

COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS

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Intro Philosophy

Basic idea: there has to be a reason or cause for everything, and this is God.

1. Aquinas's cosmological argument

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274): “There are five ways in which one can prove that there is a God.”

The second way is based on the nature of causation. In the observable world causes are found to be ordered in series; we never observe, nor ever could, something causing itself, for this would mean it preceded itself, and this is not possible. Such a series of causes must however stop somewhere; for in it an earlier member causes an intermediate and the intermediate a last (whether the intermediate be one or many). Now if you eliminate a cause you also eliminate its effects, so that you cannot have a last cause, nor an intermediate one, unless you have a first. Given therefore no stop in the series of causes, and hence no first cause, there would be no intermediate causes either, and no last effect, and this would be an open mistake. One is therefore forced to suppose some first cause, to which everyone gives the name ‘God’. (Aquinas, *R&R*)

2. Representing the argument in numbered-premise format

1. *Formulate* the argument
2. Give the *justifications* of the premises
3. *Evaluate* the argument

Step 1: formulating the argument

Aquinas's cosmological argument

1. Some objects are caused by others
2. Any object that is caused by another lies at the end of a causal series, in which the first member has no cause

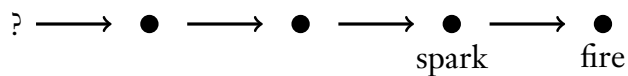
3. Any uncaused first member of a causal series would be God
4. Therefore, God exists

Causal series: A series of objects in which each object causes the next

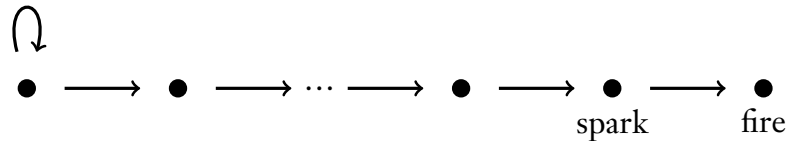
Step 2: justifying the premises

Premise 1: we know this from observation.

Premise 2: Let's trace the causes of a forest fire (say), back as far as we can:

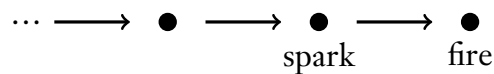


How will this process end? With a self-caused thing?:



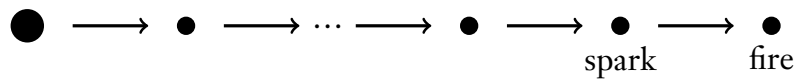
...we never observe, nor ever could, something causing itself, for this would mean it preceded itself, and this is not possible. (Aquinas, *R&R*, pp. 35-36)

Could it go back forever?:



Such a series of causes must however stop somewhere; for in it an earlier member causes an intermediate and the intermediate a last (whether the intermediate be one or many). Now if you eliminate a cause you also eliminate its effects, so that you cannot have a last cause, nor an intermediate one, unless you have a first. Given therefore no stop in the series of causes, and hence no first cause, there would be no intermediate causes either, and no last effect, and this would be an open mistake. (Aquinas, *R&R*)

The only remaining possibility is that it ends in an uncaused first cause:



Premise 3: The first cause would need to be very powerful to start up the whole series.

Step 3: evaluate the argument

The argument is valid. So if the premises are true, the conclusion must also be true. So the remaining question is whether one can object to any of the premises.

Against premise 2: why think the first premise must be good, or all-powerful, or unique?

Against premise 3: couldn't the causes go back forever in time?

3. Leibniz's and Clarke's argument from sufficient reason

Samuel Clarke (1675–1729, England), building on ideas from Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716, Germany), says: maybe there could be an infinite causal series, but the cause, or reason, for *the whole series* would need to be God.

Self-existent thing Exists always and necessarily

Dependent thing Depends on something else

...if we consider such an infinite progression, as *one* entire endless *series* of *dependent* beings; 'tis plain this whole *series* of beings can have no cause *from without*, of its existence; because in it are supposed to be included *all things* that are or ever were in the universe: and 'tis plain it can have no reason *within itself*, of its existence; because no one being in this infinite succession is supposed to be self-existent...but every one *dependent on the foregoing*; and where *no part* is necessary, 'tis manifest *the whole* cannot be necessary... An infinite succession therefore of merely *dependent* beings, without any original independent cause; is a *series* of beings, that has neither necessity nor cause, nor any reason *at all* of its existence, neither *within itself* nor *from without*: that is, 'tis an express contradiction and impossibility... (Clark, *R&R*)

Clark's argument

1. The aggregate of all dependent things is not self-existent
2. If the aggregate of all dependent things is not self-existent, it must depend on God
3. Therefore God exists

Justification of 1: a self-existent thing can't be made of dependent parts

Justification of 2: the PSR implies that the aggregate must depend on something; and that something would need to be very powerful.

Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) Anything that isn't self-existent depends on something

Advantages over original argument:

- Evades the problem that the causes could go back forever
- PSR can be used to rebut the big bang objection

But one can object to the PSR: all explanations end somewhere; why not stop with the whole material world, rather than with God?