

LIFE *in* HIMSELF

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“As the Father
has life in
himself, so he
has granted
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himself.”

John 5:26

While speaking at various public venues, I often hear questions and comments about the ultimate origin of all things. For example, on one occasion I received a summons from an elderly lady who sat in her wheelchair and spryly lifted her arms while inquiring, “Where did it all come from?” On another occasion, without any prompting by me, a person wanted to know how I felt about the first verse in the Bible: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Needless to say, I told the person that I liked the verse.) In essence, discussions on the issues of life often lead people to consider the subject of ultimate origins.

This question of origins—or, more fundamentally, the discerning of cause and effect—is deeply rooted in the everyday churn of human thought. When we come upon a car wreck, after determining if anyone is hurt, we are next beset with the question, “What happened?” which is simply an exploration of cause and effect. And so it goes all day long—we seek the causes of the manifold effects we see before us: Why did the washing machine overflow? Why is my dog limping? This is entirely natural, and we don’t even think about this thinking; we just do it. Further, this innate practice, if followed long enough, ultimately involves a linked chain that leads us back again to the question of an ultimate cause, or, as the elderly lady said, “Where did it all come from?”

This naturally occurring trail of inquiry effortlessly leads us to a related question: Does the chain continue indefinitely? That is, are we involved in a never-ending parade of cause and effect, or do the links back in time reach an eventual endpoint? Is there some place beyond which we need not, and cannot, explore? Importantly, Jesus himself resolves our quest with a short phrase in Scripture that has profound ontological implications. In the Gospel of John, he says, “As the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself” (5:26 NIV). Note, “the Father has life in himself”; specifically, he looks to no outside source for his life, and there is nothing further back in the chain of causation upon which his life depends. Instead, the cause of his existence is within himself. Such a weighty reality is wonderfully summarized as follows:

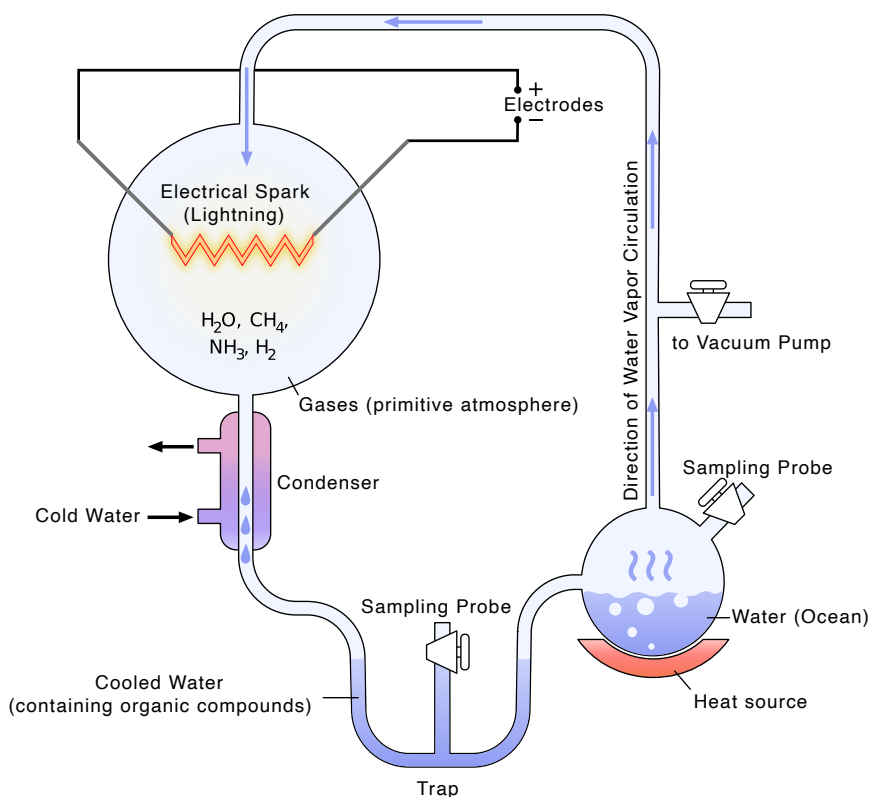
Everything in the universe, everything except God, exists because it is caused, brought into existence by something else. Parents cause children, factories cause cars, the sun causes light, tectonic plate movements cause earthquakes. God alone has no cause, needs no cause; God alone exists from within rather than from without, by His essence rather than from a cause.¹

If we meditate on it carefully, the fact that God’s existence comes from within himself, that he requires no other fountain from which to drink, is one of the most inspiring realities that humans can encounter. He was always there, he is always there,

and he will always be there, the Alpha and Omega, for he has “life in himself.” Deep down, he is what naturally exists. There is no cause behind his being, and there is no spark beyond him; the life in him is the ultimate wellspring of all creation, including us. He is the prime reality.

Conversely, as much as many of us love science, we must admit that it does not speak to the question of an ultimate cause behind the universe, and many instances of brilliant scientists freely noting this fact can be given. For example, at the end of an essay tracing a number of steps back to the earliest times in the cosmos, one author states, “This, at last, is where our knowledge comes to an end: not with a gap, but rather with a cliff of ignorance.”² Fortunately, we have another source of knowledge, specifically, Jesus, whose words do not lead us to a “cliff of ignorance” but to a personal being, God himself. Do mysteries still remain for the theist? Of course. However, prime reality for the believer is not a gaping cliff, but an eternal living being to whom we can relate.

Further, concerning the origin of life on earth from nonlife (i.e., abiogenesis), the same author quoted above states, “At some point in cosmic history, life did emerge from non-life. It is presently unknown exactly how that happened.”³ Indeed, scientists have expended considerable effort trying to develop a pathway by which life could have emerged from nonlife, yet to no avail. One of the seminal events in these efforts was the Miller–Urey experiment in 1952, in which a flask with various gases and water was subjected to electrical sparks.⁴ This was supposed to simulate conditions on the early earth and show that such conditions may have led



Miller–Urey experiment diagram. By YassineMrabet, based on an image by Carny (Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0).



“The question of life’s origin has already been answered: the eternal Creator has life in himself and has shared this life with his creation.”

All life is part of a linked chain back to the Creator, who has life in himself.
Photo by Holger Detje.

to the emergence of life. In the experiment, organic molecules (amino acids) were in fact created from inorganic material, and this is often celebrated as a foundational step in understanding the origin of life from nonlife. Yet, even simple life is exceedingly more complex than just molecules. Indeed, one current author admits, “While it is encouraging that the initial amino-acid step seems relatively straightforward, by now it has become clear that scientists are going to have to be a lot more clever if we are to understand how the steps proceeded after that.”⁵ In addition, he states, “As of this writing we have more questions than answers.”⁶

Yet, the question of life’s origin has already been answered: the eternal Creator has life in himself and has shared this life with his creation. Genesis 2:7 states, “the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” When the thought that God has given life to his creation as an overflow of his eternal existence embeds itself into our consciousness, when we get just a brief glimpse of this truth, we are ushered out of the land of undue self-reliance and into the realm of truth. In this enlightened terrain of truth, we begin to see ourselves, along with the totality of creation, as entirely crafted entities. None of us ultimately has life within; only about God can such a thing be said.

And our dependency extends well beyond our personal genesis. Every moment of our lives we are standing on contingent ground in every way, and everything can, and often does, change in a moment, either for blessing or harm. Think for a moment of all the contingencies by which you exist, how dependent you truly are. There was that event that almost occurred in which your life would have been drastically altered or even snuffed out. Or that person you met, maybe a spouse, whose entry into your life was preceded by a myriad of actions or decisions by others that were completely outside of your control. And so it goes: dependency and contingency characterize the totality of our human existence, but not so with God, for he has “life in himself,” and he always has—a truly remarkable fact.

Before the mountains were born
or you brought forth the whole world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
(Ps 90:2) ♪

Endnotes

1. Peter Kreeft, *Practical Theology: Spiritual Direction from St. Thomas Aquinas; 358 Ways Your Mind Can Help You to Become a Saint from the “Summa Theologiae”* (Ignatius Press, 2014), 7.
2. Ethan Siegel, “Science’s Answer to the Ultimate Question: Where Do We Come From?,” *Starts with a Bang*, Big Think, September 16, 2025, <https://bigthink.com/starts-with-a-bang/science-answer-ultimate-question/>.

3. Siegel, “Science’s Answer.”
4. Wikipedia, “Miller–Urey Experiment,” last modified March 31, 2026, 23:41 (UTC), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miller%E2%80%93Urey_experiment.
5. Sean Carroll, *The Big Picture: On the Origins of Life, Meaning, and the Universe Itself* (Dutton, 2017), 251.
6. Carroll, *Big Picture*, 250.