

Candidate 8 evidence

Understanding Standards Higher RMPS

Essay 8 – Origins

To what extent do you agree with religious explanations for the origins of the universe? (20)

Religious people such as Christians would look to the Bible when answering the question about the origins of the universe, in particular the Genesis narrative to support their belief that God was the origin of the universe. The Genesis 1 creation story tells how the universe and human life came into existence. Genesis 1 proposed that God created the universe in 6 days and rested on the 7th, 'Then God commanded, Let there be light...' (Genesis 1) Some Christians, such as literal Christians believe that the Bible is God's truth, therefore the creation story is true – exactly as it happened because they view the Bible as the inerrant and infallible word of God. An implication of this viewpoint is that these Christians would accept the truth of the Bible through faith - if the scientific evidence seems to go against the Bible's teachings then Christians should hold onto their faith. As a result, it does not mention Big Bang in the Bible therefore it did not happen and is not accepted by literal Christians as an explanation for the origins of the universe.

Not all Christians take a literalist view of creation. Some Christians are liberal Christians who would interpret the Bible in a symbolic way and therefore do not accept the Genesis narrative as being literally true. An implication of this viewpoint is that these Christians accept that the Biblical creation story points to God as the creator but it does so through a story which has to be interpreted as symbolism and myth. For example, they would argue that a day does not have to mean 24 hours it could mean millions of years and then the next phase of creation took place. In the book of Peter we are told, 'But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.' A consequence of taking a symbolic viewpoint is that these Christians can accept both the religious and scientific explanations for the origins of the universe: religion answers why questions and science answers how questions. Both together create compatibility – How did the Universe come about? – through Big Bang. Why did the universe come about? – because God wanted it to. They complement each other in explaining the how and why of the universe and both seek to explain the world but use different methods for doing so.

I agree to some extent with religious explanations for the origins of the universe. I think that symbolic Christians provide a valid argument by stating that the Bible is a handbook of faith, but we still need to use our intelligence and match religious claims with scientific findings – symbolically interpreting the creation story allows us to do that. Just because the Genesis story is a myth doesn't mean that it's untrue, just that it's a kind of writing where an attempt is made to explain the unexplainable. I also agree with religious explanations because the Bible is a book of religious truths, guidance from God. It is not a scientific book and does not claim to be, therefore it has to be seen within a historical and cultural context.

However, I would disagree to some extent with religious explanations for the origins of the universe due to the compelling evidence provided by science. Science would look to Big Bang Theory to explain the origins of the universe. The Big Bang Theory proposes that approximately 14 billion years ago matter, energy, time and space all began in an instant in a super-hot, super dense mixture of everything. The incredibly dense point became known as a singularity. This singularity rapidly expanded. The reason for this is still unclear to scientists.

There are 3 key pieces of evidence used by scientists to support their claim that the Big Bang Theory explains the origins of the universe. Red shift is one of the pieces of evidence used by scientists to support Big Bang theory. Edwin Hubble, an astronomer at the Mt Wilson Observatory in California, discovered that the light coming from distant galaxies was all shifted towards the red end of the light spectrum. According to Hubble, this red shift must mean that things in the Universe are moving

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apart. An implication of the discovery of red shift is that everything in the Universe appears to be expanding away from a central 'point', so there must have been such a starting off point and so for everything a 'beginning' - a Big Bang. I find this evidence to be convincing and therefore disagree to some extent with religious explanations for the origins of the universe, due to the fact that it has been tested for over forty years, and its claims verified by many scientists.

The second piece of evidence which supports the Big Bang Theory is cosmic background radiation. Astronomers Penzias and Wilson observed a noisy fuzz which seemed to be coming from every point in the Universe and was measured as having a temperature of -270 degrees. Through their research methods they concluded that this background fuzz was leftover heat in the form of radiation. An implication of this evidence is that the initial Big Bang had left behind a 'signature' in the form of remaining microwave radiation and this radiation, which can be observed and measured today. I find this to be strong evidence in favour of science, therefore disagree to some extent with religious explanations for the origins of the universe, because it is using empirical evidence which clearly points to a moment in the Universe's past where everything began in an instant.

The final piece of evidence used by scientists to support the Big Bang theory is that the elements found in the universe today, the basic atomic and chemical building blocks for everything that exists, points very strongly towards a particular process of their 'creation' in the past. For example, scientists claim that the proportion of Hydrogen in the Universe today is exactly what you would expect if the Universe had been started off by a Big Bang. This evidence would be used by Professor of Biochemistry, Issac Asimov to reject religious explanations for the origins of the universe: "I believe in evidence. I believe in observation, measurement, and reasoning, confirmed by independent observers. I'll believe anything, no matter how wild and ridiculous, if there is evidence for it. The wilder and more ridiculous something is, however, the firmer and more solid the evidence will have to be."

Asimov is implying that science, through the process of the scientific method does not claim anything that it cannot support. It has based its claims on what can be observed and this observation is tested over a number of years, resulting in robust and accurate explanations.

In conclusion I agree with religious explanations for the origins of the universe to some extent. This is because I believe that there is more to the universe than what we can experience through our senses, and science does not take this into account. Furthermore, scientific explanations for the origins of the universe are based on the work of humans and therefore reliability and accuracy can be questioned due to the bias and fallibility of humans.