

William Lane Craig, Cosmological Arguments, and Tensed Time

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William Lane Craig outlines two variations of the cosmological argument, the Leibnizian form and the kalam cosmological argument. As concerns the kalam variety, Craig summarizes the argument as follows.

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

In defense of premise 2, Craig offers two deductive sub-arguments, the first based on the impossibility of actual infinities existing in the real world and the second arguing that an actually infinite series cannot be formed by successive addition.²

Craig's first deductive argument is the following:

- 2.11 An actual infinite cannot exist.
- 2.12 An infinite temporal regress of events is an actual infinite.
- 2.13 Therefore an infinite temporal regress of events cannot exist.³

One classic illustration of this difficulty, also cited by Craig, is Hilbert's Hotel.⁴ Suppose a hotel existed which accommodated an infinite number of guests. When completely full, the number of guests in this hotel would be equal to infinity. Now suppose the guests in every other room checked out. How many guests left the hotel? The answer would also be infinity, as would the answer to how many guests remain. Because dealing with this type of actual infinity leads to such absurd conclusions in real world applications, it become clear that such infinities cannot exist.

¹ William Lane Craig, "The Cosmological Argument," in *Philosophy of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Issues*, ed. Paul Copan and Chad Meister (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 88.

² *Ibid.*, 89-91.

³ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

Craig's second argument in support of premise 2 is:

2.21 The series of events in time is a collection formed by successive addition.

2.22 A collection formed by successive addition cannot be actually infinite.

2.23 Therefore, the series of events in time cannot be actually infinite.⁵

In regard to this argument, Craig states, "It may seem that (2.21) is rather obvious, but it does presuppose the truth of a tensed theory of time."⁶ While Craig's argument is sound if the true nature of time is tensed, in committing to a tensed theory of time he has at least somewhat diminished one potential response to the problem of evil.

In general, two competing ways of viewing time are known as A-theory and B-theory. Under A-theory time is "tensed," meaning that the only actually existing point in time is the present. The past no longer exists, and the future has yet to come into existence. In contrast, B-theory holds that time is "tenseless." In describing B-theory, Stephan Torre states, "According to the B-theory of time, tense is not a fundamental feature of the world. There is nothing that ontologically distinguishes the present from the past or the future."⁷

If A-theory is correct, then when God is describing future events He is speaking of things that have not yet occurred. However, if B-theory is correct, then from God's transcendent perspective all events in all places over all times are equally apparent to Him. As Norman Geisler says, "God's Now has no past or future; time's now does."⁸ These two alternative theories have bearing on how we respond to the problem of evil.

⁵ Ibid., 91.

⁶ Ibid., 92.

⁷ Stephan Torre, "Truth-conditions, truth-bearers and the new B-theory of time," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*. 142, no. 3 (2009): 325-26.

⁸ Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Volume Two* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2003), 103.

For example, one common question in regard to evil is why God has not done anything about it. In response, the Christian could state that the question assumes God has not already done something, or at least it assumes He does not have a plan to do so. Again, Norman Geisler along with Ronald M. Brooks explain, “Just because evil is not destroyed right now does not mean that it never will be. The argument implies that if God hasn’t done anything as of today, then it won’t ever happen.”⁹

God promises a future with no evil. If A-theory is true, then God, given His omnipotence, can certainly bring this about. However, if creatures truly are free, then many future events, absent God overriding free will, cannot be guaranteed. However, if B-theory is true, we need not be concerned with whether God will be controlling peoples’ wills in order to bring about His prophesied events, because on B-theory God is not waiting for time to unfold, watching what free choices creatures make and stepping in to impose His own will over theirs when needed to “keep things on track.” Rather, He is merely describing to us moments in time which ontologically already exist, and which to Him are all equally apparent in His ever present Now. Not only does B-theory give certainty to the happening of future events, but it also takes some of the bite out of the question of why God does not intervene more in stopping evil acts. If God is willing to override people’s free will in order to bring about future events that He revealed to His prophets would occur, then why not intervene in free will to prevent the commission of evil acts? In other words, the free will defense loses some of its “bite” if one holds to an A-theory of time and God must be prepared to override people’s free choices in order bring about as of yet non-existent future states of affairs.

⁹ Norman L. Geisler & Ronald M. Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook on Christian Evidences* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990), 64.

Craig is correct that if B-theory is true, then there can be no series of events. Events are not ontologically ordered in that manner. However, even though they are equally existent, events can still be indexed as being ordered “before” certain events and “after” others. While Craig’s second argument in favor of premise 2 would not apply to such a state of affairs, the kalam argument would still be sound. Craig’s first argument as to the impossibility of actual infinities existing in the real world is just as applicable to a tenseless universe as one in which time is tensed.