

# The Beginning of the Universe was Caused by God:

## *A Response to Taner Edis*

Shandon L. Guthrie

### INTRODUCTION

Modern day apologist and Christian philosopher William Lane Craig is perhaps the most recognized figure in his articulation of the *kalam* cosmological argument today. When ample evidence is given either by him or by some other able theist in attempting to substantiate the existence of God, atheists remain waiting on the horizon ready to vanquish their arch-enemy: Christian theism. In a recent article entitled "Does the Universe Have a Cause? Is this Cause God?", atheist Taner Edis gives a commentary on the *kalam* argument as given by Dr. William Craig. The following is a critique of his assessment on the subject of the *kalam* argument and God's existence. I hope that the reader will examine the evidence and keep in mind the question, "Could God exist? If so, how has He made Himself evident?" I encourage debate and discussion on this and many other related topics concerning the important questions of life.

### "GOD" AS THE LABEL OF IGNORANCE

Taner Edis begins his article with a rather bizarre view of Christian theism. He believes that Christian philosophers posit an arbitrary, metaphysical being called *God* in order to "fill in" the areas of knowledge we either know nothing about or are forever ignorant of. Edis states:

Our perplexity when confronting such questions where naturalistic explanation reaches its limits is supposed to be alleviated when "God" is produced as an answer . . . It is a post hoc label which sweeps ignorance under the carpet of divine mystery.<sup>(1)</sup>

The postulation of God as a label of ignorance in an area supposedly devoid of any "naturalistic explanation" is simply untenable. Worse than that, the scientific notion of God being *ad hoc* (something Edis erroneously refers to as "post hoc") is equally misguided. Indeed, there is no real cause to agree with Edis once we discover how to approach the theist-atheist debate. As a precursor to such a debate, it must be noted that Edis convolutes the Christian viewpoint. First of all the concept of God is not a mere label of ignorance in the sense that we use terms such as WIMPs and dark matter in astrophysics. In contrast, the "God" postulate possesses very clear definable attributes evident in the *kalam* argument itself that cannot be simply abandoned. WIMPs and dark matter have no external definitions and are not independently verified. In fact, I wonder if Edis would pursue the astronomers for *their* labels of ignorance. At any rate, one cannot dismiss the notion of God or any such postulation solely because it is a supposed "label which sweeps ignorance under the carpet . . ." Nor can Edis accuse *God* of being a mere label devoid of any explanatory power. Quite the contrary, the concept of God answers all sorts of questions that are not answered in alternative models to the universe such as "Where did the universe come from?", "Why does the universe exist instead of nothing?", and "What is the purpose and ultimate end result for such a Being?" Atheism is

simply bankrupt to sufficiently answer these questions. Explanatory hypotheses are much more preferable when they answer more questions than they pose. As to a scientific proposition's fecundity, the hypothesis must at least give practical grounds for further investigation.

As to the notion of God being "a post hoc label", I suggest a thorough investigation on what exactly that entails. I believe the expression Edis is grasping at is *ad hoc*, not *post hoc*. *Post hoc* hypotheses are fallacies concluding a *cause* based upon a sequence of events. An *ad hoc* hypothesis is supplied in order to support (wrongly so) an original hypothesis; it is not necessarily the original hypothesis itself. An hypothesis is said to be *ad hoc* when it goes beyond the available evidence. In this regard, theists do not posit God in order to substantiate a hypothesis above the realm of God. God Himself is the original hypothesis theists strenuously defend. As noted before, the God hypothesis has many different independent attestations as to His nature and is perfectly capable of being an explanation, especially as a necessary explanation for the cause of the universe. It therefore possesses great explanatory power.

### *EVERYTHING THAT BEGINS TO EXIST HAS A CAUSE FOR ITS EXISTENCE*

Before a good treatment of Edis' critique can be given, it is important to see the theistic argument in reconstruction (as it appears in Edis' article):

- (1) Everything that *begins to exist* has a cause of its existence
- (2) The universe *began* to exist.
- (3) Therefore the Universe has a cause of its existence.

Taner Edis works backwards to dismantle the argument by beginning in premise (2). Edis seems to find comfort in the fact that mathematics utilizes "actual infinities" without any problem. As a note, it is essential to understand that premise (2) is contingent on the fact that *infinity* is not a property in the real world. Craig has offered in previous works a detailed explanation as to *why* infinity or "an actually infinite number of things" cannot exist.<sup>(2)</sup> I have also given a brief analysis of the question of infinity as it relates to the real world.<sup>(3)</sup> Edis, on the other hand, sees no reason to reject the notion of infinity in the real world. He dismisses Craig's critique on the notion that Craig appeals to a mere consensus on "intuition" contrary to others. But Edis makes an interesting statement that deserves attention:

It is a typical Rationalist mistake, attempting to constrain the *possibilities* of physics by pure thought, beyond the requirement of consistency--one is entitled to suspect a barely concealed egocentrism.<sup>(4)</sup>

Thus the issue revolves once again as to whether or not an actually infinite number of things is "possible" or "consistent." It is precisely these things that are answered in Craig's critiques of real world infinities. This has been adequately answered in Craig's and my works. Also, Edis' suggestion that infinity in the real world is just a "conceptual difficulty"<sup>(5)</sup> is also false. I can easily conceive of an actual infinite in my mind, but the problem resides in the fact that such a conception does not, indeed cannot, translate into the real world with a one-to-one correspondence. He also seems to assume that Craig does not dismiss the reality of infinity based on "theoretical incoherence or experimental falsity."<sup>(6)</sup> But this is wrong as well. The critique of infinity is theoretically incoherent because it entails contradictions that only the conceptual world of mathematics can dismiss and is experimentally false because everything that exists demonstrably has an origin in something other than itself. Should Edis actually review Craig's written material he would see why a reality of infinity is impossible and incongruous.

Edis focuses his next attack on the scientific evidence for a universe that began. He begins by agreeing with the notion that the universe is not a cyclical one (an *oscillating* universe) and, therefore, precludes me from needing to comment on such a common topic. Edis then comments on the singularity of the Big Bang theory. He says that by making the singularity a "creation event", one "creates more problems for the theist than it solves."<sup>(7)</sup> Consider Edis' statement on such a rationale:

[T]he state arising from such a singularity is fundamentally random -- *nothing* can be inferred from it, unless randomness is identified with God . . .<sup>(8)</sup>

Of course the conclusion that God is associated with randomness is counterproductive to the *kalam* argument. Indeed, God is the very antithesis to randomness and chaos. The broader picture Edis draws leaves the philosopher empty since he simply rejects the general uniformity of the Big Bang picture itself. Bare in mind that out of the initial singularity (said to lie on the boundary of spacetime) came physical space and time that operate sequentially and coherently. This cannot be productive of randomness. So the real dilemma is that either some personal First Cause is responsible for the teleological singularity or the random processes of an atheistic world view are at work. Or one may wish to affirm that the initial singularity is ontologically equivalent to *nothing*. Indeed, this seems to be the case since point-instants tend not to exist as independent, degenerate intervals of zero duration. The A-theorist theist can appreciate this conception due to the reality of temporal becoming. This is something Edis needs to address more firmly.

Furthermore, while uncertain, quantum gravity research holds out the possibility that the Big Bang singularity would give way to a universe without boundaries. Identifying the Big Bang with a *beginning* then rests on dubious theories of time, which with various degrees of sophistication, embeds physical time in sort of absolute meta-time, all supposedly compelled by extra-physical conceptual reasons.<sup>(9)</sup>

There are essentially two things wrong with Edis' claim here. First, a "boundless" universe presupposes that time exists as a fourth dimension of space. But while such models may cohere on paper, it makes no sense metaphysically to discuss time in the real world as a dimension of *space* for the two are ontologically different. This, in my opinion, is more "dubious" than any theories of time I have encountered. The Big Bang theory rests on the initial singularity *prior* to any specific attributes whatsoever. Secondly, it is unclear as to why Edis mentions the distinction between "physical time" and "absolute meta-time." If Edis is trying to dismiss the *kalam's* claim on the basis that both physical time and metaphysical time are B-theoretical, then some evidence is required to make such a claim. After all, even in a B-theory of time we may have a singularity that is temporally *prior* to physical space and time. The *kalam* cosmological argument attempts to appeal to our general intuitions about the reality of temporal becoming. On this basis it becomes more probable that, with an initial singularity, the beginning of the universe was caused by God.

#### *EVERYTHING THAT BEGINS TO EXIST HAS A CAUSE FOR ITS EXISTENCE*

The final critique by Edis is on premise (1) of the *kalam* argument. The essential message he presents to us can be divided into two categories. The first is the theoretical objection. The second is the scientific objection. In the first case Edis attempts to dismiss Craig's claim that "everything that begins to exist has a cause" on the basis that "our everyday notion of causality . . . does not work."<sup>(10)</sup> Edis downplays "common sense and intuition" as poor guides for understanding how our world works. But this is simply absurd, and incorrect when applied to scientific hypotheses. For example, Galileo Galilei dismissed the notion that the "heavenly bodies" that existed in space were immutable based on the fact that the presence of sun spots and comets *intuitively* demanded changeability. Also, the great pragmatic science philosopher, Thomas Kuhn, believed that certain intuitions toward a competing scientific paradigm would eventually result in a

scientific revolution.<sup>(11)</sup> He states:

As in political revolutions, so in paradigm choice--there is no standard higher than the assent of the relevant community.<sup>(12)</sup>

Although Kuhn's pragmatic science is rightly under vast amounts of good criticism, he does reflect how scientists generally hypothesize. Besides, a scientist need not know the precise wording of the Second Law of Thermodynamics to *intuitively know* that "from nothing, nothing comes." Edis does not give enough conclusive power to the general intuition of the thinking community. He remains in the particular world of empiricism created by David Hume.

Secondly, Edis gives examples as to how subatomic particles can come into existence without a beginning. The danger in this speculation is due to the fact that quantum physics is still in its infancy. The world of quantum physics is still just a theoretical science, different from the practical sciences of both the Newtonian and Einsteinian models. Reasoning from a theoretical science created only to solve special problems does nothing to help us with the enormous catastrophe of the Big Bang. A "pair-creation from a vacuum" would not erupt into a life-permitting universe. The odds are decisively against it.<sup>(13)</sup>

In his critique, Edis is attempting to utilize the *quantum gravity model* that is incoherent and unrealistic. It must be noted that this view does away with the common understanding of the Big Bang theory in favor of the Hartle-Hawking model popularized in Stephen Hawking's best-selling book *Brief History of Time*.<sup>(14)</sup> In a nutshell, the problem with the quantum gravity model is that when we speak of "pre-geometric states," we are forced to use imaginary numbers. This system is used in Hawking's model in his concept of "imaginary time." But I see no reason to accept unintelligible concepts such as "imaginary numbers" and "imaginary time" since they have no corresponding reality any more than "imaginary cars" or "imaginary computers". For example, using an imaginary number to solve the problem  $Y \text{ men} - Z \text{ men} = 12 \text{ men}$  can work despite the multiple results. The variable Y could be 10 and Z could be -2. But it could be that Y is 15 and Z is 3. In the former case -2, although a negative number, could not be a viable alternative since we know through *experience* and *intuition* that we do not have *negative* men. We must root our realistic scientific investigations in the physical universe. The quantum gravity model is simply impotent to account for a physical correlation.<sup>(15)</sup>

In Edis' final remark on premise (1) he revisits randomness and states that it is essential in physical explanation. Here I think Edis has confused *randomness* with *openness*. The concept of randomness is *not* important to explanatory power since an explanation requires a stable and formidable background, not a chaotic one. However, it is necessary for a scientist making hypotheses to dream up a tenable solution to a problem *openly*. I do not think that randomness is the basis from which stability most probably arises from. As to Edis' final remarks against Craig and the notion of God's sovereign will versus determinism, it is important to solve the prior problem of God's existence. It has not been the purpose of this essay to discuss the problem of God's middle knowledge in regard to predictable outcomes. Such a matter is secondary to the theist-atheist debate over the beginning of the universe.

## CONCLUSION

The success of the *kalam* cosmological argument does not rest with shaky or unverifiable premises. Each point in the argument as given by Dr. William L. Craig is based on a firm consensus of astronomy and physics. Philosophical considerations are also injected into the notion of "an actually infinite number of things." Taner Edis has not proven why the *kalam* argument is weak. In fact, he makes more claims than he is able to prove. In his surety of atheism, he remains far too cavalier about his criticism of the *kalam* argument. I think that the *kalam* argument finds its strength in the reality that everyone enjoys under the defining beliefs of modern-day cosmology. Whether or not one believes in the Big Bang theory is not an

important matter for one to answer, but the evidence under each premise is vindicated in a general scientific consensus held by most today. Edis' remarks as to the contrary are simply dubious and unattested. God exists and makes better sense in a temporally real universe that began a finite number of years ago.

## END NOTES

1. Edis, Taner, "Does the Universe Have a Cause? Is this Cause God?", paragraphs 1 and 2.
2. For example see Craig, William L., *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1984, revised edition 1994), pp. 94-100.
3. Guthrie, Shandon L., *Russell, Infinity, and the Tristram Shandy Paradox* (written in 1996). See web address <http://members.aol.com/berean7/docs/infinity.htm>.
4. Paragraph 7.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. Paragraph 9.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. Paragraph 10.
11. Kuhn, Thomas S., *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1962, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, enlarged, 1970), pp. 77-110.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
13. Barrow, John and Tipler, Frank, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 3 and 565.
14. Hawking, Stephen, *Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988).
15. Cf. Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, pp. 108-13.