

Compare and Contrast the Cosmological and Ontological Arguments

“Why do I exist? What created the universe? Does God exist?” Questions which have challenged philosophers for many years. The Cosmological and Ontological arguments attempt to answer these questions. Through this essay I hope to explore the methodology and formation of the arguments in their early stages, and their development through the years. I will also explore the extension of the arguments in the modern era, for both supporters and critics of the arguments. The modern era provides a wide range of developments to the arguments, and I will explore the ideas and thoughts of many 20Th Century philosophers. At the core of this essay is the two very different approaches of the arguments, the a posteriori based Cosmological, and the a priori based Ontological ¹.

The two approaches of the arguments are based around the a priori and a posteriori reasoning. An a priori arguments is one where the truth of the proposition does not depend on prior experience. It relies on knowledge collected outside of our own experiences. This is said by some to be an innate knowledge. The ontological argument is based around this reasoning. The basis of the argument itself depends on ones understanding of the nature of God. The argument attempts to prove Gods expistence through the meaning of the word GOD. The Cosmological argument on the other hand, is a a posteriori based argument. They argue that the truth of a proposition may only be known to be true after empirical knowledge is utilised to prove the statement true or false. ²

The two arguments were both first begun by the classical Greek Philosophers Aristotle and Plato. Plato argued one of the Cosmological arguments earliest forms. He argued that “the power to produce movement logically comes before the power to receive it and pass it on” ³ This basically means that if there is movement, then something has to have caused this. This could not logically go on for infinity, so there has to be a single solitary being that caused this chain of events. This he calls the First Mover. Aristotle also believed in the Prime mover, the uncaused cause, the original cause. In this respect the two arguments are very similar. The main thing that Aristotle really contributed to was the Ontological argument was Syllogisms. He developed the concept, and the use of deductive arguments. The argument is deductive also, and

¹ Though David Hume believed that the Cosmological was an a priori based argument. General consensus has decided that he was wrong in this assumption.

² This can be used to prove that a statement COULD be true. If a statement cannot be proved to be false then it has a possibility of being true. (this is important to the Cosmological Argument)

³ Extract from Jordan, Lockyer, Tate Philosophy of Religion For A Level

completely rational, so therefore Aristotle's Syllogism was the choice to use. So both arguments take with them the ideas and concepts of classic Greek philosophers, albeit in very differing ways.

The ontological argument attempts to suggest the existence of there being a creator, or God. There are two main contributors to the Classical Ontological argument for the existence of God. These were St Anselm and Descartes. The main creators of the Cosmological were Aquinas and Leibniz.