JOSHUA RASMUSSEN
Azusa Pacific University

Final Version: DOI: 10.24204/EJPR.V10I1.2502

Andrew T. E. Loke, *God and Ultimate Origins: A Novel Cosmological Argument*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 200 pp.

If the debate over God's existence is a chess match, then the Kalam cosmological argument is a well-worn opening with many classic variations. Major and minor moves have been studied intensely by the greatest minds throughout history. This opening is about as powerful, or as weak, as the player who delivers it.

Enter Loke. Loke is not interested in playing a game of intellectual chess. His goal is more ambitious: he sets out to reveal *entirely new lines* available to the Kalam proponent. These lines emerge a few moves beyond typical first moves. In this review, I will consider some of the most interesting lines Loke proposes.

I first setup the position with the basic Kalam opening:

(1) Everything that begins to exist has a cause.

(2) The universe began to exist.

(3) Therefore, the universe has a cause. (1, 2)

(4) A cause of the universe would be a powerful, timeless (sans creation) personal agent.

(5) Therefore, a powerful, timeless (sans creation) personal agent caused our universe to begin to exist. (3, 4)

Start with (1). Loke begins by examining historical and contemporary lines in the debate over (1). He pays special attention to a "battle on the edges" exchange between Graham Oppy and William Lane Craig. What's at stake here is an argument for (1), which begins with a principle I shall call "Causal Modal Uniformity" (CMU):

> CMU: If something *can* come into being without a cause at the first moment, then things *can* come into being without a cause at later moments.

Loke identifies dialectical drawbacks in Craig's defense of CMU. For example, Craig weds himself to the controversial dynamic of time by his A-theoretic analysis of "comes to be". Moreover, Oppy advances a piece that threatens CMU. The threat is this: once things already exist, the placement of those things act as a necessary causal condition for any new things that might appear. If so, then once the first stuff appears uncaused, no new stuff *can* appear free from causally relevant conditions. This result knocks off CMU.

Loke tries a slight variation on CMU. I shall call his variation, "Causal Counterfactual Uniformity" (CCU):

Final Version: DOI: 10.24204/EJPR.V10I1.2502

> CCU: If the initial state of reality began to exist uncaused, then certain states of affairs *would* begin to exist uncaused at later moments of time.

To reinforce CCU, Loke appeals to an argument from *inexplicable differences*. His detailed description of the argument leaves open a number of interpretations. Here is one, briefly. Suppose S can begin to exist uncaused at the first moment. Then *nothing* prior to S's existence could explain why S has *its* particular properties. Therefore, S may be anything and may obtain anywhere at any time. Nothing stops that.

Loke highlights advantages of his strategy. First, it is not vulnerable to an attack on a dynamic theory of time. That is because mere differences in times, whether they are B-theoretic or A-theoretic, are not causally relevant. Moreover, Loke thinks he can block Oppy's threat by describing states of affairs (in particular, certain changes in energy fields), such that existing things would be causally irrelevant to their obtaining.

Loke's moves highlight a territory deserving further analysis. I see a few countermoves worth examining. First, a Platonist might suppose that there are brute necessary truths about uninstantiated properties, including truths about which properties can begin to be instantiated uncaused. On this theory, perhaps (*contra* Loke) there *are* things — abstract things — prior to an uncaused beginning that could explain why that beginning has its particular properties. Second, one might decline to accept that there needs to be any explanation of why only certain things, such as our universe, can begin uncaused. Perhaps it is just brute. Third, perhaps we can reinforce the Oppy-threat by developing further hypotheses about how existing things place causal conditions with respect to *any* new state of affairs; then, only a first state could begin without a causal condition.

These potential countermoves are far from decisive. But they show that the "inexplicable differences" argument doesn't yet take us into an end game. There are more moves to play on both sides.

Loke's most imaginative argument is his defense of (2) — a finite past. After reviewing a pattern of moves in the current state of the debate, Loke tells a Christmas story. One version of the story goes like this:

> A Christmas present generator generates presents at regular intervals for as long as time has existed. Meanwhile, a person generator generates persons at the same regular intervals. Happily, each person grabs a present. The end.

The point of the story is to highlight this:

> P. Each person grabbing one present from one temporal location rather than another has no causal power with respect to the presence of leftover presents.

For example, suppose *two* people and *two* presents are produced. Then each person receives a present and no presents are leftover. It makes no difference *when* people grab their presents. No matter when they do, all presents are unaccounted for at the end.

Things become strange, however, if we allow an infinite causal chain. Suppose, first, that each person grabs the present the same day it is produced, where one is produced each day. Then no presents are left over at the end. Next, suppose instead that people grab their presents this way: the person produced today grabs the present produced *yesterday*, and the person produced *n* days ago grabs the

Final Version: DOI: 10.24204/EJPR.V10I1.2502

present produced 2 * *n* days ago, where *n* is an integer ≥0. Then there will be infinitely many presents left over. Notice that the only difference between these cases is *when* certain produced presents are grabbed. This result violates P.

We now have Loke's argument for a finite causal history:

(1) If an infinite causal chain is possible, then P is possibly false.

(2) P is not possibly false.

(3) Therefore, an infinite causal chain is not possible.

You may wonder what might underwrite P. After all, P is about *Christmas presents*, and any necessary truth about Christmas presents will surely depend on more basic truths. Loke hints at a more basic principle when he suggests that causal power depends entirely on the *things* with causal power, not those things plus their *number*. One way (among others) to unpack this suggestion is in terms of inexplicable differences. In the two Christmas stories, the causal acts involve the *same* presents and the *same* people each performing the *same* type of act of grabbing a present. Yet, the effects are infinitely different: infinitely many presents are left over in the one story but not the other. What accounts for this difference? Loke argues that no differences are *causally relevant*. In other words, we have a difference in the effect without any relevant difference in the causes. That's absurd.

We are far from checkmate, however. There are defensive moves to explore. Perhaps we can put pressure on the premise that the differences between the cases are causally irrelevant. Or, we could explore ways to challenge the premise that a causal difference is required.

Still, there may be a way to reinforce his basic strategy by clarifying the connection between the cause and the effect. Consider a variation on his story. Suppose an infinite causal history has produced infinitely many villages. Each village elects a tree planter to provide more resources for producing Christmas presents. There are two planting strategies, Sparse and Plenty. In Sparse, the tree planters each plant a tree in their village. The result is that each village enjoys one more grown tree, from which a fancy snow sled is constructed. In Plenty, by contrast, the tree planters plant their trees in different locations. The soil is equally good, and the trees all grow at the same pace as before. But this time the tree planters plant in *other* villages. They arrange their planting as follows: for each village V_n, the ten tree planters from villages V_{10*n} to V_{10*n+9} plant their trees in V_n, where *n* is an integer ≥0. The result is that each village now grows ten new trees. In other words, planting the same seeds in different places yields *more stuff* for every village.

We can be precise about the meaning of "more stuff": scenario s_2 has more stuff than scenario s_1 if and only if s_2 has whatever s_1 has, while s_1 lacks something in s_2. Placing trees in one place gives each village a table, while placing those *same* trees in different places gives each village a snow sled plus nine additional trees for constructing a variety of other gifts. That's more stuff.

This result is strange, to say the least. The causal acts in both scenarios are qualitatively the same, yet the effects are wildly different. The causes only differ in their *location*, but locations don't have causal powers over and above the powers of the seeds and soil at those locations. Thus, we have the same causal acts with qualitatively different effects. If you have the intuition that this result is problematic, then you have an intuition that gets at a root of Loke's reason for the necessity of P.

Final Version: DOI: 10.24204/EJPR.V10I1.2502

Interestingly, a similar sort of "inexplicable differences" principle appears to be at work in many of Loke's other arguments. It guides his argument against uncaused beginnings (as we saw). It also appears to reinforce a Thomist variation he proposes. His basic thought there is this: whether causal chains are infinite or looped, there is something in the chain that isn't *explained* unless there is an uncaused cause of the chain. Take loops. Loke cites a case where someone learns to build a time machine from his future self, where his future self merely reveals what he remembered learning from *himself*. Here we have an *effect* — i.e., information about how to build a time machine — with no ultimate explanation. The same is so if knowledge is passed down from generation to generation, ad infinitum. In both cases, an effect exists (i.e., some knowledge) without any explanation.

You might wonder why an explanation should even be required. Loke has various things to say, but it appears to me that an "inexplicable differences" principle may be a root of Loke's thinking. Consider that there is no knowledge of how to build a time machine in *our* world. That's because *no one figured it out* (and we can assume for sake of illustration that it could be figured out). Yet, the same is so in the above scenarios: no one *figured out* how to build a time machine. Thus, no causally relevant difference explains how such knowledge exists in the loop and infinite regress scenarios but not ours.

Loke completes the book by considering the identity of an Uncaused Cause. Here he follows a "William Lane Craig" pattern of play to argue that the Cause is timeless (in an initial changeless state), powerful, and personal. The main moves here are not new.

I conclude with a note about how to get the most out of this book. I recommend thinking of the book as an invitation to analyze strategies rather than as a playbook for decisive lines of victory. Loke displays details of many contemporary arguments for and against each premise in the Kalam argument. He skillfully navigates through current debates as he finds his way to certain dialectical positions. He then contributes some ideas for how to make progress on those positions. Many of his proposals are tweaks, or comments, on existing lines, and they are generally consistent with a number of distinct interpretations. If you read his proposals too narrowly, you may miss avenues for further exploration on both sides. If, instead, you see his proposals as invitations to have a closer look at some classic board positions, then Loke's book will help you see more than you had. You will get an up-to-date landscape of analysis of one of the most significant and widely "played" arguments in history.