

Debate between William Lane Craig and Ingmar Persson: Does God Exist?

University of Lund, Sweden

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OPENING ARGUMENT: William Lane Craig



Good evening! I want to begin by thanking Credo and the Student Evening Session for the tremendous honor of participating in tonight's important debate.

Now in order to determine rationally whether or not God exists, we need to conduct our inquiry according to the basic rules of logic. Reason, and not emotion, must be our guide this evening. We need to ask ourselves two fundamental questions: First, are there good reasons to think that God exists? And second: are there good reasons to think that God does not exist?

Now with respect to the second question, I'll leave it up to Dr. Persson to present the reasons why he thinks that God does not exist. But notice that although philosophers have tried for centuries to disprove the existence of God, no one has ever been able to come up with a successful argument. So rather than to attack straw men at this point, I'll just wait to hear Dr. Persson's answer to the following question: What good arguments are there to think that God does not exist?

So let's look, then, at that first question: Are there good reasons to think that God does exist? And tonight I want to present five reasons why I think that theism (the view that God exists) is more plausible than atheism (the view that God does not exist). Now whole books have been written on each one of these, so all I can present here is the tip of the iceberg. These reasons are independent of one another, so that if even one of them is sound, it furnishes good grounds for believing that God exists.

1. The Origin of the Universe.

Have you ever asked yourself where the universe came from? Why anything at all exists instead of just nothing? Typically atheists have said that the universe is just eternal, and that's all. But is that a plausible position? If the universe never had a beginning, then that means that the number of past events in the history of the universe is infinite. But mathematicians recognize that the existence of an actually infinite number of things leads to self-contradictions. For example, what is infinity minus infinity? Well, mathematically you get self-contradictory answers. This shows that infinity is just an idea in your mind, not something that exists in reality.

David Hilbert, perhaps the greatest mathematician of this century, states, "The infinite is nowhere to be found in reality. It neither exists in nature, nor provides a legitimate basis for rational thought. ... The role that remains for the infinite to play is solely that of an idea."

But that entails that since past events are not just ideas but are real, the number of past events must be finite. Therefore the series of past events cannot go back forever; rather the universe must have begun to exist.

This conclusion has been confirmed by remarkable discoveries in astronomy and astrophysics. The astrophysical evidence indicates that the universe began to exist in a great explosion called the Big Bang about fifteen billion years ago. Most people do not understand that physical space and time were created in that event, as well as all the matter and energy in the universe. Therefore, as the Cambridge astronomer Fred Hoyle points out, the Big Bang Theory requires the creation of the universe out of nothing. This is because as one goes back in time one reaches a point at which, in Hoyle's words, the universe was "shrunk down to nothing at all."

Thus what the Big Bang model requires is that the universe began to exist and was created out of nothing. Now this tends to be very awkward for the atheist. For as Anthony Kenny of Oxford University urges, "A proponent of the [Big Bang] theory, at least if he is an atheist, must believe that ... the universe came from nothing and by nothing."

But surely that doesn't make sense. Out of nothing, nothing comes. So why does the universe exist instead of just nothing? Where did it come from? There must have been a cause, which brought the universe into being.

We may summarize our argument thus far as follows:

- The universe began to exist.
- Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
- Therefore the universe has a cause.

Now from the very nature of the case, as the cause of space and time, this cause must be an uncaused, changeless, timeless, and immaterial being of unimaginable power, which created the universe. Moreover, I would argue, it must also be personal. For how else could a timeless cause give rise to a temporal effect like the universe? If the cause were an impersonal set of necessary and sufficient conditions, then the cause could never exist without the effect. Once the sufficient conditions are present, the effect must be present as well. The only way that the cause could be timeless and the effect begin in time is for the cause to be a personal agent who freely chooses to create an effect in time without any prior determining conditions. And thus we are brought not merely to a transcendent cause of the universe but to its Personal Creator.

2. The complex order in the universe.

During the last thirty years, scientists have discovered that the existence of intelligent life depends upon a complex and delicate balance of initial conditions simply given in the Big Bang itself. We now know that life-prohibiting universes are vastly more probable than any life-permitting universe like ours.

How much more probable? The answer is that the chances that the universe should be life-permitting are so infinitesimal as to be literally incomprehensible and incalculable. For example, Stephen Hawking has estimated that if the rate of the universe's expansion one second after the Big Bang had been smaller by even one part in a 100 thousand million million, the universe would have recollapsed into a hot fireball.

P.C.W. Davies has calculated that the odds against the initial conditions being suitable for later star formation (without which planets could not exist) is 1 followed by a thousand billion billion zeros - at least! There are around 50 such quantities and constants present in the Big Bang which must be fine-tuned in this way if the universe is to permit life. So improbability is added to improbability to improbability until our minds are reeling in incomprehensible numbers.

There is no physical reason why these constants and quantities should possess the values they do. The one-time agnostic physicist Paul Davies comments: "Through my scientific work I've come to believe more and more strongly that the physical universe is put together with an ingenuity so astonishing that I can not accept it merely as a brute fact."

Similarly Fred Hoyle declares: "A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super intellect has monkeyed with physics." And Robert Jastrow, the head of NASA's Goddard Institute of Space Studies, has called this the most powerful evidence for the existence of God ever to come out of science.

So once again, the view that theist has always held, that there is an intelligent designer of the universe, seems to make much more sense than the atheistic interpretation that the universe, when it popped into being, uncaused, out of nothing, just happened to be, by chance, fine-tuned to an incomprehensible precision for the existence of intelligent life.

We can summarize this second argument as follows:

- The fine-tuning of the initial conditions of the universe is due to either law, chance or design.
- It is not due to law or chance.
- Therefore, it is due to design.

3. Objective Moral Values in the World.

If God does not exist, then objective moral values do not exist. Many theists and atheists alike concur on this point. For example, Michael Ruse, a Canadian philosopher of science explains:

Morality is a biological adaptation no less than are hands and feet and teeth Considered as a rationally justifiable set of claims about an objective something, [ethics] is illusory. I appreciate that when somebody says, 'Love thy neighbor as thyself,' they think they are referring above and beyond themselves, ... Nevertheless, ... such reference is truly without foundation, Morality is just an aid to survival and reproduction, and any deeper meaning is illusory

Friedrich Nietzsche, the great atheist of the last century who proclaimed the death of God, understood that the death of God meant the destruction of all meaning and value in life. I think that Friedrich Nietzsche was right.

But we've got to be very careful here. The question here is not: Must we believe in God in order to live a moral life? I'm not claiming that we must. Nor is the question: Can we recognize objective moral values without believing in God? I certainly think that we can. Rather the question is: If God does not exist, do objective moral values exist?

Like Ruse, I just don't see any reason to think that in the absence of God the morality evolved by *Homo sapiens* is objective. After all, if there is no God, then what's so special about human beings? They're just accidental by-products of nature which have evolved relatively recently on an infinitesimal speck of dust called the planet Earth, lost somewhere in a hostile and mindless universe, and which are doomed to perish individually and collectively in a relatively short time. On the atheistic view, some action, say rape, may not be socially advantageous and so in the course of human development has become taboo. But that does absolutely nothing to prove that rape is really morally wrong. On the atheistic view, there's nothing really wrong with your raping someone. And thus without God there is no absolute right and wrong which imposes itself on our conscience.

But the problem is that objective values do exist, and deep down I think we all know it. There is no more reason to deny the objective reality of moral values than the objective reality of the physical world. Actions like rape, cruelty, torture, and child-abuse aren't just socially unacceptable behavior. These are moral abominations. Some things are really wrong. Similarly, love, equality and generosity are really good. Thus we can summarize this third consideration as follows:

- If God does not exist, objective moral values do not exist.
- Objective values do exist.
- Therefore, God exists.

4. The Historical Facts concerning the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus.

The historical person Jesus of Nazareth was a remarkable individual. New Testament critics have reached something of a consensus that the historical Jesus came on the scene with an unprecedented sense of divine authority, the authority to stand and speak in God's place. He claimed that in himself the Kingdom of God had come, and as visible demonstrations of this fact he carried out a ministry of miracle working and exorcisms.

But the supreme confirmation of his claim was his resurrection from the dead. If Jesus really did rise from the dead, then it would seem that we have a divine miracle on our hands and thus evidence for the existence of God.

Now most people would probably think that the resurrection of Jesus is something you either just believe in by faith or not. But in fact there are actually three established facts recognized by the majority of New Testament historians today, which I believe are best explained by the resurrection of Jesus.

Fact #1: On the Sunday following his crucifixion, Jesus' tomb was found empty by a group of his women followers. According to Jacob Kremer, an Austrian specialist in the resurrection, "By far, most scholars hold firmly to the reliability of the biblical statements about the empty tomb."

Fact #2: On separate occasions different individuals and groups of people saw appearances of Jesus alive after his death. Even the skeptical German New Testament critic Gert Lüdemann admits: "It may be taken as historically certain that ... the disciples had experiences after Jesus' death, in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ." These appearances were witnessed not only by believers, but also by unbelievers, skeptics, and even enemies.

Fact #3: The original disciples suddenly came to believe that God had raised Jesus from the dead despite their having every predisposition to the contrary. You see, Jews had no

belief in a dying, much less a rising, Messiah. And Jewish beliefs about the after-life precluded anyone's rising from the dead before the end of the world.

Nevertheless, the original disciples came to believe so strongly that God had raised Jesus from the dead that they were willing to go to their deaths for that belief. Luke Johnson, a New Testament scholar from Emory University, comments: "Some sort of powerful transformative experience is required in order to generate the sort of movement earliest Christianity was."

N.T. Wright, an eminent British scholar, concludes: "That is why, as an historian, I cannot explain the rise of early Christianity unless Jesus rose again, leaving an empty tomb behind him."

Attempts to explain away these three great facts, like "The disciples stole the body" or "Jesus wasn't really dead," have been universally rejected by contemporary scholarship. The simple fact is that there just is no plausible, naturalistic explanation of these three facts. Therefore it seems to me that the Christian is amply justified in believing that Jesus rose from the dead and was who he claimed to be. But that entails that God exists.

5. The Immediate Experience of God.

This isn't really an argument for God's existence; rather it's the claim that you can know that God exists wholly apart from arguments simply by immediately experiencing Him. This was the way that people in the Bible knew God, as Professor John Hick explains: "God was known to them as a dynamic will interacting with their own wills, a sheer given reality, as inescapably to be reckoned with as destructive storm and life-giving sunshine. ... To them God was not ... an idea adopted by the mind, but the experiential reality which gave significance to their lives."

Now if this is so, there's a danger that arguments for the existence of God could actually distract one's attention from God Himself. If you're sincerely seeking God, then, I believe that God will make His existence evident to you. The Bible promises, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." We mustn't so concentrate on the external proofs that we fail to hear the inner voice of God speaking to our own hearts. For those who listen, God becomes an immediate reality in their lives.

In conclusion, then, we have yet to see any arguments to show that God does not exist, and we have seen five reasons to think that God does exist. Together these reasons constitute, I believe, a powerful cumulative case for the existence of God. Unless and until we are given better arguments for atheism, I think that, we can agree that theism is the more plausible worldview.

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OPENING ARGUMENT: Ingmar Persson



I don't have time to argue for atheism in general. I will simply argue that we have no good reason to believe in God on Prof. Craig's conception, as an uncaused, changeless, timeless, and immaterial being which is the Creator of the Universe.

God as a Necessary Being

In addition to the properties listed, to be the Creator of the universe, God will have to enjoy necessary existence, that is, existence which is necessary. Prof. Craig replied to the question: "Why does the universe exist rather than nothing?" by asserting "God created it." But this is satisfactory only if we can't ask the same question about God. After all, we asked why anything exists, and this includes God, unless his existence is necessary. Only if God is such that we can't consistently imagine God not to exist, is the question "Why does God exist?" [tape unintelligible]. Otherwise the same question arises for God as for the universe, and nothing has been gained.

However, it's doubtful whether anything apart from abstract objects or universals, objects like numbers, properties, propositions, and so on can be necessarily existent in this sense. It is philosophically controversial, in what precise sense, say, the number two exists. But in whatever sense it does exist, it exists necessarily. It makes no sense to ask when or where the number two began to exist, or to hope or fear that it will ever cease to exist. For instance, it was surely not the case that when the first two material objects sprang into existence, if that ever happened, a third thing began to exist, namely, the number two. So it makes no sense to say about abstract entities that they can begin or cease to exist.

So I think Craig is mistaken in thinking that we need to posit God in order to explain why abstract objects like properties—for instance, the property of being morally good, if that is an objective property—that we need to postulate the existence of God in order to explain why such a property exists, because it simply can't fail to exist, if it does exist. And furthermore, if God is morally good, if God has the property of being all-good, then in order for God to exist, the property of being morally good must exist in order for him to have that property. So it's totally useless to try to postulate the existence of God in order to explain any property like, for instance the property of moral goodness, in case it is an objective property. Now you can't have necessary existence [tape unintelligible] in which claim is characterized abstract objects is the one God must have in order to be the self-explanatory source of the existence of the universe. Otherwise that question "Why does God exist?" arises instead of the question "Why does the universe exist?"

The other properties Prof. Craig attributes to God also fit abstract objects, namely: uncaused, changeless, timeless, and immaterial [tape unintelligible]. Thus, one begins to wonder how the nature of God differs from that of an abstract object like a property or something like that. If Craig can't point to any such difference, it makes no sense to say that God has created the universe. For an abstract object, of course, can't create anything, let alone something like the material universe. On the other hand, if there is such a difference, which makes God into something more than an abstract object, how can God enjoy that necessary existence in the strong sense required to exclude the question of why God exists?

If it's said that God's existence is not something abstract like a property, for instance, but rather something's having that property, or that property's being exemplified by something, like the existence of a house. The existence of a house is not just a property of a house existing but something having the property of being a house. Now if it's said that the existence of God is something's having a property, say, the property of being God, well, in that case God's existence can't be necessary. It's got to be contingent—for a property's

being exemplified can't be necessary; it's got to be a contingent fact. So in that case, the question "Why does God exist?" arises; and so nothing has been gained by saying that God created the universe—because the question arises, "Why does God exist?"

So we wondered why the universe exists, and we were told it exists because God exists; but that doesn't remove all our questions about why something exists because we have that question of why God exists.

Now it might be said that God has necessary existence in a somewhat weaker sense. God might be such that if God exists, then God exists at every point in time, past, present and future. But if such eternal existence, as we might call it, is everything that we are after, it's not clear that we need to postulate God at all. For we don't know the universe well enough in order to exclude that the universe itself is such that it has existed forever, that it has this eternal existence. True enough, the universe could logically have failed to exist, but as we've seen, the same is true about God. The universe could still, however, be such that, given that it does exist, it's got to exist forever, at every point in time, exactly as is true of God.

So I think we have a dilemma. God's existence is necessary either in the sense in which only the existence of abstract objects can be necessary or in the sense in which the existence of the universe itself might be necessary. In neither case will God's existence have that character which makes him self-explanatory—to explain the existence of the universe by saying that it is due to being created by God. So the postulation of God as the creator of the universe—sorry This shows that nothing is gained, nothing is being made clearer, by postulating the existence of God as the creator of the universe.

God as the Immaterial Creator of a Material Universe

In fact, it's the case that God (thinking of God as the creator of the universe) makes things less, rather than more intelligible. For it is utterly obscure what it means to say that "God has created the universe or everything that exists except God himself." God is conceived by Craig as something immaterial or spiritual. But how could something of this kind create matter out of nothing? We cannot even understand how the reverse can happen: that matter can give rise to something mental. But we are forced to acknowledge that this can happen, since it seems to be an incontestable fact that it happens every day when fetuses of human and many non-human animals acquire consciousness. Now observation, however, forces us to acknowledge that the opposite can't occur; that something mental, something immaterial, can cause something material. Quite the contrary, all our experiences confirm that the mental can't exist but as dependent on something material.

God as Timeless Creator

And there are several problems about God's being the creator on the one hand and God's being changeless and timeless on the other hand. For to create something, as it is ordinarily understood, involves undergoing some change in order to create something. But involving a change, this has to occur in time, and so nothing changeless and timeless like an abstract object or like God [tape unintelligible] can create something. So I think enough has been said to illustrate how postulating a God who creates time creates more problems than it solves.

There is no suitable sense in which such a God can be said to necessarily exist, so as to preclude the question, "Why does God exist?" And other properties of God, such as his

being immaterial, his being changeless and timeless, seem to rule out God's being the creator of the universe. So I think that postulating a God of the kind that Craig postulates really creates more problems than it solves as regards the existence of the universe.

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FIRST REBUTTAL: William Lane Craig



You'll remember in my opening remarks I said that we need to ask two questions tonight: First, what good reasons are there to believe that God does not exist? And second, What good reasons are there to think that God does exist? Now in his response to my opening statement Dr. Persson said that he's not going to present any good reasons to believe that God does not exist in general, but he would simply criticize the arguments for God that I offered and the concept of God entailed therein.

But I think this is inadequate to justify a "no" answer to the question "Does God exist?" It's possible that all of my arguments could fail and yet that God still exists. It might just be that I have not argued effectively for God. This point is brought up by Prof. Kai Nielsen, an atheist philosopher. He states: "To show that an argument is invalid or unsound is not to show that the conclusion of the argument is false. It's only to show that the argument does not warrant our asserting the conclusion to be true." All of the proofs for God's existence may fail, but it may still be the case that God exists. In short, to show that the proofs do not work is not enough by itself. It may still be the case that there is a God.

So I think that Dr. Persson has to do more than simply offer refutations of my arguments. If we are to justify a "no" answer to the question before us this evening, we have to have some positive reasons to think that God does not exist.

Now, he does present a sort of dilemma concerning God's existence. He says that either God's existence is logically necessary or it is what we could call factually necessary. And if you say that God is factually necessary, then it's possible that the universe could be such a factually necessary being. The universe could be eternal, uncaused, incorruptible, and indestructible.

Well, that leads right in to my first argument for theism, so let me deal with that objection in the context of my first argument, namely, the argument based on the origin of the universe. You'll remember I argued, first, that whatever begins to exist has a cause; that the universe began to exist—and I gave philosophical and scientific evidence for that premise—and concluded that therefore the universe has a cause. And then I did a conceptual analysis of what it is to be a cause of space, time, matter, and energy. And we were able to recover many of the traditional divine attributes.

Now Dr. Persson does not dispute my premise that whatever begins to exist has a cause. Something cannot come into being uncaused out of nothing. There has to be an efficient cause to bring something into being. Nor did he dispute directly my premise that the universe began to exist. You remember I argued philosophically that it is impossible to have an infinite regress of events and therefore there has to be a beginning. And secondly, I argued that the Big Bang model of the universe points to an absolute beginning of space

and time in the finite past. Just to reinforce the point let me quote from Stephen Hawking's most recent book, *The Nature of Space and Time* (1996), where on page 20 he says: "Today virtually everyone agrees that the universe and time itself had a beginning at the Big Bang."

And for that reason, Dr. Persson's dilemma fails. You cannot assert that the universe is a factually necessary being, because the universe began to exist! And it is essential to a factually necessary being that it be eternal and uncaused. T.F. Torrance, a Scottish theologian, makes the implication clear. He writes:

The problem that modern cosmology raises for thought is especially evident when we realize that the universe is finite in time. For that means that it had to have an absolute beginning, that it is utterly contingent on a source beyond it. Since it is not self-originated, the universe can hardly be regarded as self-sustaining or self-explanatory.

Thus the universe is not a factually necessary, self-explanatory being. So if my second premise is correct—and it has been undisputed so far—it seems to me that we are forced to conclude that the universe is not factually necessary.

That leads to the conclusion: Therefore the universe has a cause. Now Dr. Persson says: "But look, why does God exist?" If you say that God's existence is logically necessary, then he raises various difficulties with that.

I'm afraid he has confused here, though, two forms of the cosmological argument (which is what this argument is). There is a form of the cosmological argument, propounded by Leibniz, which sought for an explanation of all existence in a self-explanatory, logically necessary being. But that is not the form of argument that I'm presenting. I'm presenting an argument that has been called the Kalam cosmological argument, which comes out of a long tradition of Islamic, Jewish, and Christian thought. And what it concludes to is a being which is factually necessary, that is to say, a being which is eternal, uncaused, incorruptible, and indestructible. And that, I think, the argument does prove.

It makes no sense to ask "What is God's cause?" because God never began to exist. And the first premise states: Whatever begins to exist has to have a cause. That's not special pleading for God because that's what the atheists always have said about the universe, matter, and energy—the universe is eternal, uncaused, indestructible, and incorruptible. But that has now become untenable in light of modern cosmology, as well as my philosophical argument for the beginning of the universe.

So God is a timeless, factually necessary being. As the British theologian Keith Ward writes in his book *God, Chance and Necessity*: "If one asks what caused God, the answer is that nothing could bring into being a reality wholly transcendent of space-time and which is self-existent. To fail to grasp such an idea is to fail to grasp what God is." So it seems to me that the argument does conclude to a coherent concept of God.

He asks, "Well, how is God different from an abstract object?" Very simply: He differs from an abstract object in being a personal being. Abstract objects are not personal and I gave an argument, you'll recall, for the personhood of the uncaused cause based on the impossibility of having a temporal effect originate *de novo* from a timeless cause.

Finally Dr. Persson asks: "How can God create matter?" Well, I must say that I don't know how God could create matter. He hasn't revealed that to me, I must say! But I think that this is not a problem peculiar to the theist because, you see, the atheist—as I quoted from Anthony Kenny—must believe that the universe came from nothing and by nothing. Both the theist and the atheist agree that the universe has no material cause. But what the theist posits is an efficient cause, that is, a productive cause, which brings the universe into being. So the theist is not faced with any peculiar objection here that does not face the non-theist as well. And the non-theist is faced with the additional difficulty of positing not only an absence of material causality but of efficient causality, which seems metaphysically absurd.

I would also suggest that in the mind's action upon the body we do have a suggestion of how mind can affect material objects. When I freely choose to do some action, then my mind freely moves my body without any antecedent determining conditions. In other words, I'm not a materialist; I'm not a determinist. I believe there are mental substances called minds or souls, and these act on our bodies. And these would be a sort of analogy of the way in which God could act on the world.

So I don't think this is any peculiar problem to theists, and I do think in the mind-body relation we have some analogy to God's action in the world. But basically the conclusion follows from the two premises. If the premises are true and the logic is valid, the conclusion therefore follows.

Now just to review my other arguments: My second argument was based on the complex order of the universe. And I presented a trilemma here: either the fine-tuning of the universe is due to law, chance, or design. It can't be due to law because these are initial conditions not determined by law; it can't be due to chance because the improbabilities are simply incomprehensible. And therefore it is likely due to design.

I then presented an argument based on moral values, and I just want to emphasize this: if God does not exist, objective moral values do not exist. Richard Taylor, an ethicist, makes this very clear by imagining a race or tribe of people living in a state of nature. And he says: Let's suppose that one of these people kills another one and takes his goods. Taylor says this:

Such actions, though injurious to their victims, are no more unjust or immoral than they would be if done by one animal to another. A hawk that seizes a fish from the sea kills it but does not murder it. And another hawk that seizes the fish from the talons of the first takes it but does not steal it. For none of these things is forbidden. And exactly the same considerations apply to the people we are imagining.

On the atheistic view persons, human beings, are just basically animals, and animals don't have morality. So in the absence of God there are no objective moral values - these are just the byproducts of socio-biological evolution.

But surely when you think of that, that's unconscionable. It means that an event like the Holocaust, like ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, like the killing fields of Cambodia, like apartheid in South Africa, is morally neutral, that there is nothing wrong with it. And surely that's unconscionable. Peter Haas in his book *Morality after Auschwitz* asked how an entire society could have willingly participated in a state-sponsored program of mass torture and genocide for over a decade without any serious opposition. His answer is that "the Holocaust was

possible only because a new ethic was in place that did not find the arrest and deportation of Jews as wrong, and in fact to find it as ethically tolerable and good.”

He goes on to point out that because of its coherence and internal consistency, the Nazi ethic could not be discredited from within. Without a transcendent external vantage point there is no way to condemn the Nazi Holocaust or their atrocities, versus the values of the Western liberal democracies. We are simply lost in socio-cultural relativism. If you believe as I do, that there are certain objective moral values, you should therefore believe that God exists.

Finally I looked at the evidences for the resurrection of Jesus based on three facts accepted by the majority of New Testament historians. And then I looked at personal experience. It seems to me that apart from good arguments for atheism I'm rational to believe in God based on my personal experience of God. And therefore I think it is rational to believe that God exists.

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FIRST REBUTTAL: Ingmar Persson



First, I didn't merely try to disprove or argue against Prof. Craig's arguments for thinking that God exists. I tried to show that his conception of God is confused or incoherent. And, of course, it follows from that that God in that sense can't possibly exist. So that is a reason not to believe that God exists.

More importantly, I'd like to say that I granted for the sake of argument—or I didn't argue against—the principle that whatever begins to exist must have a cause. Now I think that is a principle which is not logically necessary. It could happen that things come into existence—that things happen—without having a cause. For instance, in quantum physics it is generally recognized that some things happen without a cause. So it's perfectly logically possible that the universe begin to exist without a cause. That's perfectly possible. It is not intellectually satisfactory because we'd like an explanation of everything, but that possibility is still, I think, preferable to the hypothesis that the universe is created by a God as conceived by Prof. Craig. And it's preferable for the reason that it's inconceivable, it is logically impossible, as far as we know, for something purely immaterial, which is changeless and timeless, which is outside space and time, to create something in time.

Why is that impossible? Well, first of all, as I said, we have no evidence whatsoever that anything spiritual or immaterial can exist independently of something material. For instance, everything immaterial or mental we know is correlated with a brain or something like that. So it is not adequate to take the example that Prof. Craig did, that we are able to govern our bodies, and so on. Because our minds—we do have minds, I would grant that—we have minds which are not reducible to brain processes and so on, but they still don't exist independently of the brain. And when we move our bodies, and so on, this is not comparable to the case of something purely mental, which is not supported by anything material, bringing into existence matter out of nothing. This is something we've never seen anywhere in nature, whereas we've seen, for instance, that things happen without a cause; this seems to occur in quantum physics. So I would say, out of those two explanations it is

still more intellectually satisfactory to believe that the universe has begun to exist without a cause—because there is nothing logically odd or strange about that—it is just that it is emotionally unsatisfactory because we'd like everything to have an explanation. So out of those two explanations I would say that the "no cause explanation" is more satisfactory and less problematic than the "God explanation" or "God hypothesis."

But I would also claim that we're not obliged to resort to the theory that the universe has begun to exist without a cause, since we don't know the universe well enough in order to rule out that it is, as Dr. Craig puts it, factually eternal. My opponent seems to think that the Big Bang theory is conclusively established. But this isn't the case, as far as I can understand. I'm not an astronomer or astro-physicist. About a month ago I read about two astronomers who were putting forward a theory according to which the universe was something which is capable of renewing itself—a universe which has existed for ever. And also the astronomer Fred Hoyle, who was mentioned by my opponent, put forward a theory in the 50's or so, according to which the universe was this sort of thing which could create itself, which renewed itself, which has existed forever. He thought it was unsatisfactory that the universe has begun to exist at a certain point in time. So I think it's wrong to say that we know the universe well enough in order to exclude the possibility that the universe is eternal.

Furthermore I think there are other possibilities which need to be explored which I don't think have been put forward. For instance, it might be claimed that when we analyze matter, when we go down to the atomic and sub-atomic level and so on, we might eventually reach a state in which the boundary between existence and non-existence is blurred or unclear—a boundary between existence and non-existence. In quantum physics, for instance, it's recognized that some elementary, sub-atomic entities behave both as waves and particles. And it's also recognized that some of them don't have—we can't give both definite location and definite velocity to them. So quantum physical entities seem to break the ordinary laws of our thinking. And it could be the case—this is logically possible—that as we analyze matter and get down to the sub-atomic level and so on, we reach a state where the boundary between existence and non-existence is blurred. We can't decide whether something exists or not, and for those types of entities we can't say, "Why do they exist?" because they don't exist unequivocally. And it might be the case that everything is created out of things at that level. So that's a further possibility.

I mean we have several possibilities, and all of these have something which makes them preferable to the hypothesis that God has created the universe, namely, that they don't involve logically impossible things. But it seems to be impossible that something purely mental can create matter, and it seems impossible that something which is outside time and which is for that reason changeless can create something. For to create something is to undergo a change.

So I think there are great difficulties—there are greater difficulties in the hypothesis that God has created the universe, which you don't find in the alternative explanations [tape unintelligible], but the God hypothesis does precisely that.

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SECOND REBUTTAL: William Lane Craig



Now I asked Dr. Persson to give us any good reason to think that God does not exist, and if you were listening carefully, you noticed that he has yet to do that. He said, "I presented a dilemma which showed that the concept of God is incoherent." But his dilemma did not do that. One horn of the dilemma is that God might be factually necessary. And his answer to that horn of the dilemma is not that that is impossible, but that the universe might also be, or instead be, factually necessary. In other words, at best that leads us to agnosticism. At the very best it would say that maybe God is the factually necessary being; maybe the universe is the factually necessary being. But he didn't demonstrate that God could not be that factually necessary being. So I think we've still yet to hear any positive arguments that God does not exist.

Now what about the arguments that I gave for theism? He has chosen to concentrate only on my first argument, and I'm sorry about that because I think that the arguments from the complex order of the universe, from the objectivity of moral values, from the resurrection of Jesus, and from personal experience are important. And if he answers them in his next speech, I'll only have five minutes to say something about those. So I'm sorry he has chosen not to deal with those. But let's concentrate on the first argument: the cosmological argument.

I first argued that whatever begins to exist has a cause. His response now to this is to say that's not a logically necessary principle. Well, I agree. I don't think it is logically necessary, but I do think it is metaphysically necessary—that it is really impossible for things to pop into being uncaused out of nothing. And certainly, secondly, even if it were not metaphysically necessary, it is certainly more plausible than it's contradictory. And that is the important thing in these arguments. As long as the premises are more plausible than their opposites, the argument is a good argument. And I think it clearly is more plausible. Even the atheist philosopher J.L. Mackie, under whom Dr. Persson studied in Oxford, says in the *Times Literary Supplement* (1982): "I find it hard to accept the notion of self-creation from nothing even given unrestricted chance. And how can this be given if there really is nothing?"

You can't even have chance if there really is nothing. So I think it is metaphysically absurd and certainly implausible to say that something can come into existence out of nothing.

Now Dr. Persson says, "But look, in quantum physics we have uncaused events." Those all presuppose the existence of a quantum vacuum, which is a rich physical reality possessing physical properties: it is not creation from nothing. Robert Deltete, a philosopher of science, says, "There is no physical basis in ordinary quantum theory for the claim that the universe itself is uncaused, much less for the claim that it sprang into being uncaused from literally nothing."

Secondly, indeterminacy is not even clear on the quantum level. Bohmian quantum mechanics (from David Bohm) is fully deterministic and says that the indeterminacy is merely in our minds. So I don't think he has been able to prove that quantum physics is a counter-example to the principle that whatever begins to exist has a cause.

He then asserts that it is logically impossible to have a creation of a material world by an immaterial being. Well, I simply invite him to give me the proof. That is an enormous claim that he is making—to say that it is logically impossible. I can certainly conceive of this happening, so how can he show me it is logically impossible? In fact, I suggested that we have an analogy to this in the mind-body relation. In the mind-body relation we do see an immaterial entity acting upon a physical reality. And he seems to suggest that he doesn't believe in the existence of minds as mental substances. But let me just point out that facts like the freedom of the will, intentionality, and so forth are inexplicable on a materialistic, reductionistic basis. I think that that is a far less plausible theory of mind than a substance dualism such as I am defending tonight. Let me suggest, thirdly, again, that we do see — I can make a suggestion as how the universe could originate without a material cause: many scientists say that perhaps the positive energy in the universe and the negative energy in the universe exactly cancel out, so that on balance there is no energy in the universe. In that case you wouldn't need to have a material cause to bring the positive and negative energy into being. You could just have an efficient cause. And remember, as I pointed out, on the standard Big Bang model, the universe lacks a material cause entirely. Space and time come into existence at the singularity. So the problem is worse for the atheist than for the theist. The atheist must say that there is no material cause and no efficient cause. So I think that it is certainly plausible to say that whatever begins to exist has a cause.

Now the issue is: Did the universe begin to exist? And here he ignores my philosophical arguments for the origin of the universe and says "The Big Bang evidence is not conclusive." Granted, it's not conclusive. No scientific theory is ever conclusive. But remember what Steve Hawking said: "Virtually everyone today agrees that the universe, and time itself, had a beginning at the Big Bang." So I would simply rest my case with the majority of the cosmologists and astrophysicists today. It's not conclusive, but it's more probable than not.

In any case, the scientific evidence is just confirmation of the philosophical argument I gave. And I think that the philosophical argument still stands. As the philosopher Hans Waihinger has written, "The idea of infinity is an auxiliary introduction by thought to facilitate its operations. Its application to the real world is a misuse."

It is metaphysically impossible for there to be an infinite regress. There must be a first event and a first uncaused cause.

Now Dr. Persson then says, "Maybe we can have a self-renewing universe like the steady-state universe." The steady-state universe has been dead for over three decades now. The microwave background radiation, the isotropy of the universe, homogeneity of the universe, all put nails in the coffin of the steady-state theory. If he means the oscillating model of the universe, well, this is also physically improbable. In the first place, it is physically impossible. There is no known physics that can make the universe oscillate and bounce back to a new expansion. And secondly, it is observationally untenable because the evidence indicates with 95% certainty, according to a recent study done at Harvard, Princeton, and the Smithsonian Institute, that the universe doesn't have enough density to recontract—it will simply expand forever and therefore cannot oscillate.

And in any case, the thermodynamic properties of an oscillating model show that such a model increases the size of its oscillations with time. That means that as you go back in time, they get smaller and smaller, so that such a model only has a finite past, not an infinite past.

He says, "Well, maybe on the quantum level there is a blurring between existence and non-existence [tape unintelligible] wave-particle duality." I think that is just a blatant misuse of quantum theory. There is no suggestion [tape unintelligible] wave-particle duality that existence and non-existence become blurred, whatever that means. All of quantum mechanics presupposes the reality of the quantum vacuum, which is a rich physical reality—it is a sea of fluctuating energy. And the idea that you can have a blurred boundary between existence and non-existence is just, I think, metaphysical mumbo-jumbo.

So when you look at the evidence, ask yourself: "Which is more probable: that it began or that it did not begin, that whatever begins to exist has a cause or that things can pop into being out of nothing? I think that in both cases it is far more probable that the premises are true and that therefore the conclusion follows: God exists.

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SECOND REBUTTAL: Ingmar Persson



When I talked about quantum physics, allowing the possibility of uncaused events and so on, the point was not to say that quantum theories are definitely the truth—that there occur uncaused events in the universe. I was simply trying to make it clear that that is something which is possible. Scientists are prepared to grant that there might be things like that: uncaused events.

But in the case of something mental or immaterial causing something material to come into existence out of nothing, there isn't a single case like that. No scientists would argue that there are clear instances of that happening or possible cases of that happening anywhere in nature. That is a totally unfamiliar phenomenon, and we have no reason whatsoever to think that it is possible, that it is compatible with the laws of the universe. So that is the reason why I'm saying that that hypothesis, explaining the universe by appealing to an immaterial cause, is stranger than any of the other hypotheses. And the same sort of problem arises with other properties of God, such as changelessness, and so on. We have no single instance of anything being capable of creating something without undergoing any change itself. The very concept of creation involves a change. It has got to, for that reason, occur in time. So I think you just heap—I agree that it is mysterious why the universe exists—but you just heap mystery on mystery if you try to explain the existence of the universe by appeal to God's existence.

I would like to say something about some other things as well, like objective moral properties. I did take up that problem briefly in my first speech. And the argument is simply this: Suppose that moral goodness is an objective property. Now this is a property God Himself has. God is all-good, it is claimed. So for God to exist, the property of moral goodness must exist, for Him to have that property. So God can't possibly be responsible for moral goodness. Moral goodness, if it exists, exists independently. So we don't need to resort to God to explain that. And I was disinclined to take up that bit of Dr. Craig's argument because I think it is extremely weak. First of all, we don't know that moral properties are objective. And I think the alternative he puts up—either goodness being an objective property or it's just a matter of convention, and so on—this is simply too crude. There are many other possibilities. So I think that argument is extremely weak. For that

reason I didn't want to go into that. To make that argument a tiny bit convincing you really have to go into such detail as regards to morality. And I don't think it is possible to do that here. In any case, even if we assume that moral goodness is an objective property, God can't possibly be responsible for the existence of that property, because He must have it Himself.

As to the fine-tuning of the universe—the fact that it is extremely unlikely that we would get a universe in which life is possible—I think that is true. But if the universe is very vast, possibly endless, that incredibly improbable event will happen some place at some time. I mean, the world is constituted by extremely improbable events. Consider how extremely improbable it would be at the time of the Big Bang that any one of you would exist! That is extremely improbable—that that particular individual will exist millions and millions of years after the Big Bang—that is extremely improbably, and still it happens. The world is constituted by improbabilities.

I think I'll stop there.

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CLOSING STATEMENT: William Lane Craig



All right, in my closing statement I want to draw together the threads of the debate this evening and see if we can arrive at some conclusions.

First, have we heard any good arguments to think that God does not exist? I think you'd have to agree with me that we have not. We've heard a dilemma that God can be either logically or factually necessary, and then the argument was that if you say He is factually necessary, as I have, then the universe might be factually necessary instead. But that doesn't help decide between them. So I don't think that that in itself constitutes an argument to think that God doesn't exist.

Now what about the arguments I gave for God's existence?

First the origin of the universe. I said, first of all, whatever begins to exist has a cause. And now Dr. Persson says his appeal to quantum physics was just a proof that it's possible to have uncaused events. But he admits that science knows absolutely nothing of things coming into being uncaused out of nothing. So it seems to me that what he is saying basically supports my point: Science has no experience of things popping into being uncaused out of nothing. And therefore, it seems to me, we have very good grounds, both conceptually and scientifically for believing that whatever begins to exist has a cause.

Now does it have to have a material cause as well as an efficient cause? I said "That's not very clear; give me some argument." He claimed it was logically impossible; but his argument is "It is not in our experience. None of our experience of physical laws shows this." Well, of course not—not of physical laws. But, of course, I'm postulating a cause that is supernatural, a cause that is beyond space and time, matter and energy. And therefore it would hardly be an objection to that sort of cause to say that we don't find this in our everyday experience of natural law. That is not a proof that this is inconceivable or logically

impossible. Indeed, if the premises of the argument are true, it seems to me that we have to agree with that. Moreover, I gave an example where scientists are talking about the possibility of having things without a material cause, if the positive and negative energy balances out. And I also gave examples from mind-body dualism. Think of how in your mind, in your dreams, you create a whole world of thought out of nothing, simply by thinking. In a sense God could think the universe into existence. I'm not suggesting that the world is just a dream in the mind of God. But this is an analogy for God's creating the universe out of nothing. What is absurd is that the universe should pop into being with neither a material nor an efficient cause, and that is what the atheist has to affirm.

Now did the universe begin to exist? As far as I can see my arguments against an infinite regress have never been refuted. And I explained how the steady-state, the oscillating model, the vacuum fluctuation models do not avert the Big Bang singularity. So we have good grounds for believing the universe has a cause.

Dr. Persson finally says, "Well, God must change in creating the universe." Actually, I agree with that! I think that at the moment of creation God does exercise His causal power and at that moment He enters into time.

Concerning the complex order in the universe, in his last speech he brings up an objection that the universe is vast, so all probabilities are actualized. This is a false analogy because the constants and quantities I'm talking about are present in the Big Bang itself, which concerns the totality of the universe, and therefore the vastness of the universe is irrelevant to those initial conditions. He says, "But every event in the universe is improbable." Yes, and that's not my argument. My argument is that life-prohibiting universes are vastly more probable than any life-permitting universe. It is the specified probability that whichever universe exists it is far more probable that that universe should be life-prohibiting. And that doesn't commit the improbability fallacy that he is talking about.

As for moral values, he says, "Well, we don't know if objective moral values exist." Let me simply rest that if you think that it is morally wrong, objectively, to torture a child for fun, then you will agree with me that objective moral values exist. And if they do, I think they are grounded in God. He says there are other possibilities; but he hasn't told us what they are—this remains a mystery. He says, "If God exemplifies the property of goodness, where did He get that property? He can't be the source of goodness." I would simply say that God necessarily exemplifies all of the properties that He has. These are just constitutive of who God is, so that it just is the moral nature of God. But there is no alternative that I've heard tonight from the atheist. On the atheistic view everything is socio-culturally relative. And you cannot condemn the Holocaust, ethnic cleansing, apartheid, rape, cruelty, child-abuse as objectively wrong because these do not exist on the atheist view.

The resurrection of Jesus has never been discussed.

Let me close by saying a word about personal experience. I wasn't raised in a Christian family, but when I was a teenager I began to read the New Testament. And to make a long story short, in doing so, I was captivated by the person of Jesus. I came to have a personal experience with God, and in the absence of arguments against God, I see no reason why I should deny that personal experience. God is a living reality to me, and in the absence of arguments for atheism I'll stick with that experience.

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CLOSING STATEMENT: Ingmar Persson



I'll start from the end, with experiences of God. Now if we're talking about a God which is the creator of the universe, a God which is changeless, timeless, and so on, you can't possibly experience a thing like that. So no experience can possibly prove anything which has those properties. I mean, I grant religious experiences, but it can't be an experience of a God creating the universe, and not a God which is outside time because everything we experience is in time. No experience can prove the existence of God in the sense we have discussed today.

Now as regards objective moral properties, one theory of objective moral properties is that moral laws are necessarily true, roughly as mathematical laws are necessary or logical laws are necessary. And as I said, such abstract entities like necessary laws and necessary propositions, properties, and so on, don't go in and out of existence. If they exist, they exist forever. So if there are objective moral properties in the sense that there are necessary laws of morality, that is something we need God to explain as little as we need God to explain that there are laws of mathematics. So we don't need God to explain the objectivity of moral properties. And, as I said, since God is objectively good, He can't exist unless the property of moral goodness exists for Him to have it. So He can't possibly be the source of objective moral properties.

Then Dr. Craig says time and time again, "We don't have any definite reasons to believe that God, in the sense that we have discussed him tonight—as an immaterial, changeless, and so on, creator of the universe — does not exist. But I do think we have a very strong reason—not a logically conclusive reason, because it is very hard to prove that it is logically impossible for something immaterial to exist independently of everything material. There are such philosophical arguments, but I have not brought them up tonight because it is always possible to dispute one premise in that argument. So there are no definite, conclusive arguments for proving that God, in this sense we have talked about tonight, is logically impossible. But what I'm saying is that if we compare what is involved in the hypothesis that such a God has created the universe, what is involved in that is logically much more suspect than what is involved in alternative explanations, either the explanation that the universe might be such that it is factually necessary or that the universe has popped into existence without a cause, because there is nothing conceptually absurd about any of those possibilities. It is just that we don't have any reason to believe that they are true, but they could possibly ... they are logically [tape unintelligible] to think they might be true, whereas there are logical difficulties in the God hypothesis.