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How Do We Know the Universe Isn't Eternal?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how we know the universe isn't eternal and whether there are theological implications to evolution being true or false.

* If you think God wasn't created and is eternal by nature, how do we know the universe isn't eternal by nature and men just created God because they were struggling to understand the eternal nature of the universe?

* Are there theological implications to evolution being true or false?

Transcript

You're listening to Stand to Reason's hashtag SDRask podcast with Amy Hall and Greg Koukl. Hello, Greg. I just expect you to say something.

Yep, I'm here. Alright, let's start with a question from just say no to hate. If God wasn't created and is eternal by nature, how do we know that the universe was not created but is eternal by nature? And men struggling to understand the nature of the universe created God? Well, it's a fair question, but it's a question that is being asked by someone who has never, I mean, I suspect, done an assessment of the question about the universe, the age of the universe.

There are so many indications from the nature of the physical universe that the universe had to do. And I think it's a very clear beginning that it is without question now with regards to the scientific community. And it's not just a consensus.

It's a consensus for good reason. Broadly you have Big Bang cosmology. You have the redshift of receding galaxies.

You have a whole host of indicators that the, and also Einstein's work in, I don't know if I get many questions. Special and general relativity mixed up. But anyway, his work in physics at all point to the reality of an absolute beginning of the universe.

This is why scientists say the universe is what 14.5 billion years old. It has an age. If it didn't have an age, I should say if it had an age, that means it had a birth, a beginning.

Okay, this is this is virtually uncontested. And by the way, it was something that physicists in the 20th century from very early on, including Einstein resisted vigorously because the implications were that if it began, that it must have had a beginner. If it was an effect, it came into existence must something adequate must have been there as a cause for it coming into the existence.

So now this is something outside of the material realm, of course. This is the heart of the cosmological argument that William Lane Craig has revived called the column cosmological argument. Part of that argument is the observation that the universe is not eternal.

Okay. So what we're dealing with in this particular, this particular piece of the argument, the universe had a beginning. It came into existence is established scientific fact.

Okay. But it goes beyond that. I'll just give you another observation too.

If you watch the, if you watch it like Old Westerns and the posseus trying to catch the bad guys and they come upon the encampment where the bad guys had been, what is one of the first things they do? They put their hand on the fire to see if it's still warm. If it's still warm, that means they were here recently. If it's cold, they don't know how long they've been here.

But the fact that it's still warm is an indicator that the fire has been recently built and hasn't gone cold yet. Okay. There's a parallel there with the universe.

Because the universe is hot, but it's losing its energy. It's cooling down over time. Okay.

And there will be a time when all motion in the universe will stop. It'll be at zero Kelvin, absolute zero. Okay.

And nothing will happen because all of the energy that was available in the universe to do work will have done its work and worked itself out. And therefore the universe will be cold. The fact that the universe is still hot means that it's not infinitely old.

If it were infinitely old, it would be dead already. The fact that the fire is still burning indicates the fire had a beginning because the fire is burning out, but it's not burned out yet. Okay.

If you walk into a room and there's a warm cup of coffee on the counter, you know that somebody poured that coffee within half hour, 45 minutes max because the coffee hasn't reached room temperature yet. What is room temperature? So to speak of the universe. Ultimately, it's zero Kelvin and the universe is still warm.

The coffee is still hot. Okay. So this is another indicator that the universe can't be eternal.

It can't be infinitely old. Okay. And then the third one is philosophic and there's a number of philosophic rationales for the temporality of the universe.

And some are more sophisticated than others, but here's a simple one. You will never be able to count to infinity. We talk about will live for an eternity.

People say that in heaven. Well, we don't live for an eternity. We will live forever and ever.

But we will always have an age because if you keep adding one day or one second or one year, whatever after another, if you're counting age, it's your years, you never reach a number that is infinitely long. You just reach a bigger and bigger number. So if you can't reach infinity by counting forward from this present moment, you can't reach infinity by counting backwards from this present moment.

Okay. If the universe was infinitely old, this particular moment in the universe would be the end of an infinite chain, which is obviously contradictory. There can't be an end to an infinitely long chain.

All right. So there's a philosophic argument why the universe isn't infinitely old. I hate how old the universe is.

The second law of thermodynamics, the idea that the energy is being dissipated, not for good use, entropy, which will result in ultimate heat death of the universe, which hasn't been accomplished. So the universe isn't infinitely old. And a philosophic argument about accomplishing an actual infinite of moments by successive addition.

Those are pretty powerful arguments that the universe had a beginning. And this is why virtually no one anywhere believes the universe's eternal, like they did maybe 120 years ago. And the scientific evidence is so decisive that against their will, all kinds of materialistic scientists had to accept after resisting the conclusion that the universe had a beginning.

And now the work is, how can we explain the beginning of the universe without appealing to a beginner? And that's the project now. So what we're looking at is a universe that we know had a beginning. And this is what the cosmological argument is based on.

If the universe had a beginning, a thing that came into being, then there must have been something that caused it to come into being. Every effect has a cause that is adequate to the effect. That's basically the thinking here.

And it is common for people to raise this well. In fact, we just both saw Tim sent us a little TikTok, whatever a gal was making this, as if this was so decisive. You know, if the universe had a beginning, had to have a beginning, then God had to have a beginning.

So you just kick the can down the road when you say God did it, because who created God? And if God is eternal, why can't the universe be eternal too? Boom, QED, she thinks, and a issue. Well, she's wrong on every single count. She's never thought about the issue.

She's repeated, pardon me for putting it this way, nonsense, that she's probably heard from other people saying nonsense on the internet. Our view isn't that everything had to have a beginning, and therefore God had to have a beginning. Eternal things don't need a beginning.

Only things that come into existence need a cause. And that's not circular reasoning, because you've already given reasons to think that the universe had a beginning. Of course, of course.

What are the arguments against it? If somebody thinks the universe is eternal, you're going to have to overcome those other three very powerful evidences. For a temporal universe, a universe with an age. So I think the cosmological argument there goes through.

And we are not strapped with the responsibility of answering the question who created God, because the question, if you want to think in logical terms, it's an informal fallacy called a complex question. So in other words, the question presumes an answer to another question before this one's relevant. Classically, are you still baiting your wife? Okay.

Well, that presumes you were beating your wife. So you say yes or no, you're still stuck affirming something that hasn't been established. So when somebody says, well, who created God? The presumption there is what that God was created, and now you're asking who did it? Okay.

And I had confronted this with Michael Sherman, my debate with him, and he raised the issue. Now, he's got a PhD in sociology. Actually, it doesn't matter what field you're in.

If you're up a PhD, you ought to know better that this isn't a proper question to ask. A theist. Because, and what I said to him was when he raised the issue in our national radio debate, a number of years ago, you were there, actually in studio for that.

My support, prayer support and personal support. I said, listen, Michael, you don't believe God was created because you don't believe God was, you don't believe in God. I don't believe God was created because my conviction is that God is eternal.

Okay, that's my view. Okay. Nobody in this discussion believes God was created.

So why are you asking the question who created him? Okay. And that just shows the flaw in that approach. What's interesting to me in this question is that he assumes, he says that men were struggling to understand the nature of the universe.

So they create the nature of the universe as eternal. So they created God. But what's interesting to me is he understands that we have recognized there has to be some sort of reason why the universe is here.

There has to be something that's eternal to explain the existence of everything. And I think this is part of what's going on here. We as human beings, we are able to reason.

We're able to see how things work. We know that contingent matter has a cause. We know that it doesn't exist on its own.

We know that matter breaks down, that it's not the type of thing that's eternal. And all these things we can learn and people, you know, for millennia have recognized this that we need some sort of beginner. So when you rule out the idea that the universe is eternal, you have to look outside the universe.

That's right. There's no explanation inside the universe. All you can say is the universe popped into existence with no cause for no reason or no purpose.

Okay, that's it. Well, then the question is, is that really the odds on favorite? Given our uniform experience and reflection, incidentally, this particular point that there has to be some point in the past where something that is self-existent is responsible for everything else that exists. Regardless of the Big Bang or anything, just anything existing, something self-existent has to be responsible for everything else that exists.

Or else you end up in an infinite regress that is vicious. You cannot solve this problem. What created that? Well, what created that? And you never get to a beginning that can account for everything.

And guess who famously understood this? An intellect no less than Aristotle, for goodness sake, the prime mover. Okay? So he's no lightweight. And he wasn't obviously advocating the biblical God, but he understood.

And so have intellects ever since that something great intellects that something has to be the explanation for everything else. And that something itself has to be doesn't need an explanation for itself from the outside because the explanation is in itself. It has assaity.

It has self-existence. Okay. And there's no way around that.

Forget about looking at any text, biblical text, religious claims or anything. All you have

to do is reflect on the nature of things. And this is what Aristotle is doing.

And you realize a prime mover is necessary. Okay? Even if you don't fill in the details at all, something like that is necessary to explain the world. Sometimes I'll hear an atheist respond to these arguments and he'll say, well, some evidence will show up later to explain how the universe is eternal or some other cause.

And to me, what that sounds like is, all right, we have no evidence for it. We don't know how it happened, but somehow naturalism did it. I will be proved right.

Naturalism did it. Now, what does that sound like to you? That's what they accuse us of doing. Now, we have given reasons to think God created the universe.

We've given all sorts of reasons. So it is reasonable to conclude from what we know now about the universe that God created it. So if you then turn around and say, okay, sure, but someday we'll have other information that will prove naturalism is correct.

Now you're doing what you accuse Christians of doing saying God did it. You're saying naturalism did it without any evidence. Right.

And that's fine. If you want to hold on to your worldview and say, I'm going to hold out for something else. But then just realize what you're doing.

The way we make decisions about reality is we look at what we have now. That's all we can do if we want to make a reasonable conclusion to these things. Okay.

So you have a body who, when they, a corpse, when you pump the body out, you have this massive amount of poison that's been ingested. You have five bullet holes in the chest of this individual body and you have a knife going through the skull of this individual. But I really think he died of natural causes.

And eventually we're going to find the evidence to make it clear that all of these other things that we discover over this body were inconsequential to the death of this individual. He died of natural causes. Okay.

That's the kind of thing we're facing here. Okay. Deadman do bleed.

I don't know if you know the illustration. And so it's like against in the teeth of all the evidence. And this is what's key here in the teeth of all the evidence.

People are still trying to make this kind of claim. All right. Well, if that's what satisfies you fine, but don't kind of posture as if you're the, you're the smart one using reason, going with the most reasonable alternative.

Let's go on to a question from equip. Are there theological implications to evolution being true slash false? Well, the answer to that depends on what you mean by evolution.

And so this is at this point, it's critical that the Christian asked, what do you mean by that? Okay.

Now, there are, there are various ways of characterizing the biological evolutionary process. You might talk about a descent with modification or universal common descent. Okay.

The same with modification just means that the things that we see now are related biologically, that thing, the things that were a little different than them morphologically their body that came before. And that there is some kind of mechanism that modified those physical bodies in subsequent generations. So we have descent with modification.

Then you also have UCD universal common descent. And that's just a way of, of, adding to descent with modification by saying that all living things came from an original source, an individual and, and evolved biologically from that particular individual. You might add that the mechanism of the whole process is genetic mutation with natural selection.

Okay. That's called neo Darwinism or the neo Darwinian synthesis. That isn't what Darwin believed about because he didn't believe he didn't know anything about genes.

The cell was a black box there that came, you know, 50 years later or so. And in any event, these are all different particulars. All right.

But there's another detail that is added to it. And incidentally, I don't, I'm not going to go on. I could go on record as saying that any one of those things has any real significant theological implication except for possibly how one in those frameworks treats the existence of Adam and Eve, whether these were historical individuals or not.

And so that may be an issue. Okay. But descent with modification.

We actually see that happening in some limited sense. That's called micro evolution. Universal common descent.

Maybe, maybe not. Okay. Not everybody is an evolution is accepts that.

The mechanism of natural selection working on mutations. Now that's under question, even among evolutionists right now, to be adequate for the task. But, but we do see some evidence of in very small ways, again, micro evolution of that happening.

And I don't see how any of that, apart from the Adam question, has any ramifications for theology? It may be true. It may be false, whatever, but it has no ramifications for theology unless of course you're a young earther. And then this process descent with modification in a biological way requires a whole lot of time.

And it's not going to happen in six, eight, 10,000 years. Okay. So it would have

theological ramifications for someone who believes that the universe and the earth are young.

Okay. Here's the biggie though. It's the blind watchmaker thesis.

It's that whatever this is to set with modification, universal common descent, natural selection with the mutation, whatever this is, it's all a blind process and has no teleology. There's no purpose to it. It's not shooting for any goal.

No one designed it. Nobody set it up this way to happen in this fashion. It's completely naturalistic.

Okay. It's all by accident. All right.

That's the blind watchmaker thesis. Okay. Famously characterized by Richard Dawkins in his book, the blind watchmaker.

That is the piece that is, it has serious theological ramifications. That nature is capable all on its own to do all of what we see. And of course, this is what made Darwinism so appealing in the beginning because the evidence for Darwinism was not good after the origin of species and subsequent writings.

The evidence wasn't good. And there were lots and lots of people who attacked it on its scientific merits just as there are today. And it's still the case.

It seems to me that this is propelled forward for philosophic reasons, not for strictly speaking scientific reasons. In any event, that's the biggie and that does have philosophic considerations. And what's interesting is I just worked with Doug Axe who wrote the book Undeniable and he's with the Discovery Institute.

And this is about three weeks ago. And in his presentation, he talked about the blind watchmaker thesis and he said it's not even a scientific thesis because there's, there are usually when you come to a theory about something, you have a series of established, well established scientific pieces of evidence that then allow you to draw an explanation that explains that evidence. You have this and this and this and this.

He talked about star formation and our views about how that works. But then he talked about we know this about gravity, we know this about blah, blah, blah, and the fine tune constants of the unit blah, blah, blah, blah. And I couldn't follow it all because it's not my field.

But the point is you got ABCD. And then you say, well, maybe we can construct a theory in light of these facts. But he says, when it comes to the blind watchmaker thesis, there is nothing like that.

It just comes out of nowhere because it's philosophically driven. And then the attempt is

to try to demonstrate that there are reasons why we can think that this is the way it happened. And that's what the Darwinian model isn't meant to do.

But of course, it hasn't accomplished that. And so when you ask whether evolution has theological implications, it's very important that we narrow down exactly what we're talking about. And in my view, even though I think the Darwinian model is wrong, descent with modifications mistaken, taken as a whole, the universal common descent is not the case.

I reject on the merits, not for theological reasons. I do think I'm going to talk about some that you mentioned, Greg, because I do think there are serious theological implications that people, I think, will maybe try to find ways to explain them, but they do have a bearing on this topic. So people will have to think through them if they are considering whether or not they agree with evolution.

And the first one that you mentioned, Greg, is the idea of Adam. If there was not a original man to whom we are all descendants, that is implications for the fact that we all have one head. I mean, this is the whole basis that Paul explains how Jesus can be our head now.

Yes. So in our justification, whereas Adam was our head in our fall, it has implications for the fall. It has implications for God creating things good.

And then there being a fall, you also have to consider the death before Adam. And I know there are different ways to think about that. But that's another implication that has to be considered.

Well, also the idea of human beings made in God's image that is transferred from the original human being. So if we're not all descendants of Adam and we have multiple lines of evolutionary history depending, then how does it make any sense that we are all equally into God and have the rights and value that are associated with that? Exactly. And that has led to all sorts of problems in the past where people think that certain humans are not able to be able to live.

Human beings are not equal to other human beings. So I think there are a lot of things to consider here. And I know that Christians who are evolutionists do try to find ways around these things.

But I do think there are serious things that have to be considered. All right. Well, thank you for your questions.

If you have a question, send it on Twitter with the hashtag STRS or go to our website, STR.org. And you'll find the hashtag SDRAskPage. All you have to do is just send us a short two sentence question. And we will consider it for the show.

Thanks for listening. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cocle for Stand to Reason.