

Outline the cosmological argument for the existence of God.

The cosmological argument for the existence of God is a metaphysical, a posteriori argument that sets out to prove God as a supreme being who is external to the universe. The argument is based around the idea of causation, and in its simplest form claims that if everything requires a cause, then logically the universe itself must require a cause; the argument concludes that this cause is the being that we call God.

Aquinas used the cosmological argument in conjunction with his five ways proofs. His argument from motion claims that motion should be seen as "nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality", and that nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality in this way unless by something that is in a state of actuality- "thus that which is actually hot, as fire, makes wood, which is potentially hot, to be actually hot, and thereby moves and changes it". Aquinas argued that it is therefore impossible for anything to move itself- i.e. for the wood to become hot without the fire. In this instance, he claimed that motion should be seen as a long chain of one thing moving another- but Aquinas argued that "this cannot go on to infinity". Therefore he saw that it was necessary to arrive at a 'first mover- a being that does not require a mover itself- and this is the being that we know as God. Plato also used this idea, claiming that the world required some sort of "self-originated motion" which was responsible for starting the motion that exists today.

Aquinas also presented an argument from efficient causes, which puts forward that "in a world of sense", nothing can be found to be the cause of itself- everything has been caused by one or many intermediate causes, and these intermediate causes must lead finally to an first cause. Aquinas believed that "to take away the cause is to take away the effect"- hence if there were no first cause there would be no intermediate causes, and thus no ultimate cause. However, Aquinas says, we can plainly see that an ultimate cause exists. Hence the argument draws the conclusion that it is necessary for us to admit the existence of a first cause- and this is God.

Aquinas' argument from contingency differs from the two previous arguments, as here he does not make any assumptions about the age of the universe. Aquinas asserts that everything within our universe is contingent- i.e. all of these things could have not existed, everything once began to exist, and everything will one day cease to exist. Aquinas said that if this is the case, then all of these contingent things must owe their existence to a "necessary being"- a non-contingent power, who has always existed, and cannot not exist. Aquinas argues that if there had been nothing in the beginning, and everything is contingent, then there would still be nothing now- contingent things require a cause- but, it is quite clear that there is not nothing. Therefore a non-contingent being is essential as the cause of all that is contingent, and this we call God. God does not need to have a cause, as only contingent beings require one; God is not contingent.

William Craig supports the notion of the kalam cosmological argument, which was first put forward by Islamic scholars in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Craig focuses on the idea that all things that begin to exist have a cause, and the universe must at some point have begun to exist, as an actual infinite is an impossibility. Craig uses analogy, describing a bookcase of infinite length, with books arranged in a pattern of green, red, green, red, etc. What would happen, he asks, if one removed all of the green books? How many books would there be? The answer is, of course, there would still be an infinite number of books. Craig claims that this is illogical, as it goes against the laws of division. Therefore he deems infinity to be an illogical concept in itself. Therefore he asserts that the universe does require an explanation- it cannot have always existed- and this explanation is what we know to be God.

Comment on some of the weaknesses raised against the argument. To what extent do weaknesses outweigh strengths?

Several criticisms can and have been raised towards the cosmological argument. Firstly, some philosophers argue that the concept of infinite regress should not be so quickly rejected, despite the fact that it is seen as a fallacy. J.L Mackie used analogy as a part of his argument, describing a situation in which wall hooks are hung from one another to form a chain. Mackie explained that these wall hooks would only require an initial attachment to the wall if they were a finite chain. If they were, however, an infinite chain, this would no longer be necessary. In this way, by rejecting infinite regress as a fallacy, and considering the idea as a possibility, the need for an explanation of a 'first cause' is removed entirely. Sadowsky urges philosophers not to completely dismiss the idea, saying that there is more to lose by rejecting its very concept than there is by accepting the fallacy, and hence allowing oneself to explore arguments such as Mackie's. Hume supported this view, commenting thus: "How can anything that exists from eternity have a cause, since that relation implies a priority in time and in a beginning of existence?"

It has also been questioned whether the argument actually points to God at all. Even if we do establish that the world does have a cause, the argument does not go on to explain why this cause must be God- this seems an unreasonable leap in logic, disregarding other scientific theories as to the beginning of the universe. The argument does nothing to point towards the God of Classical Theism; all that it seems to aim to prove is that the world must have at some point begun, and that something must have caused it to begin. This is surely an unsatisfactory approach for Christians, at the very least? Hume, and later Bertrand Russell, criticised the idea of a necessary being, deeming it inconsistent- they claimed that there is no being whose non-existence is inconceivable- and questioned why if such a being were to exist, it should be God? By defining God simply as 'the cause of the universe' in the way that he appears to, Aquinas is sacrificing the attributes of God upon which the Christian religion is based.

The argument's notion that God should be the single exception to the rules of causality and contingency has also brought forth criticism from Hume. He asks why it is necessary for us to enter God into this equation- "Why may not the material universe be the necessarily existent being, according to this pretended explication of necessity?". Ockham's razor states that "entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity"- Hume claimed that the use of God in the cosmological argument is doing just this. He says that God is not a necessary part of the argument- if there must be an exception to the rule, then why can this not be the universe itself? If something must be uncaused by anything else, hence going against the

Hume questioned the argument's dependence on causation. He claimed that the human mind often assumes that two events happening in succession are connected- cause and effect; he argues that this is mind-imposed, and therefore we cannot always say that cause leads to effect. Therefore

Hume accused the argument of taking the characteristics of individual parts and attributing them to the whole- even if everything in the universe is caused, he argues, why should that mean that the universe as a whole should be caused? Bertrand Russell agreed with this point, asserting that that just because all humans have a mother, it does not mean that the human race as a whole must have a mother. Russell went on to say that the universe is simply a "brute fact". As he put it: "The universe is just there, and that is all". In doing this Russell is saying that the universe cannot be explained, and therefore any attempt to explain it will automatically be a failure. Copleston argued against Russell, sayi