Did Paul quote pagan philosophers?

[by Matt Slick](https://carm.org/matt-slick)  
6/10/16

Did Paul quote pagan unbelievers in the New Testament? Yes, he did. But, he did not quote them for the purpose of supporting them. Instead, he quoted them here and there to aid in defending and spreading the gospel. But, for him to do this, he would have had to study their teachings. If Paul could do it, so can we as long as we are putting quotes in the proper context either exposing error and or building a bridge by which we might better present the truth of God's word.

Paul quoted Menander in the book of Acts and in 1 Corinthians.  He quoted Epimenides in the book of Titus.  Let's take a look.

* [Acts 17:28](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Acts%2017.28), "for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.'"
  + "The first part of verse 28 comes from Cretica by Epimenides, and the second part of the verse from Hymn to Zeus, written by the Cilician poet Aratus. To be sure, both of these lines were directed at Zeus in Greek literature, but Paul applied them to the Creator of whom he spoke."[1](https://carm.org/did-paul-quote-pagan-philosophers#footnote1_prwczmb)
  + Paul quoted "the first half of the fifth line, word for word, of an astronomical poem of Aratus, a Greek countryman of the apostle, and his predecessor by about three centuries. But, as he hints, the same sentiment is to be found in other Greek poets. They meant it doubtless in a pantheistic sense; but the truth which it expresses the apostle turns to his own purpose—to teach a pure, personal, spiritual Theism."[2](https://carm.org/did-paul-quote-pagan-philosophers#footnote2_bsxigbi)
* [1 Cor. 15:33](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/1%20Cor.%2015.33), "Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.'”
  + "a current saying, forming a verse in MENANDER, the comic poet, who probably took it from Euripides [SOCRATES, Ecclesiastical History, 3.16]."[3](https://carm.org/did-paul-quote-pagan-philosophers#footnote3_0zpgfgg)
  + "The words “Bad company ruins good morals” are found in a play by Menander (4th-3rd century B. C.) but may well have become a common saying by Paul’s time."[4](https://carm.org/did-paul-quote-pagan-philosophers#footnote4_5ed7032)
  + "Evil communications corrupt good manners. An iambic line from the ‘Thais’ of Menander, and perhaps taken by Menander from a play of Euripides. More accurately it means “evil associations corrupt excellent morals."[5](https://carm.org/did-paul-quote-pagan-philosophers#footnote5_eumtd9x)
* [Titus 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Titus%201.12), "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."
  + "Epimenides of Phaestus, or Gnossus, in Crete, about 600. He was sent for to purify Athens from its pollution occasioned by Cylon. He was regarded as a diviner and prophet. The words here are taken probably from his treatise “concerning oracles.” Paul also quotes from two other heathen writers, ARATUS ([Ac 17:28](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Acts%2017.28)) and MENANDER ([1 Co 15:33](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/1%20Cor%2015.33)), but he does not honor them so far as even to mention their names.[6](https://carm.org/did-paul-quote-pagan-philosophers#footnote6_3ly55ld)
  + "A prophet of their own; viz. Epimenides, a native either of Phæstus or of Cnossus in Crete, the original author of this line, which is also quoted by Callimachus. Epimenides is here called a prophet, not simply as a poet, but from his peculiar character as priest, bard, and seer; called by Plato θεῖος ἀνήρ and coupled by Cicero with Bacis the Boeotian prophet, and the sibyl (Bishop Ellicott); described by other ancient writers as a prophet (Alford)."[7](https://carm.org/did-paul-quote-pagan-philosophers#footnote7_bmmab3h)

As you can see, Paul the apostle clearly quoted unbelievers. But I must say again that it is not in support of their inspiration or their wisdom. We Christians will sometimes quote to a Mormon, or something out of the book of Mormon, or even the Quran. But in so doing, our goal should be to expose the error of those religious systems and promote the truth of Christianity as revealed in the New Testament.

We are free to study other philosophical and religious systems. But, we should do so with the goal of using the information we have to better equip ourselves, other Christians, and expose the error of false systems of thought.

[2 Cor. 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/2%20Cor.%2010.5), "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."

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The Cosmological Argument

by [Matt Slick](https://carm.org/matt-slick)

The Cosmological Argument attempts to prove that God exists by showing that there cannot be an infinite number of regressions of causes to things all things that exist. In other words, there cannot be an infinite number of causes that goes back in time forever. Basically, this would mean there was no first cause, and without a first cause, there is no second, or third, or fourth, etc. In order to get to now. Therefore, it states that there must be a final uncaused cause of all things. This uncaused cause is God.

The Cosmological Argument takes several forms, but a basic structure is represented below.

Cosmological Argument

1. Things exist.
2. It is possible for those things to not exist.
3. Whatever has the possibility of non-existence, yet exists, has been caused to exist.
   1. Something cannot bring itself into existence since it must exist to bring itself into existence, which is illogical.
4. There cannot be an infinite number of causes to bring something into existence.
   1. An infinite regression of causes ultimately has no initial cause, which means there is no cause of existence.
   2. Since the universe exists, it must have a cause.
5. Therefore, there must be an uncaused cause of all things.
6. The uncaused cause must be God.

Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) had a version of the Cosmological Argument called the Argument from Motion.  He stated that things in motion could not have brought themselves into motion but must be caused to move.  There cannot be an infinite regression of movers.  Therefore, there must be an Unmoved Mover.  This Unmoved Mover is God.

Strengths of the argument

The strengths of the Cosmological Argument lie in both its simplicity and easily comprehensible concept that there cannot be an infinite number of causes to an event. Some arguments for God's existence require more thought and training in terms and concepts, but this argument is basic and straightforward. Also, it is perfectly logical to assert that objects do not bring themselves into existence and must, therefore, have causes.

Weaknesses of the argument

One of the weaknesses of the argument is that if all things need a cause to exist, then God Himself must also, by definition, need a cause to exist.  But this only pushes causation back and implies that there must be an infinite number of causes, which cannot be.

But, it would be true that if the statement is offered "All things that exist must have a cause, then God would need a cause," would be true. But, is it true that "all things that exist must have a cause"?  We do not know that, and this would necessitate an infinite regression of causes which is logically impossible.

The correct issue would be all things that *came into existence* must have a cause. God did not come into existence. God has always existed.  So, the cosmological argument works for the Christian.

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 The Cosmological Argument 1

by [Brad Huston](https://carm.org/brad-huston)

The argument to be made here is a form of the cosmological argument which originated in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, and was refined by Thomas Aquinas. With the advances of modern science, the version I will provide will be perhaps clearer for some than the form set forth by Aquinas. It is a composite of Aquinas’ vertical cosmological argument and the Kalam cosmological argument:

1. Everything that has a beginning needs a cause.
2. The universe had a beginning.
3. The universe needs a cause.
4. There cannot be an infinite regress of caused causes.
5. There must be a cause for all else which has no beginning and needs no cause for its own existence.

Premise #1 is self-evident. A thing cannot bring about its own existence, since it cannot be before itself. But if it began to exist, it cannot have popped up from nothing and from nowhere; nothing produces nothing.

There are several pieces of evidence that support the contention of Premise #2 that the universe had a beginning. The scientific community has long since accepted the beginning of the universe via the big bang.  To quote from Norman Geisler, “Logically and mathematically, the evidence for the big bang suggests that originally there was no space, no time, and no matter.” (Geisler, 1999)  Here are some much summarized points to demonstrate why the universe is thought to have begun, most of which was set forth by astronomer Robert Jastrow (Jastrow, 1982), and some of which has been subsequently discovered:

1. The second law of thermodynamics shows that usable energy is running down, which means there had to be a time when the process started. If not (if there was infinite time before us), all the energy in the universe would have been used up, and we would not be here.
2. The universe is expanding. Traced backward, there would have to be a place it started to expand.  The universe cannot be continually expanding and retracting, since it would eventually run out of energy and collapse on itself.
3. If the universe were eternal, time would also be eternal. But we could never have gotten to this point if time were infinite. Time measures the intervals between movements. There was no movement until the universe began, therefore there was no time. It would be impossible to traverse an infinite amount of time.
4. We see matter continually degrading rather than becoming more complex. If things fall apart when left to themselves, the world could not be infinite. It would already be destroyed. Only that which is self-sufficient and self-sustaining can be infinite.
5. There is a radiation “echo” throughout the universe which scientists at first thought was merely static or a malfunction of their equipment. This emanation of radiation is consistent with what would be expected of an enormous explosion in the past, down to the wavelength that should be produces by such light and heat.
6. After the big bang theory became the predominant view of the universe’s origin, scientists began looking for a large mass of matter associated with the original explosion, but none could be found until the Hubble made it possible to find it. One astronomer, Michael Lemonick said “by peering back into the beginning of time, a satellite finds the oldest structure ever observed—evidence of how the universe took shape 15 billion years ago.” (Lemonick, 1993) This was exactly what they were looking for, if the theory were to be shown to be true beyond a reasonable doubt.

Premise #3 is true by the laws of logic if the first two points are true. I will quote a fellow student, Glenn Smith, on this point: “Everything we currently observe depends on something else. This includes sub-atomic particles, our planet's atmosphere, the sun, and everything observable. If it weren't for our atmosphere, you and your computer would vaporize. So if everything in the universe is currently dependent, the whole universe is currently dependent.”

Premise #4: One cannot posit an unending string of caused causes. This just seems obvious, but if you need some reasons why this is so, I will try, though it seems the more obvious something is, the more difficult it is to explain. If the causes of the universe itself needed a cause, and the cause of that cause needed a cause, ad infinitum, the string of causes could never be put into motion. An infinite series is impossible because one more moment (or cause) could always be added. But it is impossible to add to an infinite. Plus, if there were an infinite number of causes, there would be an infinite number of moments in which the act of causation took place. But if there were infinite moments, the current moment could have never arrived, since it is impossible to traverse an infinite number of moments. Quantitative infinity is merely a convention of mathematics, but has no metaphysical counterpart. Without a first cause, there is no causality in the series.

Conlusion (#5): If the universe needs a cause for its existence, and there cannot be an unending string of contingent causes, there must be a Cause whose existence is necessary. (“Necessary” is used in opposition to “contingent,” in which a contingent being needs a cause for its existence, and a necessary Being has no cause, and no beginning.) Something must be eternal for anything else to exist. For nothing produces nothing. If nothing ever existed, then nothing could exist. But the universe, as you have seen, is not eternal; it began to exist. So, there must be something else, or someone else, who does not depend upon any other for existence, but exists by virtue of itself.  This is beyond human understanding (because we have never experienced anything that is beginning-less), but it is not contradictory to logic for there to be a being without a beginning. As I hope to have shown, no other state of affairs is possible, for if something is not eternal, than nothing could have ever existed at all.

This has been a brief account of the cosmological argument. It has not taken into consideration certain objections. These objections are dealt with well in Norman Geisler’s *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* in the article “Cosmological Argument.”  This argument does not, in itself, produce the Christian God, but leads to it if one follows all of the implications and other evidence for the God of the Bible, which cannot be provided in one article. This argument is merely an attempt to show that there is a Supreme Being to which the universe owes its existence.

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**Christian Apologetics Questions and Answers**

The term ‘Christian apologetics’ doesn’t refer to apologizing (or saying ‘sorry’) for being a Christian. It comes from the Greek word ἀπολογία (*apología*) meaning *defence.* The Greek term refers to a reasoned defence that would be given in a court of law. The classic example is Plato’s*Apology,* Socrates’ defence against the charges of atheism and corrupting the youth.

Christian apologetics is the reasoned defence of the Christian faith against objections, but also includes the setting forth of positive grounds for Christianity. It is the duty of all Christians, because:

* The Lord Jesus Christ commanded: ‘Love the Lord your God … with all your *mind*.’ ([Matthew 22:37](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2022.37))
* The Apostle Peter commanded Christians: ‘Always be prepared to *give an answer* to everyone who asks you to *give the reason* for the hope that you have.’ ([1 Peter 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Pet%203.15))
* Jude’s inspired epistle said: ‘I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to *contend earnestly for the faith* which was once for all delivered to the saints.’ (v. 3)
* The Apostle Paul said: ‘We *demolish arguments* and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we *take captive every thought* to make it obedient to Christ’ ([2 Corinthians 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%2010.5)).

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