

The Cosmological Argument

What you need to know:

The Kalām argument (an argument from temporal causation).
Aquinas' 1st Way (argument from motion), 2nd Way (argument from atemporal causation) and 3rd way (an argument from contingency).
Descartes' argument based on his continuing existence (an argument from causation).
Leibniz's argument from the principle of sufficient reason (an argument from contingency).

Issues that may arise for the arguments above, including:

the possibility of an infinite series
Hume's objection to the 'causal principle'
the argument commits the fallacy of composition (Russell)
the impossibility of a necessary being (Hume and Russell).

The Kalām Cosmological Argument (an argument from temporal causation)

The original version developed by Al-Ghazali (1058-1111):

- P1:** Everything with a beginning must have a cause
- P2:** The universe has a beginning
- C1:** The universe must have a cause

The extension by William Lane Craig:

- P3:** Science cannot explain causes of the universe (only within it.)
- C2:** God is the cause of the universe
- C3:** God exists!



Possible Exam Questions

Outline the Kalam Cosmological Argument (an argument from temporal causation) (5 marks)
Outline Aquinas' First Way (the argument from motion) (5 marks)
Outline Aquinas' Second Way (the argument from causation) (5 marks)
Outline Aquinas' Third Way (the argument from contingency) (5 marks)
Outline Descartes' cosmological argument based on his continuing existence (an argument from causation) (5 marks)
Outline Leibniz's argument from the principle of sufficient reason (an argument from contingency) (5 marks)
Outline Hume's objection to the 'causal principle' (5 marks)
Outline Russell's complaint that the cosmological argument commits the fallacy of composition (5 marks)
Outline Hume and Russell's claims that a necessary being is impossible (5 marks)

12 mark questions would ask you to compare and contrast the above versions of the cosmological argument.

Does the cosmological argument prove that God exists? (25 marks)

Descartes' Cosmological Argument, based on his continuing existence (an argument from causation)

P1: My continued existence as a thinking thing needs explaining

P2: The cause of my existence as a thinking thing could be:

- a) Myself
- b) I have always existed
- c) My parents
- d) A being less than God
- e) God

P3: I cannot have caused myself (a), for then I would have created myself perfect. Nor can I sustain myself in existence, for then I would be God.

P4: Neither have I always existed (b) for then I would be aware of this.

P5: My parents may be the cause of my physical existence (c), but not of me as a thinking mind, nor do they sustain me each moment.

P6: I cannot be created by a being less than God (d), as I have the idea of God inside me and there must be as much reality in the cause as in the effect.

C: By elimination, only God could have created me.

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Aquinas' 1st Way: argument from motion ('Unmoved Mover')

- P1:** Objects are in motion e.g. become hotter or evaporate.
P2: Change means moving from a potential state to an actual state
P3: The change from potential to actual can be caused only by something already in that actual state e.g. a fire can make a room hot (the fire is already in the actual state of heat)
P4: Nothing can cause itself to change, so everything is caused to move by something else.
P5: This chain of motion cannot go back infinitely, otherwise there would have been nothing to start the whole chain and hence no chain!
C: There must have been a 'first mover' that started this chain in motion – and this first mover must itself be unmoved. This we call God, the 'unmoved mover'.

Aquinas' 2nd Way: argument from atemporal causation ('Uncaused Causer')

- P1:** Everything which exists must have a cause of its existence.
P2: Nothing can be the cause of itself (as it would have to be prior to itself, which is impossible)
P3: There cannot be an infinite chain of causes; otherwise there would be no first cause, and hence no subsequent causes, which is false.
C: There must have been some first cause uncaused by anything else. This we call God, the 'uncaused cause'.

Aquinas' 3rd Way: an argument from contingency

- P1:** There are things which are contingent.
P2: Contingent things are finite. They come into existence and pass out of existence.
P3: If everything was contingent, then it is possible there was a time when everything had passed out of existence
P4: If once there was nothing, then there would be nothing now, but this is false as there is something now
C: Not everything is contingent. There must be some thing that is necessary. This we call God, who must exist.

Key terms

Ockham's Razor: the simplest solution is most likely the right one.

Infinite Regress: the process of reasoning from effect to cause never stops.

Burden of Proof: the individual whose responsibility it is to justify their claim.

Actual Infinite: the idea of infinities that exist in reality, rather than just conceptually.

Temporal causation: The universe cannot be eternal, and therefore requires a cause to bring it about.

Atemporal causation: Even if the universe is eternal, and so was never caused in time, it still needs a cause to keep it in existence.

Principle of Sufficient Reason: the idea that contingent facts cannot be explained by reference to other contingent facts. Contingent facts can only be explained by reference to a necessary fact/being – one that is self-explaining.

Leibniz's argument from the principle of sufficient reason (an argument from contingency).

- P1:** Any contingent fact about the world must have an explanation. (Principle of sufficient reason)
P2: It is a contingent fact that there are contingent things.
P3: The fact that there are contingent things must have an explanation. (1,2)
P4: The fact that there are contingent things can't be explained by any contingent things.
P5: The fact that there are contingent things must be explained by something whose existence is not contingent. (3,4)
C: There is a necessary being. (5)