

# PHILOSOPHY AND BELIEF IN GOD: THE RESURGENCE OF THEISM IN PHILOSOPHICAL CIRCLES

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*A new interest in the God of the orthodox Hebrew-Christian tradition has arisen recently among contemporary philosophers. This new interest in theism can be traced to the demise of logical positivism, a lack of intellectual rigor in theological liberalism, and the increased sophistication of theistic arguments. Two arguments illustrate the many contemporary proofs for theism that have attracted wide interest. One argues that belief in God is rational apart from any special evidence. The other, called the kalam cosmological argument, maintains that everything which begins has a cause, the universe had a beginning, and therefore, the universe has a cause. This argument is supported by the reasonableness of a series of choices, beginning with whether or not the universe had a beginning. These arguments are satisfying proof of the existence of God for those who are philosophically inclined.*

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About twenty-five years ago President James McCord of Princeton Seminary declared with exuberance that Protestant theology's Death-of-God movement was ushering in a "whole new era in theology."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, *Time* magazine's ominous front cover, which asked the question, "Is God Dead?," was not really as prophetic as

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<sup>2</sup>"Toward a Hidden God: Is God Dead?," *Time* (Apr 8, 1966) 82 ff.

President McCord had thought, but rather, was more analogous to the boy who cried wolf or the emperor's non-existent clothes. Only five years later, *Time* on its front cover heralded the sudden revival of evangelical faith among Roman Catholic and Protestant young people with a psychedelic portrait of Jesus of Nazareth, labeled "The Jesus Revolution."<sup>3</sup> In 1980 *Time* ran a story about the sudden reexamination of God within contemporary philosophical circles.<sup>4</sup> Although still a distinct minority in secular universities, since 1980 this movement has increased in numbers and already shows an increased sophistication of argument. The reason for and the nature of this resurgence of belief in God in philosophical circles is the subject under current consideration.

### DEFINING THE TERMS

Anyone acquainted with philosophy knows the extreme importance of how a thinker defines his terms. For the sake of clarity, "God," "belief," and "philosophy" will be defined. *God* is the God of the Hebrew-Christian tradition, the God most Americans know best through their church affiliation or the practice of their neighbors. He is a Rational Spirit Being Who is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving, omnipresent, unchangeable, transcendent, and eternal, and the Personal Creator of all that is. On occasion He may decide to act in ways called miraculous.

*Belief* is the act of human consciousness that makes a personal commitment to a proposition. To believe in something is to have faith in something that is consistent with what you believe is good evidence, but the act of belief itself goes beyond the evidence. For example, marriage is an act of belief. Prior to getting married, you believe you have sufficient evidence to justify a commitment that goes beyond the evidence. In another context, you may act on faith by putting 100% of yourself in a departing airplane, though you are aware that the evidence for a safe journey is less than 100% certain. When a theistic philosopher says he believes in God, he does not mean that he has indisputable evidence to support his commitment. Rather, he means that he is within his intellectual rights in holding this belief. This essay

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<sup>3</sup>"New Rebel Cry: Jesus Is Coming!," *Time* (July 21, 1971) 56 ff.

<sup>4</sup>"Modernizing the Case for God," *Time* (Apr 7, 1980) 65 ff.

will examine two important arguments by Christian theists to support the contention that the theist is within his intellectual rights in believing in God.

*Philosophy* is the intellectual discipline which critically examines the foundations of other fields of study. Philosophy departments in universities and colleges all over the world aim to examine questions of fundamental importance in other disciplines, whether in the realm of science (e.g., do scientific theories tell us about the world?), theology (e.g., is it rational to believe in God?), or ethics (e.g., what is right and wrong?).

Unfortunately, many Christians believe that philosophy is inherently anti-Christian, basing their conclusion on the atheistic or agnostic orientation of many philosophy professors. Yet many fine Christian philosophers employ the critical thinking-skills of philosophy in assessing classical theological issues. In fact, philosophy can contribute to a Christian's defense of his faith.

For example, suppose you are a theist and someone says to you, "Okay, you say that God is all-powerful and He can do anything." You respond, "Yes, that is perfectly correct." Your adversary goes on to ask, "If God is all-powerful, can He make a rock so big that He cannot lift it?" He appears to have you trapped: if God can make the rock, He is not all-powerful because He cannot lift it, but if He cannot make the rock, He is not all-powerful because He cannot make it. Now if you ponder this carefully, you will see that this dilemma is really no dilemma at all. You can respond to your adversary, "Since God is all-powerful, He cannot, by definition, make something that is more powerful than Himself, including a rock He cannot lift. But He can make the biggest rock and He can lift it. To ask an all-powerful God to make something that is more powerful than Himself is similar to asking Him to create a married-bachelor, a square-circle, or a brother who is an only child. Such 'entities' are simply nonsense." This is philosophy.

To speak of a resurgence of interest in theological questions among philosophers is not to imply that such questions ever ceased being asked, but rather that belief in the traditional Hebrew-Christian view of God is being discussed with more vigor and sophistication than ever before in the modern world by those who believe in such a God. Philosopher Roderick Chisolm of Brown University has pointed out that in the last generation atheistic empiricists such as Harvard's Willard V. O. Quine were most influential because "they were the brightest people." Chisolm notes that now the "brightest people include theists,

using a kind of tough-minded intellectualism," which was formerly nonexistent in the theist's camp.<sup>5</sup>

Some representative twentieth-century philosophers such as William James, Josiah Royce, Charles Saunders Peirce, Alfred North Whitehead, and John Dewey showed strong interest in God and religious questions, but did not accept the God of the orthodox Hebrew-Christian tradition as a viable option. Neither did they feel He could be defended with rational argument. This situation has changed. A recent *Christianity Today* article cites the example of the Society of Christian Philosophers, with over eight hundred members as being "now the largest special interest group within the American Philosophical Association," which is the leading professional society of American philosophers.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to new innovative arguments by leading theist philosophers, arguments thought to have died during the Enlightenment are being rehabilitated by some of the greatest philosophical minds. These are people, not only in the Roman Catholic and conservative Protestant colleges and universities, but also in some of the leading secular institutions. A perusal of the *Philosophers' Index* reveals a significant increase of articles and books about theism, God, and philosophy of religion in the last twenty-five years. Philosophical arguments about traditional theological problems such as the incarnation of Christ, the Trinity, the relation between body and soul, and the possibility of miracles (issues that are bypassed by most mainline theologians who are busy trying to be relevant) are discussed with respect and serious interest by theistic and non-theistic philosophers alike.

One example of this is the book by Thomas V. Morris, philosophy professor at the University of Notre Dame, entitled *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Cornell University Press, 1986). He shows effectively and persuasively that the Christian belief that God became man in the person of Jesus of Nazareth is perfectly logical. For workers among false cultists such as Jehovah's Witnesses and The Way International, this kind of treatment is extremely helpful in responding to those who question the rationality of the orthodox doctrines of the

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>6</sup>Kristine Christlieb, "Suddenly, Respect: Christianity Makes a Comeback in the Philosophy Department," *CT* 31 (Apr 17, 1987) 32.

### Incarnation and the Trinity.

Three main reasons explain traditional theism's comeback in philosophy: (1) the demise of logical positivism, (2) the lack of intellectual rigor in theological liberalism, and (3) the increased sophistication of theistic arguments.

### THE DEMISE OF LOGICAL POSITIVISM

Logical positivism was a philosophical position which asserted that only what can be verified by the five senses or is true by definition (e.g., mathematics or tautologies) can be said to have meaning. This was called the Verifiability Criterion of Meaning. Of course, since God is neither an empirical entity nor something that is true by definition, the term "God" is meaningless, according to the positivists. The other side of the Verifiability Criterion of Meaning is the Principle of Falsifiability, popularized by Antony Flew's famous essay, "Theology and Falsification." Flew challenged the believer in God by asking, "What would have to have occurred to constitute for you a disproof of the love of, or of the existence of, God?" Flew wrote, "It seems to people who are not religious as if there was no conceivable event or series of events the occurrence of which would be admitted by sophisticated religious people to be sufficient reason for conceding 'there wasn't a God after all' or 'God does not really love us then.'"<sup>7</sup>

To explain his position, Flew employed John Wisdom's parable of the gardener:

Once upon a time two explorers came upon a clearing in the jungle. In the clearing were growing many flowers and many weeds. One explorer says, "Some gardener must tend this plot." The other disagrees. "There is no gardener." So they pitch their tents and set a watch. No gardener is ever seen. "But perhaps he is an invisible gardener." So they set up a barbed-wire fence. They electrify it. They patrol with bloodhounds. (For they remember how H. G. Wells's *The Invisible Man* could be both smelt and touched though he could not be seen.) But no shrieks ever suggest that some intruder received a shock. No movements of the wire ever betray an invisible climber. The bloodhounds never give cry. Yet still the Believer is not

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<sup>7</sup>Antony Flew, "Theology and Falsification," *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (ed. Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre; New York: Macmillan, 1955) 98-99.

convinced. "But there is a gardener, invisible, intangible, insensible to electric shocks, a gardener who has no scent and makes no sound, a gardener who comes secretly to look after the garden which he loves." At last the Skeptic despairs, "But what remains of your original assertion? Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even from no gardener at all?"<sup>8</sup>

Flew said the Believer in God is like the Believer in the Gardener. Since nothing is capable of *falsifying* or *disproving* his belief in God, this belief is meaningless.

While this sort of thinking is somewhat widespread on a popular level (e.g., Carl Sagan, Isaac Asimov, etc.), logical positivism has suffered a philosophical death. Philosopher of science Del Ratzsch outlines problems with the Verifiability Criterion of Meaning, the cornerstone of logical positivism:

First, it fails as a description of what is considered meaningful scientifically. Some basic principles essential to science are not empirically testable. For example, we cannot establish by experiment that nature is uniform, and that the principle is not obviously analytic, either. But uniformity is a presupposition without which scientific tests would be pointless. Second, the verifiability principle fails when applied to other sorts of specific examples. For instance, moral truths are not matters of empirical tests. We cannot (it is widely held) *empirically* test the wrongness and sinfulness of murder, but to claim—as some positivists did—that such moral principles are cognitively empty is outrageous both philosophically and morally. Finally, the Verifiability Criterion of Meaning is self destroying. Is the Verifiability Criterion of Meaning *itself* empirically testable? Clearly not. . . . But if the criterion itself is neither empirically testable nor analytic, then either it is itself meaningless (in which case we needn't further bother about it) or else meaningfulness does not depend on empirical testability and analyticity, in which case the Verifiability Criterion is false (and we needn't bother further about it).<sup>9</sup>

As for Flew's Principle of Falsifiability, it is merely a version of

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>9</sup>Del Ratzsch, *Philosophy of Science* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986) 37-38.

the Verifiability Criterion of Meaning<sup>10</sup> and falls under the same criticism. Furthermore, most sophisticated believers in God challenge Flew head-on and admit possible defeaters to belief in God—such as the inconsistency of God's existence and the existence of evil, the demonstration that the universe is not radically contingent, or that the concept of God is internally incoherent—but they contend that they have adequately responded to these possible defeaters.<sup>11</sup> As Plantinga has with tongue-in-cheek pointed out,

If after death I were to meet Father Abraham, St. Paul, and St. John (I think I could recognize them), who united in declaring that they had been duped, perhaps I should have sufficient reason for conceding that God does not love us after all.<sup>12</sup>

The demise of logical positivism included the disappearance of the dogma of scientism, the belief that only what is scientifically testable is true. Hence, the metaphysical door once again opened for serious philosophical discussion about the rationality of belief in God, the existence and nature of God, and the nature and content of religious experience. Before this open door is discussed, a second reason for the resurgence of traditional Hebrew-Christian theism should be addressed: the lack of intellectual rigor in theological liberalism.

#### LACK OF INTELLECTUAL RIGOR IN THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM

Many conservative scholars welcome philosophy's renewed interest in articulating and critically discussing the philosophical implications of traditional orthodox Christian doctrines, but many mainline theologians have not put out the red carpet. In a recent issue

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<sup>10</sup>Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968) 162.

<sup>11</sup>E.g., *ibid.*, 161: Plantinga writes, "My discovering a contradiction in the proposition *God exists* would constitute a disproof of it." See also Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," *The Intellectuals Speak Out about God* (ed. Roy Abraham Varghese; Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1984) 199; Norman L. Geisler and Winfried Corduan, *Philosophy of Religion* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988).

<sup>12</sup>Plantinga, *Other Minds* 161.

of *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*, Gordon Kaufman, a liberal theologian at Princeton University, claimed that the reason why theologians like himself are disinterested in recent philosophy of religion is that Christian philosophers assume the plausibility of *traditional* theistic concepts which clearly conflict with the pluralism and epistemological and moral relativism enthusiastically embraced by contemporary theologians.<sup>13</sup>

Kaufman's defense of this view is poorly reasoned, however, and is typical of some theological works that attempt to interact with philosophy.<sup>14</sup> His weak presentation provides further evidence of why Christians interested in feasting on a diet of intellectually rigorous discussions of classical theology are not tempted by Kaufman's invitation to a famine. In a response to Kaufman, Christian philosophers Stump and Kretzman take him to task by showing clearly that a dose of critical thinking can expose the philosophical incoherence of what appears to be "profound" theological insights.<sup>15</sup>

First, they respond to Kaufman's claim that Christian philosophers have ignored religious pluralism, the belief that no one religion is ultimately true and that rejection of religious pluralism entails social intolerance and lack of sympathy for other religions. Stump and Kretzman note that "since Kaufman's position must reject as false all claims made by Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and other religions to know" true things about God's nature and human salvation, therefore, "if lack of sympathy and disrespect are inevitable concomitants of the rejection of religious claims, as Kaufman seems to think, then his position is no more sympathetic and respectful than traditional Christianity with regard to other religions, but less."<sup>16</sup>

Second, Kaufman defends epistemological and ethical relativism on the basis of "the growing awareness of the way in which all our ideas are shaped by the cultural and symbolic framework of orientation within

<sup>13</sup>Gordon Kaufman, "Evidentialism': A Theologian's Response," *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989) 35-46.

<sup>14</sup>See Francis J. Beckwith, "Identity and Resurrection: A Review Article," *JETS* 33 (Sept 1990) 369-73, for a further illustration of such an attempt.

<sup>15</sup>Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzman, "Theologically Unfashionable Philosophy," *Faith and Philosophy* 7 (July 1990) 329-39.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 332.



which we are living and thinking."<sup>17</sup> But, as Stump and Kretzman note, Kaufman does not hesitate to condemn the Holocaust and other actions as inherently evil, claim to know that "God is beyond our understanding and knowledge," and assert that God is "that ultimate mystery in which both our being and our fulfillment are grounded."<sup>18</sup> If epistemological and ethical relativism are "true," then "Kaufman is ambivalent or inconsistent in his agnosticism and skepticism, unwittingly abandoning those attitudes when he has a point to make."<sup>19</sup> For instance, when Kaufman claims that God's nature is beyond our knowledge, he is in fact making a knowledge-claim about God's nature, "namely, that God's nature has the property of being unknowable to us. But if Kaufman is able to know one property of God's, his claim falsifies itself."<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore in condemning the Holocaust and other moral atrocities as inherently evil, Kaufman implies that there exists some non-culture-dependent hierarchy of values. If he denies this, his criticism of atrocities such as the Holocaust, not to mention *epistemological relativism itself*, is reduced to nothing more than ideas shaped by cultural orientation. According to this reasoning, ethical and epistemological relativism are more likely than their opposite to produce the mind-set tolerating atrocities such as the Holocaust. Moreover, as an ethical and epistemological relativist, how can Kaufman criticize Christian philosophers for pursuing their interest in traditional orthodox Christian theology? Are not the ideas of Christian philosophers "shaped by the cultural and symbolic framework of orientation within which" they "are living and thinking?" Where is Kaufman's sympathy for *this* "alternative religious movement?" Stump and Kretzman add more, but these criticisms suffice.

The sort of argumentation in Kaufman's article is typical of much liberal theological literature. For this reason, philosophers, who are typically more sensitive to critical thinking skills than those in other disciplines, have found nothing logically incorrect in pursuing rigorous intellectual discussions of traditional theological topics, although in certain theological circles such topics, like last year's designer gowns,

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<sup>17</sup>Kaufman, "Evidentialism" 42.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>19</sup>Stump, "Theologically Unfashionable" 44.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

may not be fashionable.

### INCREASED SOPHISTICATION OF THEISTIC ARGUMENT

Traditionally, four different arguments used to defend the reasonableness of believing in God's existence have been the teleological, the moral, the ontological, and the cosmological. Philosophers have also defended belief in God by appealing to miracles, revelation, religious experience, and possible solutions to the problem of evil. Christian philosophers have now revived many of these traditional approaches with unparalleled intellectual rigor and sophistication. A detailed overview of these efforts would require an entire book, so this discussion will limit itself to distilled versions of two contemporary arguments for theism that have attracted considerable interest: (1) Alvin Plantinga's defense of rationality of belief in God apart from evidence, and (2) William Lane Craig's kalam cosmological argument.

#### *Rationality of Belief in God*

Plantinga, a Calvinist who holds an endowed chair in the University of Notre Dame's philosophy department, argues that belief in God is rational apart from any evidence, although he does hold to a version of the ontological argument which he believes is plausible.<sup>21</sup>

He argues against what he calls the evidentialist objection to belief in God.<sup>22</sup> Evidentialists, such as the positivists, argue that unless a proposition is either fundamental to knowledge or based on evidence, one is not rationally justified in believing the truth of that proposition. Hence, according to evidentialism, since the proposition "God exists" is not foundational to knowledge, it is not rational without sufficient evidence to believe that God exists. However, Plantinga asks why the proposition "God exists" cannot be foundational to knowledge and thus not in need of evidence. The typical evidential response is that only *properly basic* propositions are foundational to knowledge. But how can

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<sup>21</sup>Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 111-12.

<sup>22</sup>Plantinga has presented his position in several texts and articles. An easily accessible article is, "Is Belief in God Rational?," *Rationality and Religious Belief* (ed. C. F. Delaney, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979) 7-27.

one know which propositions are properly basic? The evidentialist usually replies that the only properly basic propositions are those which are self-evident and incorrigible. An example of a self-evident proposition is, "All squares have four sides." "I feel pain" exemplifies an incorrigible truth, because even if my pain is imaginary, it is nevertheless incorrigibly true that I do feel pain. Hence, it follows that since the proposition "God exists" is not self-evident or incorrigible, it is not properly basic. Since it is not properly basic, one needs evidence if he wants to believe in God. Therefore, the evidentialist concludes that belief in God apart from evidence is irrational.

Plantinga responds by asking how one knows that self-evident and incorrigible propositions are the only ones that are properly basic. Cannot the believer in God show the evidentialist that the proposition "only propositions that are self-evident and incorrigible" is itself not properly basic, since it is neither self-evident nor incorrigible? Neither is it supported by evidence. Furthermore, many things in life are rational to believe in apart from evidence. For example, belief that the world was not created ten minutes ago with all the appearances and memories of a world that is billions of years old is a perfectly rational belief for which no evidence exists.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the evidentialist's criterion is inadequate, and he cannot rule out the possibility that belief in God is properly basic. Plantinga writes that the evidentialist's criterion

is no more than a bit of intellectual imperialism. . . . He commits himself to reason and to nothing more; he therefore declares irrational any noetic structure that contains more—belief in God, for example, in its foundation. But here there is no reason for the theist to follow his example; the believer is not obliged to take his word for it. So far we have found no reason at all for excluding belief in God from the foundations; so far we have found no reason at all for believing that belief in God cannot be basic in a rational noetic structure. To accept belief in God as basic is clearly not irrational in the sense of being proscribed by reason or in conflict with the deliverances of reason. The dictum that belief in God is not basic in a rational noetic structure is neither apparently self-evident nor apparently

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<sup>23</sup>I.e., how does one *know* that his senses and memory are accurate unless he *presupposes* as properly basic their reliability? He cannot *use* them to prove this without begging the question.

incorrigible.<sup>24</sup>

Obviously, many theists as well as non-theists do not fully accept Plantinga's argumentation, but he, with the intellectual tough-mindedness that Roderick Chisolm described, has put the non-theist on the defensive with his highly influential philosophy of religion.

### *The Kalam Cosmological Argument*

Many theists besides Plantinga offer proof for God's existence. A recent argument that has gained a hearing among philosophers is William Craig's kalam cosmological argument.<sup>25</sup> In fact, in his *magnum opus* against theism, *The Miracle of Theism*,<sup>26</sup> the eminent atheistic philosopher J. L. Mackie wrote a response to the argument only three years after Craig's initial development of the argument was published.

One of the major reasons Mackie saw a need to respond was probably the kalam argument's uniqueness to Western philosophy of religion.

The kalam cosmological argument gets its name from the word *kalam*, which refers to Arabic philosophy or theology. The kalam argument was popular among Arabic philosophers in the late Middle Ages. Christian philosophers during that period did not generally accept the argument, perhaps due to the influence of Aquinas, who following Aristotle, rejected it. A notable exception was Saint Bonaventure, a contemporary of Aquinas, who argued extensively for the soundness

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>25</sup>Craig has detailed this argument in numerous places, but his most extensive presentation of it is *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (Library of Philosophy and Religion; New York: Macmillan, 1979). He responds to objections to his initial work in *Apologetics: An Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 1984) 73-93; "Creatio ex Nihilo," *Process Theology* (ed Ronald H. Nash; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 41-73; and "Professor Mackie and the Kalam Cosmological Argument," *RelS* 20 (1985) 367-75. Other objections to the kalam argument are answered by J. P. Moreland (*Scaling the Secular City* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987] 18-42), Francis J. Beckwith (*David Hume's Argument Against Miracles: A Critical Analysis* [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989] chap. 5), and Francis J. Beckwith and S. E. Parrish, *The Mormon Concept of God: A Philosophical Analysis* [Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1991] 54-59).

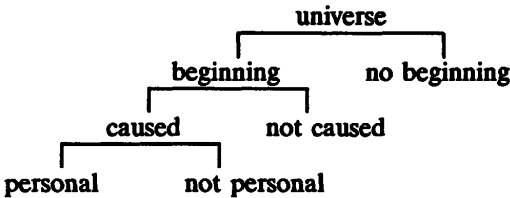
<sup>26</sup>J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982) 92-95.

of the kalam argument.<sup>27</sup>

The kalam argument can be put in the following form:

1. Everything which begins to exist does so through a cause.
2. The universe had a beginning.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

Another way of looking at this argument is as a series of dilemmas, the form to be followed in the present discussion:<sup>28</sup>



This argument presents a series of alternatives. First, the universe either had a beginning or it did not. Second, if the universe had a beginning, then it was either caused or uncaused. Third, if the beginning of the universe was caused, then this cause was either personal or impersonal. By showing one part of each alternative to be more reasonable than the other, this argument shows the reasonableness of believing in the existence of a personal Creator, God. A brief examination of each alternative follows.

(A) Alternative one: Is it more reasonable to believe that the universe has a beginning or that it does not have a beginning? Craig has developed four arguments which he believes support the contention that the universe must have had a beginning.<sup>29</sup> The argument that is

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<sup>27</sup>Moreland, *Scaling* 18.

<sup>28</sup>Diagram taken from William Lane Craig, "Philosophical and Scientific Pointers to Creation ex Nihilo," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 32 (Mar 1980) 5.

<sup>29</sup>See Craig, *Kalam*.

philosophically strongest proceeds in the following way:<sup>30</sup>

1. The series of events in time is a collection formed by adding one member after another.
2. A collection formed by adding one member after another cannot be actually infinite.
3. Therefore, the series of events in time cannot be actually infinite.

The first premise can hardly be disputed. When one thinks of a series of events in time, he does not think of them as happening all at once, but as happening one after another. For example, despite the tasteless jokes at bachelor parties, one's wedding and one's funeral do not happen at the same time. The first precedes the second (with many years between them, hopefully).

In the second premise, it must be admitted that an *infinite set* of numbers is one that is complete and cannot be added to, e.g., the infinite set of natural numbers {1, 2 . . . 10 . . . 1,000,000 . . .}. This set contains an *unlimited* number of digits from 1 to infinity. However, since an actual infinite is a *complete* set with an infinite number of members, the series of events in time cannot actually be infinite, because the series of events in time is always increasing (being added to) and one can never arrive at infinity by adding one member after another. The following example should help demonstrate this.

If you were on Interstate 15, driving from Los Angeles to Las Vegas with 280 miles to traverse, you will no doubt eventually arrive in Las Vegas. On the other hand, if you were to drive on Interstate 15 from L. A. to Las Vegas with an infinite number of miles to traverse, you would never arrive in Las Vegas. If you did arrive in Las Vegas, it would only prove that the distance was not infinite. Since an infinite number is unlimited, one can never complete a journey of an infinite number of miles. When this is applied to the universe, a certain absurdity develops: if the universe had no beginning, then every event has been preceded by an infinite number of events. But if one can never arrive at infinity by adding one member after another, he could never arrive at the present day, because to do so, he would have to "traverse" (or complete) an infinite number of days to arrive at the present day. Philosopher J. P. Moreland explains in his recent defense

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<sup>30</sup>William Lane Craig, *The Existence of God and the Beginning of the Universe* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life, 1979) 49.

of the kalam argument:

Suppose a person were to think backward through the events in the past. In reality, time and events within it move in the other direction. But mentally he can reverse that movement and count backward farther and farther into the past. Now he will either come to a beginning or he will not. If he comes to a beginning, then the universe obviously had a beginning. But if he never could, even in principle, reach a first moment, then this means that it would be impossible to start with the present and run backward through all the events in the history of the cosmos. Remember, if he did run through all of them, he would reach a first member of a series, and the finiteness of the past would be established. In order to avoid this conclusion, one must hold that, starting from the present, it is *impossible* to go backward through all the events in history.

But since events really move in the other direction, this is equivalent to admitting that if there was no beginning, the past could have never been exhaustively traversed to reach the present.<sup>31</sup>

Since the premises of this argument seem plausible, the conclusion follows that the series of events in time cannot be actually infinite. This being the case, it seems more reasonable to believe the horn of our first dilemma which states that the universe had a beginning.

(B) Alternative two: Is it more reasonable to believe that the universe was caused or uncaused? Since the overwhelming testimony of human experience testifies to the fact that something cannot arise from nothing, once it is established that the universe began to exist, the reasonable person would no doubt have to affirm that the universe has a cause. Perhaps one could still affirm that it is logically possible that the universe began uncaused, but this does not appear to be metaphysically possible. Therefore, it is more plausible that the universe was caused if it had a beginning.

(C) Alternative three: Is it more reasonable that the universe has a personal cause or an impersonal cause? Arguing that this cause is personal, Craig asks, "How can a first event come to exist if the cause of that event has always existed? Why isn't the effect as eternal as the cause?" For example, "if a heavy ball's resting on a cushion is the cause of a depression in the cushion, then if the ball is resting on the cushion from eternity, the cushion should be depressed from eternity."

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<sup>31</sup>Moreland, *Scaling* 29.

But "the only way to have an eternal cause but an effect that begins at a point in time is if the cause is a *personal agent* who freely decides to create an effect in time."<sup>32</sup> It is like a man at rest for all eternity who may will to create a work of art. "Hence, a temporal effect may be caused by an eternally existing agent."<sup>33</sup>

Concurring with Craig, Moreland presents the following example:

If the necessary and sufficient conditions for a match to light are present, the match lights spontaneously. There is no deliberation, no waiting. In such situations, when *A* is the efficient cause of *B*, spontaneous change or mutability is built into the situation itself.

The only way for the first event to arise spontaneously from a timeless, changeless, spaceless state of affairs, and at the same time be caused, is this—the event resulted from the free act of a person or agent. In the world, persons or agents spontaneously act to bring about events. I myself raise my arm when it is done deliberately. There may be necessary conditions for me to do this (e.g., I have a normal arm, I am not tied down), but these are not sufficient. The event is realized only when I freely act. Similarly, the first event came about when an agent freely chose to bring it about, and this choice was not the result of other conditions which were sufficient for that event to come about.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, the only solution to this problem is to conclude that this cause *willed* the universe to come into existence at a temporal moment, and since "will" is an attribute of a rational or personal agent, this cause must be personal. Though it is possible that the cause of the universe is impersonal, it is more plausible to affirm that it is a personal agent. In conclusion, the defenders of the kalam argument believe they have shown that it is perfectly rational to believe in the existence of a personal Creator of all that is. If the premises of this argument are correct, and its detractors have offered no persuasive reason that they are not, the theist possesses a strong argument for affirming God's existence.

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<sup>32</sup>Craig, *Apologetics* 93.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Moreland, *Scaling* 42.



## CONCLUSION

No doubt, the intellectual battle between belief and unbelief will continue. But what is amazing about the recent resurgence of theism is that it started at a time when God's death had been pronounced, the coroner was preparing for the autopsy, and the smugness of the infidels permeated the landscape of secular orthodoxy.

Some people may say that God is looking down and is amused at the feeble attempts of philosophers to demonstrate the rationality of belief in Him to a world in which so many people, completely unaware of the cosmological argument or any other theistic proof, still believe and trust in God.

Yet such absolute cynicism about the human mind seems inconsistent with a truly robust faith. For if God does exist (and I certainly believe that he does) and has given us minds and hearts with which to think and feel, it is axiomatic that He would be concerned with every minute detail of our intellectual and emotional existence. He would consequently permit the simple to feel secure in a simple faith grounded in an infinitely complex God and those more philosophically inclined to find intellectual satisfaction in the study of an infinitely complex God who is personally encountered only through an act of simple faith. Regardless of whether one finds the resurgence of theistic philosophy disappointing or encouraging, he cannot deny that it is an important and fascinating part of our contemporary intellectual surroundings.