

Dr. James S. Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 2, Theistic Proofs, Part 1, Cosmological Argument Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 2, Theistic Proofs, Part 1, Cosmological Argument, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Jim Spiegel's lecture introduces the **Cosmological Argument** for God's existence, tracing its history back to Plato. The discussion focuses particularly on the **Kalam Argument**, which posits that the universe's beginning necessitates a cause. **Alexander Proust's** perspective is examined, addressing whether the cosmos requires explanation, if a first cause is necessary, and whether that cause must be God. **William Lane Craig's** defense of the Kalam Argument is also explored, including philosophical arguments against an infinite past and the scientific argument from Big Bang cosmology, alongside **Wes Morriston's** critiques of these points. The lecture ultimately explores the reasoning behind the need for a first, personal cause for the universe.

**2. 22 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 2 – Double click
icon to play in Windows media player or go to the
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link
there (Theology → Apologetics → Philosophy of Religion).**



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3. Briefing Document: Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 2, Theistic Proofs, Part 1, Cosmological Argument

Briefing Document: The Cosmological Argument for the Existence of God

Overview:

This document provides a briefing on the Cosmological Argument for the existence of God, as presented by Dr. Jim Spiegel in his Philosophy of Religion lecture. The lecture outlines the general structure of the argument, its historical roots, and focuses specifically on the Kalam Cosmological Argument. It also addresses common objections and the defenses offered by prominent proponents like Alexander Pruss and William Lane Craig, along with critiques from philosophers like Wes Morriston.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. **The Goal of Theistic Arguments:** Dr. Spiegel introduces the Cosmological Argument as one of several "Theistic Arguments" that "aim to prove or support or confirm the reasonableness of belief in God." These arguments have a long history, dating back to Plato.
2. **The Cosmological Argument - Basic Idea:** The core concept of the Cosmological Argument is "reasoning from the existence of the world to a first cause, the need for some sort of ultimate causal explanation of the world." Kant is credited with naming this argument. A general form is presented: "if something exists, then something exists necessarily. Something does exist; therefore, there is a necessary being."
3. **The Kalam Cosmological Argument:** The lecture focuses on the Kalam Argument, which originated with medieval Islamic philosophers. Its unique feature is its emphasis on the universe having a beginning. The argument is structured as follows:
 - Premise 1: "Everything that begins to exist has a cause for its existence."
 - Premise 2: "The universe began to exist."
 - Conclusion: "Therefore, the universe has a cause for its existence."
1. **Key Questions Addressed by Alexander Pruss:** Dr. Spiegel highlights three fundamental questions raised regarding the Kalam Argument, which Pruss attempts to answer:

- **Does the cosmos actually have an explanation?** This leads to a discussion of the Principle of Sufficient Reason.
- **Can there be an explanation that does not involve a first cause?** This explores non-causal explanations (metaphysical principles, cosmic laws) and beginningless chains of causes.
- **Does the first cause of the cosmos need to be God?** This addresses the "gap problem" of moving from a first cause to theism.

1. **Pruss's Defense Against Alternative Explanations:**

- **Against Constitutive Explanations:** Pruss argues that ultimate explanations for contingent states must be causal, not constitutive (appealing to aspects within the thing itself). He states, "all ultimate explanations of contingent states of affairs have to be causal, not constitutive." This is because we can always ask why the constitutive state holds or why the thing exists at all.
 - **Against Non-Causal Ultimate Explanations (Metaphysical Principles):** Pruss contends that ultimate explanations must be "a thing" or "some sort of being" with causal power, unlike abstract principles or laws. He notes that laws of nature "describe how things go in the universe; they are not entities such that...gravity causes anything."
 - **Against Beginningless Chains of Non-Ultimate Causes (Hume):** Pruss argues that explaining each part of a chain with another finite part doesn't explain the chain itself. He uses the analogy of a cannonball: while each moment of its flight can be explained by the previous, what explains the flight in the first place? "How do you ever get a chain going, a causal chain of contingent beings, without some first member or agent that got the whole chain going? A beginningless series makes no sense."
- #### 1. **The Principle of Sufficient Reason:** Pruss's version states: "all contingently true propositions have explanations." The existence of the universe, being contingent (it might not have existed), requires an explanation.
- **Response to Hume's Objection (Imagining Ex Nihilo Creation):** Pruss argues that our ability to imagine something appearing without cause doesn't mean it's actually possible. He suggests this might be "a kind of self-deception or a lack of proper understanding of what's going on when we imagine something."

- **Justifications for PSR:** Pruss suggests the PSR is self-evident, pointing to our consistent search for causes in daily life ("if money disappears from your wallet or your purse, it never occurs to you to think that, well, maybe it just spontaneously disappeared"). He also argues that denying the PSR undermines much of our knowledge and understanding, especially in science and other fields relying on causal explanations.
1. **The Nature of the First Cause:** Defenders of the Kalam Argument argue that the first cause cannot be merely mechanistic but must be a "personal being." This is because mechanical causes operate only when conditions are present, implying the universe could have existed infinitely if its cause were purely mechanistic. A personal cause, on the other hand, can choose to act and bring the universe into existence. This first cause is posited to be "not only extremely powerful but atemporal, immutable, and also extremely intelligent or omniscient," resembling the God of classical theism.
 2. **Addressing the Question of God's Cause:** While the PSR is used to infer a first cause (God), objectors ask what caused God. Pruss responds that God's choice to create was based on His values and aims. While the origin of God's values remains a further question, affirming the PSR doesn't require knowing every detail of an explanation. We can know *that* da Vinci painted the Mona Lisa without knowing *why* or every detail about him.
 3. **William Lane Craig's Defense of the Kalam Argument:** Dr. Spiegel discusses Craig's arguments, particularly his defense of the second premise (the universe began to exist).
- **Philosophical Argument 1: Impossibility of an Actual Infinite:** Craig argues that "an actual infinite series cannot exist," and a beginningless series of events is such a series. He uses the analogy of an infinitely long shelf of alternating blue and red books to illustrate a perceived contradiction (half the infinite number equals the whole).
 - **Morrison's Critique:** Wes Morrison argues that Craig's argument relies on Euclid's Maxim (a set has more elements than its proper subsets), which only applies to finite sets. Infinite sets behave differently. Morrison also points to the infinite divisibility of finite space as a potential example of an actual infinite.
 - **Craig's Response:** Craig argues that the divisibility of space only shows potential infinity, not an actual infinite series of spaces.

- **Morrison's Counter:** Morrison argues that potential divisibility implies the pre-existence of infinitely many sub-regions.
 - **Philosophical Argument 2: Formation of an Actual Infinite:** Craig contends that "a collection formed by adding one member after another cannot be actually infinite," and a series of past events is such a collection.
 - **Morrison's Critique:** Morrison argues that this doesn't apply to a series with no temporal beginning.
 - **Scientific Argument: Big Bang Cosmology:** Craig appeals to the redshift of light from distant galaxies (discovered by Hubble), indicating an expanding universe. Rewinding this expansion suggests that all matter was once contained in a finite space, leading to the Big Bang approximately 12-14 billion years ago. This is seen as scientific support for a finite past.
 - **Morrison's Critique:** Morrison argues that Big Bang cosmology only shows a *likely* beginning, not a certain one. He raises the possibility of an oscillating universe (though currently less favored).
1. **Defense of the First Premise (Everything that begins to exist has a cause):** Craig argues this premise is less controversial, appealing to the "absurdity of supposing that any object could just suddenly appear out of nothing." He uses the illustration of a tiger spontaneously appearing.
 - **Morrison's Critique:** Morrison suggests our intuition about causes is based on our experience with objects within the universe and might not apply to the universe itself.
 - **Counter-Argument:** Dr. Spiegel presents a counter-argument: if small objects cannot spontaneously appear, why would the entire universe be any different?
 1. **Why the First Cause Must Be a Person (Craig):** Craig argues that since the universe has a beginning and mechanistic causes require pre-existing conditions (implying a potentially infinite past), the cause must be personal. A personal cause can choose to create. This first cause would possess power, intelligence, intentionality, and the ability to choose, fitting the description of a personal God.
 - **Morrison's Critique:** Morrison raises difficulties in explaining how God, as a spirit, could will the creation of a physical universe.

- **Craig's Response (Implied):** Even if the mechanism is unclear, the conceptual difficulties don't negate the confidence in a transcendent, powerful, and intelligent cause.

Quotes:

- "All Theistic Arguments aim to prove or support or confirm the reasonableness of belief in God..."
- "The basic idea of the Cosmological Argument is reasoning from the existence of the world to a first cause, the need for some sort of ultimate causal explanation of the world."
- "Something does exist; therefore, there is a necessary being." (Example of a Cosmological Argument)
- "everything that begins to exist has a cause for its existence, and the universe began to exist therefore the universe has a cause for its existence." (The Kalam Cosmological Argument)
- "...all ultimate explanations of contingent states of affairs have to be causal, not constitutive." (Pruss)
- "...principles are not things; they are not entities such that they have any causal power." (Pruss on metaphysical principles)
- "How do you ever get a chain going, a causal chain of contingent beings, without some first member or agent that got the whole chain going? A beginningless series makes no sense." (Pruss on Hume's objection)
- "all contingently true propositions have explanations." (Pruss's version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason)
- "...we never consider the possibility that maybe it didn't, it wasn't caused to be that way, it just happened spontaneously." (Pruss on the self-evidence of PSR in daily life)
- "an actual infinite series cannot exist." (Craig's first philosophical argument)

Conclusion:

Dr. Spiegel's lecture provides a comprehensive introduction to the Cosmological Argument, particularly the Kalam version. It outlines the key premises, defenses offered by proponents like Pruss and Craig, and the critical responses from philosophers like Morriston. The lecture highlights the ongoing debate surrounding the nature of causation, the possibility of an infinite past, the principle of sufficient reason, and the characteristics of a potential first cause of the universe. While the argument aims to establish the reasonableness of belief in God, the discussion reveals the complexity and ongoing philosophical scrutiny it faces.

4. Study Guide: Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 2, Theistic Proofs, Part 1, Cosmological Argument

Study Guide: The Cosmological Argument

Key Concepts:

- **Theistic Arguments:** Arguments aimed at proving, supporting, or confirming the reasonableness of belief in God.
- **Cosmological Argument:** An argument for God's existence that reasons from the existence of the universe to a first cause.
- **Kalam Cosmological Argument:** A specific version of the cosmological argument that focuses on the idea that the universe began to exist.
- **First Cause:** The ultimate, uncaused entity responsible for the existence of everything else.
- **Gap Problem:** The challenge of moving from the conclusion that the universe has a first cause to the conclusion that this first cause is the God of classical theism.
- **Mechanistic Explanation:** An explanation that appeals to natural laws and processes.
- **Personal Explanation:** An explanation that appeals to the intentions and actions of a personal agent.
- **Constitutive Explanation:** An explanation that appeals to the inherent properties or aspects of a thing itself.
- **Ultimate Explanation:** A complete and fundamental explanation that does not require further explanation.
- **Contingent Being/Truth:** Something that exists or is true but could have been otherwise.
- **Necessary Being/Truth:** Something that must exist or be true and cannot be false.
- **Principle of Sufficient Reason:** The principle that everything that is contingently true has an explanation for its being so.
- **Ex Nihilo:** From nothing.

- **Actual Infinite:** A completed infinity, where all members of an infinite series exist simultaneously.
- **Potentially Infinite:** A series that can be extended indefinitely but is never actually completed.
- **Euclid's Maxim:** The principle that a whole must be greater than any of its proper parts (subsets).
- **Redshift:** The phenomenon where light from distant galaxies is shifted towards the red end of the spectrum, indicating that they are moving away from us.
- **Big Bang Cosmology:** The prevailing scientific theory about the origin and evolution of the universe, which posits that the universe originated from an extremely hot and dense state and has been expanding ever since.
- **Oscillating Universe Theory:** A cosmological model that suggests the universe undergoes cycles of expansion and contraction.

Quiz:

1. Briefly describe the core idea of the Cosmological Argument for the existence of God.
2. What is the key distinction that makes the Kalam Cosmological Argument unique from other forms of the Cosmological Argument?
3. Explain Alexander Proust's response to the objection that the universe could have a constitutive explanation rather than a causal one.
4. According to Proust, why is the appeal to metaphysical principles or ultimate cosmic laws insufficient as an ultimate explanation for the universe?
5. How does David Hume challenge the need for a first cause by suggesting a beginningless chain of non-ultimate causes? What is Proust's counter-argument?
6. State Proust's version of the principle of sufficient reason. How does he defend this principle against Hume's objection based on our ability to imagine things coming into existence ex nihilo?
7. What is William Lane Craig's first philosophical argument against the idea of an actual infinite past, using the analogy of library books? What is Wes Morriston's critique of this argument?

8. Describe Craig's scientific argument for the universe having a beginning, and summarize Morrision's main counter-argument to this point.
9. Why does Craig argue that the first cause of the universe must be a "person"? What qualities does he attribute to this first cause?
10. What is one of Wes Morrision's main difficulties in understanding how a spiritual God could bring about a physical universe?

Answer Key:

1. The Cosmological Argument reasons from the fact that the universe exists to the conclusion that there must be a first cause or ultimate explanation for its existence. It posits that the universe cannot be self-explanatory and therefore requires something beyond itself to account for it.
2. The Kalam Cosmological Argument is unique because it specifically focuses on the idea that the universe began to exist in time. This premise about the universe's beginning is central to its formulation and distinguishes it from broader cosmological arguments.
3. Proust argues that constitutive explanations, which appeal to aspects of the thing itself, are not ultimate explanations. He contends that all ultimate explanations for contingent states of affairs must be causal, as we can always ask why that constitutive state of affairs holds or why the thing exists at all, requiring a causal account.
4. Proust argues that metaphysical principles and laws of nature are not entities and therefore lack causal power. They describe regularities but do not cause them. He believes an ultimate explanation must be a being or entity with the capacity to cause the universe.
5. Hume suggests that each contingent being could be caused by another contingent being in an infinite chain, thus eliminating the need for a first, uncaused cause. Proust counters that this fails to explain the whole chain itself. He asks what got this causal chain of contingent beings going in the first place, arguing that a beginningless series is problematic.
6. Proust's version of the principle of sufficient reason is that all contingently true propositions have explanations. He defends it by arguing that the principle is self-evident, as we always seek causal explanations in everyday life, and that denying it would undermine much of our knowledge and understanding of the world. He

believes imagining something ex nihilo is self-deceptive as we cannot truly imagine the absence of all causal influence.

7. Craig argues that an actual infinite series cannot exist, and since a beginningless series of events in time would be an actual infinite series, it cannot exist. Morriston critiques this by pointing out that Craig's argument relies on Euclid's Maxim, which states that a set must have more elements than any of its proper subsets, and this maxim is not necessarily true for infinite sets.
8. Craig's scientific argument appeals to Big Bang cosmology, which suggests the universe has been expanding from a finite point in the past, indicating a beginning around 12-14 billion years ago. Morriston counters that at best, this shows the universe very likely had a beginning but doesn't prove it with certainty, and it doesn't rule out possibilities like an oscillating universe.
9. Craig argues that the first cause must be a person because mechanical causes operate only when the relevant conditions are in place, implying the universe would have no beginning if its cause were merely mechanical. A personal cause, with intention and will, could choose to bring the universe into existence at a specific time. He attributes qualities like power, intelligence, intentionality, and the ability to choose to this first cause.
10. Morriston raises the difficulty of explaining how God, as a spirit, could will the creation of a physical universe. The nature of the interaction between a non-physical being and the creation of matter and energy presents a conceptual challenge.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Critically evaluate the Kalam Cosmological Argument, addressing both its strengths and weaknesses as a proof for the existence of God. Consider the arguments for and against the premise that the universe began to exist.
2. Explore the significance and implications of the principle of sufficient reason in the context of the Cosmological Argument. Is it a self-evident truth, and what are the consequences of accepting or rejecting it?
3. Discuss the "gap problem" in the Cosmological Argument. Even if one accepts that the universe has a first cause, what challenges remain in identifying this cause with the God of classical theism?

4. Compare and contrast mechanistic and personal explanations for the existence of the universe. Why do proponents of the Kalam Argument argue for a personal explanation, and what are some potential difficulties with this view?
5. Analyze the interplay between philosophical arguments and scientific evidence (specifically Big Bang cosmology) in debates surrounding the beginning of the universe within the context of the Kalam Cosmological Argument.

5. FAQs on Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 2, Theistic Proofs, Part 1, Cosmological Argument, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: The Cosmological Argument

1. What is the Cosmological Argument for the existence of God? The Cosmological Argument is a philosophical argument that reasons from the existence of the universe (or cosmos) to the necessity of a first cause, which is often identified with God. It posits that the universe, as an existing entity, requires an explanation for its existence, and this explanation ultimately points to a necessary, uncaused being.

2. What is the Kalam Cosmological Argument, and what are its main premises? The Kalam Cosmological Argument is a specific version of the Cosmological Argument that focuses on the idea that the universe had a beginning. It originated with medieval Islamic philosophers and is formulated with the following premises: (1) Everything that begins to exist has a cause for its existence. (2) The universe began to exist. (3) Therefore, the universe has a cause for its existence.

3. What are the three basic questions raised concerning the Kalam Argument, and how are they addressed? The three basic questions are: (a) Does the cosmos actually have an explanation? (b) Can there be an explanation that does not involve a first cause? (c) Does the first cause of the cosmos need to be God? Defenders of the Kalam Argument, like Alexander Proust, address these by arguing that the cosmos does require an ultimate explanation based on the Principle of Sufficient Reason. They contend that this explanation cannot be merely scientific or mechanistic but must be a personal cause, implying a being with attributes such as atemporality, immutability, and omniscience, resembling the God of classical theism. They also argue against non-causal ultimate explanations and beginningless chains of finite causes.

4. What is the Principle of Sufficient Reason, and why is it important for the Cosmological Argument? The Principle of Sufficient Reason, as articulated by Proust, states that all contingently true propositions have explanations. A contingent truth is something that is true but could have been otherwise (e.g., the existence of the universe). This principle is crucial for the Cosmological Argument because it asserts that the universe, being a contingent entity, requires an explanation for its existence. Defenders argue that our everyday experiences and the foundations of much of our knowledge rely on this principle.

5. What are some philosophical arguments against the possibility of an infinite past, particularly as presented by William Lane Craig? William Lane Craig offers two main philosophical arguments against an infinite past. The first involves the idea that an actual infinite series cannot exist, using the analogy of an infinitely long shelf of books to illustrate a contradiction (where half of an infinite set equals the whole). The second argument claims that a series of events formed by adding one member after another cannot be actually infinite, and thus a beginningless series of temporal events is impossible.

6. How does Big Bang cosmology factor into the Kalam Argument's claim that the universe began to exist? Proponents of the Kalam Argument, like Craig, often cite Big Bang cosmology as a scientific confirmation of the universe's beginning. The redshift of light from distant galaxies suggests that the universe is expanding, implying that if we trace back in time, all matter and energy would converge to a finite point, indicating a beginning to the universe approximately 12-14 billion years ago.

7. Why do proponents of the Kalam Argument argue that the first cause of the universe must be a personal being? The argument for a personal first cause stems from the idea that mechanical causes operate only when the necessary conditions are present. If the universe had a mechanistic cause, it could potentially be eternal. Since the Kalam Argument posits a beginning to the universe, its cause must be of a different nature—a personal cause. This cause would possess the ability to choose to create, have intentions, and be intelligent and powerful enough to bring the universe into existence, aligning with the characteristics of a personal God.

8. What are some counterarguments or criticisms raised against the Kalam Cosmological Argument, particularly those associated with Wes Morriston? Critics like Wes Morriston challenge several aspects of the Kalam Argument. Regarding the impossibility of an actual infinite, Morriston argues that Craig's reasoning relies on Euclid's Maxim, which may not apply to infinite sets. He also suggests that the potential infinite divisibility of space implies the existence of actual infinities. Concerning the universe's beginning, Morriston contends that Big Bang cosmology only offers strong likelihood, not absolute proof, and doesn't rule out possibilities like an oscillating universe. Finally, he questions the straightforward move from a first cause to a personal God, raising conceptual difficulties about how a spiritual being could create a physical universe.