

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

By
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The question of God is one of the “perennial questions” which men cannot help asking.¹ In one form or another the question of God has been present in all stages of human history. Is there really a God? If so, what is He like? If no, then where do I look for answers to life’s most perplexing questions? If yes, then what are my obligations? How can the case for God be argued? These are the kinds of questions that have baffled men for thousands of years. So, I will attempt, in this series of essays to shed some light on this all-encompassing question. In so doing, I intend to set forth evidence sufficient to warrant the conclusion, “God exists.”

When I speak of proving the existence of God, I do not mean that one proves the case in the same way as a door is proven to be solid, a desk is shown to weigh two hundred pounds, or a certain book is seen as blue. Given the modern mind-set, many have concluded that the only way anything at all can be known (or proven) is through the five senses (hearing, tasting, smelling, seeing and touching). As an example, consider the attitude of Bertrand Russell, who stated: “Whatever knowledge is attainable, must be attained by scientific methods, and what science cannot discover, mankind cannot know.”² Russell’s argument can be reduced to a three-line syllogism with reference to God’s existence, as follows:

1. If God cannot be discovered by scientific methods, then God cannot be known by mankind.
2. God cannot be discovered by scientific methods.
3. Therefore, God cannot be known by mankind.

But, neither **revelation** nor **reason** require an acceptance of the empiricist's thesis (i.e., nothing can be known except through, or, by means of, the senses)! The Bible indicates that one can reason from the creation to a Creator, or, from the world of facts to the ultimate origin of these facts (Rom. 1:19-20; Ps. 19:1-6; etc.). The Bible also demands that we put every conclusion to the test, proving or disproving it by means of adequate evidence (1 Pet. 3:15; 1 John 4:1; 1 Thess. 5:21; Isa. 41:21; etc.). In 1 John 4:1, a **specific** test is required, namely, a test for false prophets. But, in 1 Thess. 5:21, Paul insists that **all things** be put to the test. In Isa. 40-46, a specific test (predictive prophecy) is used to vindicate the God of Israel as over against the false gods of the pagans. And, this test was given to us by God Himself! The challenge issued to the false prophets is likewise a challenge the atheist issues to us today. "Produce your cause" (or, "Present your case").

Russell is wrong, for many things are known by men, which are not subject to scientific investigation at all. For instance, all ideas are intuitively known, and are not subject to empirical investigation in any sense. None of us deny that ideas exist. Neither would we argue that ideas are based on scientific study. Instead, it is precisely the other way around; scientific theories are based upon ideas! Now, let us expose the fallacy in Russell's argument.

1. If ideas cannot be discovered by scientific methods, then ideas cannot be known by mankind.
2. Ideas cannot be discovered by scientific methods.
3. Therefore, ideas cannot be known by mankind.

The second premise above is true. But, the major premise (no. 1) is false! In fact, the argument itself is built upon ideas, thus exposing Russell's fallacy with double force.

To be perfectly clear about things, the study of origins is not strictly speaking, a scientific study at all. Scientific study can give us information from any number of different disciplines (astronomy, physics, biology, etc.), but science deals with existing material, and seeks to explain how things in the known universe function. God authorized scientific exploration when he told Adam and Eve to have dominion over things on the earth. But, science does not really tell us **how** these things came to be at all. The study of origins is primarily a philosophical investigation. With these preliminary thoughts in mind, let us turn to various arguments for God's existence.

COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS

Arguments which are termed "cosmological" rest upon one central concept: the existing cosmos (the universe and all that is within it) is undeniable evidence that there is a Creator. I will briefly sketch the premises which have been developed for an argument from contingency.

A Contingent Being Exists. To be contingent means that such a being cannot account for its own existence. It is as possible for such a being not to exist as it is for it to exist at all. As such, a contingent being is dependent upon something or someone other than itself for its own existence. And, this holds true for its coming into existence and its remaining in existence from one moment to the next. As a matter of fact, I myself am such a being, for I can not account for my own existence, nor can I explain how I continue to exist from one moment to the next. My existence was originated from

outside myself, and my existence continues from outside myself. But, what exactly is a “contingent being.” Winfried Corduan explains:

... ordinary things have causes. Or, to be more precise, finite things have causes. It is here that metaphysics becomes important because I have to clarify what I mean by a *finite thing*. A finite thing is something that meets any one of the following conditions:

1. It is restricted by time and space.
2. It can be changed by something other than itself.
3. It has a beginning in time.
4. It needs things other than itself to continue existing.
5. Its attributes, whether essential or accidental, are to some extent influenced by other things.

Another term that we can use for a *finite* thing is that it is a *contingent* being. It is a contingent being simply because it could not exist without all of the factors that bring about its existence, sustain its existence, and shape its nature. To say that a thing is contingent is to say that it is finite and dependent.³

This Contingent Being Depends on Something Else for Its Existence. From what has been said thus far, this seems obvious, since any being is either (1) self-caused, (2) caused by another, or (3) uncaused. I am not uncaused, which is synonymous with necessary existence, and a Being which exists necessarily is what theists mean by God. Neither am I self-caused, since to be self-caused, I would have to exist prior to my own existence in order to bring myself into being. But, this is clearly absurd! Therefore, I (as a contingent being) am caused by another.

That Which Causes (Explains) the Existence of a (or any) Contingent Being Must be Either (1) Another Contingent Being, or (2) a Non-Contingent Being. But, if explanation is given in terms of another contingent being, then since any contingent being also requires a cause outside itself, one only postpones the question until it is

framed in terms of (3) an infinite series of contingent causes. As a result, the following premise emerges:

That Which Causes (Explains) the Existence of a (or any) Contingent Being is Either (3) an Infinite Series of Contingent Beings (Either a Transitive or an Intransitive Series), or (2) a Non-Contingent Being. Now, a non-contingent Being is one that does not depend upon any other being for its existence. Thus, it is self-existent. Furthermore, since it could neither come into existence nor pass out of existence, such a Being is eternal. Moreover, since such a non-contingent Being not only explains a single contingent being, but also all contingent beings (including the universe itself which is also contingent), then such a Being must be omnipresent. It goes without saying that such a Being must also be Infinite in power, for such a Being's causal efficacy is such that it explains all contingent reality. In other words, one means by a non-contingent Being, what the Judeo-Christian theist calls God. Indeed, the first chapter of Genesis makes the same claim I am now making: **In the beginning (when nothing contingent at all existed), God (a non-contingent Being) created the heavens and the earth, etc. (Gen. 1:1, my comments added, D.S.).**

It is also necessary to explain what is meant by "transitive" and "intransitive" in the proposition just stated. A "transitive causal series" is one in which every cause in the series causes a succeeding effect *only* insofar as it is itself being caused. Each cause depends upon a prior cause precisely for its own act of causing, for instance, that a stone is moved by a stick, the stick is moved by a hand, and so on, to infinity. As far as existence is concerned, my immediate existence is explained by my parents, and theirs in turn by their parents, and so on. The causal series, in effect, has each member of the

series “touching” (or, in close connection) to the causes both before it and after it. I was caused by my parents, and I, in turn, caused my children to be born, and they will continue the chain of cause and effect in this same way. A “transitive causal series” has to do with *sequential cause and effect*, and is the main consideration of Arabic philosophers and what has come to be known as the *Kalamic Cosmological Argument*.

An “intransitive causal series,” on the other hand, does not require that each member be in such close contact with another member. It is only that each member’s existence, whether in close contact with another member or not, can be explained only by considering the foundation (or, ground) of existence. Put another way, an “intransitive causal series” is not as interested in sequential cause and effect, but rather, in *foundational cause and effect*. Perhaps an illustration would help to explain what is meant here. Suppose a brick mason wants to build a series of pillars. He begins by attempting to support the first row of bricks. However, there is simply no foundation (or, ground) on which to place the bricks. Consequently, the bricks simply fall without being supported. Now, he may try again by mortaring bricks together, including a second row set upon the first. But, when he attempts to support this second attempt, precisely the same thing occurs as happened with the first try. The bricks simply fall. He tries again and again with the same results. In this case, it doesn’t make much difference whether or not the bricks are sequentially ordered. What matters is whether they have a foundation on which to be placed. If not, then no matter how many are mortared together, there will be no pillar (or, wall or any other structure). This is the notion of a causal series understood by philosophers who, in the Western tradition, follow the thinking of *Thomas Aquinas*. Whether or not a sequential series can be infinite does not matter here. In fact,

one may assume such an infinite series, and still offer this argument, for it has to do with the foundation of existence (“be-ing” or “is-ness) *per se*.

I maintain that there can be no infinite causal series in either sense. One simply does not exist!

But, it is False that that Which Causes (Explains) the Existence of a (or any) Contingent Being is an Infinite Series of Contingent Beings (Either a Transitive or an Intransitive Series). Space allows me only the opportunity to state this premise here without elaboration. So, at this point, I will not take time to prove the fifth premise to you. Suffice it to say that this is the crucial premise of the entire argument. I will have more to say on this subject a little later when objections to the argument are being considered. But, assuming that this premise is true, I am able to conclude the argument.

Therefore, that Which Causes (Explains the Existence of a (or any) Contingent Being is a Non-Contingent Being. Since one means by “non-contingent Being” what one means by God, it is therefore the case that God exists. Now, the argument just advanced appeals to a form of the “principle of sufficient reason.” This simply means that there must be some explanation as to why contingent beings exist. Since they cannot account for their own existence, they must have been caused by something external to themselves. Perhaps we have gone over all this a little too quickly. If so, then an illustration may possibly be of some help.

Suppose you were strolling in the woods and, in addition to the sticks, stones, and other accustomed litter of the forest floor, you one day came upon some quite unaccustomed object, something not quite like what you had ever seen before and would never expect to find in such a place. Suppose, for example, that it is a large ball, about your own height, perfectly smooth and translucent. You would deem this puzzling and mysterious, certainly, but if one considers the matter, it is no more inherently mysterious that such a thing should exist than that anything else should exist. . . . Now whatever else you might wonder

about it, there is one thing you would hardly question; namely, that it did not appear there all by itself, that it owes its existence to something.⁴

Consider again the strange ball that we imagine has been found in the forest. Now we can hardly doubt that there must be an explanation for the existence of such a thing, though we may have no notion what that explanation is. It is not, moreover, the fact of its having been found in the forest rather than elsewhere that renders an explanation necessary. It matters not in the least where it happens to be, for our question is not how it happens to be **there** but how it happens to exist at all. **If we in our imagination annihilate the forest**, leaving only this ball in an open field, our conviction that it is a contingent thing and owes its existence to something other than itself is not reduced in the least. **If we now imagine the field to be annihilated, and in fact everything else to vanish into nothingness**, leaving only the ball to constitute the entire physical universe, then we cannot for a moment suppose that its existence has thereby been explained, or the need of any explanation eliminated, or that its existence is suddenly rendered self-explanatory. If we now carry this thought one step further and suppose that no other reality ever has existed or ever will exist, that this ball forever constitutes the entire physical universe, then we must still insist on there being some reason independent of itself why it should exist rather than not.⁵

The point seems obvious enough. Contingent beings need an explanation outside themselves, both for their **original** existence and also their **continuing** existence! And, the sum total of contingent beings (which comprises the universe itself) is nothing more than contingent in nature, anymore than a hundred pieces of wood are anything other than wood when they are glued together to form a table. The accidental collection of wooden objects, which form a table, or contingent beings, which form a universe, does not alter their essential nature! Since contingent beings require an explanatory cause outside themselves, and since the universe is a contingent being (comprised of the sum total of contingent beings in existence at any given time), it follows that the universe must have a cause outside itself. But, this explanatory cause cannot be contingent, or it would also require an explanatory cause! We must finally come to the foundational explanation, and this is what the theist (and the Bible) calls God (see Gen. 1:1; Ps. 19:1-6; etc.).

OBJECTIONS TO COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENTATION

It hardly needs to be pointed out that atheists, agnostics, secular humanists, and the like, do not merely “roll over and play dead” when confronted with the case for God’s existence. Indeed, they are quick to formulate counter-arguments and objections to the positive case one makes for God. In some cases, theists do a poor job of arguing their case, and we are actually indebted to those who demonstrate the weakness of those arguments. In fact, I have frequently objected to fallacious argument presented by theists as well as atheists. The conclusion of an argument **must** rest on adequate evidence! There is simply no substitute for this!

One may argue, as I have, that since every effect must have an explanatory cause, and since the universe is an effect, the universe also must have an explanatory cause! God, who is not an effect Himself (what I identified as a “non-contingent Being”), **is** that cause. Therefore, God is the uncaused cause of the universe and all that is within it.

The atheist’s counter-argument is as follows:

1. Theists conceive of God as a self-cause being.
2. But, a self-caused being is irrational.
3. Therefore, the very concept of God is irrational.

But, this objection is based on a “straw man” argument. It attempts to refute what theists do not even believe. We do not claim that God is **self-caused** (which is clearly absurd, as I mentioned earlier), but rather, that He is **uncaused**. A self-caused being is impossible, but an uncaused being is not!

The atheists are not finished yet. They may (and often do) argue that it is also irrational to suggest that God is uncaused. Instead, they assert, it is reasonable to ask, “who made God?” I once heard Carl Sagan pose this question to Phil Donahue, to which no adequate response was given (are you surprised?). But, let us allow an atheist to make this case for himself. Gordon Stein states:

If everything must have had a cause, then God must have had a cause. If God had a cause, then He was not the first (or uncaused) cause. If God did not have a cause, then not everything must have a cause. If not everything needs a cause, then perhaps the universe is one of those things, which also does not need a cause.⁶

This is another “straw man” argument, since theists do not agree with the first premise, namely, “if everything must have had a cause, then God must have had a cause.” Theists do not believe that God is self-caused; they believe that He is uncaused. Furthermore, we do not believe that **everything** must have a cause, but rather, only that every **effect** must have a cause. Everything that begins to exist, and which cannot otherwise account for its own existence, must have a cause! Atheists say, “everything has a cause.” Theists say, “everything that begins has a cause.” Theists believe that God is an uncreated (i.e., uncaused) Creator (i.e., cause). God is the first uncaused cause of the universe and all that is within it!

Now, if it is irrational to believe that God, who has no beginning needs no cause, then atheism is also irrational. Since many atheists believe that the universe needs no cause because (according to them) it had no beginning, the real question becomes, which is eternal: God or the universe? If it is rational to believe that the universe could be eternal **without** a cause, then there can be no real argument against theists who argue that God is an eternal Being without cause! If it is irrational to accept this about God, then it

is equally irrational to accept the same idea about the universe. In other words, this objection cuts both ways!

Some atheists argue that, in spite of the fact that each particular part of the universe is dependent (or, contingent), the universe as a whole can be independent (or, non-contingent) and, therefore, eternal. Thus, the universe itself would function as the cause of all things that exist. The atheist is accusing the theist of committing the *fallacy of composition*. It's an older work, but one author dismissed the argument for God from the contingency of the world as follows:

It may be admitted . . . that nothing in Nature contains its own reason for being, and that therefore things and events are indeed contingent. But to infer from the contingency of things and events, taken individually, that Nature as a whole is contingent, and thus dependent upon another being, is to commit the fallacy of composition. This fallacy consists in arguing from the properties of the parts, taken separately, to a property of the whole, taken together. Because sodium and chlorine are poisonous, it does not follow that table salt, which is composed of these elements, is equally poisonous. Although any part of Nature, taken singly, may be contingent or dependent for its existence on something else, it does not follow that Nature, taken as a whole, is also contingent. In other words, there is no reason why Nature cannot be considered to be the ultimate ground of all existence, even though its parts depend for their existence on other parts.⁷

There is a confusion in the author's statement between *properties* and *existence*. It is plain that he means by contingent the dependence of something upon something else for its existence, and yet in his statement of the fallacy of composition, he refers not to existence, but to properties. We commit the fallacy of composition when we ascribe to a collection or group as a whole, properties which belong only to the individual things themselves. The example of table salt was a good illustration of this, because sodium and chlorine, taken by themselves, are poisonous, whereas sodium chloride (common table salt) is not! But, existence is not a property, and to be contingent is not to possess

contingency as a property. Instead, the contingency of a thing is simply the fact that the thing in question, *with its properties*, depends upon something else for its *existence*.

Insofar as nature is composed of really existing individual things, this is the only kind of real existence it has. It does not also really exist as a whole in distinction from the existence of its parts. Nature exists bit by bit in time; the *whole* of nature includes not only what is, but what was and no longer is, and what will be yet in the future. At no time in its history is the whole of nature in existence. How then could a partially non-existent whole confer existence upon the contingent parts of that whole?

Furthermore, it is obvious that, if each part of the universe would cease to exist, that the universe itself would also cease to exist. For instance, let us suppose that you cease to exist. Every other human being, every animal, every plant, and the galaxy also ceases to exist. Not only this, but also all the stars, asteroids, planets, and other celestial bodies suddenly cease to exist. In fact, everything in the universe suddenly ceases to exist (cf. 2 Pet. 3:10ff.). Would the universe itself still exist with everything that comprises it no longer existing? Obviously, the universe itself would no longer exist under such conditions. And, if the universe could cease to exist under such conditions, then it is not independent (or, non-contingent). Instead, it too is dependent for its existence on the existence of its parts. So, even if the universe could be considered as a completed whole, it would still be contingent and therefore, dependent for its existence on something else. Thus, the atheist's counter-argument is shown to be insufficient.

Then, atheists will sometimes argue that there does not need to be a "first cause." They suggest that contingent causes can go on eternally. In other words, they opt for an infinite series of contingent causes to explain the existence of any (and all) contingent

beings. I have already suggested that no such infinite series exists, and that this is the crucial premise in my argument. So, it is time to attend to this question here. Richard Purtill offers a quite useful illustration that will help the reader to see that there is no infinite series in reality (and never has been).

It seems to be logically possible for A to be caused by B, for B to be caused by C, and so on, backward *ad infinitum*. There is, however, a very serious objection to this sort of “infinite regress,” as it is called. . . .

For example, if A tries to borrow a lawnmower from B, and B replies, “I don’t have one, but I’ll borrow one from my friend C,” and C says, “I don’t have one but, I’ll borrow one from my friend D,” and so on, this is a case of the kind we are concerned with. Or if A asks B, his supervisor, for permission to take the afternoon off and B says, “I can’t give you permission without asking my supervisor C,” and C says, “I can’t give you permission to give A permission unless I ask my supervisor, D,” and so on, we have a case of this sort. Now in these ordinary cases two things are clear:

1. If the series of things that don’t have the property in question goes on to infinity, the first individual never gets that property. If everyone asked says, “I don’t have a lawnmower, but I’ll ask,” A never gets his lawnmower. If every supervisor asked says, “I can’t give you permission, but I’ll ask,” then A never gets his afternoon off.
2. If the first thing **does** get the property in question, then the series comes to an end, and does not go on to infinity. If A gets his lawnmower, someone along the line had a lawnmower without having to borrow one. If A gets his afternoon off, some supervisor could give permission without having to ask someone else.⁸

The cosmological argument is concerned with existence! Consequently, if no member of the series had existence in itself, then each member would be constantly explaining its existence in terms of another member of the series. In other words, if no one has the property in question, then the first individual never gets the property. No one would ever get “existence” if no member had that property to give! Therefore, the crucial question again becomes, “how can my existence ultimately be explained apart from an independently existing (or, “non-contingent”) Being? Plainly, it cannot!

Now, infinite set theory is a useful mathematical construct, and it enables one to do some incredible mathematical calculations. But, no such infinite set exists in reality! The fact that we can construct an infinite series in mathematics has no bearing on the question of whether or not there can have existed an infinite series of real causes.

Aristotle distinguished sharply between a “potential infinite” and an “actual infinite.” A “potential infinite” may be indefinitely divided or indefinitely extended, but so long as one decreases or increases the series by finite increments, the series remains finite! It never becomes infinite!! The ancient philosopher Zeno offered up a series of interesting paradoxes in reference to space, time, and motion. For instance, he suggested that an archer can released an arrow toward a particular target. Since that arrow travels along a certain distance, Zeno argues, the arrow will never get to its target. Why? Because at each point along the line, one can divide that distance in two. Since, he argues, one can divide such a line infinitely, it follows that the arrow can never reach its target! We all know that the arrow does reach its target, so, Zeno presented what he thought was an irreconcilable paradox. But, from the fact that a line can be divided **indefinitely**, it does not follow that it can be divided **infinitely!** And, the fact that a series can be extended **indefinitely** does not prove that the series can be extended **infinitely!** If you add to an incredibly long series by finite amounts, you just have a longer series. It never adds up to an infinite series. An infinite set contains all the possible members of that set. An infinite set cannot be changed! It can be neither added to nor subtracted from; neither can it be multiplied or divided, because it contains all the possible members that could ever exist. A finite set can be added to or subtracted from, and it can be multiplied or divided. It can always be changed! Thus, there is no infinite

series of contingent causes that is responsible for those contingent beings that now exist. In fact, there is no infinite series at all! For, if there were an infinite number of moments (for example) from an eternal past, then there would be no way to experience a “next” moment! And, if there are an infinite number of contingent causes in existence, then there can be *no further contingent causes* of anything! But, if we take a trip to the local hospital, we will likely find a woman delivering a baby or we will find a human being dying, thus, ceasing to exist in that sense. What could possibly explain the numbers of contingent causes that continue to produce various effects in the world, if all the possible contingent causes already exist as an infinite set? There would be no explanation at all, so, I argue that we never have more than a *potential infinite* in reality. Therefore, the atheistic objection that posits an infinite series of contingent causes fails, precisely because they can never point to such a *really existing* infinite series!

Another objection that is frequently pressed against the cosmological argument is that the contingency argument fails precisely because a non-contingent Being would exist (since such a Being exists necessarily, and cannot not exist) whether or not contingent things exist! So, the objection goes, no legitimate inference can be made from the existence of contingent things to a non-contingent Being. B. C. Johnson advances the argument as follows:

The attempt to base an argument for the existence of a necessary being on the existence of contingent objects and events is a misguided venture. A necessary being is defined as a being that exists necessarily. It follows that a necessary being would exist regardless of the existence of contingent beings. Whether or not there are contingent beings a necessary being would exist, since it could not fail to exist. It follows that no argument from the existence of contingent beings can have any thing to do with whether a necessary being exists. This point can be illustrated as follows. If it is claimed that John is home only when his house lights are on, then the fact that the lights are on will be the basis on which we decide that he is home. But if it is claimed that

John is home regardless of whether his lights are on then the fact that his lights are on is not the basis on which we decide that John is home. Similarly, if God would exist regardless of the existence of contingent beings, then one cannot base an argument for His existence on the existence of contingent beings.¹⁰

Johnson's point seems to be well made. I will freely grant him the initial point—that a non-contingent (or, necessary) Being would exist whether or not contingent beings existed! This is merely to grant that, before the creation occurred, God existed from eternity past (cf. Gen. 1:1; etc.). But, the theistic argument moves in a different direction than that indicated by Mr. Johnson. To change his illustration slightly: suppose that we argue that the reason lights are on in John's house is that he has turned them on (assuming that he is the only person in the house). That is, the fact that the lights are on (an effect) is explained in terms of John's activity (a cause). John could be home whether or not the lights were in the home at all. But, if there are lights in the home, and if they are on, then we know that John is responsible for that which is observed. Similarly, if contingent beings exist at all, and if contingent beings can be explained (in terms of their existence) only by a non-contingent Being, then we know that a non-contingent Being exists. Briefly put, the cosmological argument proceeds from the world of our experience to the only rational explanation for those experienced objects! Once again, the atheist's argument does not hold, and the theist's case is vindicated.

Another counter-argument pressed by atheist's is that theists commit the fallacy of equivocation. Quentin Smith, in a debate with William Lane Craig, sought to rebut Craig's argument in the following:

Bill's basic argument is this: his first premise is: Whatever begins to exist has a cause. Second premise: The universe began to exist. And the conclusion is: The universe had a cause. Now this argument commits the fallacy of equivocation, and what that means is that the word "cause" is used in a

different sense in the premise, Whatever begins to exist has a cause, than it is in the conclusion, The universe has a cause. For when we examine “things that begin to exist have causes,” what we really are examining are rearrangers of preexistent materials. Anything we point to in our daily life that we say has a cause, say, a statue, is a rearrangement of, say, a slab of marble. And even a human being is a rearrangement ultimately of chemicals and atoms and quarks and so on. And so insofar as “Whatever begins to exist has a cause” has any support at all, it would have to mean “Whatever begins to exist has a rearranger of its preexistent materials.” Now given that, and given the second premise, The universe began to exist, we cannot infer that (the) universe has a rearranger of its preexistent materials, for if the universe began to exist, there are no preexistent materials, so that if “cause” has any meaning at all in the conclusion, it has to mean something that creates the materials from nothing, and we have absolutely no experience of that in any of our lives, in any of science, anywhere. It’s just an idea that appears solely in theism. So I see no evidence for it based on empirical observation, scientific evidence, or anything. It seems to me a proposition of supernatural theology. So I don’t think that that is an argument that a rational person should accept.¹¹

Bill Craig’s response to Smith’s rebuttal is, in part, as follows:

Now Quentin attacks both of my premises. First he accuses me, with regard to the first premise, of equivocating on the word “cause” because he thinks it must mean material cause in the one case, but in the conclusion it doesn’t mean material cause. I don’t think it’s an equivocation at all. I’m using the word cause here simply to mean something that produces something else, and in terms of which that other thing, call the effect, can be explained. Whether it’s an efficient cause or material cause is simply left out of account. So I’m not specifying in the first premise what kind of cause it has to be, but simply that there must be a cause.¹²

The response given by Smith suggests that an important term is used in two different ways in the premises and, therefore, it renders the argument invalid. If the argument is invalid, then it could not possibly be sound, so, this is by far the most critical objection to the cosmological argument. If the objection is true, then one will have to find other grounds to make the case for God’s existence.

First, by way of response, I will tell the reader that Smith does not agree with theists, but neither does he agree with most atheists. This is so because he believes (counter-factually, I believe) that the universe is actually “self-caused.” That is, the

normal atheist's argument that the universe is just there, and that's all (viz., that the universe itself is uncaused) is rejected by Smith. He argues that, the universe created itself from the Big Bang. It would take us too far away from this discussion to respond to this idea here, so let me return to Smith's actual objection.

Second, my premises refer to "cause" in the sense of "explanation." In other words, I am using the term to refer to a "causal explanation" for the existence of a (any) contingent being, since no contingent being can explain its own existence! No contingent being can explain its own existence. Neither can a collection of contingent beings explain their own existence. And, the universe of contingent beings (which is, in fact, a finite collection of contingent beings—never fully constituted at any given moment—likewise cannot explain its own existence. We are searching for an ultimate (or, metaphysical) explanation for the existence of contingent reality. And, we simply cannot ultimately explain the existence of any contingent being(s) apart from appealing to a non-contingent ground of that existence. Contingent reality is the same in essence, viz., existentially dependent reality, and non-contingent reality is the same in essence, viz., non-existentially dependent reality (i.e, independently existing reality). Thus, no equivocation at all occurs in this argument.

Given the argument advanced at the beginning of this essay, and the inability of objectors to make their case against the argument, I am entitled to advance the conclusion, "therefore, God exists." I do this, precisely because the argument commits no mistakes either in form or language, and the premises are true. Thus, the conclusion is warranted by the evidence! A non-contingent Being, explaining the existence of all contingent reality, must exist. And, this is what theists mean by God!

¹ Franklin L. Baumer, *Modern European Thought: Continuity and Change in Ideas, 1600-1950* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, Inc., 1977), pp. 11-20.

² Bertrand Russell, *Religion and Science* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935; reprint ed., 1980), p. 243.

³ Winfried Corduan, "The Cosmological Argument," in *Reasons for Faith: Making a Case for the Christian Faith*, eds. Norman L. Geisler and Chad V. Meister (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), p. 204.

⁴ Richard Taylor, *Metaphysics*, 2nd ed. Foundations of Philosophy Series (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p.105.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

⁶ Gordon Stein, *How to Argue with a Theist (and Win)* (Culver City, CA: The Free Thought Association, 1979), p. 2.

⁷ Joseph Gerard Brennan, *The Meaning of Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), pp. 267-268.

⁸ Bruce R. Reichenbach, *The Cosmological Argument: A Reassessment* (Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas Publisher, 1972), pp. 95-105.

⁹ Richard Purtill, *Reason to Believe* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), pp. 83-84.

¹⁰ B. C. Johnson, *The Atheist Debater's Handbook* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1981), pp. 66-67.

¹¹ A debate between William Lane Craig and Quentin Smith at Southern Methodist University, March 22, 1996, found at www.reasonablefaith.org. This is from Smith's first rebuttal to Craig's opening argument.

¹² Craig's rebuttal to Quentin Smith's response to the first argument.