

## Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the Cosmological Argument

The Cosmological Argument is an 'a posteriori argument'. Therefore, the strengths and weaknesses of the Cosmological Argument, are the strengths and weaknesses of 'a posteriori' reasoning. 'A posteriori reasoning is 'arguing to a conclusion from our experience of the world'. The most famous expression of the Cosmological Arguments is found in what are known as Saint Thomas Aquinas' 'Five Ways,' seen as proofs of God's existence but since 'a posteriori' reasoning can only offer us probability, and not conclusive proof, then we need to clarify what exactly these arguments are attempting to do and how much do they work doing what they are actually trying to do.

There are two forms of the Cosmological argument. The first of these is the 'Kalam Argument', also known as the 'First Cause Argument'. This is the simplest expression of the Cosmological Argument. William Lane Craig, a modern day philosopher, re-visited the Kalam Argument, which had originated previously amongst Islamic philosophers. His statement of it had three premises. The first of these said whatever begins to exist has a cause. The second one followed by saying, the Universe began to exist and the third premise brings the first two together by saying that therefore, the Universe has a cause and this cause must therefore be God. The other main version of the Cosmological Argument that I will be discussing in this essay, is the 'Argument from Contingency', also known as Aquinas' 'Third Way'. Frederick Copelston, like William Lane Craig was a modern day philosopher and put this argument into modern times. He thought that everything in the Universe is contingent (dependant on something else). The Universe is simply the totality of contingent things and is therefore contingent. Given that the Universe is contingent, there must be something on which it depends – something with necessary existence. Therefore, this must be God. There is a difference between the Kalam and the Contingency Arguments. The Contingency arguments (arguments such as the third of Aquinas' Five Ways) seek to establish the dependence of the Universe on God now. They seek to show there is something necessary on which the contingent Universe depends. The Kalam argument, by contrast, seeks to establish the Universe has a beginning and that this beginning was caused.

The first premise of the Kalam Argument reads, 'Whatever begins to exist has a cause.' This view relies on us interpreting current data (data available to us). We therefore, need to make a judgement on this data to see if the Universe is uncaused or if it has a cause, which has not yet been figured out. Even if the Universe is not an infinite regress i.e. it has a cause, then this cause is uncaused. This leaves us with a problem, this problem being that there cannot be an ultimate explanation. The second premise reads, 'The Universe began to exist'. This shows us that the 'Big Bang theory' seems to support the Kalam Argument. Although the 'Big Bang theory' has not been proved, it is still a plausible hypothesis. This causes us to ask the question 'What was there before the 'Big Bang?'

The Kalam argument, overall, rests on four assumptions. This shows us that it may not, therefore, be a stable argument, as assumptions can be rejected. The first of these asks us to assume that every event has a cause. Hume, an empiricist, told us that there was no necessary relationship between cause and effect. The second assumption that comes up in this argument is that the Universe needs an explanation outside the Universe. The criticism following this, is the assumption that the question 'What caused God' is illegitimate. Going on from this, we do not know which 'God' the argument is talking about. We do not know if it is referring to one or to many gods for example.

The main point against the Argument from Contingency is that it can be said that like causes resemble like effects. By saying this, you are arguing against the leap from contingency to necessity that Saint Thomas Aquinas takes. This argument is summed up, in a book called 'The Puzzle of God' by Peter Vardy, by saying, "One cannot move from individual causes to a claim that the totality of all has a cause". Aquinas tries to arrive at necessary existence with his third way. This was questioned as to whether there was any such thing, because it is logical to say of anything that it may or may not exist.

In conclusion, the strengths and weaknesses of the Cosmological Argument ultimately depend on what we see it as attempting to do. If we see it as a proof, it fails because 'a posteriori reasoning' can never arrive at conclusive proof because of

experience. However, if we see it as a ‘probability argument’ (does it make God more rather than less probable) then it has a value, as it makes belief in God reasonable, which, I think, was Aquinas’ intention.