

THE INCOMPATIBILITY BETWEEN KALAM COSMOLOGY AND TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE

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Abstract

The Kalam Cosmological Argument has been widely employed in contemporary philosophy of religion to argue that the universe has a cause. Developed in medieval Islamic Kalam theology and popularized in modern apologetics by William Lane Craig, the argument concludes that whatever begins to exist has a cause; the universe began to exist; therefore, the universe has a cause (Wikipedia, 2025; Craig, 1979, 1994). Craig further argues that the cause of the universe must be a single, uncaused, timeless, spaceless, immaterial, and personal creator (Craig, 1979, 1994). In Christian theology, this creator is equated with God, who is further described by the doctrine of the Trinity – one God in three coequal and coeternal persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). This paper argues that the Kalam argument, while sound as a piece of natural theology, is philosophically and theologically incompatible with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The Trinity introduces internal contingency through the incarnation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit, and requires either a one-self model (which collapses the persons into modes of a single self) or a three-self model (which implies multiple centers of agency). Both models undermine Kalam's conclusion that there is a single necessary being. Moreover, the Islamic origins of the Kalam argument mean it was designed to defend strict monotheism (tawhid) against the idea of divine persons. Consequently, while Kalam establishes a necessary creator, it does not and cannot logically yield the Christian Trinity.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and significance

The Kalam Cosmological Argument (KCA) is a modern formulation of the cosmological argument that originated within medieval Islamic kalam scholarship and was revitalized in the twentieth century by William Lane Craig. The argument's basic syllogism holds that (1) whatever begins to exist has a cause, (2) the universe began to exist, and therefore (3) the universe has a cause (Wikipedia, 2025; Craig, 1979, 1994). Craig contends that the cause of the universe must be uncaused, timeless, spaceless, immaterial, powerful, personal, and singular (Craig, 1979, 1994). While Christian apologists often employ the KCA, it has its roots in Islamic kalam theology, particularly in the work of al-Ghazali, who utilized it to defend the Islamic doctrine of tawhid (the absolute oneness of God) and to argue against the possibility of an actual infinite past.

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity, in contrast, affirms that the one God exists eternally as three coequal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person is entirely God, yet there is only one divine essence. This doctrine introduces relational distinctions within the Godhead. The Father is unbegotten, the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (and, in Western theology, from the Son). These relations imply derivations within the Godhead: the Son receives being from the Father, and the Spirit is "of" both the Father and the Son (Catholic Answers, n.d.). Such processions are not obviously compatible with

the notion of an absolutely uncaused necessary being.

1.2 Purpose and objectives

The purpose of this paper is to analyze whether the **Kalam cosmological argument** can coherently lead to the **Christian doctrine of the Trinity**. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Clarify what the KCA establishes about the nature of the universe's cause and whether it points to **one necessary being**.
2. Examine how the **Trinity** introduces **contingency** (through the incarnation and procession) and plural selfhood, which seem incompatible with Kalam's conclusion.
3. Evaluate **one-self** and **three-self** models of the Trinity and their implications for necessary existence.
4. Explore the **Islamic origins** of the KCA and how its original context differs from Christian Trinitarian theology.

1.3 Research questions and hypotheses

RQ1: Does the **Kalam Cosmological Argument** logically support the **Christian doctrine of the Trinity**?

RQ2: How do the contingency of the **Son** and **Holy Spirit** and the plurality of persons in the Trinity conflict with Kalam's notion of a **single necessary being**?

RQ3: What theological and philosophical issues arise when applying an argument rooted in **Islamic tawhid** to **Christian Trinitarianism**?

Hypothesis: The **Kalam argument** supports the existence of a **necessary creator**, but it is **philosophically incompatible** with the Christian doctrine of the **Trinity**. The Trinity introduces contingent elements and multiple centers of agency, which conflict with the

KCA's implication of a single, uncaused, necessary self. The argument's Islamic origin underscores its alignment with **unitarian** monotheism rather than Trinitarianism.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Kalam argument and necessary beings

Contemporary expositions of the Kalam Cosmological Argument emphasize its conclusion that the universe has a cause that must possess specific attributes. Craig argues that because the cause of the universe is responsible for the beginning of space and time, it must be timeless, spaceless, immaterial, and uncaused (Craig, 1979, 1994). He also contends that the cause is singular on the grounds of Occam's razor, positing more than one cause without necessity is unwarranted (Craig, 1979, 1994). Moreover, since the cause initiated the universe at a finite time in the past, Craig infers that it must be personal (capable of volition), because an impersonal cause operating from eternity would produce an eternal effect.

Philosophers distinguish between contingent beings and necessary beings. A contingent being could have failed to exist; the entire physical universe, composed of contingent parts, is therefore contingent (Mystic, 2025). A necessary being, by contrast, cannot not exist; its existence is eternal and essential (Davidson, 2024). The KCA suggests that the cause of the universe is a necessary being, since contingent entities cannot account for their own existence.

A crucial question is whether there could be multiple necessary beings. Philosophers

supporting ontological arguments for a maximally great being (MGB) contend that by definition, there can only be one such being. Phil Kallberg argues that if there were two hypothetical MGBs, they would not remain equal for long because one would perform greater actions (e.g., creating more universes) and thus surpass the other (Kallberg, 2024). Furthermore, appealing to Ockham's razor, he notes that positing multiple necessary beings complicates explanation without need (Kallberg, 2024). Hence, monotheism – the claim that there is one maximally great necessary being – is philosophically justified.

2.2 The Trinity: doctrine and models

The Nicene Creed summarizes orthodox Christian belief by declaring that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are consubstantial (of the same essence) yet distinct persons. Trinitarian theology attempts to explain how there can be three who are equally divine without implying three gods. Contemporary philosophers have proposed various models to make sense of this, including self-theories and three-self theories.

One-self theories (often referred to as Latin or Western models) assert that the Trinity ultimately comprises a single self or center of consciousness. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, one-self theorists argue that the three divine persons are modes or “ways the one God is” (Tuggy, 2025). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are thus identified with events or relations through which the single divine self relates to creation; they are not distinct centers of agency (Tuggy, 2025). Karl Barth and Karl Rahner, for example, interpret “person” not in the modern

psychological sense (a distinct self) but as “modes of being” or “manners of subsisting” (Tuggy, 2025). This view avoids tritheism by collapsing the persons into the singular divine self. However, critics argue it veers into modalism, the heresy that God merely appears in different modes over time (Tuggy, 2025).

In contrast, three-self theories (also called social or Greek models) insist that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct selves – each possessing his own intellect and will – but that together they constitute the one God. The Stanford Encyclopedia notes that three-self theories are motivated by the New Testament portrayal of the Father and Son (and often the Spirit) as different selves (Tuggy, 2025). These theorists argue that multiple divine persons can be one God if identity is understood relatively rather than absolutely. Relative identity proposals claim that the Father and the Son are the same God but not the same person (Tuggy, 2025). However, such theories face challenges in explaining how three distinct centers of consciousness can share numerically one essence without entailing three gods.

2.3 Contingency in the Incarnation and Procession

Trinitarian doctrine affirms that the Son became incarnate as Jesus Christ, taking on a human nature while remaining fully divine. William Lane Craig notes that while Christ’s divine person has necessary existence, his individual human nature (the body-soul composite) is contingent (Craig, 2015). There are possible worlds in which this particular human nature never exists. Thus, the person of Christ has two natures: a necessary divine

nature and a contingent human nature. This dual nature introduces contingency into the Godhead, since the union of the divine person with a contingent human nature would not hold in all possible worlds.

The Holy Spirit is also described in Scripture as proceeding from the Father and being sent by the Son. Catholic theologians note that the Spirit is referred to as both the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son (*Catholic Answers, n.d.*). Statements that the Spirit is “of” the other two persons indicate that his person originates from them (*Catholic Answers, n.d.*). John 14:26 says the Spirit proceeds from the Father, while John 15:26 says Jesus sends the Spirit from the Father (*Catholic Answers, n.d.*). The Council of Florence (1439) explained that since the Father has given everything to the Son except fatherhood, the Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Son (*Catholic Answers, n.d.*). These relational processions suggest that the Spirit’s existence is derivative, raising questions about whether the Spirit is uncaused or has necessary existence.

2.4 Tawhid versus the Trinity

Islamic theology emphasizes tawhid—the absolute oneness of Allah. A piece from the Missouri Baptist Convention notes that Muslims insist Allah is a unit, indivisible, eternal, merciful, transcendent, and without associates (Phillips, 2018). Any association of partners with Allah (shirk) is considered a grave sin. While the Qur’an rejects polytheism, it does not explicitly engage the Christian claim that the one God subsists in three persons; the doctrine of the Trinity predated Islam (Phillips, 2018). Muslim critics often

argue that Trinitarianism implies tri-theism and that worshipping the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit constitutes worship of three deities (Phillips, 2018). This strict monotheistic context shaped the development of the Kalam argument, which al-Ghazali employed to defend tawhid against eternalism and polytheism.

3. Methodology

This study employs a **philosophical-theological analysis**. It combines close reading of primary sources (William Lane Craig's writings on the Kalam argument, doctrinal statements such as the Nicene Creed, and the Council of Florence) with secondary scholarship (e.g., the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy's entry on the Trinity). The research also draws on conceptual distinctions between necessity and contingency, as well as between self and mode, to evaluate whether the Kalam argument's necessary cause can be identified with the Trinitarian God.

First, the paper analyses what the KCA establishes about the universe's cause by examining its premises and Craig's exposition.

Second, it investigates the ontological commitments of Trinitarian doctrine, including the incarnation and the procession of the Spirit, to identify contingent elements. Third, it evaluates **one-self** and **three-self** models of the Trinity by assessing their implications for divine necessity. Fourth, it compares the concept of God in Islamic **tawhid** with that in Christian Trinitarianism to highlight differences in the theistic assumptions underlying the KCA and Trinitarian theology. Throughout, the study

assesses logical coherence and draws on Occam's razor and the definition of maximal greatness to critique the possibility of multiple necessary beings.

4. Findings / Results

4.1 What the Kalam Argument Establishes

Craig's formulation of the KCA concludes that the universe has a singular, personal, and necessary cause (Wikipedia, 2025; Craig, 1979, 1994). Because the cause created time and space, it must be timeless and spaceless; because it created matter and energy, it must be immaterial; because it is uncaused, it must be a necessary being. The argument also insists on the cause's singularity; positing multiple causes would violate the principle of parsimony and lead to an unnecessary multiplication of entities. Phil Kallberg reinforces this conclusion by arguing that a maximally great being must be singular – two equally maximally great beings cannot exist because one would eventually perform a greater action than the other (Kallberg, 2024). Ockham's razor likewise favors one cause over many (Kallberg, 2024).

4.2 Contingent Elements within the Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity posits relational distinctions that introduce contingency. The incarnation involves the eternal Son assuming a particular human nature. Craig notes that Christ's human body and soul are contingent: "there are possible worlds in which it never exists" (Craig, 2015). Even if the divine person of the Son is necessary, the composite person (divine and human) that constitutes Jesus Christ is contingent. This means that part of

what Christians identify as God (the incarnate Son) exists contingently, whereas a necessary being must exist in all possible worlds.

The Holy Spirit is described as proceeding from the Father and being sent by the Son. The Catholic Answers article notes that Scripture refers to the Spirit as both the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son, indicating that the Spirit's person originates from them (Catholic Answers, n.d.). John 14:26 states that the Spirit proceeds from the Father, while John 15:26 indicates that Jesus sends the Spirit (Catholic Answers, n.d.). The Council of Florence affirms that because the Father gave all he had to the Son, the Spirit therefore proceeds from the Son (Catholic Answers, n.d.). These processions suggest that the Spirit's existence derives from the Father (and the Son), raising questions about whether the Spirit is self-existent or necessary in the same sense as the Father.

If any part of a being is contingent, then the whole cannot be a strictly necessary being. A necessary being must be wholly uncaused and incapable of non-existence (Davidson, 2024). Because the Trinity includes contingent aspects (the incarnation and the Spirit's procession), the triune God cannot be identified with the necessary being posited by the KCA. Either the Son and Spirit are not fully God (contrary to Nicene orthodoxy), or the KCA's cause cannot be the triune God.

4.3 Problems with One-Self Models

One-self Trinitarian theories attempt to reconcile monotheism by reducing the divine persons to modes of a single self. The Stanford Encyclopedia explains that these theories

interpret the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as modes or "ways the one God is" (Tuggy, 2025). A mode is an intrinsic property, relation, or state of affairs of a thing (Tuggy, 2025). According to Karl Barth and Karl Rahner, the three persons are not distinct selves but manners of subsisting (Tuggy, 2025). This view preserves monotheism by identifying the persons with events in God's life, but it risks modalism. Modalism holds that God appears successively as Father, Son, and Spirit rather than being three eternal persons; such a view was rejected in the early church as heretical (Tuggy, 2025).

In the context of the KCA, a one-self model might align superficially with the conclusion of one necessary cause. However, it undermines Trinitarian distinctiveness. If the Father, Son, and Spirit are merely modes of one self, then there are no distinct persons for the KCA's cause to identify. Moreover, treating the Son and Spirit as modes implies that their existence is not metaphysically independent; they are contingent states or relations of the single self (Tuggy, 2025). Consequently, the one-self model cannot preserve both the necessary existence of God and the full personal distinctiveness required by Trinitarian doctrine.

4.4 Problems with Three-Self Models

Three-self models, also known as social trinitarianism, assert that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three distinct centers of consciousness that together constitute the one God. These models are motivated by the New Testament portrayal of the Father and the Son as distinct persons (Tuggy, 2025). To avoid

tritheism, some social Trinitarians adopt relative identity theories, claiming that the Father and Son are the same God but not the same person (Tuggy, 2025). However, this approach faces logical puzzles: if the Father and Son are distinct selves with their own wills, knowledge, and actions, then there appear to be multiple agents possessing divine attributes.

If each of the three persons is a necessary being with its own mind, then there are three necessary beings, which contradicts the KCA's conclusion that there is only one necessary cause (Kallberg, 2024). Alternatively, if only one person (the Father) is the necessary being and the others are contingent, then the concept of the Trinity is compromised. Relative identity proposals attempt to circumvent this by denying the standard logic of identity, but such moves are controversial and arguably unintelligible (Tuggy, 2025). In summary, the three-self model conflicts with the KCA's commitment to a singular necessary being.

4.5 Islamic Origins and Theological Divergence

The KCA was formulated in a context of Islamic tawhid to defend the oneness of Allah against polytheism and eternalism. The Missouri Baptist article notes that Muslims emphasize that Allah is a unit, indivisible and without associates (Phillips, 2018). In Islamic theology, associating partners with Allah is considered shirk, the gravest sin. The Qur'an asserts the existence of one God but does not explicitly address the concept of a tri-unity (Phillips, 2018). Because the KCA originated

from this monotheistic framework, its primary purpose was to defend a unitarian conception of God. Using it to support Trinitarianism imports an argument designed to exclude multiple divine persons. Therefore, the KCA naturally fits within the Islamic concept of God rather than the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

5. Discussion

5.1 Why the Kalam Cannot Lead to the Trinity

The Kalam Cosmological Argument concludes that the universe has a singular, necessary, and personal cause. However, the Christian Trinity posits three persons who are coequal and coeternal yet introduces contingency through the incarnation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit. If the Son's human nature is contingent (Craig, 2015) and the Spirit's existence derives from the Father and the Son (Catholic Answers, n.d.), then the triune God cannot be wholly necessary. A necessary being must exist in all possible worlds (Davidson, 2024). The Trinity, therefore, cannot be identical to the KCA's necessary cause unless one denies the contingent elements of Christ's incarnation and the Spirit's procession, effectively altering traditional Trinitarian doctrine.

Furthermore, the Trinity requires at least three centers of agency if the persons are genuinely distinct. One-self models collapse individuals into modes, undermining personal distinctions and leading toward modalism (Tuggy, 2025). Three-self models maintain personal distinctions but at the cost of positing multiple necessary beings, which contradicts

monotheism and the KCA's singular cause (Kallberg, 2024). Attempts to reconcile three-self models with monotheism through relative identity are logically controversial and arguably unintelligible (Tuggy, 2025).

The difference in origin further underlines incompatibility. The KCA developed within Islamic kalam to defend tawhid against doctrines like the Trinity. Using it to prove the Trinity thus involves a category error: it tries to derive a doctrine of special revelation from an argument of natural theology. Craig himself acknowledges that natural theology can at best establish a generic theism, and that identifying this creator as the Christian God depends on revelation and other arguments.

5.2 Alternative Explanations for the Trinity

Advocates of the Trinity may appeal to other arguments to support their doctrine, such as appeals to Scripture, religious experience, or the moral and relational nature of God. For example, social Trinitarians argue that God is love, and love requires a beloved; thus, the Father, Son, and Spirit constitute an eternal community of love. However, such arguments are theological, not philosophical, and they go beyond what the KCA can establish. Indeed, the differences in **tawhid** and the **Trinity** demonstrate that **natural theology** alone cannot determine the internal structure of the Godhead.

5.3 Implications for Christian Apologetics

For Christian apologists, the findings here suggest caution in relying on the **Kalam Cosmological Argument** to argue specifically for the doctrine of the **Trinity**. While the

KCA is effective in establishing that the universe has a cause and that this cause possesses attributes consistent with a theistic creator, it does not – and cannot – by itself imply that this creator is triune. To move from Kalam's conclusion to the Trinity, one must invoke **revelation** and theological exegesis and address the **contingency** and **plurality** issues identified. Otherwise, the argument risks misapplication, leading to conclusions the KCA was never designed to support.

6. Conclusion

The Kalam Cosmological Argument is a powerful argument for the existence of a necessary creator of the universe. It successfully shows that the universe has a cause which must be timeless, spaceless, immaterial, personal, and singular (Wikipedia, 2025; Craig, 1979, 1994). However, when one attempts to equate this cause with the Christian Trinity, serious philosophical and theological tensions emerge. The Trinity introduces contingent elements via the incarnation and the procession of the Holy Spirit (Craig, 2015; Catholic Answers, n.d.). A being with contingent parts cannot be a metaphysically necessary being (Davidson, 2024). Moreover, Trinitarian models either collapse the persons into modes (risking modalism) or posit multiple selves (risking tritheism), both of which conflict with the KCA's conclusion of a single necessary cause (Tuggy, 2025).

Finally, the Islamic origin of the Kalam argument emphasizes its alignment with uncompromising monotheism (tawhid) rather than the relational plurality of the Trinity

(Phillips, 2018). Using the KCA to support the Trinity, therefore, imports an argument designed to defend God’s absolute oneness into a theological framework that affirms a complex unity. In conclusion, while the KCA may be employed in Christian apologetics to establish a general theism, it cannot serve as a logical foundation for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity without additional premises derived from revelation and theological interpretation. Natural theology and revealed theology operate in different domains, and conflating them leads to incoherence.

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