

FEATURE: Did the Universe Have a Beginning?

- VOICE: Professor, how did the universe begin? In fact, did the universe have a beginning, or has it always existed?
- PROF.: Those are some of the most important questions that humans have asked throughout the centuries. Fortunately, now we have better answers than the people who originally asked them.
- FORMAT: THEME AND ANNOUNCEMENT
- VOICE: Did the universe have a beginning? If so, how did it begin?
- PROF.: The science and philosophy of cosmology attempts to answer that important question. And one of the best answers has emerged very recently – provided by a world-famous philosopher, the late Dr. Antony Flew.
- VOICE: Wasn't he the man who wrote a book entitled *The Presumption of Atheism* in 1976? Didn't he say he would presume that God does not exist, unless evidence convinced him otherwise?
- PROF.: Yes. But Prof. Flew's life motto was "Follow the evidence, wherever it may lead." As he followed the evidence, his thinking developed so much that he wrote a sequel in 2007, entitled *There Is a God*. With a subtitle of "How the world's most notorious atheist changed his mind," that book culminated his lifetime of research and thinking, before he died in 2010.
- VOICE: What evidence influenced him to change his mind?
- PROF.: For centuries, scientists and scholars argued about whether the universe was eternal, or if it had a beginning. But in the 20th century, astronomers discovered a way to stop merely speculating, and to arrive at an answer based on evidence.
- VOICE: Are you referring to the discovery of microwave radio waves that seem to have originated when the universe was created?
- PROF.: Yes, the more formal term for those waves is "cosmic background radiation." Prof. Flew explained, "When I first met the big bang theory as an atheist, it seemed to me the theory made a big difference because it suggested that the universe had a beginning and that the first sentence in Genesis ('In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth') was related to an event in the universe. As long as the universe could be comfortably thought to be...without beginning, ...there would be no need to postulate something else that produced the whole thing."

- VOICE: So if the universe had no beginning, it wouldn't need someone to create it. An atheist could be comfortable with that idea.
- PROF.: But the evidence changed all that. If the universe had a beginning, it became entirely logical to ask *what produced* this beginning. This changed the situation radically.
- Flew predicted that atheists would try hard to interpret that discovery in some way that wouldn't require a Creator such as God. But, in Flew's words, "I admitted that believers could, equally reasonably, welcome the big bang cosmology as tending to confirm their prior belief that in the beginning the universe was created by God."
- VOICE: Hadn't cosmologists based some theories on the assumption that the universe had always existed? Didn't they resist having to discard their old theories and accept a beginning?
- PROF.: Yes. But soon the evidence that the universe had had a beginning, became too strong to resist. Later, astronomers recognized that dozens of characteristics of the universe coordinated together so well, that they seemed to have been engineered and orchestrated in a fine-tuned arrangement.
- VOICE: I've been reading that some scientists have a newer hypothesis. They recognize that so many features in the universe need to be exactly as they are, or life could not exist. But instead of thinking that a genius-level Creator could have made all these details perfectly the first time, they speculate that nature made billions of attempts to make a universe. They hypothesize that most of them failed, but we live in the one that succeeded.
- PROF.: Yes. That's the hypothesis of "multiple universes," or a "multiverse."
The problem with that is that the one universe we know, is *so extremely complex*, that scientists calculate that the number of universes could be as high as *10 to the 500th power*.¹
- VOICE: (SURPRISED) The number 1, *followed by 500 zeroes*?
- PROF.: Yes. They reason that, if there were that many universes, it wouldn't be surprising if one of them developed with characteristics that enabled life. That's how atheists prefer to explain the livable universe where we exist.
- VOICE: When Prof. Flew tried to follow where the evidence leads, what did he think about that possibility?

1 10^{500} .

- PROF.: He wrote, “The postulation of multiple universes...is a truly desperate alternative. If the existence of *one* universe requires an explanation, *multiple universes* require a *much bigger explanation*: the problem is increased by the factor of whatever the total number of universes is.”
- VOICE: It expands the “Why is there something instead of nothing?” question. Instead of asking why there is *one* universe instead of nothing, the multiverse speculation asks “Why are there 10^{500} universes instead of nothing?”
- PROF.: Prof. Flew compared that to an excuse some students tell their teachers, to explain why they don't have their homework ready to bring to class. He said, “It seems a little like the case of a schoolboy whose teacher doesn't believe his dog ate his homework. So he replaces the first version with the story that a *pack* of dogs – too many to count – ate his homework.”
- VOICE: (LAUGHS) So Prof. Flew calls the multiverse concept “a truly desperate alternative.”
- PROF.: Yes. He calls the existence of a precisely coordinated universe, “Something too big for science to explain.”
- VOICE: That's an interesting statement. The existence of a precisely coordinated universe is “something too big for science to explain.”
- PROF.: A man who recently received a prize of more than a million dollars expressed a similar thought. Polish cosmologist and philosopher Michael Heller was awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion in a ceremony in Buckingham Palace.
Dr. Heller talks about “the root of all possible causes.”
- VOICE: “The root of all possible causes”?
- PROF.: He analyzes the way some people try to answer the question, “Why is there something instead of nothing?”
On the Templeton website, Heller reasons, “Various processes in the universe can be displayed as a succession of states in such a way that the preceding state is a cause of the succeeding one.” Some people try to explain the existence of the universe at any given moment, by the fact that it existed at an earlier moment – and so on, back through infinite time.
- VOICE: In other words, the universe exists now, because it existed before.
- PROF.: Dr. Heller answers that, yes, one event does lead to another. The universe exists now, because it existed previously.
But at some time we have to realize that the chain of creation *begins somewhere!*

VOICE: At one moment, nothing existed. At the next moment, the first object existed. As Nobel Prize-winning physicist Arno Penzias said, there was “*a discrete moment of creation from nothing!*”

PROF.: Dr. Heller says that if we look for the cause of the mathematical laws that cause the universe, “we are back in the Great Blueprint of God's thinking [and engineering] the universe.” When we ask the question, “Why is there something rather than nothing?”, “we are not asking about a cause like all other causes. We are asking about *the root of all possible causes.*”

That’s why Prof. Flew said this ultimate beginning was *something too big for science to explain.*

VOICE: Have other scholars reached that same conclusion?

PROF.: Yes. Philosopher of science John Leslie [LES-lee] has shown that none of today's fashionable cosmological speculations eliminates the possibility of a creator.

It is very probable that, if there is a God, he would make something of the size and complexity of a universe. It is very unlikely that a universe would exist without a cause.

Therefore, the argument from the existence of the universe to the existence of God is good logical reasoning.

VOICE: “Why is there something instead of nothing?” is a question that needs an explanation.

PROF.: And if there are multiple universes instead of just one, that requires even more explaining.

VOICE: That's an excellent point: “If there are multiple universes instead of just one, that requires even more explaining.”

PROF.: So as we analyze the intricacy of the universe and the mathematical laws that control it, we realize that the universe is “something too big for science to explain.” A simpler and more logical explanation is that we were made by a genius-level Creator – the kind of being that the Bible calls “God.”

FORMAT: THEME AND ANNOUNCEMENT

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