Almeida, Michael, *Cosmological Arguments (Elements of the Philosophy of Religion)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 104pp

As part of the successful series "Elements of the Philosophy of Religion" edited by Yujin Nagasawa, Michael Almeida discusses the structure, content, evaluation of traditional cosmological arguments. Almeida offers us a formulation and evaluation of traditional Kalam, Thomistic and Leibnizian cosmological arguments, though he also introduces us to the approach of modal realism, in which the explananda of such arguments is the totality of actualia and possibilia.

In the introductory study, Almeida categorises cosmological arguments in a taxonomy of general avoidance of infinite regress in the explanation of the universe. Because Cosmological Arguments are about explanation, Almeida believes convenient to remember that the explananda in most of them is the existence of motion or the coming to be from contingency. The absolute explanation of each is an "unmoved mover, a necessary being, an unchanging being, God".[1]

One of the first important remarks Almeida offers us is that though Cosmological Arguments have been considered a posteriori, many of them consist of a priori premises in their entirety. Almeida also observes that the necessity of the Cosmological Arguments applies to beings that can be considered otherwise contingent. For example, even though Jeremy Corbyn is a contingent being compared to the truths of logic, it is necessary that Jeremy holds immutable properties and they are necessary for him being the human being he is. This necessity, however, commits in some arguments –such as Spinoza's- to a permanentist view of the world, which is tantamount to the denial of any contingency, this however does not apply for Cosmological Arguments. Cosmological Arguments rely in a "safe and sane" ontology,[2] meaning that they are compatible with a view in which objects do not pop into existence without sufficient reason and a universe in which libertarian freedom is possible. Most cosmological arguments have to be evaluated by

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[1] Almeida, M., *Cosmological Arguments*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 2
[2] Almeida, M., *Cosmological Arguments*, p. 6.

taking on account these kind of ontological commitments, but Almeida wants to point out that the case of theistic modal realism is different, since provides of a an absolute explanation of the entire pluriverse, and for Almeida this makes it the most powerful candidate in this family of arguments. Almeida carries on and explains why cosmological arguments require "absolute explanations", i.e., genuine total explanations incompatible with the existence of brute facts.[3] Almeida introduces the discussion of Swinburne and Pruss on absolute explanations, which seem to entail abandoning libertarian free will and contingency in favour of some sort of modal fatalism. Almeida goes on to show that the lack of absolute explanations does not amount to the incoherence of cosmological arguments, insofar as such arguments commit to coherence as a set of premises that explain the world with no explicit inconsistency, but still can entail explanations that, though not absolute, function as "best explanations".[4]

Section One there is a review of three Thomistic cosmological arguments: the argument from change to motion, the argument from efficient causation and the argument from contingency and the observation of corruptible objects. The first argument relies in understanding processes of movement and change, the change that the senses might perceive, but points out to another more important metaphysical sense of change: something can change from potentiality to actuality if and only if there is an actual thing that actualises the change.

The force the first argument is that a series of derivative causes leads to an infinite regress, and so invoking a non-derivative cause ends with such problem of the origin of movement for even though such kind of cause always seems to suppose a possible series of non-derivative causes, God suffices to act in that non-derivative aspect without invoking yet another series. The second way is the argument from efficient causation, Almeida claims: "The argument from efficient causation is not, of course, an argument from motion or change, but an argument from existence".[5] The third way is the argument from contingency, about this one the shift is towards the efficacy of intermediate causes, Almeida tells us:

> There cannot be an infinitude of intermediate causes in this case for the same reason that there cannot be an infinitude of moved movers. The efficacy of intermediate causes in causing necessity depends on an independent source of necessity. If there were no such independent source of necessity, then there would be no necessary objects.[6]

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[3] ALMEIDA, M., *Cosmological Arguments*, p. 18
[4] ALMEIDA, M., *Cosmological Arguments*, p. 18.
[5] ALMEIDA, M., *Cosmological Arguments*, p. 29.
[6] ALMEIDA, M., *Cosmological Arguments*, p. 32.

Another issue that Thomas Aquinas took very seriously was the possibility that the world was eternal, but even such given possibility does not bet that the world needs some sustaining, even if that does not happen at a particular time.

Section Two introduces the Kalam cosmological argument, and shows its more contemporary expositors and defenders, such as William Lane Craig. The Kalam argument, contrasting with Aquinas', requires a temporal beginning of the world. A very simple formulation of such argument goes back to Arabic theologian Al-Gazzali and states: (1) Everything that begins to exist has a cause; (2) The universe began to extist, so therefore (3) The universe has a cause. The cause, of course, cannot be an object of the universe, but something that exemplifies the attributes of a divine being, i.e., a transcendental cause. On the soundness of the Kalam, Craig affirms that it is ridiculous to postulate things existing without a cause, about this Almeida says:

> But consider the question "does anyone in his right mind really believe that, say, a raging tiger could suddenly come into existence uncaused, out of nothing, in this room right now?" The question misleadingly conflates having no causal explanation with having no explanation at all.[7]

With regard to the second premise of the argument, what Almeida uses is Cantorian infinites as instances of actual infinites, in order to criticise Craig's claim that actual infinites are metaphysically impossible. Almeida spends a good deal of pages showing a very fascinating (for those of us who like philosophy of mathematics) setting of how actual infinites are metaphysically feasible, but I am not altogether sure this is fully needed in order to show a beginner how the Kalam argument has a second not fully compelling premise.

Almeida also explores different possible constitutions of the universe articulating the metaphysical and cosmological descriptions, each option given: A-Theory, Block Universes and Objective Becoming shows how dissimilar can be the evaluation of the Kalam argument. It is a complex and insightful discussion, but mainly points out that there is no uniform consensus as to the universe has a temporal beginning or not. In brief, Almeida explains: "The main problems with the scientific arguments are the inferences from empirical facts to metaphysical conclusions".[8]

Section Three focuses on Leibnizian cosmological arguments, which rely on the principle of sufficient reason (PSR). The discussion starts by explaining that there are different scopes of the principle, and one of them is an un-

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7 Almeida, M., *Cosmological Arguments*, p. 37.
8 Almeida, M., *Cosmological Arguments*, p. 63.

restricted version of the PSR, namely, a mereological sum of all beings actual and possible. Leibniz' argument assumes that the PSR entails that there must be a necessary being emerging from that sum, i.e., God. Leibniz argument can be summarised as follows:

1. There is a maximal, finite or infinite, collection of contingent beings.
2. There is a sufficient reason for every collection of contingent beings.
3. The sufficient reason for the maximal collection of contingent beings cannot be a member of that collection.
4. Every existing being is either contingent or necessary.
5. ∴/There is a necessary being that is the sufficient reason for the maximal collection of contingent beings.[9]

Criticisms on this argument focus in the fact that the world is contingent and if we want to avoid modal collapse on necessitarism (necessitism) we ought to not validate the principle of sufficient reason in its widest interpretation.

Section Four introduces the theistic modal realism strategy that concludes that "God necessarily creates the totality of metaphysical reality, so it is certainly true that no part of the pluriverse have been any different".[10] What is at stake in this kind of arguments is the concept of possible world. "Possible worlds are composite concrete objetcs… The collection of all possible worlds is the pluriverse of the totality of metaphysical space".[11] Almeida shows that traditional Leibnizian and Kalam arguments have dferent kinds of problems when dealing with necessity:

> The argument, as we saw, is that there is an absolute explanation for the actual world –an explanation for why our particular world is actual and not some other possible world– only if the actual world obtains as a matter of metaphysical necessity. The absolute expla- nation entails that there are then no contingent facts, and all modal distinctions collapse.[12]

However, Almeida defends that this is not the case of theistic modal realism:

> On theistic modal realism, the object of God's creation is the entire pluriverse, not merely our particular region of it. The principle of sufficient reason requires an absolute explanation and therefore entails that the pluriverse as a whole, and everything in it, exists as a matter of metaphysical necessity.

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9 ALMEIDA, M., *Cosmological Arguments*, p. 70.
10 ALMEIDA, M., *Cosmological Arguments*, p. 20.
11 ALMEIDA, M., *Cosmological Arguments*, p. 75.
12 ALMEIDA, M., *Cosmological Arguments*, p. 79.

It is the pluriverse and everything in it that fully satisfies the principle of sufficient reason.[13]

What seems so enticing about Theistic Modal Realism, is that even if there are spaces of randomness in a particular version of the universe, the totality of facts, depending in the standards we put in order to understand these facts, can be considered as altogether necessary. This applies even to not-neighbouring universes, in which, for example Theresa May is a poached egg. Then again there are circumstances not compatible with Theistic Modal Realism, such as stochastic variations that appear to alter and thus obtain un-caused circumstances, these are "lawless worlds". Nonetheless, one can still affirm necessitarianism of such worlds 'in toto', i.e., as possibilities actualised that respond to the larger laws of the modal pluriverse.

Yet another problem of all of our presented arguments is a Humean objection: if God can create the pluriverse *ex nihilo* then why not postulate the popping of the oddest things into existence, if they can como out of the same nothingness, or even to postulate chaotic worlds (these objections is due to John Mackie (1983) and Jonathan Edwards (2003)). Almeida shows that even chaotic situations or chaotic worlds are not a problem for theistic modal realism, since according to this there is an absolute explanation for the pluriverse and everything in the pluriverse.[14]

All in all we can say that Almeida introduces us in a very smooth and yet firm way into the deep complexities of the cosmological arguments, and finally show us that their reach, particularly in the theistic modal realist version, can challenge our wildest counterexamples and imaginations. As a lecturer in such topics I would happily recommend to consider this book as part of a basic approach to the problem, though perhaps dividing the sections of interest from those more specialised.

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[13] Almeida, M., *Cosmological Arguments*, p. 79.
[14] Almeida, M., *Cosmological Arguments*, p. 89.