DOES GOD EXPLAIN THE UNIVERSE?

“The question of why anything at all exists is the most profound question of philosophy. The philosopher Derek Parfit says, ‘No question is more sublime than why there is a universe, why there is anything rather than nothing.’ Typically atheists have answered this question by saying that the universe is just eternal and uncaused. But there are good reasons, both philosophically and scientifically, to think that the universe began to exist.” [William Lane Craig (WLC), in a debate with Christopher Hitchens at Biola University in 2010]

Here we see WLC, regarded even by many atheists as the most formidable of all Christian apologists, obscuring the difference between “anything at all” and the observable universe. For no sensible person, theist or atheist, would say that only things that we know (or believe) to exist actually do exist. There are many speculative ideas about “where” the Big Bang and the origin of the universe “came from.” But by far the least justifiable is that some superhuman being created it. Even if there were such a being, it would have to have pre-existed and we may then well ask “why is there this superhuman/divine being rather than nothing?”

“Philosophically, the idea of an infinite past seems absurd. Just think about it: If the universe never began to exist, 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 the twentieth century, wrote, ‘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 can’t go back forever. Rather, the universe must have begun to exist.” [WLC, ibid]

WLC’s mathematics is about a century out of date since it evidently takes no notice of the work of German mathematician Georg Cantor in transfinite numbers. Worse, WLC makes Hilbert appear to be dismissive of the idea of the infinite when, in fact, Hilbert was a contemporary of Cantor and defended Cantor against the critics who, like WLC, said that infinities were absurdities. WLC’s argument simply echoes, intentionally or ignorantly, similar objections that were once made against the alleged “absurdity” of zero (which appears for the first time in English in the 16th Century!), of negative numbers, and of i, the square root of -1, the basis of imaginary (the adjective was at first applied derogatorily!) numbers.

The further irony is that what WLC calls “absurd” figures prominently in theism, including WLC’s favored Christianity. Georg Cantor himself equated what he called “absolute infinity” with an apparently Spinozan conception of God. And it is easy to see that, in the spirit of mathematics, we may simply substitute “God” for “the universe” in WLC’s equation. If we do so we see that WLC’s own argument proves that his deity cannot be infinite and so “must have begun to exist.”

“What makes the Big Bang so startling is that it represents the origin of the universe from literally nothing, for all matter and energy, even physical space and time themselves, came into being at the Big Bang. As the physicist P. C. W. Davies explains, ‘The coming into being of the universe, as discussed in modern science, is not just a matter of imposing some sort of organization upon a previous incoherent state but literally the coming into being of all physical things from nothing.’
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Game Night: The regular game night crew meets nearly every Friday night at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Risk, Rummikub, and other fun games!

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“Seek and ye shall find,’ I remember being told in church as a young lad. I thought it was a sinister injunction because it’s all too likely to be true. We are pattern-seeking mammals and primates. If we can’t get good evidence we’ll go for junk evidence. If we can’t get a real theory we’ll go with a conspiracy theory.”

- Christopher Hitchens (1949-2011)