CHAPTER 11

Equality and the Kalām's God

Presupposes: the diversity/equality partition (Ch. 3); equality as the foreclosing grounding terminus, and its coherence (Ch. 4); equality as the temporal terminus (Ch. 5).

Establishes: the undischarged burden of the kalām's necessity ascription — that the ascription requires the impossibility of undifferentiated being, which the kalām neither supplies nor entails; the burden asymmetry favouring the framework. Both results are dialectical in the sense Chapter 1 (§2.4) distinguishes; note 1 records what this means for their grades.

In brief. This chapter gives Craig almost everything. The universe has a cause — granted. The cause is timeless, immaterial, powerful, even personal — granted, all of it. What it blocks is a single word: *necessary* — a result most non-theists already hold, reached here by an argument that makes the theist's burden definite. Necessity is what turns a cause into God; without it the kalām reaches an uncaused cause whose necessity is undischarged — a brute fact for all that can be shown, and no advance on a brute universe. And the necessity of an internally complex God requires that undifferentiated being — equality — be *impossible* in every possible world. That impossibility is not a conceptual truth, not a datum, and not anything the kalām delivers: it is a heavyweight metaphysical thesis no one has discharged. The burden falls unevenly; that is the argument: proving an impossibility is the heaviest of modal burdens; declining to grant one is the lightest. Craig needs the question closed. The framework needs only that it stay open.

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1 Introduction

The kalām cosmological argument is widely regarded as the strongest theistic argument in contemporary philosophy of religion. Craig's version has generated an enormous literature, and its conclusion, that the universe was brought into being by a timeless, changeless, immaterial, personal creator who exists of his own nature, remains the most direct route from cosmology to God. That the universe has a cause, this chapter grants. The theological force of the argument lies wholly in its second stage, the conceptual analysis by which a cause is shown to be God; and the load-bearing element of that analysis is a single claim: that the cause exists necessarily.

Necessity is what makes the cause God. To exist a se, of one's own nature, with non-existence impossible, is what separates the self-existent foundation of being from a merely powerful contingent thing; it is what lets the cause close the demand for explanation, which a contingent cause would only reopen one term further back. The commitment is Craig's own and unreserved: on his account God alone exists a se, and everything distinct from God exists ab alio (Craig, 2016).

An uncaused cause that is not also necessary is a brute fact, no more self-explaining than the universe it was summoned to explain, so the passage from cosmology to a creator halts short of its object. Everything built on the kalām therefore rests on the necessity of its cause. And the cause cannot be shown to be necessary.

The reason lies at the foundation of the present work. The God of theism is internally complex, a mind possessed of knowledge, will, and intention, and the necessity of an internally complex being requires that undifferentiated being be impossible (§4.2 derives this). The necessity ascription thus stands or falls with a single modal claim: that undifferentiated being is impossible.

And undifferentiated being is, on the analysis of Chapters 1 to 4, a coherent ontological state — equality, the ontological one — rather than the disguised non-being its critics take it for. If that analysis holds, the necessity the kalām needs is unavailable rather than merely unproven. If it is resisted, the impossibility of undifferentiated being is in any case no part of what the kalām delivers, but a further metaphysical thesis, owed and undischarged.

The result so framed is dialectical in Castagnoli's sense (Chapter 1, §2.4): a burden relocated onto the proponent rather than a thesis refuted, and the chapter says so at the outset rather than in the small print. Section 4.4 argues that the burden falls unevenly for a structural reason: the categorical claim needs the modal question closed, while the conditional needs only that it stay open.

The chapter grants the universe a cause, and grants that cause whatever else Craig ascribes to it: timeless, immaterial, powerful, even personal. It denies only that the cause can be shown to be necessary,

which is sufficient: a cause whose necessity cannot be made out cannot be shown to be God. The argument is ecumenical across the temporal disjunction of the present work. On the non-termination branch — infinite diversity, no temporal origin — the universe does not begin and the argument has no purchase (Oppy, 2006). On the termination branch the argument below applies. It states the kalām (§2), grants the cause and turns to the decisive ascription (§3), shows why its necessity cannot be established (§4), answers objections (§5), and draws the result together (§6).

2 The Argument Stated

The kalām argument proceeds as follows:

(K1) Everything that begins to exist has a cause of its coming into existence.

(K2) The universe began to exist.

(K3) Therefore, the universe has a cause of its coming into existence.

Craig supplements K3 with a conceptual analysis of the cause; it is this analysis rather than K3 itself that carries the theistic conclusion (Craig, 1979, pp. 149–153; Craig & Sinclair, 2009, pp. 192–196). He argues that the cause must be timeless, spaceless, immaterial, changeless, enormously powerful, and personal. Necessity, the second ascription that turns a cause into God, he defends elsewhere, in his account of divine aseity (Craig, 2016).

The necessity ascription is the chapter's concern. It is easily passed over, because "uncaused" is often heard as though it already meant "necessary". It does not, since an uncaused being may be a contingent brute fact: something that exists, has no cause, and might not have existed at all. The necessity ascription is the substantive further claim that the cause could not have failed to exist (Craig, 2016).

Personhood granted. The personal ascription — Craig's K4, that only a personal agent could produce a temporal effect from a changeless, timeless state — is the more discussed of the two, and the

chapter grants it. The grant is principled rather than a courtesy: the attributes that seem to crowd personhood out (timelessness, immateriality, changelessness, the absence of spatial location) remove four species of distinction rather than the genus, and a changeless mind individuated by fixed intentional contrasts, knowing and willing this rather than that, retains distinction of just the kind those four removals leave untouched.

Nothing in the cause's other attributes therefore excludes its being a mind. The chapter lets the cause be everything Craig says, personhood included, and asks only whether it can be shown to be necessary; if it cannot, the question of personhood does not arise.

The grant is made against the grain of the existing critique, and the divergence should be marked. Morriston's (2000) examination of the argument's second stage is the standard attack on this very ascription. He argues that a timeless personal cause is no better placed than an impersonal one to produce a temporal effect, since a timeless agent's willing can no more be temporally prior to its effect than a timeless cause's operation can, and that Craig's inference to a person therefore trades on an equivocation between two conceptions of eternity. The present argument neither uses nor needs that result. If it succeeds, the kalām loses stage two twice over; if it fails, the necessity ascription is untouched, since a cause conceded to be personal is no closer to being necessary than one that is not. The chapter's target is chosen to be independent of the critique already in the field.

3 Granting the Cause

The chapter grants K3. Whether one arrives at it by Craig's route or doubts the premises, nothing below turns on denying that the universe has a cause. A word on those premises, and then the decisive question.

On the framework's analysis, existence divides exhaustively into the differentiated and the undifferentiated (Chapter 3, §2), and the temporal regress either continues without a first moment or terminates at a structural boundary, equality, rather than at a first caused state (Chapter 5, §2.3). On the non-termination branch K2 is false. On the

termination branch the "beginning" is not a passage from non-existence to existence but the diversification of undifferentiated into differentiated being, so K1's causal demand is either met by that transition or loses its content at the boundary, where the distinctions a causal account requires are absent.

Schmid and Malpass (2023) press a complementary modal challenge to the same premises, and Malpass (2022) and Linford (2024) raise related objections. The argument below is independent of these. Granting Craig his uncaused cause, it joins the dispute where it is decisive: over whether that cause can be shown to be what the conclusion needs it to be. By §2, that is necessity.

4 Why the Kalām Cannot Reach a Necessary Being

4.1 From uncaused to necessary

The kalām needs its cause to be necessary, and this section shows that the argument cannot supply the necessity, since the only route to it requires that undifferentiated being be impossible, which no one has shown. The necessity ascription is not idle; it is what the conclusion needs. The explanatory advantage the cause carries once it is identified with the God of Craig's aseity doctrine — that it terminates the regress of explanation rather than merely adding a link to it — depends entirely on the cause being the kind of thing whose non-existence is impossible (§1). The ascription is thus the kalām's own business, internal to its claim to explanatory force, rather than an external standard imposed on it.

4.2 What necessity requires

The framework of the present work is distinctively placed to press the necessity ascription, because it supplies, in explicit terms, the alternative that necessity must exclude. Within existence, two conditions are exhaustive: diversity and equality, differentiated being and undifferentiated being (Chapter 4, §2.1). Craig's cause, being internally complex — a mind with knowledge, will, and intention — is

a being of diversity. The question is whether a necessary being of diversity is so much as available.

A short modal observation fixes what is at stake. A necessary being exists in every possible world. An essentially diverse necessary being therefore carries its diversity into every world, so that no world is one of pure equality: undifferentiated being obtains in no possible world; it is impossible. In short, if a necessary diverse being exists, then undifferentiated being is impossible. By contraposition, if undifferentiated being is so much as possible, then no necessary diverse being exists.

And because a being whose necessity is essential to it exists in all worlds or none, since there is no coherent being that is a se and self-existent here but contingent elsewhere, the conclusion on the right-hand side is not that Craig's cause would be contingent but that it would be impossible.

The all-or-none principle should be named for what it is: the S5 assumption, that necessity does not vary from world to world. It is declared here rather than smuggled; it is the shared rulebook of this entire dispute — Craig's aseity doctrine, the modal ontological argument whose mirror this is, and the present turnabout all run on it — so neither party can decline it without disarming himself. Without S5 the argument retains its minimal conclusion, that if equality is possible no necessary diverse being exists, which suffices against the kalām; S5 is used only on the upgrade from non-existence to impossibility.

Everything therefore turns on one question: is undifferentiated being possible? If it is, Craig's necessary cause is not merely unproven but ruled out; if it is impossible, the necessity ascription survives untouched.

4.3 The coherence of undifferentiated being

Is the impossibility of undifferentiated being something Craig is entitled to? He needs it to be a truth, ideally a conceptual one, so that the move from an uncaused cause to a necessary one costs nothing. It is no such thing. The materials are those of Chapters 1 to 4. In particular,

Chapter 3 (§3.5) fixed the classification — that an undifferentiated condition which obtains is equality, and that non-existence is no third option beyond the partition — while expressly leaving open the question now at issue: whether that condition can obtain at all.

Begin with what undifferentiated being is. A state of equality contains no internal distinction whatsoever — in the ontological zero/one/two analysis of Chapter 2, *ontological one*: something exists, but nothing within it is distinguishable from anything else; being without internal structure (Chapter 3, §2.1). The contrast that matters is with *ontological zero*, which is non-being: the absence of existence altogether. Equality is not ontological zero. The whole question dividing the framework from its Parmenidean opponent is whether that distinction can be sustained, or whether "being with no determination" simply collapses into "no being at all."

The framework sustains it on three grounds.

The first is that equality, unlike non-being, is not self-excluding. Non-existence cannot coherently obtain: its obtaining would be its own negation — the one "condition" whose holding negates itself, a structural feature of the concept, not an empirical fact (Chapter 3, §3.5). Equality carries no such contradiction. There is nothing self-cancelling in the idea of a state that is present but has no internal distinctions. It would be undetectable, possessing no features for any instrument or mind to register, and to any external observer it would be *indistinguishable* from non-existence. But indistinguishability from non-being is not identity with non-being. The two differ in the one respect that matters: equality can coherently obtain, whereas non-existence cannot.

The Parmenidean cost. An opponent who insists there is no difference, that undifferentiated being just is non-being, is not stating a triviality but taking on a thesis: that everything that exists must be differentiated. That thesis is coherent, and the framework grants as much. But it has a cost, and the cost is the very position it leaves standing. With no undifferentiated ground available, existence must be either infinitely diverse with no terminus, or terminate in a brute

differentiated fundamental (Chapter 4, §2.1). The second of these is Craig's own slot. The Parmenidean denial of equality therefore does not come free to the theist; it is one substantive metaphysics of being among others, where the framework's rival metaphysics, on which being does not presuppose determination, is at least its equal.

The Hegelian worry. The second ground answers the most natural worry: that a wholly indeterminate "being" is dialectically unstable, that it cannot hold as itself but must, as Hegel argued of pure Being, pass over into its opposite and so prove to be nothing after all.

This worry mislocates equality. Hegel's Being and Nothing are indeterminate concepts, since they lack content; it is their want of content that drives each into the other. The diversity/equality partition is not like this, because it is defined by a determinate condition: the presence or absence of internal distinction (Chapter 3, §3.2). Having at least one distinction is a determinate state of affairs, and having none is equally a determinate state of affairs. The dialectical instability Hegel finds in contentless concepts therefore does not arise for a determinate condition, while the partition's condition is in any case not a determination among others but the condition for determination, since distinction is what makes Hegelian negation possible in the first place, so the partition operates below the level at which the dialectic can get purchase.

A further disanalogy seals the point. Dialectical sublation requires two structured terms that push against each other, whereas equality has no structure and no content to contribute to such an interaction. Its relation to diversity is that of silence to sound rather than that of cold to hot: cold and hot are two determinations within a shared domain and can yield a third, while silence does not blend with sound to produce a mean. There is only one structured term in the partition, so there is nothing for a synthesis to be made from. Equality does not collapse into diversity; it is simply the condition that obtains when diversity is absent.

The illusion of equality. The third ground explains why, all the same, equality seems to be nothing — why the Parmenidean intuition is so compelling. A mind is constituted by distinctions and represents by

drawing contrasts. Asked to conceive a state with no distinctions at all, it cannot form a positive image of one, since an image is a structure of differences and there are none to be had. So it substitutes what it can picture: a dark, empty expanse, "dark empty space" standing in for the absence of the very conditions for space (Chapter 8).

The substitution then misfires twice. The mind takes its inability to image equality for a discovery that equality is imageless because vacuous, and it reads off "nothing" from the blank its own representational limits have produced. This is the illusion of equality: the limit of a differentiated mind's capacity to represent is mistaken for an ontological verdict about what it cannot represent. The Parmenidean thesis "there is no being without determination" is this illusion given the dignity of a principle, since it records something true about minds — that a being made of contrasts cannot grasp a being without them — and misreports it as a truth about being.

Two species of determination. Beneath the three grounds lies a single distinction, drawn out in Chapter 3 (§3.5), that makes the first analytic and the second sharp. Determination is of two species. Property-determination is a contrastive partition, since to bear F is to fall on one side of an F/non-F division, both sides available within being, and of this equality has none, being equal throughout. Obtaining-determination is the side-less determinateness of a state's being rather than not: a determinateness that is no partition and requires no second term. Equality has this, and only this.

The distinction carries ground one past coherence into analyticity: a non-being that obtains is a state of equality, since whatever is, without internal distinction, is equality under another name. The attempt to make non-being a real condition therefore converts it into equality, so its self-exclusion is a consequence the framework derives rather than a premise it borrows.

It also fixes the sense in which, against the Hegelian worry, equality is determinate: determinate in obtaining rather than in character, so that it neither suffers the want of content that drives Hegel's Being into Nothing, nor carries the property-content that would make it a

structured term in a dialectic. The Parmenidean "there is no being without determination" equivocates on just this distinction. Read of property-determination it is false of equality, which is yet; read of obtaining-determination it is already satisfied by equality, which obtains. Either way the impossibility the kalām needs goes underived (Chapter 4, §7.7 runs the dilemma in full).

The consistency model. The coherence claim now has a formal footing. Chapter 3's appendix exhibits a consistency model for undifferentiated being: a one-element structure over the empty signature, satisfying "something exists and nothing within it is distinguishable from anything else", with self-identity, no internal contrast, as its only formal feature.

The model does not demonstrate metaphysical possibility, and no formal result could. What it demonstrates is that the Parmenidean impossibility carries no logical shadow, since no contradiction is derivable from the description of equality, so the impossibility Craig requires must be metaphysical all the way down — the heaviest species of modal claim, asserted where the lightest, mere non-impossibility, is all the present argument needs. The subtraction literature, redescribed in Chapter 9 (§5.1), argues from independent premises for the possibility of a world with no concrete objects, which no necessary concrete being survives; the possibility of equality it does not supply, and the present argument rests no weight on it there.

None of this demonstrates that undifferentiated being is possible, and the chapter does not pretend that it does. The Parmenidean position — that being requires determination, so that equality is impossible — remains coherent, and a determined defender of it will not be moved by the considerations above, which do not amount to a proof.

What the three grounds do establish is the only thing the argument requires: that the impossibility of undifferentiated being is not a conceptual truth, not a datum, and not something the kalām carries with it, but a heavyweight metaphysical thesis about the nature of being — as contestable as the framework's rival thesis that being does not require

determination. Craig needs that thesis to be true. He has not made it true, nor does the kalām make it true.

4.4 The burden asymmetry and the result

The result of the argument can now be stated. Craig's necessity ascription requires that undifferentiated being be impossible. That impossibility is not establishable from the kalām's resources and is not a conceptual truth, since it is a substantive metaphysical claim that has not been, and within the kalām cannot be, discharged. Therefore the necessity ascription cannot be established.

And with it falls the cause's claim to close the explanatory regress rather than merely halt it. An uncaused cause whose necessity is undischarged is, for all that can be shown, a brute fact: contingent for anything the argument establishes, and brute in that its obtaining is left unexplained. A brute cause is no advance on a brute universe in the one respect the argument was enlisted for, which is explanatory closure. A theist who never sought that closure, such as Swinburne, whose God's existence is brute (Chapter 9), is untouched here; the title's "kalām's God" has that width. The advance sought from the kalām was the necessity, where the necessity is what stands undischarged.

One reply must be met before the clarifications, because the framework's own accounting invites it. The theist observes that the present work also owns a brute fact on either branch — the obtaining residue, the unexplained obtaining of the bounded series (Chapter 5, §2.5) or of the beginningless one (Chapter 5, §6.8) — and concludes that if bruteness is no advance, the framework advances nothing either. The observation is correct about the kind of debt and wrong about the comparison:

	The framework's brute fact	**The kalām's fallback brute fact**
What is brute	The obtaining of the series — a single structureless fact	An uncaused cause whose necessity is undischarged
What it carries	Its bare obtaining, with every member explained within it	Knowledge, will, power, personhood — all brute
Structure assumed	None	A maximally rich intentional agent

Bruteness is symmetric in kind and asymmetric in shape — a featureless fact against a featured agent — and the asymmetry is Chapter 4's explanatory ledger (§4) run against the retreat position, with §5.6 completing the costing.

Two clarifications fix its scope.

First, the argument is the mirror image of the modal ontological argument (Plantinga, 1974) and inherits that argument's well-known dialectical situation (Findlay, 1948). Where the theist reasons "possibly a necessary being exists, therefore one actually does", the present argument reasons "possibly only equality obtains, therefore no necessary diverse being does". The two conditionals are contrapositives of a single fact — that a necessary diverse being and a real possibility of pure equality cannot both stand — so the disagreement reduces cleanly to which possibility one is entitled to assert.

The chapter does not claim to have proved equality possible, only that its impossibility has not been shown, which is all that is needed to deny Craig his necessary being. The argument therefore does not disprove the cause; it blocks the necessity ascription by exhibiting it as resting on an undischarged modal premise. The symmetry is real and is not concealed.

The asymmetry of burden. Second, the asymmetry that remains is one of commitment, and it favours the present line for a structural

reason. Craig's position requires the categorical claim that the cause exists necessarily, which cannot be made good without settling the modal question against equality, without showing that undifferentiated being is impossible. It makes no difference whether Craig argues for that impossibility directly or reaches it by the modal-ontological route, asserting that a necessary being is possible, since as §5.4 shows the second path merely relocates the same undischarged premise.

The framework, by contrast, advances only the conditional "if the grounding hierarchy terminates, equality is its foreclosing terminus", and commits itself neither to equality's obtaining nor to its being necessary (Chapter 4). To block Craig it needs equality to be merely not impossible, the weakest of modal standings. Establishing an impossibility is the heaviest of modal burdens; declining to grant one is the lightest.

The undecidability of the question therefore does not fall evenly. It defeats the categorical claim, which needs the question closed, and leaves the conditional untouched, which needs only that it stay open. What insulates the framework from the impasse that defeats the stronger position is just this asymmetry of burden; it is why the kalām, which must reach a categorically necessary being, cannot reach one. The adjudication that Chapter 4's ledger deferred to this section is thereby delivered in the only form available: the possibility line is not resolved against the limitarian package, and the burden of resolving it lies with the party that needs the question closed. The ledger scores accordingly.

Where the argument stands: the kalām has been stated (§2) and its cause granted — timeless, immaterial, powerful, personal (§3); what it cannot reach is necessity, since the step from uncaused to necessary requires the impossibility of undifferentiated being, which the kalām neither supplies nor entails, and the burden of that impossibility falls on its proponent (§4). What follows meets the objections.

5 Objections and Replies

5.1 There is no being without determination

Objection. The entire argument rests on undifferentiated being being possible. But the oldest and best-motivated thesis in metaphysics — Parmenides', refined through Aristotle and Hegel — is that to be is to be something: being is always determinate, and a "being" wholly without determination is indistinguishable from, and therefore identical to, nothing. If that thesis is true, undifferentiated being is impossible, the impossibility Craig needs is secured, while the three grounds of §4.3, which establish at most coherence rather than possibility, leave it standing. Worse for the chapter, the thesis looks like a conceptual truth, since it seems to follow from the very concept of being that there is no being without a way of being.

Reply. This is the strongest objection to the argument, and the one on which its fate turns. It cannot be refuted, while even granted in full it does not discharge Craig's burden.

It is not the conceptual truth it appears to be. That being is always determinate is not contained in the concept of being; it is a substantive claim that determination is a precondition of being — the reverse of the framework's thesis that being does not require determination (Chapter 3, §3.5; Chapter 4, §2.1). The Parmenidean cannot win by definition, since the definition of "being" is just what is in dispute, where the air of conceptual necessity is the illusion of equality (§4.3) in the costume of a principle. The objection's two natural supports — that equality is indistinguishable from nothing, and that it collapses into nothing — are met in §4.3: indistinguishability is not identity, and a determinate condition does not pass into its opposite.

What remains, even granted, tells against the objection rather than for it. At its strongest it shows only that if Parmenideanism is true, equality is impossible, and the truth of Parmenideanism is what is unsettled. The kalām does not arrive with a proof of it. The objection therefore relocates the necessity ascription's dependence, from "equality is impossible" to "being requires determination", without discharging it,

since to close the question would take a successful Parmenidean metaphysics — a further and contested undertaking rather than a premise the kalām supplies.

5.2 Necessity from another source

Objection. Even if the kalām taken alone cannot deliver necessity, Craig does not rest the necessity ascription on the kalām alone. He has independent routes to a necessary being — the Leibnizian argument from contingency, perfect-being theology — and once necessity is secured by those, it may be carried over to the kalām's cause, whose existence then entails the impossibility of equality as a corollary. The argument therefore attacks a position Craig need not hold.

Reply. The objection grants what §4 argues, that the kalām taken alone cannot reach a necessary being, and seeks necessity by another route. The route does not escape the difficulty. An imported necessity is only as secure as its source: if the contingency argument's necessary being is itself internally complex, as the God of theism must be, its necessity again requires the impossibility of equality, so the same undischarged burden reappears one argument over.

Nor will the corollary "a necessary being exists, therefore equality is impossible" serve, since that is the Findlay turnabout (§5.4), good only where the possibility of a necessary being has been independently established — which returns the dispute to the very question at issue. The contingency argument is treated at Chapter 10 (§3.3); what it cannot do is lend the kalām a necessity the kalām cannot earn.

5.3 Divine aseity and the essential/free knowledge distinction

Objection. Craig (2016) develops an account of divine aseity on which God is the paradigmatic concrete being, possessing his properties essentially, with an internal life supplied by the distinction between essential and free knowledge: God essentially knows all necessary truths and freely knows all contingent truths. This account shows how God can be at once internally rich and the necessary foundation, which is what §4 declares unavailable.

Reply. The objection sharpens the dispute rather than relieving it. The distinction between essential and free knowledge is a real internal distinction: two modes of knowing, differing in object and in modal status. It places God squarely within diversity, since he is on this account an internally complex being, the very case §4 addresses. This is the intra-attribute distinction analysed in Chapter 10 (§4.1), a difference within knowledge that the identity thesis of divine simplicity cannot collapse, and Craig's adopting it concedes the internal structure the doctrine of simplicity was built to avoid.

But conceding internal structure secures nothing the necessity ascription needs. That the cause is internally complex does not make it necessary, since a complex being is, by §4, a being of diversity, and its necessity would require the impossibility of equality, which is what cannot be shown. Aseity, on Craig's account, just is the claim that God exists necessarily and a se, and §4 is the argument that this necessity cannot be established. The aseity account therefore does not answer the argument; it states, in theological vocabulary, the very ascription the argument shows to be undischarged.

5.4 The symmetry objection

Objection. The necessity argument of §4 is the mirror of the modal ontological argument, and the symmetry cuts both ways. If "possibly equality obtains, therefore no necessary God" is a good argument, then "possibly God exists, therefore necessarily God exists" is equally good, and the theist may simply run the latter, concluding that equality is impossible. The chapter has shown nothing the theist cannot turn around.

Reply. The symmetry is real, and §4.4 conceded it, including its modal frame: both directions of the turnabout run under the S5 assumption §4.2 names, so neither can win by auditing the other's logic. It is why the chapter blocks the necessity ascription rather than disproving the cause.

But the two parties do not carry the same burden (§4.4). The theist who runs the argument the other way must affirm the possibility of a

necessary being, the premise the modal ontological argument has never made non-question-begging, whereas the framework needs only that equality not be shown impossible. The turnabout therefore does not restore the necessity ascription; it re-exhibits its reliance on an undischarged modal premise.

5.5 The ecumenical scope objection

Objection. The chapter is ecumenical between the termination and non-termination branches but does not establish which obtains; on the non-termination branch K2 fails, on the termination branch the inference to necessity fails. Without settling the branch, the response is merely conditional.

Reply. The conditionality is a strength rather than a defect, because the theistic conclusion fails on every branch. On the non-termination branch the universe does not begin and K2 is false (Oppy, 2006). On the termination branch its necessity cannot be established (§4).

The result extends, as Pruss and Rasmussen's (2018) Leibnizian argument invites, beyond the kalām to the wider family of cosmological arguments: wherever an argument reaches a foundation, the same question arises — whether that foundation can be shown necessary — and the present answer does not depend on which cosmological route delivered the foundation. A response that failed on only one branch would leave the defender a retreat. This one leaves none.

Pruss and Rasmussen. Their own case for the contested premise deserves engagement beyond the citation, because it is the strongest in the current literature. Their central arguments run through modal uniformity and subtraction: causal and explanatory possibility appear uniform across kinds of states, so that for any state, its possibly having a cause or explanation is the default, and from the possibility of a necessary being's existing the S5 machinery delivers its actuality. The framework's answer operates at the possibility premise, where they themselves locate the argument's weight.

First, the uniformity principles over-generate in the familiar way. It appears equally uniform that every being is possibly absent, and the

parallel machinery turns that seeming into the impossibility of a necessary concrete being. Pruss and Rasmussen know the symmetry and work to break it, while the tie-breaking considerations they offer are intuitions about explanatory ideals — the very currency §4 declines to accept as discharge of a burden this heavy.

Second, and more locally, the framework has independent grounds against the possibility premise itself for any candidate rich enough to be the theist's God. Necessity would have to be grounded in the candidate's nature, and Chapter 4's terminus analysis leaves no room for a nature that both carries maximal richness and closes the modal question, since the only state whose modal profile the framework treats as structurally special is equality, which grounds nothing and wills nothing. The verdict of §4 therefore stands against the Leibnizian route as against the kalām's: the necessity premise is where both arguments live; it remains undischarged.

5.6 The abductive retreat

Objection. Grant that the impossibility of undifferentiated being cannot be demonstrated. The theist may retreat from demonstration to abduction: a necessary being is the best explanation of contingent existence, since it closes the explanatory regress, satisfies the principle of sufficient reason, and avoids the bruteness that both an unexplained universe and an unexplained terminus carry. On this footing the kalām's second stage no longer owes an impossibility proof; it owes only a comparative judgement, and comparative judgements are not discharged or undischarged but weighed.

Reply. The retreat is legitimate in form and should be met in kind, by weighing the packages; the dialogue between Rasmussen and Leon (2019) is the debate in this form, and the weights below are the ones a reader of it will recognise. Three weights tell against the necessity posit.

First, the rival explanation posits strictly less. The framework's disjunction — infinite diversity, or termination at a foreclosing terminus — adds no entity and no modal luxury to what the explanandum already contains, whereas the necessary-being package adds both a being and its

necessity, and necessity is the most expensive modal property an explanation can invoke.

Second, the packages carry unequal internal costs. The necessary being of the kalām is an internally complex mind, and Chapter 10 has already exposed the cost of conjoining that complexity with the explanatory ultimacy the posit exists to provide. The abductive theist inherits that cost together with the impossibility-of-equality commitment — demoted now from demonstrandum to background assumption, and no cheaper for the demotion — against which the subtraction literature stands as independent, non-partisan support for the possibility of a world with no concrete objects, a world no necessary concrete being survives (Chapter 9, §5.1).

Third, the principle doing the abduction's work collects its gain entirely through the necessity posit, which is a cost the buyer takes on credit: a modal property asserted rather than earned, whose standing §5.3 showed to be undischarged. The necessary being explains contingency only if its necessity is in good standing, and nothing in the abduction supplies the standing the demonstration could not.

This is a cost entry rather than an incoherence claim. Most sufficient-reason principles treat necessities as explanation-terminating by design, and the framework does not dispute the design; it observes only that a terminus one cannot show to be necessary terminates nothing, whereas the foreclosing terminus is the one point at which the demand for reasons is not refused but structurally inapplicable (Chapter 4, §4).

The plain summary: abduction converts the kalām's failure from a missing proof into a losing comparison, and no stalemate. A reader who weighs parsimony, internal coherence, and the independent evidence differently may still prefer the necessary being, and nothing in this section forbids her. What she can no longer claim is that the argument compels the preference — which was the promise made on the kalām's behalf, and is the promise the chapter denies.

6 Conclusion

The kalām cannot establish its cause as a necessary being. The step from uncaused to necessary requires that undifferentiated being be impossible, and that impossibility is neither a conceptual truth nor a deliverance of the kalām but a substantive metaphysical thesis — that being requires determination — which the present work gives positive reason to reject, undifferentiated being having been shown coherent on the three grounds of §4.3. What survives is necessity of another kind: being as such cannot fail (Chapter 3, §3.5) — a necessary being rather than a necessary Being (Appendix A). That claim holds on the vehicle premise Chapter 9 (§6.4) names and states the cost of.

The argument is the mirror of the modal ontological argument and shares its impasse, so it does not disprove the cause. It shows only that the cause cannot be shown necessary, with the burden falling unequally: Craig must establish that equality is impossible, while the framework needs only that its impossibility not be established (§4.4). What the kalām reaches is therefore, for all that can be shown, a brute uncaused fact — no advance on a brute uncaused universe, and, against the tu-quoque §4.4 meets, no parity with a featureless obtaining residue either — rather than the self-existent foundation its conclusion names.

Two things the argument does not do. It does not disprove theism, since it shows that the kalām cannot establish a necessary cause rather than that no necessary cause exists. And it does not settle the question on which it finally rests — whether undifferentiated being is possible, which is, at bottom, whether being requires determination. There the present work sets a worked rival beside the Parmenidean picture and shows that picture to be a substantive commitment rather than a truth of reason; it does not refute the commitment, and need not. For the kalām to reach its God the question must be closed in the theist's favour; it is open.

Granting the universe a cause, then, the kalām reaches a cause it cannot show to be necessary, and what cannot be shown necessary cannot be shown to be God, since to be God, on the theist's own account, is to exist of one's own nature.

Chapters 9 to 11 have addressed the three principal routes by which the tradition seeks a divine origin: creation (Chapter 9), the prime mover (Chapter 10), and the kalām. Each reaches a foundation; none reaches one that can be shown to be the necessary creator the tradition requires. One retreat remains — that the foundation transcends description altogether — and Chapter 12 takes it up.

Grades and Dependencies

1. Dialectical status. Both results — the undischarged burden and the burden asymmetry — are graded *established*, but they are established as *dialectical* results in the sense Chapter 1 (§2.4) distinguishes: burdens relocated onto the proponent, not theses refuted. Neither disproves the cause; the chapter grants K3 throughout, and the possibility of undifferentiated being is asserted at the weakest standing (not-shown-impossible), never as demonstrated. The General Conclusion (§1) records why results of this type sit apart from those claimed in their own right. The Premise Register carries the chain, including the S5 declaration (§4.2) and where it is and is not used.

2. Accounts settled here. This chapter delivers three items promised elsewhere: the comparative costing of the obtaining residue against the necessary being, promised at Chapter 9 (note 2) and completed at §5.6; the adjudication of the possibility line that Chapter 4's explanatory ledger deferred, delivered at §4.4 in the only form available (burden allocation, not resolution); and the reception of Chapter 9 (§5.1)'s subtraction alignment, used at §4.3 and §5.6's second weight as independent, non-partisan support for the one point Chapter 9 licenses, the possibility of a world without concrete objects. It also draws on Chapter 10 twice: the intra-attribute analysis meets Craig's essential/free knowledge distinction (§5.3), and the contingency argument's treatment (Chapter 10, §3.3) covers the imported-necessity route (§5.2).

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