and the pottery shards is that they were the product of intelligent design. To take another illustration, imagine that astronauts landing on the moon were to discover on the dark side of the moon a pile of machinery. They would be rational in inferring that the best explanation for this machinery is intelligent design, even if they had no idea at all who made this machinery or how it came to be there.<sup>123</sup> Suppose they were able to determine it wasn't American made or Soviet made. They don't have any idea who made this machinery or how it got there. Still it would be obvious that this was the product of intelligent design. You do not need to be able to explain the explanation in order to recognize that the explanation is the best.

In fact, when you think about it, demanding that you have to explain the explanation in order to recognize an explanation as the best would lead to an infinite regress of explanations. Because before you can recognize that the explanation is the best, you'd have to have an explanation of the explanation. But then you would need an explanation of the explanation of the explanation. And then you'd need an explanation one step further back from that. You would launch on an infinite regress, so that nothing could ever be explained, and science would be destroyed. So the Dawkins' principle would actually be destructive of science itself, which is ironic from a man who is a career scientist!

In order to recognize that something is the best explanation, you do not have to have an explanation of the explanation. With respect to the Designer of the universe, we can just leave it an open question as to whether that Designer has some explanation for its existence or not. That can be the subject for future inquiry. We just leave that open and

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<sup>123</sup> 10:13

recognize that the best explanation for the fine tuning is intelligent design. That's the first problem with his objection.

Here is the second problem. Dawkins thinks that in the case of a divine Designer – that is to say, if you say the Designer of the cosmos is God – , then he says God is less simple than the universe. God is just as complex as the thing to be explained. So you haven't made any advance in simplicity. You are positing a Designer which is just as complex as the thing to be explained. The explanation has not achieved an advance in simplicity. It is not any simpler than the phenomenon that you are trying to explain. Therefore, the conclusion is that you should not draw that inference because the thing that you are using to explain the universe is just as complex as the universe.

This objection raises all sorts of interesting questions about the role of simplicity in scientific explanations. The fact is that simplicity is just one, and not even the most important, criterion that scientists use for assessing competing explanations. When scientists weigh rival hypotheses, simplicity is just one of the factors that they consider, and it isn't even the most important. They will also consider *explanatory power* – how well does the explanation explain the phenomenon? They will consider *explanatory scope* – does it have a wide range, or does it explain a lot of facts, or does it have a very narrow explanatory scope? They will consider *plausibility* and other sorts of factors. It may be that in some cases, an explanation may be less simple but it may have great explanatory scope or great explanatory power and therefore is the preferable explanation, even though it is less simple.

So simplicity is not the only criterion that should be at work here, and it isn't even the most important one. But we can just leave that to the side because the objection is even more fundamentally flawed than that. So just put that to the side. The more fundamental mistake that Dawkins makes is his assumption that God is just as complex as the universe. He thinks that because God is able to have complex ideas and can do complex tasks that that means that God is just as complex as the universe; and that is plainly false. Think of what God is. God is an unembodied mind. He is like a soul without a body. He is an unembodied mind or consciousness. Therefore, he has no parts.<sup>124</sup> He is not made up of pieces. A mind is a purely spiritual or mental entity not composed of parts and therefore remarkably simple. It is hard to conceive of anything that could be more simple than an unembodied mind. Certainly this mind can be entertaining complex ideas; for example, this mind may be thinking of infinitesimal calculus. It may be able to do complex tasks like trace every particle trajectory in the universe. But the mind itself, as an entity, is a remarkably simple thing.

Dawkins has obviously confused a mind's ideas with the mind itself. That is clearly a confusion because a mind could have simple ideas. It could be thinking of simply a patch of blue. Or it could have very complex ideas – it could be thinking of calculus. Yet the mind itself is incredibly simple, having no parts. He has obviously confused a mind's ideas with a mind itself. While a mind's ideas may be complex, an unembodied mind is a remarkably, incredibly, simple entity. Therefore, postulating a divine mind behind the cosmos is definitely an advance in simplicity, for whatever that is worth. A single, unembodied mind behind the universe is vastly more simple than the complex universe

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<sup>124</sup> 15:04

with all of its unexplained and various constants and quantities. Dawkins' argument really shoots itself in the foot. In fact, when judged by simplicity, the hypothesis of a divine Designer is definitely more simple than the universe and certainly more than its rival hypotheses, such as the World Ensemble.

Of the three alternatives that are before us, physical necessity, chance, or design, it seems that the best explanation of the fine tuning of the cosmos for intelligent life is intelligent design.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* When you read Dawkins or hear him speak, he employs two different things that defeat his own argument. First, he does tend to be a believer in the multiverse which, like you said, lacks simplicity. Secondly, he has said he would rather concede an alien race seeded the human race – the idea of panspermia.<sup>125</sup> This again doesn't seem to get you to simplicity; it just pushes the question back.

*Answer:* Right! You make a good point. In the movie *Expelled*, Dawkins says if we are forced to say the fine tuning is due to intelligent design (really he's talking about biological complexity), then the designer is some alien race somewhere in the universe that has seeded our planet for life, and there the explanation lies. You are right: that doesn't represent an advance in simplicity. That is even more complicated than the thing to be explained. That is in contrast to a divine Designer, which is just incredibly simple. In fact, although we didn't discuss it in our attributes of God survey, simplicity is one of the classical attributes of God. It is one of the classical properties that God is said to have. I think you are right on that.

*Question:* Your analogy is great. He is violating what he is experiencing with his own mind. You can envision various simple tasks or situations or very complex ones.

*Answer:* Exactly! It is incredible! When you are asleep and you are not dreaming, your mind isn't entertaining any complex ideas. But when you wake up you can think of your math homework or a business problem. It is obvious that the mind is distinct from its thoughts and ideas, and yet he seems to conflate the two.

*Question:* Do you see the objection that Dawkins raises, that the Designer himself requires a designer, as parallel to the cosmological argument objection that the First Cause would itself have to have a first cause?<sup>126</sup>

*Answer:* It is only superficially similar because in the cosmological argument, if you cannot have an infinite regress, you get back to an absolutely First Cause. The cosmological argument demonstrates that there is a first, uncaused cause, something that didn't come into being. In the design argument, technically speaking, the design argument doesn't get back to an undesigned Designer. It just leaves it an open question. So in that sense, I think, it is not analogous. It is different. The cosmological argument demonstrates a first, uncaused cause, but the design argument does not demonstrate an

<sup>125</sup> The theory that alien beings or some other unknown extraterrestrial source seeded Earth with life is known as "panspermia."

<sup>126</sup> 20:04

undesigned Designer. It simply demonstrates a transcendent Designer beyond space and time who has established the laws of physics and all of the constants and quantities of the universe, but it leaves it an open question as to whether this Designer has himself a cause. And I like that about the argument – it is modest. It is a modest argument, and it reminds us that these arguments are to be taken together in a cumulative case for theism. One argument will give you an uncaused cause but not its moral qualities. Another argument may give you that it is intelligent but not its metaphysical necessity. Another argument may give you its moral properties but not its being the uncaused cause of everything. It is the arguments taken together, like a lawyer’s case – it is the cumulative force of the evidence that leads us to the conviction that theism is true.

*Question:* Why is simplicity such a necessary ingredient in the argument? Why not just make the argument that God is the most complex thing that ever existed and therefore it is so complex that he is entirely capable to do anything to overcome the objections.

*Answer:* It would be quite legitimate to infer to a more complex entity to explain the universe if that resulted in an increase in explanatory power, for example. The idea that simplicity is the only criterion to judge theories is just completely wrong headed. Think of it this way – the simplest explanation in one sense would be not to explain anything at all. Just take the phenomena as they are and offer no explanation! Then you don’t have any additional level of complexity. But you want to have explanatory power. You want to explain where the fine tuning came from, and if that is bought at the expense of postulating a complex entity, no problem. But I do think that it is ironic that even when you judge the argument by his own standards, it caves in.

*Question:* I think we need intelligent design back in the schools. I think to get that we need to show that alien races is one possibility. That is a different argument, and it puts it on equal footing.

*Answer:* You are quite right that the intelligent design proponents are not being disingenuous when they say that the Designer need not be God. It could be some other sort of reality. And if intelligent design is ever to get into the public schools, which I think is highly unlikely myself, it would have to be on the basis of some sort of religiously neutral plank.

We have an argument map of the argument from fine tuning. Remember the way the argument map works. You have in blue the positive assertion of the argument’s proponents. And then in red, the skeptic’s response to the argument. Then you will see how you can respond to that red box in the blue boxes that follow. In the argument map, if the arrow goes down to another box of the same color, that is supporting evidence for that assertion. If the arrows go up from a box of a different color, that is an objection or a response to what went before.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>127</sup> Total Running Time: 25:09. For argument maps of all the arguments see Dr. Craig’s *On Guard*. (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § IV. MORAL ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 1

### **Moral Argument**

We have looked at three arguments for God's existence, and today we want to come to the Moral Argument.

#### ***Introduction***

The American Humanist Association is sponsoring a bus banner campaign in certain U.S. cities which carries the message on the side saying, "No God, No Problem," and then the sub-caption says, "Be Good for Goodness Sake." And I thought that was a very, very clever ad, especially that slogan, "Be good for goodness sake." That should be familiar to you – it comes from the children's popular Christmas song about "Santa Claus is coming to town." But as the humanist uses it, it involves a very clever pun; it is a double-entendre. It is different from the way it is in the children's song. Remember in the children's song, Santa Claus is portrayed as this sort of omniscient God-surrogate who is "keeping a list and checking it twice. He's gonna find out if you're naughty or nice." So the advice of the Christmas song is: "You better not pout, you better not cry, you better not shout, I'm telling you why. Santa Claus is coming to town!" Like the second coming of Christ, Santa Claus is coming, and he's been making this list, and he's gonna find out whether or not you have been good. In fact, it says this all-seeing surrogate deity called Santa Claus, "he knows when you've been sleeping, he knows when you're awake, he knows if you've been bad or good – ." So the advice is: "Be good, for goodness sake!" Now here the advice to be good, for goodness sake, is a sort of expletive. It is like saying, "For goodness sake! Be good!" Why? "Because Santa Claus is coming!" It's just a sort of expletive.

But when the humanists say this, it is different. When the humanists say this, there is no comma, as in "Be good, for goodness sake!" Instead, they say, "Be good for goodness' sake." That is why you should be good – because goodness is an end in and of itself. What the humanists rightly see is that this perverted Santa Claus theology gets it completely wrong when it says the reason you should be good is because of the rewards or the desserts that might come from being good. You are looking out for self-interest, and that is why you should be good. What the humanists rightly see is that that is a very perverse kind of theology. Rather, you should be good for "goodness' sake." Goodness is an end itself – you are to do good because it is good.

The problem I have with the humanist slogan is not with that sub-caption; it is with the main one: "No God, No Problem." The problem is, if there isn't any God, why think that there is any goodness, for which sake we can be good? If there is no God, then why think that good and evil objectively exist? So the question that is raised by the issue of atheism is whether we really can be good without God.

Now, at one level, the answer to that question is obvious. We all know people who are not

believers in God who live good and decent lives. Many of us come from families like that – good, decent, hard-working folks who may just not believe in God. It would be arrogant of us to say they don't live good and decent lives. So, at one level, of course, you can be good without believing in God. But that is not the question that is raised by the American Humanist bus campaign. The question is not, “Can we be good without the *belief* in God?” The question is, “Can we be good without *God*?” The issue isn't *belief* in God; it is whether God exists.

The issue that is being raised here is whether, in the absence of God, there is any objective difference between good and evil. It is raising the meta-ethical question about the basis for the moral values that we all hold dear and try to guide our lives by.<sup>128</sup> If there is no God, then is the difference between good and evil just like driving on the right-hand versus the left-hand side of the road, which varies with the culture and society you are in? Or is it just a matter of having a taste, as for certain foods? Some people like vanilla, and other people like chocolate, and there isn't any objective truth about whether chocolate is better than vanilla. It is a matter of personal taste or opinion. Is that what moral values are like in the absence of God? Or are moral values somehow valid and binding on us regardless of what we think? And if they are objective in that way, then the question is, what is their foundation?

The existence of objective moral values and duties provides a very good argument for the existence of God. I myself stumbled into this argument through the backdoor, so to speak. I was speaking on university campuses on the absurdity of life without God. And what I would argue was purely negative – I would say that in the absence of God, life ultimately becomes absurd. There is no ultimate meaning to life, there is no ultimate purpose in life, and there are no ultimate, objective values in life. Everything becomes relative and subjective. And I found, to my surprise, that the response of students to this argument was to say that objective moral values *do* exist and that we *do* experience that things are really right and wrong and good and evil. What the students said didn't in any way undermine my claim that in the absence of God there wouldn't be any objective moral values. But by insisting that there are objective moral values, what the students had done is actually supply the missing premise in an argument for God's existence. So we can argue in the following way:

1. If God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist.
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.

From which it follows logically and inescapably:

3. Therefore, God exists.

This little argument is easy to memorize, and it is logically airtight – if the premises are true, the conclusion follows necessarily. It is a wonderful argument to share with unbelievers. I had been arguing for the first premise – if there is no God then there are no objective moral values and duties. The students to whom I spoke supplied the second premise. There are objective moral values and duties. And this leads to the conclusion: therefore God exists. I think what makes this Moral Argument for God's existence so powerful is that people generally believe in both premises. They just never put the two

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<sup>128</sup> 5:00

together to draw the logical conclusion.

Students have been taught today that there are no objective moral values. Everything is relative to society and culture. They have had this value of tolerance so deeply ingrained into them that they are deathly afraid of making a moral judgment about someone else. You have got to tolerate everything. So, they have been taught premise (1) – if there is no God, everything is relative and there are no objective moral values and duties.

But the problem is that they also believe premise (2), that there are objective moral values and duties. For example, they are deeply committed to the value of tolerance! They think it is wrong to be bigoted and narrow-minded and dogmatic. So their very commitment to tolerance is their commitment to the objective value of toleration. They think that it is objectively wrong to be intolerant of someone else. So they are committed to premise (2) as well as to premise (1).

This can lead to some very strange conversations. I remember one student I was sharing the Moral Argument with, and when I would talk to him about premise (1), he would agree with that and he would deny premise (2). And then we would go on to talk about premise (2), and when we talked about that, he would agree with premise (2) and he would deny premise (1). And so we'd go back to premise 1 again and talk about that, and he would then agree to premise (1) and deny (2). And so we would go back and forth, jumping from one premise to another with him unable to make up his mind. It would have been funny if it hadn't been so pathetic to see this student floundering desperately to try to avoid the obvious implication of objective moral values and duties – namely, that God exists.<sup>129</sup>

I think this is a very powerful argument for God's existence. I want to now look more closely at each of the premises and see what sort of defense we can give of them and what kind of objections the unbeliever might raise.

The first premise says that if God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist. In order to understand this premise it will be helpful to define a couple of terms to make a couple of key distinctions.

### **Moral “Values and Duties” Defined**

First, notice that I distinguish between *values* and *duties*. Values have to do with whether something is good or bad. The value of something has to do with whether it is good or bad. Duties have to do with whether something is right or wrong. At first you might think that this is a distinction without a difference, that it is the same thing. You might think that “good” and “right” mean the same thing, and “bad” and “wrong” mean the same thing. But if you reflect on this, you will see that really isn't the case at all. Duty has to do with moral obligation – with what you ought to do or ought not to do. There is an “ought-ness” or “should-ness” involved with moral duties. Obviously, I am not morally obligated to do something just because it would be good for me to do it. For example, it would be good for you to become a medical doctor. But that doesn't mean that you are obligated to become a medical doctor because, after all, it would also be good for you to become a farmer or to become a homemaker or to become an architect. Obviously, you

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<sup>129</sup> 10:02

can't do them all. So just because something is good for you to do doesn't mean that you have a moral obligation or duty to do that thing. Moreover, sometimes we only have bad choices. We have to choose between the lesser of two evils. Think of the movie *Sophie's Choice*, where, you remember, a mother is put into a horrible situation by a Nazi concentration camp guard of choosing which of her children gets to live and which one is killed. To not choose, to refuse to choose, would mean they are both exterminated. So this wretched mother has to choose to send one of her children off to be killed and to choose one of the children to go with her and hopefully live. She didn't have a good choice; she only had bad choices. So sometimes we have to make choices where neither option is good, but nevertheless we choose.

When you reflect on it, there is clearly a difference between the good and the bad, versus the right and the wrong. The good and the bad has to do with something's worth, its moral worth. Whether something is right or wrong has to do with something's being obligatory or forbidden. The one has to do with moral value, and the other with moral duty.

## DISCUSSION

*Question: (inaudible)*

*Answer:* Certainly, some values are conditional. If you want to grow corn, it would be good for you to rotate your crops. But you are under no obligation to grow corn – that is not an unconditional duty. So, yes, there are certainly duties and obligations that are merely conditional. That is the way a lot of unbelievers, in fact, think of moral duties. They think they are all conditional. If you want to regard other people as ends in themselves, then you ought to be a loving person, or something like that. But the question is, why choose what is in that “if” clause, in that antecedent clause? But what we are talking about here are unconditional obligations or unconditional goods or evils.<sup>130</sup>

*Question: (inaudible)*

*Answer:* Yes, I think that there clearly are. For example, I think it is unconditionally bad to torture a child for fun. That is, I think, clear. It is unconditionally good to be a loving and generous person. I think when most of us reflect on our moral experience, we do see that there is a clear, objective, unconditional difference between modes of behavior. But we will get to that when we talk about the second premise.

*Question:* Do skeptics ever just object to the ideas of moral values? I heard some people occasionally say to look at animals. Animals behave instinctively good and if they attack and eat another animal, that is not evil, that is just preservation. But the point is that it wasn't moral values; it was just instinctual. So you can say, yeah, you don't torture a child because it is an animal instinct not to do it.

*Answer:* I think that this attitude, which you hear very, very prevalently in this culture today, is *supportive* of premise (1)! This will be the sort of argument I will give for premise (1). If there is no God, then we are just animals. And the kind of behavior that we

<sup>130</sup> 14:52

exhibit in human morality is simply foreshadowed already in the altruistic behavior that exists, say, in a troupe of baboons, where natural selection has determined that if one scratches another's back, the other will scratch his back in return. The species will survive more effectively if this sort of altruistic behavior is exhibited. So that is actually a powerful argument in support of premise (1). Far from denying it, it supports it.

*Question:* When you talked about things existing necessarily, has anyone argued that moral values necessarily exist?

*Answer:* Yes, we will talk about this when we get to premise (2). I think what you will find – and this is a surprise to most people – is that the wide majority of philosophers and university professors do believe that objective moral values exist. Although the ones that get the press are the ones who defend premise (1) – people like Richard Dawkins and others – the fact of the matter is, by far and away, most philosophers think that objective moral values and duties exist. And the question will be their grounding or their foundation. And some will say, “Well, you don’t need a foundation. They are just there. They just exist necessarily.” So we will talk about that when we come to premise (2).

*Question:* In my experience, atheists seem to say that God does not exist, but objective values do exist. So they would disagree with premise (1). I think that is where we get hung up. It is hard to get agreement on premise (1) when in the past we have seen so many civilizations engage in behavior that we, today, think is wrong (like cannibalism, or child sacrifice, or even Nazi Germany’s Final Solution).

*Answer:* If that is the answer, it is hard for you to get clarity on their response because what I heard there was talking out of both sides of their mouth. On the one hand, you don’t need God to have objective moral values and duties. On the other hand, what I hear is, “But look at the relativity of moral values among societies and cultures in the world. Look at how they used to do things in the ancient realm that now we find morally unthinkable – we just simply learned how to live together in society now.” That is supporting premise (1)! So you have two different contradictory things coming out of the same person’s mouth. On the one hand, he wants to affirm the objectivity of moral values and duties, but then when he explains it, it is supportive of premise (1), saying that moral values and duties are things we’ve just learned over the centuries and that they still vary widely from culture to culture and society to society. So what we want to know is, with what right can one culture or society say that the moral values of another are objectively wrong, rather than just different?<sup>131</sup> They are relative. So why can one culture or society think that its values are right and another’s are mistaken? If there is no God to act as a transcendent anchor point, from which these different cultural viewpoints can be judged, aren’t you just left with a plurality of cultures and societies which have evolved different morals, and what is unthinkable in one is thinkable in another? Who is to say whose cultural values are right and whose are wrong? That is supportive of premise (1).

### **“Objective” Defined**

That is the first distinction. The other distinction is the distinction between objective and subjective. By objective, I mean independent of people’s opinions. Something is

<sup>131</sup> 20:35

objective if it is independent of people's opinions. By subjective, I mean dependent upon people's opinions. When we say there are objective moral values and duties, what we are asserting is that certain things are good or bad, right or wrong, independently of what anybody thinks about it. It doesn't matter if everybody in the world disagreed and believed something else, these moral values would still be true and real. That is what it means to say something is objective. To say that we have objective moral values means that something is good or bad regardless of what people think about it. Similarly, to say we have objective moral duties to fulfill means that we have moral obligations and prohibitions which are binding on us, regardless of what we think. So the claim is, in premise (1), that if there is no God, then moral values and duties are not objective in that sense.

An easy way to remember it is: "subjective" sounds like "subject" and so it is dependent on what somebody (the subject) thinks whereas "objective" sounds like "object" and that is just out there – an object – regardless of what you think about it. Objective is the thing that is real and independent of anybody's opinion. Subjective is what depends on how some subjects (*i.e.*, people) view it.

Let me illustrate what it would mean to say that something is objectively wrong. Take the Holocaust, for example. To say that the Holocaust was objectively wrong is to say that the Holocaust was wrong even though the Nazis who carried it out thought that it was right. And it would still have been wrong, even if the Nazis had won World War II and succeeded in brainwashing or exterminating everybody who disagreed with them, so that everybody in the world thought the Holocaust was right and good. To say that the Holocaust was objectively wrong means that it was wrong regardless of the outcome of World War II. And the premise is that if there is no God, then moral values and duties are not objective in that sense.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* To go back to your original opening statement of "be good for goodness' sake" – goodness would be a subjective value, correct?

*Answer:* No, goodness would be something that would exist in the sense that, say, being a loving person is a "good thing." A person who is a loving person has the quality of goodness insofar as he is loving and selfless.

*Followup:* But if my love is squashing my child's ability to be independent, then is it still good?<sup>132</sup>

*Answer:* I would say that that is objectively bad because you are hurting another person who is a bearer of intrinsic moral value. You are crippling that other individual, so that would be objectively wrong to do that. So to say you do something for goodness sake is to say you do it because it is the right thing to do. Now I distinguish between goodness and rightness – you are not morally obligated to do something just because it is good. But suppose that it is the right thing for you to do, then you should do it because it is right, not because you are going to get a reward or it is in your self-interest. And it really is

<sup>132</sup> 25:01

right, even if you don't think that it is right – that is what we mean when we say it is objective.

*Question:* To premise (1), not only don't moral values and duties exist, but the terms "good" and "evil" are meaningless.

*Answer:* I wouldn't say they are meaningless, though I think I understand what you are saying. It would be to say that they have no reference point. They do not refer to anything. Or they have to be redefined so that they refer to something, like "that which is conducive to human flourishing" or "that which will promote harmonious living and society." You redefine the terms to mean something else. But I think you are quite right in saying that in the absence of God, there just is no good and evil. These words refer to nothing.

You can be mistaken about what the good and right is. Certainly this is not an argument that our moral perceptions are infallible. We make mistakes all the time, but the very fact of moral error points to the objectivity of these values. If they are not objective, you can't err or fail to do the right or good thing because it is all subjective anyway. So the very fact of moral error and moral disagreement and moral failure actually presuppose the objectivity of moral values and duties.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Total Running Time: 27:57 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § IV. MORAL ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 2

### **Objective Human Value on Naturalism / Euthyphro Dilemma**

We are looking at the Moral Argument for God's existence. And we saw last time that there is a difference between moral values and moral duties. Moral values have to do with what is good or bad – the moral worth of something. Moral duties have to do with what is right or wrong – it has to do with our obligations and our prohibitions.

Then we also saw there is a difference between being objective and being subjective. Something is objective if it is independent of people's opinions. If it holds or is true independently of what anybody thinks then it is objective. It is subjective if it is dependent upon people's opinions.

#### ***Defense of Premise (1)***

We now want to turn to an examination of premise (1) in the Moral Argument which is "If God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist."

Let's talk first about moral values. Traditionally, moral values have been thought to be anchored in God, who is the supreme Good. Traditionally, God has been thought in theology as the greatest Good or the highest Good or in Latin "*summum bonum*." Other goods are determined by how they relate to God as the anchor or the yardstick or the moral plumb line for value. But suppose God does not exist. Then what is the basis for objective moral values? What plumb line or anchor remains in the absence of God for moral values? In particular, why think that human beings would have objective moral worth on an atheistic view?

#### **Objective Human Value on Naturalism**

The most popular form of atheism is a philosophy called *naturalism*. Naturalism is the view that science and science alone determines what exists. What exists is what our best scientific theories of the world require. If something is not required by our best scientific theories of the world, then it does not exist. But this is devastating for ethics because moral values are not required by science. Science is morally neutral. You cannot find moral values in a test tube. So it follows immediately, from the perspective of naturalism, that moral values do not really exist. They are just subjective illusions of human beings.

So, on naturalism, the morality we experience in our lives is really just a subjective illusion of human beings. Suppose the atheist isn't a hardcore naturalist. Suppose he is willing to go beyond the confines of science to see what exists. Still, we could ask, given atheism, why are human beings objectively morally valuable? After all, what are human beings on an atheistic worldview? They are just accidental byproducts of nature which have evolved relatively recently on an infinitesimal speck of dust called the planet Earth and which are doomed to perish individually and collectively in a relatively short period

of time. Richard Dawkins' assessment of human worth may be depressing, but why on atheism is he wrong when he says, "there is at bottom no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pointless indifference. . . . We are machines for propagating DNA. . . . It is every living object's sole reason for being."<sup>134</sup> This is what, on an atheistic view, human beings are reduced to.

So what are moral values on an atheistic view? It seems that moral values are just the spin offs, or the byproducts, or socio-biological evolution, just as in a troupe of baboons you will see self-sacrificial behavior exhibited by members of the troupe.<sup>135</sup> They will look out for each other's interest because natural selection has determined that this is going to be valuable in the struggle for survival. And just as you see that in a troupe of baboons, so their primate cousins, *Homo sapiens*, have a similarly evolved herd morality which is useful in the perpetuation of our species. The illusion of morality has survival value and therefore is perpetuated among *Homo sapiens*.

But there isn't anything about *Homo sapiens* to make you think that this morality is objectively true. It is simply conducive to the survival of our species. And to think that human beings are somehow morally special is to be guilty of the fallacy of species-ism. This is an unjustified bias in favor of one's own species. To think that human beings are morally special, different from other animals, is just to succumb to the natural temptation to species-ism. If there isn't any God, it is very difficult to see why the morality that has evolved among *Homo sapiens* on this planet is in any way objectively true. If you take God out of the picture, then all we seem to be left with is an ape-like creature on this planet who is beset with delusions of moral grandeur. He thinks that somehow he is the sink of objective moral values.

Secondly, let's talk about moral duties. Traditionally, our moral duties were thought to spring from God's commandments, for example, the Ten Commandments. God has given certain moral commands to us which constitute our moral duties. But take away God, and what basis remains for objective moral duties? On the atheistic view, human beings are just animals. And animals don't have obligations toward one another. When a lion, for example, kills a zebra, it *kills* the zebra, but it doesn't *murder* the zebra. Or when a great white shark forcibly copulates with a female shark, it *forcibly copulates* with her, but it doesn't *rape* her. None of these things has any moral dimension to it. They are neither forbidden nor obligatory. There just are no moral duties to fulfill with regard to these things. If God doesn't exist, why think that we have any moral duties to fulfill? Who or what lays these moral obligations and prohibitions upon us? Where do they come from?

It is hard to see that moral duties would be anything more than a kind of subjective illusion that has been ingrained into us by societal and parental conditioning. Certain actions, say, incest and rape, are not advantageous in human society, and so in the course of societal evolution, rape and incest have become generally taboo among human

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<sup>134</sup> Cited in Lewis Wolpert, *Six Impossible Things before Breakfast: The Evolutionary Origins of Belief* (New York: Norton, 2006), 215. Unfortunately, Wolpert's reference is mistaken. The quotation seems to be a pastiche from Richard Dawkins, *River out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York: Basic, 1996), 133, and Richard Dawkins, "The Ultraviolet Garden," Lecture 4 of 7 Royal Institution Christmas Lectures (1992), <http://physicshead.blogspot.com/2007/01/richard-dawkins-lecture-4-ultraviolet.html>. (Thanks to my assistant Joe Gorra for tracking down this reference.)

<sup>135</sup> 5:00

cultures. There are certain taboos that exist in human society. But this is not to say that these actions are objectively, morally wrong. Such actions go on all the time in the animal kingdom. Actions which look very much like rape and incest and murder happen all the time among animals. With respect to human beings, the child pedophile or rapist who tortures and kills a little girl, on atheism, doesn't really do anything morally *wrong*. It is just *socially unacceptable*. He is kind of like the man who belches loudly at the dinner table, violating the rules of etiquette, or like the person who wears white socks with a tuxedo. It is socially unconventional. But if there isn't any moral law giver, then there isn't any objective moral law which we are obligated to fulfill. So it seems that on atheism, there really aren't any objective moral values or duties. And that is exactly premise (1).<sup>136</sup>

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* You said all these behaviors you can see in the animal world, so the atheists say it is no big deal. But I don't think anywhere in the animal world they have homosexuality. Correct me if I am wrong. I think that is where the argument will fall apart.

*Answer:* I am not expert enough to make a biological pronouncement, but certainly there are animals that are either sex. Certain kinds of animals like worms and other types are bi-sexual. But let me say in the first place, as we will see in a minute, most atheists want to affirm the objectivity of moral values. I think it is the brave minority who have the courage to face the implications of their worldview and draw these conclusions. But I think the vast majority, inconsistently, I would say, want to affirm that certain things are really right and wrong and good and evil. So they wouldn't try to read moral values out of the evolutionary process. Nature is red in tooth and claw, and if you try to read your morality out of what evolution inculcates in animals to survive, then you would sanction all sorts of atrocities. So whether or not a certain type of behavior is observed among animals I think is really morally irrelevant. Animals aren't moral agents, so what they do or don't do is just no guide to morality at all. It is morally neutral. So whether there are mammals that practice homosexual copulating is really morally irrelevant because nobody is trying to read moral values out of nature.

*Question:* You said societal values have evolved until the point it has been determined what is beneficial. Where do you come back to say that there is a God that has established right and wrong? The conversation typically goes, "Society determines that something is good or bad. And that means there is not a God."

*Answer:* No, it doesn't. You are right. It will be in conjunction with the second premise that it will lead to God's existence. So hang on to that question. Some of you might be a little uncomfortable with what I have been arguing here because it sounds so much like the kind of atheistic or naturalistic propaganda that you read about in magazines and newspapers, namely, there is no God, and therefore everything is relative. I think these folks are right – *if* there is no God, everything is relative, and there are no objective moral values. I admire those naturalists who have the courage to face up to this and own it. I think that the writings of atheists like Richard Dawkins and philosophers Russell, Sartre,

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<sup>136</sup> 10:15

Nietzsche, and the rest, are very helpful in understanding the human predicament apart from God. What would life be like if there were no God to anchor moral values and duties? I think the picture is grim indeed.

*Question:* If I am the first gorilla or human, maybe I like being the only gorilla or human. Who says I have an obligation to propagate the species?

*Answer:* Exactly, why think you have any obligation to perpetuate your species? Why not look out for self-interest? Again, you cannot read morality out of the evolutionary process because you have no obligation to do those things.<sup>137</sup> So if you feel, for example, instinct pressuring you to engage in some self-sacrificial act for the sake of others, maybe even to sacrifice your life, it seems that on atheism the intelligent thing to do would be to look out for your own self-interest, and there is no reason that you should obey those instincts. Those are just ingrained into you by evolution and society; there is no objective reason to follow them, and so you ought to look out for self-interest and resist these instincts. So, on atheism, what happens is, there is a huge clash between what our moral conscience tells us to do and what prudence sometimes tells us what to do. Prudence and morality are often at odds, and the question for the atheist would be: why act morally rather than out of self-interest? Why not just act out of prudence?

*Question:* Homosexuality is very common in the animal kingdom, especially among higher primates. There are several species of monkeys that regularly engage in these acts.

*Answer:* I have never heard of that. OK, thank you; that is news to me.

*Question:* Dogs mount your leg and also eat their young. So you are right we should not read out of the animal kingdom any kind of morality. If you talk to a lay person on the street, they say something to the effect of, morals are just innate. They don't feel like they have to explain it any further. It is just somewhere in us, somehow. Can you comment on that? You are also saying it is hard to make sense of these moral ideas on a naturalistic perspective, but can you turn it and say natural selection would encourage predatory behavior?

*Answer:* That is what I said in response to the earlier question. If you try to read morality out of the evolutionary process, it will sanction all sorts of atrocities because nature is red in tooth and claw. It is the predator who is preying upon the weak and the infirm. There is no compassion of that sort in nature. It is survival of the fittest. Nobody, not even naturalists, want to try to say that we should read morality out of the evolutionary process because if you do, it will sanction murder, genocide, rape, incest, cannibalism, killing innocent people, and all kinds of things. You can't try to read morality out of the evolutionary process.

With respect to a couple of the other alternatives: Individual relativism, or maybe a kind of social contract in which we get together and make a compact for the good of society, those are both right in line with premise (1). Objective morals don't exist – remember what objective means: independent of human opinion. So relativistic morality and social contract views of morality are subjective. They are dependent upon pacts made by human beings that are dependent upon human opinion. If we choose to make a different compact, then we can have a very different morality, such as in South Africa, where

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<sup>137</sup> 14:56

blacks were disenfranchised, or in Nazi Germany, where Jews and Gypsies and homosexuals were considered fodder for the gas chambers and the ovens. So those social contract views and personal choice views are right in line with premise (1). We will consider in a moment other points of views that try to defend objective morals without reference to God. But at least so far, I am simply arguing that on a naturalistic view, human beings are just animals, and we have no grounds objectively for thinking they are valuable or have any duties to one another or anything else.<sup>138</sup>

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### **Is *Belief* in God Necessary to Recognize Objective Moral Values and Duties?**

Now if you share this argument with somebody else, I can almost guarantee the response that you are going to get. Somebody will say indignantly, “Are you saying that all atheists are bad people? How dare you say that atheists cannot be good people? That is arrogant and immoral! You are judgmental and intolerant in saying that about atheists!” We need to help these folks to see that that is a complete misunderstanding of the argument. We are not arguing here that atheists are immoral people or that they can’t live good and decent lives or anything of the sort.

The question that we are facing is not, “Do you have to believe in God in order to live a good and decent life?” That is *not* the question. There is no reason to think that unbelievers cannot live what we would normally call a good and decent life. In fact, many of us come from families where our family members are good and decent and loving people, but they may be unbelievers. So, clearly, the claim is not that in order to live a decent life, you have to be a believer in God. Again, the question is *not*, “Can we recognize objective moral values without believing in God?” We are not asking whether we can recognize objective moral values without believing in God. You do not have to believe in God in order to recognize that you ought to love your children rather than mutilate and abuse them. Indeed, the Bible actually teaches that the moral law of God is written on all people’s hearts. In Romans 2:14-15, it says even Gentiles who do not have the law do by nature what the law requires – they show the law is written on their hearts. Therefore, from a Christian point of view, there is a kind of innate moral instinct or sense that all persons have in virtue of being God’s creatures. We don’t need to believe in God in order to recognize that objective moral values and duties exist. Or, again, the question is *not*, “Can we formulate an adequate system of ethics without believing in God?” We are not asking if we can formulate an adequate system of ethics without believing in God. If a person is willing to grant that human beings have intrinsic moral value, given that presupposition he can probably work out a system of ethics with which the Christian will very largely agree.

The question is, “Why think that human beings have intrinsic moral worth?” The question that this argument is raising is simply this, “If God does not exist, do objective moral values and duties exist?” The question is not about the necessity of the *belief* in God, the question is about the necessity of the *existence* of God. We are not claiming *belief* in God is necessary for morality; we are claiming *God* is necessary for morality.

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<sup>138</sup> 20:18

I have to say, I have been shocked at how even professional philosophers who ought to know better make this confusion. For example, several years ago, I participated in a debate on the subject “Goodness without God is Good Enough” with the humanist philosopher Paul Kurtz of the American Humanist Association at Franklin & Marshall College in Pennsylvania.<sup>139</sup> And I argued, as I have here, that if God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist. And this is how Paul Kurtz responded – he completely missed the point:

If God is essential, then how is it possible for the millions and millions of people who don’t believe in God to nonetheless behave morally and ethically? On your view they could not. And so God just is not essential. Many people, indeed millions of people, have been optimistic about life, have lived a full life, and find life exciting and significant, yet they don’t wring their hands about whether or not there is an afterlife. It is living here and now that counts.

Kurtz’s point only shows that *belief* in God is not necessary for living an optimistic and full life. It doesn’t do anything to respond to my claim that if God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist. To repeat again, just to make it absolutely clear, *belief* in God is not necessary for morality; *God* is necessary for morality. That is the argument.<sup>140</sup>

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* If God does not exist, there is no bad or good objectively. Therefore, other people, even atheists, can subjectively believe they know what objective moral values are, but by definition they are subjective. In fact, you would have to know God completely to know if you know any objective morality. Everything is subjective until you know him, correct?

*Answer:* Well, no. If God exists, then there is objective morality, and that means, for example, that the atheist is doing wrong things when he commits sins that are against God’s will. The atheist is doing good things when he does things in accordance with God’s will. And that is the case even if the atheist doesn’t believe in God. So again, belief in God is not necessary for objective morality. The atheist can do evil and can do good if God exists, even though the atheist doesn’t believe in God. So don’t think that because he doesn’t believe in God, everything becomes subjective. What matters is that God exists, not whether the atheist believes in him.

*Followup:* What I was saying, you can’t know what you subjectively know is objectively true, until you know the Creator because it all comes from him. People can obey and most people believe in the bulk of the objective laws.

*Answer:* In taking this stand on this argument, I am not committing myself to how we come to know about objective moral values. I am inclined to think that the atheist can

<sup>139</sup> A full transcript of this October 2001 debate, along with essays from several people on both sides of the issue, can be found in *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?: A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

<sup>140</sup> 25:31

know that objective moral values exist because I believe Romans 2:14-15, where it says it is written on the hearts of all men. So when the atheist sees that loving his children is a good thing to do, I think that he has moral knowledge. He has knowledge of that truth. But he just doesn't understand the foundation for it. That is neither here nor there with regard to my argument. Certainly some moral duties we wouldn't be able to apprehend without a knowledge of God because certain commandments that God gives us would be things we would not be able to read off of the natural law. Sabbath worship would not be something you can read off of the natural moral law – that is a command God has given. You wouldn't be able to know about that moral duty to keep the Sabbath unless you had some revelation from God. There could be a variety of ways that we can come to moral knowledge. Some could be through the instinct written on our hearts, some could be through intuition, some could be through divine revelation. I am not making a commitment on any of those.

*Question:* I am assuming from the atheist argument's standpoint, they would not agree with you that the fact that they naturally love their children is anything other than a subjective decision. Would they argue that millions of individuals make subjective decisions that end up being similar just by happenstance?

*Answer:* This is the paradox. The fact is – and I'll say something about this when we get to premise (2) – the majority of philosophers who are atheists believe in objective moral values. They *do* affirm the objectivity of moral values and moral duties. There are not that many philosophers that I run into who are willing to take the kind of nihilistic line which says there are no moral values or there is no moral knowledge. Most of them really do believe in objective morality. I will say something about that when we get to the second premise. It is a misimpression actually that these intellectuals are all relativists. Actually, they are not. That is more in pop culture than among these academics.<sup>141</sup>

*Question:* Do you find the contemporary atheist is as honest about the moral situation as, say, a Nietzsche or a Russell?

*Answer:* No, I don't. I do not think they can face the conclusions. I have great admiration for somebody like Nietzsche, even though he was in many ways a pathetic and unhappy man. Nevertheless, Nietzsche had the courage to face the death of God that he proclaimed and to draw unflinchingly the implications from the death of God, namely, the nihilism that results from atheism. It is interesting, in his personal life, Nietzsche couldn't live like that. You can show in his personal life that he could not live as though moral values were purely subjective. Shortly before he went insane and had to be institutionalized, he was in Torino, Italy, and there was a man mercilessly beating his horse, trying to get it to move his wagon. And Nietzsche, in tears, threw himself around the neck of the horse to try to protect it from the blows of this cruel master who was beating it. Even Nietzsche, the person who declared we should be living beyond good and evil, couldn't live that way. At least intellectually, he understood the consequences of the death of God that he proclaimed.

*Question:* Objective moral values depend on a God. And by definition there can only be objective moral values if there is a God, unless they are changing what objective means.

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<sup>141</sup> 30:09

*Answer:* That is right. You have to watch out for the terminology. That is really true. What will happen is they will affirm objective moral values, but they will quietly change the definition of “objective.” For example, they will say that values that are the product of evolution and of societal conditioning are objective in the sense that they are not just made up by people in the way we have made up rules that in America we drive on the right hand side of the road, whereas in Great Britain they drive on the left hand side. Moral values aren’t like that, they say; they have an objective reality or foundation in that they are the product of evolution, rather than inventions of human beings. And so they change the meaning of “objective” in that sense. Certainly they are objective in the sense that they can be the products of evolution, but they are not objective in the sense that they are valid and binding independent of human opinion. You still have to, by choice, agree that those things that have been instilled into us by evolution are valid and binding. And if you do not make that decision, then there is nothing wrong with that. There is no moral obligation to agree with those things. So you have to be very careful with how the definition works.

### **Objection: Euthyphro Dilemma**

There is one other response that you can be sure to get when you present this argument. This is the so-called Euthyphro Dilemma. The Euthyphro Dilemma is named after a character in one of Plato’s dialogues called *Euthyphro*. The argument or the dilemma goes like this: is something good just because God wills it, or does God will it because it is good? The claim is that either one of those horns of that dilemma have unacceptable consequences.

If you say that something is good just because God wills it, then that makes morality arbitrary. It means God could have willed that it be good that we hate one another and kill one another and that greed and selfishness be good, and it would be actually evil and sinful to love another person and be compassionate. And that seems crazy.<sup>142</sup> So you can’t just say that because God wills something, that makes it good.

On the other hand, if you say that God wills something because it is good, then that means that the good is independent of God. Now it means that God has to look to some higher standard, and what he wills and commands will be in accord with that higher standard. Therefore, morality is not based upon God after all, morality is independent of God. Indeed, in a sense, God himself is subservient to the Good – he himself has to make his life conform to the Good, and he has to fulfill his moral obligations and duties to the Good. So moral values and duties in fact exist independently of God, and that contradicts premise (1).

I do not think that we need to refute either horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma because it is a false dilemma. That is to say, these aren’t the only two choices; there is a third alternative. And that is, God wills something because *he* is good. Now what do I mean by that? I mean that God’s own nature is the standard of goodness, and his commands to us are necessary expressions of his own moral character. So, in short, our moral duties are determined by the commandments of a just and loving God. Moral values are not

<sup>142</sup> 35:01

independent of God because God's own character defines what is good. God is essentially compassionate, loving, kind, just, impartial, fair, and so on. His moral nature is the defining standard of what is good. God's commands reflect his essential nature, they flow necessarily out of his nature, and therefore they are not arbitrary.

What if the atheist asks you, for example, "If God commanded that we should all murder our children, would we be morally obligated to murder our children?" That question is like asking, "If there were a square circle, would its area be computed by squaring its sides?" It is a meaningless question because the antecedent of the question is logically impossible. There is no such thing as a square circle, so there is no answer to the question. In exactly the same way, to say that if God were to command that everyone commit child abuse, we would then be obligated to do so is a logical incoherence.

The Euthyphro Dilemma is a false dilemma. It presents us with a false choice, and you shouldn't be fooled by it. The morally good or bad is determined by God's nature; the morally right or wrong is determined by his commandments or his will. God wills something because he is good, and something is right because God wills it.

This view of morality is being defended in our day by very prominent ethicists like Robert Adams, Philip Quinn, William Alston, and so on. And yet atheists still go on pressing the straw man erected by this Euthyphro Dilemma as though it has never been answered. For example, in the recent *Cambridge Companion to Atheism* published in 2007 there is an article on God and morality written by a very prominent ethicist, and in this article he refers neither to the work of any of these men nor to the view of ethics that I have been explaining here, but instead the only view that he presents as a theistic based ethics is the view that God just arbitrarily made up moral values. God just made them up! That is a straw man which nobody whom I know defends. So the Euthyphro Dilemma is very, very common in the literature. It is commonly pressed, but in fact it is a false dilemma, and you shouldn't be misled by it. Again, the answer to the dilemma is neither to say that something is good because God wills it or that God wills something because it is good. The answer is to say that God wills something because he is good.<sup>143</sup>

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* What about the cases like when Abraham was commanded to kill Isaac? That would have been murder, had God not commanded it. But because he did, would it have been considered good? Or does the fact that he never actually sacrificed Isaac make this whole point null and void?

*Answer:* I would say the former. I think that God is able to make exceptions to certain moral commands that he gives in general. So, for example, he can command Abraham to do an act which, had Abraham done it on his own initiative, would have been wrong and it would have been sin. But given the presence of a divine command, it now becomes Abraham's duty to do it. But I am suggesting it would be contrary to God's moral nature for there to be a general command that child abuse is good and this is the way we should behave, and loving your children is evil. That is what I am suggesting would be contrary

<sup>143</sup> 40:30

to his nature. But there could be these exceptional cases where God, who is the source of the moral law, can make an exception and command a person to do something which, in the absence of a divine command, would have been wrong but is, in fact, now his moral duty.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Total Running Time: 42:41 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § IV. MORAL ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 3

### **Atheistic Moral Platonism**

We have been talking about the moral argument for God's existence, and last time we looked at Plato's Euthyphro Dilemma. Does God will something because it is good or is something good because God wills it? And I suggested that that is a false dilemma – we don't need to pick either of those two horns, but rather the correct alternative is to say that God wills something because *he* is good. God's own nature is what Plato called "The Good," and his will expresses that toward us in the form of commandments which constitute our moral duties.

#### **Objection: Atheistic Moral Platonism**

The mention of Plato brings to mind another possible atheistic response to the first premise of the moral argument that *if God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist*. Plato thought that the Good just exists as a sort of self-subsistent idea, as an entity in and of itself. Indeed, it is the most real thing in reality. The Good simply exists. If you find this difficult to grasp, join the company! Nevertheless, that is what Plato believed. Later Christian thinkers, like Augustine, equated Plato's Good with the nature of God. God's nature is the Good, and so it was anchored in a concrete object, namely, God. But for Plato, at least, the Good just sort of existed on its own as a kind of self-existent idea.

Some atheists might say that moral values, like Justice, Mercy, Love, and Forbearance, just exist all on their own as sort of abstract moral objects. They have no other foundation; they just exist. We can call this view Atheistic Moral Platonism. According to this view, moral values are not grounded in God. They just exist all on their own.

#### **Unintelligibility of Atheistic Moral Platonism**

What might we say by way of response to Atheistic Moral Platonism? Let me make three responses. First, it seems to me that this view is just unintelligible. I simply don't understand what it means. What does it mean, for example, to say that the moral value Justice just exists? I understand what it means to say that a *person* is just or that some *action* is just, but what does it even mean to say that in the absence of any persons or any objects at all, that Justice just exists? It is hard to understand even what this means. Moral values seem to be properties of persons, and so it is hard to understand how Justice can just exist as a sort of abstraction.

#### **Lack of Moral Obligation on Atheistic Moral Platonism**

Secondly, a major weakness of this view is that it provides no basis for objective moral duties. Let's suppose, for the sake of argument, that moral values like Justice, Love, Forbearance, and Tolerance just exist on their own. Why would that lay any sort of moral obligation upon me? Why would the existence of this realm of ideas make it my duty to

be, say, merciful or loving? Who or what lays such an obligation upon me? Why would I have the moral duty to be merciful or loving? Notice that on this view moral vices like Greed, Hatred, and Selfishness presumably also exist as abstractions. In the absence of any moral law giver, what obligates me to align my life with one set of these abstract ideas rather than with some other set of abstract ideas? There just doesn't seem to be any basis at all for moral duty in this view. In the absence of a moral law giver, Atheistic Moral Platonism lacks any basis for moral obligation.

### **Improbability of Atheistic Moral Platonism**

Finally, thirdly, it is fantastically improbable that the blind evolutionary process should spit forth exactly those kinds of creatures that align with the existence of this realm of abstract values.<sup>145</sup> Remember that they have no relationship with each other at all. The natural realm and this abstract moral realm are completely separate. And yet, lo and behold, the natural realm has by chance alone evolved exactly those kind of creatures whose lives align with these moral duties and values. This seems to be an incredible coincidence when you think about it. It is almost as if the moral realm knew that we were coming! I think it is a far more plausible view to say that both the natural realm and the moral realm are under the sovereignty of a divine being, who is both the creator of natural laws that govern the physical universe and whose commands constitute the moral laws that govern our ethical duties. This is a more coherent view of reality. Theism is a more coherent view because these two realms of reality don't fall apart in this disjointed way. They are both under the sovereignty of a single natural and moral law giver.

For those three reasons, Atheistic Moral Platonism is a less plausible view than theistic based ethics such as I have been defending.

## **DISCUSSION**

*Question:* My atheist friends don't look at it as being abstract, but rather they evolved with the human race and not outside of it. While it is not subject to any individual, but what has evolved with the human race is a common understanding of morals. The moral evolution has risen to the top in order for the human species to progress.

*Answer:* This view (Atheistic Moral Platonism) is very different from the one you just described. You are right: on the popular level you are not going to find many people who hold to this kind of Atheistic Moral Platonism. This is more popular among academics. Professional philosophers would often hold to something like this. But the man-in-the-street is more apt to buy into the view that moral values are just the product of biological and social evolution. What I would argue is that, as I have said last week, that actually *supports* premise (1) because those really aren't moral values. What those are are simply conditions under which the human species will flourish. But there is no reason to think that that species has any sort of intrinsic value, more than mice or rats or ants. And there are certain values which would cause ants to flourish. Or if you want to have mice flourish, there would be certain things that ought to be done to cause those species to flourish. And to think that human flourishing is somehow morally special, as I said, is to

<sup>145</sup> 4:59

be guilty of species-ism, which is an unjustified bias in favor of your own species. What you need to do is ask those folks, “Why is what you are describing not just a reiteration of the view that I am maintaining, namely, that in the absence of God, all you have described is the conditions under which this particular species will flourish and survive? But that does not mean that they are intrinsically morally valuable or that we have any obligation to make this species survive or flourish.” The sociopath who rejects the herd morality is not really doing anything wrong, it seems to me, on this view. Another thing you might say in response to that view is that if you were to rewind the film of evolution, like a movie, and start over again, then a very different sort of creature might have emerged from the evolutionary process with a quite different set of moral values. And if that is the case, then whose are right? Theirs or ours? The answer would have to be, neither one! These are just the byproducts of evolutionary development, and you can’t say that these other beings’ morality is inferior to ours, or that ours is better than theirs. There isn’t any objective truth about these things. That popular view is one that we can exploit in the defense of premise (1). By contrast, Atheistic Moral Platonism really is a rejection of premise (1). It is saying that these moral values and duties just exist without any sort of basis in God.<sup>146</sup>

*Question:* In support of what you are saying, I see when I read in scientific journals that people that hold this popular view will apply an emotive or volitional quality to evolution which is contradictory to the process. Nothing can be evolved in anticipation of some future condition or good. So this is self-contradictory to say that they knew this was going to be good so that is how it evolved.

*Answer:* Evolution is purely accidental. What you describe would be untenable and that kind of anthropomorphism in regard to natural selection or speaking of natural selection as though it had purposes in mind or things to achieve is a misleading way of talking.

*Question:* Does the argument from evolution change if you use the word “absolute” (“absolute objective moral values”).

*Answer:* I don’t think so. I have avoided the word “absolute” in this defense because I am not defending the view that there are absolute moral values in the sense of moral values or duties that are universally applicable regardless of one’s situation. What I am saying is that there are objective moral values, objective moral truths, even if these differ from situation to situation. So, for example, in some situations, it would be wrong to put a bullet into somebody’s head. But in other situations, say, a terrorist attack, it would be right to put a bullet in a terrorist’s head to protect innocent people. In the one case, the action would be objectively bad and in the other case objectively good. So my concern here is with objective moral values as opposed to moral absolutes. There are probably some moral absolutes, for example, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, body, and mind.” I think that holds regardless of your situation. But that is neither here nor there in regards to this argument.

### **Objection: Stubborn Humanism**

The next possible objection to premise (1) is what I call Stubborn Humanism. The atheist

generally wants to affirm objective moral values and duties. He wants to affirm that human beings are morally valuable. Children, for example, are morally valuable, and it is good to love them. So most of them will simply embrace a kind of humanism and just stop there. Whatever contributes to human flourishing is good, and whatever detracts from human flourishing is bad, and that is the end of the story. You just stick with humanism.

But taking human flourishing as your ultimate stopping point is premature. I say that because of two factors: first, its arbitrariness and, second, its implausibility.

Let me say first a word about its arbitrariness. Given atheism, why think that what is conducive to the flourishing of human beings on this planet is valuable as opposed to what is conducive to the flourishing of, say, mosquitoes or rats? Why think that inflicting harm on another member of our species is morally wrong? I put this question once to Walter Sinnott-Armstrong in a debate I had with him at Dartmouth College,<sup>147</sup> and when I asked him why it is wrong to harm another member of our species, his answer was this, “It simply is. Objectively. Don’t you agree?” Well, of course I agree! Yes, it is wrong to hurt another human being. But that wasn’t the question! The question is, *given atheism*, why would it be wrong to hurt another human being? Given an atheistic worldview, picking out human flourishing as the Good is arbitrary, since there is nothing morally special about human beings on a naturalistic worldview.

Secondly, it also seems implausible. What atheists will sometimes say is that once the natural or physical properties of a situation are in place, then the moral properties just automatically, necessarily, attach themselves to that physical situation.<sup>148</sup> The technical term that is used for this is “supervene.” Once you have fixed the natural, physical properties of a situation, then the moral properties come along and supervene on that situation or attach themselves necessarily to it. So, for example, take the situation of a man beating up his wife. Once the physical properties are there of his bludgeoning her and her being beaten and so forth, then the moral property of *badness* just necessarily attaches to that situation. Or, by contrast, take a mother nursing her little infant. Once the physical properties are in place for that to be the case, then the moral property of *goodness* just necessarily attaches, or supervenes, on that situation. Atheists will say that once all the natural properties are in place, the moral properties just automatically come along and supervene on the situation.

On atheism, this is extraordinarily implausible. Given atheism, why think that these strange, non-natural properties like *goodness* and *badness* even exist, much less that they somehow magically attach themselves necessarily to these physical situations? Why in the world would these things come along and supervene on these natural properties? I cannot see any reason, on atheism, to think that, given a full description of the physical situation, that any moral properties at all would come along and attach themselves to that situation. The physical properties would do nothing to fix or determine any of the moral properties of that situation. It is just really implausible that this happens.

What these humanistic philosophers have done is they have adopted what is called a

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<sup>147</sup> This debate occurred in 1999 with a follow up debate in 2000. A book resulted from those debates: *God?: A Debate between a Christian and an Atheist* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>148</sup> 15:07

“shopping list approach” to ethics. Just as you would go to the grocery store with your shopping list and just help yourself to the things on the shelf that you want, so these philosophers go down the philosophical aisle with their shopping carts, and they just help themselves to the moral properties that they need in order for their ethical system to work. But what is wanting here is any sort of *explanation* or *justification* for thinking that situations would have these moral properties attaching to them.

Again, I want to emphasize that it is inadequate for the humanist to say that we just do sense that these situations are good or that they are bad. That is not in dispute. In fact, that is the second premise of the argument – there are objective values and duties. Rather, the question is *why*, on atheism, should we think that human beings are morally significant or that they have any moral duties. It seems to me that humanism is nothing more than a stubborn, moral faith in a naturalistic universe.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* I am reminded of a debate you had where your opponent asked if you had any friends after you mentioned that point!

*Answer:* That was Louise Antony at the University of Massachusetts,<sup>149</sup> where she remarked, “Don’t you dare tell me that on my atheistic view my children have no moral value because you will find I can be very strong or aggressive.” I forget her exact words. I then said, “But on atheism, I can’t see any reason to think your children have any moral value.” And she looked at me and said, “I wonder if you have any friends!” That was all the refutation that she could offer.

*Followup:* Yeah, a devastating rebuttal! On the concept of supervening properties, do you ever exploit the fact that they are affirming an immaterial entity?

*Answer:* I don’t, but my colleague J. P. Moreland likes to. Notice that in appealing to things like Atheistic Moral Platonism or talking about these non-natural properties, the atheist has moved away from a materialistic view of the world. He is admitting now that there are non-physical, immaterial realities like values or properties, and that is a move away from a kind of hard-nosed naturalism. I don’t exploit that view because so many naturalists are quite ready to say that there are non-physical realities. That may surprise you, but that is actually true. A great many naturalists today are not physicalists or materialists. They think there are non-material realities. But that softens the ground to think that there is a non-physical reality like God. So I don’t exploit that, but you are quite right that it is a move away from a hard line naturalistic/materialistic view of what exists.<sup>150</sup>

*Question:* In the supervening of properties, you say the moral properties attach themselves after the natural properties are fixed.

<sup>149</sup> This debate was titled “Is God Necessary for Morality?” and occurred in 2008. For a video of this debate (split into two parts), see:

Part 1: <http://www.rfmedia.org/av/video/is-god-necessary-for-morality-craig-vs-antony-1>

Part 2: <http://www.rfmedia.org/av/video/is-god-necessary-for-morality-craig-vs-antony-2>

<sup>150</sup> 20:34

*Answer:* Not in a chronological sense, but they are explanatorily secondary.

*Followup:* A chronological morality seems worthless. I would need them to show up before the physical properties appeared, so I can fix the situation according to those moral laws.

*Answer:* When I say “after” here, I do not mean in a chronological sense. It is more like the foundation is the physical properties, and then what lies on top of them are the moral properties. But these would be simultaneous, although one would be more basic than the other. Even though they are simultaneous, one is after it in the sense that the other one is the foundation, and the moral properties are on top of that in a sense. But it is still, on naturalism, very odd to think that when these primate animals called human beings nurse their children, there are these moral properties that somehow attach to this situation. I just can’t see any reason to think that would happen, given atheism.

*Question:* Do you find this evolutionary, socio-biological explanation to be the most common among naturalists when trying to argue their side or during debates?

*Answer:* Not in my debates, as I will say when I come to the second premise. Very, very few of the atheist philosophers I have debated take this kind of hard-nosed, evolutionary line that we described earlier. Most of them will be more like Atheistic Moral Platonists. They will want to affirm that there are these objective moral values and duties, and these are not just the spin-offs of social and biological evolution. What you are talking about is how moral values and duties might be explained as illusions that arise in us because of our kinship to other genetically similar organisms and the selfish gene in order to survive. They get individuals to perform sacrificial acts that will hurt the individual, but it will be good for the propagation of the species. As I say, you can see that even among ants in an ant heap. There are soldier ants which will give up their lives for the sake of the ant heap because instinct has programmed it into these ants to perish fighting for the queen or for the ant heap. But it is not because they do this out of moral duty or anything of that sort – they don’t do anything praiseworthy. It is just blind evolutionary instinct that has been built into the ants because that will make the ant species survive if some of the soldier ants are willing to give up their lives for the ant heap. That is all moral values are among human beings as well. They are just illusions inculcated into us by natural selection and parental conditioning and societal conditioning to get us to perform in various ways that would be conducive to the survival of the human species. It seems to me that is all they are on the atheistic view. That is why premise (1) is true.

*Question:* Remember the ’50s and ’60s alien movies where aliens come to Earth and tell humans that, because they have detonated a nuclear bomb, they must be stopped before they spread their violence to other parts of the universe? That is a perfectly reasonable view, though humanists would argue otherwise. Humans aren’t any great bargain, what with our wars and violence over the centuries. How can you as a humanist say, “This is good because it advances mankind?” First you have got to prove that advancing mankind is good, and, without God, I don’t see any evidence of that.<sup>151</sup>

*Answer:* This is an excellent illustration. It parallels the illustration I gave when I said rewind the film of evolution, start over again, and a very different creature might evolve

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<sup>151</sup> 25:08

with different values and duties. The other illustration is this extraterrestrial intelligent life who comes to Earth with a significantly different set of moral values. Who would be right? Us or them? There isn't any objective way to decide. Michael Ruse, who is an agnostic philosopher of science and an evolutionist, has written a wonderful article titled, "Is Rape Wrong on Andromeda?" He argues in this essay that there is no guarantee that a race of intelligent beings from the galaxy Andromeda might think that rape is not a good thing. In that race, rape would be regarded as perfectly moral and all right. In my debate that I had with Michael Ruse, I quoted his own article and asked what he would say if these beings came to the Earth and they decided to go throughout the Earth raping and killing? Maybe they are more advanced than us, comparable to the way we are advanced to, say, cattle and sheep, and they begin to farm the Earth and use us for food. What would we say as to why this would be wrong? This is wrong for us? Well, the aliens would say, "That's just a product of your evolutionary conditioning. There is no reason we should think that it is wrong to eat you or to rape throughout the Earth." So I think this extraterrestrial illustration is a very powerful illustration that, in the absence of God, human morality isn't objective. It has no more claim to be objective than some extraterrestrial alien morality.

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That completes the defense of premise (1), which brings us to the second premise that *objective moral values and duties do exist*. I initially thought that this would be the really controversial premise in the argument. But what I have found with my debates with atheist philosophers is almost nobody disputes this second premise. In fact, surveys actually show that university faculty are less relativistic than students. They are more apt to believe in objective moral values and duties than the students do, and of the faculty, the branch that believes most in objective moral values and duties are the philosophers. So the philosophers, whose job it is to reflect about ethics, are the ones most apt to believe in objective moral values and duties, more so than the rest of the faculty, and the faculty believe in them more so than the students. So it is really quite a wrong impression to think that it is in the university faculties that all of this relativism is being propagated. It is more common among the students.

Next time, what we will do is look at what justification exists for premise (2) – why is it that even most non-Christian, non-theistic philosophers believe that objective moral values and duties exist?<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Total Running Time: 28:40 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § IV. MORAL ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 4

### **Objection: Socio-Biological Evolution**

We have been talking about the Moral Argument for God's existence, and today we want to finally draw this discussion to a close by looking at the second premise of that argument, which is *objective moral values and duties do exist*.

#### ***Defense of Premise (2)***

I initially thought that this was going to be the really controversial premise in the argument; that it would be almost impossible to convince people that objective moral values and duties really do exist. But I must say that, in my debates with atheist philosophers, what I have found is that almost nobody denies this premise. Virtually everyone, if you push them far enough, will affirm the existence of some objective moral values and duties.

Philosophers who reflect upon our moral experience find no more reason to deny that experience than our experience of the physical world. We trust our physical senses to tell us that there is a world of physical objects out there, unless we have some good reason to think that our senses are misfiring. There are such things as mirages or such illusions as when the stick placed in the jar of water looks bent, but we know that it is not. So sometimes our physical perceptions are mistaken. But nobody thinks that that would justify a sort of overwhelming skepticism that says there is no physical world out there, you are just a body lying in the Matrix experiencing a virtual reality. In the absence of some overwhelming defeater, we are perfectly rational to trust our sensory experience that there is a world of physical objects around us.

Similarly, in exactly the same way, in the absence of some sort of a reason to distrust my moral experience, I am rational to believe that there are objective moral values and duties – that there are things that are objectively good and evil or right and wrong. Most all of us would agree that we do experience objective moral values and duties. They impose themselves upon us.

I remember I was speaking several years ago at a Canadian University, and as I walked through the hall I saw a poster on the wall posted by the Sexual Assault and Information Center. And it read, "Sexual Assault: No one has the right to abuse a child, a woman, or a man." Now think about that. I think most of us would recognize that that is true. But a naturalist, an atheist, can't make any sense out of a person's right not to be sexually abused. In nature, whatever is, is right. And yet most of us recognize the truth of that sign – that sexual abuse like rape, pedophilia, torture, or incest are really morally wrong. By the same token, we recognize that things like love, self-sacrifice, generosity are really good.

People who fail to see the difference between these are just like people who are blind. A physically blind person doesn't have an accurate perception of the world of physical

objects around him, but that doesn't cause us to doubt our physical perceptions of reality. In the same way, the person who can't see the difference between nurturing and loving a child versus torturing and abusing that child is just morally handicapped; he is morally blind. There is no reason to let his moral inhibition cause us to doubt what we do clearly perceive. Thus, any argument for moral skepticism would have to be based upon premises which are less obvious than premise (2) of the Moral Argument, that *there are moral values and duties that are objective*.

I have found, frankly, that when you talk with most people, 95% or more – although they may at first give some lip service to relativism – very rapidly can be convinced that there are objective moral values and duties. Just give them a few illustrations to make the point.<sup>153</sup> For example, ask what they think of the ancient Hindu practice called “sutee” which was put to a halt by the British when they colonized India. In sutee they would take the widow of a man who had died, and they would throw her alive onto his funeral pyre, and she would be burned alive along with her husband's body. Ask if they think that is a moral thing to do to a woman. Or take the ancient Chinese practice of binding the feet of little girls so tightly as to resemble lotus blossoms that they would be permanently crippled for life. Is that really a moral thing to do to a little girl? Or you can make the point really effectively by using examples of abuse by Christians. The Crusades, for example, or the Spanish Inquisition. Do they think they were morally indifferent? Ask them what they think about Catholic priests who abuse little boys and then the Church trying to cover it up by just shifting that priest to another diocese without actually disciplining him. Don't they think that that would be wrong to do? I can almost guarantee you that if you are dealing with someone who is really honest and sincere, then he will very quickly come to agree that there are objective moral values and duties.

Of course, occasionally you will find some hardliners who will just bite the bullet and say there are no objective moral values and duties. But I think that this position is seen by most people to be so extreme that they become very quickly repulsed by it. For example, several years ago I attended a session of the Society of Biblical Literature on “Biblical Authority and Homosexuality.” All of the panelists on this panel endorsed the practice of homosexual activity – that this was morally permissible. And one panelist justified this by saying that the biblical prohibitions of such activity just reflect the cultural context in which the biblical author wrote and that, therefore, they are not timeless ethical truths. They are just reflections of that biblical culture. But that is the case for *all* of Scripture's commands! They weren't written in a vacuum. They all reflect the culture in which they were written. This would imply that there are no Scriptural truths that are normative and timeless, and so this panelist concluded, “There are no timeless, normative moral truths in Scripture.” During the discussion period, I got up and I said, “If there aren't any timeless, normative moral truths in Scripture, then doesn't that just lead to socio-cultural relativism? So you could not condemn even a culture which practices the discrimination and abuse of homosexuals. You are actually sanctioning anti-homosexual behavior by what you are saying!” And he responded to this with a fog of theological double-talk and said that basically there is no place outside of Scripture either where we can find timeless, normative moral truths. And I said, “But then that just *is* ethical relativism. You are just saying there are no objective, normative values or duties. And that just *is* moral

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<sup>153</sup> 4:55

relativism.” “In fact,” I said, “On your view, there is no content to the affirmation that God is good. What does it mean to say that God is good if there are no objective moral values? He might as well be dead!” And I pointed out Nietzsche thought that the death of God meant moral nihilism, that there is no objective moral value or duty in life. At that point another panelist came in with a peremptory remark – she said, “Well, if you are going to get pejorative about it, we might as well not talk about it!” And, well, that was meant to stop the debate right there! So I sat down. But the point wasn’t lost on the audience. A man then got up in the audience and said, “I am a pastor, and people are always coming to me, asking me if they have done something wrong and if they need forgiveness. For example, isn’t it always wrong to abuse a child?” And still this woman on the panel would not admit it! She said, “What counts as abuse differs from society to society. So we can’t really use the word ‘abuse’ without tying it to a historical context.” Well, the pastor didn’t quit! He said, “You call it whatever you want, but the fact is, abuse is damaging children. Isn’t it always wrong to damage children?” And she still wouldn’t admit it! And I think this kind of hardness of heart ultimately backfires upon the atheist and really exposes in the mind of most people the bankruptcy of such a worldview.<sup>154</sup>

So in our moral experience, I think we have every good reason to affirm the reality of objective moral values and duties, unless there is some overriding defeater that should cause us to think otherwise.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Isn’t there a difference in your examples? Sutee is an example where an entire population practices it [*i.e. is condoned by society*] but abuse by Catholic priests was behavior that was abhorrent in our society. Is that a relative judgment we are making on that society?

*Answer:* I would argue that it is not relative. The fact that a whole culture can participate in misbehavior is no reason at all to think that what they are doing is morally indifferent and is good. And surely we have examples of that in, for example, Nazi Germany. National Socialism had an ethic in which it was not immoral to kill Jews, homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Gypsies, and other undesirables; and they sent 11 million people to the gas chambers and ovens. Or take South Africa, where people were delegitimized simply on the basis of their skin color. I think we should have no reason to say that entire societies and cultures do not sometimes participate in immoral behavior. So the number of people doing it doesn’t affect the objective rightness or wrongness.

*Question:* I guess it gets hard when you try to decide which values are objective and which are not. For example, would you say homosexual activity is objectively morally wrong, and on what basis would you say this?

*Answer:* What this question is asking is, “What is the content of our moral values and duties?” And I have not taken a position on that. That is quite open for debate. But this is a discussion of what is called “moral ontology,” that is to say, what the *foundations* of duty and ethics are. You are asking a question about “applied ethics” or “practical ethics,”

that is, “Is this really wrong?” That is not germane to the argument. That is important and interesting, but it is not germane to either premise.

To answer your question directly, I do think that homosexual activity is morally wrong, and I would say that on the basis of God’s revelation in Scripture. I have good reason to believe that Scripture is a revelation from God, that God’s commands to us supply our moral duties, and that he has prohibited this activity, and therefore it is wrong. Moral duties are rooted in the divine commands; values are rooted in God’s nature. So if God were to command us not to eat beans, I would say it would be immoral to eat beans. God has the right to prohibit that. And, in fact, he did prohibit certain things in the Old Testament arbitrarily that shouldn’t be eaten. Or certain types of cloths or tissues should not be put together, like linen and wool and so forth. Those, then, become moral duties for us to obey and they are objective because they are rooted in God’s commands and in his very nature.

### **Objection: Socio-Biological Evolution**

What objection might be raised to trusting our moral experience? You remember I talked about the socio-biological account of the origin of moral beliefs. Many people think that our moral beliefs are spin-offs of biological and social evolution and conditioning. Some might say that this socio-biological account of the origins of morality undermines our moral experience. But is this true? Does the socio-biological account of the origins of morality undermine or give us reason to distrust our moral experience?<sup>155</sup>

Think about that. On the one hand, the socio-biological account, if true, does nothing to undermine the truth of our moral beliefs. To think that it undermines the truths of our moral beliefs is to commit the genetic fallacy. The genetic fallacy attempts to invalidate a person’s point of view by showing how he came to hold it. For example, “The only reason why you believe in democracy is because you were raised in the West. If you had been raised somewhere else, you would not, maybe, believe in democracy.” Or, “The only reason that you believe in the Big Bang theory is because you were raised in modern times of astronomy and culture.” This is an attempt to invalidate a person’s belief by showing how that belief originated. And that is simply fallacious because how a person came to arrive at a belief is independent of the truth of the belief. You may have acquired your moral beliefs by reading a comic book or through divining tea leaves in the bottom of a tea cup. That doesn’t do anything to say that your moral beliefs are therefore untrue.

If God exists, then he is the foundation of moral values and duties regardless of how we come to apprehend them or come to learn about them. So, at best, the socio-biological account would prove that our perception of the moral realm is the product of a gradual and fallible evolution. But it wouldn’t show that objective moral values and duties do not exist, just that we come to perceive them in this gradual and fallible way. But if moral values and duties objectively exist and are grounded in God, then our gradual, fallible apprehension of the moral realm does nothing more to undermine the objectivity of that realm than our gradual, fallible apprehension of the physical world undermines the objectivity of the physical realm around us. In both cases, there is an objective reality of

<sup>155</sup> 15:03

which we have a gradual, fallible apprehension.

I think that it is clear that the socio-biological account does nothing to undermine the truth of the second premise that *objective moral values and duties exist*. But, someone might say, maybe the socio-biological account undermines, not the truth of our moral beliefs, but it undermines our *justification* for those beliefs. If you acquired your moral beliefs through reading tea leaves or a comic book, they might turn out to be true accidentally, but you would not have any good reason for your moral beliefs. They would just happen to be true, but you wouldn't be able to have any justification for thinking they are true. You wouldn't know them to be true. And similarly, the objection might be here that if our moral beliefs are the product of biological and social evolution, then we can't have any confidence in their truth because evolution aims, not at truth, but at survival value. Beliefs are selected by evolution for how well they help the species to survive, not for whether or not they are true. So it could be that our moral beliefs have been selected by evolution because of their survival value, not because of their truth. And therefore we cannot really trust our moral experience and affirm that premise (2) is true. It could be true, but we would not have any justification for believing it to be true.

There are two problems with this objection to our knowledge of premise (2). First of all, the objection assumes that atheism is true. It is question begging. It assumes that atheism is true. If there is no God, then our moral beliefs are just the product of socio-biological evolution. I argued the same thing in my defense of premise (1). If there is no God, then moral values and duties are just the products of the socio-biological process. But that is no reason to think that the socio-biological account is, in fact, true. If God exists, then it is very likely that he would want us to have true moral beliefs.<sup>156</sup> Therefore, he would either guide the evolutionary process so as to produce those beliefs or else he would instill them in us in a kind of instinctual way in the way that Romans 2:15 says he has done. He has placed the moral law upon the heart of every person. So only if atheism is true do we have reason to distrust our moral experience. And to assume that atheism is true would be begging the question. Only if atheism is true, do we have reason to distrust our moral experience. So the objection just assumes the truth of atheism and is question-begging.

The second response to this objection is that it is self-defeating; it refutes itself. On atheism, all of our beliefs, not just our moral beliefs, but all of them, are selected for their survival value, not for their truth. Evolution doesn't aim at truth, it just aims at survivability. And so what the evolutionary account would lead to is not just skepticism about our moral beliefs; it would lead to total skepticism about *all* of our beliefs. We cannot be confident that anything we believe is true because it is the product of faculties that are just geared toward survival and not toward truth. But then that is self-defeating because then your belief in the theory of evolution and in naturalism is itself the product of these cognitive faculties that are not aimed at truth but at mere survival. And so you couldn't have any confidence in the objection. So the objection undermines itself. It is like sawing the limb off on which you sit. It attacks the reliability of our rational faculties and thereby undermines itself, since that objection is itself a product of our rational faculties. So the objection itself would be the product of just biological and social

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<sup>156</sup> 20:05

conditioning, and we'd have no justification in thinking that it is true.

So the objection based on the socio-biological account to our justification of premise (2) is question-begging because it assumes atheism is true and, secondly, it is self-defeating because if it is correct, you would have no good reason to believe the objection itself.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Therefore, from the warrant that our moral experience provides for premise (2), we do have good grounds for believing objective moral values and duties do exist.

From the two premises:

4. If God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist.
5. Objective moral values and duties do exist.

it follows logically and inescapably that

6. Therefore, God exists.

The Moral Argument supplements the two Cosmological Arguments and the Teleological Argument by showing us that this Creator and Designer of the universe is also the locus of absolute moral goodness and the source of all moral value in life. It gives us a personal, necessarily existing being, who is not only perfectly good, but whose very nature is the Good – it is the standard of goodness – and whose commands constitute our moral duties. So this powerfully supplements the arguments we already looked at by filling out the moral nature of God and also reemphasizes that he must be a necessarily existing being to ground necessary values and is also personal because value is lodged in persons.

This is an extremely powerful argument for God's existence. In fact, I would say that in my experience this Moral Argument is the most compelling argument for the existence of God in the thinking of most people. I say this with reluctance because my favorite is the Cosmological Argument – I really like that one. But the Cosmological Argument doesn't really connect with people in the way the Moral Argument does. You can brush off these philosophical arguments for the finitude of the past or the scientific evidence for the beginning of the universe.<sup>157</sup> But you can't so easily brush off the Moral Argument. Every day you get up you answer, by how you behave and how you treat other people, whether or not you believe there are objective moral values and duties. So the Moral Argument is inescapable, it hits us at the very core of our beings because every day we answer the question of whether we believe there are objective moral values and duties – it is simply unavoidable.

To revisit that question that we asked at the very beginning of this examination of the Moral Argument, "Can we be good without God?" – the answer is, no, we cannot truly be good without God because only if God exists is there objective moral value and duty in life. We cannot truly be good without God. But if we can, in some measure, be good, then it follows logically that God exists.

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<sup>157</sup> 25:00

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* So we know the Good does exist, but our coming to know it is dependent on God's nature to reveal it. God could exist, good could exist, and we could be a world where we only know some truths, like it was before Christ came.

*Answer:* Even before Christ came, the Scripture says that God has written the moral law on all people's hearts, so all people in any time and place in history can have an understanding of God's basic moral law. But certainly God's will in all its fullness isn't revealed until Christ comes. That is certainly true. I think you are right in saying that whether or not we do come to a correct apprehension of moral truth is going to be dependent upon God. He is going to need to guide the process, to enlighten our minds, and so forth, by which we come to know moral values. We are going to need the right kind of faculties to apprehend our duties, and that will ultimately depend on him.

*Followup:* His nature of goodness implies that he wants us to know him.

*Answer:* I think so. I don't think that there is a possible world in which God exists, he creates persons in his image, and then he abandons them to utter moral error and doesn't give them any faculties by which they can know right from wrong. That seems incompatible with God's goodness and therefore not even logically possible.

*Question:* The point is, people can be good without knowing God but not if God doesn't exist.

*Answer:* Thank you! That is exactly right. This reminds us of the difference between God's existence and believing in God. The argument is not that you have to believe in God in order to be good; rather the argument is that God must exist in order for goodness to exist.

*Question:* One of the reasons why I think the Moral Argument is so effective is that many of our morals do not make sense from an evolutionary perspective. For example, if a girl who is 20 years old gave her life to save her grandmother, it would be a completely stupid thing to do from an evolutionary perspective because she could have children and continue humanity, whereas her grandmother obviously cannot.

*Answer:* Exactly! People like Richard Dawkins look at Mother Teresa, who doesn't bear children and gives up her life serving the poor, and they think she is an evolutionary misfit. She is a misfiring of nature. So there are lots of other moral arguments as well. I have just focused on one that I find particularly persuasive. But you are right – the adequacy of evolutionary theory to account for altruism and self-sacrifice and so forth is very controverted today and subject of much debate.

*Question:* Can you comment on the ubiquitous nature of relativism in the media versus the university? I heard it is on its way out.

*Answer:* I think that although relativism appears ubiquitous in our culture, it is very shallow. I think it is a thin veneer, and when you probe just below the surface, you find people do hold deeply held moral beliefs that are objective in their thinking – belief, for example, in tolerance. Tolerance, open mindedness, and fair play are deeply held beliefs.

I remember a book by William Watkins,<sup>158</sup> where I thought he got it exactly right. He called it the “new absolutism.” It is not that we live in an age of relativism. We really don’t! We live in an age of new absolutes. The old conservative absolutes like sexual purity, modesty, and so forth have gone by the boards; but in their place there is a set of new absolutes which include things like tolerance, open mindedness, and so forth. And these are deeply held moral beliefs that folks have today.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> William Watkins, *The New Absolutes*, (Bethany House Publishers 1997)

<sup>159</sup> Total Running Time: 31:52 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § V. ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 1

## Ontological Argument

### ***Introduction***

The Ontological Argument for the existence of God was originated by a Benedictine monk in the 11<sup>th</sup> century named St. Anselm, who was the Archbishop of Canterbury. Anselm had been working on arguments for the existence of God – he was a natural theologian. But he was frustrated because he wanted to find a single argument that would prove that God exists with all of God’s superlative attributes. And he had nearly given up on this quest when he came upon the concept of God as the greatest conceivable being. God, he said, must be the greatest conceivable being because if you could conceive of anything greater than God, then *that* would be God. By definition, the concept of God is the concept of the greatest conceivable being.

Anselm believed that once a person came to truly understand this notion of a greatest conceivable being, then that person would see that such a being must exist – the existence of God follows from the very concept of God. That is why Anselm believed the Scriptures say that “The fool has said in his heart there is no God” – because once you understand the concept of God, you will see that God must exist and, therefore, anyone who asserts that God does not exist is uttering a logically incoherent statement.

Anselm’s argument came to be known as the Ontological Argument from the Greek word “*ontos*” which means “being.” The thing that makes an ontological argument an ontological argument is that the argument attempts to deduce the being, or the existence, of God from the very concept of God. Once you understand the concept of God, then you will see that God exists.

The argument has gone through a long history of revision and development, and the version that I want to share with you in this class is one that has been developed by a man who is widely regarded as the greatest living Christian philosopher: Alvin Plantinga. In order to understand Plantinga’s argument, it is helpful to have a little bit of philosophical background so as to grasp the argument.

### ***Philosophical Background***

#### **Possible Worlds**

Plantinga’s version of the argument appeals to the language of “possible worlds.” What do we mean when we talk about possible worlds? We are not talking about planets or even another universe. Rather, by a “possible world” one simply means a sort of maximal description of reality. I think maybe the best way to think of a possible world is to think of it as a conjunction of true propositions. Let’s imagine some propositions *p*, *q*, *r*, *s*, and so on. These would be statements like, “Joe Jones teaches at Georgia Tech,” “Georgia

Tech campus is in Atlanta,” “Bob Smith attends Defenders class at Johnson Ferry Baptist Church.” These are all just various truths or various propositions. You can imagine a possible world as just a huge conjunction of such propositions:

$p \ \& \ q \ \& \ r \ \& \ s \ \& \ . . .$

so that all of the propositions that are true are included in that conjunction. We can alter some of these propositions – we can negate them – to arrive at a different world. For example, a series of possible worlds might be:

World #1 could be:  $p \ \& \ q \ \& \ r \ \& \ s \ \& \ . . .$

World #2 could be:  $\text{not-}p \ \& \ q \ \& \ \text{not-}r \ \& \ s \ \& \ . . .$

World #3 could be:  $\text{not-}p \ \& \ \text{not-}q \ \& \ r \ \& \ s \ \& \ . . .$

World #4 could be:  $p \ \& \ \text{not-}q \ \& \ \text{not-}r \ \& \ \text{not-}s \ \& \ . . .$ <sup>160</sup>

Each one of these will represent a different possible world – a maximal description of the way reality might be. When we are talking about possible worlds, we are not talking about parallel universes or other sorts of worlds that exist, populated with actual people and things. We are just talking about abstract descriptions, maximal descriptions, of the way reality might be.

Since each one of these worlds has to be a possible world, that means that the propositions that make up the conjunction need to be able to be true together. They need to be able to be true individually, and they need to be able to be true conjunctively – that is, together. For example, take a proposition like “The prime minister is a prime number.” That is not even possibly true. A prime minister could not be a prime number because a prime number is a sort of mathematical abstract object, which couldn’t fill the role of a prime minister. So that proposition will not be even possibly true. It is not a member of any description of reality. That proposition will be false in every possible world. It will be necessarily false that the prime minister is a prime number. So that proposition will be false in every possible world.

But by contrast, take a proposition like “Hillary Clinton is the President of the United States of America.” That proposition is not true, but it is possibly true. There is a possible description of reality in which Hillary Clinton is the President of the United States. So that proposition is true in some possible worlds. There are descriptions of reality in which that proposition is true. To say that Hillary Clinton is the President of the United States in some possible world just means that there is a description of the way the world might be which includes that proposition in it.

To say that God exists in some possible world is simply to say that the proposition that God exists is true in one of these possible worlds. To say that God exists in a possible world is simply to say that that proposition is true in one of these descriptions of reality.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Some would say that God does not exist in this real world that we live in. I am

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having difficulty how to calculate that into what you said.

*Answer:* If a person says that God doesn't exist in the actual world, that is to say that this proposition is false in the description that is the actual world. In other words, one of these worlds that we have mentioned here is the actual world. The actual world is a possible world. Let's call the actual world, say, Alpha, and maybe it is World #3. So World #3 is the actual world, and these other worlds are not actual. And in this actual world the atheist is claiming the proposition "God exists" is false. As theists, we disagree – we think that that proposition is true in the actual world, that God exists, but the atheist disagrees. He'll say that proposition is false in the actual world.

*Question:* I thought about this argument for some time and to me it is about 99% question begging. [Dr. Craig interjects and says that he hasn't presented the argument yet and don't poison the well before we drink!] I don't buy the argument and the first reason I don't buy it is this #2. [Dr. Craig interjects again and says we haven't got to #2 yet – we are still just defining our terms!]. OK, then forget the numbers and let's continue with what you just said. The idea of possible worlds is a bogus concept or one I don't get. You said there is a world in which Hillary Clinton is President of the United States. Yes, there is and I would call that Wonderland.<sup>161</sup> That is a fantasy world; that is not a real world [Dr. Craig interjects and says, "Right, I agree!"]. So, if something possibly exists – first of all, you said it is not given; it is only a possibility that it exists – so if it is a possible proposition such that something exists in some possible world. Well, yeah, but that world is perhaps a fantasy world, so what good is it? We can all imagine a world where anything can happen – we can have giant bunnies and a one hundred foot Sta-Puff marshmallow man or anything we want. But as long as it is possible, how does that relate to truth? And you said this is a description of reality? That is no description of reality. There is no reality in which Hillary Clinton is President of the United States.

*Answer:* I largely agree with what you say. These other worlds, you can call it "Alice In Wonderland World," or "Fantasy World," or anything like that, that is fine. All that these are are maximal descriptions of the way reality *might* be, not the way reality *is*. We have already said the actual world is described by one set of propositions. But those propositions are not necessarily true – they could have been false. And if they were, you would have another description of the way the world is. That doesn't mean that just anything could be. As I said, it is impossible that the prime minister be a prime number – there is no possible world in which that is true. There is no possible world in which there are married bachelors or where there are round triangles and things of that sort. So this idea of possibility and necessity is definitely an important idea, especially when we are trying to sort out nonsense from what is meaningful. Very often people will assert self-contradictions, and they need to be told that that isn't even possible. There is no possible world, for example, in which God is evil and creates people that go through unremitting suffering and never have a chance to experience good. That is an impossibility – there is no possible world like that.

*Followup:* One other thing. The phrase "reality might be" – but reality *is*. And there is no conditions to reality – when you say reality might be, you are having a conditional voice.

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But reality is, and it is one thin little set, and then everything else is not reality.

*Answer:* Yes, that is right, but there is this idea here that I think we need to get a handle on of what is called modality. Modality is what is concerned with possibility and necessity.<sup>162</sup> You are right: whatever *is*, is real. Or, whatever is real, *is*. That is the way things are *de facto*. But not everything that is, is necessarily. Things could be different, and not everything you can just imagine in your mind is really possible. There are some ways reality could not have been. Self-contradictions, for example. So we are asking questions here not just about the way things are but about the way things could have been, or the way things might be. That is really significant. This idea of the modes of existence is very important. Whether something is possible, whether something is impossible, whether it is necessary, whether it is contingent – these are important questions to ask and intelligible.

*Question:* Maybe a simple layman’s view of saying this is, “This is the reality of today, but things could change, and then tomorrow we could have a different reality.”

*Answer:* This raises an interesting question. This is really a knotty problem; and that is, how do you introduce time into these worlds? – because things change over time. So *p* maybe true today, like “Obama is the President of the United States.” But that hasn’t always been true, and it won’t always be true, so reality itself is changing. So what you would have to do would be to outfit these propositions with times and dates, so that their truth value doesn’t change. You would say, “Barack Obama is President of the United States in 2010.” That is always true if it is ever true. In 40 B.C, it is true that Barack Obama is President of the United States in 2010. And it would be true long after he is dead and gone.

So we are talking here, not just about the way the world changes over time – you are quite right that the world does change over time – , but we are talking here about the way things might have been but never will be.<sup>163</sup> For example, God might never have created the world. As Christians, that is what we believe. We believe that creation was a free act of God – that is, there was no compulsion. There is a possible world in which all of the propositions about the things that we see around us, they are all false. What is true in that world is “God exists alone” – there is no universe, there is no time, there are no people, there is no space. You would just have propositions about God and what he does and is and so forth. That is a possible way reality might have been. You see what I mean? We are talking here, not just about change over time, but about totally different ways reality might have been. That is often the way philosophers define possible worlds. They will often say a possible world is just “a way things might have been.” I like the concept of conjunctive propositions because it helps you to make it more concrete – to think of a possible world as just a conjunction of all these propositions that describe the way the world is.

*Question:* Is this somewhat related to God and middle knowledge?

*Answer:* It is related in that, if you remember our discussion on God’s omniscience, we

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<sup>162</sup> A formal definition of modality can be worded as follows: “a classification of propositions on the basis of whether they claim necessity or possibility or impossibility”

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said that God is all-knowing and so he knows all possible worlds before he creates this world. He knew the range of possibilities that were open to him to create, and he chose which possible world would be the actual world.

*Followup:* That affects us because he knows, based on our free will, what we could have chosen and he also knew what we did choose, right?

*Answer:* I would affirm that, yes. Now here we are getting a little off on a tangent, but you are recalling what we talked about when we talked about the attributes of God. God knows what we could have done had some other world been actual. He knows that I could have been a firefighter, say, or a farmer, or something of that sort, had one of these other worlds been actual. What middle knowledge says is even more radical than that. What it says is God also knows what I would have done, had I been in some other circumstances. Not merely what I *could* have done, but what I actually *would* have done. That is even more radical – to suggest that God knows something like that. But that isn't presupposed in what we are talking about here. So you can just leave that to the side. What we were just talking about here is that when people talk about possible worlds they don't mean that there are these other mysterious realities out there. These are just imaginary. They are ways the world might have been.

### **Maximal Excellence and Maximal Greatness**

Plantinga's argument appeals to the idea of God as a maximally great being. What does Plantinga mean by that? First, he talks about what it is to be a maximally excellent being. Plantinga says a being that is maximally excellent would have such attributes as being omniscient, or all-knowing, he would be omnipotent, and he would be perfectly good. If a being is *maximally excellent*, he'll be omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. A *maximally great* being will be a being which is maximally excellent in all possible worlds. It would be a being which has omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence in every possible world. That is what it means to be maximally great. That would be the greatest conceivable being, this idea of a maximally great being.

## **DISCUSSION**

*Question:* Why does he necessarily have to be omnibenevolent?

*Answer:* To be loving, to be good, is a great-making property. You are greater if you are loving and have this virtue, than if you are hateful or even cold or somewhat indifferent. These are what are called great-making properties. A being which has them is greater than one which doesn't, and therefore a maximally great being would need to have these properties.<sup>164</sup>

Lest you think that this material is so difficult to understand that it is of no value whatsoever, I want to share with you a letter that I just got two weeks ago from a man in

Australia who teaches a Sunday school class of children. This is what he wrote:

Dear Dr. Craig,

Greetings from South Side International Church in Brisbane, Australia. I would like to express my appreciation for your excellent ministry, which has been very useful to our church. I am a Sunday school teacher with a class of wonderful students ages 8 to 10 years old. For a while now I have been teaching, and I have used material from your website to prepare Sunday school lessons in apologetics. Your ministry is helping us to teach them a defense of Christianity. For example, one of the students liked the lesson so much that she went home and shared it with her non-Christian father. He previously had thought Christianity was silly, but after reading her worksheet, he said that actually makes sense. I have found the students to be so intelligent that they were taught the Cosmological, Moral, Teleological, and even Ontological Arguments. Not only did they find the lessons enjoyable, most of them even seemed to understand it. I have attached a copy of their Sunday School worksheet so you can see for yourself. (...and then he includes these worksheets...) God is using your work to help these children to become strong in the faith. With God's grace they will grow up to become mature, intelligent, and active Christians through your work. Perhaps some of them will even decide to become an apologist like yourself when they are older. All of us at South Side International Church again say thank you for the work that you do.

And then the teacher and children sign it.

Here is the Sunday school worksheet that these children work on the Ontological Argument [*he shows the class the worksheets*].<sup>165</sup> And it starts off talking about how to understand the word "possible." He differentiates possibility of knowledge and possibility of existence. What possibility of existence means is what could exist or what could be real. For example, I could have been fat. Me being very fat is possible. I could have had five sisters. Me having five sisters is possible. I could have been a prince or princess. Me being a prince is possible. You can see from the doodles that the children have filled in all of these worksheets on the Ontological Argument with incredible depth of understanding about these notions of maximal excellence, maximal greatness, possibility, and so forth.

So I get really impatient with adults who depreciate themselves and say, "I am too stupid to understand this." Nonsense! You are not too stupid to understand this. This is stuff that an 8 or 10 year old can get, and you can get it, too. That is a real encouragement to all of us to see that this material really is graspable.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* I am trying to understand that if there are certain attributes that God does have,

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<sup>165</sup> This material has actually now been published as both a student workbook and teacher handbook. See William Lane Craig and Joseph Tang, *The Defense Never Rests: A Workbook for Budding Apologists* (CreateSpace, 2011) and William Lane Craig and Joseph Tang, *The Defense Never Rests: Teacher's Handbook* (CreateSpace, 2011)

is he under certain obligations due to having those attributes?

*Answer:* I don't think that follows from this. These are further questions that one could ask. For example, you might say, is a being who is omnibenevolent morally obligated to do certain things or not? That will raise really difficult questions. When I talked about the Moral Argument for God's existence, when we talked about the goodness of God, when we looked at the attributes of God – I don't think God has any moral obligations. I think moral obligations stem from God's commands.<sup>166</sup> Our moral duties are constituted from his commands, and he doesn't issue commands to himself. So he doesn't have any moral obligations. But does that mean God can do just anything and create a world in which, say, children are tortured unremittingly with no hope of escape? No, because that would be incompatible with his character, which is his omnibenevolence. It is not that he has a moral obligation to do something, but it is just that he is too good for some of those things to be possible. I would say that is an impossible situation – there is no possible world in which children are unremittingly tortured with no means of escape.

*Followup:* Specifically, in certain passages in the Bible, God does obligate himself. For example, in Genesis where he swears by himself when he promises Abraham what he is going to do. When he does that, he seems to obligate himself to do certain things.

*Answer:* That would be a matter of God's making a promise. What one would say is that God is faithful and therefore keeps his promises. But he is not under any sort of obligation to make that promise. But again we are starting to go off on a tangent that is interesting and important, but it is not really relevant to the argument that we are considering right now. What we want to make sure we understand now is: do we understand the idea of different possible worlds, different ways reality might have been, and do we understand what it means to be maximally great, which is to be maximally excellent in every possible world?

*Question:* Isn't omnibenevolence based on what our idea is of what is good? A societal type of thing? Because in some societies, they would go with the omnipotent and omniscient, but being good would not be part of it. He may be a strong, mighty warrior – that would be more valuable.

*Answer:* I think that that is open to discussion. That we would have to talk about. Do you think being loving is a great-making property? And it is not clear that all of the attributes that are normally ascribed to God are great-making properties. For example, take the question of God's eternity. Is it greater to be timeless than to be everlasting throughout time? I do not think we have any clear sense of that. Some people think it is greater to be outside of time, that the greatest conceivable being must be timeless because he would transcend time. But others would say, no, it is greater to be active and dynamic and interacting with things, and therefore it is greater to be temporal but to be everlasting throughout time. There I think we just don't have any clear sense of which is the greater way. Maybe they are neutral. Maybe they are fifty-fifty or something of that sort. But with regard to other properties, I think we can say that it is clearly better. For example, morally, it is better to be morally loving and kind and generous. Or at least if you don't like omnibenevolence, replace it with moral perfection. God must be a morally perfect

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being as well as omnipotent and omniscient.

*Question:* I think omnibenevolent is an assumption, but it rests on objective moral values which you already addressed. The other thing is: knowing and their being possible are two different things. To me I think you can go from this argument that the maximally great God exists to imply that he is a God of the maximally great reality, which is not perceived now, and everybody struggles with evil.

*Answer:* Hang on to those thoughts. I thought you were going to go somewhere else with them. But you are quite right there is a difference between knowing something is possible and its really being possible. We will pick that up again later.

*Question:* I can see where this characteristic of benevolence can be the tripping point because some people can say, “How in the world can this God be maximally benevolent when he told the Israelites to just wipe out certain nations?”<sup>167</sup> In more recent history, how can you say he was benevolent when he allowed the Holocaust to take place and didn’t intervene to stop it?

*Answer:* That really wouldn’t be relevant to this argument because all that would show is that the Christian God isn’t the true God. The God of the Bible isn’t the real God; the real God is this maximally great being which has been distorted by the Christian religion or something of that sort. So we are not arguing for the God of the Bible, we are arguing here for the notion of the greatest conceivable being. If you don’t like that notion of omnibenevolence, let’s just substitute “morally perfect” for that.

*Followup:* I do like it. I think he is, but these are questions people have.

*Answer:* Right, but those questions are not relevant to this argument. Those questions are relevant to whether or not the God of the Bible is maximally great. That will be discussed when we get to things like the problem of evil and suffering and things of that sort.

### ***Alvin Plantinga’s Version***

With those concepts in mind, here is Plantinga’s argument:

- 1 It is possible that a maximally great being (God) exists.
- 2 If it is possible that a maximally great being exists, then a maximally great being exists in some possible world. (Why? Because that is just what it means to be possible.)
- 3 If a maximally great being exists in some possible world, then it exists in every possible world. (Why? Because that is the way maximal greatness is defined. Maximal greatness means you have maximal excellence in every possible world.)
- 4 If a maximally great being exists in every possible world, then it exists in the actual world. (Why? Remember we said earlier that the actual world is one of the possible worlds, namely, it is the one possible world that is actual. So if he exists in every possible world, then he exists in the actual world.)

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- 5 If a maximally great being exists in the actual world, then a maximally great being exists.
- 6 Therefore, a maximally great being exists.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* For #1, it says it is possible. OK, possibly. But the second one says it does exist, is that correct?

*Answer:* No, notice what it says. It says it exists in some possible world.

*Followup:* OK, but it does exist in some possible world. I am lost because I do not understand if it possibly exists, why then does it exist? Just because it is possible, what makes it happen?

*Answer:* It is because that is what we defined “possibly true” to mean. Remember I said, when we say that something is possibly true, like Hillary Clinton is the President of the United States, that just means there is a possible description of reality that could be true that has that proposition as part of the description. So don’t think of existence in a possible world as some sort of mysterious form of existing somewhere. It just means that that proposition is true in one of these descriptions of the way that the world could be.

*Question:* It seems this whole argument really rests on #3, and I don’t at the moment see why #3 follows. I think I could buy something similar to #3, which would say “If a maximally great being exists in some possible world, and if that possible world is the actual world, then it exists in every possible world.” As stated, I don’t see why #3 follows.<sup>168</sup>

*Answer:* The reason #3 follows is by the definition of “maximal greatness.” Maximal greatness means that it exists in every possible world. So if, in some world, there is a being which is maximally great, then that means that that being exists in all of the worlds. Otherwise, it wouldn’t be true that it is maximally great. So, imagine some other world, say W10. In W10, imagine there is a maximally great being. That means that in W10, if you look out at all the other worlds, that being is in all those other worlds, too. So the very definition of maximal greatness means that if it is in one, it is in all. So the controversial premise is not actually #3. The really controversial premise is #1. That is the controversial premise.

*Question:* I used to have trouble with this, but now I think I understand this. Let me phrase it my way and tell me if I understand it correctly. The reason why #3 follows is because if there is a possible world where there is a being possessing qualities like omnipotence, omnibenevolence, *etc.* but this being exists in only one possible world (not every possible world), then that would not be a maximally great being. It would only be one possibility. If we say there is one that possesses these qualities in one possible world, we can say that is an excellent being. If it is in three worlds, it is more excellent. If it is in all possible worlds, then it is maximally great.

*Answer:* Yes, that is exactly right! Imagine you have possible worlds. And let's imagine that in one of them, there is a maximally great being. As you said, to be maximally great means he has maximal excellence in every possible world. So that means it must exist in all of them. So it is either all or nothing. If the being is maximally great, he can't just exist in one world, or it wouldn't be maximally great. The definition entails that it must be in all of them.

*Followup:* Am I correct in saying that a maximally great being is equivalent to a necessary being?

*Answer:* Not equivalent, but it entails his necessary existence. He is not just necessary, he is also omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, and all the rest. But it would imply he has necessary existence.

*Followup:* So a maximally great being cannot not exist.

*Answer:* Right! See, that is what Anselm said. He said once you understand the concept of God, you can see that God cannot not exist. That is what the atheist is going to have to say, is that premise #1 is false.

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Let me wrap up by saying that contrary to expectation, steps (2) to (6) in this argument are really uncontroversial. Steps (2) to (6) just follow by definition. What is really controversial is premise #1 – is it possible that God exists? We need to look at what warrant exists for thinking that the existence of God is possible.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Total Running Time: 38:50 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § V. ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 2

### **The Ontological Argument Examined**

We have been talking about the Ontological Argument. It basically shows that if it is possible that God exists, then it follows that God exists. So the principal issue that needs to be settled with respect to this argument is the first premise – that *it is possible that a maximally great being exists*. The other steps of the argument are relatively uncontroversial. The really controversial premise is – is it possible that God exists?

#### ***The Argument Examined***

##### **Epistemic vs. Metaphysical Possibility**

In dealing with this issue we need to keep in mind the difference between what we could call *epistemic possibility* and *metaphysical possibility*. What do I mean by those terms? Epistemic possibility just means “for all we know, something is possible.” Take some complicated mathematical equation that we might write out on the blackboard – say, the square root of 176 is 14 or something like that. We might say, for all we know, that might be true. But if it is true, it is necessarily true, whereas if it is false, it is necessarily false. Mathematical equations are either necessarily true or they are impossible. But epistemically, that is to say, as far as we know, it is possible. We look at that and say it is possible that it is true, and it is possible that it is false. That is correct to say in an epistemic sense. But in a metaphysical sense, it cannot really be false if it is true, and it can’t be true if it is false. Metaphysical possibility and necessity would mean the way something can actually be. Can something actually be that way or is it actually impossible?

With respect to this first premise, we should resist the temptation to say, “Well, it is possible that God exists or it is possible that he doesn’t exist!” That is true epistemically. “For all we know, it is possible that God exists or doesn’t exist!” But, if a maximally great being exists, he exists necessarily in this metaphysical sense. Therefore, God’s existence is either possible or impossible. So the atheist has to maintain that God’s existence is metaphysically impossible in order to avoid this argument, whereas the defender of this argument thinks that God’s existence is not merely epistemically possible (“for all we know he exists”), rather he thinks that God is metaphysically possible as well.

##### **Coherence of a Maximally Great Being**

So the question is, do we have any reason to think that the existence of God, a maximally great being, is metaphysically possible, as opposed to just epistemically possible? Is there any reason to think this first premise is true in a metaphysical sense of possibility? I think there is reason for that. Intuitively, the idea of a maximally great being is a coherent idea. When you think about the notion of a being that is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-

good in every logically possible world, that seems to be a perfectly coherent idea. In order for the Ontological Argument to fail, the concept of God needs to be metaphysically impossible. It needs to be logically incoherent, like the idea of a married bachelor or a round triangle. Those things clearly are metaphysically impossible because they are incoherent. But when you think about the idea of a maximally great being, there is nothing in that concept that appears to be even remotely incoherent. Indeed, I think we have a positive grasp of that concept as a coherent idea. If that is correct, that provides some intuitive basis for thinking that this first premise is true, that it is possible that a maximally great being exists.<sup>170</sup>

### Parodies of the Argument

One of the main reasons that is often given for doubting the first premise of the Ontological Argument – and this is a very ancient strategy – is that if this type of reasoning is correct, then we ought to be able to think up parodies of the argument – thinking of other sorts of things that would then have to exist. For example, the idea of a most perfect island would be one that exists in every logically possible world and has all of the great-making properties that make up a perfect island, and therefore there must exist something like this. Or the concept of a necessarily existing lion would be the concept of a lion that exists in every possible world, and so therefore a necessarily existent lion must exist. These notions must also seem coherent, and therefore, if it is possible there is a necessarily existent lion, then there must be one. Or if it's possible that there is a maximally great island, then there must be one. But this is absurd.

The argument's proponent can defend his argument against these sort of parodies by arguing that these supposedly parallel notions aren't really analogous to the idea of a maximally great being. For one thing, the properties that go to make up maximal greatness have intrinsic maximal values. Things like being all-knowing means knowing all truth. There is a kind of maximum quality there that you can't get beyond – you know *all* truth. Being omnipotent is being able to do anything that is logically possible. Or being all-good. These have intrinsic maximal values. By contrast, something like a most perfect island or a maximally great island doesn't seem to have those kind of intrinsic great-making properties. In the case of islands, for example, there could always be more palm trees and more hula girls to increase the greatness of the island. It is not even obvious what the intrinsic properties of a greatest possible island would be. That seems relative to your interests. You can think a great island is a remote desert island where you can be by yourself or is one that is bursting with fine resort hotels and all sorts of entertainment. It is relative to the interests of the vacationer. The idea of a greatest island or a most perfect island really turns out not to be a coherent idea. There aren't intrinsic maximal values or even objective properties that go to make up the excellence of islands.

The idea of a necessarily existent lion, as well, is also incoherent. Just think about it. In order to be such an animal, this beast would have to exist in every logically possible world. But that would mean that in a world in which the universe consisted of nothing but a singularity, just a point of infinite spacetime density, pressure, curvature, that there would be this necessarily existent lion. Anything that could exist in a universe which consisted of a simple singularity just isn't what we mean by a lion. A lion is a sort of big

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cat having certain properties, and it couldn't exist in a universe like that. So, clearly, a lion is subject to certain sorts of physical limitations in order to be a lion and therefore cannot be coherently conceived to be necessarily existent.

This can become almost ludicrous at times. In my debate with Victor Stenger at Oregon State University, in response to the Ontological Argument, he attempted to parody the argument by saying maybe there is a maximally great pizza, the greatest possible pizza, and therefore that would have to exist as well. And what I pointed out was the greatest possible pizza would have to exist in every logically possible world and that would mean that it couldn't be eaten! Right? Because it is metaphysically necessary. Therefore, it would not be a pizza because a pizza is something you can eat. Again, it just turns out these parodies are often incoherent ideas that don't really match the intuitively coherent notion of a maximally great being, one that is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good in every logically possible world.<sup>171</sup>

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Are there arguments or disagreements on what God's characteristics must be? God has certain characteristics (omnipotence, omniscience, aseity, *etc.*) and if God exists and necessarily has those characteristics, then that would imply that we would all need to agree with that he has those characteristics or else that would not be the maximally great being. Is he simple, for instance? Would someone who wants to argue against the Ontological Argument say that a maximally great being might not have some characteristics that we think God has?

*Answer:* You are absolutely right that there is dispute in this case as well as to what makes for a great-making property in God's case. That is why Plantinga cashed the argument out in relatively uncontroversial properties like being all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing. But he doesn't say, for example, that the greatest conceivable being would be timeless rather than temporal or simple rather than complex. It is certainly true that some of those properties are less intuitively clear in terms of whether they are really great-making properties. Is a being that exists timelessly greater than one that exists temporally? I think that is far from obvious. So that is why the argument is couched simply in terms of these three properties. If there is such a being, then we need to examine further whether or not we have any reasons to think that this being is temporal or timeless, simple or complex. Has he revealed himself in the world or has he not? Those can be issues, then, that can be further explored or maybe even known on the basis of divine revelation. Those would still be in some cases perhaps necessary attributes of God, but it is just that we wouldn't have any clear intuitions about that. So the argument is couched simply in terms of those that are pretty indisputable as being great-making properties, and we leave it an open question as to what other properties this being has.

*Question:* I can't share your enthusiasm for this argument. I am going to have to reject premise one on what I consider contradictory attributes. Let me first say Dr. Plantinga has defined himself to victory by saying this maximally great being exists in all possible worlds. This is of course a possible world, so by definition here he is, and there is really

<sup>171</sup> 10:02

no debate. Similarly, I have a problem with this logically possible worlds argument anyway, because I don't believe there is any world that is logically possible other than the one that we have.

*Answer:* I don't think you really believe that. There has to be a misunderstanding. You don't think that everything that happens happens logically necessarily – that you have no free will, for example, that it would be logically impossible for you to lower your hand right now.

*Followup:* Maybe we have different ideas of what a possible world is. I am saying from my understanding of this possible worlds idea is any world that you can conceive of this being would have to exist in. I don't believe there can be another world besides what we have. The world that we have has various turns and different futures, but how can there be another universe or reality other than the one that we have?

*Answer:* Let's answer that question by your choosing to do something different. In this world, you will get up and go to lunch in a few minutes. But you have freedom of the will, I believe, and you could choose instead to just remain seated. And then a different world would exist than the one that will in fact exist.

*Followup:* I would say that is the same world. We all have different choices within the same world.

*Answer:* It is not the same world in the sense that different events occur and so, if a world is simply a description of the way reality is, those are not the same description. They have different events in them and so they are different descriptions, and that is all a "world" means here – a maximum description of reality.<sup>172</sup>

*Followup:* Maybe I am not looking at it quite the way you do. But I believe there are contradictory attributes in Plantinga's maximally great being. First, he says he is maximally great and therefore maximally good. Then he says he exists in all possible worlds. I don't think those two things go together. If you have a maximally great being, there is no way he is going to exist in but a very small minority of all the worlds that we can conjure up because they would be abhorrent to him.

*Answer:* This is a very good point that you are making here. A very good point! Intuitively, we would think that it is logically possible that there would be a world in which there would be no higher life forms than, say, rabbits who are diseased and sick and exist in a state of continual pain and suffering. That seems to be logically possible. But I think you are quite right in saying God would never permit such a world. He is too good and wouldn't create such a world. So what that means is, if God does exist, that envisioned world of animal pain and suffering isn't really logically possible at all. What is implied here is that if you believe in God as a metaphysically necessary being, this is going to radically affect your view of what is possible or impossible. Certain things that look as if they are possible turn out really not possible at all. Another example would be a world in which every human being rejects Christ and goes to hell. I think that is incompatible with the goodness of God – God would not create such a thing. What this means is that isn't really a possible world. That really is a logically impossible or incoherent state of affairs. You are quite right in your intuition here that certain sorts of

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<sup>172</sup> 15:12

states of affairs are going to be incompatible with God and his existence. But I think most Christian philosophers would do, rather than deny that God is metaphysically necessary (which would make God a contingent being, and we don't want to say that), is prefer to revise their view of possible worlds. They would do that rather than revise their concept of God as being metaphysically necessary and all good. You have got to revise something, and I think most of us would say you revise your concept of what is really logically possible rather than revise the concept of God, so that he is no longer the greatest conceivable being. This is a very thought provoking question.

*Question:* I am also not enthusiastic about this argument either. How do you rhetorically get around the idea that somebody feels that you are loading the dice in your favor from the get-go? In a debate, it looks like in this argument you are saying, "If you can even conceive of God, I win."

*Answer:* I think the way you do it is by making this distinction between epistemic and metaphysical possibility. And to affirm that something is metaphysically possible is making a significant truth claim. It would not be significant if we were just talking about epistemic possibility. In that case, you are just saying, "Well, yeah, for all we know he exists or he doesn't exist!" But you are making a significant claim here. You are saying it is logically possible that there be a maximally great being having this description of these properties. That is a significant truth claim, to say that that is coherent. But then if you admit it is possible, then the rest just follows.

*Followup:* So you don't have an issue at all with building on a metaphysical pragmatism just constructing an ontology of God by way of . . .

*Answer:* Why do you call it pragmatism?

*Followup:* Because of what you are forced to do by way of your mental or noetic faculties.

*Answer:* I don't have any problem with that at all. There is nothing circular about this argument because you are not saying that you believe premise (1) is true because you believe that God exists.<sup>173</sup> That would be circular. You are saying, "As I think about this idea of a being that is all-powerful, all-good and all-knowing in every possible world, that is an intuitively coherent idea. It is not like a married bachelor or a necessarily existent lion or a maximally great pizza – which are all incoherent. This is a coherent idea and therefore something that possibly exists." That is a significant truth claim to say that such a thing is possible; but what follows from that is: if it is possible, then it is necessary. Like that mathematical equation – if it is possibly true, it is necessarily true.

Let me put it this way (and this is how I presented it in the debate): at the very least what the argument shows is that if God's existence is possible, then God must exist. That is a conditional claim. You don't have to defend that it is possible that God exists – just leave that up to your audience. That is what I did in the debate. I didn't try to prove that it is possible that a maximally great being exists. All the argument shows is that *if* it is possible, then God must exist. So what do you think? Do you think it is possible that God exists, as I do? Then you should agree that God exists. If you do not think that God exists, then you have got to say that the concept of God is logically incoherent. You have

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<sup>173</sup> 20:02

to affirm that it is impossible. Not just that he doesn't exist but that he is impossible to exist. So the conditional statement of that argument is still very powerful. If it is possible God exists, if the first premise is true, then God exists. That in itself is an important insight.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Total Running Time: 22:07 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § V. ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

#### Lecture 3

### **Defending Premise One of the Ontological Argument**

We have been talking about the Ontological Argument for God's existence. You will remember I said that steps (2) through (6) of this argument are relatively uncontroversial – they really just follow by definition once you understand the concept of a maximally great being (which, you will recall, is a being that is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect in every possible world). So the really crucial, controversial premise in the argument is premise (1) – *possibly, a maximally great being exists*.

We saw that it is not enough that that is epistemically possible – that is to say, possible “for all we know.” It is required that this is metaphysically possible. So the question is, what warrant is there for thinking that it is metaphysically possible that a maximally great being exists? I have been arguing that there is a sort of intuitive warrant for this first premise. When we think about the concept of a being which is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect in every possible world, we see that this is a coherent concept. It is not like a married bachelor or a round triangle. We can see that this is a coherent idea and is something that could possibly exist. This gives some intuitive warrant for thinking that the first premise is indeed true.

We saw how critics of the argument will often try to parody the argument by thinking up analogies like a greatest conceivable island or a necessarily existent lion. If they possibly exist, they will exist in every world and therefore exist in the actual world. But I argued that when you think about those concepts, you can see that, in fact, they are not logically coherent concepts. The idea of a necessarily existent lion is incoherent because such a beast would have to exist in every possible world, including universes in which the entire universe is just a single cosmological singularity of infinite density, pressure, temperature, and so forth. Anything that could exist in such a state just is not what we mean by a lion. Similarly, with regard to a maximally great island, there can always be more palm trees or more hula girls. So the idea of a maximally great island also is logically incoherent. These attempts to parody the argument really don't undercut the intuitive warrant we have for thinking that the existence of a maximally great being is possible.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to this appeal to intuition would be to say that it is equally possible to think of the concept of a quasi-maximally great being. That is to say, a being who exists in every possible world but isn't maximally excellent in every possible world. Perhaps, for example, he might be omnipotent and he might be morally perfect, but maybe he doesn't know all truths. Maybe he is not omniscient. He might be like the God of open theism which lacks foreknowledge of future contingent events. He has perfect knowledge of the past and the present, but he lacks knowledge of the future. Such a being would merely be quasi-maximally great, and this doesn't seem to be an incoherent concept. We seem to be able to conceive of a quasi-maximally great being, from which it would follow that a quasi-maximally great being would exist, which seems absurd. That

would be an attempt to parody the argument and say we similarly have no warrant for thinking that a maximally great being possibly exists.

Is this correct? If we are warranted in thinking that it is possible that a maximally great being exists, are we equally warranted in thinking that a quasi-maximally great being exists? I don't think so. When you think about it, maximal greatness is logically incompatible with quasi-maximal greatness. That is to say, if there is a maximally great being, then there cannot be a quasi-maximally great being in any world with him.<sup>175</sup> Why is that? By definition, a maximally great being is omnipotent and all-powerful. That means that nothing else can exist outside of his creative power. If there is any thing else that exists, that thing would be in the creative power of the maximally great being. And that means the maximally great being must have the power to refrain from creating anything else at all. So there must be possible worlds in which the maximally great being exists, but there is nothing else in that world. He refrains from creating anything else. But that means, therefore, that quasi-maximal greatness is not possibly instantiated after all if maximal greatness is because a quasi-maximally great being has to exist in every possible world (by definition). But what we have just seen is that there must be possible worlds in which it does not exist if there is a maximally great being. So it turns out that these two kinds of being are incompatible with each other. There cannot be both of them.

So if it is possible that maximal greatness is instantiated, it follows that it is logically impossible that quasi-maximal greatness is instantiated. It is not true that our intuition that a maximally great being is possible is undermined by an equal intuition that a quasi-maximal great being is also possible. Because that latter intuition – a quasi-maximally great being is possible – depends on the assumption that there is no maximally great being, that such a being cannot possibly exist. But that begs the question.

Moreover, any intuitive warrant that we would have for thinking that there is a quasi-maximally great being is parasitic upon our intuition that a maximally great being is conceivably possible. The only reason why you would think that quasi-maximal greatness is possibly instantiated is because you have an intuition that maximal greatness is possibly instantiated. So there really isn't any grounds for thinking that if maximal greatness is possibly instantiated, then also quasi-maximal greatness is equally plausibly instantiated. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Our intuition that there is possibly a maximally great being actually undermines any warrant for thinking that it is possible that there be a quasi-maximally great being.

### **Defense of Premise (1)**

We have some real good intuitive warrant for thinking that premise (1) of the Ontological Argument is true. Intuitively, the idea of a maximally great being seems to be a coherent concept and that therefore such a being is possible. But is there any additional evidence or reason to think premise (1) is true apart from its intuitive warrant? Alvin Plantinga gives a clue when he says, "If we carefully ponder the key premise and the alleged objections to it and if we consider its connections with other propositions we accept or reject and we still find it compelling, then we are within our rational rights in accepting it." Here Plantinga suggests, not simply appealing to the intuitive warrant for premise (1)

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<sup>175</sup> 5:07

that we can just see that maximal greatness is a coherent idea, but he says consider its connections with other propositions we accept. Weigh it in light of other truths that we know about and see if we don't come to think that maximal greatness is possibly instantiated on that basis.

How might we do that? We might consider, for example, other arguments for the existence of God. Think, for example, of Leibniz's Argument from Contingency that we talked about. Remember this argument says that everything that exists has an explanation of its existence, either in the necessity of its own nature or else in its external cause. And then, secondly, if the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is God.<sup>176</sup> Thirdly, the universe is an existing thing. From those three premises it follows that the explanation of the existence of the universe is God. Leibniz's Contingency Argument, if it works – and I think it does –, gives us a metaphysically necessary being who is the source of all reality outside himself – the ground of being and the explanation for the existence of everything other than itself. The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument gives us good grounds for thinking that there is a metaphysically necessary being which is all-powerful and the Creator of everything else that exists.

Moreover, think about the Moral Argument for God's existence. Remember, when we looked at the Moral Argument, I argued first that if God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist. Secondly, but objective moral values and duties do exist. Therefore, it follows that God exists. If the Moral Argument works, it gives us a God who is the ground of moral value and moral duties. One of the interesting things about moral principles is that at least some of them seem to be necessary truths. They are true in every possible world. As the naturalist philosopher of science Michael Ruse has said, "The man who says that it is morally acceptable to rape little children is just as mistaken as the man who says,  $2+2=5$ ."<sup>177</sup> Notice here Ruse equates the truth of a moral statement with a mathematical truth, which is necessarily true – true in every possible world. So it would follow that certain moral truths are necessary truths, and therefore if God is the ground for these moral truths, it follows that God must exist in every possible world as the source of moral value and our moral duties. In other words, the Moral Argument gives us a necessarily existent being who is perfectly good and the ground of moral values.

Thirdly, think about a Conceptualist Argument for God's existence. This would be an argument for God as the ground of abstract objects like numbers and propositions. It might go like this:

1. Abstract objects are either independently existing realities or else concepts in some person's mind.
2. Abstract objects are not independently existing realities.

From which it follows,

3. If abstract objects are concepts in some person's mind, then an omniscient, metaphysically necessary being exists.

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<sup>176</sup> 10:00

<sup>177</sup> Michael Ruse, *Darwinism Defended*, (London: Addison-Wesley, 1982), page 275

Why? Because these abstract objects are necessary in their existence. Mathematical objects, if they exist, like the number 2, exist in every possible world, and there are too many of them to be contained in the mind of any finite person. Only an infinite mind, an omniscient mind, could ground all mathematical and logical truths. So if abstract objects are not independently existing realities but are concepts in some person's mind, they must be concepts in the mind of an omniscient, metaphysically necessary being. From which it follows,

4. Therefore, an omniscient, metaphysically necessary being exists.

If one finds this argument persuasive, it would give you God as a metaphysically necessary and omniscient being.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Put these three arguments together, and you've got (1) a metaphysically necessary being which is the source of all reality outside itself (Argument From Contingency); (2) a metaphysically necessary being which is morally perfect and the ground of moral value (Moral Argument); and (3) a metaphysically necessary being which is omniscient (the conceptualist argument). Put all of these together, and this seems to give good grounds for believing that a maximally great being possibly exists, a being which is metaphysically necessary, omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect. So these sorts of arguments might give us good grounds for thinking that the first premise in the Ontological Argument – that *possibly a maximally great being exists* – is in fact true.<sup>178</sup>

At this point, the question arises whether the Ontological Argument has not, then, become question-begging. What do I mean by that? An argument is question-begging if your only reason for accepting a premise in the argument is that you already believe the conclusion. So you are, in effect, reasoning in a circle. The reason that you believe the premise is that you already believe the conclusion. In this case, it might be that you believe that it is possible that a maximally great being exists because, on the basis of these other arguments, you already believe that a maximally great being does exist. You believe that such a being does exist, and therefore it is possible that it does exist. That would seem to be question-begging.

I think that this misgiving about the argument may result because of a misconception of the project of natural theology. It seems to conceive of natural theology in too linear a fashion. We should not think of the arguments for God's existence as links in a single chain, where the chain is only as strong as the weakest link in the chain. Rather we ought to think of the arguments for the existence of God as being links in a coat of chain mail, where all of the links reinforce one another and the mail is not as weak as the weakest link. In that way we can think of the Ontological Argument as part of a cumulative case for theism in which a number of factors simultaneously combine to lead one to the overall conclusion that God exists. In that sense, Anselm may have been wrong in thinking that he had discovered a single argument which, all by itself, independently of anything else, served to demonstrate God's existence with all his superlative properties.

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<sup>178</sup> 15:19

Nevertheless, I think Anselm's argument does have a part to play, along with the other arguments, in an overall cumulative case to show that God as a supremely perfect being does exist.

That brings us to the end of the discussion of the Ontological Argument. The reason we have spent so much time on natural theology is because, in an increasingly secular society such as we have in the West, it is vitally important that we as Christians be able to defend this absolutely foundational truth of our worldview, namely, that God exists. If this goes, everything goes. So it is vitally important that we as Christians be prepared to engage people in our increasingly secular society with good arguments and evidence for why we believe that, in fact, God exists.

The question arises as to whether or not arguments for the existence of God are necessary in order for belief in God to be rational or warranted. Is a person irrational to believe in God if he has no theistic arguments such as we discussed? Or is it unwarranted to believe in God without these sort of arguments? That raises the question as to whether or not belief in God can be rational or warranted in the absence of the arguments of natural theology. That will be the question covered next time.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Total Running Time: 19:25 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § VI. PROPERLY BASIC BELIEF IN GOD

#### Lecture 1

### Properly Basic Belief in God

We have been talking about arguments for the existence of God, and I have suggested that there are a number of good arguments that make it probable that God in fact does exist. We looked at the Contingency Argument, the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument, the Teleological Argument, the Moral Argument, and the Ontological Argument. But I want to say something more now about a question that was asked last time, when someone asked, “What about a person who doesn’t have any arguments for God’s existence? How does he know that God exists?” Can you know that God exists, is it rational to believe in God, wholly in the absence of any arguments? I think that it is rational. This brings us to the subject of belief in God as properly basic.

There is a three step argument for this.

#### ***Defense of Premise (1)***

1. Beliefs which are appropriately grounded may be rationally accepted as basic beliefs not grounded on argument.

#### **Properly Basic Beliefs Characterized**

What we are talking about here is a knowledge of God that is not based on argument. Rather it is a belief in God as a properly basic belief. What do we mean by properly basic? The idea here is that you can know that God exists without making an inference to God’s existence from something more basic. This is not an argument from religious experience to the existence of God. That would still be an argument. Rather the idea here is that belief in God can be part of your foundation of your system of beliefs, and it is grounded in experience. But it is not an inference from experience. It is not an argument for God from religious experience.

When you read the Bible, this is the way people in the Bible knew God. God for them wasn’t something that you needed to prove by argument. He was a real person in their lives. John Hick, a well known philosopher of religion, puts it this way:

God was known to them as a dynamic will interacting with their own wills, a sheer given reality, as inescapably to be reckoned with as destructive storm and life-giving sunshine . . . They did not think of God as an inferred entity but as an experienced reality. To them God was not . . . an idea adopted by the mind, but an experiential reality which gave significance to their lives.<sup>180</sup>

Philosophers call beliefs like this, that are part of a person’s foundations of knowledge, “properly basic beliefs.” These are beliefs that are not based on some other beliefs. They

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<sup>180</sup> John Hick, “Introduction,” in *The Existence of God*, ed. with an Introduction by John Hick, Problems of Philosophy Series (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 13-14.

are not inferred from those other beliefs. Rather they are part of the very foundation of your system of beliefs. Other examples of properly basic beliefs would include things like belief in the reality of the external world around you and the physical objects in it, belief in the reality of the past, that the world was not created just five minutes ago with built in appearances of age, or the presence of other minds besides yourself.

When you think about it, beliefs like these cannot be proven on the basis of some other more foundational beliefs. Rather these are part of your very foundations of your system of beliefs. How could you prove, for example, that you are not just a body lying in the Matrix wired up with electrodes, being stimulated to live in a sort of virtual reality, making you think that you are here in this world listening to this class, when in fact you are actually just lying in the Matrix with tubes and wires coming out of you? There is no way that you can prove that that was false. Or imagine the belief that the world was not created five minutes ago. How could you prove that the world wasn't created five minutes ago with built-in memory traces in our brains from events that never happened,<sup>181</sup> breakfasts in our stomachs from meals we never really ate, and all the other appearances of age? There is no way to disprove that sort of wild hypothesis. Or how could you prove that there are other minds besides yourself? How could you prove that other people are not just soulless automata that exhibit all of the external behavior of a person with a mind, but in fact they are just really robot-like androids with no interior life? There is no way to prove any of those beliefs. These are just basic beliefs that are part of the foundations of our knowledge, rather than beliefs that you try to prove from some more foundational belief.

### **Properly Basic Beliefs Are Not Arbitrary**

Although these beliefs are basic for us, that does not mean that these beliefs are arbitrary. And this is the second premise. Although these beliefs are basic, that does not mean they are arbitrary. Rather, these beliefs are grounded in the sense that they are formed in the context of certain experiences. For example, in the context of hearing and seeing and feeling things around me, I naturally form the belief that there are certain physical objects around me which I am sensing. Although this may be a basic belief which is not provable, nevertheless, it is not an arbitrary belief. It is grounded in my experience. It is perfectly rational to hold a belief like this unless you have some overriding reason to think that you are deluded. That is to say, unless you have some sort of defeater of this basic belief. In the absence of such a defeater, you are perfectly rational to entertain these basic beliefs. You would have to be crazy if you really thought that you were a body lying in the Matrix and that everything around you is illusory or if you thought the world around you was created five minutes ago. So although these beliefs are basic, they are not arbitrary. Rather, they are *properly* basic because they are formed in the context of certain experiences.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Why isn't this an argument?

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*Answer:* I am arguing that belief in God can be properly basic. So there is an argument here. But I am not arguing that we should infer the existence of God from experience or from this argument. In other words, I am giving an argument; but it is an argument for the position that it is rational to believe in God without argument.

*Followup:* I thought you said in the beginning that this was for a person that didn't have an argument for God.

*Answer:* Right, a person who doesn't have any arguments for God's existence! I am giving an argument that that person can believe in God in a properly basic way, grounded in his experience of God, as we will see. This is the same way that you and I believe in the reality of the external world or the reality of the past. I am not giving an argument for the reality of the past or for the external world, but I am giving an argument for why it is rational to believe those things without arguments.

*Question:* Do you think that God was alluding to this when he answered Moses, and he said "I AM." So just the fact that we exist is foundational to God's existence.

*Answer:* I don't know. As you will see in a moment, I am going to argue that the biblical view of the knowledge of God is that it is properly basic. Whether or not that would be a proof text I would appeal to, I am not sure. It did seem that Moses had a sort of experience there that was self-authenticating. When you come face-to-face with God in that way, you know it is God, and there is no mistaking that. It would be properly basic for Moses to believe that. But that isn't a text that I had thought of appealing to.

*Question:* If we are in a Matrix, then who is controlling the Matrix?

*Answer:* Right, we do not know. We wouldn't know. This isn't an argument that there is no reality. Here is another popular example that philosophers often use.<sup>182</sup> Maybe you are a brain in a vat of chemicals wired up with electrodes, and some mad scientist is stimulating you to believe that you are here listening to this class. Obviously, that doesn't imply that there is no reality outside of your brain. There is the mad scientist, the laboratory, the electrodes – all of that is real and exists. But you wouldn't know about it, and the people around you here that you see and, indeed, your own hands and your head are all illusions that the mad scientist is creating in you. There isn't any way to disprove that kind of hypothesis. What you can simply say is the belief that I have a head is a properly basic belief, and in the absence of some defeater for that belief, I am perfectly rational to go on believing it, and, indeed, I think I know that I have a head.

*Question:* Another process that people can go through that don't have an argument is Pascal's Wager, where you think the evidence is equally balanced, nevertheless you choose to believe in God because the benefits of believing seem to outweigh the benefits if you reject. Can you comment on that?

*Answer:* This is a very good point. What you are talking about is not belief in God as properly basic, but belief in God in terms of practical reasoning, not theoretical reasoning. Pascal and certain other philosophers have argued that if you are in a situation where the evidence is equal – 50/50 – that God exists, you can have practical reasons for believing in God that would make it justifiable to believe in him. For example, Pascal's

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<sup>182</sup> 10:03

view is that if you believe in God and you are right, then you have infinite gain – eternal life. On the other hand, if you believe in God and you are wrong, well, you have lost nothing, or very little – maybe you have given up the pleasures of sin for a season, but not much. On the other hand, if you don't believe in God and he exists, then you have suffered infinite loss because you will be separated from him forever. If you do not believe in him and he doesn't exist, well, then you have gained the pleasures of sin for a season but that is finite compared with the infinite loss you might suffer. So Pascal argues that you have infinity to gain by believing and infinity to lose by not believing, so practical reason dictates that you ought to believe. Pascal's Wager is the subject of a great deal of controversy and some very interesting things have been written about it. I talk about it in the book *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* which I wrote with J. P. Moreland. If you are interested in this justification for the belief in God, take a look at the chapter in that book.

The essential difference between this approach, this Pascal approach, and properly basic belief in God is this: Pascal's approach would be that you can be justified in believing in God in the absence of any warrant for it, that it is OK to believe something without warrant. The view that the belief in God is properly basic says that you *are* warranted in believing in God, but you are warranted in believing in it, not by an argument, but in a properly basic way. So it is very different. One is trying to say you can believe in God without any warrant at all – by just gambling, as it were. The other way is to say that you are warranted in believing in God, but in a non-inferential way. You are warranted in believing in God in a properly basic way, just as your belief in the external world is warranted or your belief in the reality of the past is warranted. Those aren't just gambles. You are warranted in believing in those things. That separates these two approaches as very, very different from each other. I will say something more about properly basic belief and fideism (is this just by faith?) and how does warrant work here; but that will be later on.

*Question:* These would be existential proofs rather than objective proofs, correct?

*Answer:* I think I understand what you mean by saying that. They are not inferential. You do not say "If ..., therefore, God exists."<sup>183</sup> But it is more existential in the sense that you just have this belief in the context of this experience. So, yes, I think that would be a fair way to characterize it.

*Question:* Would you be making the argument that a belief based on sense data is more likely than, say, a belief contrary to our senses? You say it is basic, but if something goes against our senses, could that be a properly basic belief as well?

*Answer:* It would depend if you had some sort of experience that would ground that. Obviously, sometimes our senses do mislead us. We see the stick in the jar of water, and it looks bent, but we don't believe that because we have a defeater for that. We know, by optics, that the light is refracted when it goes through the water, so the stick looks bent. Because of that defeater, that defeats that properly basic belief that the stick is bent. These beliefs that are known in a properly basic way are not indubitable. They can be revised if there are defeaters for them. Sometimes, you are quite right, we deny

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<sup>183</sup> 14:58

something that our senses tell us. We say it is a mirage or it is due to some other aspect of our sensory experience that isn't the way reality is. But what we do say is that in the absence of a defeater, it is perfectly rational to go with what our senses tell us. Don't think of "properly basic" as meaning "indubitable" or "unrevisable" because that is clearly not right. The idea is that in the absence of a defeater, you are justified with going with your experience and what you experience tells you.

## ***Defense of Premise (2)***

The second claim that I want to make is:

2. Belief that the biblical God exists is appropriately grounded.

### **The Inner Witness of the Holy Spirit**

This can be a properly basic belief on our part. It seems to me that the fundamental way in which we, as Christians, know that God exists is not through argument. I think that arguments are *sufficient* to know that God exists, but they are not *necessary*. I want to suggest that the fundamental way in which we know that God exists is through the self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit.

What do I mean by the self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit? I mean the experience of the Holy Spirit is veridical – that is to say, it is an experience of a genuine reality. It tells us something that is true about reality. It is unmistakable for the person who has it. For the person who has the witness of the Holy Spirit and attends to it, he cannot be mistaken in thinking that it is the Holy Spirit. That doesn't mean, however, that it is irresistible or indubitable. We can grieve the Holy Spirit through sin. We can repress the Holy Spirit by refusing to allow him to fill us – so we can resist the Holy Spirit. But for the person who attends to it and responds to it, the experience of the Holy Spirit is veridical and unmistakable.

I also mean that such a person doesn't need to have supplementary arguments or evidences in order to know, and know with confidence, that he is, in fact, experiencing the Spirit of God. You can have supplementary arguments, but you don't need them.

I also mean that this experience doesn't function as a premise in an argument for God from religious experience. It is not as though you argue, "I have this experience of the witness of the Holy Spirit, and the best explanation of this is that God exists." This is not an argument from religious experience. Rather, the idea here is that this is the immediate experience of God himself, so that belief in God is formed in a properly basic way.

I also mean that, in certain contexts, the experience of the Holy Spirit will imply that we apprehend certain truths about God like "God loves me" or "I am guilty before God" or "God forgives me through Christ" or "I am reconciled to God through Christ" or "Christ lives within me," and so forth. In certain contexts, these beliefs will be apprehended by the witness of the Holy Spirit.<sup>184</sup>

And I mean that such an experience gives a person not only a subjective assurance of

<sup>184</sup> 20:08

Christianity's truth – it is not just that he feels confident – but rather that he actually knows that Christianity is true. He has an objective knowledge that God exists and has revealed himself in Christ.

And finally, I mean that arguments and evidence which are incompatible with these truths are simply overwhelmed by the experience of the Holy Spirit for the person who fully attends to it.

The New Testament teaches that this is the way in which we know that God exists and that Christianity is true, whether you are a believer or an unbeliever. Let me say that, at first blush, this appeal to Scripture might appear circular or self-defeating, as if to say we should believe in the witness of the Holy Spirit because this is what Scripture teaches. “We should believe there is a self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit on the basis of this other thing” would seem to be self-defeating. But insofar as we are all Christians here today and this is an in-house discussion among people who do accept the authority of Scripture, I think it is entirely appropriate to look at what the Bible has to say about the way in which we know that God exists. If we were talking with a non-Christian, obviously we wouldn't appeal to the Bible to justify this. We would simply share with that person, “I do experience the witness of the Holy Spirit, and he does give me assurance of these truths.” But among friends, so to speak, or among family, I think it is entirely appropriate to ask, “What does the Bible teach about how we know that God exists and Christianity is true?” I think we will see that, in fact, it does teach that we know the truth of the great things of the Gospel through the witness of the Holy Spirit.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Wouldn't it be easier to prove the authority of the Bible through the basic knowledge of sense perception and causality? Peter said, “We don't believe in myths” and “We report what we see and hear” and that the authority of the Bible can be proven. Therefore, if you can prove the authority of the Bible, then you can go from there. This seems easier.

*Answer:* There are a number of things to say here. One is, even if that were easier, it would still be self-defeating because in that case you would not be believing in this in a properly basic way. You would be believing in it on the basis of Scripture.

*Followup:* Yeah, but you are basing it on truth. Things that are historical, things that happened.

*Answer:* No, it is not an argument, anymore than my belief in the external world is an argument that is based on sense experience. The idea is that this is a properly basic belief, and it isn't an inference from anything. Let me say something else about what you said. I think that the view you expressed also has the disadvantage that it would rule out faith for anybody who didn't have the Bible. Somebody, say, who doesn't have it translated into his own language – and there are millions of people like that today. Or somebody who doesn't have literacy skills, and so can't read the Bible. I want to say that these persons aren't shut out from salvation because of their illiteracy or their lack of translations of the Bible into their languages. If they hear the Gospel preached to them by a short wave radio, say, or by a friend or a missionary, I want to say that that person is rational in

believing in the Gospel even if he has no evidence whatsoever that the Bible is true and can't even read the Bible.<sup>185</sup>

*Followup:* I agree with that. But I thought you said that you really can't prove the authority of the Bible. Did I misunderstand that?

*Answer:* I think you did misunderstand. What I said was that my appeal to the Bible here to help you see that this is the way in which we know God exists should not be thought to be circular because we are Christians and we do believe that the Bible is true and so it is totally appropriate for us to ask what the Bible has to say about how we know God exists.

*Followup:* But my faith is based on the twelve apostles and what they saw and what they heard. That is just the intellectual part.

*Answer:* What does the Scripture say? I am going to talk about this later on, but I want you to look at 1 John 5:9. John is reflecting on the apostolic testimony to Jesus, and he talks about the witnesses to Christ: the Spirit, the water, and the blood. The water is probably Jesus' baptism, and the blood is his crucifixion. So these are the bookends of Jesus' earthly ministry. The Spirit, the water, and the blood, he says, are the witnesses. And then in verse 9 he says, "If we receive the testimony of men," (this is the apostolic testimony that you were just talking about) "the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that he has testified concerning his Son." (He is talking there about the witness of the Spirit; remember there are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood.) "The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself." I think that John is teaching that, as great as the apostolic testimony is and as credible as it is, it pales in comparison to the testimony of the Holy Spirit himself, who lives within us and gives us testimony that this is true. We should not think of these as competing with each other (and I wasn't suggesting you did), but I do want to say that, biblically, in addition to historical evidences and testimony, there is this other thing called "the witness of the Holy Spirit" that is even greater and will apply to people who are illiterate and even mentally retarded people who can't understand an argument for God's existence. That person can believe rationally, too, because of the witness of the Holy Spirit.

*Question:* Certainly that is true that through the witness of the Holy Spirit for someone without the Bible we can come to a knowledge of the great truths of the Gospel. But most of us live in contexts where we have heard of the Bible, we have heard the evidences of God's existence.

*Answer:* That is certainly true for those of us who had the benefit of living in America. But we need to think globally and historically. When you think globally, the vast majority of the world's population doesn't have the education, the library resources, or the leisure time to study arguments and evidence for God's existence. Nor have most of the millions of people that have lived in the past, who were largely illiterate and never had the opportunity to do this. When we think globally and historically, there has got to be some way of knowing these things, I think, apart from apologetics and arguments and evidence. We will go into this in a lot more detail, but I think you can already see the interesting questions that this raises about how we know the great truths of the Gospel.

*Question:* What came to my mind when you were talking was when Christ said he was

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<sup>185</sup> 24:57

going to send the Holy Spirit. And that really is what he was saying – he is imparting this to us so that we would know this is real and this really happened.

*Answer:* I think that is right. What John says here in 1 John 5 is almost an echo of what Jesus says in John 14-16 about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We will look at those passages next time.

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Next time we will look at the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, and then we will look at the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the unbeliever. And I will argue that in both cases the way in which we should know that God exists is primarily through the witness of his Holy Spirit.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Total Running Time: 30:09 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § VI. PROPERLY BASIC BELIEF IN GOD

#### Lecture 2

### **Biblical Data Pertinent to the Witness of the Holy Spirit**

We have been talking about belief in the biblical God's being a properly basic belief grounded in the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. What I suggested is, when you look at what the New Testament has to teach about how we know Christianity is true, the New Testament teaches that we know that our faith is true through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. What I would like to do is look at some of the New Testament material pertinent to the witness of the Holy Spirit, first, in the life of the Christian believer.

### **Biblical Data Pertinent to the Witness of the Holy Spirit**

When a person becomes a Christian, he is automatically regenerated by the Spirit of God and becomes indwelt with the Holy Spirit. In Galatians 3:26 and 4:6 Paul says, "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. . . . And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" We are indwelt with the Spirit of God and by that Spirit we cry out to God, "Abba! Father!"

Turn to Romans 8:15-16, where Paul reflects further on the witness of the Holy Spirit. Here he explains that it is through the witness of the Holy Spirit that we have confidence that we are God's children. "For you did not receive the Spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of sonship. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our Spirit that we are children of God." Paul says that the way in which that you know you are a child of God is through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

In Colossians 2:2 and 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Paul uses the Greek word *plerophoria*, which means "complete confidence" or "full assurance" to indicate that the believer has the knowledge of the truth as a result of the Spirit's work. We have complete confidence, full assurance. In popular piety, this is called "assurance of salvation." Do you have assurance of your salvation? Yes, I know that I am saved; I know I am reconciled to God. When you think about it, having assurance of salvation entails certain truths of Christianity such as "God has forgiven me of my sin" and "Christ has reconciled me to God" and "I am a child of God," and so forth. So in having assurance of salvation, you have assurance of these central truths of the Christian worldview.

Not only Paul, but also the apostle John, makes it very clear that it is the indwelling Holy Spirit who gives believers the conviction of Christianity's truth. Look at 1 John 2:20 and 27. John says,

But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know. . . . but the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that any one should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him.

John says it is the anointing of the Holy Spirit that teaches the believer the truth of divine

things. When John says this, he is clearly echoing the teachings of Jesus himself as John records them in the Gospel of John. For example, in John 14:26, Jesus says, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”<sup>187</sup> This is the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer that Jesus describes and that John then echoes.

The truth that the Holy Spirit teaches us is not, I am convinced, the fine points of Christian doctrine. There are too many Spirit-filled Christian believers who differ doctrinally in order for that to be the case. Rather, I think what John is talking about here is the inner assurance that the Holy Spirit gives of the central, basic truths of the Christian faith – what Alvin Plantinga has called the Great Truths or the Great Things of the Gospel. This assurance doesn’t come from human arguments or evidence, but directly comes from the Holy Spirit himself.

Somebody might disagree with me about this by pointing to 1 John 4:1-3. One might say that this shows the testimony of the Holy Spirit is not self-authenticating but needs to be tested. John says,

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of the antichrist . . .

Here John talks about testing the spirits, and someone might say that shows that the Holy Spirit’s witness needs to be tested. I think that would be a misinterpretation of this passage. John is not talking here about testing the inner witness of the Holy Spirit in your own heart. Rather, he is talking about testing *other people* who come to you claiming to speak by the Holy Spirit. He says many false prophets have gone out into the world. And he refers to these people earlier on in 1 John 2:18-19:

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us.

So John is talking about people who are coming, claiming to give messages inspired of the Holy Spirit, and says you need to test to see if these people are really speaking by the Spirit of God. But I do not find any place in his epistle where he encourages believers to doubt or test the inner witness of the Holy Spirit in a person’s own life. Rather, he is talking about a situation that is external to you, where somebody else is claiming to speak by the Holy Spirit, and you need to test that person by his doctrinal purity to be sure that he is speaking by the Spirit of God. But in our own lives, the inner witness of God’s Spirit is sufficient to assure us of the basic truths to which the Holy Spirit testifies.

John also underlines other teachings of Jesus on the work of the Holy Spirit, as he gives them in the Gospel of John. For example, John 14:16-17, 20, where Jesus says it is the

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<sup>187</sup> 5:13

indwelling of the Holy Spirit that will give us the assurance of knowing that Jesus lives in the believer and that the believer is in Jesus, in the sense of being united with him. Jesus says,

And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you. . . . In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

Here Jesus says it is by the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit that we have the knowledge that we are in Christ and he is in us.<sup>188</sup> John teaches the same thing in 1 John 3:24, 4:13: “All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us. . . . By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit.” John uses his characteristic phrase “by this we know” to emphasize that as Christians we can have a confident knowledge that our faith is true, that we really do abide in God and that God really does live in us.

John even contrasts the confidence which the Holy Spirit’s testimony gives with the confidence brought by human evidence. In 1 John 5:6-10a:

This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth. There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has borne witness to his Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself.

Here John says that the testimony of God is even greater than the testimony of men, which probably refers to the apostolic testimony to the life of Jesus. The water and the blood are probably the baptism and the crucifixion of Jesus, which are the beginning and end of his earthly ministry, and the testimony of men is this apostolic testimony that John lays such emphasis on in his own Gospel. But here he says, if we rightly receive this testimony, the testimony of God is even greater. As Christians, we have the testimony of God living within us. The Holy Spirit bears witness with our Spirit that we are children of God.

So it seems that even though evidence and arguments, such as the arguments of natural theology, can be used to support the believer’s faith, they are not properly the basis of that faith. The proper basis of Christian faith for a believer, I think, is the inner witness of the Holy Spirit himself. God, for us, is not just the conclusion of a syllogism; he is the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, dwelling within us, empowering us to live the Christian life. How does the believer know that the Christian faith is true? He knows it through the self-authenticating witness of God’s Holy Spirit who lives within him.

What, you might ask about, is the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the unbeliever? Since the unbeliever is not indwelt by the Holy Spirit, does that mean that the unbeliever has to rely upon evidence and arguments in order to know that Christianity is true? Since

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<sup>188</sup> 9:45

he doesn't enjoy the witness of the Holy Spirit, is he cast upon arguments and evidence?  
That is what we will take on next time.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Total Running Time: 13:39 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § VI. PROPERLY BASIC BELIEF IN GOD

#### Lecture 3

### **Role of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Unbeliever**

We have been talking about whether or not belief in God, and in the God of the Bible in particular, is properly basic. That is to say, is it rational to believe in the God of the Bible even if you do not have any evidence or arguments in favor of his existence? Indeed, can you know that the God of the Bible exists, even if you are wholly bereft of any arguments or evidence for the existence of God? The argument that I have been presenting is that, yes, it is perfectly rational and, indeed, you can *know* that God exists wholly apart from arguments simply on the basis of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, which is a self-authenticating witness that grounds belief in God as a properly basic belief. The belief that God exists is not inferred from other beliefs. Rather it is a properly basic belief akin to belief in the reality of the external world or the reality of the past or the presence of other minds, and it is not arbitrary because it is grounded in the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

Last time we saw that this is the teaching of the New Testament with regard to the witness of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian believer. Every believer is indwelt by the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God bears witness with his spirit that he is a child of God. And that entails the truth of certain things like “God exists,” “I am redeemed through Christ,” “God forgives my sin,” and so forth.

### **Role of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Unbeliever**

That leads to the question, “What about the unbeliever?” Since the unbeliever is unregenerate, and since he is not indwelt with the Holy Spirit, surely he needs to rely upon evidence and argument in order to know that the Gospel is true when he hears it because he has no experience of the Holy Spirit! I beg to differ. It seems to me that according to the Scriptures, God has a special ministry of the Holy Spirit which is particularly geared to the needs of the unbeliever. Jesus describes this ministry in John 16:7-11. Here Jesus says,

Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

Notice here Jesus is describing a ministry of the Holy Spirit which is *not* to the believer. This is a ministry of the Holy Spirit to the *world*, and he says specifically, “they do not believe in me.” This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit toward the unbeliever. It is three-fold in nature. The Holy Spirit convicts the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. That is to say, he convicts the unbeliever of his own sin, he convicts him of

God's righteousness, and then of his consequent condemnation before this righteous God. An unbeliever who is so convicted by the Holy Spirit can know such truths as "God exists," "I am guilty before God," "I need God's forgiveness," and so on and so forth.

It seems to me that, in fact, this is the way it had to be. If it weren't for the work of the Holy Spirit, no one would ever become a Christian. Look at what Paul says in Romans 3:9b-11, "I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God.'" According to Paul, natural man left to himself does not seek God.<sup>190</sup> Instead, he is lost in sin. Indeed, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:14 that the natural man isn't even able to understand spiritual things: "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." So the natural man, apart from the Spirit of God, thinks that spiritual things are foolish, and he can't understand them because it requires spiritual discernment.

Paul says that the natural man, left to himself, is hostile to God. Romans 8:7: "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot." So the natural man is at war with God apart from the Spirit of God. He cannot receive spiritual things. So, as Jesus said, men love darkness rather than light. Left to himself, natural man, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, would never come to a knowledge of God. The fact that you will find people, non-Christians, out there who are seeking God and who are ready to believe in Christ when you share the Gospel with them is evidence that the Spirit of God has already been at work in their hearts convicting them and drawing them to himself, so their hearts are prepared for the Gospel message. Jesus says in John 6:44, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." God, by his Holy Spirit, is drawing people to himself.

It seems to me that the implication of this is that when a person refuses to come to Christ, it is never just because of a lack of evidence or for want of good arguments or because of intellectual difficulties. At root, a person refuses to come to Christ because he ignores and deliberately rejects the drawing of God's Holy Spirit upon his heart. So, in the final analysis, I do not think anyone fails to become a Christian because of a lack of evidence. Ultimately, the reason why a person fails to become a Christian is because he loves darkness rather than light and he wants nothing to do with God. But if a person will respond to the drawing of God's Spirit and his convicting power with an open mind and an open heart, then that person can know with assurance that the Gospel message is true because God's Holy Spirit will convict him that it is true. Look at John 7:16-17:

So Jesus answered them, 'My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me; if any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.'

This strikes me as a very, very important passage from Jesus' own lips. "If any man's will is to do God's will, then he will know whether my teaching is really from God or whether I am just speaking on my own authority." Jesus is affirming here that if anyone is truly seeking God, then he will know that Jesus' teaching is truly from God.

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<sup>190</sup> 5:11

So for the unbeliever, as well as for the believer, the ultimate basis for his knowledge of the truth of Christianity is the witness of the Holy Spirit. The unbeliever who is truly open to God will be convinced of the truth of the Christian message because the Holy Spirit will convict him that it is true. Therefore, it seems that whether we are talking about believers or unbelievers, it is ultimately, in the final analysis, the self-authenticating work of the Holy Spirit that gives one the assurance of Christianity's truth.<sup>191</sup>

So I would say the truth of the existence of the biblical God is a properly basic belief which is grounded in the inner witness and conviction of the Holy Spirit. Because this belief is formed in response to the witness of God himself, it doesn't require any sort of external authentication. It is self-authenticating. It isn't merely rational, but it actually provides knowledge that God exists. This is a way of knowing that the God of the Bible exists.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* About the inner witness of the Holy Spirit – some Christians believe it is irresistible, but what you are saying is that the Holy Spirit is an influence that we can choose to listen to or ignore.

*Answer:* That is correct. Here my Arminian slip is showing! I do not think that the witness of the Holy Spirit is irresistible. It seems to me that God allows freedom of unbelief. That is why some people go to hell. I think that the reason that some people go to hell is because they willingly separate themselves from God forever. I do not think they go to hell because God does not give them an irresistible witness of the Spirit, but he does give that just to the elect. It seems to me that this is in accord with biblical teaching. I will not defend that now, but when we get to the Doctrine of Salvation, we will talk more about this – the doctrine of election and so forth. You are quite right – that is what I have said. I am presupposing that the witness of the Spirit is not irresistible.

But having said that, let me back off of that a little bit and say the defense of the view that belief in God is properly basic doesn't depend on that. A Calvinist could offer this same religious epistemology, and, indeed, many do. So while I would disagree with the Calvinist as to whether this is irresistible or not, I think we would both agree that this is the source, ultimately, of our knowledge of Christianity's truth, and it is a properly basic belief grounded in the witness of the Spirit. If you disagree with me about its being irresistible, that is fine; it doesn't need to affect what the discussion here is about.

*Question:* Predestination is throughout the Bible – he chooses and chooses. How does that associate with this, where you are saying you are choosing?

*Answer:* We will talk about this later when we get to that section of the class. But let me just give a little thumbnail sketch of what I would say. Certainly the Bible does teach predestination and election. The question is – whom is it that God has predestined and chosen to be his people? It seems to me, when you read Romans 9 and 10, the answer to that is: those who have faith in Christ Jesus! Those are the ones who are predestined to justification, glorification, and the rest. If we think of predestination as primarily a

<sup>191</sup> 10:07

corporate notion – God has elected anyone who puts his faith in Christ Jesus – , then anyone who places his faith in Christ Jesus is part of the elect. So it is up to you whether or not you want to be part of the elect. Then, in a secondary sense, you can say, “Yes, I am predestined by God to be saved because I am part of this corporate group.”

*Question: [asks how this relates to Muslims and the Islamic religion]*

*Answer:* I am not sure I understand the question. What I have argued so far in the class has just been for the existence of God in a kind of generic monotheistic sense. There is a Creator and Designer of the universe, a ground of being of the universe, and a source of moral values.<sup>192</sup> Muslims would resonate with all of those arguments that I have given. Here I am claiming that it is the God of the Bible who bears witness to our spirit that he exists. So this is more specific. I think the Muslim would probably say something very similar to this about Islam. They would say Allah has a self-authenticating witness of his spirit that bears testimony to the truth of Islam. We have a sort of standoff here between the Christian and the Muslim in making these competing claims. I will say something more about that in a minute because that is an objection that someone might raise to this view – what about the Muslim, or the Mormon who says he knows the book of Mormon is true because when he reads it he has a “burning in the bosom?” Doesn’t that show that this is all just subjective? I will say something about that in a minute. But the arguments that I gave are consistent with a sort of generic monotheism. Here I am arguing that through the witness of the Holy Spirit we can know specifically that the God of the Bible exists and that, therefore, the God of the Qur’an does not.

*Question:* Could you speak to the Demas version of believers where, at one time, they accepted these evidences but later rejected them?

*Answer:* All of these theological questions are very important and controversial. This question would be: what about a person who claims to have been a Christian – claims that he has tasted the Holy Spirit and known God – and then walks away from it and apostatizes and throws Christ out of his life? There are really two views about this. The one view is that he wasn’t really regenerate in the first place. He wasn’t really born again – he just had an emotional experience or went forward at an altar call, but he never really had that inner witness of the Holy Spirit. The other view would be that that person really was a regenerate Christian, he knew the Holy Spirit, but because of sin in his life he hardened his heart against the Holy Spirit and finally cast Jesus Christ out of his life and committed apostasy. This is what the author of the book of Hebrews warns about in chapters 6 and 10 – about those who have tasted the goodness of the Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit and the age to come, and then they commit apostasy. On that view they have lost their salvation. They have thrown Christ out of their life.

If you were to ask me what do I think – I tend to believe the latter. I think that if you take these warnings in Hebrews seriously, it suggests that a person, a born-again Christian, can commit apostasy and throw Christ out of his life and lose salvation. That is why I said earlier that the witness of the Holy Spirit isn’t indubitable, it is not irresistible, we can grieve the Holy Spirit through sin, we can quench the Holy Spirit by refusing to submit our lives to him, and, I think, ultimately, the Scripture teaches that you can cast the Holy

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<sup>192</sup> 14:57

Spirit out of your life by committing apostasy and renouncing Jesus Christ. The Scripture has very stern warnings about that. But again, I want to repeat, one's views on the question of "eternal security" or "perseverance of the saints" doesn't affect whether or not [belief in] the God of the Bible is properly basic. Whichever view you take, you can still maintain on the basis of the witness of the Holy Spirit that someone who has the witness of the Holy Spirit and attends to it can know with confidence that Christianity is true because the Holy Spirit gives him assurance that it is true.

*Question:* Would Romans 1:18-20 fit into this or would that just be saying God is providing external evidence?

*Answer:* That is a good question. How do we interpret Romans 1:18-20? This is where Paul talks about how, ever since the creation of the world, God's eternal nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived through the things that have been made, so that people are without excuse. The question here is – and this is subtle – is Paul endorsing natural theology in Romans 1? Is he endorsing a kind of cosmological argument or a design argument, saying that when people look at the world around them, they can see there had to be a cause of all this, that there is obviously a designer of this? That would be one way to interpret it.<sup>193</sup> Or is he saying that the circumstances of being in the creation are the circumstances that ground a properly basic belief in God, so that they aren't inferring, "There must be a designer of this" or "There must be an adequate cause of this," but rather that just being in the circumstances of the created order, one forms in a properly basic way the belief in God. That is the exegetical, or interpretive, question here.

My own point of view is that I think that Paul probably is talking about arguments of natural theology here, frankly. In Acts, when Barnabas and Paul are preaching in Lystra and the people say, "The gods have come down from heaven!" and are going to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, they restrain them in saying that the God who made the Earth and the heavens has not left himself without a witness. The word there suggests "evidence" – he hasn't left himself without evidence. He has given you seasons and fruitful times of the year, and so forth. Paul seems to be saying on which basis that you can infer that God exists. When you look at extra-biblical literature like the *Book of Wisdom*, which is an apocryphal Old Testament book, it has passages in it that sound almost like Romans 1 and make it very clear that the author there is talking about making an inference from the creation to the existence of a Designer and Creator. It may well have been the case that Paul even knew this Old Testament work and had it in mind when he wrote Romans 1. So while this isn't a slam dunk, it is not an open and shut case, I do incline toward the view that what Paul is talking about in Romans 1 is the validity of natural theology.

We went through several arguments prior to this, arguing that there are sound reasons to believe that God exists. But at the same time, I think that the Scripture also teaches that you do not need those arguments. You can know that God exists, and particularly you can know that the biblical God exists on the basis of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

*Question:* Are you saying the only way you can lose your salvation is through blaspheming the Holy Spirit? It is not like other sins in your life – if you sin too much,

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<sup>193</sup> 19:59

you may lose your salvation. Are you saying the only way you can lose your salvation is only if you turn around and say, “I don’t believe anymore?”

*Answer:* That is correct. I am not talking about backsliding here. What I am talking about is a person who deliberately commits what the Bible calls apostasy, someone who says, “I reject Jesus Christ. I refuse him. I cast him out of my life!” If you do not think there are people like that, then read the epistles of Paul. He gives examples, people like, I think it was, Demas and others that he says “are in love with the world and have left me.”<sup>194</sup> There are serious warnings in Scripture about apostasy, and I take them at face value.

But, we do not want to linger on that point because that is tangential to the central point here! And that is: through the witness of the Holy Spirit we can know with confidence that the God of the Bible exists.

### **Warrant and Christian Belief**

If that is true, then what is the role of argument and evidence in knowing that Christianity is true? I have already said that the fundamental way in which we know that Christianity is true is through the self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the only role left for reason and argument to play is the role of a servant, a secondary role. Here I think the Protestant reformer Martin Luther correctly distinguished between what he called the magisterial and the ministerial uses of reason. The magisterial use of reason occurs when reason stands over and above the Gospel message like a magistrate and judges whether or not the Gospel is true. The ministerial use of reason occurs when reason submits to and serves the Gospel message.<sup>195</sup> And what Luther maintained is that only the ministerial use of reason is legitimate. In light of the Holy Spirit’s witness, it is only the ministerial use of reason which is valid. Another way of putting it is that philosophy is the handmaid of theology. God has given us reason as a tool to help us better understand and defend our faith. Ours is a faith that seeks understanding, as St. Anselm put it. A person who knows that Christianity is true on the basis of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit can also have a sound apologetic which gives him evidence and arguments for the truth of Christianity.

But while that backs up the witness of the Holy Spirit and confirms it, it doesn’t supplant it or serve as a basis of his belief. If the arguments of natural theology and Christian evidences are good, then that person has kind of a second source of warrant for his Christian beliefs. He has first and foremost the witness of the Holy Spirit, but then he also has the warrant that accrues from the arguments and evidence for Christianity. So this person has, in a sense, a double warrant for his belief in the truth of the Gospel. You can imagine all sorts of benefits that would accrue to such a person for having a double warrant for his belief. For example, this greater warrant could give him more confidence that the Gospel message is true. In the case of the unbeliever, that greater confidence might lead him to come to Christ more readily. In the case of a believer, it might lead him to share his faith with more confidence and to be ready to bear witness to Christ. The ability to have this double warrant could also predispose the unbeliever to be open to

<sup>194</sup> cf. 2 Timothy 4:10

<sup>195</sup> 24:56

hearing the Gospel message in a way that perhaps he wouldn't have been. And it could provide the believer with assurance in times of doubt or struggle when the witness of the Holy Spirit is eclipsed in his life and he is going through a dark valley of spiritual dryness. I am sure you can think of many other ways in which having these dual sources of warrant for Christianity's truth would be very beneficial.

But should there ever arise a conflict between the evidence and arguments and what they lead to and what the inner witness of the Holy Spirit is telling you, it is the witness of the Holy Spirit which should be given precedence, not the arguments and evidence. For example, say you were a university student studying at Moscow University during the time of the Soviet Union and you were a Christian believer and sensed the witness of the Spirit in your heart. But you had no way of refuting your Marxist professors and the atheist propaganda they were giving you. You had no library resources, there was no internet, and nothing was available. I am arguing that you are perfectly rational in that case to attend to the witness of the Holy Spirit, even though you don't know how to answer the arguments and the evidence that your professors give. The witness of the Holy Spirit, while it is confirmed by evidence and argument, cannot be disconfirmed by them for a person who properly attends to it. That would be how I would understand the relationship between evidence and argument and the witness of the Holy Spirit.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* This is sort of having the right tool for the job in your spiritual toolbox. If you are witnessing to a university professor, appealing to the Holy Spirit may not be the right tool to convince him. Whereas if you are witnessing to an elderly woman, she may not be interested in hearing the material evidence but would be moved in hearing about the Holy Spirit. It is useful for Christians to have a wide variety of resources that they can appeal to to most effectively witness.

*Answer:* I couldn't agree more! I think that is absolutely right. These things are audience-relative so to speak. What may be appropriate for one person isn't for the other.

*Question:* I watched a program about the Shroud of Turin.<sup>196</sup> They are positive in their conclusion that it cannot be proven not to be authentic. They are still struggling with it, but to watch this program is very supporting for someone who is trying to find evidence for Jesus Christ.

*Answer:* Yes, the Shroud is an incredibly intriguing artifact. I think I may have said it in this class before, but I think what really needs to be done is for these carbon dating tests to be rerun because those who dispute them claim that they were done on a patch that was later added to the cloth and therefore isn't part of the original. So they really need to be redone in order to authenticate or disconfirm the age of the Shroud. I heard, too, that the Shroud is going to be on display now. The Church of St. John the Baptist in Torino is putting it out again in the next couple of weeks. If anyone wants to see it, now is your chance to go to Italy!

*[Q&A: another comment about the television program on the Shroud of*

<sup>196</sup> 30:00

*Turin]*

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Next time what we are going to look at is the subject of how, then, do you deal with defeaters of your Christian belief? Suppose you have a confidence that Christianity is true on the basis of the witness of the Holy Spirit but you encounter arguments and objections to Christianity that you can't answer. What are you rationally obligated to do in a situation like that? That will be the question of how you deal with so-called defeaters of this properly basic belief that the biblical God exists. That will be the subject we deal with next time.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Total Running Time: 32:48 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § VI. PROPERLY BASIC BELIEF IN GOD

#### Lecture 4

### **Defeaters and Christian Belief**

We have been talking about belief in God as properly basic. Last time I argued that for a person who has not merely the witness of the Holy Spirit but also good arguments and evidences for the truth of Christian theism, that person is doubly warranted in his Christian belief. He has the warrant from the witness of the Holy Spirit immediately, and he has the warrant that accrues from rational argument and evidence for Christianity. There can be great benefits to this sort of warrant.

#### **Defeaters and Christian Belief**

This raises the question of what happens when you run into defeaters for your Christian belief – when you encounter objections or obstacles to Christian belief that are raised through argument and evidence. Certainly this does happen. I remember speaking once to a Christian gentleman from the Soviet Union soon after the wall came down and asking him, “As a Christian living in Russia, what resources do you have for studying Christianity?” And he said there was an encyclopedia of atheism that the state publishes and by reading that you can learn a little bit about Christianity from what it attacks; but apart from that there just isn’t much. And I thought: *This dear brother! His only resources for learning about his faith was the encyclopedia of atheism attacking it!* So certainly people do find themselves, due to the accidents of history and geography – or perhaps I shouldn’t say accidents but the vicissitudes of history and geography, will find themselves in situations where the evidence and the arguments seemingly go against Christian theism. What do you do in a case like that?

Plantinga emphasizes that just because a belief is properly basic doesn’t mean that it is indefeasible, that is to say, that it cannot be defeated. Properly basic beliefs can be defeated by arguments and evidence that are brought against them. Therefore, just because something is properly basic for you doesn’t mean it is indubitable or certain. If there are defeaters that are brought against a properly basic belief, you have to come up with a defeater of the defeater, if you are to remain rational in holding to that properly basic belief. So you have got to have a defeater-defeater in order to continue to believe rationally. In that case it would mean that a Christian confronted with some defeater, say, the problem of evil as an argument for atheism, in order to remain rational needs to have an answer to the problem of evil. Otherwise, he should give up his belief in God.

#### **Christian Apologetics**

This is where Christian apologetics would come in. Christian apologetics serves to provide defeaters of the defeaters that are brought against Christian belief. For example, Plantinga would offer the Free Will Defense against the problem of evil to show that the problem of evil is not a successful argument for atheism. So one thing that apologetics can do is defensive in nature. It wards off, or defeats, the potential defeaters that are

brought against Christian belief. Notice in that case, one doesn't then begin to believe Christianity on the basis of the defeater-defeaters; you still believe it in a properly basic way. You just defeat the objections that are brought against it.

However, this raises the disturbing question – what about somebody like my acquaintance in the Soviet Union who had no ability to get any defeater-defeaters? All he heard was the Marxist propaganda brought against Christianity, and he had no way of having defeaters of those. Is he rationally obligated to commit apostasy and reject Jesus Christ out of his life and become an atheist? Surely that is not right! That seems unconscionable that anyone could be rationally obligated to apostatize.

### **Original Belief as Intrinsic Defeater-Defeater**

Here Plantinga has very helpfully argued that in some cases the original basic belief may itself be so powerfully warranted that it becomes an intrinsic defeater-defeater. It has so much intrinsic warrant that it defeats the defeaters that are brought against it. He gives this very interesting example.<sup>198</sup> Suppose that you are accused of a crime which you know you didn't commit because you were alone at the time that the crime was committed. And yet, somehow, all of the evidence is against you, so that a jury of your peers ought to convict you of the crime, even though you know you are innocent. Indeed, if you were on the jury, you should yourself convict you of being guilty of the crime because all of the evidence is against you! Plantinga says, yet you *know* you are innocent and didn't commit the crime. Are you rationally obligated to go along with the evidence and agree with your peers that you are guilty? Obviously not! The belief that you have that you are innocent is so warranted for you that it is an intrinsic defeater of the defeaters brought against it. So you are not obligated to follow the evidence where it leads because you know better.

In exactly the same way, Plantinga makes the theological application by saying the Christian belief may be so powerfully warranted by the witness of the Holy Spirit that it becomes an intrinsic defeater-defeater. It intrinsically defeats the objections brought against it by arguments and evidence. It seems to me that that is entirely correct. It is completely plausible and makes sense. Indeed, I suspect that disadvantaged brethren, like the fellow in the Soviet Union that I met, may actually receive a greater measure of grace from God to endure under such circumstances, a more powerful witness of the Holy Spirit than perhaps you and I receive because we do have good defeaters for the objections that are brought against Christian belief. But God isn't going to abandon his children to committing apostasy simply because the vicissitudes of history and geography put them in places where the evidence goes against Christian faith. He, through his Holy Spirit, can provide such a powerful witness to the truth of the Gospel that it will intrinsically defeat those defeaters.

Remember what John says in 1 John 4 that we read earlier – if we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater. He who believes in Jesus, that he is the Son of God, has the testimony in himself, the indwelling Holy Spirit. Therefore, with regard to the defeaters, when we have arguments and evidence to defeat the defeaters, that's fine; but even in cases where we don't, Christian belief is completely rational and, I would say,

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<sup>198</sup> 4:59

warranted on the basis of the intrinsic witness of the Holy Spirit, which defeats any defeaters that are brought against it.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* That kind of argumentation is like adding an emotional nuance to a completely logical point. It seems like you are using emotions as a point for a logical premise. [Dr. Craig interjects and asks, “How do emotions enter the picture?”]. It seems to me the whole witness of the Holy Spirit could just be, as Richard Dawkins says, a hallucination.

*Answer:* Well, I disagree with him. I think the witness of the Holy Spirit is not just an emotional experience. I would say this has nothing to do with emotions. What we are talking about here is an objective, external witness borne by God to the believer’s and the unbeliever’s mind, telling him that the great truths of the Gospel are really true, if he will attend to them. We must not confuse this with an argument from religious experience or think that we are talking about emotions. We are talking about an immediate experience and testimony from God himself. Now Dawkins can deny that there is such a thing. He is at liberty to do that. But there is no reason why I should follow him and think that. I experience the witness of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the Scripture teaches that there is such a witness. So why should I go along with what Dawkins says?

*Question:* This kind of reminds me of the old verificationist line of thinking, where we only have five senses, and anything outside of that is meaningless. A lot of people do not think about this today, but we do have more than five senses – we have a sense of acceleration, a temperature sense, a pain sense. What is to say that our external perception of the world could not be influenced by some sort of spiritual sense as well? People point out sociopaths, or deaf persons, or mute persons. Just because their sense doesn’t work doesn’t mean they aren’t correct with others.<sup>199</sup>

*Answer:* I agree thoroughly! There are other senses that even approximate this spiritual sense more closely. Things like a moral sense – that we have the ability to grasp moral truths. Or aesthetic truths. There is simply no reason to go along with the old empiricist or verificationist idea that anything you can’t prove through your five senses is just a matter of emotional expression or personal taste.

*Question:* Is there an atheistic equivalent argument that says, “You have convinced me that what you say is true, but I just don’t think it is, so I am not going to agree.”

*Answer:* It is very hard to see how atheism could be a properly basic belief. This is a very good question because there isn’t any such thing as a witness of the Holy Spirit in atheism. So it is really difficult to see how atheism could make a parallel claim. I know of one atheist who has toyed with something like this. Quentin Smith has said that in the presence of horrible evil it is just a properly basic belief that God does not exist. He admits he can’t give any argument to show that, but it is just properly basic to say this could not have been permitted by God. But if the atheist wants to take that gambit, then I think we can offer defeaters of that by showing that there is no reason at all to think that

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<sup>199</sup> 10:01

God couldn't have permitted this evil – you could do the whole Free Will Defense and the rest of that. I think you can defeat his allegedly properly basic belief. But I do not know of any atheist who has sincerely maintained that atheism would have something parallel in being properly basic.

*Question:* On the metaphor you use with the court case, if all of the defeaters are against you, how can you say, “I strongly believe that I know I am not guilty?” How can you prove that to the jury?

*Answer:* You couldn't! See, that's the whole point. We have probably seen movies like this, haven't we? We have all seen movies where some innocent person, through hook and by crook, finds himself in a situation where it really looks bad. It really looks like he did the crime, but he knows he didn't. But he is utterly incapable of proving to the jury that he didn't do the crime. And yet he doesn't have to go along with the evidence that he is guilty, even though he can't prove that he is not guilty. That is why this is not an argument for theism. This is quite the contrary – it is the claim that it is properly basic. I have no argument to prove this is true – I cannot prove to the jury at all that he is innocent. But he doesn't have to follow the evidence because he knows he is innocent in a properly basic way.

*Question:* How would you then explain those Christians who walk away from the faith? I know of people that claimed they had the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, and yet they still, through whatever reason, leave the faith.

*Answer:* Remember what I said that because a belief is properly basic doesn't mean it is indubitable? In order to experience the witness of the Holy Spirit in its fullness, we need to walk in the Spirit daily. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to be controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is where philosophy connects very practically with spiritual formation and Christian living. Think of a person who is living in disobedience and who is quenching the Holy Spirit – for example, by not following the Holy Spirit's leading to do something, but instead may be following in American materialistic, consumerist values and culture – or a person who is grieving the Holy Spirit through sin. Both of those are mentioned by Paul: quenching the Holy Spirit and grieving the Holy Spirit. Think of a person that has unconfessed sin in his life – he is looking at pornography or he has got a bad temper that isn't submitted to the Lord, and he sins. Those kind of sins disrupt your fellowship with God, and you are not walking in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and that is going to weaken the witness of the Holy Spirit in your life. If this epistemology is right, then to me this underlines hugely the importance of keeping short accounts with God, confessing your sins daily, self-examination, to be sure you are walking in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and so forth. Otherwise, as you have said, you can get off the track. I remember seeing one of these statements by one of these apostate Christians on the internet and it was very interesting. He said, what happened to me is that I began to no longer have my daily devotional time with the Lord and I didn't read my Bible and pray every day, and I began to drift away from that.<sup>200</sup> As he left those spiritual disciplines, it made it easier and easier for him to drift away. The fact that there is a witness of the Holy Spirit that is adequate and sufficient for warrant in Christian belief and that it is something that is self-authenticating doesn't mean that you

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<sup>200</sup> 15:07

cannot grieve and quench the Holy Spirit and therefore mute his witness in your life.

*Question:* First, could you make a distinction between this and fideism? Second, is this the G. E. Moore shift that if you have enough original warrant it can somehow overpower defeaters?

*Answer:* Yeah, I see your point. G. E. Moore, a philosopher back in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, said: “Here is my right hand, and here is my left hand. There! We have a proof of the existence of the external world!” What Moore meant, of course, is any argument against the existence of the external world is going to be less obviously true than the fact that I have a right hand and a left hand. I think he is right about that. It is like an intrinsic defeater of any argument brought against the reality of the external world, like you are a brain in a vat or a body lying in the Matrix and this is a virtual reality and it is all illusory. It is kind of like that.

Now, is this fideism, you ask. What is fideism? Fideism comes from the Latin word “*fides*” which means “faith.” So fideism is the view that the way you know Christianity is true is you just take it by faith – it is just belief by faith. Is that what this is? Plantinga resists that label vigorously. It is no more by faith than my belief in the existence of the external world or the reality of the past is by faith. Plantinga says these are part of the deliverances of reason. It is just that they are not inferred beliefs. These are part of the foundations of your cognitive system of beliefs. But they are just as much deliverances of reason as the inferred beliefs. These are just part of the foundations rather than inferred from the foundations. I think he is quite right about that. It isn’t fideism; it is saying that these beliefs are deliverances of reason which are properly basic in virtue of the fact that they are grounded in our experience and are not defeated by anything. So it is not fideism. Fideism would be the view that you have no warrant for your Christian beliefs and you just leap into the dark and believe it anyway. This is an account of warrant. This is not to say you are unwarranted in your Christian beliefs. This is an account of warrant. So it is quite different from fideism, which says you believe without any warrant.

*Question:* Going back to the court case and the evidence presented to the jury points towards guilt when you are actually not guilty. Seems to me the person in that case has to conclude that the evidence is incomplete. Therefore, there should be other evidence out there. It may not be immediately knowable, but the fact that the available evidence points to a false conclusion indicates there is something missing.

*Answer:* Right, I agree with that, and I think that is what the Christian like my friend in the Soviet Union would say: “I can’t refute these arguments because I do not have the materials. But I believe there are answers to them if only I had access to it.” For example, somebody who [hears it said], “Belief in the resurrection of Jesus is derived from the myths of Osiris and Adonis in ancient pagan religions” may be unfamiliar with those ancient religions, and he doesn’t know if that is true, and he can’t disprove that. But he says, “I know Christ is risen because I know Christ, and if I did have familiarity with those texts, and if I were an expert in ancient mythology, then I would know that your argument is wrong, and there is a flaw there somewhere, but I am just too ignorant to know where it is.” You are absolutely right; this is not a claim to believe something false.

I think some of the internet infidels who have criticized me on this have misunderstood this. This is not a claim to say that you should believe something that is contrary to

reason or that it is somehow not a fact. Rather, it is just to say what you just said – on the basis of the witness of the Holy Spirit, you know when you are in a situation like this that all the facts aren't in and that your information is incomplete and therefore you are perfectly rational to believe and have faith and confidence that if you did have all the facts then the objection would be exposed as false. That is a good point.<sup>201</sup>

*Question:* Could you talk about people like Tertullian and Kierkegaard who said they believe Christianity because it is absurd – what is the basis for their belief and how do we avoid that?

*Answer:* It is hard to know about Tertullian. He was an ancient church father. He was also extremely rational. But at least with Kierkegaard, the Danish 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, his writings are so extensive that it is clear – he was a *bona fide* fideist. Kierkegaard believed that there is ultimately no warrant for Christian belief and you simply take a leap of faith to believe. What he tried to do is to motivate this leap by showing how life lived apart from God ultimately degenerates into despair, boringness, and languishing in absurdity. He tried to motivate the person to make the leap. But ultimately for Kierkegaard it is a criterion-less leap of faith. He thought that Christianity was indeed absurd because it says that God, who is timeless, entered into time in the Incarnation and that this is absurd – the presence of the eternal in the temporal. When I was in college, I actually went through a temporary flirtation with Kierkegaard because I could not figure out the Incarnation. I couldn't figure out how could God be timeless and yet enter into human history. It seemed to me that it was absurd. One of my theology professors said, “Well, the problem with that is you can think of things that are more absurd than the Incarnation. For example, that God would become a cow instead of a human being!” So it isn't the ultimate absurdity, as Kierkegaard thought. And I thought, *Yeah, I guess that is true!* I ultimately came to change my view about God's eternity, that God is in time since the moment of creation, and therefore the Incarnation is no problem because God is already temporal and therefore can enter into relations with humans in history. Kierkegaard would be a *bona fide* fideist, and Plantinga's epistemology, his theory of knowledge, would be a rejection of Kierkegaardian fideism. Plantinga would say that when you believe in the great truths of the Gospel, you are warranted in doing so on the basis of the inner sense of deity that God has placed in your mind and on the basis of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

*Question:* It seems like a natural defense would be to say to atheists that you would not take any reasonable action in your life based on the probabilities of their belief. For example, an atheist belief in evolution and the improbabilities inherent in that – if you had to make a life decision based on those same probabilities, you wouldn't do that since they are so improbable.

*Answer:* Let me interrogate you; I am not understanding your point. The atheist we are imagining – for example, in the Soviet Union – the Marxist, propagandist teaching in the university – he thinks that it is probable that God does not exist. When he weighs the evidence, like Richard Dawkins, he will say that on balance, it is overwhelmingly probable that there is no God. What is the matter with that? If I had arguments that showed it was overwhelming probable that there is a God, then I would say, “Yes, you

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<sup>201</sup> 20:10

ought to believe.”

*Followup:* In application to his life, when he went out in his daily activities, he expects people to behave a certain way. And if they don't, there is no reason to believe that they would behave that way unless there is something about humans that motivates them to move that way.<sup>202</sup>

*Answer:* I think what you are raising is that you are saying that atheism is practically unlivable because he can't live as though other people are valueless products of natural selection and genetic mutation. I think that while that is making a good point about the existential impossibility of atheism, it doesn't really address the problem that we are dealing with here about what you ought to believe. Bertrand Russell once said in response to a woman who said, “Mr. Russell, if what you are saying is true, then the world is a terrible place,” Russell said, “Madam, the world *is* a terrible place, and you just have got to come to terms with it.” The hard-nosed atheist would just admit he cannot live consistently and happily with this worldview, but nevertheless the evidence suggests it is true, and we find ourselves in this unwelcome predicament. I think what you are suggesting is correct in saying, “But wait a minute, why think we are in this predicament?” If it really is unlivable, maybe we ought to go back and look again at the evidence. I think that is entirely appropriate. I try to get people to do that myself. But nevertheless, a person who is in the situation where the evidence is overwhelmingly in favor of atheism, apart from the witness of the Holy Spirit, it would seem he ought to go along with the evidence, unless there is something else that has greater warrant that warrants him in thinking that that evidence is somehow false or incomplete. I think that is exactly the situation we do find ourselves in, as Scripture teaches and as Christian experience reveals.

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Next time, we are going to look at the question of how to deal with somebody else, like the Mormon or the Muslim, who says, “I have a self-authenticating witness of God's spirit in my heart and therefore I know that the Book of Mormon is true or that Islam is true, and my experience is just as good as yours.” Shouldn't that lead you to be skeptical of your own experience and to think that you are perhaps deceived? How do you respond to that objection? That is what will be covered next.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> 25:08

<sup>203</sup> Total Running Time: 27:41 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY  
§ VI. PROPERLY BASIC BELIEF IN GOD

Lecture 5

**What About Other Faiths and  
Their Claim of Religious Experience?**

We have been talking about belief in God as properly basic. You will remember that simply because a belief is properly basic doesn't mean that it is indefeasible. There can be defeaters that are brought against that belief. If you should be confronted with a defeater of one of your properly basic beliefs, you need to come up with a defeater-defeater – something that will defeat the ostensible defeater – if you are to remain rational.

We saw last time that what Plantinga suggested is that in some cases the original belief itself can be so strongly warranted that it becomes an intrinsic defeater-defeater. This seems to be the case with respect to belief in the great truths of the Gospel as attested by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. God, through the witness of the Holy Spirit, especially for those who find themselves in evidentially challenged situations, can so warrant basic Christian belief that it becomes an intrinsic defeater of the defeaters that are brought against it.

**What About Other Faiths and Their Claim of Religious Experience?**

Some people would disagree with what I have said about the role of argument and evidence in confirming Christian belief but not being used to judge it. They would advocate a view that would see a more magisterial role given to reason. Here is an objection that will often be made against the notion that Christian belief can be properly basic or even an intrinsic defeater-defeater. They will point out that Mormons, for example, also claim to have an inner witness of the Holy Spirit – a “burning in the bosom” that they feel when they read the book of Mormon. And on the basis of this burning in the bosom, this inner witness of God's Spirit, one can know in a properly basic way that the Book of Mormon is true. Similarly, Muslims will sometimes claim, especially in the more mystic traditions, that they have an inner witness of God's Spirit that tells them the truth of Islam directly. We (Christians) do not regard those experiences as veridical, that is to say, as authentic and as really giving them the truth of Mormonism and Islam. So Christian claims to a subjective experience of God's witness seems to be on a par with these other experiences. Doesn't the presence of these other non-Christian claims to an inner witness of God's Spirit somehow invalidate the claim that we Christians know the great truths of the Gospel in this properly basic way through the witness of the Holy Spirit?

Let's think about this objection together. How can the fact that other people falsely claim to have an inner self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit be even relevant to my knowing the truths of the Gospel through the Holy Spirit's witness? Suppose that there is a genuine and authentic witness of the Holy Spirit to the great truths of the Gospel that I

experience. Does that imply that nobody else can falsely claim to have such an experience? Obviously not! People can say anything they want. How does the fact that other people claim, falsely, whether sincerely or insincerely, to have a self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit do anything to invalidate the authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit that I enjoy? Why should I be robbed of my joy and assurance of salvation and of the truth in the Christian faith just because somebody else falsely claims to have a self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit? If the Mormon or Muslim falsely claims to have an inner witness of the Holy Spirit to the truth of Mormonism or Islam, it seems that that does nothing logically to undermine the veridicality of an authentic claim to the witness of the Holy Spirit.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* If the skeptic is an outside observer to all three individuals – Christian, Mormon, and Muslim – and places no special weight on anybody’s claim, what they are saying is, why should they take the Christian’s claim to be any more authentic than the other two?<sup>204</sup>

*Answer:* We are not looking at this from the skeptic’s vantage point. We are looking at this from the first person standpoint of a Christian and asking, “Should I give up my Christian faith, or am I somehow irrational in believing Christianity, because other people claim to have a witness of the Holy Spirit?” And I do not see any reason to think that. You could be quite right that from the third person standpoint of the skeptic, they might all appear equal, and he wouldn’t know which one is authentic or veridical, though, as I said, I do think that the Holy Spirit has a special ministry to the unbeliever as well. But we’ll leave that aside. That is just not germane to the question we are asking now – is this a defeater for me of my properly basic belief in the great truths of the Gospel? I can’t see that it is.

*Followup:* Then what we would have to explain to the skeptic is that this doesn’t really have apologetic value for them. It is not going to convince them one way or the other, but it is how we Christians can have assurance of our own belief.

*Answer:* Right. This is not intended to be, as you say, a way of showing Christianity to be true. We are talking here about how we know Christianity to be true. My argument that I am presenting in this section of the lectures is that we are not dependent upon the arguments of natural theology to know that God exists or on historical evidence to know that Christ has risen. As Christians, we have another source of warrant by means of which we know Christianity is true. You are quite right; it is a very different question to ask how you show somebody else that it is true. That is a different issue.

*Question:* Do you see the scope of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit as encompassing things like the assurance that God exists, Jesus is God, and that Jesus died and rose for my sins and things like that? Is it all of that or is it just that God exists?

*Answer:* This is a good question. I think that the boundary lines here are very vague. What Paul says in Romans 9 is that when we cry, “Abba! Father!” the Holy Spirit bears

<sup>204</sup> 5:04

witness with our spirit that we are children of God and therefore heirs of God. So I take it that this fundamental assurance of salvation is what the Holy Spirit gives. He gives you the knowledge that “I am reconciled to God through Christ. Through him I have forgiveness of sins and eternal life.” That in turn entails truths like “God exists,” “I am redeemed through Christ,” and “I am forgiven by Christ.” So I think that what this provides is a sort of fundamental assurance of what Plantinga calls the great truths of the Gospel. But it is not going to help you to differentiate between Calvinism and Arminianism, or sacramentalism and non-sacramental views of the Lord’s Supper and eschatology or things of that sort.

*Followup:* The timing is the other question. Does the inner witness occur after you have come to the faith or can it help you come to faith?

*Answer:* This goes back to an earlier section of the lectures when I talked about this. This witness of the Holy Spirit is primarily in the life of the believer (this should be the inheritance of every born-again or regenerate Christian). But remember we looked at John 16, where Jesus talks about a ministry of the Holy Spirit which is not directed toward the church but toward the world. He says when the Spirit comes he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. “Concerning sin because they do not believe in me.” Here Jesus seems to envision a special ministry of the Holy Spirit toward the unbeliever to draw him to Christ. There, timing may well be critical. When somebody says to me, “Well, I haven’t experienced any kind of convicting power of the Holy Spirit,” I will often say, “Hold on, keep searching, and keep seeking and continue to pray and read, and it will come.” It may not be that this is something that happens constantly throughout the unbeliever’s life. It may well be delayed and come at a different time. In God’s providence, he knows when this convicting and drawing work should come in the life of the unbeliever, and we shouldn’t presume that it is going to be there in an equal obviousness all the time.<sup>205</sup>

*Question:* We are concluding “drawing” is always positive. I think Jesus does draw men to him, but sometimes the Spirit draws them and brings them to salvation, but in some cases they are drawn to him but reject him and use him as an object of derision, but they do take him seriously.

*Answer:* That is a good point. Through God’s common grace that is shed abroad among all persons who have heard of Christ, there is a kind of drawing that takes place. I think you are quite right in saying that this can be in ways that, given our human proclivity to rationalize sin, the unbeliever may not even be aware of the drawing of God’s Spirit on his heart, if he would just attend to it rather than harden his heart to it.

Somebody might insist at this point, “How do you know that your experience isn’t also spurious? If you say the Mormon’s and the Muslim’s experience of the Holy Spirit is spurious, maybe your experience is, too. How do you know that your experience is not inauthentic?” I think I have already answered that question in explaining the view. The genuine and authentic ministry of the Holy Spirit is self-authenticating for the person who really has it. The Spirit-filled Christian can know immediately and confidently that

<sup>205</sup> 9:55

his claim to the Spirit's witness in his life is true despite being confronted with false claims that are being made by people in other religions.

What is the most plausible spin that we could put on this objection? The most plausible way to take this objection could be as follows: You could say that the presence of false claims to the witness of the Holy Spirit ought to undermine my confidence in the reliability of my cognitive faculties in forming religious beliefs because apparently those faculties go wrong so often. Look at all the people in the world whose cognitive faculties have gone wrong in leading them to think they have a witness of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The fact that so many people apparently sincerely and yet falsely believe that God's Spirit is testifying to them of the truth of their religious beliefs ought to make us suspicious of our own experience of God.

As I said, I think that is the most plausible spin to put on this objection. But I think there are two things wrong with this construal of the objection.

First of all, the Christian does not need to say that all non-Christian religious experience is simply spurious. We are not committed to saying that all religious experience outside of Christianity is just spurious. It may well be the case that adherents to other world religions do enjoy a veridical experience of God in some measure. For example, as the ground of all being – as in Eastern religions – the ground upon whom we all depend as finite creatures. Or maybe an experience of God as the moral absolute from whom all values are derived. Or maybe even a veridical experience of God as the loving Father of mankind. We are not at all committed to the view that people's cognitive faculties for experiencing the divine are simply unreliable. I think that there can be genuine experiences of God in various ways in different religions.

But secondly, notice that the objection unjustifiably assumes that the Christian experience of the witness of the Holy Spirit is indistinguishable experientially from other religious experiences. In fact, that is just not true. It is not true that Christian religious experience is not distinctive compared to the religious experiences of other religions. For example, Buddhist or Hindu religious experience is very different from Christian religious experience. The Buddhist or Hindu typically has a religious experience of a sort of loss of self and a loss of sense of distinctness from the All, a sense of being subsumed in the All or the totality of things. That is very different from Christian religious experience of being related to a loving and personal God. So why should I think that when they have their religious experience that it is the same as mine and that mine isn't distinctive? When a Mormon claims to have a burning in the bosom that attests to the truth of the Book of Mormon, why should I think that his experience is exactly the same as mine?<sup>206</sup> When I have an experience of the witness of the Holy Spirit, I don't see any reason to think that these non-veridical experiences in other religions are indistinguishable from Christian experience.

One way to get some empirical evidence for this would be to ask converts from Islam and Mormonism to Christianity, "Is your experience of God, now that you are a Christian, different then it was when you were a Mormon or Muslim?" I hazard to say that the vast majority will say, "Yes, it is very different – I never knew Christ in a personal way as a

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<sup>206</sup> 15:10

Muslim or as a Mormon – my religious experience of the witness of the Spirit is very different than what I knew as a Mormon or as a Muslim.”

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Satanic counterfeits. We know from the story of Ananias and Sapphira, that Satan has the ability to put something in your mind. He could possibly put in an emotional/religious kind of perception.

*Answer:* Certainly, it is legitimate to think there could be satanic counterfeits of the witness of the Spirit. In Voodoo, for example, there is a religion that invokes satanic spirits and could well have some sort of demonic experience. But I think you would probably agree that that doesn't give me any reason to think that therefore I might be having a satanic experience and that my experience of the Holy Spirit isn't veridical.

*Followup:* I am offering it up as a possible explanation on how all these millions of people have what they think is a meaningful experience.

*Answer:* That is certainly possible, though I would prefer to give a little bit more sympathetic and charitable spin to these other religious experiences like Mormons and so forth. But, as I say, in certain religions, like Voodoo, I don't have any problems in what you are suggesting.

*Question:* In those other religions, particularly Islam, is there any promise in the book of Islam of something comparable to the Holy Spirit like there is in Christianity?

*Answer:* I am not aware of anything in the Qur'an like that. Having read it and studied it, I am not aware of anything like that. But there are mystical Muslim traditions like Sufism, for example, which is very experientially oriented, and certainly Sufis would claim to have this kind of immediate mystical experience of God.

*Followup:* But the experience of the Holy Spirit combined with the promise in the Bible that there is such a Holy Spirit that will dwell within us seems to me to confirm that that is a bit more verifiable.

*Answer:* I think you are right. In particular for traditional Islam, Qur'anic Islam, God or Allah is so far removed from human beings that you couldn't have an experience of him because he is utterly transcendent. I think that it is difficult to square that with your more traditional Islam, but I was thinking of Sufism when I made my comments.

*Question:* I work with Hindus and Muslims, and I cannot help but wonder every day why do these people continue to believe in what they believe in. When I was a young man, while growing up, I thought I was a Christian; then realized I wasn't a Christian, and I walked away from it. How can millions, perhaps billions of people, year after year, generation after generation, continue in their practices if they are getting nothing out of it? You have spoken to that, perhaps they are having a genuine experience based on the fundamentals of "God is" and they are connecting somehow with God, and God is allowing them because of his grace to all man to experience something. Maybe Satan is having some demon communicating with them?

*Answer:* There are deceiving spirits. And certainly, in a religion like Hinduism, which is

so idolatrous that it's filled with gods and goddesses and various forms of idol worship, one could well imagine that what Paul said about the pagan deities of Rome and Greece would be true of these deities of Hinduism.<sup>207</sup> Paul said that when these pagan Greeks and Romans offer worship to God, he says they are worshiping demons rather than Christ. That is why he forbade Christians to have table fellowship with these Greco-Roman pagans in the temples. They weren't to go to the feasts. He said, "I do not want you to be partners with demons."<sup>208</sup> Although it was very politically incorrect, that was clearly Paul's attitude toward the polytheistic religions of his day in the Greco-Roman world – he thought they were demonic. With a religion like Hinduism, it would be very easy to see how there could be demonic influences. In addition to that, of course, we should not underestimate the incredible factor of just socialization. The socialization that goes on within Mormonism and Islam is so deep that to become a Christian is to leave that culture and to deny virtually your whole identity. We know how difficult it is to break free of that socialization that comes from being raised in a Muslim culture or a Mormon church. When Jan and I were in Turkey last year and we would walk about in Istanbul and we'd see these giant mosques on every other corner and you would hear the call to prayer go out constantly, I just thought, *How could anybody raised in this culture not think Islam is true?* It is just so overwhelmingly powerful and in your face – of course, you would think it is true just in virtue of being raised in that culture. That, in addition to spiritual factors, would provide a sociological explanation to explain why it is difficult to break free.

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Let me proceed to one more variation on this objection. Somebody might say, "But aren't neuroscientists capable of inducing artificially religious experiences in the brain that seem like the witness of the Holy Spirit? They can wire your brain with electrodes to make you have a religious experience. Doesn't that show that this might not in fact be veridical?" In fact, this is not true, despite what you might have heard. It is not true. The sort of religious experiences that have been artificially induced by brain stimulus have been more akin to the experiences in pantheistic religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, where a person has a sense of oneness with the All – a sense of being united with the totality of all things. That kind of religious experience has been induced in people through artificial brain stimulus. But I don't know of anybody who has been able to induce, artificially in the brain, an experience of God's personal presence and love such as Christians experience in Jesus Christ.

But even more fundamentally, even more importantly than that, the fact that a non-veridical experience can be artificially induced does nothing to undermine the veridicality of an experience that you have which is not artificially induced. Otherwise, you'd have to say that, for example, your physical perceptions are all somehow in doubt and dubious because scientists can wire your brain up to make you have a sense of seeing or hearing something that isn't really there. That would be obviously absurd. This would lead to total skepticism. Just because a scientist could wire my brain up to have an experience of seeing something that isn't there doesn't in any way prove that when I am not wired up

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<sup>207</sup> 20:12

<sup>208</sup> cf. 1 Corinthians 10:20-21

and I see some people sitting here at the table that somehow that experience is non-veridical or illusory or even dubious. It doesn't seem to me that simply because a neurologist could stimulate my brain to think that I am having an experience of God means that when I am not being stimulated by the neurologist that my experience is somehow invalid or somehow dubious.

Therefore, I do not think that the objection to the self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit based upon supposedly comparable experiences in other religions does anything at all to undermine our trust or confidence in the deliverances of the Holy Spirit's witness.<sup>209</sup>

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* You were just talking about brain stimulation. Should we or should we not believe a testimony based on something like a near death experience?

*Answer:* I am not sufficiently expert in these near death experiences to make an intelligent judgment. I tend to be skeptical about these because one wonders if there isn't still some sort of brain activity that is leading the person to have these illusions. On the other hand, there are those, like my colleague J. P. Moreland and Gary Habermas, that have related experiences where these people appear to know things that they couldn't possibly have known during the time that they were comatose or were out. That would give some grounds, if those could be verified, that maybe there is something going on there. It is really hard to understand how a disembodied soul can float up to the ceiling like these people describe themselves having experience of. How can a disembodied soul have a visual perspective from the ceiling, since a disembodied soul doesn't have eyes or retinas to have the photons impinge on them? One wouldn't think they would have any perspective, much less one from the ceiling. So that is just very odd, and so I have an open mind about it and am willing to follow the evidence where it leads. I just haven't cared to pursue it in any depth.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

I have argued that the role of rational argumentation and evidence in knowing Christianity to be true is the role of a servant. The primary way in which we know that Christianity is true is through the self-authenticating witness of God's Spirit, and while reason and evidence and argument can be used to confirm that conclusion, it cannot be properly used to subvert that conclusion. Therefore, while the arguments of natural theology that we've studied are very useful in showing another person that God exists, and in providing a double warrant for what we know through the witness of the Holy Spirit, it seems to me that one is perfectly rational and, indeed, warranted in believing in God even in the absence of such arguments on the basis of the witness of the Holy Spirit.

Next time we will look at objections to the existence of God. We have discussed reasons to believe in God, as well as knowing that God exists apart from argument and evidence.

<sup>209</sup> 24:59

But, of course, there are arguments against God's existence, predominantly the problem of suffering and evil in the world. Next time we will begin our section of the class discussing the principal arguments as to why God does not exist and see what sort of answer we might give to those arguments.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Total Running Time: 28:16 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § VII. PROBLEM OF SUFFERING AND EVIL

#### Lecture 1

### **Problem of Suffering and Evil**

We have been talking about natural theology, and we have looked at arguments for God's existence. Then we looked at belief in God as properly basic – warranted belief in God without arguments. I argued that on the basis of the witness of the Holy Spirit, one can have a warranted belief in God as a properly basic belief grounded in the self-authenticating witness of God's Spirit.

Of course, on the other side of the ledger are the arguments for atheism that might be offered. In fact, there really aren't very many arguments for atheism. What you discover when you talk to the vast majority of atheists is that they will simply say, "There's no evidence that God exists!" In fact, this becomes almost a sort of mantra with many atheists. They have been taught to utter this slogan, and if the Christian has no evidence, then that just excuses them in their atheism. They just repeat that there is no evidence that God exists.

Sometimes this can be almost funny. I had one blogger characterize my debate with Lewis Wolpert in Central Hall, London, a couple of years ago as follows: Wolpert gets up and says, "There's no evidence that God exists!" Craig gets up and says, "There *is* evidence that God exists, and here it is: A, B, C, D" and lays out the evidence. Wolpert gets up and says, "There's no evidence that God exists!" Craig gets up and says, "There *is* evidence that God exists, and here it is: A, B, C, D." And back and forth.

In fact, it seems many times that that is not an exaggeration of the case. The atheist has just been taught to say that "There is no evidence for God's existence!" and to repeat this as a sort of slogan. But if you have mastered the arguments for God's existence that we've just completed in this class, then that mantra won't apply to you. If the atheist says, "There's no evidence for God's existence!" then what you can say is, "*Really?* Gosh, I can think of at least five arguments for God's existence!" At that point, he has *got* to ask you, "Like what?" Then you are off and running! And you share with him the teleological argument or the ontological argument or the cosmological argument. Then you can discuss whether or not these are good arguments. But you have gotten the debate off of this dime of saying there is no evidence for God's existence. For the vast majority of atheists, they are able to get away with this because the Christian doesn't have any arguments for God's existence. But with you, that won't apply.

### ***Introduction***

What positive argument could be offered for atheism? I think the principal argument in favor of atheism today is the argument from the suffering in the world. When you look at the suffering in the world, so much of it appears to be utterly pointless and unnecessary that it is hard to believe that there could be an all-loving and all-powerful God. So the suffering in the world would provide some reason for thinking that God does not exist.

In dealing with this very emotionally loaded topic, I think it is helpful to make a number of distinctions (these are on the outline) that will keep our thinking clear. First of all, we need to distinguish between the *intellectual* problem of suffering and the *emotional* problem of suffering.

The intellectual problem of suffering concerns whether or not it is plausible to think that God and the suffering in the world can coexist. The intellectual problem concerns whether or not, given the suffering in the world, it is impossible or improbable that there is a God. How plausible is it to think these two can coexist? On the other hand, the emotional problem of suffering is very different. This concerns how to dissolve people's dislike or repudiation of a God who would permit the suffering in the world.

I think it is very important to keep these problems distinct because the answer to the intellectual problem of suffering is apt to appear dry and uncaring to someone who is actually going through terrible suffering. I remember reading that when Joni Eareckson suffered her paralyzing diving accident there was a parade of well-meaning Christians through her hospital room, offering reasons as to why God may have permitted this to occur in her life.<sup>211</sup> As I read them, I said, "Wow! Some of these are pretty good! These are pretty good, philosophically sound reasons and defenses." But to her, they came across as utterly arid and empty and meaningless because they didn't speak to her emotional need. Someone who, like Joni Eareckson, is really suffering emotionally – that person is going to need some sort of emotional comfort or salve to help them, not an intellectual answer.

But somebody who is contemplating the problem as a purely intellectual or philosophical objection isn't going to be satisfied with having some kind of emotional salve to put on his wounds. He wants a rigorous answer. The answer to the emotional problem of evil is apt to appear superficial and inadequate and sentimental because he is considering it as an abstract philosophical problem.

So the responses that are appropriate to the intellectual problem and to the emotional problem are very different. I am convinced that for most people the problem of suffering is not really an intellectual problem. I think for most people it is really an emotional problem. Their unbelief is not borne out of *refutation* of God's existence, but out of *repudiation* of God's existence. They just want nothing to do with a God who would allow them or other people to suffer so terribly, and so they want nothing to do with him.

But in order to support my claim that the problem of suffering really is an emotional rather than an intellectual problem, we need to first look into the intellectual problem posed by suffering to show why it fails as a proof of atheism.

## DISCUSSION

Question: Do you find this in Q&As a lot? The emotional objection?

Answer: I was thinking more in personal conversation. When I talk to folks who are wrestling with this problem, I very quickly get the impression that for them it is really

<sup>211</sup> 5:05

more of a kind of anger – they are angry at God – because of all the terrible suffering that they see. “How could there be someone who would permit this sort of thing?” I would really encourage you to read Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* – it is very much like Ivan, who just says, “I don’t *care* if there is a good reason! I don’t want anything to do with a God like that. I just reject him.” I think that is the way most people who reject God because of atheism think. It is not so much intellectual as it is anger and hurt.

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### ***The Intellectual Problem of Evil***

Let me say something about the intellectual problem. Here we need to keep in mind exactly who has the burden of proof with respect to this problem. We are considering now arguments *for atheism*. Previously, we have been talking about arguments *for God*. So it was the believer who had the burden of proof to support his premises in his arguments for God’s existence. But now, you see, it is the atheist’s turn. Now we want to hear from the atheist some good argument against God’s existence. So it is the atheist who has to shoulder the burden of proof here. It is up to him to give us an argument for the conclusion “Therefore, God does not exist.”

I think too often believers, in dealing with this intellectual problem, allow the atheist to shift the burden of proof onto their shoulders. The atheist says, “Give me some good reason why God would permit all the suffering in the world!” And suddenly the burden is thrust back on the believer to explain all the suffering in the world, and the atheist is able to just sit back and fold his arms and play the skeptic and take pot shots at the various reasons that the theist offers and say they are all inadequate. The atheist ends up having to prove nothing. He just gets to play the skeptic. This might be a clever debating strategy on the part of the atheist, but it is completely illegitimate philosophically. It is intellectually dishonest. The atheist should not be allowed to shirk his intellectual responsibilities. It is the atheist who is claiming that the coexistence of God and the suffering in the world are in some way incompatible with each other:<sup>212</sup> they are either impossible or they are improbable with respect to one another. So it is up to him to give us an argument – it is up to him to provide support for its premises. It is now the Christian’s turn to sit back and play the skeptic and to take pot shots at the arguments or the evidence that the atheist will provide. The Christian doesn’t have to show that there is some good reason for the suffering in the world; the atheist has to show that there is no good reason that God might have for permitting the suffering in the world. So when you are talking to an atheist about the problem of suffering, do not allow him to shift the burden of proof to your shoulders. It is up to him to show that somehow the suffering in the world disproves God’s existence.

The problem of suffering, intellectually speaking, comes in two versions: the *logical* version and the *probabilistic* version. The logical version of the problem says that the existence of God and suffering in the world are logically impossible. They are like the irresistible force and the immovable object – if one exists, the other one does not exist. So, given the existence of the suffering, it is logically impossible for God to exist. On the other hand, the probabilistic version, which is sometimes called the evidential version of

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the problem of suffering, says, “All right, it’s *possible* that God and the suffering in the world coexist, but nevertheless it is highly *improbable* that God and the suffering in the world coexist.” Given the terrible suffering in the world, it is improbable that God exists.

So before you begin to talk about the problem of suffering with a non-believer, you need to determine which version of the problem he is pressing. Which version is bothering him? If he is like the typical unbeliever, he has got no clue as to which version of the problem he is pressing. So you need to help him out. You need to say to your friend, “Now, let me understand what you are saying. Are you saying that it is logically impossible that God and the suffering in the world coexist? Is that what you mean? Or are you saying that it is just improbable that God and the suffering in the world coexist? What are you saying?” You may need to help him clarify his thinking in order to determine which version of the problem to respond to. And what he says will determine how you respond because there are different responses to the logical version and the probabilistic version.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* I think it goes without saying that the God you are defending is a kind and loving God.

*Answer:* Yes, that is right. When, as we will see when we get to the statement of the problem, we are talking about a God, it is a God who is all-loving and all-powerful. Obviously, if God is limited in power, then maybe he can’t stop all the suffering in the world because he is finite. Or if he is not all-good, if he is kind of malevolent, in that case he wouldn’t necessarily want to stop all the suffering. So we are talking about the classical concept of God as an all-good, or all-loving, and all-powerful being. The question is, can that sort of God exist and the suffering of the world exist? That is a good point you raised.

*Question:* Couldn’t you move back a step further and say if you are really a materialist and atheist, then there really is no problem?

*Answer:* That is what the atheist will say! The atheist will say for him the problem of suffering is not a problem on his worldview because, of course, in a world in which there is no God superintending things, it is just blind nature that is at work, and so we would naturally expect to see the world filled with suffering as a result of the blind evolutionary process. Nature is red in tooth and claw, as they say. So many statements of the probabilistic version of the problem of suffering will be of this nature. They will say that the suffering in the world is more probable on naturalism than it is on theism because if naturalism is true, this is exactly the sort of world you would expect to see, but it is not what you would expect to see if theism is true.

*Followup:* Even further back, in definition, there is no such thing as suffering and evil.<sup>213</sup>

*Answer:* All right, I see your point; but I have tried to avoid this problem for the atheist by how I formulated the problem. Usually, among philosophers, this problem is not called

the “problem of suffering.” It is usually called the “problem of evil.” As you have pointed out, that would make it easier for the theist to defeat the atheist by just saying that, on naturalism, there is no such thing as objective good and evil. In nature, whatever is, is right. So the atheist cannot really consistently complain about all the evil in the world, because on his view there really isn’t any evil. You need God in order to have evil. But that is why I framed the problem in terms of suffering rather than evil. As I have framed it, I am not assuming that there is evil in the world, just that there is suffering. C. S. Lewis wrote a book that had a nice title; he called it *The Problem of Pain*. Same thing! So I think the atheist can avoid the problem that you rightly raise – and we will return to that later on – , but you can avoid that problem by focusing, not on moral evil in the world, but just focusing on pain and suffering and asking how could an all-loving, all-powerful God permit so much unnecessary and pointless suffering.

*Question:* If you hold to a personal creator theology, as opposed to a perfect being theology, this isn’t even an issue. I believe in a personal creator. So, I would ask, how is suffering even evidence against a personal creator? Even if it is proof against a perfect being, that doesn’t justify atheistic evolution. It doesn’t justify arguments against miracles, it doesn’t justify a lot of things.

*Answer:* By personal creator, are you saying what was inferred from an earlier question – a creator that is finite in power and limited in his goodness? Is that what you mean?

*Followup:* Maybe our moral intuitions are messed up. We don’t technically know that our moral intuitions are perfect. I am saying if there is a personal creator out there, how is suffering evidence against it?

*Answer:* As I say, in response to the earlier question, we are assuming an orthodox concept of God. They may be willing to admit that the problem of suffering is quite compatible with, say, Zeus. No problem! In fact, that is why Intelligent Design theorists will often say their argument is not an argument for God’s existence – because there could be an intelligent designer who might be an absolute stinker, morally speaking. Or he might be limited in power. So this isn’t an argument against a personal creator; it is not an argument against a designer. It would be an argument against the existence of an all-loving, all-powerful God in the classical sense of the word “God.” But you are quite right: it wouldn’t justify naturalism in the sense that there is no personal creator or designer. That is quite right.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Total Running Time: 18:34 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § VII. PROBLEM OF SUFFERING AND EVIL

#### Lecture 2

### Problem of Suffering and Evil: Logical Version

We have been talking about the problem of suffering in the world, and I suggested that this is the most potent of the atheistic arguments that is on offer today. I distinguished two versions of this problem: an *intellectual* version and an *emotional* version. In looking at the intellectual problem of evil, we saw that this also comes in two versions: a *logical* version and a *probabilistic* version.

According to the logical version of the intellectual problem of suffering, it is logically impossible that God and evil (or suffering) coexist. According to the probabilistic version, it is possible that God and suffering coexist, but, nevertheless, it is highly improbable, and thus, given the suffering in the world, it is improbable that God exists.

#### Logical Version

##### Statement of the Problem

What we want to do is begin to examine the logical version of the intellectual problem of evil. The key to this argument is the atheist claim that it is impossible that God and the suffering in the world coexist. The atheist is basically saying that the following two statements are logically inconsistent with each other:

1. God is all-powerful and all-good.
2. Suffering exists.

The proponent of the logical version of the problem of evil is saying that these two propositions cannot both be true. The obvious question that arises when we put the problem in this way is, why think that these two propositions are logically inconsistent with each other? After all, one is not the negation of the other. So there is no *explicit* contradiction between these two statements. The atheist must think that these are somehow *implicitly* contradictory. But in that case, he must have some hidden assumptions which would bring out this implicit contradiction and make it explicit. The question is: what are those hidden assumptions?

They seem to be two in number:

3. If God is all-powerful, then he can create any world that he wants.
4. If God is all-loving, then he would prefer a world without suffering.

The idea here is that God is all-powerful, and therefore he can create any world that he wants. He is all-good, and therefore he prefers a world without suffering. Thus, God is capable of creating, and he prefers, a world without suffering. Therefore, suffering does not exist. But that contradicts #2 – that suffering exists – so it shows that there is a contradiction between God and suffering. Given that suffering exists, it follows that God

does not exist. Given the presence of suffering, we know that there is no God.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* In statement #1, you say he is all-powerful and all-good, but statement #4 you say he is all-loving. Is there a difference?

*Answer:* No, you could have “all-loving” in there if you want. I think all-good would comprise being all-loving because loving is part of being good.

*Question:* In order to use the first argument [*i.e.*, *the first premise*] would you not have to define “all-powerful” and “all-good”? You would only be able to define him in terms that we understand. So, you don’t really know what he is saying.<sup>215</sup>

*Answer:* No, you would just ask, “What do you mean by ‘all-powerful’ and ‘all-good’?” We will see that, at least with regard to being all-powerful, that does require some finessing here in assessing the truth of #3. But by being all-good, I think the atheist would just say what we normally mean by a good person or a loving person. If you say that a good person makes people suffer unnecessarily and without any reason for it at all, then you are just using the word “good” in an idiosyncratic way that isn’t what we mean normally by goodness. So the words here are not intended to be peculiar; they are intended to be used in the normal way that Christians would affirm when we say that an all-powerful and all-good and all-loving God exists.

*Question:* It seems that the element that is missing in the logical sequence is that there is the assumption that man has no free will outside of God. It assumes God is in control of every aspect of reality.

*Answer:* I think what you are doing now is raising a critical issue rather than a comprehension issue, and I think you are right.

*Followup:* There doesn’t seem to be a logical conclusion presented here.

*Answer:* No, I think the logic here is fine. I think that the conclusion does follow correctly that if God is all-powerful and all-good and these two assumptions are necessarily true, then it is impossible that suffering exists. So the question will be, are these two assumptions true?

*Followup:* It seems to me that all of these could be true.

*Answer:* Well, that is going to be the question. If they are all true, then we have a problem.

*Followup:* Think about the Garden of Eden and heaven. God prefers there is no suffering in both. So, all premises are true (including #3 and #4).

*Answer:* Well, we will see! Hang on, and we will see whether or not they are all true. I am more skeptical than you are that #3 and #4 are necessarily true.

*Question:* The critical verb to me is “prefers” in #4. If God prefers a world without suffering, then this is OK. In other words, you would have to substitute “demands”

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<sup>215</sup> 5:04

instead of “prefers.” If he just prefers one, that would infer he would allow one temporarily at least for a greater good.

*Answer:* Let’s substitute a different word then – say, God would “choose.” If God is all-loving, he would choose a world without suffering.

*Followup:* I would think you would have to substitute a word “demand” or “not allow.”

*Answer:* OK, “would not allow” suffering! We can use that instead for premise #4. “If God is all-loving, he would not allow suffering to exist in the world.” I am not trying to load these terms with lots of special meanings. Then you will do what I am going to do – you will challenge the truth of #4. But the basic argument is the same, an all-loving God, if he exists, would not allow this suffering in the world.

*Question:* Doesn’t this argument violate the atheistic moral realism you went through? They are using “good” which, in a prior argument you presented, they don’t believe in “good.”

*Answer:* Let’s understand this about the logical version of the problem of evil: What the logical version of the problem of evil does is try to expose an *internal* contradiction in the Christian worldview. The atheist is not affirming that it is true that God is all-good. He is just saying, “You Christians believe #1, and you believe #2. You don’t think suffering is illusory as Hindus do. Yet, #1 and #2 are contradictory with each other.” So he has exposed an internal contradiction within the Christian worldview. That is why there is no problem with moral realism.<sup>216</sup>

## Solution of the Problem

What might be said in response to this logical version of the problem of suffering? In order for this argument to be logically valid, both of the hidden assumptions need to be necessarily true. The question is, are they each *necessarily* true? Let’s think about them.

### There is No Proven Inconsistency Between God and Evil

Think about #3, that *if God is all-powerful, then he can create any world that he wants*. Is that *necessarily* true? I think that, as the earlier question has suggested, it is not necessarily true, if it is possible that people have freedom of the will. It is logically impossible to *make* someone do something *freely*. That is as logically impossible as making a married bachelor or a round square. So God’s being all-powerful does not mean that he can do the logically impossible. Indeed, there really aren’t any such things as the logically impossible. Those are just self-contradictory combination of words, like “square circle” or “married bachelor.” So God does not necessarily have the ability to create just any world that he wants, if it is possible that human beings have genuine freedom of the will.

If the unbeliever insists at this point that an omnipotent God, an all-powerful God, most certainly *does* have the power to do the logically impossible, then the problem of evil just evaporates automatically. Because then he can bring it about that both #1 and #2 are true,

<sup>216</sup> 9:50

even though they are logically contradictory to each other! So the atheist shoots himself in the foot, if he says God can do the logically impossible because he is omnipotent. Then there is no problem posed by suffering, since God can bring it about that these two logically incompatible propositions are both true.

If it is possible that people have free will, it turns out that #3 is not necessarily true because there may be possible worlds in which the people don't freely do the things that God would prefer for them to do. They can refuse to do what God desires. So there might be any number of possible worlds that are not feasible for God to create because the people in them would not do the right thing. In fact, when you reflect on it, it is possible that in any world of free persons which has as much good as the actual world does, there would also be this much suffering. There is no guarantee whatsoever that in some other world of free persons with this much good, there would be less suffering.

Notice that this conjecture doesn't need to be true. It doesn't need to be probable. It just needs to be *possible*. As long as that is possible, it shows that it is not necessarily true that if God is all-powerful, he can create just any world that he wants. So assumption #3 is not necessarily true, and therefore the atheist argument is logically invalid.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* It seems like God would be able to create any world he wants; he could create a world without free will. So he could choose not to create free will. So you need to have the best of all possible worlds.

*Answer:* I don't think so. Certainly God could create a world without any free creatures in it at all. He could create a world that has no higher life forms than rabbits, for example. That is certainly within God's power. But there may be worlds – for example, worlds of free persons that involve as much moral good as this world does, but he doesn't have the ability to create them – and then, say, in these possible worlds these persons would never sin, and there would be no evil and no suffering. God may not have the ability to create those worlds because if he tried to create those people in those circumstances, they would not cooperate, and they wouldn't do the right thing. So there is any number of possible worlds that are logically possible for God to create, but they are not actually feasible for him to create because the people in them would not cooperate; they would freely go wrong.

*Followup:* He can choose to create any world he wants, but what you are saying is he can't choose one that is logically inconsistent, correct?<sup>217</sup>

*Answer:* No, I am not saying that. Let's imagine a world without sin, in which there are lots of free people, and in every moral situation they find themselves in they always make the right choice. That is a logically possible world. There is nothing illogical or self-contradictory about a world like that. But what I am saying is that that kind of a world may not be feasible for God to create because if he created those people, in those circumstances, they might freely go wrong. And so that world wouldn't come about. It is not within God's control to make them always do the right thing. If he did that, that

removes their freedom. This leads to this rather paradoxical conclusion that I think is quite correct that there are worlds that are, in and of themselves, logically possible – there is no inconsistency in a world in which people always freely do the right thing – , but those things might not be feasible for God to create because, in order to do that, he would have to override their free will, and in these worlds we are imagining people do have free will.

*Question:* How do you reconcile the doctrine of heaven? Is it possible for people in heaven to sin? Given an infinite future, wouldn't it seem possible that every free agent in heaven would sin?

*Answer:* I think there are a couple of ways to deal with this. This comes up in my debate with the philosopher Ray Bradley on the question of hell.<sup>218</sup> What I point out in that debate is that heaven is not itself a possible world. Heaven is the result of a state that leads up to heaven where people have freely chosen to obey and worship God, and so they are rewarded and go to heaven. It is not as though God could just sort of scale away or take off this pre-mortem state and just create heaven by itself because heaven is the state which is the result of all these prior choices. If he did try to create such an isolated world, then you have got a new world on your hands, and it might very well be the case that then the people would go wrong and do the wrong thing. The deeper question posed by your question is, in heaven will people have the freedom to sin or not? I think there are a couple of ways that one might respond to this. There isn't any sort of orthodox doctrine on this. I think a couple of sorts of responses are possible. One would be that people in heaven do have the freedom to sin but God has chosen the elect to be only those who, if they were in heaven, would always freely choose to do the right thing. So even though they have the ability to sin, they just won't exercise it. The other thing you could say – and this I find very plausible – is that the freedom to sin is effectively removed in heaven by coming to see Christ in all of his beauty and glory and purity. I think that the human will to evil will simply be overcome by the powerful and immediate presence of Christ. So, just as iron filings stick to a gigantic magnet, there would not be the ability to fall away because Christ, being seen in all of his magnificence, would be so attractive and irresistible that the freedom to sin would be removed. But again, that is only the result of a pre-mortem condition in which people are created at a sort of “arm's length” from God and all his glory and thus have the freedom to respond or refuse to believe in him during this vale of decision-making until we get to heaven.

*Question:* On this #3, it is a resurrection of the old chestnut, “Can God make a stone so big he can't move it?” So if we are saying God can make a world where there is moral choice, then it would violate one of his attributes to say he should make it where there are no moral choices.

*Answer:* It is similar to that in that the idea of making a stone too heavy for God to lift is a logically incoherent task, and therefore it doesn't affect divine omnipotence. An almighty being doesn't need to have the ability to make a stone too heavy for him to lift. Similarly, a being who is almighty doesn't need to have the ability to make people freely

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<sup>218</sup> For a transcript of this debate, see <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/can-a-loving-god-send-people-to-hell-the-craig-bradley-debate>

do something because that is also logically incoherent.<sup>219</sup> If that is right, then that means there may be worlds that God isn't capable of creating because if the people in them are free, he has got to stand back and let them make their choices, and it may be that in all of those worlds, somebody at least goes wrong. Therefore, there are no worlds that are completely free of evil and suffering.

*Question:* Evil began in heaven.

*Answer:* Right. . . . when I say "people" I would expand that to mean creatures of any sort that have free will, whether you think of this as angels or persons or extraterrestrials.

*Question:* The sin question negates time. There has been experience with sin and with Satan and with sin in heaven, so that is something that in the original creation you wouldn't have this example. So believers, whether they are going to sin in heaven, they know the consequences of sin and having seen an angel sin in heaven and being cast out and so forth. So those portions of the argument would negate those experiences in that time.

*Answer:* You are responding to the point of sin in heaven?

*Question:* The thing about sin and sin in heaven – the Bible says that Jesus was slain before the foundation of the Earth. God, in his knowledge, knew that when he built us, however he built us, that we were going to fail right off the bat. I am sure that while he was sitting around in eternity past with Jesus, and he says, "Let's create a few billion angels, one of which is going to sin and take a third of them away, and there is going to be a conflict; you, my Son, I am going to call on later on to be the focal point of all eternity, as what would separate the sin from the saved."

*Answer:* We are not talking here about God's knowledge of the future or what will happen in the actual world. What we are talking about here is God, so to speak, "prior" to creation and contemplating the different worlds that he might make. And one of these worlds would be a world in which there are all these free persons, and in every situation they always do the right thing, so that there is no sin and no evil in that world. What I am suggesting is that God's being omnipotent doesn't mean that he has the power to create that world. The reason is because he doesn't have the ability to make the creatures freely do what is logically possible for them to do. So they might go wrong, and if they did, then that world wouldn't come about.

*Question:* I am not sure if it's logically possible for there to be a world in which all people freely choose to do good – in every choice they have they always choose good. I am not sure how God creating that world, would mean that he is making them freely choose good.

*Answer:* First of all, you said you weren't sure that there is such a possible world, where people always freely do the right thing, is that right?

*Followup:* No, I do not see any reason why there wouldn't be such a possible world.

*Answer:* Then if you say this is logically necessary – that free creatures sin –, that would seem to negate human freedom. If you say that sin is logically necessary, that seems to be

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<sup>219</sup> 20:00

just completely contrary to free will. In any moral situation in which a person is free, he has the ability either to do the right thing or to do the wrong thing. And if you say that sin is logically necessary, then I don't see how you can say that that person is free. So it seems to me that there is no inconsistency in imagining a world of free people in which, in every moral situation they find themselves, they always freely do the right thing. So it seems to me that such a world is *logically possible*. So now the question is, is it *feasible* for God to make that world? That would depend upon whether or not, if those people were in those circumstances, they would freely choose to do the right thing. It is possible that they do the right thing. That is all that proves – that there is a possible world like that, that it is *possible* that they would do the right thing.<sup>220</sup> But *would* they, if they were in those situations? It may well be the case that they would not and that, if God is going to allow them to be free, he has to allow them to sin and go against him. So, even though that world is possible, it would not be actual if God were to try to create those people in those circumstances because they would go wrong.

*Question:* Talking about suffering as something that is caused by man and free will – but how about natural disasters?

*Answer:* Right, we are not here talking about natural disasters because we are dealing simply with this question – if God is all-powerful, does that mean he can create any world that he wants? And I am suggesting that that isn't necessarily true. God's options may well be limited. Therefore, this argument fails. So we are not trying to give an account of natural suffering. We are just examining the truth of this third assumption, and I am suggesting it is not necessarily true. The atheist would have to show us that there is a world feasible for God – well, he would have to even show us more than that really. I don't know how the atheist could show us this – that any possible world is within God's ability to make. It seems to me the atheist would have to show that freedom of the will is *impossible* in order to carry this third point. He would have to show that freedom of the will is impossible. Otherwise there are going to be worlds where God may well find himself unable to actualize those worlds because the people would not freely cooperate.

*Question:* Are you saying that it is possible for God to create a world in which creatures always choose to do the right thing? That is possible but not feasible?

*Answer:* This is a very technical use of terms. What I am saying is a world like that is possible. A world like that is a possible world. But it may not be feasible for God to do it because it is logically impossible to make people do the right thing. So he finds himself incapable of bringing about that sort of a world.

*Followup:* So does that mean that we assume that, given free will, people will not always do the right thing unless they are made to?

*Answer:* No, we are not assuming that. That was a point I could have made here earlier as well. What we are just saying is that it *might* be the case. Remember the atheist is making a very strong claim here – that it is impossible for God and the suffering in the world to coexist. So we do not need to show that it is, in fact, the case that in order to bring about a world in which people always freely do the right thing that God would have to make them always do the right thing. As long as it is possible that people have free will, it may

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<sup>220</sup> 25:05

be the case that God finds himself confronted with a situation in which any world that involves, say, this much good would also have this much moral evil in it.

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Let me move on to the fourth assumption and address that: *If God is all-loving, he prefers a world without suffering* – or would choose a world without suffering. Is that *necessarily* true?

Again, as I think about it, it just doesn't seem that this is necessarily true. God could have overriding reasons for allowing the suffering in the world. We all know cases where we permit suffering in order to bring about a greater good. C.S. Lewis once remarked, "What do people mean when they say 'I am not afraid of God because I know he is good?' Have they never even been to a dentist?"<sup>221</sup> That illustration shows that many times we permit suffering for some greater good.

The atheist might say, but God wouldn't be limited in that way – he could just bring about the greater good directly! But clearly, given freedom of the will again, that may not be possible. Some goods, for example moral virtues, require freedom of the will. They cannot just be created in a puppet. They need to have free creatures in order to have moral virtues brought about.

So, it may well be the case that God finds that a world in which there is suffering may be, on balance, better than a world with no suffering at all.<sup>222</sup> At least that is possibly the case, and if that is possibly the case, then #4 is just not necessarily true. It is not necessarily true that God would prefer a world without any suffering in it.

It seems that both of the key assumptions made by the atheist are not necessarily true, and therefore the argument is doubly invalid.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Getting back to the emphasis on the world "prefers." I maintain that that #4 is absolutely and completely true. He does prefer a world with no suffering. He allows one with suffering, which presumably comes from sin, because of a greater good. A biblical example of this would be his decision of divorce. In Malachi, he says flat out, "God hates divorce." Yet, the Pharisees came to Christ and asked him about this, "Why did Moses allow a certificate of divorce?" and Christ says he did it because men's hearts were hard. So he has two wills which we know – he has his overriding will, which is an agreement with his overall attributes, but then he has a permissible will, which he will allow something that goes against what he really likes. He will allow it temporarily for a greater good, as you said. Even though I maintain that #4 is absolutely true, I see nothing wrong with that statement. The problem is that even though he prefers not to have it, he will allow it.

*Answer:* If you say that, then you will simply say that #3 is not necessarily true even though #4 isn't; therefore the argument still fails. But I am not even convinced that #4 is

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<sup>221</sup> C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, Chapter 3

<sup>222</sup> 30:08

true. For example, take the great good that is the result of the crucifixion of Christ and his death. I can well imagine that it is true that God would prefer a world in which that great good comes about, which necessitates sin, than a world in which nobody ever does anything wrong, so there is no moral evil in the world, but nevertheless it lacks this great good of Christ's crucifixion and death. Maybe, say, a world in which he only creates three people, and they all do the right thing and then they die, and that is it. I can well believe that God would prefer a world filled with suffering and some great good, like, say, Christ's suffering and death on the cross, over that world with three people in it and the limited good that would be brought about by that. I do not think even #4 is necessarily true.

*Followup:* One other example is – why did God allow sin and suffering? He could have stopped it – why did he allow it? I maintain he did it so at some point in the future he can demonstrate to all intelligent creatures anywhere by saying he gave these creatures total free will, and I can confirm that – “They chose not to obey me and they caused myself and my Son and the Holy Spirit pain. And look at what I did to get them back” – and then demonstrates his grace. If we tried to do something like that, that would be horrible, but God is all-good, so this points to his good...

*Answer:* See, I think that is saying what I am saying: that #4 is not true! A world in which that happens is preferable over a world in which, say, three people exist and never sin. Or that there is a world without any suffering. I could well see a world such as you have described would be preferred by God over a world that has no suffering at all.

I think you can see, in summary, that in assuming the truth of #3 and #4, the atheist has made incredibly strong assumptions for which there is really no good reason. We have every reason to be skeptical of #3 and #4, and, therefore, no sort of contradiction or inconsistency has been shown between God's being all-powerful and all-good and the existence of suffering in the world.<sup>223</sup>

<sup>223</sup> Total Running Time: 34:53 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § VII. PROBLEM OF SUFFERING AND EVIL

#### Lecture 3

### **Problem of Suffering and Evil: Probabilistic Version**

We have been talking in our lesson about the problem of evil, particularly the logical version of the problem of evil. You will remember that that version says that the existence of God and the existence of the suffering in the world are logically incompatible with each other. There is no possible world in which God exists and the world has suffering in it, or the suffering that we observe in it. These are logically incompatible with each other.

We saw that there is no explicit contradiction between the affirmations that *God exists* and *suffering exists*. So the atheist must be assuming some hidden premises that would bring out this contradiction and make it explicit. Those premises seem to be, first of all, that *if God is all-powerful, then he can create just any world that he wants*. Secondly, *if God is all-loving or all-good, then he would choose to create a world without suffering*. Since God is both all-powerful and all-loving, he both could and would choose to create a world without suffering. But since suffering exists, it therefore follows that God does not exist.

What I argued is that neither of those implicit assumptions is necessarily true. First of all, omnipotence doesn't mean that God can create just any world that he wants. It is logically impossible to *make* someone do something *freely*. So if God chooses to create free creatures, that means that he cannot guarantee how they will freely choose. But then it immediately follows that there are all kinds of worlds that are possible in and of themselves but which are not feasible for God to create because the free creatures would not cooperate. They would go wrong and therefore would not bring about the world that God intended. So it may well be the case, and I think it is the case given that human freedom is possible, that there are possible worlds that God cannot create. So that first assumption is just false, and that alone invalidates the atheist argument.

But secondly, we also saw that it is not necessarily true that if God is all-loving, he would choose a world without suffering. Worlds without suffering might have overriding disadvantages that make them less preferable to worlds that involve great amounts of suffering but maybe other great goods as well. Therefore, we cannot say with any sort of confidence that if God existed he would choose to create a world that had no suffering in it.

Since neither of those hidden assumptions is true, it follows that the atheist's argument is simply logically invalid. Therefore, no one has succeeded in showing the logical incompatibility between God and evil.

#### **We Can Prove that God and Evil are Consistent**

In fact, we can push the argument a notch forward by offering a proposition which, if possibly true, would prove that God and evil are logically compatible. Here is such a proposition:

God could not have created a world with as much good as this world but less evil, or less suffering, than the actual world. Moreover, God has good reasons for allowing the suffering in the world.

The idea here is that God's options for creating worlds are limited by human freedom. It may be that a world that has as much good as the actual world but with less suffering in it is infeasible for God. But, nevertheless, he has got good reasons for allowing the suffering that he does allow.

If this statement is even *possibly* true then it shows that there is no logical inconsistency between God and the suffering in the world because:

1. God exists.
2. God could not have created a world with as much good but less suffering and,
3. He has good reasons for allowing it.
4. Therefore, suffering exists.<sup>224</sup>

If this is true, then it entails that suffering exists and yet it is compatible with God's existence. I am not claiming that this *is* true, but as long as it is even *possibly* true, it shows that there is no inconsistency between God and the suffering in the world. It seems to me this is very plausibly possibly true. Therefore, this demonstrates positively that there is no logical problem of suffering.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Is there an advantage to keeping this whole discussion relative to this world and time? As soon as you put "afterlife" and "eternal life" into the context, all of this becomes not only possible but beyond plausible.

*Answer:* I agree with you that you cannot just limit the question to this life because that would presuppose that Christianity is false – that there is no afterlife. This is supposed to be an argument that shows an internal contradiction within Christian theism. So you are absolutely right! One of the reasons that God might have for allowing suffering would be to reward with over-abundant blessing those who bear their suffering in patience and faith in God.

*Followup:* I'm saying the entire worlds of this one and the next one, net-net, doesn't have suffering?

*Answer:* Let's be careful lest we sound like a Hindu, who says suffering is illusory. What you want to say is that suffering is compensated, that there is a recompense, for suffering in heaven and the afterlife. Those who have experienced horrible suffering in this life and go to heaven will look back and say, "I would go through it a million million times over in order to know this blessing and this joy!" So you are absolutely right: the atheist cannot exclude the idea of the afterlife if he is trying to show a logical impossibility between God and the suffering and evil in the world.

<sup>224</sup> 5:02

*Question:* What comes to my mind concerning this point is that certain types of good may not be able to be expressed without evil also being present in the world. That is probably why you would say that you could not create a world with as much good as this without evil also existing because you wouldn't be able to have acts like sacrifice and people saving each other, God saving other people, and that sort of thing without evil existing.

*Answer:* That is very true! I used to kind of discount that point when I would hear Christian theists say that. It didn't sound to me as if those moral goods were all that great. But when you really think about it, I think you are absolutely right about that! Moral virtues are not something that can just be created out of nothing, *ex nihilo*. That is why Adam and Eve, for example, were not morally perfect. They were innocent. They were morally innocent; but they weren't morally perfect. Even Jesus, we are told in the book of Hebrews, was perfected through what he suffered. He learned through what he suffered. So the development of moral virtues, of character, of the ability to make right and wrong decisions and to choose the right when temptation is strong to do the wrong, the whole notion of moral character presupposes the reality of evil and suffering. So this is not a point that is lightly dismissed. I think you are absolutely right that many great goods would not be possible, like having mature moral agents, unless there were suffering and difficulty in the world to overcome.

*Question:* You can also turn this around and in a presumed segment of the world where there is no suffering or evil, do you have happy people? For example, if everybody had enough money and no apparent illness, would that mean that they were happy and fulfilled? If you take a country like Sweden that has the highest standard of living and medical care and you take the young people there that have no apparent illnesses, the suicide rate in Sweden has been historically the highest in the world for decades.<sup>225</sup> How does this play?

*Answer:* That is a really good point! And here is something to go with it: I recently heard on the news that a survey of different countries of the world had been done to determine which was the happiest.<sup>226</sup> What was the country where people had the greatest sense of happiness and satisfaction and so forth? The answer was: Nigeria! That just blew me away when I heard that! It reinforces the point that you are making.

*Question:* John Piper makes several good points. One is similar to what you just said. If we didn't have a world with evil and suffering, Christ would not have been able to identify with us and there would not be such a thing as the crucifixion.

*Answer:* Right, the great good of Christ's atoning death and sacrifice needs to be factored in here, too. It may well be that a world containing that great good justifies permitting a world with creatures who choose evil and go astray.

*Question:* If evil is necessary for these second order goods like sacrifice and courage and so forth, doesn't that introduce a problem because it would mean that the fall was necessary for virtue to exist or be perfected?

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<sup>225</sup> In fairness, a correction needs to be made here. While higher than most countries, Sweden's suicide rate has not been the historically highest in the world as per the WHO suicide statistics found at [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/prevention/suicide\\_rates/en/](http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide_rates/en/)

<sup>226</sup> 10:04

*Answer:* Let's be careful here. I think that suffering may well be necessary in order for certain virtues to be developed – hardship, trial, pain, and so forth. But that doesn't mean sin is necessary, I don't think. So that is why I am differentiating between suffering and evil. Now it would be true that evil would be necessary for Christ's atoning death to occur, and some medieval theologians said of the fall, "*O Felix Culpa!*" or "Oh, Blessed Sin!" that Adam committed because it was through that that Christ's atoning sacrifice came to be a reality. So that would be a sort of paradox that it was through that that this great good came into the world. But that doesn't mean that the sin itself wasn't wrong and immoral and so forth. It would just mean that God had some overriding reason for allowing it to occur that justified him in doing so.

*Question:* If God created living creatures, man is the only one who can actually have evil.

*Answer:* Right, other than angels, say.

*Followup:* Watch Animal Planet and you see a male lion killing the cubs of a cheetah. But that is not evil. They have no morality built into them. They do whatever it takes to feed themselves and to survive. We are the only ones that are given the capability to do evil. I think what the question for me is, what was God's purpose in creating this particular world the way he did it. It very likely could have been that he wants creatures that "will worship My Son, and for them to worship My Son they have to have some cause. I can just make them all worship him, but that is no good, I want them to freely worship My Son and to do that, then they have to be able to freely go the other way."

*Answer:* Absolutely, I do not need to add to that. I think that is well said.

## **Probabilistic Version**

Most philosophers today, by far the vast, vast majority, be they theist or atheist, recognize that the logical version of the problem of evil has failed. But that leads us, then, to the probabilistic version of the problem of evil. And this is still very much a live issue.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The atheistic claim here is that the suffering in the world renders God's existence improbable, if not impossible. In particular, it seems improbable that God could have good reasons for permitting all of this suffering in the world. So much of the world's suffering appears to be pointless and unnecessary. Surely, God could have reduced the suffering in the world without impinging upon the overall goodness of the world. So the suffering in the world would provide some evidence that God does not exist. It would render God's existence improbable.

This is a much more powerful version of the argument. Because it has a more modest conclusion, it is easier to establish. It doesn't require as heavy a burden of proof as the logical version. Therefore, the atheist's responsibility here is lighter – simply to show that it is improbable that God exists. So what can we say in response to this argument?

## Solution to the Problem

I want to make three points in response to this argument.<sup>227</sup>

### Our Inability to Properly Assess the Probability that God and Evil Co-Exist

The first point is that *we are simply not in a position to say with any confidence that it is improbable that God lacks sufficient reasons for permitting the suffering in the world.* We are not in a good position to say that it is improbable that God lacks morally sufficient reasons for permitting the suffering. The key to the probabilistic version of the problem of evil is the atheist claim that it is improbable that God has good reasons for permitting the suffering that we see around us.

We all recognize that much of the suffering in the world looks unjustified – it looks unnecessary. The key move here for the atheist will be the move from appearance to reality. He needs to show that because the suffering in the world looks unjustified, therefore it really is unjustified. My first point that I want to make is that the atheist simply can't bridge that gap. He can't plausibly bridge the gap between the appearance of unjustified suffering to the fact that the suffering really is unjustified.

As finite persons we are limited in intelligence and insight, in space and time, and therefore have a limited frame of reference. But God sees the end of history from the beginning, and he providentially orders history so that his ultimate ends are achieved through the free decisions of human persons. In order to achieve his ultimate purposes, God may well have to put up with certain evils and suffering along the way which have been justly permitted by God in order to attain his ultimate purposes.

Let me just give a very brief illustration of this before we close, and then we will develop this point in more detail next time. I once saw a puzzle where there was a box like this [*Dr. Craig draws the illustration on the whiteboard*] and inside it were four dots. And the challenge was, how do you connect these four dots without lifting your pencil from the paper with only two lines? You have only two lines; how can you connect these four dots with two lines without lifting your pencil from the paper? And when you look at it, it seems as if it is impossible; there is no way you could connect the four dots using two lines without lifting your pencil – until you look at them within a wider frame of reference! And then you see, it is easy! The problem was you were looking at it within your limited frame of reference where it looked impossible but within a wider frame of reference you can see you can actually do it.

That is illustrative of the point I am trying to make. Within our limited frame of reference, bound in time and space, limited in intelligence and insight, we may not see or discern the reasons why God permits some instance of suffering to come into our lives. But when looked at within his wider framework of the whole of human history, from beginning to end, there may well be sufficient reasons why God permits that suffering to come into your life, which are simply not within your cognitive abilities to grasp. Therefore, to someone within the limited framework, he is in no position to say with any kind of confidence that “It is improbable that God has a good reason for allowing this instance of suffering to come into my life.” Given his limited frame of reference, he

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<sup>227</sup> 15:05

simply is not in a position to make those kinds of probability judgments with any sort of confidence.

Next time, I want to give two illustrations of this point: one from modern science and then another from popular culture.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Total Running Time: 19:45 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

## § VII. PROBLEM OF SUFFERING AND EVIL

## Lecture 4

**Given the Full Scope of the Evidence,  
God's Existence is Probable**

Last time we began to look at the probabilistic version of the problem of suffering, which says that although God and the suffering in the world are logically compatible, nevertheless, given the suffering in the world, it is highly improbable that God exists. We saw that that hinges upon the judgment that it is improbable that God could have a good reason for permitting the suffering that we observe in the world.

The first point in response that I wanted to make to this is that this is a claim which is so extreme that no atheist can discharge the burden of proof to show that it is improbable that God lacks morally sufficient reasons for permitting the suffering in the world. We are just not in a good position to make those kind of probability judgments with any confidence because we operate in a very limited frame of reference in time and space, our cognitive abilities are limited, and God's morally sufficient reasons for allowing the suffering that we observe to enter our lives might not emerge until centuries later or in a way that is so complicated we could never hope to discern it.

I promised to give two illustrations of this point, one from science and then one from popular culture. The first illustration comes from the field of science called "chaos theory." Scientists have found that certain large scale systems exhibit chaotic behavior. That is to say, they are sensitive to the tiniest disturbances that will upset the entire system. For example, weather systems are this way. Insect populations are also chaotic in this way. A little butterfly fluttering its wings on a twig in South Africa can set up a chain of events that will eventually ensue in a hurricane over the Atlantic Ocean. And yet no one looking at that little butterfly fluttering on the branch would ever, in principle, be able to predict such an outcome. We have no way of knowing how even a trivial alteration in the events of the world might have an impact that is utterly unexpected.

The second illustration comes from popular culture – the movie *Sliding Doors*, starring Gwyneth Paltrow. This is a fascinating film which tells the story of a young woman who is rushing down the stairs to catch a subway train. As she approaches the train, the doors begin to slide shut. At that point, the movie splits into two separate tracks. In one track, it shows how her life would go if she manages to get through the sliding doors into the train. In the other track, it shows how her life would go if the doors slide shut before she manages to reach the train. What you discover is that, in these two lives, the trajectory of these lives take increasingly divergent paths. Based on this seemingly trivial incident of the sliding doors, the one life goes into a trajectory that is filled with happiness, success, material prosperity – everything she does succeeds! The other life is filled with disappointment, failure, suffering, and misery. All because of this seemingly insignificant incident of making it through the sliding doors or not! Moreover, whether or not she makes it through the sliding doors depends upon whether or not a little girl playing with

her dolly on the stairwell railing is pulled back by her father as the young woman rushes down the stairs to catch the train. And you can't help but wonder as you watch this film what other trivial, seemingly inconsequential, events went into preparing that event. Maybe the father and the daughter were delayed that morning because the little girl didn't like the breakfast cereal that her mother poured for her that morning.<sup>229</sup> Or maybe the father was distracted from watching his daughter because of something he read in the morning newspaper, and so on and so forth. Just utterly seemingly trivial events could have resulted in that momentary difference of the little girl's playing with her dolly on the stairwell railing that resulted in the incredible impact on this young woman's life!

The most interesting part of the movie, however, is the film's ending. What happens is that in the life that is filled with happiness and success the young woman is suddenly killed in an accident. In the other life, the seemingly miserable life, she learns from her experiences, and that life turns around, and it turns out in the end that the life with the suffering and the misery was really the better life after all!

Now, don't misunderstand me. My point here is *not* that everything is going to turn out for the best in this life and that we will see that it was all for a reason. No, no! The point I am trying to make here is much more modest. It is simply this: given the dizzying complexity of life, and the incomprehensible way in which events are intertwined with one another, it is simply beyond our capacity, when some incident of suffering enters our life, to say with any confidence that it is improbable that God has a morally sufficient reason for allowing that to occur. Every event which occurs sends a ripple effect through history so that God's morally sufficient reasons for permitting it might not emerge until hundreds of years from now or maybe in another country. Only an all-knowing God could comprehend the infinite complexities of directing a world of free people toward his ultimate ends for human history.

Take any single historical event that you want to – say, the Allied victory at D-Day – and think of the innumerable, incomprehensible complexity of the preparations that had to go into that event's transpiring. It is not at all improbable that there would be all sorts of suffering and difficulty and trial that would be required in order to get all of the free agents in those circumstances on the scene at the same time to bring about that event. I think it is hardly surprising that many events that occur in history would appear to us to be pointless and unnecessary, that we wouldn't see the reason for which they occur, because we are simply overwhelmed by this kind of complexity.

Notice that this is *not* an appeal to mystery. It is not saying, "God works in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform!" Rather, it is an appeal to our inherent cognitive limitations as time-bound and space-bound creatures, limitations which make it impossible for us to say, when we are confronted with some incident of suffering, that God probably doesn't have a good reason for allowing this to occur. In other contexts, unbelievers recognize these limitations. For example, this is one of the very common criticisms of a theory of ethics called utilitarianism, which is the view that you should do that action which will bring about the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. That is what you should do in any moral situation in which you find yourself – do that action that will bring about the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.

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<sup>229</sup> 5:03

Sounds great, doesn't it? Well, one of the common criticisms of utilitarianism is that we have absolutely no clue what will bring about the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. Some action that looks like a great boon in the short term could turn out to be disastrous in the long term. Something that, in the short term, looks really terrible could turn out to be a great benefit to mankind. We just don't have a clue as to what will ultimately bring about the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. Similarly, when we contemplate God's providence over the whole of human history, directing a world of free creatures to his provisioned ends, then I think you can see that we are simply not in a position to say with any sort of confidence that God probably doesn't have a morally sufficient reason for allowing the suffering that we observe in the world.<sup>230</sup>

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* I had a student that used to consistently withdraw to chaos theory as an excuse to not have to learn a lot of things and not have to really think about things. "As far as I know, anything could mean something." What would you say to somebody who takes refuge in this chaos theory?

*Answer:* It seems to me that is a misuse of the theory. The theory doesn't say that the outcomes, say, of these events in the weather or insect populations or water flowing out of your faucet, is exempt from causal determinism. It does not mean "chaotic" in the sense that these are causally indeterminate. Rather, it is that these causes are so complex that a tiny disturbance or perturbation can upset the system so that you cannot predict the outcome. But it doesn't mean that it is indeterminate. So this is still governed by the physical laws of nature. It is no excuse for thinking that just anything goes. That is not what it means.

*Question:* This is supported by the Anthropic Principle – if you make very small changes in physical features throughout the universe that you could have destruction.

*Answer:* Yeah, that is a good point! I hadn't thought of that before. Remember when we did the argument from the fine-tuning of the universe for a cosmic designer we saw that if you were to alter, say, the subatomic weak force by even one part out of ten to the hundredth power, it would prove absolutely disastrous for the whole cosmos? That would be an example of where some seemingly inconsequential change could have consequences that would be just very, very far reaching.

### **Given the Full Scope of the Evidence, God's Existence is Probable**

Second point (this is the third point on the outline [*Dr. Craig is referring to the original outline*], but I am going to take it second) is: *Relative to the full scope of the evidence, God's existence is probable.* The key point to understand here is that probabilities are relative to background information. When you say that some hypothesis is probable, say, hypothesis H, you mean it is probable relative to some background

<sup>230</sup> 10:17

information. It is the probability of H on B – the probability of the hypothesis on the background information. To give an example, suppose we are given the background information that “Joe is a college student” and “90% of college students drink beer.” Relative to that background information, the probability of the hypothesis that “Joe is a beer drinker” is very high. That would be a very, very high probability that Joe drinks beer relative to that background information. But now suppose that our background information is filled out a little more and we find out that Joe is a college student at Biola University, where you are not supposed to drink alcohol, and that 90% of Biola University students keep their integrity and don’t drink alcohol, don’t drink beer. Now the probability of Joe being a beer drinker is completely reversed. It is highly unlikely that Joe is a beer drinker.

So, to repeat, probabilities are relative to what background information you consider. The atheist says that God’s existence is improbable. When he says this, you should immediately ask yourself, “Improbable relative to what?” What is the background information relative to which God’s existence is said to be improbable? Is it relative to the suffering in the world? If that’s all you consider for your background information, it is hardly surprising that God’s existence might look improbable relative to that alone (though I’ve argued that even in that respect we are not in a position to make that sort of judgment with any confidence).<sup>231</sup>

But this is not really the interesting question, is it? The really interesting question is, what is the probability of God’s existence relative to the full scope of the evidence? I am convinced, when you consider the full scope of the evidence, that God’s existence is quite probable, even given any improbability that suffering might be thought to throw upon the existence of God. In other words, people who claim that God’s existence is improbable because of the suffering in the world are almost always presupposing that there is nothing on the other side of the scale, that there are no good arguments for God’s existence. Therefore, the evidence of suffering decisively tips the scale against God. There is nothing to outweigh it! But as I have argued in this class, I think there are very weighty arguments on the other side of the scale. So even if God’s existence is improbable relative to the suffering in the world alone, taken in isolation, I think it is simply outweighed by the arguments that we have discussed in this class in favor of theism. So, relative to the full scope of the evidence, God’s existence is probable. That is the really interesting question!

Consider in particular the Moral Argument that we discussed before. Much of the suffering in the world is moral evil – the result of bad moral choices that people make. In that case, we can argue as follows in a way reminiscent of the Moral Argument:

1. If God does not exist, objective moral values do not exist. (If there is no God, then everything becomes socio-culturally relative.)
2. Evil exists. (This is what the atheist says – there is evil in the world that we observe around us.)
3. Therefore, objective moral values exist (namely, evil exists – some things are really evil and therefore objective moral values exist).

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<sup>231</sup> 15:08

#### 4. Therefore, God exists.

At a superficial level, the evil in the world might seem to call into question God's existence; but at a deeper, philosophical level, I think evil actually demonstrates God's existence because in the absence of God, good and evil as such would not exist. There would simply be, as Jean-Paul Sartre said, the bare valueless fact of existence.

So when the atheist says that the suffering in the world is bad or ought not to be or that it would be wrong for God to permit it, he is making moral judgments which themselves cannot be true unless God exists.

Theoretically, we could actually concede that, relative to the suffering and evil in the world alone, God's existence looks improbable. But nevertheless, taken relative to the full scope of the evidence, God's existence is very probable. And in particular, moral evil itself demonstrates God's existence.

## DISCUSSION

*Question:* If you were to talk to atheists about all the suffering, there is really not a good way to measure all the suffering in the world, but it could be counterbalanced if you can measure non-suffering. Those good things that are in the world. There are people in America who suffer, but there are people in America who do not suffer. There is a certain amount of goodness that would counterbalance that – there is probably a greater amount of non-suffering people in the world that are suffering.

*Answer:* I think you are right in one sense. The world, on balance, has a lot more good than bad in it. Otherwise, everybody would commit suicide and end it! But obviously, people think that life is, on balance, worth living. And when times are going bad, we typically hope for the future that things will improve and that we will get through it.<sup>232</sup> So on balance I think you are quite right that there is a lot more good in the world than there is evil. But, I think, on behalf of the atheist, what he would say here is that he is not arguing that the world is more evil than good. He is saying that if there is a good God, then he would only allow evil in the world or suffering in the world that serves some sort of good purpose and that much of the evil in the world and the suffering in the world doesn't serve any purpose. It is pointless and unnecessary and therefore it is improbable that there is a God. My argument in response to that is, first, that is a probability judgment that we are not in a position to make and, secondly, relative to the full scope of the evidence, God's existence is very probable.

*Followup:* A lot of the suffering is brought about by not heeding God's warnings. If you had a child and you say this stove is a great instrument if it is used correctly, but if it is used incorrectly you are going to burn yourself. The burn represents evil. But God is not the cause of the evil being put on us.

*Answer:* It certainly is true that much of the suffering in the world is due to our own moral choices. But on the other hand, there is a lot of natural evil, too: earthquakes and hurricanes and disease and mud slides and oil leaks and things of that sort. There is a lot

<sup>232</sup> 20:04

of natural evil in the world about which one would also wonder, “Why does God allow that to occur?” I want to suggest that it also fits into this overall scheme for human history that God is building. The natural evils or sufferings that occur are a context in which the drama of God’s Kingdom is being played out. I will say something more about that when I get to my third point.

*Question:* In discussions with a friend who is a doubter, he addresses the question, “What are the attributes we associate with God?” We associate omnipotence and loving with God. He would make the argument that if he is loving, he wouldn’t allow the suffering to happen, and if he is omnipotent he could prevent a Hitler being born.

*Answer:* What that skeptic is proposing is the *logical version* of the problem of evil. This is where the atheist says God is all-powerful and all-loving but if he is all-powerful he can create any world that he wants; if he is all-loving he would create a world without evil – therefore, evil and suffering should not exist. We dealt with that earlier. What I argued there, and what virtually all philosophers – atheists and theists alike – agree today is that the two premises, those assumptions, are not necessarily true. Indeed, we can show that it is logically possible that God would create a world that has suffering. All you have to do is say that on balance the world has more good than evil and God has morally sufficient reasons for permitting the suffering in the world; and that shows they are logically compatible. If the atheist is willing to admit they are logically compatible, then we are immediately into this probabilistic version.

*Followup:* They are not necessarily logical – they are motivated by emotion.

*Answer:* OK, again, if you look at the outline, I distinguished between the intellectual version of the problem of evil and the emotional version. And my contention, as mentioned in an earlier lecture on this subject, was for most people this really isn’t an intellectual problem; it is an emotional problem. But nevertheless we have to deal with the intellectual problem, lest we appear condescending and not treating them seriously. We want to treat the objection seriously, and then, having done so, we will look at the emotional problem, which is, I think, where the difficulty really lies. People just resent or hate a God who would permit them or others to suffer in these terrible ways.

*Question:* You are using evil and suffering interchangeably.

*Answer:* Well, not really! The problem here is that among philosophers this is called the problem of *evil*.<sup>233</sup> But I am trying to get away from that because I am concerned also about suffering that isn’t evil but is just part of the natural world we live in. Philosophers often call that natural evil, but that is really a misnomer because there is nothing evil about a hurricane as such, or even about a hurricane’s killing people. It is just a natural event. I am not using them synonymously. When we use the word evil, we need to say there is a moral quality to it, it is something that ought not to be, and there is something wrong or bad about it. When you talk about suffering, you are just talking about pain and harm – the terrible harm and pain that comes to people because of things that happen in life. The question would be, how could an all-loving God permit so much pain and suffering in the world?

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<sup>233</sup> 25:05

### Christian Faith Includes Doctrines that Increase the Probability that God and Evil Co-Exist

Let's go to the third point. What I want to argue on the third point is that *Christianity entails doctrines that increase the probability of the coexistence of God and the suffering in the world*. In other words, if the *Christian God* exists, then it is not really so improbable that the suffering in the world would exist. I think that the problem of suffering is actually easier to deal with from a Christian point of view than from just some sort of bare-boned monotheism because Christianity entails certain doctrines which, if true, increase the probability of suffering in the world. What are these doctrines? Let me just mention four of them.

1. *The chief purpose of life is not happiness but the knowledge of God*. I think that one reason that the problem of evil and suffering seems so difficult for us is that we just tend to naturally assume that if God exists, then his purpose for human life is happiness in this life. God's role is to build a comfortable terrarium for his human pets. But on the Christian view, this is false. We are not God's pets. The goal of life is not human happiness as such, but rather it is the knowledge of God – a personal relationship with God – which will in the end bring ultimate human fulfillment. Much of the suffering in the world may be utterly pointless, utterly gratuitous, with respect to producing human happiness in this life; but it may not be pointless with respect to producing a deeper knowledge of God.

Innocent human suffering provides an occasion for deeper dependency upon God and for faith in him, either on the part of the person who is suffering or those around him. Of course, whether or not God's purpose is achieved is going to depend on your response – how do you respond to what you suffer? Do you respond with anger and bitterness toward God for allowing you to go through this? Or do you respond with faith and deeper dependency on God as you go through these trials? I think it may well be the case that God is less concerned with what we go through than with our attitude while going through it. It may well be the case that suffering in the world is part of God's plan for drawing people freely into his Kingdom.

Because God's ultimate purpose for human history is to bring people into relationship with himself, human history cannot be seen in its proper perspective apart from the Kingdom of God. God is building a Kingdom on this planet, drawing men and women out of the world into a relationship with himself. The purpose of human history is the Kingdom of God. God wants to draw as many people as he can freely into his everlasting Kingdom. And it may well be the case that doing that would require an enormous amount of suffering in the world.<sup>234</sup>

This isn't just airy-fairy speculation on my part. A reading of a missions handbook like Patrick Johnstone's book *Operation World* will reveal that it is precisely in those countries of the world that are experiencing terrible suffering that the Gospel – that Christianity – is growing at its most rapid rates. For example, he gives these reports – from Johnstone's *Operation World*.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> 29:58

<sup>235</sup> Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1993), pp. 164, 207-8, 214.

China: It is estimated that 20 million Chinese lost their lives in Mao's Cultural Revolution. Christians stood firm in what was probably the most widespread and harsh persecution the Church has ever experienced. The persecution purified and indigenized the Church. Since 1977, the growth of the Church in China has no parallels in history. Researchers estimate that there were 30 to 75 million Christians by 1990. Today, it is estimated to be somewhere between 90 million and 100 million. Mao Zedong unwittingly became the greatest evangelist in history.

El Salvador: The 12-year civil war, earthquakes, and the collapse of the price of coffee, the nation's main export, impoverished the nation. Over 80% live in dire poverty. An astonishing spiritual harvest has been gathered from all strata of society in the midst of the hate and bitterness of war. In 1960 evangelicals were 2.3% of the population, but today, they are around 20%.

Ethiopia: Ethiopia is in a state of shock. Her population struggles with the trauma of millions of deaths through repression, famine and war. Two great waves of violent persecution refined and purified the Church, but there were many martyrs. There have been millions coming to Christ. Protestants were fewer than 0.8% of the population in 1960, but by 1990 this may have become 13% of the population.

Examples like this could be multiplied over and over again. When you look at the history of mankind, it has been a history of war and suffering; and yet it has also been a history of the advance of the Kingdom of God. This is illustrated in a very powerful way by some figures released in 1990 by the U.S. Center for World Mission in Pasadena. These figures document the number of Christians in the world today compared to non-Christians. In the year AD 100, there were about 360 non-Christians for every believer in the world. By the Middle Ages, the year AD 1000, there were around 220 non-Christians for every Bible-believing Christian in the world. By the year 1900, that ratio had shrunk to 27 non-Christians for every evangelical believer in the world. And by 1989, that ratio was down to 7 non-Christians for every evangelical believer in the world!<sup>236</sup> Even if you throw in all of the nominal Christians as legitimate targets for evangelism, that would still mean that there are only about 9 people to be reached for every evangelical believer in the world in order for the Great Commission to be completely fulfilled – for everyone to have heard the Gospel! According to Johnstone, “We are living in the time of the largest in-gathering of people into the Kingdom of God that the world has ever seen.” It is not at all improbable, I think, that this astonishing growth in the Kingdom of God is possible only because we live in a world that is suffused with natural and moral evil.<sup>237</sup>

What the atheist would have to show here is that there is some other world feasible for God which has greater knowledge of God and more people coming to eternal life than this world, but with less suffering. And remember, that includes not just past and present but the future as well! Obviously, there is no way the atheist could show that – it is pure conjecture what the future might hold or what ratios of saved to unsaved, which are

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<sup>236</sup> As per William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter Varsity, 2003) p. 546. These numbers were arrived at by the various contributors to the Lausanne Statistic Task Force, headed by David Barrett, Ph.D., who is the author of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*.

<sup>237</sup> 34:52

available to God, are in other feasible worlds.

I think you can see that given God's purpose for human history, there is no reason to think that it is improbable that there should be a great deal of suffering and pain in the world.

Next time we will look at those other three Christian doctrines that also increase the probability of suffering and evil in the world if God exists and show, on this basis, that Christian theism is not at all improbable given the suffering and evil in the world.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Total Running Time: 36:39 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

## EXCURSUS: NATURAL THEOLOGY

### § VII. PROBLEM OF SUFFERING AND EVIL

#### Lecture 5

### **Problem of Suffering and Evil: The Emotional Problem of Evil**

We are talking about the probabilistic version of the problem of suffering, and my third response to this problem was that, given the existence of the Christian God, the suffering in the world really isn't all that improbable. If the Christian God exists, this increases the probability of the coexistence of God and suffering in the world.

I mentioned four Christian doctrines which, if true, would greatly increase the probability that the world would have suffering in it. The first of those was that *the purpose of life is not happiness but rather the knowledge of God*. Much of the suffering in the world may be utterly pointless, utterly unnecessary, if you think that the goal of life is human happiness. But it may not be unnecessary if God's goal is to build his kingdom and to draw men and women freely into an eternal relationship with himself. In fact, we saw, when you read contemporary books on missiology, that it is precisely in those nations of the world that are suffering the greatest deprivation and war and famine and poverty that the growth in the rates of evangelical Christianity is the highest, whereas, in the indulgent Western world (Western Europe and North America), the growth rates are almost flat by comparison. I think it is not at all improbable that it is only in a world suffused with natural and moral evil that the optimal number of persons would come freely to know God and his salvation. So what the atheist would have to prove in order to put through the problem of evil is that there is a feasible world that God could have created which has less suffering than the actual world, including past, present and future, but has a greater knowledge of God and his salvation. And, of course, that is utterly impossible to prove. That is totally conjectural. The atheist has a burden of proof here which is simply unsustainable.

The second Christian doctrine I want to mention is that *mankind is in a state of rebellion against God and his purpose*. Rather than worship and serve God, people rebel against God and go their own way and so find themselves alienated from God, morally guilty before him and groping in spiritual darkness, pursuing false Gods of their own making. The terrible human evils in the world, the inhumanity of man to man, is simply testimony to the state of man's depravity in this condition of moral and spiritual alienation from God. The Christian isn't surprised at the terrible moral evil in the world. On the contrary, we *expect* it! The Bible says that God has given mankind over to the sin that it has chosen. In Romans 1, three times Paul says, "God gave them up." He doesn't interfere to stop the course of human depravity. He lets it run its course, with all of its terrible consequences. This only serves to heighten our moral culpability before God and our desperate need of God's forgiveness and moral cleansing in our lives.

Third doctrine – *God's purpose is not restricted to this life but spills over beyond the grave into eternal life*. According to the Christian worldview, this life is not all there is.

This life is just the cramped and narrow foyer that then opens up into the great banquet hall of God's eternity. God promises eternal life to everyone who will place his faith in Christ as his savior and Lord. So when God asks his children to endure horrible pain and horrible suffering in this life, it is only with a view to an eternal life of heavenly recompense that is literally beyond all comprehension.

The apostle Paul understood this.<sup>239</sup> When you reflect on it, the apostle Paul lived a life of incredible suffering. He suffered both from natural evil – he had some kind of a disease that he called his “thorn in the flesh” that was a hindrance to him and a burden to others – and he also suffered moral evil, as he was persecuted and beaten and so forth. His life as an apostle, as he puts it, was punctuated by “afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watching, and hunger.” And yet, he wrote these words:

So we do not lose heart. . . . For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Paul lived this life in the perspective of eternity. He understood that the length of this life, being finite, was literally incapable of being compared to the life that we will enjoy with God in heaven. Think about it this way – the longer we spend in heaven, the more the sufferings of this life shrink by comparison to literally an infinitesimal moment. That is why Paul can refer to them as “a slight momentary affliction.” He wasn't being insensitive to those who suffer horrible things. On the contrary, he was one of them himself. But he simply understood that the sufferings of this life, being finite in duration, were simply overwhelmed by the ocean of divine eternity and joy that God will lavish upon his children in heaven.

I think it is entirely possible that there may be suffering in this life that we undergo which has no earthly purpose whatsoever. It has no point at all. But God permits it simply that he might over-abundantly compensate those who have borne their suffering in dependency and trust in him with reward of incomprehensible proportions. When you think of eternal life and the reward that that is, it simply overwhelms the suffering that God asks us to endure in this life.

Finally, number four, *the knowledge of God is an incommensurable good*. The passage from 2 Corinthians 4 also makes this same point. Here Paul imagines, as it were, a scale in which, on one hand, is placed all the sufferings and rottenness and misery of this life, and on the other side of the scale is placed the glory that God will bestow upon his children in heaven. And Paul says the weight of glory is so great that the sufferings of this life are not even worth comparing to it. For the person who knows God, who is connected to the source of infinite goodness and love, no matter what he suffers, no matter how awful his pain, can still truly say, “God is good to me!”, simply in virtue of the fact that he knows God – an incommensurable good.

These four Christian doctrines, if true, greatly increase the probability of the coexistence of God and the suffering in the world. Given the truth of these doctrines, I do not think it is really all that surprising that we should find ourselves in a world that is suffused with

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<sup>239</sup> 5:00

natural and moral suffering. They thereby decrease any improbability which this suffering might be thought to throw upon God's existence.

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## DISCUSSION

*Question:* Is this an anti-Christian view or an anti-God view? If you look at Lamentations, you clearly see God's hand in suffering and the reason for it, and it is very explainable. But the God that seems like this question is raised of is the new covenant God.<sup>240</sup>

*Answer:* I suppose a Jew could make these same points if he believes in immortality. He would say the knowledge of God is the purpose of life, that we are in a state of rebellion against God, that God's purpose spills over to eternal life, and that knowing God is an incommensurable good. So I think it would be right to say that this is the biblical God; but that these would be points, I think, that a Jew could also probably affirm.

*Question:* Regarding (4), what do you think about the classical book *Candide* – how would that play here?

*Answer:* I don't think it plays into (4). Let's say a word about that. This is talking about Voltaire's book *Candide*, ridiculing Leibniz's claim that this is the best of all possible worlds. Voltaire takes as his point of departure the Lisbon earthquake, which resulted in something like 50,000 deaths in Portugal, and asks, ridiculing and mocking Leibniz, how can this be the best of all possible worlds? Initially, that seems like a pretty plausible response by Voltaire. But if I am right about point (1) – not so much about point (4), I think point (1) – I don't think that is a good refutation at all. It may well be the case that only in a world in which the Lisbon earthquake occurred that the optimal number of people would freely come to know God and find salvation. We have no idea of the historical ramifications of the Lisbon earthquake down through history. In fact, for example, I have seen statements about the recent earthquake in Haiti, where so many thousands were killed, that God has used this in Haiti to bring about revival. There are thousands of people, including voodoo priests, coming to Christ because of the suffering that was endured that was a result of that earthquake. I think Voltaire is one more example of this kind of superficial atheism that uses mockery and ridicule to refute a point, but when you probe it on a deeper level, it is really not as impressive as it might at first seem.

*Question:* In response to the point that God's purpose is not restricted to this life, that suffering in this life is infinitesimal compared to eternity, doesn't that argument cut both ways? What about the majority of humans born not going to heaven? This is the whole doctrine of hell, that some will be raised to everlasting abhorrence, something that either includes flames or something so bad it can only be described as flames. Doesn't that sort of cut on both sides of the argument?

*Answer:* I think it raises a new problem, but a different problem, because the problem that we are initially confronted with is, "Doesn't the suffering in the world show that God does not exist?" I think that my response to that shows that, no, that is not true. What the

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<sup>240</sup> 10:05

atheist might then argue is something like: the doctrine of hell is a pernicious doctrine and is incompatible with either God's love or his justice. Then I think what we would try to do is argue that it is neither incompatible with his love nor with his justice. But that is not the problem of suffering or the problem of evil anymore, that is a different question. That is the question of the doctrine of hell and whether or not that is consistent with God's attributes.

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Let me say something more at this point, so that we will come to a stopping point. The atheist might respond at this point that we have not shown that these four Christian doctrines are true. But remember who has got the burden of proof here! You do not have to show that these doctrines are true – it is the atheist who is saying that God's existence is improbable given the suffering in the world. It is entirely legitimate for you to say, "Not for the existence of the Christian God! That is not improbable given the suffering in the world." It is up to the atheist then to show either that these doctrines are improbable or that evil or suffering is improbable even given these doctrines. The burden of proof either way is on him – don't let him shift the burden of proof onto you.

In summary, I think that the probabilistic version of the problem of suffering is no more successful than the logical version. It requires probability judgments that are way beyond our ability to make, it fails to take into account the full scope of the evidence for God's existence, and it is diminished in force when it comes to the Christian, or biblical, God.<sup>241</sup> Therefore, since neither the logical version nor the probabilistic version of the problem of evil successfully shows that God does not exist, I conclude that the intellectual problem of suffering fails as an argument for atheism.

### ***The Emotional Problem of Evil***

When I say "fails," of course, I mean "fails intellectually." The anger and the bitterness and the anguish of the problem of suffering may still remain. That takes us to the emotional problem of suffering. I have already said that I think most people who object to God's existence based on suffering are really dealing with an emotional, and not with an intellectual, problem. Does the Christian faith have anything to say to people who are struggling with the emotional problem of suffering?

I think it most certainly does! – because the Christian faith tells us that God is not some sort of an impersonal ground of being or a distant creator, but rather he is a loving, heavenly father who shares our sufferings and who hurts along with us.

On the cross, Christ endured a suffering of which we can form no comprehension whatsoever. He bore the wrath of God and the penalty for the sins of the whole world. None of us can understand what he suffered. He was utterly innocent. If anyone can complain of the problem of innocent suffering, it would have been Jesus of Nazareth. And yet he underwent incomparable suffering. And why? *Because he loves you so much.* How can we reject him who was willing to give up everything for us?

So when God asks us to undergo suffering that seems unmerited, pointless, or

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<sup>241</sup> 15:03

unnecessary, I think that meditation upon the cross of Christ, meditation upon the wounds, the sufferings, of Christ can help to give us the moral strength and the courage to endure the cross that he asks us to bear.

I said a moment ago that knowing God is an incommensurable good, to which our suffering cannot even be compared. I think few of us really understand this truth. But a colleague of mine recently got to know a woman who did. My friend Tom used to make it his habit to visit shut-ins in a nursing home in the area in order to try to bring some cheer into their lives. One day he met a woman whom he would never forget. I want to read you his testimony about this person:

On this particular day I was walking in a hallway that I had not visited before, looking in vain for a few who were alive enough to receive a flower and a few words of encouragement. This hallway seemed to contain some of the worst cases, strapped onto carts or into wheelchairs and looking completely helpless.

As I neared the end of this hallway, I saw an old woman strapped in a wheelchair. Her face was an absolute horror. The empty stare and white pupils of her eyes told me that she was blind. The large hearing aid over one ear told me that she was almost deaf. One side of her face was being eaten by cancer. There was a discolored and running sore covering part of one cheek, and it had pushed her nose to the side, dropped one eye and distorted her jaw so that what should have been the corner of her mouth was the bottom of her mouth. As a consequence, she drooled constantly. I also learned later that this woman was 89 years old and that she had been bedridden, blind, nearly deaf, and alone for 25 years. This was Mabel.

I don't know why I spoke to her. She looked less likely to respond than most of the people I saw in that hallway. But I put a flower in her hand and said, "Here is a flower for you, Happy Mother's Day!" She held the flower up to her face and tried to smell it, and then she spoke, and much to my surprise her words, though somewhat garbled because of her deformity, were obviously produced by a clear mind. She said, "Thank you, it's lovely, but can I give it to someone else? I can't see it you know, I'm blind."

I said, "Of course," and I pushed her in her chair back down the hallway to a place where I thought I could find some alert patients. I found one and stopped the chair. Mabel held out the flower and said, "Here, this is from Jesus."<sup>242</sup>

It was then that it began to dawn on me that this was not an ordinary human being. . . . Mabel and I became friends over the next few weeks, and I went to see her once or twice a week for the next three years. . . . It was not many weeks before I turned from a sense that I was being helpful to a sense of wonder. And I would go to her with a pen and paper to write down the things she would say. . . .

During one hectic week of final exams, I was frustrated because my mind seemed to be pulled in ten directions at once with all of the things that I had to think about. The question occurred to me, *what does Mabel have to think about?* Hour after hour, day after day, week after week, not even able to know if it is day or night. So I went to her and asked, "Mabel, what do you think about when you

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<sup>242</sup> 19:57

lie here?"

And she said, "I think about my Jesus."

I sat there and thought for a moment about the difficulty for me of thinking about Jesus for even five minutes. And I asked, "*What* do you think about Jesus?" She replied slowly and deliberately as I wrote, and this is what she said,

I think how good he has been to me. He has been awfully good to me in my life, you know. . . . I'm one of those kind who's mostly satisfied. . . . Lots of folks would think I'm kind of old-fashioned. But I don't care. I'd rather have Jesus, he is all the world to me.

And then Mabel began to sing an old hymn:

Jesus is all the world to me,  
My life, my joy, my all.  
He is my strength from day to day,  
Without him, I would fall.  
When I am sad, to him I go.  
No other one can cheer me so.  
When I am sad, he makes me glad.  
He's my friend.

*This is not fiction.* Incredible as it may seem, a human being really lived like this. I know, I knew her. *How could she do it?* Seconds ticked and minutes crawled, and so did days and weeks and months and years of pain without human company and without an explanation of why it was all happening – and she laid there and sang hymns. *How could she do it?*

The answer, I think, is that Mabel had something that you and I don't have much of. She had power. Lying there, in that bed, unable to move, unable to see, unable to hear, unable to talk. . . , she had incredible power.<sup>243</sup>

Paradoxically, even though the problem of suffering is the greatest obstacle to believing in God, at the end of the day, God is the only solution to the problem of suffering. If God does not exist, then we are locked without hope in a world filled with gratuitous and unredeemed suffering. God is the final answer to the problem of suffering because he redeems us from evil and takes us into the fellowship of an incommensurable good for eternity, which is fellowship with himself.

I'll simply end there and leave it to your reflection.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Thomas E. Schmidt, *Trying to Be Good: A Book of Doing for Thinking People* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990), pp. 180-183.

<sup>244</sup> Total Running Time: 23:47 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)