

My "dialogue" on the kalam argument with Bill Craig

Links and notes

Bill Craig and I had a "dialogue" on the kalam cosmological argument at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri on March 16, 2009. I have no idea when the "video" of this thing might be available. I'm not particularly looking forward to it, since I said far too many stupid things that I would want to rephrase or retract altogether, and failed to say the many intelligent things I should have said. Isn't that how it usually goes in these high pressure public events? I wonder why anyone expects that genuine light is going to be shed on anything in such a setting.

Craig's opening statement contained no surprises. All the usual arguments were compressed into twenty minutes, but there was nothing new.

Since there seems to be some interest in this event, I have posted a copy of my opening statement, just as I read it. It includes "click points" that will take anyone who cares to see them through the slides in the accompanying powerpoint.

Here are the links. The opening statement can be found here:

<http://spot.colorado.edu/~morrsto/Reply2BillCraig.pdf>

And the accompanying powerpoint can be found here:

<http://spot.colorado.edu/~morrsto/Reply2BillCraig.ppt>

I did indeed argue that, as far as Hilbert Hotel type paradoxes are concerned, an endless future series of events of the sort that Craig himself believes to be possible would not be relevantly different from a beginningless series of past events. As far as I can see, the only way to avoid this conclusion is to say that the future is necessarily "open" in a way that would make it impossible for God to know in detail all the facts about each member of the endless series of "praises" that I envisaged.

Craig responded as I expected, insisting that the endless series of praises would be only a "potential" infinite. Whether it is a "potential" or an

“actual” infinite depends on how those terms are defined. I think the terminology makes little difference as long as the following points are acknowledged.

1. God could – *now* – make it the case that Wes and Bill will take turns praising Him forever.
2. Each of those future praises is discrete and fully determinate and can be referred to now. For example, we can now refer to the tenth praise, to the millionth, to the billionth, and so on. God would be able to refer to (and know all about) any of them.

Given 1 and 2, I think the question, *How many praises will be said?* is perfectly meaningful, and the only sensible answer is, *infinitely many*.

At one point, Craig appealed to “presentism” to help him out. As a presentist, he thinks future events don’t exist. I don’t see how this helps his case. For one thing, a presentist has to admit that past events don’t exist either. So a lot of fancy footwork will have to be done to show how a beginningless series of past events is any more of an “actual” infinite than an endless series of equally definite, determinate, and successive future events. But secondly (and I wish I’d made this point while we were onstage), I don’t see how the non-existence of future events is relevant to the arithmetical operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and so on that are involved in the supposed paradoxes of the actual infinite. Let me explain.

Suppose God determines that Wes and Bill *will* alternate praising him five times. How many distinct praises will occur? (Notice that this is *not* the same as asking “How many will *have occurred* at some future time?”) The only possible answer is that *ten* will occur. Now, then, we can ask, *What if God had instead determined that Wes will omit all his praises while Bill will continue exactly as in the first scenario?* In that case, *How many praises will be said?* The answer – obviously – is *five*. The fact that the future praises are non-existent doesn’t make it impossible to answer this simple question. The future praises are determinate, discrete, and they can be referred to. That’s all we need to make the question, *How many will be said?* meaningful.

So how is it relevantly different if – right now – God determines that each of an endless distinct, determinate, and successive praises will be said? If it’s

not relevantly different (and I can't see how it could be), then we are forced to say that infinitely many will be said. But that means that we can reproduce Hilbert's Hotel type paradoxes for the endless future series of praises. If God prevents infinitely many praises one way, *only finitely* many will be said. If He prevents infinitely many another way, *infinitely many* will be said. If anything, it's easier to reproduce the Hilbert's Hotel puzzles for an endless series of future events that God has already determined will occur than it is to reproduce them for a beginningless series of past events.

The only way out for Craig would be to deny that God *can* determine that each of infinitely many successive praises will occur. But I am sure he doesn't want to go down that road.