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Graham Oppy

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UNCAUSED BEGINNINGS

Graham Oppy

I defend the view that it is possible for reality to have a contingent initial state under the causal relation even though it is impossible for any other (non-overlapping) parts of reality to have no cause. I claim that, while there are good theoretical and commonsense grounds for maintaining that it is simply not possible for non-initial parts of reality to have no cause, these good grounds do not require one to claim that it is impossible that reality has an uncaused initial state.

There are many possible *models* for the causal shape of reality. Amongst the simple models to be considered—even if only to be subsequently rejected as models of *real* possibilities—we should certainly mention: REGRESS, CIRCLE, NECESSARY INITIAL STATE, and CONTINGENT INITIAL STATE.¹ (According to REGRESS, each state of reality is preceded by some other state of reality under the causal relation. According to CIRCLE, the states of reality form a circle under the causal relation. According to NECESSARY INITIAL STATE, there is an initial state that is prior to all other states under the ancestral of the causal relation, and it is necessarily the case that there is an initial state of this kind under the causal relation. According to CONTINGENT INITIAL STATE, there is an initial state that is prior to all other states under the ancestral of the causal relation, but it is only contingently the case that there is an initial state of this kind under the causal relation.)

Each of these simple models admits of both theistic and naturalistic interpretations. It is widely recognised that in several of these cases—REGRESS, CIRCLE, CONTINGENT INITIAL STATE—naturalism would be preferable to theism: if reality had the causal shape in question, then there would be good—albeit defeasible—reason to accept naturalism and to reject theism.

I think that naturalism is preferable to theism even in the case of NECESSARY INITIAL STATE. Consequently, I think that considerations about the causal shape of reality provide grounds for naturalism: for I judge that, on any of the most plausible causal shapes that might be taken by reality, naturalism is more plausible than theism. Of course, these judgments of

¹NECESSARY INITIAL STATE and CONTINGENT INITIAL STATE come in different sub-varieties, depending upon the number of possible initial states that are countenanced (one or many).



mine are highly controversial; however, what seems less controversial is that the grounds for naturalism are strengthened if the models on which naturalism is clearly preferable to theism remain in play.

In this paper, I shall be examining an argument for the claim that CONTINGENT INITIAL STATE is not a model that should be kept in play. This argument runs as follows.

1. If it is possible for reality to have a contingent initial state under the causal relation—i.e. it is possible for reality to have a contingent initial state that has no cause—then it is possible for other (non-overlapping) parts of reality to have no cause. (Premise)
2. It is not possible for other (non-overlapping) parts of reality to have no cause. (Premise)
3. (Hence) It is not possible for reality to have a contingent initial state that has no cause. (From 1, 2)

This argument is my reconstruction of an argument, found in the writings of William Lane Craig², which he claims has antecedents in the work of Jonathon Edwards³ and Arthur Prior⁴. While it may be that this is not the best possible reconstruction of Craig's argument, that will not matter for present purposes, since my main aim here is to investigate the first premise of this argument, and, in particular, to explore potential naturalistic objections to it. I take it that Craig clearly commits himself to this first premise, and that Edwards and Prior do likewise; further investigation of exactly who argues what and how can be left to some other occasion.

1

If naturalists are to deny the first premise of the argument, then a natural first thought is that they will claim something like this: *a contingent initial state of reality and the contingent things that feature therein are the only kinds of thing that can have no cause*. That is, it is necessary that non-initial states of reality, and all of the contingent things that feature therein that did not feature in the initial state of reality, have causes. In other words: anything that comes into existence, other than the contingent initial state of reality and all of the contingently existing things that feature therein, has a cause.

If naturalists are to endorse this claim, then it seems to me to be plausible to suppose that they will also endorse the following claims: first, that *anything that is or can be a contingent initial state of reality cannot be anything other than a contingent initial state of reality*; and, second, *anything that is or*

²“Professor Mackie and the *Kalām* Cosmological Argument,” *Religious Studies* 20 (1985), p. 371n3; “God, Creation and Mr. Davies,” *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 37 (1986), pp. 167–168; “The Existence of God and the Beginning of the Universe,” *Truth* 3 (1991), p. 87; and “Graham Oppy on the *Kalām* Cosmological Argument,” *Sophia* 32 (1993), p. 7.

³*A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will which is Supposed to be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame* Boston, 1754 <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/works1.iii.html>.

⁴“Limited Determinism,” *Review of Metaphysics* 16.1 (1962), pp. 55–61

can be a non-initial state of reality cannot be anything other than a non-initial state of reality. In other words: the properties of being initial and non-initial states of reality are *essential* properties of states of reality. (And likewise for the contingent things that features in states: something that features in a contingent initial state of reality can only come into existence as a feature of a contingent initial state of reality; and something that comes into existence as a feature of a non-initial state of reality can only come into existence as a feature of a non-initial state of reality.⁵)

Among the questions that Craig poses to proponents of CONTINGENT INITIAL STATE, there are the following two: first, if you deny that it is possible for a raging tiger to ‘suddenly come into existence uncaused out of nothing’ in the room in which you are reading this article, how can you allow that it is possible for the initial state of reality to ‘suddenly come into existence uncaused out of nothing’?; and, second, if you suppose that it is possible for the initial state of reality to ‘suddenly come into existence uncaused out of nothing,’ how can you deny that it might have been hydrogen atoms or rabbits that ‘sprang spontaneously from the void’?

The theses sketched above suggest a clear answer to both of these questions. The enunciated causal principle tells us that it is possible for the initial state of reality to have no cause; and, in conjunction with the subsidiary principles about essential properties of states of reality and things that feature therein, it also tells us that it is impossible for a raging tiger to pop into existence uncaused here and now (at least given the further uncontroversial assumption that tigers have come into existence as features of non-initial states of reality). Moreover, in conjunction with those same subsidiary principles about essential properties of states of reality, the causal principle also entails that hydrogen atoms and rabbits could not have come into existence as features of the initial state of reality (at least given the further uncontroversial assumption that hydrogen atoms and rabbits have come into existence as features of non-initial states of reality).

2

Craig—following the lead of Edwards and Prior—has a response to the proposal developed in the previous section. The naturalist cannot seriously maintain that kinds of things that come into existence as features of non-initial states of reality cannot come into existence as features of initial states of reality because *prior to their coming into existence, things do not have natures that could control their coming to be*. If it were possible for some kinds of things to be features of contingent initial states of reality, then it would have to be possible for *any* kinds of things to be features of contingent initial states of reality, since there is nothing prior to the coming into existence of those contingent initial states of reality to place constraints on their nature and features.

⁵These principles might, in turn, be taken to derive from theses about the necessity of causal origin; however, I do not propose to explore this suggestion here.

I don't think that this response is satisfactory. Consider, for example, Craig's suggestion that, if we suppose that the contingent initial state of reality had no cause, we are obliged to allow that it might have been a rabbit 'that popped uncaused out of the void.' If it were really possible that a rabbit might have 'popped uncaused out of the void,' then it would have to be possible for there to be nothing other than a rabbit in existence. But, I think, it is manifestly impossible for the initial state of reality to be exhausted by the state of a single rabbit. Rabbits are not kinds of things that are capable of that kind of lonely existence.⁶ On the contrary, rabbits can only exist as part of larger networks of related entities. (It is also true that rabbits necessarily have a particular kind of causal ancestry; however, it would suffice for Craig's purposes if the initial state of reality could be exhausted by a single rabbit 'duplicate.' So this point can be accommodated by appropriate adjustments in Craig's claim.) Moreover, what goes for rabbits goes for almost all of the things that we see around us: all of those things can only exist as parts of larger networks of related entities.

The general point here is that there is a good sense in which natures do constrain 'initial' coming into existence: the initial state of reality has to be the kind of thing that can exist even though there is nothing else in existence; and the things that feature in the initial state of reality have to be kinds of things that can exist as parts of an initial state of reality. If there are very few possible initial states of reality—and if there are very few kinds of things that can feature in initial states of reality—then Craig, Edwards and Prior are just mistaken. The lesson here seems clear: our naturalist could insist that there are very few possible contingent initial states of reality (perhaps even, as we'll see in the next section, no more than one); and our naturalist could also insist that there are very few possible things that could have featured in initial states of reality. One consequence of the latter assumption will be that very few of the things that now exist could have featured in initial states of reality: that consequence will certainly suffice to answer more general versions of Craig's question about whether rabbits and hydrogen atoms might have 'sprung spontaneously from the void.'

3

Even if it is granted that the various assumptions that we have offered to naturalists would suffice to defeat the argument that we are considering, there are clearly further questions about motivation and plausibility that remain to be addressed. Are there deeper metaphysical claims that might be taken to motivate acceptance of the claims that we have offered to naturalists? In particular, are there plausible views about modality

⁶In the present context, it would be manifestly irrelevant to object that there are good senses in which it is conceivable or imaginable that the initial state of reality is exhausted by a single rabbit. In those senses, it is also conceivable or imaginable that something might 'pop into existence in my room uncaused out of nothing.' Craig insists on a sense of 'real' possibility that is not contradicted by those kinds of conceivability or imaginability; I simply follow his lead.

and causation that could be taken to underwrite the rejection of the identified premise?

The modal case is perhaps easier, so let's start with that. Here's a *very* brief sketch of a candidate theory of real (alethic) modality. There is an alethically possible world in which there isn't anything causal. All other alethically possible worlds have the same initial state as the actual world, and differ from the actual world only insofar as objectively chancy processes have different outcomes. Because objective chance is ubiquitous, there are many alethically possible worlds. Some might want to allow more worlds: for instance, alethically possible worlds that have different initial states, or alethically possible worlds in which there are differences in the evolution of states due to factors other than objective chance. However, the view that I am outlining here does not accept this relaxed austerity: those other worlds might be, say, doxastically or merely logically possible, but that's not enough to establish real alethic possibility.⁷

Now for causation. The key thought here is that causation is the glue that unifies reality: what makes a given non-initial state a state of reality is that it is causally consequent upon earlier states of reality. Moreover, what makes some non-initial thing that features in a state of reality a part of reality is that it is causally consequent upon things that featured in earlier states of reality. (Given this way of talking, it is at least a doxastic possibility that, in the actual world, there are independent realities: causal networks between which there is no causal interaction. But, of course, in that case, I would use the word 'reality' to refer to the causal network in which *we* are embedded. And, in any case, on the view that I'm developing, the claim in question is *only* a doxastic possibility.) Given the account of modality—with its acceptance of objective chance—there is some sense in which this view denies that causation is deterministic; however this account leaves it open whether causation should be analysed in terms of probabilities, or counterfactuals, or networks, or INUS conditions, or transfers of conserved quantities, or whether causation should be treated as a theoretical primitive.

It seems to me to be plausible to claim that these views about causation and real (alethic) modality provide support for the various principles

⁷As Tom Flint pointed out to me, there are many other variants of the simple view proposed in the text. One might think, for example, that there are many really (alethically) possible worlds that consist of a single material simple; and one might think that there are many really (alethically) possible worlds that consist of two causally unrelated material simples; and one might think that there are many really (alethically) possible worlds that consist of three causally unrelated material simples; and so forth. I take it that the simple view proposed in the text provides a *minimal* commitment for my naturalists: however real (alethic) possibility is disposed, these things are among the real (alethic) possibilities. Whether more than this is really (alethically) possible is something about which my naturalists might reasonably be uncertain: outright belief in the simple view might rely upon giving too much weight to considerations about theoretical simplicity. On the other hand, the simple view also has the advantage that it clearly conforms to the thought that the actual is the ground of the possible: it isn't clear that the way that the world is gives my naturalists any reason to think that more is really (alethically) possible than is allowed by the simple view.

that were offered to naturalists as a way of objecting to the first premise in the target argument. Given this view of alethic modality, there is only one possible initial state for reality, but it is a contingent matter whether that initial state obtains. Moreover, given the role that causation plays as the 'glue' that unifies reality, it is at least natural to suppose that, on these views, the properties of being initial and non-initial states of reality will be *essential* properties of states of reality, and that the contingent initial state of reality and the contingent things that feature therein are the only kinds of thing that can have no cause. And so forth.

Of course, what has been offered here is, at best, a *very* rough sketch. But it seems to me that, at the very least, it suffices to show that, until you explore the range of possible naturalistically acceptable accounts of modality, causation, and so forth, you cannot be in a good position to assert—as Craig does—that if one holds that it is possible for something (an initial contingent state of the universe) to come into existence uncaused out of nothing, then one is simply unable to explain why there are no other things that do or can come into existence uncaused out of nothing.⁸

4

So far, this discussion has proceeded at a very high level of abstraction, thereby avoiding questions about the nature and extent of natural reality. (Is natural reality exhausted by something rather like a single big bang universe; or is natural reality comprised of something rather like a large collection of big bang universes, causally related to one another through singularities, or wormholes, or some such? Is natural reality universally spatio-temporal, or are there some parts of natural reality that are 'framed' by other kinds of external relations? Where reality is spatio-temporal, is it the case that causal priority and temporal priority are everywhere perfectly aligned? Etc.) However, it is worth asking whether, if we descend from these heights and focus on well-established features of the part of reality that we inhabit, we might be able to construct a plausible case, for the claim that it is impossible for a raging tiger to 'suddenly come into existence uncaused out of nothing' in the room in which you are reading this article, that is pretty obviously independent of assumptions about whether it is possible for reality to have a contingent initial state under the causal relation. In this discussion, I take it for granted that, at least at the macroscopic level, temporal order and causal order coincide in the part of reality that we inhabit.

⁸Of course, naturalists can ask Craig how *he* proposes to *explain* why there are (and can be) no non-initial things that come into existence uncaused out of nothing. True enough, the causal principle that he accepts—that nothing can come into existence uncaused—*entails* the claim to be explained. But it is clear that the causal principle that we are here investigating—that no non-initial thing can come into existence uncaused—*also* entails the claim to be explained. As far as explanatory credentials go, the two cases seem to be on a par. Before we can make any further comparison of the merits of theistic and naturalistic explanations of the claim, we also need to have some properly elaborated theistic theories on the table!

Suppose that there is a table in the room in which you are reading this article. Is it possible that a tiger 'come into existence uncaused out of nothing' where that table is? I don't think so. I assume that it is just impossible for the table and the tiger to simultaneously occupy the same spatial location: if there is to be a tiger where the table now is, then it cannot be that the table also continues to be there. Thus, in the causal order, before the tiger can come to occupy a spatial location that overlaps with the current spatial location of the table, the table must cease to occupy that location. Moreover, it cannot just be the coming into existence of the tiger that brings it about that the table ceases to occupy that location: non-existent things do not have causal powers, and the tiger does not begin to exist until it occupies some spatial location or other. However, if that's right, then I think that we should say that the table's ceasing to occupy the location that it currently occupies is *a cause* of the coming into existence of the tiger (given that the tiger comes into existence where the table now is). But, if the table's ceasing to occupy the location that it currently occupies is *a cause* of the coming into existence of the tiger, then it isn't true that the tiger 'comes into existence uncaused out of nothing.'

If this line of thought is plausible, then it generalises. Pick any tiger-shaped space in the room. In order for a tiger to occupy that tiger-shaped space, that space must have appropriate internal and boundary properties: there are, after all, lots of ways that the boundary and interior of that space could be that are simply inconsistent with the occupation of that space by a tiger. But, if that's right, then it seems to me that we should allow that the consistency of the boundary and interior of the space with occupation by a tiger—or, more strictly, the coming about of the consistency of the boundary and interior of the space with occupation by a tiger—is *a cause* of the coming into existence of the tiger. And, as before, if this is *a cause* of the coming into existence of the tiger, then it is isn't true that the tiger 'comes into existence uncaused out of nothing.'

Might one object that, if the table's ceasing to occupy the location that it currently occupies—or the coming about of the consistency of the boundary and interior of the space with occupation by a tiger—itself has no cause, then we would have a situation in which the tiger 'comes into existence uncaused out of nothing'? I don't think so. Compare with a situation in which there are several causes of an explosion: the presence of oxygen, the presence of gas, the lighting of a match, and so forth. If we suppose that one of these factors—say, the presence of oxygen—has no cause, that seems to make no difference to its status as a cause of the explosion, nor to the status of the claim that the explosion had a cause. Even if there is no cause of the table's ceasing to occupy the location that it currently occupies, it will still be the case that the table's ceasing to occupy the location that it currently occupies is a cause of the coming into existence of the tiger; even if there is no cause of the coming about of the consistency of the boundary and interior of the space with occupation by a tiger, it will still be the case that the coming about of the consistency of the boundary and

interior of the space with occupation by a tiger is a cause of the coming into existence of the tiger.

Might one object that it is a mistake to suppose that, in the imagined circumstances, the table's ceasing to occupy the location that it currently occupies—or the coming about of the consistency of the boundary and interior of the space with occupation by a tiger—is *a* cause of the coming into existence of the tiger? Again, I don't think so. Compare with the case of the explosion: nearly everyone accepts that it is right to say that the presence of oxygen, the presence of gas, the lighting of the match, and so forth, are all causes of the explosion. But the role of the table's ceasing to occupy the location that it currently occupies—or the role of the coming about of the consistency of the boundary and interior of the space with occupation by a tiger—in the coming into existence of the tiger seems to be on all fours with, say, the role of the presence of oxygen in the explosion.⁹

Might one object that it is a mistake to suppose that, in the imagined circumstances, the table must cease to occupy its current location before the tiger can come to occupy a spatial location that overlaps with that current spatial location of the table, *on the grounds* that there could be an uncaused instantaneous reorganisation of the constituents of the table in which they become the constituents of a tiger? I don't think so. On the one hand, it seems to me that there are good grounds for thinking that it is not really possible that mere instantaneous rearrangement of constituents could transform a table into a tiger (or, at any rate, a tiger 'duplicate')¹⁰. On the other hand—and more importantly—I take it that, even if there could be an uncaused instantaneous reorganisation of the constituents of the table in which they become the constituents of a tiger, that would not be a case in which a tiger came into existence 'uncaused out of nothing.' Rather, that would be a case in which a tiger came into existence 'uncaused out of the constituents of a table'—and so it would not be a counterexample to the claim that it is impossible that a tiger 'come into existence uncaused out of nothing' where the table is.

⁹Perhaps it is worth noting that we can make the same kind of point in cases in which we're inclined to judge that there is just one salient cause. Consider a case in which a stationary billiard ball starts to move because it is struck by another moving ball. Suppose that this is a case in which we're disposed to say that *the* cause of the movement of the hitherto stationary ball is the collision with the moving ball. If we suppose that the moving ball has 'popped into existence out of nothing' just prior to its collision with the stationary ball, that supposition seems to have no effect at all on our judgment that the collision with the moving ball is *the* cause of the motion of the hitherto stationary ball.

¹⁰Remember: we're following Craig's lead, distinguishing carefully between real possibilities and logical possibilities. You might think that it is logically possible that the constituents of a table be instantaneously reorganised to form a tiger; but even if you do think that, you'd need further reason to suppose that this is a *real* possibility. (Suppose that we adopt the theory of alethic modality described in section 3. I reckon that in the set of worlds that have the same origin as ours, and which differ from ours only in the outcomes of objectively chancy processes, there isn't even one world in which the constituents of a table are instantaneously reorganised to make a tiger. So, on that account of alethic modality, I reckon that such instantaneous reorganisation is not a real possibility.)

Might one object that it cannot be right to claim that it is impossible for a tiger to suddenly come to occupy a tiger-shaped location in the room in which you are reading this article on the grounds that quantum mechanics makes provision for just these kinds of sudden appearances? I don't think so. It may be so that there are various mechanisms embraced by contemporary physics that could bring it about that a tiger suddenly appeared in the room in which you are reading this article where there was no tiger beforehand—quantum tunnelling, travel through space-time wormholes, etc. However, if such things are really possible, they are certainly not cases in which a tiger 'comes into existence uncaused out of nothing,' since they are one and all causal processes. If a tiger quantum tunnels into the room from somewhere else, then that plainly isn't a case in which a tiger 'comes into existence uncaused out of nothing'; likewise for a tiger that is transported into the room via a space-time wormhole. (While it is strictly irrelevant to the present argument, it might be worth noting that, even if this kind of quantum tunnelling were possible, we could explain why we've never observed a case of it involving macroscopic objects: such events are so massively improbable that there is virtually no chance of a single event of this kind in a volume the size of the observed universe over a time period longer than the currently estimated age of the observed universe.)

Might one object that it cannot be right to claim that it is impossible for a tiger to suddenly come to occupy a tiger-shaped location in the room in which you are reading this article on the grounds that a special T-singularity might appear and then rapidly expand to become a tiger?¹¹ I don't think so. On the one hand, there is surely good reason to deny that this is a real possibility: perhaps you can make a mental picture of such an occurrence, but why should you suppose that that picture corresponds to something that might really happen? On the other hand—and more importantly—even if the T-singularity 'comes into existence uncaused out of nothing,' this would not be a case in which a tiger came into existence uncaused out of nothing, since it is clearly being supposed that the expansion of the T-singularity is a causal process, and that the existence of a tiger is the end-product of that causal process.

Might one object that most of the observable universe consists of spaces whose interior and boundary conditions are consistent with occupation by a tiger—i.e., that almost every tiger-shaped space in the universe is actually consistent with occupation by a tiger? Put more vividly: might one object that it is surely the case that the Apollo astronauts ought to have been no less certain that tigers would not pop into existence around them as they winged their way to the moon! Certainly not. Of course, I agree that the Apollo astronauts ought to have been no less certain that tigers would not pop into existence around them as they winged their

¹¹I am grateful to Peter Forrest and Greg Restall for being causes of the inclusion of this paragraph in my paper.

way to the moon. But nothing in the preceding argument requires the assumption that the coming about of the consistency of the boundary and interior of a tiger-shaped space with occupation by a tiger might be the *sole* cause of the coming into existence of a tiger in that space. On the contrary, the argument has only been for the conclusion that—in the room in which you are reading this paper—the coming about of the consistency of the boundary and interior of a tiger-shaped space with occupation by a tiger would be *a* cause in any ‘popping into existence’ of a tiger in that space.¹² (I suppose that, if it were so that almost every tiger-shaped space in the universe is consistent with occupation by a tiger, it would *still* be the case that the coming about of the consistency of the boundary and interior of a typical tiger-shaped space with occupation by a tiger would be a cause of the ‘popping into existence’ of a tiger in that space¹³: causal factors do not cease to be causal merely because they are *nearly* ubiquitous.)¹⁴

Again, what I have provided here is no more than an incomplete sketch. But, again, it seems to me that, at the very least, it suffices to show that, until you have explored the prospects for direct arguments on behalf of the claim that it is impossible for a raging tiger to ‘suddenly come into existence uncaused out of nothing’ in the room in which you are reading this article, you cannot be in a good position to assert—as Craig does—that if one holds that it is possible for something [an initial contingent state of the universe] to come into existence uncaused out of nothing, then one is simply unable to explain why there are no other things that do or can come into existence uncaused out of nothing.

¹²Of course, it hardly needs pointing out that, if a tiger arrives in the room by a causal process that plainly ought not to be called ‘popping into existence’—e.g., if a tiger wanders in through the door—then the coming about of the consistency of the boundary and interior of the tiger-shaped space that is actually occupied by the tiger with occupation by a tiger is *not* a cause of the presence of the tiger in that space. In cases in which it would be appropriate to talk about ‘popping into existence,’ the coming about of the consistency of the boundary and interior of the tiger-shaped space with occupation by a tiger must be causally prior to—and hence causally independent of—the existence of the tiger. But in other cases—as when a tiger walks into the room—the coming about of the consistency of the boundary and interior of the tiger-shaped space with occupation by a tiger is causally dependent upon—and hence not causally prior to—the existence and presence of the tiger.

¹³I suspect that it is *false* that almost every tiger-shaped space in the universe is consistent with occupation by a tiger—even in interstellar and intergalactic space, tiger-shaped spaces are typically *inconsistent* with (immediate) occupation by tigers. However, nothing in my argument rests on whether this suspicion is correct.

¹⁴I think that a *minimum* requirement for the real possibility of the ‘popping into existence’ of tigers in tiger-shaped spaces would be a distribution of objective chances for the ‘popping into existence’ of tigers over those tiger-shaped spaces. However, if there were a distribution of objective chances for the ‘popping into existence’ of tigers over those tiger-shaped spaces, then—a *fortiori*—there would be further (probabilistic) causes of the existence of any tigers that came into existence in this objectively chancy way. Moreover, it seems to me that my naturalists could suppose *either* that it is really impossible for there to be any such distribution of objective chances over tiger-shaped spaces, *or else* that, on any really possible distribution of objective chances, the chance that a tiger ‘pop into existence’ in a tiger-shaped space is *vanishingly* small. But nothing in my main argument turns upon whether the speculations introduced in the current footnote are correct.

5

In this paper, I have conducted a rough preliminary investigation of the claim that, if it is possible for reality to have a contingent initial state under the causal relation—i.e. if it is possible for reality to have a contingent initial state that has no cause—then it is possible for other parts of reality to have no cause.

I have suggested that there are various grounds—theoretical and commonsensical—for maintaining that it is simply not possible for non-initial parts of reality to have no cause; and I have also claimed that these grounds are pretty clearly consistent with the claim that it is possible for reality to have a contingent initial state under the causal relation. Of course, I don't claim to have provided an exhaustive investigation of grounds of this kind; there may well be many other ways in which one could argue for the same conclusion.¹⁵

Because this investigation is rough and preliminary, it may have gone wrong in various ways. However, even if that is so, it may still be that the main aim of the paper is achieved: for the points that I most want to emphasise are (i) that it is possible for naturalists to engage in this kind of metaphysical theorising, and (ii) that there can be no justified assessment of the theoretical merits of the products of such theorising that doesn't look at the details of the theories in question. It isn't possible to assess the merits of theories until those theories have been constructed and tabled; in particular—despite Craig's implicit suggestion to the contrary—it isn't possible to make justified claims about what certain types of theories can and cannot explain until you have the relevant theories in hand.¹⁶

Monash University

¹⁵Here is a sketch of a different line of thought. An initial state of reality establishes a 'frame' for external relations: space, time, and the like. Once this 'frame' is established, it is impossible for another 'frame' of external relations to be embedded within it. Consequently, an initial state of reality is—and must be—utterly different in kind from any non-initial state of reality. Moreover, this clear difference extends to the causal properties of reality. On the one hand, it is obvious *a priori* that an initial state of reality has no cause. On the other hand, it is a plausible metaphysical speculation that the 'evolution' of the 'frame' of reality is, and must be, causal. Development of this line of thought will need to await some other occasion.

¹⁶I read this paper at the inaugural APRA (Australasian Philosophy of Religion Association) conference in Canberra on September 28, 2008. Thanks to all of those who participated in the conference, and, in particular, to all of those who engaged in discussion of my paper. Special thanks to Tom Flint, Peter Forrest, Greg Restall, and two anonymous referees, for very helpful questions and comments.