

# THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

## Before we start ...

- Arguments for the existence of God tend to fall into two categories – *a priori* argument and *a posteriori* argument.
- *A priori* arguments do not rely on appeal to experience. For example, the laws of mathematics are thought to be like this.
- *A posteriori* arguments start with some experience of reality and argue on this basis; for example, the Argument from Design looks at the beauty, purpose and order in the universe and infers a Designer (God) behind this.

## Cosmological Argument

There are many types of Cosmological argument, and they all share many features in common -in particular, they argue from the world to God and are thus *a posteriori*.

- *The ancient Greeks had versions of this.* Aristotle's argument influenced St. Thomas Aquinas. Aristotle argued to an 'unmoved mover'. This unmoved mover was not a personal God like the Christian God, and it had no religious significance - rather, it should be seen as the ultimate cause of the Cosmos.
- Islamic and Jewish philosophers also developed versions of cosmological argument. (Also, the works of Aristotle were preserved by Islamic libraries, allowing Aquinas to discover him.)

## AQUINAS ARGUMENT

Aquinas' Five Ways are not taken to be proofs in the scientific sense, rather they are 'converging and convincing arguments', according to the Church. Aquinas was not creating new arguments but adapting old ones.

In the Five Ways, Aquinas argues:

1. FROM MOTION
2. FROM EFFICIENT CAUSES
3. FROM CONTINGENCY AND NECESSITY
4. FROM GRADES OF PERFECTION IN THINGS
5. FROM DESIGN

### Here is a snapshot of 1,2 and 4.

- 1 Aquinas argues that the chain of movers must have a First Mover because nothing can move itself. If the whole chain of moving things had no First Mover, it could not now be moving but it is. If there were an infinite regress of movers with no First Mover, no motion could ever begin, and if it never began, it could not go on and exist now. But it does go on: it does exist now. Therefore it began, and therefore there is a First Mover. (Motion here refers to any kind of change, not just change of place.)

- 2 He expands the proof from proving a cause of motion to proving a cause of existence. He argues that if there were no cause for the universe coming into being, then there could be no second causes, since second causes (i.e. caused causes) are dependent on a First Cause. But there are second causes all around us. Therefore there must be a First Cause.
- 4 There must also be a First Cause of 'perfection,' or goodness, or value. We rank things as more or less perfect, good or valuable. Unless this ranking is false, unless souls don't really have any more perfection than slugs, there must be a real standard of perfection to make such a hierarchy possible. For a thing is ranked higher on the hierarchy of perfection only insofar as it is closer to the ideal. Unless there is a Most Perfect Being to be that real standard of perfection, all our value judgments are meaningless. Such a Most Perfect Being, or real-ideal standard of perfection, is another description of God.

### Here's 3 in more detail.

Aquinas' argument from contingency starts like this:

**'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. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which can not-be at some time is not, Therefore, if everything can not-be, then at some time there was nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist begins only to exist through something already existing.'**

Peter Vardy's notes give this summary:

1. Everything can 'be' or 'not be'
2. If this is so, given infinite time, at some time everything would not be
3. If there was once nothing, nothing could come from it
4. Therefore something must necessarily exist
5. Everything necessary must be caused or uncaused
6. The series of necessary things cannot go on to infinity, as there would then be no explanation for the series
7. Therefore there must be some Being having of itself its own necessity'
8. This is what everyone calls God.

It is important to note that the overall aim of Aquinas' arguments is not to move back in a temporal sequence —rather, they seek to establish Dependence, the dependence of the world on God now. Aquinas believed that there was no way of establishing that the Universe had a beginning in time - this was a revealed doctrine. He did, however, believe that his arguments established the need for the world to be dependent on God.

Aquinas' arguments arrive at 'That which is necessary to explain the Universe or that which is necessary to explain motion, causation or contingency. There is a jump, however, from whatever this is, to describing it as God. This gave rise to Pascal's quote: 'The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - not the God of the philosophers. Aquinas ends his proofs by saying 'This is what everyone calls God', but this can be challenged. Aquinas Prime Mover appears radically different from the God of most Christians. If we said that God was 'whatever sustains the universe in existence', we would be somewhere near to what Aquinas was saying - but this 'whatever' may be some way from Yahweh.

## Some Objections

OBJECTION	POSSIBLE ANSWER
<p>First, 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 Pascal, who was a passionate Christian but did not believe you could logically prove God's existence.</p>	<p>It's quite true that the proofs do not prove everything the Christian means by God. But they do point to a transcendent, eternal, uncaused, immortal, self-existing, independent, all-perfect Being.</p>
<p>Second, some philosophers, like David Hume, say that the concept of cause is ambiguous and not applicable beyond the physical universe to God. How dare we use the same term for what clouds do to rain, what parents do to children, what authors do to books, and what God does to the universe?</p>	<p>The answer is that the concept of cause is analogical; that is, it differs somewhat but not completely from one example to another. Human fatherhood is like divine fatherhood, and physical causality is like divine causality. The way an author conceives a book in her mind is not exactly the same as the way a woman conceives a baby in her body either, but we call both causes. (In fact, we also call both conceptions) The objection is right to point out that we don't fully understand how God causes the universe, as we understand how parents cause children or clouds cause rain. But the term remains meaningful. If no cause, no effect. If no creator, no creation; if no God, no universe.</p>
<p>Third, it's sometimes argued (e.g. by Bertrand Russell) 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. The child who asks, Who made God? is really thinking of this objection.</p>	<p>The answer is very simple: The argument does not use the premise Everything needs a cause. Everything in motion needs a cause, everything dependent needs a cause, everything imperfect needs a cause.</p>
<p>Fourth, it's often asked why there can't be infinite regress, with no First Being. Infinite regress is perfectly acceptable in mathematics. Negative numbers go on to infinity just as positive numbers do. So why can't time be like the number series, with no highest number either negatively (no First in the past) or positively (no Last in the future)?</p>	<p>The answer is that real beings are not like numbers. They need causes. For the chain of real beings moves in one direction only, from past to future, and the future is caused by the past. Positive numbers are not caused by negative numbers. There is, in fact, a parallel in the number series for a First Cause: the number one. If there were no first positive integer, no unit one, there could be no subsequent addition of units. Two is two ones, there is three ones, and so on. If there were no First, there could be no second or third.</p>

It is important to recognize that Aquinas ends up with God as *de re* necessary - necessary in and of himself and cause of himself. This is NOT meant to be the same as *de dicta* necessity (logical necessity, based on the way words are used - for instance 'All spinsters are female') which applies in the Ontological argument. It necessary to be clear on the difference between *de re* and *de dicta* necessity. The Ontological argument starts with *de dicto* necessity' and attempts to arrive at *de re* necessity<sup>2</sup>. The *de re* necessary God is wholly simple. The crux of the notion of divine simplicity is the identity of essence and existence in God - God is not something that just happens to exist; God's essence *includes existence*. God cannot be a material being because God:

*...cannot have any intrinsic accidental properties: cannot, therefore, change in any way; and cannot be an individual of any given species or genus. Hence an absolutely necessary being does not have a nature in any straightforward sense at all.*

### **LEIBNIZ (1646 - 1716)**

The best known expression of Leibniz' argument is based on the BOOK OF THE ELEMENTS OF geometry:

*"Suppose the book of the elements of geometry to have been eternal, one copy always having been written down from an earlier one. It is evident that even though a reason can be given for the present book out of a past ones we should never come to a full reason. What is true of the books is also true of the states of the world. 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."*

Leibniz often uses the word 'reason' but it is clear that this effectively means cause' - for instance he quotes the example of Archimedes' balance which is held in equal balance unless there is a reason (i.e. cause) why one side should be weighed down. He argues for 'the existence of the ultimate reason of things' which he takes to mean the ultimate cause of things. Effectively he wishes to maintain that everything (including the universe itself) must have a reason or cause for its existence and this must mean there is an ultimate, uncaused cause - which he takes to be God.

Leibniz considered that there must be a complete or sufficient explanation, and therefore the book (in the example above), like the world, must have had a first cause. Geisler and Corduan summarise Leibniz argument as follows:

1. The world we see is changing
2. Whatever is changing lacks within itself the reason for its own existence
3. There is a sufficient reason for everything either within itself or outside itself
4. Therefore there must be a cause beyond itself for its existence
5. Either this cause is itself caused or is its own sufficient reason
6. There cannot be an infinite regress because this will never provide a sufficient reason
7. Therefore there must be a first Cause of the world, which has no reason beyond itself but is its own sufficient reason.

The key to this argument is the PRINCIPLE OF SUFFICIENT REASON, which Leibniz thought to be self-evidently true. In practice, people are normally content with proximate reasons - reasons that satisfy. Thus the reason these notes are written is to make philosophic issues clearer to students. One might ask further questions such as why bother since no-one reads them, whether this is the best way of helping students, but most people would not consider that there has to be an ultimate explanation of my action in order for the explanation to make sense. It is the assertion of an ultimate explanation that the Principle of Sufficient Reason maintains.