Causal Finitism and the Kalām Argument

Alexander R. Pruss

Department of Philosophy
Baylor University

February 7, 2018
The strange and the impossible

- No one doubts that infinity is strange.
- But the strange is not the impossible.
- **Proof:**
Warmup: Thomson’s Lamp
Guessing dice: The game

- Every day from eternity you play this game:
  - You guess whether you will roll a six or not.
  - You roll a fair and memoryless die.
  - If you were wrong, you’re tortured.
  - Die is not affected by your guesses.

- **Obviously Correct Strategy:** Never guess 6.

- No strategy using information from the past will be better than the Obviously Correct Strategy, on pain of something like the Gambler’s Fallacy.
Guessing dice: A better strategy

- Absurdly, one can leverage past data to find a strategy that (a) in some possible situations is better than Never-Six, and (b) is never worse.
- “Almost always” = “Finitely many exceptions.”
- Better Strategy:
  - If you almost always had sixes, guess six.
  - Otherwise, guess non-six.
- In most worlds, you’ll have infinitely many non-sixes and infinitely many sixes. Same result as Never-Six.
- But if you almost always have six, Better Strategy gives only finitely many tortures, but Never-Six gives infinitely many!
Causal Finitism, I

- Finitism would rule out all these paradoxes.
- Finitism conflicts with mathematics and with eternalism and is too strong.
- **Causal Finitism**: Not possible for infinitely many causes to impinge on a single event.
- Infinitely many Grim Reapers observations of victim impinge on the life at end of experiment.
- Better die-rolling strategy requires one’s knowledge to be affected by infinitely many rolls.
Causal Finitism, II

- Causal Finitism is a simple principle that rules out many paradoxes.
- But it allows for actual infinites, just as mathematics requires.
- There is no good competitor.
- Probably, it’s true.
A version of Kalām

1. There is a cause.
2. If there is a cause and every cause has a cause, there is circularity in causation or an infinite causal regress.
3.Circularity in causation is impossible.
4. Infinite causal regress are impossible. (By causal finitism)
5. So not every cause has a cause.
6. So there is an uncaused cause.
7. Every contingent thing has a cause.
8. So there is a necessary being.

*Et hoc dicimus deum?*