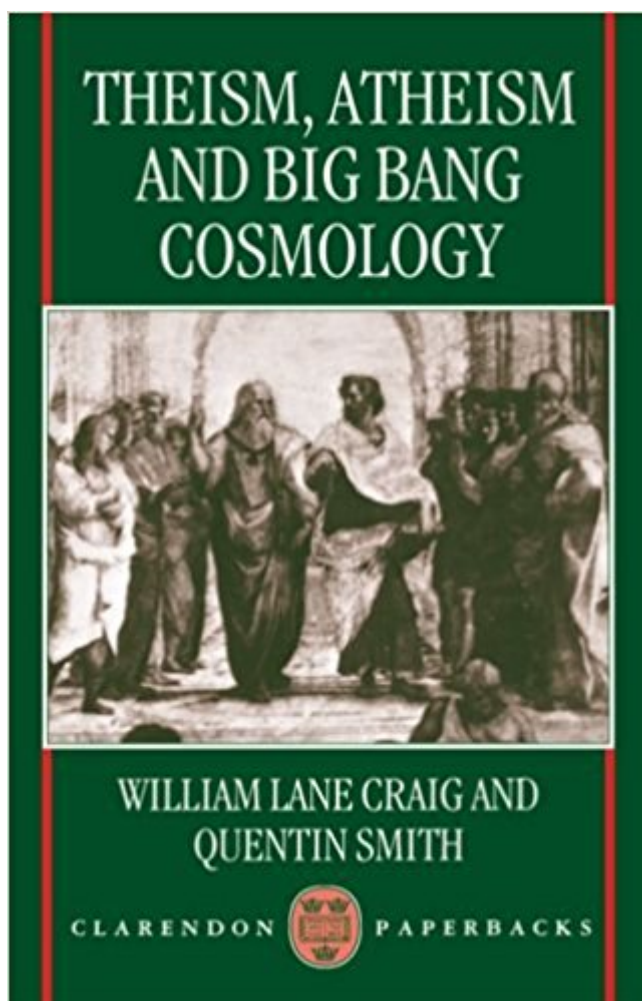


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Theism, Atheism, And Big Bang Cosmology (Clarendon Paperbacks)



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*.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Recommended for all college libraries."--Choice

William Lane Craig is at Catholic University of Louvain. Quentin Smith is at Western Michigan University.

Dr. Craig never disappoints!

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. In the final section, Craig critiques Hartle-Hawking Cosmology, which purportedly eliminates the need for a Creator. Craig shows that this cosmology only averts the need for a Creator by utilizing metaphysically absurd concepts such as "imaginary time." Smith agrees that the cosmology needs some changes in order to remain coherent, and in the final essay he attempts to improve the metaphysics of the cosmology in order to construct a plausible alternative to Divine Causation. This book, while extremely informative and interesting, was also very technical. Thus, it is recommended only for those who have a great interest in the topics discussed and who are looking for an advanced treatment of the issues.

Recent developments in the field of cosmology have caused it to become increasingly topical in the theism - atheism debate. Theoretical and empirical work during the last century has shattered the common modern belief that the universe was temporally infinite. Indeed, these developments have made a compelling argument for the universe having an actual being. Obviously, if one accepts the

finitude of the past this view has profound philosophical and theological implications. Why is there a universe? Is God the only viable hypothesis? In *Theism, Atheism and Big Bang Cosmology*, philosophers Quentin Smith and William Craig discuss these and other fascinating questions. The book has three parts. It is laid out in a debate style format wherein one author puts forth their case that is subsequently followed by a series of rebuttals and responses. In Part 1 Craig makes the theistic case. In Part 2 Smith makes the atheist case. In Part 3 the authors discuss some of the cosmological musings made by Stephen Hawking in his popular works such as *A Brief History of Time*. The first two parts of the book provide a comprehensive analysis of the implications of modern cosmology. Though well done, this discussion may be best suited for readers who possess some familiarity with modern physics and philosophical thought. An abbreviated and simplified overview of this topic can be found on Craig's website as part of a public debate between himself and Smith. For readers who have been exposed to Hawking's philosophical musings Part 3 should also be enjoyable. Smith in particular is helpful in reformulating and correcting some of Hawking's often muddled thoughts in this area. Although some of the argumentation can seem rather esoteric the book is worthwhile for anyone seeking a better understanding of modern cosmology

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