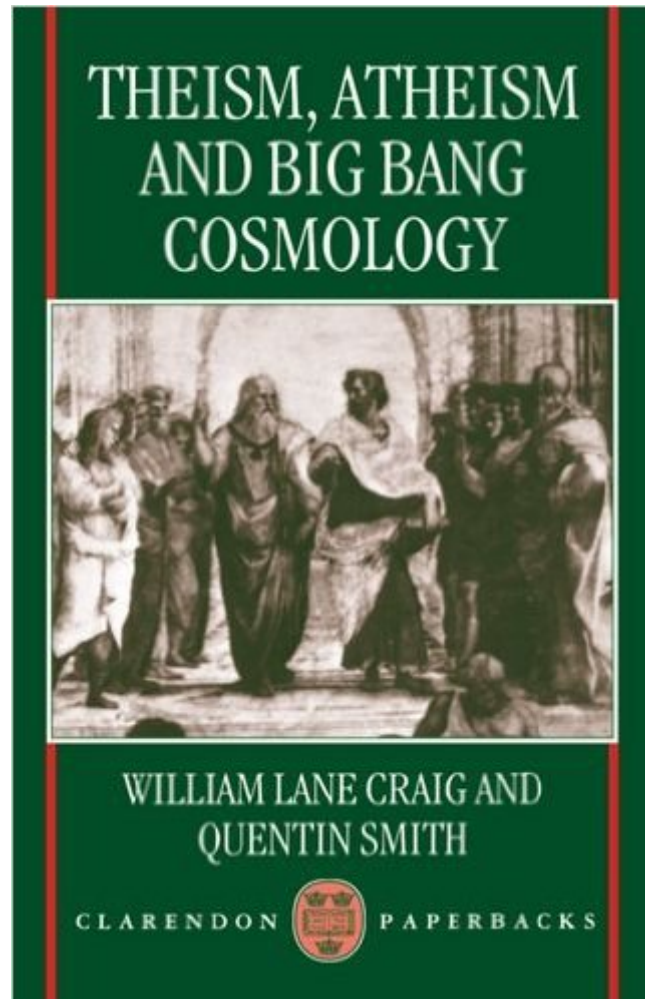


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Theism, Atheism, And Big Bang Cosmology (Clarendon Paperbacks)



Synopsis

Contemporary science presents us with the remarkable theory that the universe began to exist about fifteen billion years ago with a cataclysmic explosion called "the Big Bang." The question of whether Big Bang cosmology supports theism or atheism has long been a matter of discussion among the general public and in popular science books, but has received scant attention from philosophers. This book sets out to fill this gap by means of a sustained debate between two philosophers, William Lane Craig and Quentin Smith, who defend opposing positions. Craig argues that the Big Bang that began the universe was created by God, while Smith argues that the Big Bang has no cause. Alternating chapters by the two philosophers criticize and attempt to refute preceding arguments. Their arguments are based on Einstein's theory of relativity and include a discussion of the new quantum cosmology recently developed by Stephen Hawking and popularized in *A Brief History of Time*.

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Customer Reviews

This is not the easiest book in the world to read. Then again, its subject matter is recondite enough to warrant its difficult essays. It is recommended that anyone who wishes to take on this monster first be acquainted with philosophy as well as contemporary 20th century cosmology. Stephen Weinberg's "The First Three Minutes" and Timothy Ferris' "The Whole Shebang" would be good places to start before attempting to read this book. It would also be helpful for one to have read at

least one book on quantum mechanics ("Taking The Quantum Leap" by Fred Alan Wolf would be a wise choice) as a pre-requisite. Even having read these books beforehand, this is STILL not an easy book. What this book deals with is the First Cause argument which St. Thomas Aquinas borrowed from Aristotle & then modified for Christianity. The question it confronts is "Why is there something rather than nothing?" The Creationist's answer is that the answer lies with God, the cause of all things. The atheists counter that this does nothing but push the question back, as then one must ask "where did God come from?" (if, indeed, the universe "came" from anywhere at all). If one cannot answer this, then why not just skip a step and say that nobody knows where the universe came from? (as opposed of taking the seemingly superfluous step of inferring a God or gods). William Lane Craig defends the theistic side of the argument while Quentin Smith takes the helm for the atheists. Both are quite erudite & it makes for a very good match. In the 20th century, scientists used to adore the "steady state" theory, which was invented by Sir Fred Hoyle, the famous Cambridge astronomer. Why? you ask.

In this advanced work, Christian philosopher William Lane Craig debates atheistic philosopher Quentin Smith in a series of technical essays. The book is separated into three main sections. In the first section, Craig and Smith debate the possible existence of the actual infinite in the real world. Craig contends that the infinite is applicable only, if at all, in the realm of the mathematical. While admitting the applicability of Cantor's set theory, he tries to show that an actual infinite instantiated in the real world would lead to contradictions. He also argues that it is impossible to create an infinite by successive addition. He therefore concludes that the universe had a beginning. Smith counters Craig by attempting to resolve the supposed paradoxes, and establishing the reasonability of an actual infinite. In this section Craig also attempts to argue from the beginning of the universe to the necessity of a personal cause. Smith contends that, although the universe did begin to exist in the Big Bang, it is impossible to prove that it requires a cause and is therefore reasonable to assume that the universe began to exist without a cause. In the second section, Smith attempts to construct an atheistic cosmological argument. He claims that the Big Bang singularity will emit all configurations with equal probability, and, therefore cannot be guaranteed to result in a life-permitting universe. He concludes that the unpredictability of the first states of the universe is incompatible with divine creation, since God would want to ensure a life-permitting universe. Craig addresses this by denying the actual existence of the singularity and by countering that God's interaction in the world to ensure a life-permitting universe is compatible with His attributes.

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