CHAPTER 11

Equality and the Kalām's God

Suppose you accept that the universe began, and that whatever begins has a cause. Then the universe has a cause. That argument is the kalām cosmological argument, widely held to be the strongest case for God in philosophy of religion today. This chapter takes up William Lane Craig's version and grants it the conclusion. Then it asks the awkward question: have you reached God?

Craig thinks you have, once you work out what such a cause must be like. He argues that it is timeless, outside space, immaterial, changeless, enormously powerful, and a person. The chapter grants all of that. It blocks one word, and the word is "necessary". A necessary being could not have failed to exist. Craig holds that God alone exists of his own nature, and that is what necessity means here.

What the chapter sets out to show is that the kalām cannot earn that word. The step to a necessary cause needs a further claim about what is possible, and nobody has made it good.

One word that turns a cause into God

Why should a single word carry so much? Because an uncaused cause whose necessity is missing may be a brute fact. It would exist, it would have no cause, and it might never have existed. The demand for explanation then reopens one term further back.

A cause whose non-existence is impossible would end that demand. Necessity is what lets the cause close the question.

The word is also easy to miss, since "uncaused" is often heard as though it already meant "necessary". It does not. The chapter even grants that the cause is a person, since a changeless mind can still know and will this and no other thing.

What necessity would require

The book divides everything that exists into two conditions, and Chapter 3 argues that the division leaves no gaps. Either a state has at least one internal difference, which the book calls diversity, or it has none, which it calls equality. Equality is hard to hold in mind: something exists, and nothing inside it can be told apart from anything else.

Craig's cause is a mind with knowledge, will and intention. So it has internal differences, and it is a being of diversity. A necessary being exists in every way things could have been. A being diverse by its nature carries its differences into every one of those ways. So no way things could have been is one of pure equality.

Turn that round. If equality is so much as possible, no necessary diverse being exists. The chapter says this weaker conclusion is already enough against the kalām.

It then strengthens it. A being whose necessity belongs to its nature exists in every way things could have been or in none. So if equality is possible, Craig's cause would be impossible. That all-or-none step is the S5 assumption: whatever is necessary would still be necessary however things had gone. The chapter declares it a contested premise, and notes that Craig's own doctrine runs on it too. A reader who rejects it keeps the weaker conclusion.

Everything now turns on one question. Can undifferentiated being obtain?

Can a state with no differences obtain?

Craig needs the answer to be no, and ideally by the concepts alone. Three grounds hold equality apart from sheer non-existence.

The first is that equality does not cancel itself. Non-existence cannot obtain, because its obtaining would be its own negation. Nothing like that goes wrong with a state that is present and has no internal distinctions. Such a state would be undetectable, and would look exactly like nothing at all. Being indistinguishable from non-being is still not the same as being it.

The opponent here is Parmenidean: to be is to be something. The chapter grants that the position is coherent, and then prices it. Without an undifferentiated ground, existence must either be endlessly diverse, or end in a first level that already has differences and no explanation. The second is Craig's own slot, so denying equality does not come free to the theist.

The second ground answers Hegel, who argued that pure Being slides into Nothing. Hegel's terms lack content, the chapter replies, and that is what drives each into the other. The book's division is fixed by a definite condition instead.

The third ground explains why equality feels like nothing anyway. A mind is made of distinctions, and it pictures things by drawing contrasts. Asked to picture a state with no distinctions, it substitutes a dark and empty expanse. Then it reads "nothing" off that blank. The chapter calls this the illusion of equality.

Then comes the admission. None of this shows that undifferentiated being is possible, and the chapter says so plainly. The Parmenidean position stays coherent.

A brute cause and an uneven burden

The result follows. Necessity requires that undifferentiated being be impossible. That impossibility is no truth of the concepts, and the kalām cannot deliver it. So the necessity cannot be shown.

With it goes the cause's claim to close the regress of explanation. For all that can be shown, the kalām reaches a cause that is simply there and unexplained. A brute cause is no advance on a brute universe in the one respect the argument was recruited for. The verdict reaches only a theist who wanted that closure. Richard Swinburne, whose God exists as a brute fact, is untouched.

The chapter then meets the obvious reply. The book owns a brute fact of its own, the unexplained obtaining of the series. Its answer is that the bruteness is the same in kind and different in shape. One side has a featureless fact, the other an agent whose knowledge, will and power are all brute.

The chapter also admits that its argument is a mirror. Alvin Plantinga's modal ontological argument reasons from the possibility of a necessary being to its existence. This one reasons from the possibility of pure equality to the absence of a necessary diverse being. So the dispute comes down to which possibility you are entitled to assert.

The asymmetry it does claim is one of commitment. Craig needs a flat claim, that the cause exists necessarily, and he cannot make it good without closing the question against equality. The book advances a conditional instead: if the order of grounding ends, equality is where it ends. To block Craig it needs equality only to be not impossible. Proving an impossibility is the heaviest burden; declining to grant one is the lightest. An undecided question therefore does not fall evenly between them.

The objections the chapter answers

The strongest objection is the Parmenidean one, and the chapter says its fate turns on it. The thesis that to be is to be something looks like a truth of the concepts. The reply is that it cannot win by definition, since the definition of being is what is in dispute. The chapter grants outright that the objection cannot be refuted. Even granted in full, it does not discharge Craig's burden, since the kalām brings no proof of that thesis.

Another objection says Craig has other routes to a necessary being, such as the argument from contingency. The reply is that an imported necessity is only as secure as its source. If the being at the source is internally complex, the same burden reappears one argument over.

The last objection is a retreat from proof to weighing, on which a necessary being is the best explanation of contingent things. The chapter accepts the form of the retreat and weighs both packages. The necessary being adds an entity and a modal luxury, and keeps the impossibility of equality as a background assumption. This is entered as a cost, and no charge of incoherence. The chapter's verdict is that abduction turns the kalām's failure from a missing proof into a losing comparison, with no tie. A reader who weighs the costs differently may still prefer the necessary being. She can no longer claim that the argument compels the preference.

What the chapter claims

Two results come out of the chapter, and both are graded *established*, the rung below the book's top mark. The first is that the kalām's ascription of necessity carries a burden nobody has discharged. The second is that the burden falls unevenly, in the book's favour.

Both carry conditions the book states openly. They are dialectical results, which means the burden moves onto Craig while his thesis stands unrefuted. Nothing here disproves the cause, and nothing shows that equality is possible. A second condition arrives from earlier chapters, since the argument leans on Chapter 4's account of where grounding ends and on Chapter 5's account of time. The results also carry the open question whether equality can obtain at all.

The case against the kalām holds on both branches the book leaves open for time. If the past has no first moment, the universe never begins, and the kalām's second premise is false. If it ends at a boundary, the cause cannot be shown to be necessary. A reply that failed on only one branch would leave the defender a retreat. This one leaves none.

The chapter reframes the dispute and says it does not settle it. Two things it declines to do: disprove theism, and settle whether being requires determination. What survives is necessity of another kind, that being as such cannot fail, and that claim rests on a premise Chapter 9 names and costs.

Three routes to a divine origin have now been tried, and none reaches a creator that can be shown to be necessary. One retreat remains, that the foundation lies beyond description, and Chapter 12 takes it up.