Lesson 2

The Existence of God—Cause & Effect

Apologetics Press Introductory Christian Evidences Correspondence Course

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD—CAUSE & EFFECT

One of the most basic issues that the human mind can consider is the question, "Does God exist?" Either God does exist or He does not. There is no middle ground. The atheist boldly states that God **does not** exist; the theist states just as boldly that He **does** exist; the agnostic says that there is not enough evidence to make a decision on the matter; and the skeptic doubts that God's existence can be proven with certainty. Who is correct? Does God exist or not?

The only way to answer this question, of course, is to seek out and examine the evidence. It certainly is reasonable to suggest that if there is a God, He would make available to us evidence adequate to the task of proving His existence. But does such evidence exist?

The theist holds to the view that adequate evidence is available to prove conclusively that God exists. However, when we use the word "prove," we do not mean to suggest that God's existence can be demonstrated scientifically in the same fashion that one might prove that a sack of potatoes weighs ten pounds or that a human heart has four distinct chambers within it. Such matters as the weight of a sack of vegetables, or the divisions within a muscle, are matters that may be verified empirically using the five senses. And while empirical evidence often is quite useful in establishing the validity of a case, it is not the **only** way of arriving at proof.

For example, all legal authorities recognize the validity of what is known as a *prima facie* case. Such a case exists when enough evidence is available to establish such a high probability of a fact being true that, unless that particular fact somehow can be refuted, it is considered proven beyond reasonable doubt. It is the contention of the theist that there is a vast body of extremely powerful evidence which forms an impregnable *prima facie* case for the existence of God—a case that simply cannot be refuted. We would like to present here a portion of the evidence that composes the *prima facie* case for the existence of God.

CAUSE AND EFFECT—THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Throughout human history, one of the most effective arguments for the existence of God has been the cosmological (cause and effect) argument, which addresses the fact that the Universe (Cosmos) is here and therefore must be explained.

The Universe exists and is real. Every rational person—including atheists and agnostics—must admit this point. So the question arises, "How did the Universe get here?" If a thing cannot create itself, then it is said to be "contingent" because it is dependent upon something outside of itself to explain its existence. The Universe, therefore, is a contingent entity since it cannot cause or explain its own existence. If the Universe did not create itself, it must have had a cause.

It is here that the Law of Cause and Effect is tied firmly to the cosmological argument. So far as scientific knowledge goes, natural laws have no exceptions. This certainly is true of the Law of Cause and Effect, which is the most universal and most certain of all laws. Simply put, the Law of Cause and Effect states that every material effect must have an adequate antecedent cause (that is, a cause that comes before the effect).

Material effects without adequate causes do not exist. Also, causes never occur **after** the effect. It is meaningless to speak of a cause following an effect, or an effect coming before a cause. In addition, the effect never is greater than the cause. That is why scientists say that every material effect must have an **adequate** cause. The river did not turn muddy because the frog jumped in; nor did the book fall from the table because the fly landed on it. These are not adequate causes. For whatever effects we see, we must suggest adequate causes—which brings us back to the original question: What **caused** the Universe?

There are only three possible answers to this question: (1) the Universe is eternal; it always has existed and always will exist; (2) the Universe is not eternal; rather, it created itself out of nothing; or (3) the Universe is not eternal, and did not create itself out of nothing, but instead was created by something (or Someone) outside of, and superior to, itself. These three options deserve serious consideration.

Is the Universe Eternal?

The most comfortable position for the person who does not believe in God is the idea that the Universe always has been here, and always will be here, because such an idea avoids not only the problem of a beginning or an ending, but also the need for any "first cause" (such as God). However, modern science recognizes that the Universe is not eternal; it had a beginning, and it will have an end.

Among the most important and well-established laws of science are the laws of thermodynamics. The First Law of Thermodynamics (often called the Law of the Conservation of Energy and/or Matter) states that neither matter nor energy can be created or destroyed. The Second Law of Ther-

modynamics (often called the Law of Increasing Entropy) states that everything is running down or wearing out. Energy is becoming less and less available for use. Entropy (a measure of randomness, disorderliness, or unstructuredness) is increasing. That, of course, means that eventually the Universe will "wear out." The Second Law points to: (1) a beginning when, for the first time, the Universe was in a state where all energy was available for use; and (2) an end in the future when no more energy will be available (referred to by scientists as a "heat death"), thus causing the universe to "die." In other words, the Universe is like a giant watch that has been wound up, but that now is winding down. The conclusion to be drawn from the scientific data is inescapable—the Universe is not eternal. Eternal entities do not have a beginning or an ending, and they do not "run down." One famous scientist, Robert Jastrow of NASA (who does not believe in God), wrote: "Modern science denies an eternal existence to the universe." He is correct. We now know scientifically that the Universe is not eternal.

Did the Universe Create Itself Out of Nothing?

In the past, it would have been practically impossible to find any reputable scientist who would be willing to suggest that the Universe simply created itself. Every scientist, as well as every schoolboy, understood the fact that no material thing can "create itself." The Universe is the **created**, not the **Creator**. And until fairly recently, it seemed there could be no disagreement on this point. However, so strong is the evidence that the Universe had a beginning (and thus a cause superior to itself) that some unbelieving scientists have suggested that the Universe literally created itself from nothing!

Naturally, such a proposal would seem absurd, because the basic principles of physics establish that the creation of something out of nothing is impossible. Be that as it may, those who do not believe in God have been willing to defend it. This suggestion, of course, is in clear violation of the First Law of Thermodynamics, which states that neither matter nor energy may be created or destroyed in nature. As astronomer Robert Jastrow put it, "The creation of matter out of nothing would violate a cherished concept in science—the principle of the conservation of matter and energy—which states that matter and energy can be neither created nor destroyed. Matter can be converted into energy, and vice versa, but the total amount of all matter and energy in the Universe must remain unchanged forever. It is difficult to accept a theory that violates such a firmly established scientific fact." Furthermore, science is based on observation, reproducibility, and empirical data. But when pressed for the empirical data that document the claim that the Universe created itself from nothing, unbelievers are forced to admit that no such evidence exists. The Universe did not create itself. Such an idea is absurd, both philosophically and scientifically.

Was the Universe Created?

Either the Universe had a beginning, or it did not. But all available evidence indicates that the Universe did, in fact, have a beginning. If the Universe had a beginning, it either had a cause or it did not. One thing we know for sure, however: it is correct—logically and scientifically—to acknowledge that the Universe had a cause, because the Universe is an effect and as such, it requires an adequate cause. Cause and effect states that wherever there is a material effect, there must be an adequate antecedent cause. Further indicated, however, is the fact that no effect can be greater than its cause.

Since it is obvious that the Universe is not eternal, and since it also is obvious that the Universe could not have created itself, the only remaining alternative is that the Universe **was created** by something, or Someone, that: (a) existed before it—that is, some eternal, uncaused First Cause; (b) is superior to it—since the created cannot be superior to the creator; and (c) is of a different nature—since the finite, dependent Universe of matter is unable to explain itself.

In connection with this, another fact should be considered. If there ever had been a time when absolutely **nothing** existed, then there would be nothing now, because it always is true that nothing produces nothing. In view of this, **since something exists now, it must follow logically that something has existed forever!**

Everything that humans know to exist can be classified as either **matter** or **mind**. There is no third alternative. The argument then, is this:

1. Everything that exists is either matter or mind.
2. Something exists now, so something eternal exists.
3. Therefore, either matter or mind is eternal.
   A. Either matter or mind is eternal.
   B. Matter is not eternal, as the evidence cited above shows.
   C. Thus, it is mind that is eternal.

Or, to reason somewhat differently:

1. Everything that exists is either dependent (that is, contingent) or independent (non-contingent).
2. If the Universe is not eternal, it is dependent (contingent).
3. The Universe is not eternal.
4. Therefore, the Universe is dependent (contingent).
   A. If the Universe is dependent, it must have been caused by something that is independent.
   B. But the Universe is dependent (contingent).
   C. Therefore, the Universe was produced by some eternal, independent (non-contingent) force.

In the past, atheistic evolutionists suggested that the mind is nothing more than a function of the brain, which is matter; thus the mind and the brain are the same, and matter is all that exists. However, that viewpoint no longer is credible scientifically, due in large part to the experiments of the renowned Australian physiologist Sir John Eccles. Dr. Eccles, who won the Nobel Prize for his discoveries regarding how certain portions (known as "neural synapses") of the brain work, documented that the mind is more than merely physical. He showed that the supplementary motor area of the brain may be fired by mere **intention** to do something, without the motor cortex (which controls muscle movements) operating. In effect, the mind is to the brain what a librarian is to a library. The former (the librarian) is not reducible to the latter (the library). Eccles explained his scientific methodology and his conclusions in *The Self and Its Brain*, a book he co-authored with the eminent British philosopher of science, Sir Karl Popper.

Scientifically, then, the choice is between matter only and more than matter as the explanation for the existence and orderliness of the Universe. The difference, therefore, between the two models is the difference between: (a) time, chance, and the natural properties of matter; or (b) design, creation, and the undeniable properties of organization and mind. In fact, when it comes to any particular case, there are only two scientific explanations for the origin of the order in the Universe and life in the Universe: either the order was **imposed upon** matter, or it naturally **resides within** matter.

To those who are willing to suggest that the order resides naturally within matter, we respond simply by saying that we certainly have not seen any evidence of such. Furthermore, the scientific and philosophical evidence that we do possess speaks loudly and clearly to the existence of an independent, eternal, self-existent Mind that created this Universe and everything within it.

Try as they might, skeptics are unable to avoid the obvious implications of the Law of Cause and Effect. However, that has not stopped them from trying, and they therefore have leveled countless arguments against it. For example, one such argument insists that the idea must be false because it is inconsistent with itself. The argument goes something like this. The principle of cause and effect says that everything must have a cause. On this concept, it then traces all things back to a First Cause, where it suddenly stops. But how may it do so and remain consistent? Why does the principle that "everything needs a cause" suddenly cease to be true? Why is it that this so-called First Cause does not likewise need some kind of cause? If everything else needs an explanation, or a cause, why does this First Cause also not need an explanation, or a cause? And if this First Cause does not need an explanation, why, then, do all other things need one?

We may offer two responses to such a complaint against the principle of causality. First, it is absolutely impossible logically to defend any concept of "infinite regress" that suggests an endless series of effects with no ultimate first cause. Philosophers have argued this point correctly for generations. Whatever begins to exist must have a cause. Nothing causeless happens.

Second, the complaint offered by unbelievers suggesting that the Law of Causality is inconsistent with itself is not a valid objection against the Law; rather it is an objection to an **incorrect statement** of that Law. If someone were to say, "Everything must have a cause," then the objection might be valid. But this is not what the Law of Causality says. It states that every **material effect** must have an **adequate antecedent cause**. Ultimately, at some point in the distant past there must be a pure First Cause that is non-material in nature.

CONCLUSION

The Law of Cause and Effect, and the cosmological argument based upon that law, have implications in every area of human life. The Universe is here, and therefore must have an adequate antecedent cause.

To illustrate the Law of Cause and Effect, one scientist, R.L. Wysong, referred to the following historical event. Some years ago, scientists were called to Great Britain to study orderly patterns of concentric rocks and holes —an archaeological find eventually designated as Stonehenge. As studies progressed, it became quite apparent that these patterns had been designed specifically for the purpose of allowing a variety of astronomical predictions. Many questions (for example, how ancient peoples were able to construct an astronomical observatory, how the data resulting from their studies were used, etc.) remain unsolved. But one thing we know with certainty—the **cause** of Stonehenge was **intelligent design**.

Now, compare Stonehenge to the situation paralleling the origin of the Universe, and of life itself. We study life, observe its functions, contemplate its complexity (which highly intelligent men cannot duplicate, even using the most advanced scientific methods and technology), and what are we to conclude? True, Stonehenge **might** have been produced by the erosion of a mountain, or by catastrophic natural forces working in conjunction with meteorites to produce rock formations and concentric holes. But what scientist or philosopher ever would suggest such an idea?

No one in his right mind could be convinced that Stonehenge "just happened" by accident, yet atheists, agnostics, and skeptics expect us to believe that this highly ordered, well-designed Universe (and the complicated life that it contains) "just happened." To accept such an idea is irrational because the conclusion is unreasonable, unwarranted, and unsupported by the facts at hand. The cause simply is not adequate to produce the effect.

This type of reasoning applies not only to the Universe, but also to those of us who inhabit it. We possess certain undeniable traits—the ability to reason, the ability to know, the ability to act rationally. But what is the origin of such critically important traits? The theory of evolution certainly has no adequate answer. As philosopher Norman Geisler put it: "The cause cannot give what it does not have to give. If my mind or ability to know is received, then there must be a Mind or Knower who gave it to me. The intellectual does not arise from the nonintellectual; something cannot arise from nothing."

Dr. Geisler is absolutely correct. If we as humans possess the capability to reason, then there must be an adequate cause standing behind that capability—a cause that possesses the ability to reason. If we as humans possess the capability to know (i.e. there is an intellectual as well as a physical side to our make-up), then there must be an adequate cause standing behind that capability—an intellectual cause that possesses the ability to know. If we as humans possess the capability to act rationally, then there must be an adequate cause standing behind that capability—a cause that is capable of acting, and acting rationally.

Simply put, the central message of the cosmological argument, and the Law of Cause and Effect upon which it is based, is this: Every material effect must have an adequate cause that came before it. The Universe is here; intelligent life is here; morality is here; ethics is here; love is here. What is their adequate, antecedent cause? Since the effect never can come before, or be greater than, the cause, then it stands to reason that the Cause of life must be a living Intelligence that Itself is moral, ethical, and loving. When the Bible records, "In the beginning, God," it makes known to us just such a First Cause.

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Questions—Lesson 2

TRUE OR FALSE

Write TRUE or FALSE in the blanks before the following statements.

_____ 1. God can exist and not exist at the same time.

_____ 2. The Universe does exist and is real.

_____ 3. Something that cannot create itself is called "contingent."

_____ 4. Science has proven that the Universe had a beginning.

_____ 5. Some material things do not have a cause.

_____ 6. The Universe created itself from nothing.

_____ 7. The cause always comes before, and always is greater than, its effect.

_____ 8. Matter and mind are the same thing.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Circle the correct answer(s).

1. Which of the following terms applies to the Universe?
   (a) Eternal (b) Self-Creating
   (c) Dependent (d) Independent

2. Every material thing must have a cause described by which of the following phrases?
   (a) Greater than itself (b) Less than itself
   (c) Equal to itself (d) None of these

3. Everything that exists falls into which **two** categories below?
   (a) Matter (b) Particle (c) Animal (d) Mind

4. Which ancient group of rocks was used for astronomical predictions?
   (a) The Great Barrier Reef (b) Statue of Liberty
   (c) Stonehenge (d) Rock City

5. If a material thing exists, then it must have had which **two** of the following?
   (a) Effect (b) Cause (c) Beginning (d) Car engine

FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. The _____ exists and is _____.
2. Either God _____ exist or He does not _____. There is no _____ ground.
3. If the Universe did not _____ itself, it must have a _____.
4. The First Law of _____ states that matter and _____ can neither be _____ nor destroyed.
5. The _____ did not create itself. Such an idea is _____, both philosophically and _____.

MATCHING

Match the related concepts (place the correct letter in the space provided by each number).

1. ____ A case that cannot be refuted
2. ____ The Law of Cause and Effect
3. ____ Had a beginning, and will have an end
4. ____ Law of Conservation of Energy
5. ____ Cannot create itself
6. ____ Must come before the effect
7. ____ Things are running down
8. ____ Only thing that could be eternal

A. Universe

B. Matter

C. Cause

D. Mind

E. Cosmological Argument

F. First Law of Thermodynamics

G. *Prima facie*

H. Second Law of Thermodynamics

NOTES/COMMENTS

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