

But even if we grant that this argument proves the universe must have had a cause, how does that help the argument for the existence of God? Despite what some theists might argue, scientists don't all believe that the universe appeared uncaused from absolute nothingness. There are, in fact, a number of theories about how our universe (and, perhaps, other universes) might have come into being that make no appeal to a deity or divine intelligence.

When you come right down to it, if this argument proves anything, it's nothing we don't already know.

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We all agree that our universe began to exist at the time of the Big Bang. We also agree that something outside our universe likely exists. But while the theist proposes something supernatural existing outside our universe, the atheist proposes that there is something natural. At this point, neither possibility can be investigated, so why assume the supernatural?

It might seem that a natural explanation implies an infinite period of time outside our universe. Perhaps it does. But what is the alternative? If there was a point before time existed, then time had a beginning and, by Craig's argument, must have had a cause. But cause can't precede effect if time doesn't exist, so the cause of time could not have preceded it.

This gives us three non-God possibilities: cause doesn't always come before effect, there was indeed an infinite span of time somewhere, or there is something about the universe we don't understand. If cause doesn't need to come before effect, opening the door for God to have created time, and we might ask if, in that case, the universe in some sense may have simply caused itself without divine intervention or planning.



MUST THERE HAVE BEEN A DIVINE FIRST CAUSE?

A Question of Moral Atheism

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THE ARGUMENT FOR God as a necessary first cause of the universe comes in many forms. A popular one was put forth by William Lane Craig who argued: "Everything that begins to exist has a cause. The universe began to exist. Therefore, the universe must have a cause." He reinforces the second premise by saying that there cannot be an infinite series of causes, because an infinite span of time is an impossibility. If the universe must have had a cause outside of itself, does that prove that God — or any deity — exists? Let's look at the argument piece by piece.

The first premise, that everything that begins to exist has a cause, seems pretty uncontroversial. But the reason it seems uncontroversial is that experience tells us that every effect has a cause. If we're going to rely on experience when interpreting this argument, how about our experience that every cause of something in nature is a natural cause? That experience would lead us to expect that whatever caused the universe is natural, not supernatural.

**This is a form of the Kalām cosmological argument, part of Islamic philosophy.*

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QUESTIONS OF MORAL ATHEISM: INSTRUCTIONS

We appreciate your interest in helping us spread information about moral atheism! To make copies of this pamphlet for your own use or to share with friends, follow these simple steps:

1. Print pages one and two of this document, one on each side of the same piece of paper (if you don't have access to a duplex printer, print page one, put the page back in the paper tray upside down, and print page two — depending on the type of printer, you may have to experiment a bit).
2. Cut the printout in two, using the thin rules across the middle of the page as a guide.
3. Fold the two pieces of paper in half, making a pair of small pamphlets.
4. Keep one of the pamphlets to read, and give the other away to an interested friend or stranger.

That's it! If you have any questions, suggestions, or comments, we invite you to share them by leaving a comment on blog.iamanatheist.org. Thanks!
