

Debunking Christianity

June 06, 2012

William Lane Craig and the Kalam Cosmological Argument (#1)

Recently, William Lane Craig has produced a video, based on an essay in a book he and Paul Copan have edited this year (“Come Let Us Reason: New Essays in Christian Apologetics”) entitled “Terrible objections to the Kalam Cosmological Argument”. I am yet to read the essay, but I must assume it to broadly follow the line of his video of the lecture “Worst objections to the Kalam Cosmological Argument”.

I have a mild obsession with the Kalam Cosmological Argument (KCA) and am potentially one of the internet infidels to which he derogatorily refers in his introduction. What I found in his exposition of these “worst” arguments is that the talk was a fantastic array of straw men, ad hominem, mischaracterisation of cogent arguments, and poor reasoning. I will tell you for why.

The talk is split into the following parts: 1 - 3: Objection to the Form. 4, 5: Objection to the First Premise. 6, 7: Objection to the Second Premise. 8 - 10: Objection to the Conclusion. The introduction seems to have been an ad hominem attack on internet detractors of the KCA. This is rather amusing since his first objection is what he accuses as being an ad hominem attack on himself. There is some irony here. I am not going to go through his objections because, for the purposes of this post, I want to concentrate on one thing and one thing only: the circularity of the argument and issues of causality. In this, Craig sort of addressed parts, and neglected to do them justice.

Let's remind ourselves of the KCA:

- 1) Everything which begins to exist has a cause for its existence.**
- 2) The universe began to exist.**
- 3) Therefore, the universe had a cause for its existence.**

This is it, in its simplest form. So how can I accuse the argument of being circular? A circular argument is one which presupposes its conclusion within the premises.

The problem for the KCA is the definition of “everything” and as such, we could indeed have a fallacy of equivocation. My claim is that everything is in fact ‘the

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universe' itself.

What we need to think about first here is causality. Indeed, this whole argument is one over causality. Cause and effect. Whilst cause and effect might be at face value a very simple thing, just the term cause can be tricky. When Craig talks about cause, he terms a cause as an *efficient cause* which is often defined as that which causes change and motion to start or stop. And this is where it gets difficult. Let me analyse:

Smith is driving along the road over the speed limit. He is tired due to a heavy work schedule and a deadline which meant a lack of sleep the night before and is late for a meeting. One of his favourite songs comes on the radio and he starts singing along to it. On the pavement (sidewalk) a drunk man falls over into a bin which the Council had just put in place to improve the cleanliness of the town. The bin is knocked off its stand and rolls into the road. Smith sees the bin late as his attention is distracted. He swerves, to avoid it. At the same time, a boy is trying to cross the road without looking. Smith is swerving into him and has to reverse his swerve significantly the other way, hitting a pothole in the poorly maintained road. This sends the car out of his control and onto the pavement. Jones, who had been walking by, slips on some soapy water draining from the carwash he is walking past. Whilst picking himself up, Smith's car mounts the pavement, hits Jones and kills him instantly. What is the cause of Jones' death?

This is a very difficult, but standard causal question. The universe is not an isolation of one cause and one effect. It is a matrix of cause and effect with each effect being causal further in the continuum. One could say that the impact of the car on Jones' head kills him. But even then, at what nanosecond of impact, what degree of the force killed him? This is arbitrarily cutting off the causal continuum at 1, half or quarter of a second before the effect (Jones' death). Having said that, the cause could be said to be the lack of oxygen to the brain, or the destruction of his vital organs. We could also accuse the bin, the drunk or anything else as being a cause.

As a result, I would posit that the cause of Jones' death is one long continuum which cannot be arbitrarily sliced up temporally. As such, it stretches back to, say, the Big Bang – the start of the causal chain. In terms of free will, we call this the *causal circumstance*. Because the universe is one big causal soup, I would claim that any effect would be the makeup of the universe at any one point, like a snapshot. This makeup cannot be sliced up arbitrarily, but is the entire connected matrix of 'causes and effect' (for want of a better term) since the Big Bang.

In other words, there is only one cause. The universe at the Big Bang (or similar).

So how does this look so far? Well, if we project this conclusion onto the syllogism, we get:

1) Everything which begins to exist has the universe as the causal conditions for its existence.

2) The universe began to exist.

3a) Therefore, the universe had a cause for its existence.

Or

3b) Therefore, the universe had the universe as a causal conditions for its existence.

As you can easily see, both conclusions are problematic. 3a seems to be nonsensical. 3b seems to insinuate that the universe is self-caused.

But it is actually more complicated still, as I will show. We now get on to talking about 'everything' and 'begins to exist'.

Firstly, the only thing, it can be argued, that 'has begun to exist' is the universe itself (i.e. all the matter and energy that constitute the universe and everything in it). Thus the first premise and the conclusion are synonymous – the argument is entirely circular.

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So how do I establish that the only thing which has begun to exist is the universe? We may think that things like tables, chairs, humans, rocks, lemmings and so on exist. Well, they do in one sense (an arrangement of matter / energy), but in the sense of the abstract labels of 'rock' or 'chair', they are exactly that, abstract labels. Their existence, in Platonic terms, as some kind of objective entity, requires the philosophical position of (Platonic) realism. This is not a position that Craig adheres to. All we have on a nominalist or conceptualist worldview (as opposed to realist) is a transformative coming into existence. What this means is that what makes the chair, the molecules and atoms, already existed in some other form or other before the 'chair' came to be. So the matter or energy did not 'begin to exist'. This merely leaves the label of 'chair'.

Let's now look at the 'label' of 'chair'. This is an abstract concept, I posit, that exists only in the mind of the conceiver. Most philosophers agree that the part of the definition of abstracts is that they are causally inert. We, as humans, label the chair abstractly and it only means a chair to those who see it as a chair – ie it is subjective. My idea of a chair is different to yours, is different to a cat's and to an alien's, as well as different to the idea of this object to a human who has never seen or heard of a chair (early humans who had never seen a chair, for example, would not know it to be a chair. It would not exist as a chair, though the matter would exist in that arrangement). I may call a tree stump a chair, but you may not. If I was the last person on earth and died and left this chair, it would not be a chair, but an assembly of matter that meant nothing to anything. The chair, as a label, is a subjective concept existing in each human's mind who sees it as a chair. A chair only has properties that make it a chair within the intellectual confines of humanity. These consensus-agreed properties are human-derived properties, even if there may be common properties between concrete items – i.e. chairness. These properties are arguable and not objectively true themselves. Thus the label of 'chair' is a result of 'subjectively human' evolution.

If you argue that objective ideas do exist, then it is also the case that the range of all possible entities must also exist objectively, even if they don't exist materially. For example, a 'forqwibllex' is a fork with a bent handle and a button on the end (that has never been created and I have 'made-up'). This did not exist before now, either objectively or subjectively. Now it does - have I created it objectively? This is what happens whenever humans make up a label for anything to which they assign function etc. Also, things that other animals use that don't even have names, but to which they have assigned 'mental labels', for want of better words, must also exist objectively under this logic. For example, the backrubby bit of bark on which a family of sloths scratch their backs on a particular tree exists materially. They have no language, so it has no label (it can be argued that abstracts are a function of language). Yet even though it only has properties to a sloth, and not to any other animal, objectivists should claim it must exist objectively. Furthermore, there are items that have multiple abstract properties which create more headaches for the objectivist. A chair, to me, might well be a territory marker to the school cat. Surely they same object cannot embody both objective existences: the table and the marker!

When did this chair 'begin to exist'? Was it when it had three legs being built, when $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{2}{3}$, $\frac{4}{5}$, $\frac{9}{10}$ of the last leg was constructed. You see, the energy and matter of the chair already existed. So the chair is merely a conceptual construct. More precisely a human one. More precisely still, one that different humans will variously disagree with.

Let's take the completed chair. When will it not become a chair? When I take 7 molecules away? 20? a million? The fallacy of the beard / sand dune / slippery slope will tell you that this is entirely subjective.

Now let's take an animal - a cat. What is this 'chair' to it? I imagine a visual sensation of 'sleep thing'. To an alien? It looks rather like a shmaglan because it has a planthoingj on its fdanygshan. Labels are conceptual and depend on the conceiving mind, subjectively.

So, after all that, what has begun to exist? A causally inert abstract concept.

You see, once we strip away the labels and concepts, all we have left is matter and energy which is only ever involved in what can be called 'transformative creation', meaning it doesn't begin to exist, but is being constantly being reformed throughout time. It only began to exist at the Big Bang or similar (in Craig's model).

As Craig mentions in the video, this can sometimes be seen as *mereological nihilism* which is explained here. This is a complex subject itself. I think the notion that Craig derisorily laughs of an established philosophical disciple (since the time of Plato) and throws it in with 'amateur internet infidels' says more about Craig than about the arguments he is trying to put down.

But even if we move away from a kind of nihilism, we have, as I suggested above, a discussion about the philosophy of realism vs conceptualism vs nominalism. Craig merely sweeps this under the carpet for the KCA, but it is entirely relevant. I will define conceptualism and nominalism as per the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy:

Conceptualism (also called psychologism and mentalism, depending on the sorts of objects under discussion): This is the view that there do exist numbers — or properties, or propositions, or whatever — but that they do not exist independently of us; instead, they are mental objects; in particular, the claim is usually that they are something like ideas in our heads. As we will see below, this view has serious problems and not very many people endorse it. Nonetheless, it has had periods of popularity in the history of philosophy. It is very often thought that Locke held a conceptualistic view of universals, and prior to the twentieth century, this was the standard view of concepts and propositions. In the philosophy of mathematics, psychologicistic views were popular in the late nineteenth century (the most notable proponent being the early Husserl (1891)) and even in the first part of the twentieth century with the advent of psychologicistic intuitionism (Brouwer 1912 and 1948, and Heyting 1956). Finally, Noam Chomsky (1965) has endorsed a mentalistic view of sentences and other linguistic objects, and he has been followed here by others, most notably, Fodor (1975, 1987).

Nominalism (also called anti-realism): This is the view that there are no such things as numbers, or universals, or whatever sort of alleged abstract objects are under discussion. Thus, for instance, a nominalist about properties would say that while there are such things as red balls and red houses, there is no such thing as the property of redness, over and above the red balls and red houses. And a nominalist about numbers would say that while there are such things as piles of three stones, and perhaps "3-ideas" existing in people's heads, there is no such thing as the number 3. As we will see below, there are many different versions of each of these kinds of nominalism, but for now, we don't need anything more than this general formulation of the view. (Sometimes 'nominalism' is used to denote the view that there are no such things as abstract objects; on this usage, 'nominalism' is synonymous with 'anti-platonism', and views like immanent realism count as versions of nominalism. In contrast, on the usage employed in this essay, 'nominalism' is essentially synonymous with 'anti-realism', and so views like immanent realism will not count as versions of nominalism here.)

So either abstracts and labels do not exist, or they only exist as mental (potentially causally inert) constructs, or they exist, as Craig would have it, as real thing in some way. The problem for Craig is that he claims many abstracts are not Platonically real:

"I am wholly in sympathy with your scepticism about numbers, propositions, and scientific laws as abstract objects. Moreover, insofar as they are conceived to be uncreated, I am dead set against them."

Whilst denying these labels as being in any way abstract, that the thing 'chair' or 'Bill Craig' exists in any different way, as illustrated above.

Whilst Craig might be right, and whilst the KCA might actually be sound, Craig assumes an awful lot in laying this out. He doesn't seem to want to deal with these difficult questions. Rather, he either dismisses them as unworthy in some way, or merely asserts his premises under a massive assumption that his philosophy on mereology or realism is correct. He doesn't even let his audience, readership or debating partner know that his premises depend on these assumptions. Obviously any philosophical claim depends on an awful lot of philosophical underwriting in order to stand, and one cannot enter every debate or create every paper by building up one's philosophy from scratch. But when one is arguing God so forcefully on what is effectively 3 lines of syllogism, I would demand a little more honesty of what those premises entail.

So now let's look at the KCA again, and what the syllogism would look like given these notions of nominalism or conceptualism:

- 1) Everything that begins to exist has a cause for its existence**
- 2) the universe began to exist**
- 3) therefore, the universe had a cause for its existence.**

Let's look more closely at premise 1. We have agreed, then, that abstract concepts might begin to exist, but these are causally inert and do not exist objectively - only in the minds of the conceiver. So that leaves matter and energy, which has always existed because it is, in effect, the universe itself. It is not that the universe is 'made up' of lots of matter and energy making it something, it simply IS a quantity of matter and energy. This, then, makes the KCA look like this:

- 1) The universe that begins to exist has a cause for its existence**
- 2) the universe begins to exist**
- 3) therefore, the universe has a cause for its existence**

The syllogism becomes entirely circular, and thus logically invalid.

What is happening is you are trying to make a generalised rule about other things to apply that rule to the universe. But there are no other things, so the only thing that has begun to exist is the universe itself. We cannot seek to prove a conclusion about the causal behaviour of a one-off event merely by asserting it in the premise.

In this context, causality **is** the universe. personally, I adhere strictly to causality 'within' the universe: I am a determinist. However, I recognise that it doesn't necessarily follow that the universe required causation (I actually believe in an eternal universe in some way such as Loop Quantum Gravity). Phrases like 'within the universe' are misleading since the universe **is** everything. The KCA does its work inductively. It looks at everything in the universe (but as mentioned there is nothing 'in' the universe since everything 'of' or 'in' the universe is the universe itself) and sees a pattern and ascribes it to the universe itself.

My point is you can't make a pattern from a singular event, if you will, and then say, necessarily, that the event itself must adhere to this one-off rule.

In critiquing the KCA, of course, one does not invalidate the notion that God created the universe, or that the universe had a cause or what-have-you. One is merely saying that if that is so, one cannot prove it using the KCA. The KCA is not sound.

In later posts, I will look at other issues with the KCA.



By Jonathan MS Pearce at June 06, 2012 74 Comments

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AdamHazzard

14 years ago edited

Interesting, Jonathan. Thank you for this.

2 0 



AdamHazzard

14 years ago edited

It fascinates me that if you restate the first premise as
Every state of the universe proceeds from a prior state
it actually contradicts the second premise.
To resolve the contradiction you would have to begin with a different premise,
something like:
Every state of the universe derives from an initial state which had no prior state
...which itself contradicts the conclusion, since any cause, natural or
supernatural, would constitute a "prior state!"

4 0 



Jonathan MS Pearce

→ AdamHazzard

14 years ago edited

I like those terms and phrases a lot. Thanks!

I like the second phrase. the syllogism would go like this:

- 1) **Every state of the universe derives from an initial state of the universe**
- 2) **We cannot yet explain the initial state of the universe**
- C) **We don't know if the universe required a cause or not**

It's not pretty, it ain't catchy, it doesn't get us far, but it's sound and accurate!

11 0 

D

dalazal

14 years ago

Fascinating post.

1 0 

K

Kel

14 years ago

I thought the whole point of deductive syllogisms is that the conclusion by necessity is built into the premises.

0 0 



Jonathan MS Pearce

→ Kel

14 years ago

You are right, but it does not mean it is sound, and also, there is the concept of a grey area in the premise. This was going to be part of my next post, but I will elucidate a little here.

Deductive logic is close to being tautologous in a way since the conclusion is wrapped up in the meaning of the terms in the premises, such that:

- 1) All librarians sort books
- 2) Jim is a librarian

I'm a librarian

C) Therefore Jim sorts books

This is pretty obvious as the definition of a librarian is someone who sorts books. However, in the KCA, the opening premise is a piece of categorical reasoning. Effectively, it's an absolute assertion which can be false. But it is an assertion based on an inductive reasoning of past uniformities. Here is the Humean Problem of Induction. Do we have good reason to predict future (or other) behaviour based on past uniformities? Well, not NECESSARILY (in logical terms). In other

[see more](#)

5 0

KKel → Jonathan MS Pearce
14 years ago

Does this make sense?

It seems to, yes.

That's one thing I don't get about Craig's arguments: why he bothers to put them into syllogisms. Is it part of his apologetic tactic, or is it something expected of philosophers? Because, to my mind at least, the presentation seems a distraction from the point that the premises are making.

0 0

DD Rizdek → Jonathan MS Pearce
13 years ago edited

I suppose the reason the argument seems like it should be convincing is that your expanded argument might read like this:

- 1) Everything that everybody everywhere all the time has observed that begins to exist required a cause for its existence
- 2) Therefore, everything which begins to exist requires a cause for its existence
- 3) The universe began to exist
- C) Therefore, the universe requires a cause for its existence

However, unless someone already has a concept of what that first cause might be, i.e. a god of some sort, the argument pretty much falls flat even if one accepts all the premises and thinks it is sound. IOW all you are left with is a big question mark..."ok, what is that cause we just "proved" has to exist."

0 0

**Jonathan MS Pearce**

14 years ago

Here's a video I did a couple of years ago on this:



Hopefully, most points still stand!

0 0 ↗



GearHedEd

14 years ago

There's more wrong with Craig's formulation than what you posted above: One cannot assume causality TO the universe, because the way Craig defines causality requires it to operate *within* a time continuum that doesn't exist externally to the universe, while at the same time presuming a timeframe within which to work that cannot exist until *after* the inflation of the spacetime continuum has "begun to exist"! The KCA is invalid because it presumes conditions that only obtain AFTER the universe has started to expand to explain its existence through a causal agent (which itself is problematic).

7 0 ↗



Jonathan MS Pearce

→ GearHedEd

14 years ago

Cheer, Ed. Yet again, as with @Kel's post, this was another point that will feature in a KCA critique #2. It will be a derivation of stuff which can be found here:
<http://atipplingphilosopher...>

2 0 ↗



Jonathan MS Pearce

→ Jonathan MS Pearce

11 years ago

the link to part 2 can be found here:
<http://www.skepticink.com/t...>

0 0 ↗



Patrick Reynolds

14 years ago

"What is the cause of Smith's death?"

Smith did not die. It was Jones who was hit by Smith's truck.

1 0 ↗



johnbebbington

→ Patrick Reynolds

14 years ago

When I was going to St Ives

1 0 ↗



Jonathan MS Pearce

→ Patrick Reynolds

14 years ago

Will change that!

oops...

0 0 ↗



cipher

14 years ago

What's funny, interesting and sad all at the same time is that the Buddhists use a very similar process of reasoning to come up with their metaphysical system, in which there is no first cause. Of course, they still believe in hell. Eh, they're all the bloody same.

Jonathan, I hope you aren't also suffering from the "William Lane Craig is a

good guy who means well but is misguided" malady. (Sorry, John!)

3 0 ↗



Jonathan MS Pearce

→ cipher

— ↗

14 years ago

Hmm. WLC, eh?

Part of me thinks he is a very knowledgeable philosopher and a knowledgeable theologian. But I can't help but think that he deludes himself.

i wrote a post on this some time ago. <http://atipplingphilosopher...>

Check the picture below and this is what I wrote in answer to a point @Kel made:

I was speaking to a theologian friend today about this. Part of me thinks, with regards to his position of infallibilism / literalism wrt exegesis, that he knows damn well it is not right. And part of me thinks he's actually come so far as to have deluded himself. His reasoning for the Canaanites that he has been attacked for recently shows the mental gerrymandering he has to go through to get there. I think he has such strong core beliefs that he deludes himself into 'believing' such ad hoc and improbable explanations and exegesis as to be sad for an obviously clever man.

I think he is smart. And I think he has such strong convictions in some of his arguments A, B and C that when D is called into question, he can give an ad hoc and ridiculous answer because he feels the strength of A, B and C mean that D must be true.

2 0 ↗



articulett

→ Jonathan MS Pearce

— ↗

14 years ago

WLC sounds smart to those looking for a rational reason to believe. Nobody starts believing BECAUSE of any of Craig's arguments-- and his arguments are not the reasons believer's believe. They believe because they've been indoctrinated and imagine there are great rewards for faith... and eternal damnation for non-belief. They are on a hamster wheel continually looking for a way of rationalizing magical thinking and show the invisible eye in the sky that they have "faith". Christians are the same as Muslims in that regard. It's a mind virus.

Even if we grant Craig his hypothetical uncaused cause that is outside of space and time (whatever that means) and made of nothing (and thus identical to nothing) how does that lead to the 3-in-1 schizophrenic, megalomaniac god that Christians believe in?

How do you even get to this uncaused cause being

"uncaused"? Or is "he"? Or having an "eye" to build

see more

7 0 ↗



cipher

→ articulett

— ↗

14 years ago edited

They are on a hamster wheel continually looking for a way of rationalizing magical thinking and show the invisible eye in the sky that they have "faith".

Yep.

1 0 ↗



Jim E Jones

→ cipher

— ↗

13 years ago edited

Multiple hamster wheels. See

[http://www.lyricsfreak.com/...](http://www.lyricsfreak.com/)

Round, like a circle in a spiral
Like a wheel within a wheel.
Never ending or beginning,
On an ever spinning wheel

...

0 0

Guest articulett

14 years ago

Amen @articulett . I really sums it all.

I understand that this discussion might be an interesting philosophical exercise, but it always boils down to what you said. All of this mental masturbation solves no practical problem. Even if we grant everything of the "AlaKazam" argument, so what?

The image that comes to my mind is always of a 4 year old child responding: "Then, who created God ?"

And WLC looks like an used car salesman, and he acts like one. And every car salesman know what they sell is not as good as they want others to think they are. He might believe in God, but he knows he's using bad and contorted logic.

7 0

Guest Guest

14 years ago

not meant to denigrate the excellent post...

2 0

Jim E Jones Guest

14 years ago

Old Joke:

Q: "What's the difference between a car salesman and a computer salesman?"

A: "The car salesman knows when he's lying."

I think that applies to most theologians as well.

0 0

D Rizdek articulett

13 years ago

"

I'm not even sure Craig believes his garbage"

It would be interesting to "see" inside his head when he's presenting his arguments in a debate, sermon, seminar or lecture. I wonder if he actually could argue the other side equally well and win. It seems his ability to debate depends not so much on his conviction of what he's arguing, but on his almost encyclopedic memory, his ability to pounce on any flaw in his opponents reasoning, and his ability to articulate his arguments and lines of reasoning in a way that seems to impress his fans and confound his

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seems to impress his fans and confound his opponents. I've only seen one debate where WLC seemed flustered (w/ Sam Harris). Normally he's in complete command of his debates.

Notwithstanding the negative comments, has anyone seen him defeated in a debate? Does anyone know of any "up and coming" theologian/apologist for conservative Christianity that would fill his aging shoes?

1 0

**Jonathan MS Pearce**

→ D Rizdek

—



13 years ago

I think you've nailed Craig there. He IS brilliant, but not so much as a philosopher or theologian, as an orator with a massive and very quick memory. I really do think that is why he does so well in debates. It is presenting an unbeatable argument (rhetorical techniques, machine gun approach) whilst at the same time pouncing on any flaw and taking advantage of it with his encyclopedic memory.

I love the idea of him arguing the other side. I think he would win.

In fact, I would love to see him argue against someone else who was arguing 'his arguments' just to see what he thinks the weaknesses are.

1 0

**Jonathan MS Pearce**

→ D Rizdek

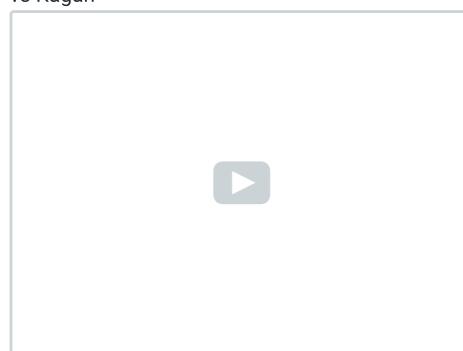
—



13 years ago edited

These are the debates I think he lost:

vs Kagan



vs Tabash



see more

1 0

**Ryan M**

→ articulett

—



13 years ago

Theist's posit that God has no physical parts, but not that God has no properties. God would be identical to nothing iff God had no properties at all. But obviously theists say that God has either multiple properties or at least one, so God isn't identical to nothing.

Agree with the other stuff.

0 0



articulett → Ryan M

13 years ago edited

Yes... I am aware of the purported "properties"-- god is supposed to be a "he" and think without a brain and want you to believe in "him" (or else). He's supposed to have made man in his "image" though he has no image until he becomes Jesus (though I hear he was a burning bush, has a "back side," and revealed himself in some way to Adam, Eve, Noah, and Abraham.) He's Omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent(?), and omnibenevolent-- and also "perfect"-- (but he creates imperfect beings for some reason and then punishes them for all eternity). He's the god of the old testament... and he's 3-in-1 though indistinguishable from nothing at all except for the nebulous incoherent properties those who believe in him imagine he has.

How do you get all that stuff from a hypothetical

[see more](#)

7 0



Guest → articulett

13 years ago

Triple like, Amen , ditto and done.

1 0



Jim E Jones → articulett

13 years ago

"How can immaterial beings "do" anything? How can they participate in a material world? How can they influence matter when a force requires matter acting upon matter?"

If they can influence our universe then they are **of** this universe. The nearest star to the sun is 4.243 light-years away (equivalent to 24,900,000,000,000 miles). It can have so little influence on our solar system that it can be discounted - and it's **our closest neighbor** outside our system! So either 'god' is so powerful 'he' distorts time and space everywhere or he's real close - which begs the question, why would he be?

0 0



articulett → Jim E Jones

13 years ago

Yes... and if it can "be" without matter, why would it make matter? (Or time? Or space?) Especially if it's "perfect"? If it doesn't suffer, why would it create anything that could? The more you try to get a sense of what this "uncaused cause" is supposed to "be"-- the less it seems like it could "be" anything one would call a god. I can't make sense of what it could "be" at all! And I think the only way theists can think that it makes sense is by being scientifically ignorant and/or by never really thinking about it at all.

My questions wouldn't compute with them. So I give them their "hypothetical uncaused cause"--

Debunking Christianity: William Lane Craig and the Kalam Cosmological Argument (#1)

but I try to force them to explain to me why they think it wants to be "believed in". Craig's followers are looking for a reason to belief; I'm not.

1 0



cipher → Jonathan MS Pearce

14 years ago

Oh, who could parse all of that? "This much is lying, that much is denial..." Who cares? I'm not his therapist.

My point - of which I never could convince our host - is that he's a son of a bitch. He'd gladly see us all in hell, so long as he can keep clutching the security blanket for a little while longer.

2 0



D Rizdek → cipher

13 years ago edited

One of the lines of reasoning that accompanies the cosmological argument has to do with the impossibility of an actual infinite. See <http://www.leaderu.com/trut...>

I have looked a little, but is anyone aware of any website where this is discussed from a Buddhist standpoint? IOW how do the Buddhists address this thorny little issue? WLC's discussion of this does not convince me of the need for an uncaused first cause outside of a prior state of the universe, but neither have I developed a cogent response to the impossibility of an actual infinite. To my limited way of thinking, it presents a dilemma.

Good post and discussion BTW.

0 0



cipher → D Rizdek

13 years ago edited

I don't know if this will be of any use to you, but...

It's considered axiomatic in Buddhism that every phenomenon must be caused by a prior phenomenon. To accommodate this, they conceptualize the universe as being eternal in both directions - although the word they use generally gets translated as "infinite", which I wish they'd stop doing.* Most of my experience has been with Tibetans and their Western students. The Tibetans have only been here for thirty or forty years, are still operating with a medieval reality map and appear to be stuck with the concept of linear time (of course, it goes without saying that the quantum notion of uncaused events would be incomprehensible to them). They're completely opposed to the notion of a first cause. When I've suggested a creator might exist outside of spacetime, the Tibetans haven't understood me and the Westerners refuse to consider anything the Tibetans haven't told them. They can't (or

[see more](#)

0 0



A is for Atheist

14 years ago

Great post Jonathan. I am looking forward to part 2...:)

1 0



Thorne

14 years ago

Debunking Christianity: William Lane Craig and the Kalam Cosmological Argument (#1)

The problem I have with the KCA is not so much the first premise but the second. How does Craig know that the universe began to exist? All we can truthfully claim is that the universe AS WE KNOW IT began to exist with the Big Bang. We have no idea what may have come before.

5 0

**Jonathan MS Pearce**

→ Thorne

14 years ago

Absolutely. I have all that to come!

Cheers!

1 0

**Jim E Jones**

→ Thorne

14 years ago

Isn't his argument a form of "The chicken or the egg"? And his answer is godidit?

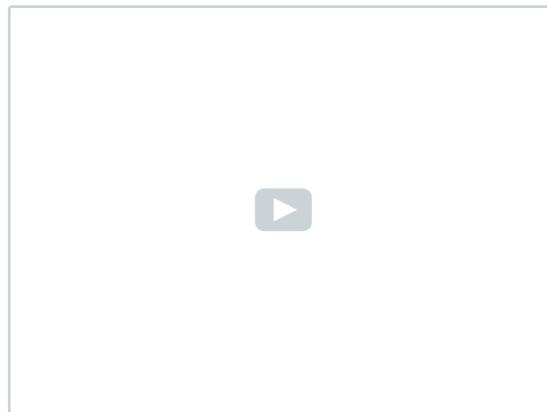
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**GearHedEd**

→ Jim E Jones

13 years ago

In a nutshell... yes. He cuts the Gordian Knot of infinite regress by trying to stop it with an actually infinite god.
Suuuuure...



2 0

**Ryan M**

→ Thorne

13 years ago

Craig appeals to big bang cosmology (Or at least some aspects/interpretations of it) but mostly argues that an actual infinite cannot exist. The basic idea is that if an actual infinite cannot exist, then the universe cannot exist infinitely into the past, so the universe must be finite.

1 0

**GearHedEd**

→ Ryan M

13 years ago edited

I'd like to see Craig attempt to show how an infinite (eternal) God can exist eternally into a past that cannot exist, in a time continuum that has no meaning (and probably doesn't exist in any case!) externally to the universe Craig inhabits (and is the only time continuum he or anyone else experiences).

4 0

**BronzeDog**

14 years ago

I'm reminded of a truly stupid argument I read, once. I think it was Ken Ham, Kirk Cameron, or someone like them. He started talking about the "bizarre"

idea that atheists believed that dinosaurs always existed because they didn't believe things began to exist. Whoever he was, it became clear that he apparently couldn't grasp the meaning of the hypothesis that matter and energy existed eternally. It's the difference between a box and LEGO bricks and a toy made of those LEGO bricks.

1 0 ↗

**Jim E Jones** ➔ BronzeDog

14 years ago

— ↗

I'm still amazed at how many people walk around breathing with zero apparent ability to reason more than a cockroach.

0 0 ↗

**Alex Gillotte**

14 years ago

— ↗

The KCA is callow and easy to dismiss because its first premise is false. Our experience of things "beginning to exist" is when we see matter or energy in one form take on another form—it does not apply to Craig's conception, which is of an actor acting upon nothingness—which is of course an impossible contradiction, because cause and effect requires not just an actor, but something to be acted upon. If the universe came out of nothing, ironically, it could not have had a cause.

2 0 ↗

**Bertrand Le Roy**

13 years ago edited

— ↗

My main objection to Craig's form of the argument is that he has a very naive understanding of causality. The very words he uses betray it: "begins" implies that time plays a crucial role in the argument, but we now know that in the vicinity of the Big Bang, time loses significance. Craig lacks the knowledge of physics he needs to understand what it means to say that the universe began to exist. It did not "begin" to exist in any common sense of the word. He's basically making an absolute of time, whereas we know it's merely a local property of the particular universe we inhabit, and one that doesn't even exist everywhere in that universe. That, and using inductive reasoning from local facts to the whole collection of all facts that there are, which is unique. It's a stupid argument throughout in view of modern science.

3 0 ↗

**Papalinton**

13 years ago edited

— ↗

Not to put too fine a point on it, but the KCA is simply a spurious, artificial and misleading hypothesis forged from the kalamity that masquerades as religious 'trooth'. There is nothing new in the KCA. WLC simply trots out this recycled nonsense in the same tread-worn manner that christian theism has done for millennia. Pretty much as they do with Aquinas. Christian theism is not about building on humanity's knowledge base, only reinterpreting old and worn ideas that generally perform the same task as a bad smell, they hang around so long as to become unwanted and unwarranted.

A useful précis of the KCA can be found at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/e...>

2 0 ↗

**pboyfloyd**

13 years ago

— ↗

The KCA is a bait and switch argument, using efficient causes as premisses and concluding with an efficient AND material cause, or some supposed efficient cause OF material itself.

3 0 ↗

**GearHedEd**

➔ pboyfloyd

13 years ago

— ↗

I liked the more detailed version you posted @ St. Brian's...

0 0

**Jonathan MS Pearce** GearHedEd

13 years ago

Have you got a URL for that?

0 0

**GearHedEd** Jonathan MS Pearce

13 years ago

Jonathan,

I was hoping pboy would bring it in himself, or that I could copy/paste his comment in here without plugging the other blog... I'll post a link in B.A.S.H.

0 0

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