~~ATHEISM~~
ON
TRIAL

LOUIS
MARKOS

HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
EUGENE, OREGON

Copyrighted material

Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover by Jason Gabbert Design

Atheism on Trial

Copyright © 2018 Louis Markos

Published by Harvest House Publishers
Eugene, Oregon 97408
www.harvesthousepublishers.com

ISBN 978-0-7369-7307-6 (pbk.)
ISBN 978-0-7369-7308-3 (eBook)

All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 / BP-SK / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Copyrighted material

CONTENTS

Copyrighted material

PART ONE:

The Nature of the Universe

Copyrighted material

CHAPTER ONE

In the Beginning

Being the descendant of four grandparents who were born in Greece and immigrated to America around 1930, it was perhaps natural that I would become a lifelong lover of Greek mythology. The stories of Zeus and Athena, Daedalus and Icarus, Apollo and Daphne, Theseus and the Minotaur, Perseus and Medusa: these were the stories that shaped my dreams and, in many ways, my sense of myself. Over time, my love for the Greek myths expanded to take in Roman mythology as well; however, many years would pass before I felt the desire to move outside the Greco-Roman world to seriously explore the myths of other nations.

When I finally did, I must admit, I was a bit horrified. I didn't have to read too far into Norse mythology before I learned, to my dismay, that the first man and woman had dropped out of the armpits of a frost giant; or, in a different version, had been licked out of the salt ice by a great cow. Egyptian mythology was even worse, with its primal deity rising spontaneously out of a mound of earth and masturbating the other primal deities into existence. Indian mythology proved even stranger and more disturbing, with goddesses of death dancing on human skulls and an inexorable cycle of creation and destruction from which there was no escape.

No loving gods here, no higher purpose, no special creation.

Copyrighted material

It wasn't much better than the Darwinian myth I had absorbed growing up in secular schools, with single-cell organisms arising, somehow or other, out of the slime and evolving, randomly and purposelessly, into human creatures bereft of any special status. I would stick with my beloved Greek myths, thank you very much.

That is, until I looked more closely at them and found that, for all their sense of fun and adventure, they were marked by the same uncaring deities, the same lack of a greater purpose or plan, the same horrible deeds perpetrated by those who were supposed to be our divine standard bearers: Kronos, the father of Zeus, for example, castrated his own father, Ouranos, to seize control of the heavens! Worse yet, it turned out that Greek mythology agreed with the other myths *and* with the Darwinists that the supernatural did not create the natural, but that impersonal nature had, somehow or other, given birth, not just to man, but to the gods as well.

But now I'm moving too fast and getting ahead of myself. Let me slow down and trace the story step by step.

Out of Chaos or Out of Nothing?

The Bible alone of all ancient books makes the remarkable claim that "in the beginning, God." Every other book holds that in the beginning there was matter. Contrary to popular opinion, the primal myths of Greece and Rome, Egypt and Babylon, India and Scandinavia do not begin with an eternal God or gods who have always existed and who created the world out of nothing. That vision arose, not from the empirical observations and experiences of primitive man, but from the revealed words of Genesis.

The ancient myths of our forefathers do not teach creationism; to the contrary, they teach evolution. The divine and human drama invariably begins with chaos: that is to say, undifferentiated matter. Out of that purely physical matter all other things, including

Copyrighted material

the gods, are born. Once they have come into being, those gods often take part in the shaping of the chaos, but they are themselves products *of* that chaos. The gods, though they often have no ending, have a definite beginning. If they are immortal, they are, like biblical angels, immortal in only one direction.

Now, once the gods exist and are established in power, they will, in one way or another, manipulate the natural world and give birth to the human world. And primitive man will use those divine tales to explain why things are the way they are: why, for example, there are thunder and lightning, sunrise and sunset, wolves and dolphins. The gods will be seen as taking an active part, often a meddling part, in the affairs of men, and a high premium will therefore be put on appeasing those gods.

Still, let me emphasize again the too-often overlooked fact that the Bible is unique in its insistence that matter has not always existed but was brought into being, *out of nothing* (*ex nihilo* in Latin), by an eternal Creator. It took several thousand years for science to catch up to this revelation and discover the shocking reality of the Big Bang: namely, that space and time—matter and minutes—*began* at a specific moment some fourteen billion years ago.

I will have much more to say about the Big Bang; for now, let it suffice to point out that the Bible and the Nicene Creed—which affirms that God is "the maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible"—far from mirroring mythology, lines up with modern scientific discoveries in physics and cosmology.

> In sharp contrast to the myths of the ancient world and the theory of evolution, the Bible teaches that the universe was created *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing"). In this longstanding debate, the modern scientific discovery of the Big Bang supports the Bible.

Copyrighted material

The Natural and the Supernatural

I can still recall the moment that I realized, in a flash of insight, that mythology lined up not with the Bible, but with Darwinism in its foundational belief that the ultimate origin of all things is physical rather than spiritual. That realization stunned me for a while, and threatened to rob myth of its awe and wonder. But only for a short time. I soon realized that mythology, despite its beginnings in chaos, nevertheless presented an enchanted world shot through with divine interference. Reality existed and worked on two levels: the physical and the metaphysical, the natural and the supernatural, the mortal and the immortal, the human and the divine. Within that two-story system, appeals are made to the gods to explain everything from droughts to earthquakes, hurricanes to plagues. Religion dominates society, often leading, it is true, to ignorance, superstition, and paranoia, but more often inspiring obedience, piety, and gratitude.

Although the endlessly repackaged charge that religion is an outgrowth of superstition and that the two represent nothing more than the two sides of the same coin does not square with history, I will here concede that the two *can* and often *have* gone hand in hand, and that, as such, secular critics of the religious worldview have been partly justified in their critiques. Religious people, whether pagan pantheists or Christian monotheists, can easily fall into the fallacy of ascribing every single natural event to a direct supernatural cause. And when they go to that extreme, it should not be surprising that their immoderate, excessive action often provokes an equal and opposite reaction.

Such a reaction occurred in the sixth and fifth centuries BC along the coasts of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), Greece, and Italy. In such bustling port cities as Ephesus and Miletus (Asia Minor), Elea and Crotona (Italy), and Akagras (Sicily), the free

Copyrighted material

flow of fresh, culturally diverse ideas from across the Mediterranean inspired a group of scientists and philosophers—the words were used identically at this stage—to fashion a new, naturalistic view of the world that contrasted sharply with the more established supernaturalism of the priests, soothsayers, poets, and common people. In the works of Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Zeno, Pythagoras, Empedocles, and Anaxagoras, and Leucippus and Democritus—a group collectively referred to as the Pre-Socratics—man's gaze is turned away from the heavens and focused back on the earth. Answers are to be found not in the realm of the spiritual, but in the realm of the physical.

Perhaps the best and fullest embodiment of the supernatural view against which the Pre-Socratics reacted can be found in the two mini-epics of Hesiod, a late eighth-century Greek poet-farmer who was likely a contemporary of Homer: *Theogeny* and *Works and Days*. Like Homer, who lived in Asia Minor, Hesiod looked to the actions of the Olympian gods of the Greek pantheon (Zeus, Poseidon, Hades, Hera, Aphrodite, Apollo, etc.) as a way of explaining events on earth.

Unlike Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, however, where the gods play a dramatic role in furthering the plot and in assisting (or setting up obstacles in the way of) the mortal heroes, Hesiod's *Theogeny* presents the gods as more removed forces that initiate, guide, and direct. The *Theogeny* (Greek for "birth of the gods") is an etiological poem, one that seeks to trace the origins and causes of things. It is in *Theogeny* and *Works and Days* (a sort of poetic farmer's almanac) that Hesiod explains how Hades's kidnapping of Persephone, daughter of Demeter ("mother earth"), led to the seasonal cycle, how human creativity was born when Prometheus stole the fire from the gods and gave it to man, and how all the evils of the world

Copyrighted material

were set loose when Pandora opened a box. On a more subtle level, Hesiod shows as well how strife and reconciliation in the heavens manifest themselves on the earth. As in Homer, our earthly existence is played out in the midst of a two-story universe.

> The ancient pre-Christian religious worldview is best summed up by Hesiod and Homer's vision of a two-storied universe, where the divine, the immortal, and the supernatural affect and interact with the human, the mortal, and the natural.

The First Evolutionists

In reaction to this two-tiered worldview, the Pre-Socratics, like their evolutionary heirs, set about to fashion a new scientific-philosophical method for exploring the nature of reality that did not rely on, or even take into account, the actions and intrigues of the divine pantheon. Though the complex visions of Pythagoras and Parmenides retained a strongly spiritual flavor, the other Pre-Socratics looked to material explanations for why things are the way they are. This was particularly true of Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, a group known collectively as the Milesians, since they lived in the cosmopolitan city of Miletus.

Thales (c. 624–c. 546 BC), universally hailed as the father of science in the West, initiated this new worldview by asking a simple question: What is the *arche* (Greek for "origin" or "first principle") of all things? Although, as I explained above, mythology begins with chaos (matter) rather than gods (spirit) and is ignorant of the biblical creation *ex nihilo*, a religious writer like Hesiod would nevertheless have chosen one or more of the gods as his explanatory *arche*. Ultimate questions could not be answered by referring only to physical matter; divine intention and intervention needed to be factored in.

Copyrighted material

Not so Thales. He insisted that the *arche* was material and then argued that that material *arche* was water. Out of water came the other three "elements" that make up the building blocks of life: earth, air, and fire. Nothing outside these four elements—and the endless combinations and permutations formed by their joinings and disjoinings—was needed to account for the world and life as we know it.

Whereas religious writers like Hesiod wanted to know the *who* and *why* of things, Thales limited himself, and all those thinkers who followed in his wake, to the more impersonal, mechanistic questions of *what* and *how*. Though Thales did not espouse atheism, he was not interested in the plans or desires or motivations of a supernatural designer (or designers); he was interested only in the physical, mechanical processes by which things were formed and broken.

In this, Thales was followed by his pupil Anaximander (c. 611–c. 547 BC), who, coming somewhat closer to modern nontheistic thinkers like Carl Sagan, posited that the *arche* was an amorphous mass that he called the unlimited (or boundless) and that he believed predated the four elements. The third Milesian scientist-philosopher, Anaximenes (sixth-century BC), backed away from Anaximander's cosmic soup to posit air, rather than water, as the *arche*. More importantly, Anaximenes worked out a more detailed system for exactly how the four elements performed their changes from one form to the other.

Anaximenes lined up the four elements from the coldest and heaviest at the bottom to the hottest and lightest at the top: earth, water, air, fire. Through a process he called rarefaction, earth gave way to water which gave way to air which gave way to fire. By an opposite process he called condensation (or compression), the elements shifted downward from fire to air to water to earth. Thus,

Copyrighted material

airy clouds gather (compress) together to produce rain which waters the earth, while ice (solid) melts into water (liquid) which itself, at the right temperature, transforms into steam (gas). This dual process proceeded impersonally and mechanically, unplanned and unguided by any kind of divine hand or supernatural will. Like Thales before him, Anaximenes did not declare himself an atheist; he simply made God (or the gods) irrelevant to the creation and transformation of life.

The reductive theories of the Milesians—reductive because they reduced the vast mysteries of life to the random motions and changes of four material building blocks—were reduced even further by the atomists Leucippus (fl. 535 BC) and Democritus (c. 460–c. 370 BC). Rather than speak of a single *arche*, they argued that only two things exist in the universe: atoms and the void. By atom (*a-tom*, a Greek word that means "cannot be cut") they meant a tiny piece of matter that could not be subdivided any further. These bits of "stuff," these cosmic pebbles moved—or, to be more precise, fell—ceaselessly through empty space: that is, through the void. As the atoms moved, they collided with one another to form all things.

Though Leucippus and Democritus worked diligently to refine their atomic view of the universe, it would be left to the first-century BC Roman poet Lucretius (c. 98–55) to take their atomic theories—as passed down through the Epicureans—and rework them into a grand sweeping vision. In his epic poem *De Rerum Natura* (*On the Nature of Things*), written in the same meter as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, Lucretius conjures for his readers a cosmic dance that, while being rigidly materialistic, shocks and enthralls the reader into a kind of metaphysical awe.

Copyrighted material

> Like modern evolutionists, the Pre-Socratics narrowed and reduced science to questions of what and how, rather than who and why, and insisted that all phenomena be ascribed to physical, material causes.

From Atoms and the Void to Ones and Zeroes

Let me pause here and admit that I am very much a fan of Lucretius, even if I disagree sharply with his worldview. He was a skilled poet who magically transformed ideas and images best suited to a dull science textbook into the matter of a great epic; in fact, so skilled was he that he almost singlehandedly made Latin poetry as respectable and pure as Greek poetry, thus paving the way for one of the four or five greatest poems ever written, Virgil's *Aeneid*. Still, for all my love of Lucretius the poet, I must, for the sake of seeking after the truth about us and our world, critique him as I would Darwin or Carl Sagan, Stephen Jay Gould or Richard Dawkins.

Although Lucretius, in the now-familiar mode of the modern new atheist, is both censorious and dismissive of religious thinkers who would look to the gods for answers and explanations, he is also highly critical of Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes. Thus, while championing their materialism and their search for a physical *arche*, he sharply criticizes their attempts to identify that arche with one of the four elements. In a passage dripping with irony and condescension, he takes the Pre-Socratic Heraclitus (fl. 500 BC) to task for asserting that that *arche* was fire. He even ridicules the Pre-Socratic Empedocles (c. 484–424 BC) for his attempts to refine the condensation/rarefaction processes of Anaximenes into an elaborate system of attraction and repulsion.

According to Lucretius, all these early pioneers missed out on

Copyrighted material

two important scientific truths: (1) that the true building block of life (the indivisible atom) is far smaller than any of the four elements, and (2) that there exists a universal void through which these atoms move. Because the four elements are in constant change, they must themselves be composed of something else that does not change. For Lucretius, all of this is obvious to anyone who has eyes to see and ears to hear. No, we cannot see the atoms—they are, as we would say today, microscopic. But we can see and experience their effects, as we do with wind or the fragrance of a flower. Some things grow while others decay; we do not see that growth or decay, but we can infer by the result that atoms have been added or taken away.

Lucretius takes obvious pleasure in refuting the Pre-Socratics and exposing the gaps in their logic. Still, he clearly prefers their naturalistic attempts to describe the workings of the world, error-ridden though they be, to what he considered the metaphysical ravings of prophets and oracles. Indeed, he treats Empedocles as a saintly man with a godlike mind. Like his heirs among the new atheists, Lucretius looks to scientists, rather than priests, as the true seekers after truth, and therefore as the ones who should guide society forward.

I will return many times to Lucretius's epic in the chapters that follow, but I hope that this brief overview will make clear that materialism is by no means a discovery of the twentieth century or even of the Enlightenment. From the sixth-century Thales, to Epicurus, the founder of Epicureanism who flourished around 300 BC, to the first-century Lucretius, who based his poem closely on the teachings of Epicurus (c. 341–271 BC), the desire to explain all things in terms of physical, material, natural processes was strong, carefully nuanced, and uncompromising. And it did not refrain from heaping scorn on religious thinkers who insisted that neither

Copyrighted material

our world nor we ourselves could be accounted for apart from the supernatural and/or the divine.

Whether the vehicle of generation be the interplay of the four elements, the movement of atoms through the void, or the accumulation of small incremental changes selected for survival, the materialist desire has remained the same for over two-and-a-half millennia: to construct a purely natural system that can proceed apart from any supernatural design, guidance, or purpose. How is that possible? For Empedocles it was the impersonal forces of love and strife that drew the elements together or drove them apart; for Lucretius, it was the arbitrary swerve of the atom as it fell through the void that caused it to collide with other atoms and form various compounds; for Darwin it was the blind process of natural selection that "decided" which random changes would be passed down to the next generation; for the modern evolutionist, it is the chance mutations each time the DNA replicates itself that provide the vehicle for micro- and macroevolution.

If I may be somewhat playful, I would compare the materialist systems of Empedocles, Lucretius, Darwin, and Steven Jay Gould et al. to the transporter in Star Trek. Even a child understands immediately and intuitively the concept behind the transporter: (1) a man's body is broken down into a million atoms; (2) those atoms are projected through space; (3) they are collected back together and reassembled. Now, even a minute of impartial and commonsensical thought will reveal that neither the complexity of the human brain nor the insubstantiality of the human soul could be successfully broken down and reassembled. Yet we accept the possibility—not because it is physically possible, but because we can *imagine* it happening. We can make a mental picture of it in our brain, and we can verbalize the process in words.

Today our ability to imagine the possibility of atomism (or the

Copyrighted material

transporter) has been strengthened by the invention of binary technology. Amazingly, all the information contained in a symphony or an epic film can be reduced to a series of ones and zeros and imprinted on a CD or DVD. Our knowledge that such things can be makes it far easier to give credence to the atomism of Lucretius, since atoms and the void appear to line up nicely with the ones and zeros that provide us with such stunningly lifelike sounds and images. But then we must not forget that binary codes were invented and put into use by intelligent purposeful agents, not blind, random chance. Furthermore, binary code works with nonliving inorganic material, not with trees or ants or sheep, and certainly not with living, breathing men and women.

No, it is no more possible to transport a human being with all his physical and nonphysical complexity by reducing him to binary atoms than it is for blind, unguided forces to produce something as intricate as the human eye or the DNA code through the random collision of elements, atoms, or mutations. Indeed, even the most intelligent breeder of animals cannot so manipulate the genes of a cat as to transform it into a dog or a horse or an ape. It simply doesn't work, but, again, we can *imagine* it working. The appeal may seem to be to our brain and our reason, but it is ultimately to our imagination: as if the fact that the Dutch artist M.C. Escher can sketch fish turning into birds with his magical inks and pens proves that such a transfiguration could actually take place in the real world given sufficient time and chance.

> Lucretius is but one of many thinkers who have tried to construct a system in which everything can be explained by the random interactions of a few key material building blocks.

Copyrighted material

Avoiding Accountability

The materialist theories—or better, visions—of Thales, Lucretius, and Darwin make a strong and vivid appeal to our imagination, but their real strength lies in the appeal they make to our human capacity for wishful thinking. If only we can convince ourselves that random collisions can create all that we see and know, then we can free ourselves from any kind of accountability to a supernatural designer. On this score, Lucretius, unlike many (though not all) of the new atheists, is refreshingly open and honest. Through his system, he promises to free both himself and his readers from the icy grip of religious teachings and leaders.

Four times in *On the Nature of Things*, near the openings of Books I, II, III, and VI, Lucretius repeats this revealing refrain:

> This fright, this night of the mind must be dispelled
> not by the rays of the sun, nor day's bright spears,
> but by the face of nature and her laws.**

The fright to which Lucretius refers is the fear of punishment in the afterlife, a fear propagated by power-hungry priests and cruel, retributive deities. Lucretius promises to free us from such things not by seeking fuller divine revelation or reforming religious rituals, but by subjecting all things to a logical, reasoned analysis of the laws of nature.

Moderns associate the concept of the clockwork universe with Galileo and Newton, but the desire to systematize and codify the movements of the heavens is an ancient one. However, whereas the Christian Galileo and the at-least strong theist Newton saw the hand of God in the workings of the world—"nature and nature's

** For full bibliographical information, including the page number, for this quote, as well as for all other quotes in this book, please consult the annotated bibliography, which begins on page 267.

Copyrighted material

God," to quote the Declaration of Independence—Lucretius and his heirs have sought to construct a cosmology that works apart from divine initiation, impulse, and intention. The magi of the Nativity studied the stars to discern the will of the gods; philosophers and scientists like Thales and Lucretius studied the stars to liberate themselves from any and all reliance on supernatural forces. The former looks to science—that is, to reasoned observation of nature—as an aid to understanding and drawing closer to the will of the divine; the latter looks to science as a way of evading the claims and demands of religion.

There is nothing inherent within science or religion that should set them at odds. Indeed, until the Enlightenment, most scientists in the West had no problem embracing a worldview that included the supernatural. Still, there have always been some in the scientific camp who have insisted on excluding anything outside or beyond the physical, just as there have always been some in the religious camp who have demanded that all natural phenomena, from earthquakes to diseases to floods, be traced back to a specific supernatural cause. The latter encounters severe mental illness and says it *must* be a case of demonic possession; the former sees the same case and refuses even to consider that it might have a spiritual dimension.

My point here is not to ridicule either of these two extremes, but to make clear that *both* extremes have always existed. The science *versus* religion worldview is not a new one; it has merely been the minority viewpoint until quite recently. The possibility of setting up science as a defense from, if not a substitute for, religion has been there as an option at least as far back as Thales. There wasn't some clearing of the eyes that happened 250 years ago; if anything, our eyes have become increasingly dimmed so that they can only see the natural, the physical, and the material.

Copyrighted material

> Materialistic systems that try to explain all things apart from the supernatural are not always neutral and objective; more often than not, they are constructed as a means for avoiding accountability to a divine creator.

Christian Cross-Examination #1: The Cosmological Argument

Such has been the ongoing case for atheism for the past 2,600 years, a case that was no more proved in the time of the Pre-Socratics than it has been in the time of the new atheists. Do Christians have a response? Do they possess arguments strong enough to turn the tables and put the atheists themselves on trial? They do! Indeed, they always have. The side of God has never lacked skilled attorneys to cross-examine the usually baseless claims of materialists, skeptics, and secular humanists.

Ironically, one of the strongest arguments against materialism is to be found in Book I of *On the Nature of Things*. Following in the footsteps of Epicurus, Lucretius begins from the premise that nothing comes from nothing. Lucretius cites this foundational principle of Epicureanism as a way of refuting any notion of gods miraculously bringing things into existence out of nothing. If such things could happen, Lucretius asserts, then all would be chaos, and madness would reign in the natural world. No, he asserts, the material laws of nature work their processes on atoms (bits of matter) that have always existed and always will exist. Each species has its own unique, essential atoms and propagates after its own kind.

So Lucretius insists, but, in the very act of insisting, he makes necessary what Aristotle called an Unmoved Mover. Granted the swerve of the atom might cause collisions that might make new compounds apart from external guidance or purpose. But what

Copyrighted material

set the atoms in motion in the first place? True, we might be able to construct a material chain of causation for each collision that reaches back and back to the dawn of time, but if we don't have a Prime Mover to start the motion and the swerve, then we are left with infinite regress.

This argument, known in philosophy as the cosmological argument, is most often associated with the great medieval Christian philosopher-theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). But Aquinas's arguments can be traced back directly to the fourth-century BC pagan philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BC). A generation before Epicurus and three centuries before Lucretius, Aristotle had already shown that, since nothing comes from nothing, there must be a beginning to motion, just as there must be a beginning/cause for existence itself.

We are what philosophers call contingent beings: that is to say, beings that do not contain life within themselves. Just as a time will come when our life will end, so there must have been a time when we did not possess life. We are, and continue to be, reliant upon something outside of ourselves for our life and our existence. As contingent beings, Aristotle (and Aquinas after him) taught, we could not have created ourselves; nor could we simply have been. There must have been a First Cause that does not itself have a cause—a Being whose existence and essence are the same, who has Life in himself.

And just as we are contingent, so is our universe. Aquinas understood this as did many medieval Arabic philosophers—for they all drank from the same Aristotelian well. In the Muslim world, the cosmological apologetic for the existence of God—of a Cause who was not himself caused, a Mover who is himself unmoved—was known as the Kalam argument, a simple but profound argument

Copyrighted material

that has been resuscitated in the West by the American apologist William Lane Craig.

The argument is constructed in the form of a syllogism. The major premise, the self-evident principle that does not need to be proven, states that anything that begins to exist must have a cause. Essentially, this premise is identical with Epicurus's assertion that nothing comes from nothing. The minor premise states that our universe came into being, which it must have done, for it, like us, is contingent. On the basis of these two premises, we are compelled to conclude that there must be a cause for the universe. But if that is so, then that cause cannot be a part of the universe it caused: it must be a transcendent cause, both supernatural and metaphysical.

> The cosmological argument of Aristotle and Aquinas states that if there is no First Mover to initiate movement, then we are left with infinite regress. Both we and our universe are contingent—that is, we rely on an outside cause to give us being and motion.

Christian Cross-Examination #2: The Big Bang Demands a Big Banger

Logic then pushes us backward to God—to an Unmoved Mover/Uncaused Causer who has Life within himself and in whom existence and essence are one and the same. And yet, wonderfully, serendipitously, modern physics has done an about-face since the days of Thales, Epicurus, and Lucretius and backed up the logic of Aristotle and Aquinas. The discovery that our universe had a beginning, perhaps the greatest scientific discovery of the twentieth century, has given flesh and blood to the cosmological argument.

Or has it? Desperate to shake off the theistic implications of the

Copyrighted material

Big Bang, Stephen Hawking, one of the architects and popularizers of Big Bang cosmology, has tried to make an end run around the singularity that brought our universe into fiery existence. Perhaps, he theorizes, channeling and even exceeding the imaginative power of Lucretius, our universe is but one of multiple universes (or multiverses). Given billions of these potential universes springing into existence one after the other, surely one would arise that could support our planet and the organic life it contains.

Just like Thales, Epicurus, and Lucretius before him, Hawking insists that our world did not require the intervention of a divine, supernatural Mover to get it started. But if that is so, then what was there before the Big Bang that had the power and ability to initiate all these failed multiverses? It's as if Hawking and his fellow materialists, finding themselves unable to explain the existence of a single universe, thought to cover their tracks by positing the existence of millions of them.

But Hawking is not to be defeated so easily. He *does* have an answer to the question of origins, one that lines up nicely with the vision of Lucretius. It is the material, impersonal, mechanistic laws of nature, specifically the law of gravity, which drives the multiverse machine. Hawking makes this argument in *The Grand Design* (2010), which he co-wrote with Leonard Mlodinow—an argument that was answered one year later by Oxford mathematician John Lennox in his brief but penetrating book *God and Stephen Hawking: Whose Design Is It Anyway?*

As Lennox shows, there is a world of difference between physical laws and the kind of personal agency it takes to create something and bring it into being. The law of gravity is an effective formula-tool for defining the interaction between material bodies in space, but it cannot cause that material to come into existence. Besides, Hawking's faith in the creative capacity of the law of

Copyrighted material

gravity is unfounded, a species of scientific wishful thinking. First, to say that the law of gravity helped initiate the Big Bang is to say that the law of gravity existed before it existed—since the Big Bang brought everything, including the law of gravity, into existence. Second, it makes no sense to say the law of gravity initiated the Big Bang because the law of gravity can have neither existence nor meaning until there is physical matter for it to move—and that physical matter did not arise until after the Big Bang.

The tools of science may have advanced, but the materialist dream of being able to explain all things by the movement and interaction of matter has not changed in the more than 2,000 years that separate Lucretius from Stephen Hawking. The latter remains just as adamant as the former in his belief that the fixed laws of nature working on the physical building blocks of life can account for every aspect of the universe—both external and internal—that we perceive with our senses.

And yet, ironically, in pressing that dream to its extreme, Hawking posits the very thing that Lucretius most feared. If multiverse theory is true, then we live in a truly chaotic, haphazard universe where anything can spring into being at any time, and then just as quickly cease to exist. In Hawking's multiverse world, nothing is stable.

Incidentally, Hawking is not the only modern materialist who, while being fully aware that there was nothing before the Big Bang, chose to ignore completely the theistic implications of that scientific truth. Any American who was born before the mid-1960s will likely remember the late Carl Sagan's pathbreaking TV series *Cosmos* (1980). In that unforgettable series, Sagan took an awestruck audience on a tour through the depth and breadth of our vast and complex universe.

Although the general public was not yet fully aware that the

Copyrighted material

Big Bang had already been proven beyond the shadow of scientific doubt—a full fifteen years earlier, Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson had discovered the "smoking gun" of the Big Bang—Sagan *was* aware that matter is not eternal but came into existence at a specific moment. And yet, despite this knowledge, Sagan did not hesitate from beginning his series with an assertion that scientists, most of them secular, had already shown to be false. The cosmos, Sagan declared, boldly co-opting the language of the praise of God in Revelation 4:8, is all there is, all there has ever been, and all there will ever be.

How did Sagan manage, in the face of Big Bang cosmology, to convince the public that our universe is eternal? The same way Lucretius was able to convince many of his readers that time + chance + the swerve of the atom was enough to "create" all the complexity we see around us: by the overwhelming power of his rhetoric and the desire of his audience to avoid accountability before a divine and personal Creator who might just expect something from the creatures he had made. Even for left-brained scientists, subjective imagination often proves a stronger force than objective reason and logic.

> There was nothing before the Big Bang: no atoms, no void, no physical laws of nature; neither Carl Sagan nor Stephen Hawking can get around the theistic implications of the Big Bang.

Postscript

I recently watched *The Theory of Everything*, a well-made biographical picture of the tragic but triumphant life, loves, and career of Stephen Hawking. Skillfully directed by James Marsh and featuring the chameleon Eddie Redmayne in the lead role, the film stays quite close to the truth; it even, surprisingly, succeeds in being

Copyrighted material

fair to the Christian faith of Hawking's first wife, Jane. And yet, for all its attempts to honor Jane's religious beliefs, the filmmakers made a biblical error that would be funny if it weren't so revealing about the ingrained materialism of our modern age.

In the film, the atheist Stephen and the Christian Jane have some entertaining sparring contests over their opposing worldviews. At one point, Jane seems to win over, temporarily, her skeptical partner. As the lovers stare together at a numinous sky twinkling with stars, Jane quotes the opening verse of Genesis, provoking a look of wonder in Stephen's eyes. But she misquotes the verse! Instead of saying, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void: and darkness was upon the face of the deep," she says "In the beginning was the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void: and darkness was upon the face of the deep."

There you have it. Even when the modern secular mind tries to be true to the Bible, it finds itself unable to conceive of a cosmos created *ex nihilo* by a self-existent, noncontingent God who dwells outside time and space. Whether the scientist be Thales or Lucretius, Sagan or Hawking, the imaginative and emotional power of materialism is just too strong to leave a space in the universe for the Light of the One whose name is I Am that I Am to shine through and illuminate the darkness of the void.

Copyrighted material