

**Title:** (ii) In your *second* essay of **2000 words**, you may choose to focus on a specific issue to answer in our current situation today. A list of questions will be provided to help you choose a question. You are required to let me know which question you have chosen. **(50%)**

*Course:* Christian Apologetics

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#### **DECLARATION**

I certify that this ASSIGNMENT is my own work. I have acknowledged all material and sources used in it, and that I have not plagiarised in part or whole the work of others without stating the references.

## **Evaluate the assertion that the arguments for the existence of God are like leaky buckets; and so, they hold no water**

The issue of the existence of God (or gods) is probably as old as religion or philosophy itself. Denying that a higher power exists goes back to perhaps Diagoras of Melos<sup>1</sup> in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. In recent times, the popularity of agnosticism and atheism has gradually increased<sup>2</sup> alongside the spread<sup>3</sup> of related philosophies such as rationalism, secularism, naturalism and scientism. In common for these ‘isms’ is the claim that they claim to be based on facts, evidence, reason and logic – and hence conversely, religion is *not* based on those tenets.

As far as Christians are concerned, the Bible exhorts us not only to have faith in God despite not having ‘visual evidence’ (Hebrews 11:1); but also to be prepared with the *reason* we believe (1 Peter 3:15). We are to love God with our *mind* (Luke 10:27) – using our *reasoning* (Isaiah 1:18) to recognize God through the *evidence* of His creation (Psalm 14:1-4; Romans 1:19-20 & 10:18).

Thinkers of Christendom expanded and refined their reasons for belief, solidifying them into arguments that many Christians use today. And yet, critics and polemicists maintain that arguments for the existence of God are flawed... Mistaken... Full of holes. Arguments for God, they say, are like leaky buckets which hold no water.

However, if our God is a God of truth, then we would expect that His very existence must make sense. Not only that, assuming the contrary – that God does *not* exist – would lead to irrationality and impossibility.<sup>4</sup> It is in fact the *rejection* of the existence of God that holds no water – as I shall demonstrate using two arguments as follows.

### **The Cosmological Argument**

Variants of this argument date as far back as Plato<sup>5</sup> in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-century B.C. – namely, that the universe must have been created by a supreme being. Christian versions were later developed, with an important revival by Thomas Aquinas with his argument about efficient causes<sup>6</sup>.

More recently, renown<sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup> Christian apologist William Lane Craig has popularized a variant which he coined the Kalam Cosmological Argument (named after the medieval Islamic discipline which first proposed this form<sup>9</sup>).

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<sup>1</sup> Cicero, “M. TVLLI CICERONIS DE NATVRA DEORVM AD M. BRVTVM LIBER TERTIVS”, *THE LATIN LIBRARY* (accessed 26-Jun-2022): <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/cicero/nd3.shtml#89> [89]

<sup>2</sup> Michael Lipka, “10 facts about atheists”, *Pew Research Center* (accessed 26-Jun-2022): <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/12/06/10-facts-about-atheists/>

<sup>3</sup> Gabe Bullard, “The World’s Newest Major Religion: No Religion”, *National Geographic* (accessed 26-Jun-2022): <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/160422-atheism-agnostic-secular-nones-rising-religion>

<sup>4</sup> Peter Kreeft & Ronald K. Tacelli, *Pocket Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (IL/USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 18.

<sup>5</sup> William Lane Craig, *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz* (Basingstoke/UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *The Essential Summa Theologiae: A Reader and Commentary* (MI/USA: Baker Publishing Group, 2021) Perlego Edition, Question 2, 1.2.3

<sup>7</sup> AI Staff, “William Lane Craig”, *Academic Influence* (accessed 26-Jun-2022): <https://academicinfluence.com/people/william-lane-craig>

<sup>8</sup> TBS Staff, “The 50 Most Influential Living Philosophers”, *The Best Schools* (accessed 26-Jun-2022): <https://thebestschools.org/magazine/most-influential-living-philosophers/> [11. William Lane Craig]

<sup>9</sup> William Lane Craig, “The Kalam Cosmological Argument”, *Reasonable Faith* (accessed 26-Jun-2022): <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/existence-nature-of-god/the-kalam-cosmological-argument>

The Kalam variant of the Cosmological Argument proceeds as follows:

- 1) Whatever begins to exist must have a cause.
- 2) The universe began to exist.
- 3) Therefore, the universe has a cause.

In order to refute the above syllogism, at least one of the premises must be disproven. The first premise is self-evident from plain intuition, experience and causality (the basis of scientific inquiry<sup>10</sup>). It is our everyday experience that objects *do not* simply pop into existence for no preceding reason! If the atheist objects to this first premise, they would be making baseless postulations that go against their much-vaunted criteria of “Show me the evidence!”

The second premise has certainly been challenged in the past, with some models of the universe proposing that it has simply always existed (e.g. Steady State Theory<sup>11</sup>). However with the discovery of several physical characteristics of the universe<sup>12</sup>, in modern times the prevailing model is the Big Bang Theory – which proposes that the universe indeed had a beginning. If the atheist objects to this second premise, they are once again going against the accepted evidence.

Hence, the conclusion from the two premises stands – that the universe has a cause. It must be noted that this conclusion does not directly conclude that ‘Therefore, God exists’. Rather, it infers the existence of God as the best explanation as the cause of the universe. Since ‘the universe’ includes all space, time, matter and energy... the cause cannot then be anything comprising or reliant upon space, time, matter or energy. The cause would have to be spaceless, timeless, immaterial and immeasurably powerful (in order to give rise to all the matter and energy in the universe).

Out of all the possible spaceless and timeless things such as numbers or laws of logic, only a mind would have causal powers.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, it would have its own volition: “...since this cause exists outside of anything physical, temporal, or material, none of these things could logically cause or force this ultimate cause to do anything. Therefore, this ultimate cause seems to have its own volition or libertarian free will.”<sup>14</sup>

Hence, the cause starts to sound very much like the Christian concept of God – a being who is immaterial spirit (John 4:24), timeless (Psalm 90:2, Isaiah 43:13), all powerful (Hebrews 1:3), a personal mind (1 Corinthians 2:16) with volition (Isaiah 46:10), who created all the universe (Genesis 1:1, Jeremiah 32:17, Colossians 1:16). It is to be noted that God is not Himself subject to the Cosmological Argument – as God never *began* to exist, but instead has always existed. Hence, God does not need a cause – He is the Uncaused First Cause.

Now take the contrary position – that God does not exist. How then did the universe arise? If the atheist adheres to both naturalism and also the Big Bang Theory, they have painted themselves into an absurd corner. If the universe (by definition) is all that there is, then *sans* the universe there is simply nothing. To put the atheist’s dilemma in the form of a satirical quip: “Much human ingenuity has gone into finding the ultimate Before. The current state of knowledge can be summarized as thus:

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<sup>10</sup> M. Regopoulos, “The Principle of Causation as a Basis of Scientific Method”, *Management Science* Vol. 12, No. 8, Series C, Bulletin (April 1966), C135-C139. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2627756>

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Liddle, *An Introduction to Modern Cosmology Third Edition* (NY/USA: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2015) Perlego Edition, Chapter 1 & Chapter 10

<sup>12</sup> Helge Kragh, *Cosmology and Controversy: The Historical Development of Two Theories of the Universe* (NJ/USA: Princeton University Press, 2021) Perlego Edition, Chapter 7

<sup>13</sup> Braxton Hunter, “Matt Dillahunty vs Braxton Hunter (Does the Christian God Exist)”, *Trinity Radio* (accessed 27-Jun-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9Uktg9nLx8> [15:35 to 16:22]

<sup>14</sup> Timothy A. Stratton, “The Image of God: The Kalam & Freethinking Arguments”, *Free Thinking Ministries* (accessed 26-Jun-2022): <https://freethinkingministries.com/the-image-of-god-the-kalam-freethinking-arguments>

In the beginning was nothing, which exploded.”<sup>15</sup> If that sounds ridiculous, that is because it *is* ridiculous!

Atheists have resorted to various workarounds in an attempt to avoid the problem of the universe’s origin. For example, Stephen Hawking postulates that “Because there is a law such as gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing. Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist.”<sup>16</sup> But where did ‘a law such as gravity’ itself come from, if *nothing* was in existence – which by definition, includes physical laws such as gravity? In all honesty, this unironic quote sounds more ridiculous than the earlier non-serious one!

### **The Freethinking Argument**

I have just explained a rather pedigreed argument for God regarding the *origin* of the universe. A quite natural follow up would be to transition to the Fine Tuning Argument, which deals with the *conditions* of the universe. However, I would like instead to introduce the somewhat less well-known Free Thinking Argument<sup>17</sup>.

This argument purports that in order to have rational thoughts and beliefs, it is necessary for a human to possess a soul – something that transcends the physical laws of biology and chemistry that otherwise would fully dictate the functions and reactions of the brain. In recent times, apologist Timothy Stratton has popularized this argument – however, it has been presented in varying forms by C.S. Lewis and Thomas Aquinas<sup>18</sup>.

In a distilled and simplified form, the Free Thinking Argument proceeds thusly:

- 1) If humans do not have immaterial souls, then rational thought is impossible.
- 2) Rational thought is possible.
- 3) Therefore, humans have immaterial souls.

Once again, in order to refute the above syllogism, at least one of the premises must be disproven. If the atheist objects to the first premise, then they are saying that rational thought is possible *without* a mechanism that is free from the bounds of the observable physical universe. This goes against the assumptions of naturalistic science – since the brain is a physical organ that operates on biochemistry, it must be governed by the laws of physics and chemistry. The physical brain is supposedly all there is: “There is no place in the brain for a soul or an ego to be hiding.”<sup>19</sup>

To the atheist, the brain’s current condition must therefore be caused entirely by preceding events, which in turn were caused by prior events – a nigh endless series of dominos toppling in turn. “The contemporary scientific image of human behavior is one of neurons firing, causing other neurons to fire, causing our thoughts and deeds, in an unbroken chain that stretches back to our birth

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<sup>15</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Lords And Ladies (Discworld Novel 14)* (London/UK: Transworld Publishers Ltd, 2001), 11.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Holden, “God did not create the universe, says Hawking”, *Reuters* (accessed 26-Jun-2022): <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-hawking-idUSTRE6811FN20100902>

<sup>17</sup> Timothy A. Stratton & Kirk R. MacGregor, *Human Freedom, Divine Knowledge, and Mere Molinism: A Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Philosophical Analysis* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2020), Logos Edition, Chapter 12, The Free-Thinking Argument.

<sup>18</sup> Timothy A. Stratton, “Standing Among Giants: The History of the FreeThinking Argument”, *Free Thinking Ministries* (accessed 26-Jun-2022): <https://freethinkingministries.com/standing-among-giants-the-history-of-the-freethinking-argument/>

<sup>19</sup> Joshua Fields Millburn, “Waking Up: Sam Harris Discusses the Benefits of Mindfulness”, *The Minimalists* (accessed 26-Jun-2022): <https://www.theminimalists.com/sam/>

and beyond.”<sup>20</sup> To propose that free will can exist without a corresponding mechanism is to reject the law of causality.

If the atheist instead objects to the second premise, then on what basis can *any* rational decisions be made? “...without freedom, rationality would have no room to operate. Arguments would not matter, since no one would be able to base beliefs on adequate reasons. ... One would hold beliefs only because he had been predetermined to do so.”<sup>21</sup> Human existence thus becomes a farce, a mockery.

That being said, there are atheists who *do* actually argue for this – boldly claiming that our very lives are but an elaborate kabuki show: “Science shows that we don’t have what we would call libertarian free will – but it’s a beautiful, useful illusion.”<sup>22</sup> Nobody has rationality, and hence we hold no responsibility for our decisions: “Free will *is* an illusion. Our wills are simply not of our own making. Thoughts and intentions emerge from background causes of which we are unaware and over which we exert no conscious control. ... Either our wills are determined by prior causes and we are not responsible for them, or they are the product of chance and we are not responsible for them.”<sup>23</sup>

Fair enough, this stance is consistent with the atheist worldview – but if true, then why should anyone agree that it is *rational* to affirm atheism (or any belief for that matter)? Why do atheists attempt to *persuade* people that they *cannot change their minds* – a self-defeating, self-contradicting endeavour? Such a worldview may be internally consistent, but it is not by any means *rational*.

Similar to the Cosmological Argument, the Freethinking Argument does not directly conclude that ‘Therefore, God exists’. Rather, it infers the existence of God – an immaterial spirit with will, as explained in the preceding section – as the best explanation for the existence of the immaterial human soul which has will. God created humans in His likeness with rationality and individuality, by His spirit making our spirits live (Genesis 1:26-27 & 2:7, Job 33:4 & 34:14-15, Psalm 104:30, Isaiah 42:5, Revelation 11:11).

## **Conclusion**

I have given two examples of arguments for the existence of God and demonstrated how they are logical and coherent – they carry water just fine. Moreover, it is self-evident that rejecting those arguments shows up the atheist as the one holding the philosophical leaky bucket, full of holes in their reasoning.

It is thus with confidence that Christians can boldly declare: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. – Psalm 9:10”

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<sup>21</sup> Gregory Koukl, *Tactics, 10th Anniversary Edition: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* (GR/USA: Zondervan, 2019), 175.

<sup>22</sup> Dan Barker, “Is free will an illusion? And does it matter if it is? Dan Barker vs Braxton Hunter”, *Premier Unbelievable?* (accessed 26-Jun-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Q0FaZDyIYU> [10:50 to 10:56]

<sup>23</sup> Sam Harris, *Free Will* (NY/USA: The Free Press, 2012), 11.

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