

COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Key Points	Supporting Views	Arguments against	Some Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Cosmological’ – from the word ‘cosmos’ meaning ‘the universe’ • ‘a posteriori’ argument – starts from experience of the universe and argues by induction back to God • various versions – for example, before the Western Christian scholastics, Islamic scholars put forward a version (often called the <i>Kalam</i> cosmological argument) • Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the great Dominican Theologian, put forward his Quinque Viae (Five Ways) for the existence of God, the first three commonly being seen as cosmological arguments. <p>A summary of the third argument is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>In nature there are things that come into and go out of existence (e.g. plants)</i> - <i>however not everything can have a ‘here today, gone tomorrow’ existence since (looking back into an infinite past) things should have ‘fizzled out’ – ending all existence so there must be things that simply ‘must be’, necessary beings</i> - <i>these necessary beings are either caused or uncaused, and the series of necessary things cannot go on to infinity, as there would then be no explanation for the series</i> - <i>therefore there must be some Being having of itself its own necessity’ and this is what everyone calls God.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Islamic <i>kalam</i> arguments was taken up by a modern philosopher William Lane Craig: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - everything that begins to exist has a <i>cause</i> of its existence - the universe began to exist - there is a transcendent cause of the universe • Leibniz, (1646 - 1716) a German Mathematician and Theologian, put forward the <i>principle of sufficient reason</i>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - suppose the book of the elements of geometry was eternal - one copy written down from an earlier one and passed on - you can give a reason for the present book of geometry by saying ‘it has come from the book before’ - this is a reason – but not a sufficient reason – since we could keep on going back; we would not get the ‘sufficient (full) reason’ - Leibniz argues that the successive states of the world are like the geometry book passed on – we must look for a sufficient reason – by which he meant ‘complete explanation’ – God • Some scientists and philosophers are impressed with the Big Bang theory with its explanation for a 14 to 15 billion-year-old cosmos that <i>began to exist</i>. This theory seems to lend support to cosmological arguments (<i>although Aquinas, for example, did not use arguments that relied on temporal (time) sequences – he didn’t think philosophy could show that the world had a beginning.</i>) • Many people who believe in God find cosmological arguments appealing and somehow intuitive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many say the proofs just don’t prove God, but only some vague first cause or other. God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, not the God of philosophers and scholars, cries Blaise Pascal, an 18th C. French thinker ... • David Hume tried to drive a wedge between two ideas: first, the idea of a cause, and second, the idea of something beginning to exist. He said it is possible to imagine a disconnection between the ‘idea of cause’ and the ‘idea of beginning to exist’. And what is possible for the imagination is possible in reality. A 20th C. Oxford Philosopher, Elizabeth Anscombe, showed up flaws in Hume’s thinking. • Hume also thought the idea of ‘cause and effect’ cannot be transferred out of the physical world in which we see these things • The Cambridge Philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) had a famous debate in 1947 with the Jesuit Philosopher Francis Copleston about the Cosmological Argument. • Russell refused to go along with the view of an ultimate cause of the universe: ‘I should say that the universe is just there, that is all.’ Russell prefers stop at the universe as ‘the brute fact’ rather than positing a God as the ‘brute fact’. • Russell also argued that to go from individual causes of events in the universe to positing one ultimate cause for the universe is like saying all humans have mothers and so the human race as a whole must have a mother. • Bertrand Russell argued that there is a self-contradiction in the argument, for one of the premises is that everything needs a cause but the conclusion is that there is something (God) which does not need a cause. Others point out that ‘everything nature needs a cause’ is the premise. • Many modern philosophers attack cosmological arguments for their denial of infinite regress. 	<p><i>We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to be corrupted, and consequently, it is possible for them to be and not to be...</i> Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae</p> <p><i>If you suppose the world eternal you will suppose nothing but a succession of states and will not find in any of them a sufficient reason...</i> Leibniz</p> <p><i>Transcending the entire universe there exists a cause which brought the universe into being ...</i> William Lane Craig</p> <p><i>I should say that the universe is just there, that is all ...</i> Bertrand Russell</p> <p><i>How do we know that the universe is not ‘a mere unintelligible brute fact’? ... this is precisely what the sceptic believes it to be; and to exclude this possibility at the outset is merely to beg the question at issue.’</i> John Hick, 20th C. Cambridge Philosopher</p> <p><i>There is no doubt that the models best substantiated today are the ones which show the Universe expanding from a ‘big bang’ some 14,000 years ago ...</i> Richard Swinburne (20th C. Oxford Theologian and Philosopher)</p> <p><i>If the universe was caused to come into being, it presumably could not have been cause to do so by anything material. For a material object would be part of the universe, and we are now asking about a cause distinct from the universe ...</i> Brian Davies, Dominican Philosopher</p> <p>cf. Ps 19:1-4, Rom 1:18-20</p>

TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Key Points	Supporting Views	Arguments against	Some Quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes called the Teleological Argument – from the Greek ‘telos’, meaning purpose or goal • An ancient argument that surfaces in different ways in different philosophy and belief systems • Aquinas’ fifth argument in the <i>Quinque Viae</i> (Five Ways) • Most popular of the theistic arguments • The basic idea is that the apparent design and purpose, beauty and symmetry in the natural world points to a designer God. • William Paley (1743-1805), an Anglican clergyman, explained it in a memorable way using the analogy of finding a watch. • A modern version of the Teleological Argument is the <i>Anthropic Principle</i>. The universe seems to have been ‘tuned very finely’ to allow the emergence of self-conscious beings. The laws of physics are so finely tuned that even tiny differences would have disallowed the kind of cosmos we have. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many find the design argument attractively simple. • Aristotle believed that we may be uncertain about the purpose of many things in life, but there are many more things that are so clearly purposeful that we can infer an ultimate designer. • The modern Philosopher and Theologian Richard Swinburne (b. 1934) argues that if we have to choose between believing that a ‘designer God’ was behind everything or that ‘chance operation of blind natural forces’ was, then it is a simpler and better explanation to opt for the ‘designer God’. • Swinburne and others argue that while there may be no <i>single</i> observation that clinches the theistic explanation, the evidence <i>cumulatively</i> (when amassed together) points convincingly in favour of a <i>theistic</i> rather than <i>naturalistic</i> (blind natural forces etc.) hypothesis. • In particular, the Anthropic Principle draws on cumulative knowledge about the cosmos, especially the absolutely incredible ‘fine-tuning’ of all physical variables in the universe to make not only for life, but for rational, self-conscious, wondering, reflective life (ourselves). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The theory of evolution seemed to deal a death blow to Paley’s arguments since it explained the incredible variety and functionality within the world by natural selection. • David Hume mounted a concerted attack on Design arguments; a few of his objections are given below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the universe is bound to have the appearance of being designed since there could not be a universe at all in which the parts were not adapted to one another to a considerable degree. - the analogy between the world and a human artefact is weak. The universe is not particularly like a vast machine; you could equally well compare it to, say, some kind of giant crustacean or vegetable. Then, of course, the design argument fails, because whether crustaceans and vegetables are or are not consciously designed is precisely the question at issue. - even if we could validly infer a divine designer of the world, we would still not be entitled to postulate the infinitely wise, good, and powerful God of Christian tradition. • Hume, J. S. Mill and others have also observed that if the universe is a work of design by an all-wise Creator, why is there such immense suffering, wastage and futility? This takes us then to the problem of evil. • Modern critics, like Professor Richard Dawkins, have rubbished design arguments. Dawkins wrote: ‘<i>In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won’t find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice.</i>’ • A common attack on design arguments (especially the anthropic principle) is that they get things the wrong way round. Teleologists say: ‘Look how well designed the earth is for the flourishing of life’. Critics say, ‘Look how well life adapts to antecedent conditions.’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cf. Job 38:4-19, Psalm 104:5-20 • <i>Whence arises all this order and beauty and structure?</i> Isaac Newton • <i>... when we came to inspect the watch, we perceive (what we would not discover in the stone) that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose ...</i> William Paley • <i>The immense and wonderful universe cannot be the result of blind chance ... I feel compelled to look for a First Cause ...</i> Charles Darwin in a letter to a friend • <i>If Aquinas had lived today he would doubtless have argued that the evolutionary hypothesis supports rather than invalidates the conclusions of the (Teleological) argument.</i> Francis Copleston, S. J. (b. 1907) • <i>In fact, the hypothesis of the existence of God makes sense of the whole of our experience, and it does so better than any other explanation which can be put forward, and that is the grounds for believing it to be true.</i> Richard Swinburne • <i>The current scenario of the origin of life is about as likely as a tornado passing through a junkyard beside Boeing airplane company accidentally producing a 747 airplane</i> Sir Fred Hoyle