

ESTABLISHING A THEISTIC WORLDVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

An atheist, a pantheist, and a theist were all transported back in time and found huddling around the empty tomb of Jesus on the first Easter Sunday in early first-century Jerusalem. After all the chaos of the previous week culminating in the criminal-like execution of the man who claimed to be the Jewish Messiah, the tomb he was buried in was now inexplicably vacated and the body could not be found. Hoping to offer an explanation for this extraordinary event, the atheist noted that science might be able to provide an answer. Perhaps, he said, scientific laws should be expanded to include the possibility that under certain unique atmospheric, astronomic, and biological conditions, corpses can immaterialize leaving no trace of their whereabouts. The pantheist, on the other hand, piped in that a more likely explanation was that Jesus became one with the All and his physical body had been just an illusion in the first place. Upon his apparent death, that illusion was no longer necessary as he had completed his cycle of samsara and was now in blissful union with the Cosmos. The theist, however, interjected that Jesus claimed to be God in the flesh, had fulfilled Old Testament prophecy concerning Himself, and vindicated His claim by rising from the dead. This, the theist declared, was neither a scientific anomaly nor a cosmic reunion with the All. The empty tomb was sure proof of the miraculous, physical resurrection of God the Son.

As absurd as the above illustration may seem, it demonstrates that the examination and interpretation of unique and extraordinary events can be deeply affected by one's *worldview*. To the Christian, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of his faith. However, it is not a strong enough apologetic to simply prove that the tomb was empty that Sunday morning. *Why*

was it empty? Is the person who rejects belief in the existence of God likely to interpret the empty tomb as proof of God? Perhaps, but more likely he will squeeze the event into his naturalistic worldview that does not include God. What about the person who believes that all is God and God is all? Is he likely to interpret the event as proof that the God of the Jews is the true God instead of Brahman? Again, it is certainly possible for an event such as a physical resurrection to profoundly affect one's foundational belief system. Nevertheless, it is more instinctive for unbelievers to distort the true nature of this remarkable event based upon their erroneous and presupposed worldview. Thus, an effective Christian apologetic should follow a two-step approach that first establishes theism as the correct worldview then, secondly, demonstrates the veracity of particular Christian evidences, such as the empty tomb. The aim of this paper is to establish the first step, the theistic worldview.

QUESTIONS ABOUT WORLDVIEWS IN GENERAL

What Is A Worldview?

A worldview may be defined as “any ideology, philosophy, theology, movement, or religion that provides an overarching approach to understanding God, the world, and man’s relations to God and the world.”¹ Moreover, a worldview can be likened to an “intellectual lens through which we see the world. If someone looks through a red-colored lens, the world looks red to him. If another individual looks through a blue-colored lens, the world will look blue to her.”² Philosopher Ronald Nash adds that “worldviews contain a least five clusters of beliefs, namely, beliefs about God, metaphysics (ultimate reality), epistemology (knowledge), ethics, and human

¹ David A. Noebel, *Understanding the Times: The Religious Worldviews of Our Day and the Search for Truth* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1999), 8.

² Norman Geisler and Peter Bocchino, *Unshakable Foundations: Contemporary Answers to Crucial Questions About the Christian Faith* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2001), 19-20.

nature.”³ Thus, a worldview may be summarized as that interpretive “lens” through which each individual, consciously or not, seeks to understand the existence and nature of God, the universe, and man. Each person’s worldview, even if highly unrefined and uncritically held, becomes the filter through which the sense data of the external world is received and assimilated by his mind. As in the illustration of the red and blue lenses that block out all colors except their own, two different worldviews allow two different people to come to two different conclusions when considering common data, such as the empty tomb of Christ or the historicity of miracles in general.

What Are The Possible Worldviews?

According to Dr. Norman Geisler and Peter Bocchino, there are seven possible worldviews: theism, atheism, pantheism, panentheism, deism, polytheism, and finite godism.⁴ *Theism*, which is foundational to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, is the view that the universe had a supernatural First Cause who is uncaused, one, personal, moral, and infinite in all His attributes including power and intelligence. This God is both beyond the universe and manifests Himself in the universe. *Atheism*, the pillar of both secular and Marxist humanism, teaches that no God exists either beyond the universe or in it. Thus the universe, which is either eternal or randomly came to be, is all there is and man is its ultimate authority. *Pantheism*, as in many Eastern religions and the New Age, holds that creator and creation are one and the same; God is the world and the world is God.⁵ For the purposes of simplification, theism, atheism, and pantheism,

³ Ronald H. Nash, *Life’s Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 14.

⁴ Geisler and Bocchino, 57.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 58-60.

to the near exclusion of the other four, will be the most widely discussed views in this paper as together they dominate worldview thinking.

Why Are Worldviews Important?

Only the worldview of theism provides the necessary framework by which to properly interpret particular evidences for the Christian faith such as the historicity of the gospel accounts and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Any theological controversies regarding the doctrines of the *Word of God* or the *Son of God* become completely irrelevant apart from the existence of the theistic God. If there is no God, then of course there is no Word of God or Son of God. In such a case any debate about alleged Christian “evidences” would amount to mere triviality, akin to quarreling over how Santa Clause manages to complete all his deliveries on time. All the atheist or pantheist has to do is prove his non-theistic worldview and he has effectively eliminated the only legitimate worldview upon which Christianity can be based. If, on the other hand, theism as a worldview can be reasonably established, then the antagonist or skeptic cannot automatically dismiss as irrelevant the individual evidences that substantiate the Christian faith. Thus, Christianity in particular is dependent upon theism in general and a theistic worldview is logically prior to a Christian worldview.

Additionally, since Christianity is a religion birthed within a specific historical context and as such is dependent upon the historical method for its defense, a certain level of historical objectivity must be attainable for Christianity to be considered a reasonable faith. Yet, as Geisler points out, true historical objectivity cannot be attained apart from a theistic worldview.⁶ Consequently, theism must be established prior to an examination of historical evidences such as

⁶ Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, “History, Objectivity of,” (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 327.

the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To reiterate, Christian apologetics should follow a two-step method that establishes the theistic worldview primarily and Christian evidences secondarily and thus, the importance of worldviews cannot be overstated.

Establishing The Theistic Worldview Using TLC

The first step of the two-step apologetic consists of three sub-steps, summed up by the acronym *TLC*. First, one must properly define truth and demonstrate that objective truth exists and is knowable. Second, the basic rules of logic must be applied to reality to show that whatever is contrary to truth is false. The steps of truth and logic are prerequisite to the third step which constitutes the heart of the argument, which is to show that once one has demonstrated that anything at all exists, the principle of causality informs us that only a self-existent, uncaused First Cause (the theistic God) can ultimately account for that existence.

Truth

Christian philosopher Peter Kreeft writes that “From a practical point of view, the question of whether we can know objective truth is one of the most important questions in apologetics....”⁷ If objective truth itself cannot be known, then there is no reason to explore the objective truth claims of Christianity or any other religion. The basic question that we are seeking to discover about the various worldviews is whether or not one of them can be demonstrated to be true. In order to answer that question, we must know what truth is. Geisler defines truth as that which “corresponds to its referent. Truth about reality is what corresponds to the way things really are. Truth is ‘telling it like it is.’”⁸ Philosopher J.P. Moreland writes that “truth appears to be a

⁷ Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 362.

⁸ Geisler, *BECA*, “Truth, Nature of,” 742.

relation of correspondence between a thought and the world. If a thought really describes the world accurately, it is true.”⁹ Though there are many competing theories about how to define truth, the correspondence definition here advanced is undeniable. For if one attempts to define truth any other way, he necessarily implies that his theory *corresponds to* the way things really are. Thus, in formulating a rival definition of truth, one cannot avoid using the very correspondence definition that he is attempting to refute. In other words, the correspondence definition is undeniable and therefore true.¹⁰

In addition, it is also undeniable that truth about reality is knowable. The claim that “no one can know the truth” is itself a (self-defeating) truth claim. Atheist George Smith helpfully notes that “while it is legitimate to ask, ‘What does man know?’ or ‘How does man acquire knowledge?’ it is not legitimate to ask, ‘*Can* man acquire knowledge?’ The mere asking of this question already presupposes knowledge on the part of the questioner, including knowledge of language, man, and a consciousness with the capacity to understand the question, as well as to distinguish a satisfactory from an unsatisfactory answer. Without knowledge, no questions can be asked, and no questions can be answered. Any argument against knowledge is thus self-refuting.”¹¹

Thus, the question about the truthfulness of any of the seven worldviews comes down to the simple proposition: Do the major tenets of any of the worldviews correspond to the way things really are? Can any of the worldviews adequately explain undeniable facts of existence? If a worldview can meet those requirements, then and only then it can be said to be true.

⁹ J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 81-82).

¹⁰ Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1976), 239. “But whatever is undeniable is true, and what is unaffirmable is false.”

¹¹ George H. Smith, *The Case Against God* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1979), 143-144.

Logic

Just because one worldview may be demonstrated to be true, does that necessarily mean that the others are false? Is it possible for two contradictory worldviews to both be true? Is there any reason that atheism (no God), pantheism (all is God) and theism (one God) cannot all be true? What if they all presume to “correspond to reality?” The answer to those questions is found in the basic laws of logic that govern all rational thought. Smith identifies the three fundamental laws of logic as 1) the law of non-contradiction (LNC); 2) the law of identity; and 3) the law of excluded middle.¹² Essentially, these three laws are three different ways of looking at the same reality. The LNC says “A cannot be both *B* and non-*B* at the same time and in the same sense.”¹³ The law of identity very simply says that *B* is *B*, that is, anything is itself. Moreover, the law of excluded middle affirms that it is either *B* or non-*B*, there is no third option.

These laws are so fundamental, that just like the correspondence definition of truth, they cannot be denied without employing them. And since the laws of logic are undeniable they are therefore true.¹⁴ Smith agrees that “the laws of logic are fundamental to all concepts, thought and communication. We cannot prove them because they are presupposed by the very concept of ‘proof...’ Even the denial of these principles entails their acceptance. Therefore, we accept the laws of logic because we must accept them; they are self-evident and necessarily true. Faith plays no part here.”¹⁵ Geisler expounds upon the inescapability of the laws of logic, noting that “...if someone tried to [say that the LNC is false] he would have a problem. Without the law of

¹² Ibid., 143.

¹³ Nash, 194.

¹⁴ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 239.

¹⁵ Smith, 143-144.

noncontradiction, there is no such thing as true or false, because this law itself draws the line between true and false.”¹⁶

We can therefore deduce from the basic laws of logic that if God exists as theism asserts, it is not possible that He does *not* exist as atheism asserts. Similarly, if God and the universe are one as pantheism asserts, then it cannot be true that God and the universe are *not* one as theism asserts. Two contradictory worldviews cannot both be true. Thus, if atheism is found to correspond to reality, then by default theism and pantheism are false. If pantheism is found to be true then atheism and theism are false, and so on. If any of the seven worldviews can be established as corresponding to the facts of reality (i.e., is true), then by default, the six others are false because they contradict those facts. Incidentally, any worldview that denies the prerequisites of truth and logic disqualifies itself in advance of any further evidence it might provide in its defense. Such a worldview precludes itself from the very rational discourse it would rely upon to assert its truth claims and therefore assumes a self-refuting position from the start.

Causality

Christian philosopher Etienne Gilson writes that there is only one way “open to us if we wish to arrive at the conclusion that God exists. It consists in starting from the consideration of things and in inferring from their existence, such as it is given in sense experience, the existence of a Being that is not given in sense experience.”¹⁷ Thus, in order to begin the demonstration of the theistic worldview, one should locate those truths of existence that cannot be denied and from there infer the existence of God. Such undeniable truths exist in what is known as *first principles*

¹⁶ Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks, *Come, Let Us Reason: An Introduction to Logical Thinking* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990), 16.

which are foundational to all knowledge. Geisler notes that “first principles are undeniable or reducible to the undeniable. They are either self-evident or reducible to the self-evident. And self-evident principles are either true by their nature or undeniable because the predicate is reducible to the subject. That the predicate is reducible to the subject means that one cannot deny the principle without using it.”¹⁸ Thus, first principles are non-negotiable, self-evident truths upon which all knowledge is built, and therefore rational discourse is impossible apart from their employment. Of the twelve first principles that can be set forth, the first five are sufficient to establish the existence of the theistic God. These five are:

1. Being is – the principle of existence
2. Being is Being – the principle of identity
3. Being is not Nonbeing – the principle of non-contradiction
4. Either Being or Nonbeing – the principle of the excluded middle
5. Nonbeing cannot produce Being – the principle of causality¹⁹

Existence (principle one) cannot be denied. As Geisler notes, “It is undeniable that something exists. No one can deny his own existence without affirming it. One must exist in order to deny that he exists, which is self-defeating.”²⁰ Stuart Hackett quips that “it will probably not occur to anyone to deny the existence of anything at all. But if he does, we can easily prove either that he is mistaken, or that his statement is not a refutation of the argument, or both. He is mistaken because he at least exists to effect the denial, which is therefore self-contradictory.”²¹

¹⁷ Etienne Gilson, *The Elements of Christian Philosophy* (New York: Mentor-Omega, 1963), 53.

¹⁸ Geisler, *BECA*, “First Principles,” 250.

¹⁹ Ibid. Principles two, three, and four are restatements of the basic laws of logic.

²⁰ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 239.

²¹ Stuart C. Hackett, *The Resurrection of Theism: Prolegomena to Christian Apology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1957), 194.

Once I rightly admit that “I exist,” I must then inquire as to the cause of my existence. In other words, the truth that something undeniably exists leads us to the principle of causality (principle five), which can be acceptably stated as “every effect has a cause,” “every thing that comes to be is caused by another,” or “nonbeing cannot cause being.”²² R.C. Sproul comments that, “The ‘law of causality’ is usually linked with the word *effect*. This law is often called the ‘law of cause and effect’ We usually define *effect* as that which has an antecedent cause. Cause and effect, though distinct ideas, are inseparably bound together in rational discourse. It is meaningless to say that something is a *cause* if it yields no *effect*. It is likewise meaningless to say that something is an *effect* if it has no *cause*. A cause, by definition, must have an effect, or it is not a cause. An effect, by definition, must have a cause, or it is not an effect.”²³ Cause and effect are two sides of the same coin called the principle of causality. In addition to being true by definition as noted by Sproul, the principle also states what seems to be obvious, that being cannot come from nonbeing. That nonbeing cannot cause being should be self-evident, for a caused being is an effect, but nonbeing cannot be the cause of an effect since it is nothing, that is no-thing. Commenting on causality, Geisler points out that “nonbeing is nothing; it does not exist. And what does not exist has no power to produce anything. Only what exists can cause existence, since the very concept of ‘cause’ implies that some existing thing has the power to effect another. From absolutely nothing comes absolutely nothing.”²⁴

Thus, Sproul concludes that “reason demands that if something exists, either the world or God (or anything else), then *something* must be self-existent.”²⁵ In other words, since something now exists (principle one), and nothing cannot produce something (principle five), there could never

²² Geisler, *BECA*, “Causality, Principle of,” 120.

²³ R.C. Sproul, *Not a Chance: The Myth of Chance in Modern Science and Cosmology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 171.

²⁴ Geisler, *BECA*, “Causality,” 121.

²⁵ Sproul, 179.

have been a time when there was nothing. For if it was ever the case that nothing existed, then nothing would still exist. But something does exist, thus reason demands the existence of a self-existent something. This self-existent “something” is rightly called the Necessary Being. Hackett defines the Necessary Being as “one whose determinate character is completely self-contained, one that has within itself all the conditions of its existence and that faces no limitations which are not self-involved. Now such a being must transcend the temporal series by reason of the fact that it must be absolutely changeless and devoid of succession, whereas the temporal series is characterized by just such marks of change and succession....”²⁶ Geisler elaborates that “a Necessary Being is by definition a mode (kind) of being that cannot not be. That is, by its very mode (modality), it must be. It cannot come to be or cease to be.”²⁷ Since a Necessary Being has no beginning, it is not subject to the principle of causality (“everything that *begins* has a cause”) and is thus the only adequate explanation for the existence of those things that *did* have a beginning, i.e. all limited and contingent beings. All that remains is to discover what (or who) is the self-existent, Necessary Being and reason affords us only four possible candidates: myself (or some existing self), a part of the universe, the universe as a whole, or God.²⁸

Could I Be The Necessary Being?

Though seemingly a patently absurd position, some have asserted *solipsism*, “the doctrine that for each self the world is within his mind....”²⁹ Hackett notes that even if one asserts such a position, “it is nevertheless easy to show that the contention itself proves our original point,

²⁶ Hackett, 196.

²⁷ Geisler, *BECA*, “First Principles,” 252.

²⁸ Hackett, 198.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

namely, that the absolutely necessary being transcends the world of experience.”³⁰ Smith mocks the solipsist and notes that the doctrine is “...rarely defended outright, because when it is, we have the ludicrous picture of a man informing other men that they do not exist....

[Furthermore]... if one is trapped within one’s private world of consciousness, if one is unable to perceive an independent universe, then one has no way to compare one’s own use of language with the usages of other men. Therefore, since the [solipsist] must employ language in order to communicate his argument, he implicitly concedes the existence of an external world.”³¹ But if the external world exists in reality then solipsism is found false in addition to being absurd.

Furthermore, I (or any self) can only account for my existence in three possible ways: impossible, necessary or contingent. But since my existence is actual, it cannot be impossible. And since my nonexistence is possible (though not actual), it follows that my existence is not necessary for it is not possible for a necessary being to not exist. Moreover, as a matter of record I came to be, that is I had a beginning. By definition, therefore, I am an effect caused to exist by another. Thus, I am a contingent being and not the Necessary Being.³²

Hackett humorously concludes that there is “something strange in the notion that when a solipsist passes through the gates of death, he not only succumbs to the very effects which his own will imposed but leaves the rest of us, who do not actually exist, to bemoan his departure. And thus all reality vanishes in the oblivion of nonexistence!”³³

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Smith, 146.

³² Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 238-241.

³³ Hackett., 199.

Could A Part Of The Universe Be The Necessary Being?

Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli observe that “the material world we know is a world of change.... As for the thing that changes, although it *can be* what it will become, it is *not yet* what it will become.”³⁴ Furthermore, “We notice around us things that come into being and go out of being. A tree, for example, grows from a tiny shoot, flowers brilliantly, then withers and dies.”³⁵ Countless other examples could be noted from the observations of astronomy, geology, meteorology, and other disciplines. In other words, the parts of the universe are subject to *time* and *change*, two characteristics that cannot be true of a Necessary Being. Hackett comments that “a part of the space-time universe is, by definition, a thing or event to which the whole universe sustains an active and reciprocal causal relation; i.e., such a part is contingently related to the whole. But a being that is thus contingently related is by that very fact not the absolute being which we are seeking.”³⁶ Furthermore, as Moreland points out, the Second Law of Thermodynamics informs us that “the amount of energy available to do work is decreasing and becoming uniformly distributed. The universe is moving irreversibly toward a state of maximum disorder and minimum energy.”³⁷ Apart from an extraneous influx of energy, no part of the universe can be permanently sustained. But a Necessary Being is not subject to any energy loss nor is in need of any extraneous influx, for such involve change and subjection to temporal succession and a Necessary Being cannot be subject to either whether from within itself or from without. Consequently, since every part of the known universe is subject to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, no part can be demonstrated to be the Necessary Being. Though there are still yet undiscovered frontiers in the universe, it does not follow that there is a possibility of

³⁴ Kreeft and Tacelli, 50.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

³⁶ Hackett, 200.

³⁷ Moreland, 34.

someday discovering a part of the universe to be the Necessary Being. Hackett explains that, “To say that a thing is part of the universe is to say that it belongs to the temporal series and that it is therefore an event determined by its place in the series and not an existence determined from itself. To maintain therefore that some part of the universe is the absolute being which thought necessarily posits is self-contradictory, since it is the same as saying that some part of the universe is not a part of the universe.”³⁸

Could the Universe As A Whole Be the Necessary Being?

Atheists and pantheists argue that the universe is all that is, a claim that is the chief rival to theism and will require the most extensive treatment. Specifically, atheists believe that “the universe is eternal. If it is not eternal, then it came into existence ‘out of nothing and by nothing.’ It is self-sustaining and self-perpetuating.”³⁹ To the atheist, matter is all that exists. Similarly, pantheism teaches that “God pervades all things, contains all things, subsumes all things, and is found within all things. Nothing exists apart from God.... The world is God, and God is the world.”⁴⁰ In other words, to the pantheist God is all that exists and all that exists is God. Atheists and pantheists agree that there is but one type of thing in existence. To the atheist it is matter; to the pantheist it is spirit. Either way, they argue, the universe as a whole, whether spirit or matter, is the self-existent “something” that is necessary to account for the existence of other things. Nevertheless, by proving that the universe had a beginning and is, consequently, a contingent effect, the theist can refute such a claim. Such proof comes in the form of both philosophical argumentation and scientific evidence.

³⁸ Hackett, 200.

³⁹ Geisler, *BECA*, “Atheism,” 57.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, “Pantheism,” 580.

Actual infinites. One philosophical argument posits that if the universe had no beginning (i.e., was self-existent), then an actual infinite number of moments would have had to occur before today for today to ever have arrived. But it is impossible to traverse an actual infinite; therefore, the universe had a beginning.⁴¹ To fully grasp the import of this argument, we need to distinguish between a potential infinite and an actual infinite. For the current purposes, two properties of a potential infinite will suffice to distinguish it from an actual infinite. Moreland tells us that, “First, a potential infinite increases its number through time by adding new members to the series. Second, a potential infinite is always finite.”⁴² One can add numbers to a finite set from now to eternity, but the set will always be a finite set. It can reach towards infinity, but it will never arrive there. A potential infinite is actually possible; an actual infinite is not.

The concept of actual infinites is best understood using illustrations. For example, consider two sets of numbers, one contains all the natural numbers (0,1,2,3,4...) and the other all the even numbers (0,2,4,6,8...). Which set has more members? Odd as it seems, according to infinite set theory both have the same amount of members for there is an infinite number in both of them.⁴³

Or consider a more entertaining illustration:

Imagine a library with an actually infinite number of books. Suppose further that there is an infinite number of red books and an infinite number of black books in the library. Does it really make sense to say that there are as many black books in the library as there are red and black books together? Surely not. Furthermore, I could withdraw all the black books and not change the total holdings in the library. Let us also assume that each book has an actual infinite number of pages. There would be just as many pages in the first book in the library as there are in the entire, infinite collection. If someone read the first book, she would read just as many pages as someone who read every page of every book in the library!⁴⁴

⁴¹ Moreland, 22-23.

⁴² Ibid., 22.

⁴³ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 23.

Or ponder the following scenario which illustrates the absurdities that would arise if actual infinities were admitted into the astronomical history of the universe:

Suppose that the past is an actual infinite number of events. Now for each yearly revolution of the sun, there are twelve revolutions of the moon during the same period. No matter how far back one goes, the number of lunar revolutions would be twelve times that of the sun. But if they have been revolving on their courses for an actual infinity, then a paradox results. The number of lunar revolutions would be equal to the number of solar revolutions. But this seems absurd. How could this be the case if the lunar revolutions occur twelve times more frequently than the solar revolutions? Something has gone wrong here, and it is the admission of an actual infinite into the real world.⁴⁵

It should be obvious at this point that actual infinities are actually absurd. But, as Moreland admits, not all philosophers are easily convinced, perhaps because they well know the theistic ramifications of the argument. But even if it cannot be proven that actual infinities do not exist, it can still be argued that the universe had a beginning. Moreland explains that, "This second argument works even if an actual infinite is possible. It states that if there is an actual infinite, it must occur, as it were, all at once. It can be put as follows: It is impossible to traverse (cross) an actual infinite by successive addition. The temporal series of past events has been formed by successive addition. Therefore, it cannot be actually infinite. But since it is not infinite, it must be finite (i.e., it must have a first term). And this is what we mean by saying the universe had a beginning."⁴⁶ Moreland amplifies the point with this illustration:

It is impossible to count to infinity. For if one counts forever and ever, he will still be, at every moment, in a place where he can always specify the number he is currently counting. Furthermore, he can always add one more member to what he has counted and thereby increase the series by one. A series formed by successive addition is a potential infinite. Such a series can increase forever without limit, but it will *always* be finite. This means that the past must have been finite. For the present moment is the last member of the series of past events formed by successive addition. And since one cannot reach infinity one at a time, then if the past was actually infinite, the present moment could not have been reached. For to come to the present moment, an actual infinite would have to have been crossed.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., 23-24.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 29.

Thus, Moreland argues first that actual infinities do not exist and then bolsters that with the argument that even if they could exist, one still cannot traverse an actual infinity in reality. No matter if the universe came into existence 6000 years ago or 15 billion years ago, it must be conceded by the intellectually honest philosopher that to posit a beginning-less universe is to admit into the universe the absurdity of actual infinities. The only reasonable conclusion is that the universe must have had a beginning. And if the universe had a beginning, it is finite and contingent and cannot be the Necessary Being. Christian apologist William Lane Craig concludes that “we thus have two separate arguments to prove that the universe began to exist, one based on the impossibility of an actually infinite number of things and one on the impossibility of forming an actually infinite collection by successive addition. If one wishes to deny the beginning of the universe, he must refute, not one, but both of these arguments.”⁴⁸

Big Bang cosmology. In 1929, astronomer Edwin Hubble discovered that the universe appeared to be expanding, which led to the theory of origins known as the “Big Bang.” Craig comments on the implications of this widely accepted scientific theory: “Everything in the universe is expanding outward. The staggering implication of this is that at some point in the past *the entire known universe was contracted down to a single mathematical point*, from which it has been expanding ever since. The further back one goes in the past, the denser the universe becomes, so that one finally reaches a point of infinite density called the singularity from which universe began to expand.”⁴⁹ That single mathematical point of infinite density with no dimensions of mass, energy, space, or time is indistinguishable from *nothing*. In other words, even Big Bang cosmology affirms that the universe came to exist from nothing at some point in

⁴⁸ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994), 100.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

the distant past. Being alarmed by this discovery, however, many scientists and philosophers have sought refuge from the theistic implications of the Big Bang by formulating rival theories such as Cosmic Rebound, Steady State, and even infinite time.⁵⁰ Unfortunately for them, however, none of these “anti-beginning” rivals offers a reasonable explanation of the now-established fact that the universe began to be at some point in the past. These alternate theories only seem to be vain attempts to escape the rationally inescapable, that the universe was brought into existence from nothing by a Necessary Being, which (or who) alone is capable of such a feat.

Creation scientist Henry Morris comments that “evolutionists have frequently criticized creationism as unscientific because of its basic commitment to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.... Yet now we hear many evolutionary astrophysicists maintaining that the universe ‘*evolved*’ itself out of nothing! Creationists at least assume an adequate Cause to produce the universe....”⁵¹ Whether one believes in a young or an old earth, one’s model of the origin of the universe must ultimately account for the fact that the universe came from nothing. The principle of causality instructs us that this transformation of the universe from nothing to something (creation *ex nihilo*, if you will) must have been effected by a Cause whose existence is independent of its effect.

The non-theist’s escape hatch. In light of the scientific and philosophical evidence that the universe had a beginning and is therefore not eternal, the atheist is forced to posit that the universe either is self-caused or sprang into being out of nothing. The latter contention flies in the face of the principle of causality, not to mention common sense. Sproul clarifies the reasons for rejecting the former:

⁵⁰ Geisler, *BECA*, “Big Bang Theory,” 103-104.

For something to create itself, it must have the ability to be and not be at the same time and in the same relationship. For something to create itself it must be *before* it is. This is impossible. It is impossible for solids, liquids, and gasses. It is impossible for atoms and subatomic particles. It is impossible for light and heat. It is impossible for God. Nothing anywhere, anytime, can create itself.... [Self-creation] is a concept that is analytically false.... Analytically false statements are adjudged to be false not only because they are unintelligible, but because they are nonsense statements. They are not nonsense because they are unintelligible; they are unintelligible because they are nonsense.⁵²

At this point, some atheists reject the principle of causality or misrepresent it. Smith exemplifies such misrepresentation when he writes “the first premise of this argument states that everything must have a cause, and the conclusion asserts the existence of an uncaused supernatural being. But if *everything* must have a cause, how did god become exempt?”⁵³ Like many notable atheists, including Bertrand Russell, Smith errs by misstating the principle. It does not teach that *everything* must have a cause but rather that every *finite* thing must have a cause. An infinite Being such as God does not and indeed cannot, need a cause for He never came to be but eternally exists. In contrast, a finite being by definition is one that comes to be and therefore needs a cause. Thus, the principle of causality correctly exempts God, and only God, from causal dependence.

Furthermore, pantheism is self-defeating. God cannot be the universe, for it is apparent that the universe had a beginning and is characterized by change. God, by definition, cannot come to be or be subject to change, thus the universe and God cannot be one and the same. Some pantheists will retreat to the assertion that the universe is an illusion, but this too is self-defeating. For “if the mind is part of the illusion, it cannot be the ground for explaining the

⁵¹ Henry M. Morris and John D. Morris, *The Modern Creation Trilogy: Volume Two, Science and Creation* (Green Forest, Arkansas: Master Books, 1997), 207.

⁵² Sproul, 12, 17-18.

⁵³ Smith, 239.

illusion. Hence, if pantheism is true in asserting that my individuality is an illusion, then pantheism is false, since there is then no basis for explaining the illusion.”⁵⁴

Some non-theists object that to conclude the contingent nature of the universe simply from the contingent nature of its parts is to commit the fallacy of composition. Could not the whole universe, they protest, be greater than the sum of its parts? Is not a fully assembled automobile greater than the sum of its individual parts? Geisler responds to these objections:

...either the sum of the parts [of the universe] is equal to the whole or it is more than the whole. If the whole universe is equal to its parts, then the whole must be dependent, just as the parts are. Proof of this is that, when all the parts are taken away, the whole would vanish too. Thus, it must be contingent also. If, on the other hand, the whole universe is more than the parts and would not vanish were the parts all destroyed, then the ‘whole’ is the equivalent of God. For it is an uncaused, independent, and eternal, and Necessary Being on which the entire universe depends for its existence.⁵⁵

Thus, neither the universe as a whole, nor a part of the universe, nor an individual self can be the Necessary Being that must necessarily exist in order to explain the undeniable reality that something now exists. By default, we are left with only one remaining candidate, the God of theism.

The God Of Theism Is The Necessary Being

By virtue of eliminating the possibility that any of the other candidates (self, part of the universe, universe as a whole) could possibly fit the description, the God posited by theism and described below is found to be the only adequate explanation for the existence of finite, contingent beings. At this point, however, one might object that all we have demonstrated is the existence of some mysterious first cause in the distant past. We have done nothing to prove that

⁵⁴ Geisler, *BECA*, “Pantheism,” 582.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, “Cosmological Argument,” 165.

any such being still exists.⁵⁶ That objection can be answered in one of two ways. First, it is the very nature of a Necessary Being to exist. It cannot not exist, or its existence was not necessary in the first place but contingent either upon factors within itself (perhaps it chose to go out of existence) or from some extraneous source. In either case, a Necessary Being cannot become anything nor cease to be what it necessarily is, for that involves potentiality and a Necessary Being, as Pure Actuality, has no potentiality.⁵⁷ Second, the vertical form of the cosmological argument adequately demonstrates that *current* existence requires a *current* Necessary Being as its cause. Geisler explains that, “A Necessary Being must continue to cause its contingent being(s). A contingent being must remain contingent as long as it exists, since it can never become a Necessary Being. But this is the only other alternative for a contingent being other than going out of existence or remaining a contingent being. But if a contingent being is always contingent, then it always needs a Necessary Being on which it depends for its existence. Since no contingent being holds itself in existence, it must have a Necessary Being to hold it from going into nonexistence – at all times.”⁵⁸ So it follows that the Necessary Being found to be necessary once the existence of anything is affirmed is not only the first cause of contingent things but also the current cause of such.

The principle of analogy. Earlier, Etienne Gilson informed us that the existence of God is inferred from the consideration of things given in the sense experience.⁵⁹ This follows the principle of analogy that informs us that in acting, every being produces an effect similar to itself.⁶⁰ Gilson explains, however, that “we cannot achieve a perfect knowledge of God. Only God knows Himself perfectly. We cannot even know the existence of God with the kind of

⁵⁶ Smith, 237.

⁵⁷ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 240.

⁵⁸ Geisler, *BECA*, “Causality, Principle of,” 122.

⁵⁹ Gilson, 53.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 206.

evidence we would have if our knowledge of it could be deduced a priori from what we know of God's essence. As has already been said, the essence of God is unknown to us."⁶¹ But because we have knowledge of His effects, we can infer truths about Him. Gilson continues that, "If we say that God is life, for instance, we say something that is true of God, for if there were no life in God, the First Cause, there could be no life in any of His effects.... There is in God that which must be there to account for the fact that what we call life exists as its effect and, therefore, resembles it as effects resemble their causes."⁶² Geisler concludes that the principle of analogy, "is the only way to preserve true knowledge of God. Univocal God-talk is impossible and equivocal God-talk is unacceptable and self-defeating. Only analogy avoids the pitfalls of each and provides genuine understanding of God."⁶³ Furthermore, since the Necessary Being, as Pure Actuality, cannot create another Necessary Being, all the effects caused by God are composed of both actuality and potentiality. Thus, God is similar to His effects in their actuality but dissimilar in their potentiality. This dissimilarity, "is called 'the way of negation' (*via negativa*), and all adequate God-talk must presume it."⁶⁴ Therefore, once the distinction is made between a contingent being (act + potency) and a Necessary Being (Pure Act), certain truths about God become apparent through way of analogy. Space does not permit a full disclosure of the nature of God, but the following is adequate for demonstrating the contradictions between theism and the other six worldviews.

⁶¹ Ibid., 53.

⁶² Ibid., 151.

⁶³ Geisler, *BECA*, "Analogy, Principle of," 17.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 18.

God exists absolutely. He is the source of being, or existence, for all things.⁶⁵ He is “Pure Actuality, with no potentiality in his being whatsoever.... God’s aseity [self-existence] means that he *is* Being; everything else merely *has* being.”⁶⁶ This is the deathblow to atheism.

God is infinite. A Necessary Being is by definition a being with no limitations, and what is finite is limited. “The first Cause is the unlimited limiter of every limited thing. If this Cause were limited (i.e., caused), it would need a cause beyond itself by which to ground its limited existence.”⁶⁷ This mitigates against both finite godism and polytheism.

God is one. Since God is without limit, there cannot be more than one God. There cannot be two infinities. For there to be two or more Gods, “one being would have to lack some characteristic found in the other. But any being that lacked some characteristic of existence would not be an unlimited, perfect existence. In other words, two infinite beings cannot differ in their potentiality, since they have no potentiality; they are pure actuality.”⁶⁸ Since there can only be one God, polytheism is again refuted.

God is immaterial. A body is always limited and subject to change. As Kreeft and Tacelli note, “To be subject to change in this way is *not to be* what one *will become*. And therefore to be subject to change involves *nonbeing*.... Now God is the limitless fullness of being, so God cannot be a body.”⁶⁹ The worldview of panentheism teaches that the universe is God’s body.⁷⁰ That God is immaterial clearly refutes this.

God is immutable. God has no potential, for He is Pure Actuality. What has no potential has no potential to change, therefore God cannot change. Furthermore, only beings with composition

⁶⁵ Kreeft and Tacelli, 91.

⁶⁶ Geisler, *BECA*, “God, Nature of, 283.

⁶⁷ Geisler, *BECA*, “God, Objections to Proofs for,” 289.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 291.

⁶⁹ Kreeft and Tacelli, 92.

⁷⁰ Geisler, *BECA*, “Worldviews,” 786.

(parts) can change. But God is not composed of parts as His effects are, but is indivisible and simple. Therefore there is no “part” of him that can change. For Him to change, His whole being would have to change, but then He would be an entirely new being and not the Necessary Being. Therefore, God cannot change.⁷¹ Pantheism, panentheism and finite godism all at least imply that God can change, which is clearly false.

God is eternal. God, as a changeless Being, has no before and afters. As the Creator of the temporal series, He is not subject to it. God created time and is therefore not subject to it. His effects are temporal; He is non-temporal. Any worldview, therefore, that teaches that God is a part of the temporal sequence is false. This would include pantheism, panentheism, finite godism, and polytheism.

God is transcendent and immanent. Kreeft and Tacelli observe that “God cannot be a *part* of the universe. If he were, he would be limited by other parts of it. But God is the *Creator* of all things, giving them their total being.... So God must be *other* than his creation. This is what we mean by the *transcendence* of God.”⁷² Thus, pantheism is false for it denies transcendence. On the other hand, “God must exist *in* all things. They cannot be set over against him, for then he would be limited by them.... In other words, God is immanent.”⁷³ The immanence of God directly contradicts the worldview of deism which teaches that God made the world but has since left it to operate on its own.

Conclusion

Once the Christian has demonstrated that the very undeniable facts of existence can only be adequately explained by the theistic worldview, he is then in a position to advance the evidence

⁷¹ Geisler, *BECA*, “God, Nature of,” 284.

⁷² Kreeft and Tacelli, 93.

that sets Christianity as true over and above all other theistic worldviews, most notably Judaism and Islam. Until that first step is secured, however, the apologist continually runs the risk of wasting his time laying out evidence that the atheist or pantheist is prone to interpret within the framework of an erroneous worldview. The most effective overall apologetic, therefore, is to first demonstrate the existence of the God of theism using the principles of truth, logic, and causality. The theistic worldview, thus established, consequently provides the justification for believing in both the possibility and actuality of miracles and the divine inspiration of the Bible. And when an atheist, pantheist, and theist huddle around the empty tomb of Christ, the theist will be able to witness with confidence that the only adequate explanation for the missing corpse is that the God of theism raised up Jesus from the dead and declared Him to be the Son of God.

⁷³ Ibid., 93-94.