

# Theistic Arguments

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January 2006

## Hebrews 11:6

- ✦ And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. [NIV]

# Outline

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- # Part I: Setting the Stage
  - Atheism and its implications
  - What is an argument?
- # Part II: The Craig Program
  - Cosmological Argument
  - Teleological Argument
  - Moral Argument
  - Resurrection Argument
  - Basic Beliefs

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# Range of Responses

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- # I don't believe that God exists.
- # Nobody knows if God exists.
- # I don't need the concept of God.
- # The idea of God doesn't make sense.
- # I don't care.
  - Even atheist philosophers, e.g., Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, recognized that the whether God exists makes a tremendous difference!

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## Quote from Norman Levitt

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- # Victor J. Stenger, *Has Science Found God? The Latest Results in the Search for Purpose in the Universe*, Prometheus Books, 2003.
- # Quote from back of book by Norman Levitt, Professor of Mathematics, Rutgers University, and author of *Prometheous Bedeviled: Science and the Contradictions of Contemporary Culture*.

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## Implications of Atheism

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- # If atheism is true, then ultimately life is meaningless.
- # If atheism is true, then ultimately we must live without hope.
- # If theism is true, then not only does life have meaning and hope, but there is also the possibility to know God and his love personally.

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## Life is Meaningless?

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- # Quote from Stenger again.
- # For an atheist, life may have *relative* meaning, but not *ultimate* meaning.
- # For an atheist, life may have *subjective* purpose, but not *objective* purpose.

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## No Hope?

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- # Quote from Bertrand Russell, *Selected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, Random House, 1927, p. 3.

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## Theistic Arguments

- # Pascal: all else being equal, rational to believe that God exists.
- # In fact, all else are not equal!
- # Craig: Five arguments for the existence of God.
- # Plantinga: Two dozen or so arguments.

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## Arguments

- # Statements leading to a conclusion.
- # Deductive and inductive arguments.
- # What makes a good argument?
  - Validity
  - Soundness
  - Not question-begging.

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## Refuting Arguments

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- # Plausibility: subjective.
- # Failure of an argument does not imply that the conclusion is false.
- # Logical fallacies.

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## Further Reading

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- # William Lane Craig, *God Are You There? Five Reasons God Exists and Three Reasons It Makes a Difference*, Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM), 2002.
- # Charles Taliaferro, *Does the Idea of God Make Sense?*, RZIM, 2002.
- # James Beilby and David K. Clark, *Why Bother with Truth? Arriving at Knowledge in a Skeptical Society*, RZIM, 2000.
- # E. K. P. Chong, "Logical Fallacies in Attacks Against the Bible: Eleven Examples," at:  
[www.engr.colostate.edu/~echong/pubs/apologetics](http://www.engr.colostate.edu/~echong/pubs/apologetics)

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# Cosmological Argument

## Cosmological Argument

- # God makes sense of the *origin of the universe*.
- # *Kalam* cosmological argument.  
[Craig 1979]
- # *Kalam*: An Arabic term meaning “argue” or “discuss” or “speak.”  
More broadly, means “natural theology” or “philosophical theism.”
- # Used by Islamic philosophers about a thousand years ago.

## The Argument

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- # Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
- # The universe began to exist.
- # Therefore, the universe has a cause.
- # (*A deductive argument.*)

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## Universe Began to Exist

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- # The Big Bang.
  - Astrophysical evidence suggests a point around 15 billion years ago when the universe began to exist.
- # Nonexistence of actual infinities.

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## Actual Infinities

- # If the universe did not begin to exist, then the number of past events in history is infinite.
- # David Hilbert: "The infinite is nowhere to be found in reality. It neither exists in nature nor provides a legitimate basis for rational thought. The role that remains for infinite to play is solely that of an idea."
- # Operations involving infinity cannot be put in correspondence with the real world (e.g., subtraction and cardinality of sets).
- # Past events are not just ideas, but are real. Therefore, the number of them must be finite.

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## Whatever Begins to Exist Has a Cause

- # An intuitively plausible metaphysical principle.
- # *Ex nihilo, nihil fit.*
- # Anthony Kenny (philosopher): "A proponent of the big bang theory, at least if he is an atheist, must believe that the universe came from nothing and by nothing."
- # Kai Nielson (atheist philosopher): "Suppose you suddenly hear a loud bang ... and you ask me, 'What made that bang?' and I reply, 'Nothing, it just happened.' You would not accept that. In fact, you would find my reply quite unintelligible."
- # Arthur Eddington (scientist): "The beginning seems to present insuperable difficulties unless we agree to look on it as frankly supernatural."

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## The Cause

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- # Immediate conclusion from first two premises: the universe has a cause.
- # The cause must be uncaused, changeless, timeless, and immaterial.
- # But more can be said ...

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## Personal Cause

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- # The cause cannot be “mechanical;” must be “personal.”
- # A mechanical cause cannot exist without its effect. (But the cause of the universe existed timelessly without the universe.)
- # A personal cause is associated with a free agent.
- # The only way for the cause to be timeless and the effect to begin in time is for the cause to be a personal agent who freely chooses to create an effect in time without any prior determining conditions.
- # Thus, we are brought, not merely to a transcendent cause of the universe, but to its *personal* creator.

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## Counter-Arguments: Premise 1

- # Whatever begins to exist has a cause?
- # Sub-atomic events are said to be uncaused.
- # Premise 1 is true only for things *in* the universe, but it is not true *of* the universe.

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## Answers (Premise 1)

- # *Sub-atomic events are said to be uncaused.*
- # Not all scientists agree with this “Copenhagen Interpretation” of subatomic physics (e.g., [David Bohm]).
- # Even with the above interpretation, particles do not come into being out of *nothing*, but out of the energy fluctuations in the sub-atomic vacuum. The same can be said about theories of the origin of the universe out of a primordial vacuum.
- # Robert Deltete (philosopher of science): “There is no basis in ordinary quantum theory for the claim that the universe itself is uncaused, much less for the claim that it sprang into being uncaused from literally nothing.”

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## Answers (Premise 1) [cont'd]

- # *Premise 1 is true only for things in the universe, but it is not true of the universe.*
- # This objection misconstrues the nature of the premise: it is a *metaphysical* principle (a principle about the very nature of reality).
- # J. L. Mackie (atheist): "I myself find it hard to accept the notion of self-creation *from nothing*, even given unrestricted chance. And how *can* this be given, if there really is nothing?"
- # On the atheistic view, there wasn't even the *potentiality* of the universe's existence prior to the Big Bang, since *nothing* is prior to the Big Bang.

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## Counter-Arguments: Premise 2

- # The universe began to exist?
- # There are alternative theories to the Big Bang that do not involve a beginning.
- # Actually infinite number of things can exist.

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## Answers (Premise 2)

- # *There are alternative theories to the Big Bang that do not involve a beginning.*
- # The overwhelming verdict of the scientific community is that none of them are more probable than the Big Bang theory.
- # Theories like the Oscillating Universe (which expands and re-contracts forever) and Chaotic Inflationary Universe (which continually spawns new universes) do have potentially infinite future but turn out to have only a finite past.
- # Vacuum Fluctuation Universe theories (which postulate an eternal vacuum out of which our universe is born) cannot explain why, if the vacuum was eternal, we do not observe an infinitely old universe.
- # Quantum Gravity Universe theory [Stephen Hawking], if interpreted realistically, still involves an absolute origin of the universe.
- # Hawking: "Almost everyone now believes that the universe, and *time itself*, had a beginning at the Big Bang."

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## Answers (Premise 2) [cont'd]

- # *Actually infinite number of things can exist.*
- # For example: the number of members in the set of natural numbers  $\{0, 1, 2, 3, \dots\}$  is infinite.
- # Not all mathematicians and philosophers agree.
- # Potential infinities vs. actual infinities.
- # Existence in the mathematical realm does not imply existence in the real world.

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## Other Counter-Arguments

- # *Just because we can't explain it doesn't mean God did it.*
- # Misconstrues the argument: this argument is deductive. If the premises are granted, the conclusion follows; it doesn't matter if it's explanatory or not.
- # The argument does not postulate God to plug up a gap in our scientific knowledge. The scientific evidence is used only to support the plausibility of the truth of premise 2 (which is a religiously neutral statement and can be found in any textbook on astronomy).
- # The hypothesis of God is, in fact, genuinely explanatory (though not scientific, but personal). It explains some effect in terms of an agent and his intentions.
- # Personal explanations are valid and used all the time. Example: "Why is the kettle boiling? Because I put it on to make a cup of tea."
- # Richard Swinburne (philosopher): there *cannot* be a scientific explanation of the first state of the universe. So, without a personal explanation, there is no explanation at all—which is metaphysically absurd.

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## Other Counter-Arguments [cont'd]

- # *A cause must come before its effect, and there is no moment before the Big Bang.*
- # Many causes and effects are simultaneous.
- # The moment of God's causing the Big Bang just is the moment of the occurrence of the Big Bang.
- # God's existing alone without the universe is either before the Big Bang, not in physical time, but in metaphysical time, or else is strictly timeless but enters into time at the moment of creation.

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## Other Counter-Arguments [cont'd]

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- # *If the universe must have a cause, then what is God's cause?*
- # Reveals an inattentiveness to the formulation of the argument.
- # Not “Whatever *exists* has a cause” but “Whatever *begins to exist* has a cause.”
- # God never began to exist, and hence would not require a cause.
- # This is not a special pleading for God, since the atheist who believes in an eternal and uncaused universe relies on this too.

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## Other Counter-Arguments [cont'd]

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- # *Isn't God infinite? So how can God exist?*
- # The argument was that an actually infinite *number of things* cannot exist. God is not a collection of an actually infinite number of things!
- # In theology, “God is infinite” in a qualitative, not quantitative, sense. (God is absolutely holy, all-powerful, all-knowing, etc.)

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## Further Reading

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- # William Lane Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument*, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000.
- # Wes Morriston, "A Critique of the Kalam Cosmological Argument," in *God Matters*, Ray Martin and Christopher Bernard, eds., Longman, 2002, pp. 95–108.  
<http://spot.colorado.edu/~morristo/kalam-not.html>

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Teleological Argument

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## Teleological Argument

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- # God makes sense of the *complex order in the universe.*
- # Many forms:
  - Fine-tuning argument
  - Intelligent design in living organisms

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## The Argument

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- # The fine-tuning of the universe is due to either law, chance, or design.
- # It is not due to law or chance.
- # Therefore, it is due to design.
- # (*A deductive argument.*)

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## Fine-Tuning of the Universe

- # Existence of intelligent life depends upon a complex and delicate balance of initial conditions given in the Big Bang itself.
- # Old belief: Whatever the initial conditions of the universe, eventually intelligent life might evolve.
- # Current belief: Our existence is balanced on a knife's edge. A life-*prohibiting* universe is much more likely than a life-*permitting* universe like ours.

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## Specific Examples

- # Stephen Hawking: if the rate of the universe's expansion one second after the Big Bang had been smaller by even one part in  $10^{15}$ , the universe would have re-collapsed.
- # P.C.W. Davies: The odds against the initial conditions being suitable for star formation is at least  $10^{1021}$ .
- # P.C.W. Davies: A change in the strength of gravity or the weak force by one part in  $10^{100}$  would have prevented a life-permitting universe.
- # Roger Penrose: Odds of the Big Bang's low entropy condition existing by chance are on the order of one out of  $10^{1230}$ .
- # There are around 50 such quantities and constants present in the Big Bang that must be fine-tuned in this way if the universe is to permit life.
- # Not just must *each* quantity be fine-tuned, their *ratios* must also be fine-tuned.

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## Law, Chance, or Design

- # **Law:** the fine-tuning of the universe is physically necessary. It had to be that way, and there was no (or little) chance of its not being life-permitting.
- # **Chance:** the fine-tuning of the universe is due entirely to chance.
- # **Design:** an intelligent Mind behind the cosmos.
- # Which is the most plausible?
- # Check: false dilemma?

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## Law

- # Requires that a life-prohibiting universe be virtually impossible.
- # Extraordinarily implausible. Requires strong proof or evidence.
- # John Leslie: "The claim that blind necessity is involved—that universes whose laws or constants are slightly different 'aren't real physical possibilities' ... is eroded by the various physical theories, particularly theories of random symmetry breaking, which *show* how a varied ensemble of universes might be generated." If subatomic indeterminacy (or uncausedness) is real, then it must be possible for the universe to be different.
- # Even if the laws of nature were necessary, we still have to supply initial conditions. Hence, the physical universe is not necessarily unique [P.C.W. Davies].
- # If there is a single physically possible universe, this would itself be strong evidence for a designer.
- # *Strong Anthropic Principle:* often taken as indicative of God's existence [Barrow and Tipler].

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## Chance

- # It could have happened by chance, but the odds against it are incomprehensibly great. We would never embrace such a hypothesis in any other area of our lives. But it's not just probability that's at stake here; see next point.
- # *Specified probability*: demonstration that the event in question is not only improbable but also conforms to an independently discovered pattern. Example: chimpanzee typing "To be or not to be; that is the question."

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## Many-Worlds Hypothesis

- # Theorists who defend the chance alternative have adopted the Many-Worlds Hypothesis (that there are many parallel universes).
- # This is a sort of backhanded complement to the design hypothesis in that the fine-tuning cries out for explanation.
- # The Many-Worlds Hypothesis is no more scientific, and no less metaphysical, than the hypothesis of a Cosmic Designer [John Polkinghorne].
- # The designer hypothesis is arguably superior because it is simpler (Ockham's razor).
- # No good explanation for generating a World Ensemble. (The only consistent inflationary model is Linde's Chaotic Inflationary Theory, but it requires fine-tuning to start the inflation.) [Robert Brandenburger]
- # The Many-Worlds Hypothesis faces a challenge from biological evolutionary theory.

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## Counter-Arguments: Fine-Tuning

- # *We really don't know how much certain constants and quantities could have varied from their actual values.*
- # This admitted uncertainty becomes less important when the number of variables to be fine-tuned is high.
- # Example: The chances of all 50 variables being fine-tuned, even if each has a 50% chance of being its actual value, is less than 3 out of  $10^{17}$ .

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## Counter-Arguments: Fine-Tuning

- # *The existence of any universe is equally improbable, and therefore there is nothing to be explained.*
- # In light of specified probability, can immediately see the fallacy.
- # It's not the probability of some universe or other's existence, but the specified probability of a life-permitting universe's existing.

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## Counter-Arguments: Fine-Tuning

- # *We shouldn't be surprised at the finely tuned conditions of the universe, for if the universe were not fine-tuned, then we wouldn't be here to be surprised about it.*
- # True statement: "We shouldn't be surprised that we do not observe conditions of the universe incompatible with our existence."
- # It does not follow that: "We shouldn't be surprised that we do observe conditions of the universe that are compatible with our existence."
- # John Leslie's analogy.

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## Counter-Arguments: Designer

- # *The Designer Himself remains unexplained; an intelligent designer also exhibits complex order, so that if the universe needs an explanation, so does its designer.*
- # Based on a misconception of "explanation." If the best explanation of a disease is a previously unknown virus, we cannot dismiss the explanation just because we can't explain the virus.
- # The complexity in a Mind is not analogous to the complexity of the universe. A mind's ideas may be complex, but a mind itself is a remarkably simple thing. In order to be a mind, it must have certain properties like intelligence, consciousness, and volition. These are not contingent properties that it might lack.

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## Counter-Arguments: Designer

- # *What about alleged designs that are evil or hurtful?*
- # Irrelevant to the design hypothesis, which says nothing about the moral qualities of the Designer.  
(But see next reason.)

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## Craig-Flew Debate

- # In 1998, Craig debated well-known atheist philosopher Anthony Flew. See: *Does God Exist: The Craig-Flew Debate* (Ashgate Publishing, 2003).
- # It was reported that the debate had some impact on Flew. The Winter 2004 issue of the journal *Philosophia Christi* published an exclusive interview with Flew, "My Pilgrimage from Atheism to Theism," in which Flew now declares himself a theist.
- # Flew: "I think that the most impressive arguments for God existence are those that are supported by recent scientific discoveries. I've never been much impressed by the kalam cosmological argument, and I don't think it has gotten any stronger recently. However, I think the argument to Intelligent Design is enormously stronger than it was when I first met it."

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