

Reviews

THE KALĀM COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT by William Lane Craig. *Macmillan*, 1979. pp x + 216 £12.00

Dr Craig has chosen to concentrate on one currently neglected argument according to which the universe had a beginning in time from which it follows that God exists. His book falls into two parts. In Part I the genesis of the *kalām* argument is located in the work of medieval Arabic writers and there are accounts of the argument as advanced by al-Kindi, Saadia and al-Ghazali. Part II is an assessment of the argument. Finally there are appendices on the the argument and Zeno's paradoxes and the argument and Kant's first antinomy. According to Craig the *kalām* argument is successful: 'Since everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence and since the universe began to exist, we conclude, therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence ... Transcending the entire universe there exists a cause which brought the universe into being *ex nihilo* ... The *kalam* cosmological argument leads us to a personal Creator of the universe, but as to whether this Creator is omniscient, good, perfect, and so forth we shall not inquire.' (pp 147, 152)

Craig's book has a lot to recommend it. For one thing it provides useful accounts of opinions in theology, philosophy and science which are bound to help readers first approaching the issues involved in the view that the universe was created at some time past. Craig is also interested in considering arguments for God's existence – no bad thing and a welcome alternative to the varieties of dogmatic *a priorism* which aim to sabotage in advance of a hearing any attempt to see whether a rational argumentative case can be made in favour of belief in God. It is also good that Craig has seen through what could be taken as the Humean argument for the assertion that something can begin to exist without a cause. In this connection (unfortunately with a slight misquotation) he cites G.E.M. Anscombe's helpful paper 'Whatever Has a Beginning of Existence

Must Have a Cause': Hume's Argument Exposed' (*Analysis*, 34, 1974). According to one interpretation of Hume's argument it is possible for something to come into existence without a cause since one can imagine something coming into existence without a cause. But as Anscombe observes, 'if I say I can imagine a rabbit coming into being without a parent rabbit, well and good: I imagine a rabbit coming into being, and our observing that there is no parent rabbit about. But what am I to imagine if I imagine a rabbit coming into being without a cause? Well, I just imagine a rabbit coming into being. That this is the imagination of a rabbit coming into being without a cause is nothing but, as it were, the title of the picture. Indeed I can form an image and give my picture that title. But from my being able to do that, nothing whatever follows about what is possible to suppose "without contradiction or absurdity" as holding in reality.' Anscombe's point is important. It raises the question of whether or not it is coherent to talk about things beginning to exist without a cause.

So far, then, so good. But I should now want to suggest that Craig's book is fundamentally unsatisfactory. For the *kalām* argument as Craig presents and defends it is highly suspect considered as an argument for God's existence.

Craig's argument asserts that the universe has existed for a finite time from which it follows that God exists. But what is this universe about which Craig talks so easily? And what is involved in saying that it exists? These questions, which raise problems in areas like that of philosophical logic, are not really dealt with by Craig. But they would need a pretty thorough airing in a rigorous presentation of the kind of argument for God envisaged by him. Craig might reply that we are committed to belief in God if we concede both that the universe had a beginning and

that whatever has a beginning has a cause. But if the universe had a beginning and if everything that begins to exist has a cause it still does not follow that everything that comprised the universe at its beginning has one and the same cause. It looks in fact as if the *kalām* argument as Craig presents it allows for a pantheon of deities. Craig might reply that this is not so since the universe at its beginning was one thing. But he provides no argument for such a view. He might also say that Ockham's razor makes it reasonable to believe in one God rather than a collection of gods. But again he does not argue the matter. Nor (astonishingly) does he give any reason for supposing that the God to which he concludes is not now defunct. For he moves without demur from 'the universe was caused to exist' to 'what caused the universe to exist now exists'. At best, therefore, Craig has shown that the universe was brought about intentionally.

To take matters further, however, I doubt whether he has shown even this. The above use of 'intentionally' is meant to latch on to Craig's assertion that if the universe was caused to exist then the cause of the universe must have been personal. But why should one accept this assertion? Craig appeals to the principle that when two different states of affairs are possible

and when one of them comes about it must be that the realization of the one possibility rather than the other is due to a personal agent who freely chooses one possibility rather than another. But (passing over the difficulties involved in the notion of an agent choosing among possibilities in the absence of the universe) this principle is clearly debatable taken simply as a premise of an argument for God. It is equally possible either that I will die of cancer or that I will not (though things would, of course, be different if we substitute 'probable' for 'possible'). But if I do die of cancer why should anyone believe that my death is caused by a personal agent who freely chooses that I shall die of cancer? To take another example, when the Titanic began its last journey it was equally possible either that it would sink or that it would arrive at its destination. As we know, the Titanic sank, and it seems perfectly in order to say that the sinking of the Titanic was caused by an ice-berg. At present I presume that ice-bergs do not choose to sink ships, that they are in no sense personal agents. But possibly someone is writing a thesis to the contrary even now. Maybe their conclusions will throw light on divine impassibility.

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THE DISSUADERS by D. W. D. Shaw SCM 1978 pp 87 £1.10

This slim volume, subtitled *Three Explanations of Religion*, is a most lucid essay in apologetics. The author notes the general vague assumption among Modern People that religion has been explained away by Modern Science. He sets out to show that neither Freud nor Marx nor Durkheim, who for different reasons saw religious consciousness as false consciousness, can be said to have succeeded in explaining religion away.

Freud, Marx and Durkheim have a chapter each. The formula is the same for each chapter: the thinker's attitude to the phenomenon of religion is presented in outline, and is seen to be a reductionist one (people may think they're worshipping their heavenly Father, etc. . .); the presuppositions and assumptions of each

such attitude are discussed and found to fall short in some ways (e.g. religion is not always the sanctification of the status quo: what about Amos and Co?); but then the positive lessons which can be learned from the critique in question are outlined (e.g. if we understand, with Durkheim, how closely religion and society are intertwined, then we will realise that 'unless the theological vocabulary is related to society's own vocabulary, it will not communicate'. p. 75).

I have two criticisms of this otherwise admirable tract. One is that it seems to presuppose this kind of a picture: there's a given, fairly clear-cut phenomenon called religion (usually, in this book, the Christian religion) on the one hand; and a new, potentially threatening and partly help-