

ii) What are the main criticisms of the cosmological argument? How far is it fair to say that the strengths outweigh the weaknesses?

(20)

There have been many criticisms put forward against the cosmological argument, which can be said to outweigh the strengths because they outnumber them. One of the most important criticisms is the idea of infinite regression. There are numerous theories by modern scientists that agree with infinite regression, and this is the most important weakness because it challenges the whole notion of the argument. Also, it uses scientific knowledge which is accepted to be true by the majority of people. Together, the steady state theory and Stephen Hawking's theory of space-time curvature attempt to undermine the cosmological argument completely. Hawking argues that the dimensions of space and time form a surface, like a sphere, which has no beginning and no end. He said that "if the universe is really completely self-contained, having no boundary or edge, it would have neither beginning nor end" and continued to ask "What place, then, for a creator?" This is an important criticism because if you accept infinite regression, then there's no need for a first cause and so no need for God as the creator of the universe.

An equally important weakness is causation. Hume argues that reasoning based on probability is less effective and reliable as reasoning based on fact. For example someone could assume that the sun will rise tomorrow because it has risen every other day; however we do not know for sure. It's probably that the sun will rise tomorrow, however it is not a certain fact. Hume argues that it's impossible to infer a connection between two events only after observing repeated instances of their conjunction. Following this logic, he said that it's only justifiable to infer the cause of the universe if we had actually observed the creation of other universe and we haven't so we can't make that inference. We can only speculate what caused the universe, and so we have no solid evidence. This is important because it illustrates that we as humans can never fully understand the existence of the universe because we weren't around at the time of creation and haven't experienced the creation of other universes.

Another significant criticism of the cosmological argument is that it is a posteriori which means that the evidence used to explain it can be observed in the world around us by anyone. This is a weakness for the argument because everyone interprets things differently, and so our senses can mislead us. Tyler and Reid said that "the theist chooses to interpret the world in the light of the existence of God; he is not logically compelled to do so" i.e. theists can look at the evidence and see clear evidence of the existence of God; however

atheists will not see this. Hume is another critic of the argument, arguing that the argument starts with something which we have all experienced, the universe, but it then leads on and out of our experiences to claim God as an answer. As none of us have experienced the creation of the universe, the answers are out of our own experience and so they are likely to be inaccurate or wrong.

Another important weakness of the cosmological argument is that it is inductive. This is a weakness because there are other possible explanations and so God doesn't necessarily have to be the answer. The "proof" attained in the argument doesn't prove that God must have caused the universe but there could be other answers. Aquinas concludes that God is the first mover and therefore a necessary being. Tyler and Reid agreed with this, arguing that "this is because the logic of the premise does not demand that God be a necessary conclusion."

However despite having numerous criticisms and weaknesses, the cosmological argument also has many strengths. The main strength of the argument is the rejection of infinite regress, because this rejection is supported by many scholars. Aquinas and Craig reject the idea that the world has always existed because they say that infinity is philosophically problematic and cannot be added to. The rejection is also supported by science with theories such as the Big Bang theory because these show the universe to have a finite existence. This is important because it merges science with religion to strengthen the argument and made it more plausible to atheists.

Another strength of the argument is Ockham's Razor. Ockham's Razor states that the simplest form of philosophical argument is the most effective. It says that if God's existence appears to be the best explanation then why criticise it? Tyler and Reid ask "where God suffices as the simplest explanation, why postulate further explanations?" This is important because there will probably never be any philosophical proof that God really is in fact the creator of the universe. However the principle doesn't actually state whether God does or does not exist, and can easily be dismissed as an opinion.

Another important strength of the cosmological argument is the principle of sufficient reason. The principle of sufficient reason says that everything has a sufficient reason for being the way it is. Webber argues that "to reject the idea that there is an ultimate cause of the universe is implicitly to reject the principle of sufficient reason; something will have to come from

nothing". This is important because it shows that it's more plausible to believe that there is a reason for human existence.

There are many other strengths of the cosmological argument such as the fact that it's a posteriori which produce a more convincing argument about whether God exists or not. However there are a lot more weaknesses than there are strengths such as contingency and God being a necessary being. The weaknesses by far outweigh the strengths and so are more convincing.

In conclusion, although the cosmological argument fails to prove the existence of God, it also fails to prove that God doesn't exist either. Despite numerous criticisms there are still some strengths, one of which is that the argument is a posteriori therefore it draws conclusions using evidence from the world around us which makes it universally accessible. The fact that it's inductive makes the argument unreliable and unconvincing because more than one conclusion can be possibly drawn from it. The argument is strong enough to support a theist's belief in God; however it isn't convincing enough to convert an atheist. Aquinas and Craig's rejection of infinite regression is essential to the argument because without it, the argument would collapse. however there are many scientific theories which prove that infinite regress is possible and if so, that there's no need for a first cause. The cosmological argument combines science with religion which helps to make the argument more widely accepted. The fact that the argument has stood the test of time shows that although it's not strong enough to prove the existence of God, it's strong enough that nothing has disproved it and proved for definite that God doesn't exist. The weaknesses of the argument outweigh the strengths, because they greatly outnumber them, however this doesn't mean that the argument fails, just that it may not persuade an atheist of God's existence. It's still enough to support a theist's belief in God and still remains an important argument for the existence of God. Tyler and Reid stated that "Ultimately, the argument cannot explain God, only postulate God as an explanation, and if we are not satisfied with the idea of God as a being who himself requires no explanation, the argument will fail."