

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 from the nature of efficient causes. For we find in observable things that there is an order of efficient causes. Nevertheless, we do not find—nor is it possible—that something is the efficient cause of itself; for then a thing would be prior to itself, which is impossible. However, it is not possible that efficient causes go on to infinity. This is because in any order of efficient causes, the first is the cause of the intermediate, and the intermediate is the cause of the last, whether the intermediate cause consists of many or only one. Now if the cause is removed, the effect is removed. Therefore, if there were no first efficient cause, there would not be any final or intermediate ones. But if the series of efficient causes should proceed to infinity, there would not be a first efficient cause, and so there would not be a final effect, nor intermediary efficient causes, which is clearly false. Therefore, it is necessary to posit some first efficient cause, which everyone calls God. (Aquinas, p. 48.)

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

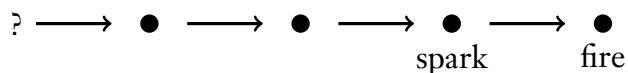
2. Any object that is caused by another lies at the end of a causal series, in which the first member has no cause
3. Any uncaused first member of a causal series would be God
4. Therefore, God exists

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

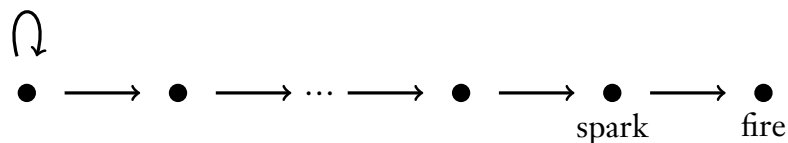
Step 2: justifying the premises

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:

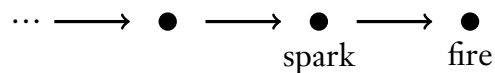


How will this process end? With a self-caused thing?:



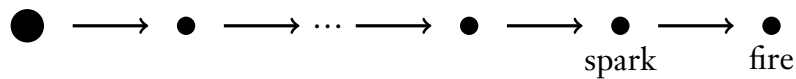
...we never observe, nor ever could, something causing itself, for this would mean it preceded itself, and this is not possible. (Aquinas, p. 48)

Could it go back forever?:



However, it is not possible that efficient causes go on to infinity. This is because in any order of efficient causes, the first is the cause of the intermediate, and the intermediate is the cause of the last, whether the intermediate cause consists of many or only one. Now if the cause is removed, the effect is removed. Therefore, if there were no first efficient cause, there would not be any final or intermediate ones. But if the series of efficient causes should proceed to infinity, there would not be a first efficient cause, and so there would not be a final effect, nor intermediary efficient causes, which is clearly false. (Aquinas, p. 48)

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

Against premise 3: why think the first cause must be good, or all-powerful, or unique?

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, p. 49)

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?