

The Eternal: Personal God, Deistic or Random Purposelessness?

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Introduction

Increasingly in life today, with the relentless hustle and bustle all around, people, Christians included, scarcely take time to question or probe certain assumptions taken for granted (Grenz, 1996). They do this for various reasons without the least reason to question why. For one thing, they may have inherited or adopted these assumptions from their ancestors, kinsfolk, or surrounding culture. For another, they are so fashioned and influenced by the structuring of their thought process by modern education (Craig, 1984). Still further, they probably have never had the time or leisure to raise the necessary key questions since what they have in hand pragmatically works well for them, so why bother? Interestingly, Science also has some assumptions, starting points or presuppositions from which it operates, premised on faith in some sense although the Scientist will deny this, claiming to base truth claims on factual empirical evidence (Kuhn, 1996). The Theologian, as much as the Scientist, equally has some fundamental presuppositions whether fideistic (i.e. presuppositional) or evidential in nature (Geisler, 2008; Craig, 1984). This paper approaches the issue of truth establishment from a slightly different perspective (though within presuppositional apologetics) rather than the usual evidential, teleological or other 'theism versus materialism' argument. It aims at demonstrating the fact that all, Scientist or not start from a faith (and at times syncretic) premise.

As Steven Gollmer (2013) has rightly observed, current Christian apologetics related to the Creation account (i.e. for a Young Earth) in Genesis has ranged from the evidential to presuppositional, contingent on the primary audience/readership and target group to be addressed. In order to make this a reality, the right question asked tends to elicit answers that ordinarily would not have come forth, much like what one gets when they place a question on an online search engine. The Scientist and Theologian alike are invited to objectively consider this paper for it is neither a theological nor a scientific apologetic but that which asks pertinent questions relating to origins demanding straight answers. In our research, we consulted various credible sources.

What is *eternal*?

The word *eternal* carries different connotations in our age and thus is variously defined or described. Steven M. Gollmer¹ of the Cedarville University has defined it as “*that which is before all things and will persist after all things are gone*”. According to Gollmer (2013), this eternal is the foundation or basis of all reality. I attempted to add my voice by defining it as ‘*something that precedes all creation, has no end and outlives time*’. From these two simple definitions and many others besides, it is evident that the idea of *eternal* carries several basic minimums such as 1. Superseding and outstripping time. 2. Not be confined to time. 3. Outside and completely other of time in the sense we know it.

Why the *Eternal*?

Perhaps the question that begs answering at this stage is why ask the eternity question rather than exploit the conventional route? Why spend so much time on words or a series of them? A number of reasons can be adduced. The first is that the right question guides our discussion and probes further. Hitherto, certain expected and standard questions have been used leading to certain conclusions. The eternity question opens up fresh avenues of enquiry. Secondly, the eternity question helps clarify matters by probing areas where we do not ordinarily traverse. Thirdly, the eternity question proves that we all have presuppositions whether Theist, Scientist or not. Finally, the question engages the mind more seriously than merely parroting what others have said. The answers given to the eternity question betrays what we inherently hold, believe and espouse. Further, this question posed from this angle generates several responses and questions we interact with in later sections of this paper.

Implications of *Eternal* question

The implications are long ranging including establishing that truth is not only found or arrived at using one single method but several. Second, the eternal question highlights or exposes some inherent biases people have whether theistic or not. There is no true neutrality in the world, in that sense. What is deemed as true, in a large measure depends on one’s world view and hind beliefs (Geisler, 2008).

Selected Considerations/scenarios

¹ Paper available at:

https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1178&context=science_and_mathematics_presentations, accessed on 26th April, 2022.

Several questions have been raised with potential to guide our discussion of the eternity question. It must be stated that there are hard and soft positions over this matter. We consider each perspective here briefly via reactions, propositions or questions, Gollmer (2013), is here extremely handy:

- **Absurd and ridiculous question:**

This question of the eternal definitely provokes people because it asks a question that is somewhat too basic, confusing (i.e. questions such as “Who made God?” or “What was before the beginning of ‘time’?” if we treated time as a commodity?) and to some extent non-sensesical. And yet it is this question that is best placed to probe into the inner recesses of enquirer’s hearts. St Augustine probed into some of these philosophical questions and puzzles. Various reasons account for this reaction. The first is that according to Science, reality is enshrouded and bound up in the material world (Kuhn 1996; Burge 2005; Wright 1994; Morris 1974). Although the universe may be said to be eternal, it is physical in nature and as such all deliberations should be within the physical realm that can be tested² and seen or verified using the five senses. Repeated experimentation, empirical evidence and interpretation from what is visibly verifiable is what constitutes Science. The word “eternal” used in the sense of this paper may suggest delving into the metaphysical (i.e. the nature of things etc.) which is beyond the scope of science, a limitation³. The second reaction could be that this use of the word “eternal” suggests design, a plan or purpose by a supreme creator or being. Like Bertrand Russell (1967) and others before or after, this suggestion⁴ is repulsive because the universe was not caused or created by some supreme being. As far as these pundits are concerned, the universe is purposeless and random. The third reaction is that discussion of the eternal has at its base a presupposition that some being exists or created all things. According to the scientific method, we do not come to perform the task of science with a presupposition or basic assumption. What is objectively verifiable by repeated experimentation is what holds not any hunch or unverifiable or no-evidenced intuition. For these and other reasons, this question may be perceived as out of step and order with the times. One thing that Scientists forget however, is that even Science itself starts from a basic premise, a presupposition and then proceeds (Plantinga 1995). The final reaction is connected to the first reason; that of time. How do we treat the issue of time in relation to the eternal universe? Present understanding of General Relativity has some things to say such as Time and Space being related. But how is this to be understood in discussing origins? One question for instance would be: “How do we study life before it begun?” Clearly

² i.e. falsified

³ By that token, Science can only investigate and determine the nature of material things but not outside that realm.

⁴ E.g. of an eternal personal being or intelligent force.

Science cannot know or establish anything outside the realm of Time when no life existed, hence its other limitation.

- **Everything Out of Nothing:**

This view argues that something emanated from nothing to become the universe(s) we now see or observe with all our sophisticated powerful technological gadgets⁵ such as telescopes or electronic microscopes (Plantinga 1984; Geisler 2008; Craig 1984). The universe that is, has a beginning and emanated from nothing, so this view posits. It further argues and according to current scientific information, that the mass/energy of the universe is zero in total and thus makes this assertion possible in sync with Einstein's Relativity Theory that suggests that space⁶ is firstly curved at some point, making it possible to traverse the universe in shorter time than initially thought, and that the universe can expand indefinitely because of the zero effect in the kinetic and gravitational forces or energy (Gollmer 2013) . If two energy forces: kinetic and negative gravitational are in equilibrium (or in balance), then the universe can expand infinitely without problems or else if either of these forces are greater, we may have a collapsed or open universe, both which are unstable. As things stand, the universe is said to be stable (Gollmer, 2013; Krauss, 2012). As for the origins of species, some chance occurrence over a long period of time, given the vastness of the universe, could have possibly caused a one off accidental (i.e. a happy accident!) happening to spawn the universe as we see it today. No creator or order was involved but merely a chance occurrence. By this view, the universe has evolved from nothing and continues to without purpose, aim form or special design. Further, it has been claimed that the universe that we now see must have been spawned from invisible matter existing outside the known universe. Some of these claims are surprising to come from renowned Scientists like Lawrence Krauss that effectively border on faith!⁷ His book *A Universe from Nothing* makes interesting reading where he makes some interesting statements. The introductory sections of the said book paint a picture of a disappointed and somewhat disoriented Einstein, who, after a decade of painstaking research arrived at conclusions at variance with the trending popular scientific views in his day⁸. It would take nearly 100 years before his theories would actually be proved true. This sounds fascinating for sure. It appears Krauss makes similar attempts ready to be vindicated by the future. To appreciate what we here suggest, let us quote this giant

⁵ Such as the Hubble Space Telescope or more recently and better, the James Webb Space Telescope (Launched 25th December, 2021). More data about this accessible at:

<https://www.space.com/news/live/james-webb-space-telescope-updates>, accessed on 26th April, 2022.

⁶ It suggests that Space and time are intricately connected. Refer to: <https://www.space.com/17661-theory-general-relativity.html>, accessed on 26th April, 2022.

⁷ As at 2022, some Scientists are now suggesting the existence of an anti-universe, in addition to the M-Universe! Much speculations of sorts just there!

⁸ See chapter 1.

verbatim about the idea of something emanating from nothing, although he initially queried this possibility: *“This thinking is strikingly non-intuitive that can seem almost magical...our universe is so vast that, as I have emphasized, something that is not impossible is virtually guaranteed to occur somewhere within it. Rare events happen all the time.”* Now that is post-modern theoretical science for you...sounding more of fideism for once!!!

- **Eternality of the material universe:**

This view posits that the universe is made up of material that is eternal, unable to be created or destroyed. These⁹ are said to be eternal minute (non-divisible) building blocks called atoms. This eternal material has always been and merely changes form (i.e. into matter or energy) or shape but retains its presence in the universe. This implies that this eternal is impersonal, purpose less and has neither beginning nor end. The challenge with this view today is that atoms have been discovered not to be the smallest particles in nature given the presence of quarks and other discoveries (Gollmer 2013). In fact, atoms can be proved not to be the smallest particles using the best extant cutting edge technology. However, the issue here is that the material universe is eternal which is brought into question by some. The question arises from the fact that the universe has been proved to be expanding by modern Science using state of the art technology and gadgets such as the Hubble Telescope or the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST)¹⁰ that peer into the deep wonders of the universe into time. For now we focus on what we know best, the Hubble. The Hubble has proved that the universe is expanding and if that be the case, then extrapolating backwards, there must have been a beginning. This view, in itself, smashes the idea of an eternal material universe. Further, it is difficult to definitively test the validity of these claims either of eternality of matter or finite universe using the standard scientific mode of experimentation. Only models and theories abound attempting to explain the finite nature or not of the material universe including one proposed by Fred Hoyle¹¹ and others called the Quasi Steady State (QSS) universe where matter is continuously being created as the universe expands. Lawrence Krauss proposes the Eternal Inflation¹² hypothesis that posits that non-interacting universes appear or are spontaneously created from false vacuum drawn from the substratum. These universes are linked by the recently confirmed Higgs field and particle by Europe's

⁹ i.e. eternal matter, minutest elements of matter.

¹⁰ This telescope, at full and proper function is expected to peer some 100 times more the Hubble, into the distant past, so some sources claim. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Webb_Space_Telescope#:~:text=It%20can%20detect%20objects%20up,time%20after%20the%20Big%20Bang), accessed on 26th April, 2022.

¹¹ Boyle presents this QSS case alongside Burbidge and Narlikar in 2000

¹² First proposed by Linde and Vilenkin

CERN hadron collider. If this be true, then newer and smaller universes can be spawned out leading to the Darwinian scenario where only 'the fittest universes progressively survive' to the next stage. As can be seen, none of these theories adequately or satisfactorily answer the material universe eternity question.

- **The eternal is a Metaphysical essence or Cosmic consciousness:**

The eternal is said to be outside the scrutiny of Science because it¹³ resides in nature, having fashioned and designed it. This being or system may not necessarily be personal and is part of the created order. The said, the being is the one that is known by the order, detail and design in the cosmos. This consciousness in the living cosmos is indicative of the existence of this being. This is one form of Panentheism or at best Pantheism. Plato and Aristotle had a lot to say on this matter and are thus quoted by some, though not most modern scientists, to foster their cause. It is generally believed to be misleading in some sense. Slightly viewed at another angle, this leads to the idea of *Gaia*¹⁴, belief that nature has life in itself, thus an intelligent living being.

- **The eternal is divine, self-existent, self-sufficient, omnipotent and a personal creator:**

This view posits that the created order has a supreme personal being that has designed, willed to create by His word (not using evolution per se) and enshrined purpose, perfection including meticulous order in all He has created. This being is intimately involved and connected to what He has created (i.e. immanent) and yet transcendent at the same time, dwelling outside time (and thus beyond the conventional scrutiny of the scientific method). This being not only is the perfect creator but is the omnipotent, able to create at will, governs all things by His providence and is Spirit in nature (John 4:24 ff). Unlike the deistic being that created and retreated into obscurity, hoping things will unwind as humans make voluntary decisions, the personal God interacts with His creation, communicates through His word and works according to His will. This personal being communicates in real and several ways and thus may be known by His creation, given the special and general revelation. What Science can do is confirm His being and existence by proxy through what He has created, the intricate and delicate order, design and functioning (Romans 1:18ff; Psalm 8; 19; Job 38; Isaiah 40) because He is beyond tracing out (Romans 11: 33-36)! In Him, all things move, exist and have their being! This is the Christian Creationist view often classified as largely fideistic (Geisler, 2008).

¹³ Some give a personal pronoun of he or she.

¹⁴ A goddess of nature, say the earth.

What Others Have Said or Written on the Matter of Reality

As hinted at in this paper, Steven M Gollmer has devoted an entire paper highlighting the various viewpoints highlighted in this paper on how people come to an establishment of truth¹⁵, using evidences or other premise. Gollmer ably demonstrates that the presuppositional arguments for creation and reality are equally valid given the limitations of other views. Another, Dr Norman Geisler has written in his land mark text “*Christian apologetics*” highlighting the various views available on the apologetics market demonstrating that each of them has weak and strong sides. For instance, he demonstrates that both evidentialism and fideism have their limitations and potencies. Evidentialism at times relies on historical evidence that is time and context bound to be significant and may not appeal or resonate to the postmodern mind. Others however, such as Lawrence Krauss vehemently deny that Science is premised on or includes the metaphysical asserting that facts, brute facts alone are admitted as crucial evidence for truth establishment. This is laced with rank rationalism in many senses. Krauss (2012) has written a thought provoking book ‘*A Universe from Nothing*’ whose title may mislead but in fact is atheistic in nature. Richard Dawkins has written the afterword, which confirms the Atheistic nature of the book on Origins¹⁶. The arguments in the book are clearly from a naturalistic premise attempting to explain the universe from interesting angles. An established and respectable scientist Karl Popper (1963)¹⁷ had some useful things to say about the nature of Science. He stated that true science dealt with repeated experimentation in the immediate or present physical realm (Popper, 2002). Anything outside that fails to pass for true Science. The boundaries and limitations of the Scientific Method are thus drawn. Of course, Thomas Khun added other dimensions to the discourse surrounding the nature of Science.

Lessons Gleaned from this Consideration

From this consideration, we learn many valuable lessons worth carrying along as we do the noble task of apologetics. We point out some of these learnings below:

- Various views of reality are on the market ranging from the evidential to the subjective presuppositional. These are couched in philosophy’s metaphysics and epistemology.
- Of the several views and approaches, it is reasonable to hold that creation was brought forth by a personal, self-existent and all powerful being called God. This being is one and intimately linked or connected to his creation and yet transcendent.

¹⁵ A form of epistemology and metaphysics intermixed or dealt with side by side.

¹⁶ In our view, atheism is a religion in itself.

¹⁷ As echoed by Nicholas Maxwell, 2017 in his book ‘*Karl Popper, Science and Enlightenment*’

- Other equally interesting views on origins exist and worth knowing such as advanced by Lawrence Krauss, Paul Davies, Richard Dawkins among others.
- People are more ready to believe Homer, Plato, Aristotle or Socrates stories or writings far more easily than the Holy Bible account of Genesis, and yet there is far more historical evidence for the Bible (ranging into the thousands) far more than all other works mentioned above combined.
- God dwells outside time (Transcendent) and thus cannot be subjected to scientific enquiry method. He is the holy other, past tracing out, the inscrutable one. At the same time, God is immanent.
- The universe has a beginning and has some meticulous order about it that is inexplicable even by science. The view that the Universe is expanding suggests there was a beginning point, hence the non-eternality of matter as well as the commencement of the Universe at some point in the past. The Hubble Telescope, and now more recently, the JWST, have helped us peer into the deeper recesses of space suggesting an expanding Universe, according to the present scientific knowledge.
- True objective Science and Religion/Christianity are not at odds but complement each other. In fact, Science expounds what God has said in his word. A towering science giant, Werner Gitt makes the following astounding statement in this regard: *“To my mind, scientific findings and biblical affirmations are inseparable. It is a tragic fact of history that these two approaches have diverged and become separated.”* (From the Introduction)
- Another school of thought posits that the universe has no purpose, no special design and came into being by mere chance, despite the huge probabilistic odds against evolution’s claims.
- Evolution is the default presuppositional basis of many in the scientific community, although at one time, all science originally hailed from the theistic cradle.
- There is need to have Christian thinkers to occupy and be found in the various faculties around the world’s university. We desperately need faculty members that will write and contend for the faith from a theistic premise as Steven Gollmer has ably demonstrated. Using language that faculty can understand or resonate to is not far from Paul’s approach

found in Acts 17 and 18. Lars Dahle¹⁸ makes much of this latter suggestion in his apologetics perspective.

- A lot of time is needed for a chance occurrence to take place in the case of evolution. Huxely and others firmly stood on this evolutionary premise of chance occurrence despite the extremely low probability evidence of evolution having taken place in relation to Origins.
- Some people hold that it is true that Natural selection (i.e. micro-evolution not Macro evolution) still does take place today but creation has been completed from the beginning. What God does is to sustain all things through providence. Mutations within organisms do take place but progressive organism transformation never take place as suggested by Evolution pundits.
- One view posits that the universe is still expanding at an exponential rate, according to Richard Dawkins and others. They use this as an argument for evolution and the Big Bang Theory. They claim that even the Hubble Telescope has proved this fact. This claim has implications: The universe had a beginning.
- Yet another view suggests that there are multiple universes (M-Universe) not one universe in sync with Hinduism or some such religion. This view further argues that new universes are consistently and periodically being spawned. This suggests that millions of black holes and universes exist. Lawrence Krauss and others probably would agree with the idea of new Universes being consistently spawned out while other older attributes disappear into oblivion by the same token.
- There is need to point out the boundaries and limitations of Science. Although it is respectable and does great wonders for us, it is none the less limited to the physical not the metaphysical realm. Dr Karl Popper (1963) made an important distinction worth noting and yet sadly ignored if not over turned in our day.
- Theology is defined as the “*study of God and his creation*” while Science, according to Gollmer, is defined as “*a system of knowledge that can be tested against the physical universe*”. Each of these has standards or methods from which to verify legitimacy of a truth claim. For the scientific method, it is experimentation by empiricism while for the Christian; it is the canon of scripture. Without these standards, the triumph goes to the most persuasive and eloquent orator of the day. The door remains wide open

¹⁸ Refer to his work at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348962001_Lars_Dahle-Acts_17_16-34_An_Apologetic_Model_Then_and_Now_PhD_thesis_The_Open_University_2001_UK Date accessed: 26th April, 2022.

for whoever presents their case well or the most convenient option for the day, especially if it is in sync with popular majority.

- Cosmological¹⁹ models are ever in use to attempt proving the origins of life. Further, as earlier hinted at, some hold that the Universe is expanding and replicating itself in the process. Thus, there could be a number of universes at any given time and continues to be so.
- Science has a Philosophy that Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn and others have sought to expound in the past in relation to the true nature of Natural Science²⁰ but these are now in question in the postmodern context that allows for the metaphysical aspects. Champions of these aspects, although not conscious perhaps, include Stephen Hawkins, Leonard Mlodinow, Lawrence Krauss and others who assert that Science is the ultimate answer to everything and nothing else, not even Religious revelations. They, like Religion, have Dogmas.
- Ones' core beliefs and world view inevitably influences their interpretation of data or findings even in the best laboratory in world. This implies that two people can look the same set of data but attribute different interpretations to it because perception is coloured by hind world view. There is no neutrality.

Importance and Value of this Consideration

As the world evolves with new things and ideas consistently being spawned, it is ever so important for the Christian to appraise themselves so as not to be left behind. Things are changing all the time. The ferocious contextual dynamism demands diligence and resolve to know stuff, pass them through the crucible of scripture and rightly interpret them so that we ourselves or our children do not get lost in the data avalanche. This consideration, though a bit mentally demanding and in some places somewhat technical, is a necessary endeavour. It opens correct avenues of thought and may require repeated reading, research and consistent updating on what is recently trending within theological discourses and without. Further, this consideration affords us the opportunity to interact with the leading thoughts about what naturalists think and how Christians should respond. Thankfully, Steven Gollmer, in the midst of a busy career, found time to push a case for God. We need to take the challenge to research and write. Our pens should never be idle. That is what we need, saints dotted all over this terrestrial ball making the case for the Lord. Moreover, it needs to be said that this is excellent review because it brings out out various aspects on the issue of Origins coupled with other related thoughts advanced by pundits from either side of the

¹⁹ And 'Cosmogenic' models used by Lawrence Krauss and others for origin of the Universe.

²⁰ In this we refer to Science that is solely materialistic in nature to the exclusion of all metaphysical aspects of nature.

coin. This paper triggers great questions leading to an exploration of different angles of thought before pointing to the revelation brought out in the Bible. The Bible needs to be heard in the public sphere because what is inherent there in is true. We advise readers to take an interest in science, read Journals while developing arguments for the cause of Christ. Being presuppositional apologists, we need to think Biblically at all times while objectively interacting with facts as they present themselves in God's world. We have a duty and privilege to do so.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it can safely conclude that truth can be established by asking the right questions in addition to the relevant physical evidence adduced. The metaphysical aspects are equally important and need not be negated as all researchers or proponents of a view commence from some presupposition. Thus, the response to The Eternal question cannot possibly be scientific at all.

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