

Cosmological Argument

A. What are the key ideas of the cosmological argument?

The Cosmological Argument is an argument that attempts to conclude the existence of god, through reference to the existence of the universe. It's main principle, first suggested by Plato, then developed by Thomas Aquinas, is that there must be an uncaused causer or an unmoved mover. Its Aposteriori nature, with a conclusion coming after experience, provides evidence to support this argument, rejecting infinite regress. The principle of sufficient reason is linked to this and Aquinas' theory of contingency underlines the main principle for the existence of god.

Thomas Aquinas developed upon the theory of causation, first suggested by Plato. It states that everything that has been moved has in itself been moved by something else. This means that everything must have a cause and therefore there is a chain of causes. This principle is concluded by looking at events and tracing them back and says there must be a first cause, an unmoved mover to start this all off. Aquinas' religious background most probably helped in his decision that this is god.

Aquinas' theory of contingency explains why there is and must be a first cause, god. He says that because of the causation theory, everything in the world is contingent and conditional and co-dependant on something else. This means that god is necessary, not contingent, as the world depends on him. Without god the universe would not exist.

The principle of sufficient reason, developed by GWF Leibniz is similar to this. Leibniz suggests that because everything within the world can be explained with reference to something else within the world, there must be some ultimate reason, which explains the entire universe, but does not break the rules. Therefore this must be by something superior outside the world, not following our rules, so does not in itself depend on anything, which is god. If this was not so, we would not know why these rules and the world are apparent, but just how. Leibniz explains that the world does not seem to contain within itself reason for its own existence and so god does this.

Aquinas and William Lane Craig reject the infinity of regress. Because we are at today, we have added to the past, therefore the universe is potentially infinite. Aquinas rejects the possibility that causes go on forever because for there to be a future, there must be a past and so a beginning. Craig outlined this saying, because we have begun, there is a beginning and this means the universe is finite.

Because we are present, we have a beginning and therefore a cause. This means everything has a cause and this causation rule must have some ultimate reason or cause to explain it, which is not contingent but necessary to explain the universe. This, the philosophers Leibniz, Aquinas and Craig stated is god, uncaused due to different rules in a different cosmos.

B. Identify the main strengths of this argument.

This Cosmological Argument has much strength, one of which is the importance of the empirical evidence. The theory of causation fits in with our own experiences and empirical data that everything in the world depends on something and is caused by something. We see and experience it everyday and

so can strongly support the theory that everything has a cause and this theory that everything is contingent makes sense.

The second point within this argument that is strong is Leibniz and Aquinas' theory that everything has a cause, therefore the universe cannot 'just exist', it must have a cause or it would not exist. However it does exist and so the Cosmological Argument states a starting point for the universe. This is god and the theory of sufficient reason answers our questions to how and why god exists.

Thirdly god's omnipotent nature is important in this argument. This means that he does not need a cause, because there is nothing greater than him and so no power to give a cause to him. He is the final cause because nothing else in the world is omnipotent and this is strength for the Cosmological Argument because it states god does not need a cause. The Cosmological Argument fits in with what religion tells us, that god is omnipotent.

Aquinas and Craig's rejection of infinite regress states that we can add to the present therefore there is a future. This would not be if infinity was true and the world would not move, with time staying still. Therefore the rejection of infinite regress fits in with common sense and therefore is strong to this argument.

The last strength of this argument is the universe itself existing, provides evidence that the theory is strong. Because the universe is complex, there must be some ultimate being creating it, it cannot simply 'be'. This fits with Swinburne's principle that the world is dependent on a superior being - god. The Cosmological Argument gives a reason how this complex universe was created, how and why god exists.

C. How far do the strengths outweigh the weaknesses?

Though this argument is strong, it also has many weaknesses, some very obvious but confusing.

The first is the unanswered question of 'who caused god?' within the Cosmological Argument. Thomas Reid supports this saying "it is common sense everything has a cause?" John Hick says "doesn't god need an explanation as well?" Changing this assumption when it comes to god because he is a so-called "special case" does not make sense therefore the weakness outweighs the strength. The rule within the Cosmological Argument is that everything has a cause, but the Cosmological Argument leaves god's cause not fully explained, making the Cosmological Argument illogical.

Even is the principle that god is outside the world so does not need a cause and follow normal rules, developed by Leibniz, was apparent, this would not work. God is not in our cosmos and so how can he intervene. Being outside, he is no longer omnipotent and therefore cannot cause the universe. This principle of sufficient reason with god being it, therefore does not make sense either and weakens the argument.

The theory of causation may be correct, everything does have a cause (apparent due to empirical evidence) and therefore this argument is stronger. However, how do we link these causes to god? We have not enough evidence that god is the first cause, and Immanuel Kant stresses this. There are many different interpretations of what the first cause is, such as the big bang theory, therefore it is hard to conclude and believe that god is in fact it. The problem of other things possibly having no cause is then led on to. We have not much evidence that everything is contingent, just our experiences, so don't know if the first cause is in fact god.

Another main weakness that is apparent is Bertrand Russell's suggestion that why does the universe need a cause? Why can't we just accept that "it just is"? Hume states "The world may be the cause of itself, and maybe part of the way things are and the way the universe exists". However the Cosmological Argument theory of causation suggests that this would not happen and so the strength here wins.

Aquinas and Craig reject infinity in their theory of the universe. However they then contradict themselves by saying that god is infinite. Again this breaks a rule they set for the Cosmological Argument, so why can't other things break the rules? Leibniz however accounts for this loophole. He

says that god is outside our cosmos so has different rules. Therefore God being infinite and the world potentially infinite is not breaking the rules, just following different rules.

The main problem with this argument is that with each point, there are weaknesses and strengths. You can then end up accounting for this by explaining a certain theory and why it is apparent, evident with Leibniz's explanation above. With the Cosmological Argument you can keep going back and forth arguing the strengths and weaknesses. Therefore the Strengths outweigh the weaknesses, but the weaknesses also sometimes outweigh the strengths. It is an ongoing argument with no firm conclusion one can come to.