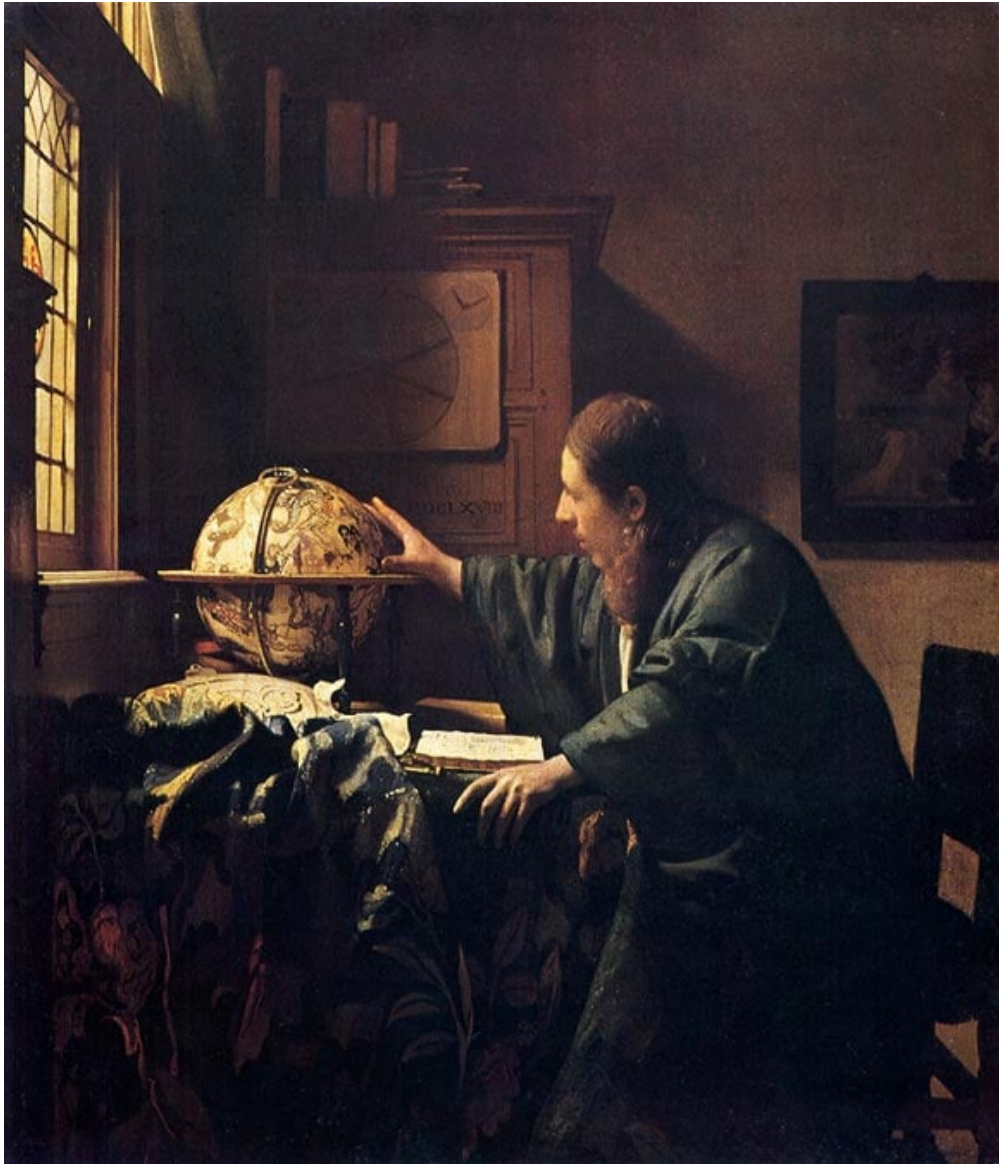


Genesis, a Cup of Tea, and the End of the World

by Kenneth Francis (September 2017)



The Astronomer, Johannes Vermeer, 1668

In an epic hit-and-miss essay on America losing its mind, in a recent edition of *The Atlantic* magazine, Kurt Andersen writes that Americans believe—*really believe*—in a story of life's

instantaneous creation several thousand years ago.

If Mr. Andersen is referring to the age of the universe or life, he is exaggerating. All Americans don't '*really believe*', although some do, in instantaneous creation several thousand years ago. From the Belgium Catholic priest, astronomer Georges Lemaitre (1894-1966), to astrophysicist Stephen Hawking, some 13.7 billion years seems to be the duration in time since the universe began, according to Big Bang cosmology. And most American Christians and atheists—again, not all—believe in this and an old universe/earth. As for life: it didn't just pop out of nothing *uncaused*, a concept that is religiously neutral.

However, Christianity, which is in fact the most science-friendly belief system amongst the world's religions, says nothing about the earth's age. As for human creation: The story of primordial beings, Adam and Eve, is infused with metaphor and symbolism. The Hebrew for Adam is 'Man', and Eve is 'Living One'. There was no talking snake, but a metaphor symbolizing Satan (serpent). However, this is an inhouse discussion amongst fellow Christians and subject of another essay. But back to creation: Stephen Hawking, although most of his views on astronomy are sound, is dismissive of the biblical account. He also rejects a creator.

About seven years ago, during a talk on Hawking at a university, I raised my hand and criticised comments he made in his then latest book, *The Grand Design*, which he co-wrote with Star Trek screenwriter Leonard Mlodinow.

My question was, "why did Hawking write such a nonsensical idea that the universe created itself because of gravity?" (In order for the universe to create itself it would have to have

existed before it exists, and gravity is part of the universe). I also asked why did Hawking write “philosophy is dead” at the beginning of his book (a self-refuting statement, as it’s philosophical), while constantly philosophising throughout the entire book?

There was an awkward silence in the lecture hall and the speaker looked at me in what seemed like a confused expression. He said, “Did he really say that?” (He hadn’t read the entire book). I told him the page numbers where he could find the quotes. I wasn’t criticising Hawking the man (a man enduring a severe neurone disease that has paralysed him for decades), but Hawking the scientist.

But, as the speaker looked at me with what seemed like an expression of disbelief, to my rescue came a distinguished astrophysicist on the panel, who stood up and said, “Kenneth is right; Hawking did write those things”. The subject was quickly changed in a ‘move-along-nothing-to-see-here’ kind of way. Because Hawking is an atheist and doesn’t believe the universe was created by God, his views on the origin of the cosmos generally go unchallenged by secular academics and the mainstream media who are generally hostile to Christianity.

And he’s not alone in this view. The likeable atheist philosopher Daniel Dennett also denies that the universe has any theological importance. Although he says that the universe has a cause, he thinks its cause is: ‘Itself’ (*WHAT?*). Yes, he calls this the ‘ultimate bootstrapping trick’ (is this a non-existing universe, sometime in the finite past, pulling up a non-existence ‘itself’ by non-existence bootstrings? Where do these metaphorical bootstrings come from? Not to mention ‘Itself’!) Not only is this logically incoherent but, in the words of Oxford University’s mathematician, John Lennox, nonsense remains nonsense regardless of who says it. Nonsense,

because in both Dennett's and Hawking's descriptions, a first state of the universe is beyond scientific explanation: it is outside of Naturalism, where there are no physical laws; therefore, the cause must be an eternal, uncaused, immaterial, personal, all-powerful and ultimately divine entity, i.e. a non-physical Mind: God.

Then there's the late celebrity scientist Carl Sagan, another likeable atheist, who also didn't accommodate the divine or a creator. He was also no stranger to contradictions and the odd, daft statement about the origin of the cosmos. He once said: "One of the great commandments of science is, 'Mistrust arguments from authority'. (Scientists, being primates, and thus given to dominance hierarchies, of course do not always follow this commandment.)"

What he seems to be saying is, 'don't trust what I'm saying', as he and all the other scientists are hairless apes prone to error. He added: "The cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be." *Really?* Whatever happened to the Big Bang and the Second Law of Thermodynamics (SLT)?

But the secular academia and 'intelligentsia' would rather believe celebrity scientists than The Bible's account of creation. This rejection of Genesis is where 'intellectual' pride gets you. In 2 Corinthians 11:19, St Paul said: "For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise." But not all non-believers are hostile to Scripture.

In his book, *The Genesis Enigma*, Oxford evolutionary biologist Andrew Parker wonders how did the writer of the first chapter of Genesis get it so scientifically correct. Parker is taken aback by the order of creation described in Genesis, which follows the order of geologic and life evolution as science

understands it. He writes: "Either the writer of the creation account of Genesis 1 was directed by divine intervention or he made a lucky guess."

Parker isn't alone. Other agnostics, theists and atheists marvel at the fine-tuning of the universe and its beauty. In his book *The Universe: Past and Present Reflections*, British astrophysicist Fred Hoyle wrote: "A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super-intellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as with chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature. The numbers one calculates from the facts seem to me so overwhelming as to put this conclusion almost beyond question."

The opening line of Genesis is historically the first to mention the Big Bang by another name: "In the beginning . . . " For the ancient Greeks and Eastern religions, the universe was/is eternal, but The Bible proved otherwise when a hint of the SLT debunked such unscientific notions. This law began to emerge again in the early 19th century and became widespread and fully developed in the 20th century, estimating the age of the universe at approximately 13.7 billion years old.

But it's not just the beginning of the universe that The Bible got spectacularly right and went against general accepted teaching of the time. For The Bible, there was never a flat earth. *Isaiah 40:22* mentions "circle of the earth," and in *Job 26:10*, God inscribed a circle on the surface of the waters. And what supports the earth? According to The Bible, it's not an infinite number of turtles all the way down, but space. God "hangs the earth on nothing" (*Job 26:7*). For the earth to be unsupported would have been regarded as absurd in the ancient world. Then there is the expansion of the universe. According to The Bible, the universe has been "stretched out" (*Isaiah 40:22*). Just imagine how ridiculous this sounded to our

ancient ancestors that the seemingly 'static' heavens that they saw in the night sky was in fact expanding.

There is much more on how astronomy confirms The Bible, but back to thermodynamics. To the ordinary person outside of the fields of science, the SLT might seem complex. However, the great philosopher, JP Moreland, gives a good 'coffee' analogy. But to borrow from JP, here's my 'tea' version of SLT: Imagine boiling a kettle to make a cup of tea. You pour the boiling water into a cup, place it on the table, and walk away. Twenty minutes later, you return to the cup and place your finger into the water, which is no longer hot but cooling down until it reaches the point of chilled. This is what is happening on a cosmic scale to the universe: everything is winding down to a uniform state; the lights and heat turned off resulting in heat death of the cosmos: from Big Bang to a pathetic whimper (you'll never look at a cup of tea in the same way again!). The philosophy writer PJ Zwart describes such a cosmic state:

. . . according to the second law the whole universe must eventually reach a state of maximum entropy. It will then be in thermodynamical equilibrium; everywhere the situation will be exactly the same, with the same composition, the same temperature, the same pressure etc., etc. There will be no objects any more, but the universe will consist of one vast gas of uniform composition. Because it is in complete equilibrium, absolutely nothing will happen anymore. The only way in which a process can begin in a system in equilibrium is through an action from the outside, but an action from the outside is of course impossible if the system in question is the whole universe. So in this future state of maximal entropy, the universe would be in absolute rest and complete darkness, and nothing could disturb the dead silence.

This is a major headache for atheists, as the beginning of the universe demands a first cause; in other words, a Creator, while the end of the universe, if there is no God, is cosmic 'curtains' with everything everyone ever did throughout history, *ultimately* becoming undone and in vain. In his book, *A Free Man's Worship*, atheist philosopher, Bertrand Russell, bleakly laments:

That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.

Russell, who criticised people who were certain of their beliefs, was certain of this depressing outcome. But one must commend his profound command of the ramifications of a Godless universe. But there is a God because something caused the universe and science points to a First Cause.

Even the world's most famous atheist, Richard Dawkins, gets confused on this question. During a TV debate in Australia a few years ago on the origins of the universe, Dawkins claimed something can come from nothing. He said: "Of course common sense doesn't allow you to get something from nothing . . .

SOMETHING [yes, you read that right] pretty mysterious had to give rise to the origin of the universe.” Dawkins also said supernatural claims for the universe should be “ridiculed with contempt.” Does that include the Big Bang, which was a supernatural event? Or freedom of the will? Or the laws of logic, aesthetic judgments, love, morality, mathematics, all of which transcend Naturalism?

Consider the philosopher William Lane Craig’s version of the Kalam Cosmological Argument. Here is the crux of the argument: whatever begins to exist, has a cause of its existence. The universe began to exist. Therefore, the universe had a cause of its existence. And this cause of the universe must be a *personal* creator.

Dr. Craig says the only way to have an eternal cause but a temporal effect would seem to be if the cause is a personal agent who freely chooses to create the universe. Think about it: there was no ‘before’ the universe because time itself was created with space and matter.

The term, mentioned earlier above, is ‘ontologically prior’ to the universe. Very few people, with the exception of a handful of philosophers, find God’s relationship with time and divine eternity to be enormously complex. It makes the problem of evil and suffering (theodicy), the greatest problem for most people, seem like a walk in the park. Think about it: God has always existed. However, he entered into time a finite time ago by an act of making a personal, free choice. So, the hard question is, what ‘was’ God doing ontologically prior to the universe? Was he floating around in some transcendent dimension whistling and twiddling his thumbs while waiting to create the Big Bang? Such a state seems absurd.

According to Christianity, God is a triune entity (three persons in the one Godhead) and, as such, there is spiritual love relationship within this entity. If God isn't triune, then His love would have to be self-absorbed love, which is an imperfection, just like a narcissist is deeply flawed. And as God is not some finite, human figure, we cannot know exactly what He was doing or thinking ontologically prior to the universe. As for Time: God also knows the future. This is not to say that we are determined and lack free will. Our actions and potential future actions are decided by us and us alone.

As for how the world will end: for the theist, spiritual eschatology is the apocalyptic viewpoint of the Second Coming of Christ. Here is how that event is described in the *Apocalypse of John*, the last book in the New Testament (remember, The Bible is rich in metaphor and symbolism. The NT text below is translated from Greek):

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven

and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." –Rev. 20.11-21.3 ESV

Eschatology, says Dr. Craig, has also become a branch of physics called: Physical eschatology. It is a sub-discipline of cosmology, which is the study of the large-scale structure and evolution of the universe. Cosmology subdivides into two parts: Cosmogony is the sub-discipline which studies the origin and past history of the universe. Eschatology, by contrast, is the sub-discipline which explores the future and final fate of the universe.

William Lane Craig again:

Just as physical cosmogony looks back in time to retrodict the history of the cosmos based on traces of the past and the laws of nature, so physical eschatology looks forward in time to predict the future of the cosmos based on present conditions and laws of nature. The challenge for those interested in the interface between theology and science is how to arrive at an integrated perspective on the world's future adequate to the concerns of both theology and science.

The key to physical eschatology is the Second Law of Thermodynamics. About the middle of the nineteenth century, several physicists sought to formulate a scientific law that would bring under a general rule all the various irreversible processes encountered in the world. The result of their efforts is now known as the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

With all that in mind, why not make yourself a nice cup of tea and don't worry about the end of the world . . . for now.

Kenneth Francis has for the past 20 years worked as an editor in various publications, as well as a university lecturer in journalism. He also holds an MA in Theology and is the author of [*The Little Book of God, Mind, Cosmos and Truth*](#) (St Pauls Publishing).

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