

# The cosmological argument needs the law of causality

*Not a Chance: The Myth of Chance in Modern Science and Cosmology*

R.C. Sproul

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You may have noticed that Richard Dawkins and the New Atheists have heightened the (manufactured) debate between science and theology in recent years. In response, many Christians have written excellent books to defend the faith. But one book in the Christian collection adds a dimension to the debate that is frequently forgotten, and the omission often has disastrous consequences for Christian apologetics.

Such a disaster occurs when the Christians appear unable to stop, or at least slow down, the skeptic and his responses. If all truth is God's truth, then there should be a way of presenting the message of the Bible in such a way that gives the skeptic the most difficult time possible in presenting a response to his position. Can this be done? Yes it can, and one Christian apologist shows how it can be done.

R.C. Sproul's reputation as a fine theologian is well established, and his teaching materials circulate the globe in print and digital format. But he is also a superior philosopher and a logician. And it is logic that becomes his 'tool' for the defence of the creation of the cosmos by the God of the Bible. He explains why as we read through his book.

For Sproul, logic is not an abstract concept in the sense that philosophers refer to it as a brute fact.<sup>1</sup> Logic is

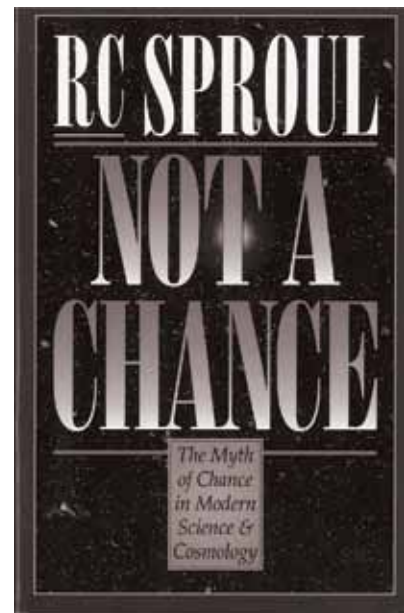
not material, but it is not unrelated to other facts of the universe. This is because logic comes from the God who is ultimate rationality and therefore ultimate logic. The 'laws' of the universe, in either science or philosophy, are the direct result of the creation by God who is an infinite being, rational, and logical.

The rejection of creation by God leads the anticreationists to one of two possible alternatives. Either the universe itself (e.g. matter and energy) is infinite in time and has always existed in some form, or else the cosmos self-created. In both instances, Dr Sproul uses the law of non-contradiction to assess these possibilities. And he commences his argument with a discussion of the idea of 'chance'.

A common mistake in debates between Christians and atheists is the fallacy of reification. Reification is the error of attributing concreteness to something that is not concrete. You cannot touch 'chance', nor can you smell it, hear it, see it, or taste it. 'Chance', rather, is an abstract idea which is used to indicate something which itself is not concrete but a mental concept. Thus, when people argue that an idea such as 'chance' *does* something, the fallacy is committed. The same applies when scientists suggest that 'science' has buried God. Science has buried no-one, certainly not God. But many scientists have *used* science in an attempt to explain a universe without God.

## Science vs magic

Sproul, however, is not content to explain the misuse of the idea of chance as merely a logical fallacy, which it is. "When scientists attribute instrumental power to chance, they



have left the domain of physics and resorted to magic. Chance is their magic wand to make not only rabbits but entire universes appear out of nothing" (p. 9). We are reminded of the comment by Prof. Andrew Strominger of Harvard University on black holes and singularities: "A singularity is when we don't know what to do."<sup>2</sup> This is the atheist version of the god-of-the-gaps that believers are often accused of using in their explanations. Skeptics appear to have created their own singularity-of-the-gaps as a way of responding to unanswerable questions.

In the raging debate for God, however, an ongoing struggle of definitions is occurring. Nothing, says the theologian, means nothing, period. But "linguistic confusion occurs when analytically false statements are used or when 'studied ambiguity' replaces linguistic precision" (p. 162). Some scientists, on the other hand, want to argue that nothing is something.<sup>3</sup> Often they are more than willing to attribute to nothing—that is, to chance—all kinds of activity. But this, argues Sproul, goes right against the scientific method itself:

"The classical scientific method consists of the marriage of induction and deduction, of the empirical

and the rational. Attributing instrumental causal power to chance vitiates deduction and the rational. It is manifest irrationality, which is not only bad philosophy but horrible science as well.

“Perhaps the attributing of instrumental power to chance is the most serious error made in modern science and cosmology. It is certainly the most glaring one. It is serious because it is a patently false assumption that, if left unchallenged and uncorrected, will lead science into nonsense” (pp. 9–10).

Since chance is nothing, to attribute any action to chance is to suggest that something comes from nothing. But *ex nihilo, nihil fit*—from nothing, nothing comes—is one of the basic applications of the law of non-contradiction, of which the law of causality is but one aspect. According to Sproul, this “law states simply that A cannot be A and non-A (-A) at the same time and in the same relationship”.

Self-creation out of nothing in any form, Sproul continues, is a compromise with the law of noncontradiction. It requires that something which does not exist must also exist at the same time, even if only briefly, in order to take action upon itself. To exist and not to exist at the same time is a violation of the law of non-contradiction, a nonsense. This law, Sproul argues, is fundamental to the acquisition of knowledge. Without it everything disappears into a bottomless ocean of meaninglessness. “For something to create itself, it must have the ability to be and not be at the same time and in the same relationship. For something to create itself, it must be *before* it is. This is impossible” (p. 12). Self-creation may often be masked with different language. ‘Spontaneous generation’ can become a substitute for self-creation. But this does not eliminate the problem of logic that the idea of self-creation makes for itself.

His final observation on the concept of self-creation is a telling one. Such

an argument is analytically false. “An analytically false statement is false by definition ... . Analytically false statements are adjudged to be false not only because they are unintelligible, but because they are nonsense statements.” Then he drives the point home: “They are not nonsense because they are unintelligible; they are unintelligible because they are nonsense” (p. 17).

In summary, either the law of non-contradiction holds in logic or else there is an epistemology of irrationalism. “If a truth’s contrary can also be true, no truth about anything can possibly be known.”

### Has QM pronounced the death of causality?

Has not quantum mechanics, however, shown that contradiction is inherent in the universe?<sup>4</sup> No it doesn’t, argues Sproul. Subatomic particles disappear and reappear at what appears to be random locations. But does this mean there are effects without a cause? Surely this is ‘scientific’ evidence that if the law of causality applies it does not necessarily apply everywhere. No, argues Sproul, because an effect is, by definition, that which has an antecedent cause. When an electron ceases to exist in one place while mysteriously appearing at another, perhaps it is time to ask whether the appearing electron is the same one that disappeared elsewhere.

“Does the electron pass out of being and back into being?”, asks Sproul. “Is it destroyed and created all at the same time? Does it exist and not exist at the same time and in the same relationship? If so, science is finished, wrecked by maverick electrons that make knowledge of anything impossible” (p. 44).

Sproul is on a roll with his use of the law of non-contradiction. He concludes:

“If a theologian declared that God can be in Boston and not be in Boston at the same time and in

the same relationship, he would be laughed to scorn by the scientific community. Please excuse this theologian for laughing at the attribution of this same ability to an electron” (p. 46).

Is there a possibility, however, that the scientist is witnessing uncaused effects in his quantum laboratory? No, argues Sproul, “because uncaused effects represent a contradiction in terms” (p. 48). What ‘arrogance’ is assumed in such a scientific conclusion that there are effects without a cause? Such a claim presupposes *omniscience*, and Sproul is not ready to concede that omniscience is an attribute of any human or the outcome of accumulated human endeavour.

“To say that an effect has no cause can easily be done by retreating into irrationality (and still retaining some humility). But to say that *we know* a given effect has no cause presupposes that we have full knowledge of every possible cause in the universe. That requires total knowledge of all that there is [emphasis added].”

In other words, the law of causality and the law of non-contradiction form a fearsome opponent to the arguments that attempt to leave God out of the discussion on origins of the universe. “To be free of causality is to be free of



Photo: Wikipedia/James Thompson

**Figure 1.** R.C. Sproul (1939–) is an American theologian, author and pastor. He is also a superior philosopher and a logician.

logic, and license is given for making nonsense statements with impunity” (p. 52). The only exception to the law of causality is not found in the QM laboratory, but must be something that exists necessarily and therefore has no beginning.

### The necessary God

Having demolished the idea of self-creation, Sproul now turns to the issue of an eternal universe. To do that, he highlights the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and the argument for necessary being (*ens necessarium*). Before he arrives at that, however, Sproul recalls the debate between the pre-Socratic philosophers Heraclitus and Parmenides. This is the problem of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’. If all is flux, as Heraclitus argued, then everything is in constant change. But the opposite extreme was that of Parmenides, who argued that nothing is changing. Aristotle resolved this by affirming the reality of change, but it was ‘actualizing’ some ‘potentiality’. Biblical theism has asserted on the basis of biblical revelation that God is not the God of potentiality; he is fully actualized. There is no change in God: He is pure being. He cannot be pure being and subject to change. For if God is subject to change, he is still in the process of *becoming*. In which case he would exist in time, for time is the theatre of change.

Making use of the law of causality in particular, Sproul explains the argument for God. God is necessary, both *logically* and *ontologically*. If something exists now, the law of non-contradiction prohibits self-creation. In order to avoid an infinite regress in an argument—what Sproul describes as an infinite absurdity—there is, and must be, something that has always been in existence. In other words, “it has the power of being within itself. It is not dependent on anything outside itself in order to be.” Thus he concludes, “So we know logically that *if* something exists now,

then *something* is self-existent. Self-existence is now a logically necessary concept” (p. 52).

But does this logical conclusion require God (the Creator) to be the answer to self-existence? Until the question of metaphysics is addressed the answer will not be obvious. And here, Sproul is keen to eliminate what is often a misunderstanding of transcendence. The idea of transcendence might be mistaken to be a spatial or geographic term. This term, though, does not describe where God lives.

“Transcendence refers to God’s *ontological* status with respect to the world. God, by virtue of self-existence, is a higher order of being than that which is not self-existent ... . Transcendence refers to that sense in which God is ‘above’ or ‘beyond’ the world. ... When theologians say God is a transcendent being, they mean that he transcends every created thing ontologically” (pp. 160, 183).

What is a self-existent being? One that never *commences* to be. A being who begins is not self-existent and such a notion would confront us yet again with the law of non-contradiction.

The law of causality states that every effect must have a sufficient cause. Since self-creation is not logically possible, then the sufficient cause of the cosmos can only be the God of the Bible, who always has been. He meets the demands of logic. No-one has shown how that which is personal, for example, can come into existence of its own volition or be brought into existence by that which is impersonal. Such a claim ignores the law of causality. And if all the components of the universe are placed in a line, the God of the Bible is the sufficient cause for every one of them. Nothing else, and no-one else, fits the bill.

It is not surprising that there should be a rejection of the law of causality. Many atheists are reluctant to affirm

causality as a necessary ‘law’ of logic, just as they are also hesitant to affirm the law of non-contradiction as a necessary precondition for knowledge. The idea of causality involves mind and purpose. If the Creator God is to be denied, then it is a logical extension to deny the law of non-contradiction and the law of causality. Ultimately, this will also call into question some of the conclusions of science, since the law of inertia is intricately involved with the law of causality.

“The idea of self-creation is *sayable*; it is not rationally conceivable [emphasis in original]” (p. 173), concludes Sproul, as his final chapter discusses philosophers such as David Hume and Bertrand Russell. By misstating the law of causality, Russell, following John Stuart Mill, concludes that everything must have a cause, including God. Rather, the law of causality is much more particular: every effect (or event) must have a sufficient cause. Thus, not everything has a cause, just those things that are classified as having a beginning.<sup>5</sup> If everything has a cause, however, this forces the argument into an infinite regress of causes and thus there is no possible identification of a first cause.

So the unbelieving skeptic must then make another selection from the ‘possible answers’ basket. He might suggest, as explored earlier, that the universe brought itself into existence, at which time Sproul will simply assert that the law of non-contradiction provides a logical falsification of such an idea.

“We have insisted *ad nauseum* that the concept of self-creation is falsified by the law of non-contradiction. There is every reason why the world cannot come into being without a cause. Reason itself is the reason why this premise must be rejected. It asserts a formal impossibility.”

Russell postulated the possible existence of an external world. Such a notion, argues Sproul, is not a “formally false” argument.

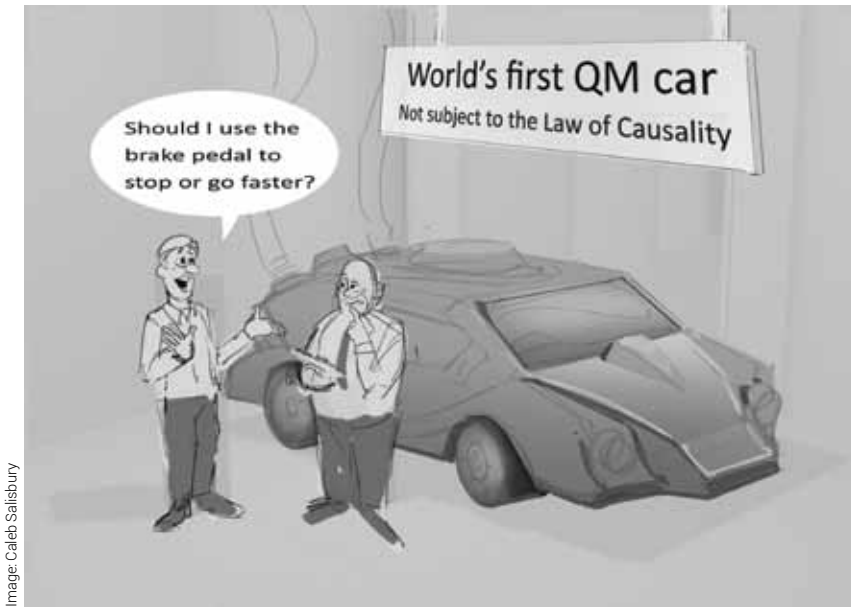


Figure 2. Has quantum mechanics eliminated the law of causality?

“Indeed, reason demands that if something exists, either the world or God (or anything else), then *something* must be self-existent. The only possible alternative to this is that something comes into being without a cause or is self-created” (p. 179).

**The policeman of science**

In the words of Francis Schaeffer, echoed by Sproul, that which is impersonal is not a sufficient cause for that which is personal. So the self-existent something, which is the ultimate cause of everything else, must contain within it all “necessary being” to bring into existence everything else that exists.

“The force of the First Cause argument is this: *If* something exists, something somehow, somewhere, at some time has the power of being intrinsically. It is not an effect. The only logical alternative to a First Cause is a No Cause” (p. 180).

This is a very tight argument from logic that Sproul presents. The choices appear to be:

a. The only logical alternative to a First Cause is a No Cause.

- b. An argument for an infinite regress of causes, but this gives no ultimate answer.
- c. The idea of self-creation, but this notion violates the law of non-contradiction.
- d. If the cosmos came into being without any cause, then it cannot even be its own cause.
- e. The only logical possibility that remains is that something is self-existent. And that something must be the sufficient or adequate cause for everything else that exists.

If something is self-existent it cannot be a part of the world that comes into existence. A pen, a computer, a desk all had a beginning. Thus, the idea of self-existence demands a distinction in ontology in the idea of being: Being *without* a beginning, and being *with* a beginning. And that being without a beginning (i.e. the being that is not an ‘effect’) is God. Not just any old god, but the self-attesting ontological Trinity of Scripture, who, among other things, is “infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”<sup>6</sup>

“If it is the function of the mind to seek or to find order in the

phenomena, then it is the function of reason to arbitrate that order” (p. 126).

Thus, for Sproul, logic acts as “the governor or policeman of science” (p. 128). The law of non-contradiction “is a law of *knowledge*, because where the law is violated no knowledge or intelligible discourse is possible” (p. 127).

**Conclusion**

In this book Sproul calls the reader back to a rigorous use of logic and rationality. The God of the Bible is variably described as absolute rationality, absolute will, absolute truth, absolute love, and more. These are not antiquated abstractions but form the very basis of logic, rationality, and truth. Thus the God of the Bible exists and has created all things apart from Himself as the Scriptures reveal. Neither logic, nor rationality, nor truth will entertain any other answer.

**References**

1. A brute fact is one that has no relationship to any other fact. It is an absolute abstraction and therefore without meaning.
2. Kaku, M., Quantum Mechanics vs General Relativity, youtube.com, accessed 9 September 2013.
3. “Nothing is Something” is the title of chap. 9 in Lawrence Krauss’s *A Universe From Nothing: Why There is Something Rather Than Nothing*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012. See review by Reynolds, D., *J. Creation* 27(1):30–35, 2013.
4. See Sarfati, J., If God created the universe, then who created God? *J. Creation* 12(1):20–22, 1998; creation.com/if-god-created-the-universe-then-who-created-god. Also, Should creationists accept quantum mechanics? *J. Creation* 26(1):116–123, 2012; creation.com/qm.
5. Thus the Kalam Cosmological Argument is framed as ‘every beginning has a cause’.
6. The answer to “What is God?” from the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q.4.