

# THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

## Main Idea

The argument proposes that the existence of God is the best answer to the two questions *Why does anything exist?* and *Why does anything change?* Nothing would exist unless something brought it into existence, and nothing would happen unless it was started.

## The Principle of Sufficient Reason

Anaximander (in ancient Miletus) argued that the Earth must be at rest, because there is no more reason for it to move up than to move down. Archimedes said a balance with equal weights stays level for the same reason. This claim rests on the principle that *there must be a reason for everything*. It is a key component in Leibniz's version of the Cosmological Argument.

The principle cannot be proved, but if it is true it supports the Cosmological Argument. There must be a reason why things exist; there must be a reason why things are changing. There must also be a reason why things are the way they are, and happen the way they happen, rather than existing and happening some other way.

**Plato** (*The Laws 894a-899c*, in Hick pp. 72-79)

Movement is either caused, or self-generated. The second kind is superior, and is caused by 'soul' (*psuché*). Heavenly bodies such as the sun must have a soul, and the 'best soul' must control the movement of the heavens, because that is regular and good.

**Aristotle** (*Metaphysics*)

God is the 'First Cause', and the supreme 'unmoved mover'. God is a remote impersonal spirit which is the thing at which all change and action in the universe aims. Nothing would happen if God did not exist. God is not the *efficient* cause of things (which directly leads to their happening), but is their *final* cause (their ultimate purpose).

**Thomas Aquinas** (Hick pp. 83-84)

First Way (*from motion*): every movement is caused by some other movement, but this chain of movers must stop somewhere, because movement would not happen without an initiator.

Second Way (*the first cause*): there must be an ultimate final cause for things, and we observe intermediate ('efficient') causes succeeding one another, but these are only possible if there is a first cause to begin the process.

Third Way (*from possibility and necessity*): all natural things have contingent existence (they can cease to be); if a thing *can* cease to be, then sooner or later it *will* cease to be; therefore every natural thing would have ceased to exist by now; once everything disappears, there is no way for it to come back into being on its own; therefore there must be something which has necessary existence, which can endure when other things cease, and so bring them back into existence; clearly something has kept natural things in existence, because they obviously exist now.

**Copleston's comments on Aquinas** (Hick pp. 86-93)

1. Aquinas means a hierarchy of movements and causes existing *now*, not a sequence in time.
2. Aquinas admits that time *might* be infinite, but says that the hierarchy of movements and causes could *not* be.
3. The third way assumes that time is infinite (so that contingent things *must* have ceased to exist by now).
4. The key to all the cosmological arguments is to admit that existence is a *problem*.

## Notes on Aquinas

1. Is the First Way just a subset of the Second Way, as succeeding movements are just a particular example of succeeding causes?
2. Aquinas's arguments are *a posteriori*, because they depend on observing some very basic features of the material world.
3. Is Aquinas assuming too much in treating the First Mover/Causer as a conscious being, identical with our idea of 'God'?
4. In the Third Way, it may be that we haven't yet reached the time when contingent things vanish (which could be due very soon!)

**Hume's Criticisms** (Hick pp. 95-97)

- Demea says the argument asks for the cause of the whole chain of causes-and-effects, which will explain why we have this particular chain, and not a different one. Without God, there seems no more reason for something to exist than nothing.
1. Cleanthes says that the idea of a being having "necessary existence" is incoherent, and could never be proved by pure reason.
  2. If something has to have necessary existence, why couldn't it be the universe itself, instead of God?
  3. You can't ascribe a First Cause or Mover to the universe if it is eternal; there may just be an infinity of causes.
  4. If you know the cause of each link in the chain, no further explanation is required, as the chain is just the sum of its links.

## Other Criticisms

Fallacy of Composition: this is the invalid argument which claims that if something is true of the members of a set of things, then it must also be true of the set as a whole. E.g. individual citizens make choices, so there must be something called 'the will of the people'. Supporters of the Cosmological Argument cannot simply reason that because every known object and event seem to have causes, that therefore the whole of creation must have a single cause.

Sufficient Reason: Although there *seems* to be a reason for everything we experience, we can't know this principle *a priori*, and it may not be a necessary truth. That is, *some* things (e.g. the start of the universe) may happen for no reason.

Inconsistency: The argument seems to be built on the initial assumption that 'everything must have a cause', and ends by proposing something that *hasn't* got a cause.

Uniqueness: It seems possible (within the logic of the argument) that there are *several* uncaused causes of the universe.

## Modern developments

Big Bang: The Big Bang theory of the universe offers no explanation of the cause of the Bang (except a 'quantum fluctuation')

Bayes' Theorem: The probability of A given B is (*the prior probability of A*) x (*probability of B given A*) / (*the prior probability of B*). That is, "how likely is it that this evidence (B) would have occurred if my theory (A) is true?". The theorem assesses explanations. You could, for example, assess the probability of an alien visit (A) on the basis of observing crop circles (B). Richard Swinburne claims that the existence of God (A) is more likely to be true when we observe the physical universe (B), by applying this equation.

# THE TELEOLOGICAL (DESIGN) ARGUMENT

## Main Idea

The argument is *a posteriori* (empirical), and states that the orderly behaviour of the universe, and the intricacies of living things, are only possibly if some conscious mind has designed them.

## Ancient Philosophy

The Greeks formulated the teleological argument. Some examples are preserved by Cicero (a Roman who studied Greek philosophy):

Armillary sphere: If a complex armillary sphere (used in astronomy) were shown to the people of Britain (rather dim!), even they would see that it was the product of reason, despite not understanding it. [*The Nature of the Gods* II.88]

Gymnasium: Anyone entering a gymnasium can see immediately that someone is in charge and is being obeyed. [II.14]

Alphabet: Someone who thought the universe could accidentally occur would also have to believe that if a barrel of letters of the alphabet were shaken out onto the ground, they might form the 'Annals' of Ennius (a long poem). [II.93]

Natural flutes: If well-tuned flutes grew on an olive tree, we would assume the tree was musical; so the universe must be controlled by wisdom and reason if it produces rational and wise creatures. [II.22]

## Thomas Aquinas (Hick p.85 and p.91)

Fifth Way ('from the governance of the world'): a mass of inanimate and unthinking matter works in co-ordination towards the single end of an ordered and harmonious universe, which is only possible if there is an intelligent director who has an aim.

## Paley's Watch (Hick pp. 99-103)

Paley proposes that if anyone found a watch, they would see from its internal structure (like the world) that it was designed. Also:

1. You can see that something like this has a purpose, even if it is unclear exactly what the purpose is, and how the parts work
2. You would make the same deduction even if you found defects in the watch
3. We can't pretend that the world's structure is random, or just imagined by us

## Hume's Criticisms (Hick pp. 104-114)

1. Natural causes are very different from human causes (as microscopes reveal), so man-made machines are not a good analogy
2. We must infer that the maker is like his creation; so, for example, if the creation is finite then so is its creator
3. The virtues of the universe may not be due to its maker (just as a carpenter gets little credit for the design of a ship)
4. The virtues of the universe may be due to trial-and-error, and its defects due to inexperience, incompetence, or even senility
5. If we follow the analogy with complex machines, we must deduce that the universe is made by a large team of clever humans
6. If the universe is eternal and also changing, then sooner or later we would expect it to fall into a design-like pattern
7. (pp.97-8) Numbers seem to contain 'designed' patterns, until you understand the underlying cause of the pattern

## Mill's Criticisms (Hick pp. 114-120)

1. Nature's actions would be judged unfair and merciless crimes if people did them, and good side-effects would be no excuse
2. Ordinary childbirth is painful and dangerous, famines destroy the basics of human life, and there is chaos as well as order
3. Because God is omnipotent, it is undeniable that the miseries of the world must have been willed by Him
4. If God makes virtue the highest good for us, not many people have it, and it seems to depend on the luck of upbringing
5. In general the world is not especially well designed, and seems like the product of a hostile god, not a kind one

## Darwin's Theory of Evolution

1. Darwin says that mutations produce variations in species, and then natural selection picks out the fittest individuals to breed
2. If the theory is right, it gives a good explanation of *apparent* design; creatures are highly adapted to their environments
3. Problems are how the process gets started, how completely new species appear, and what advantage consciousness gives
4. A striking feature of the theory is that it works *ruthlessly*, by killing off a large proportion of offspring because they are 'weak'
5. Divine intervention might be seen in the start of the process, and the production of moral, rational, religious beings

## F.R. Tennant's Defence (Hick pp.121-135)

1. The law of entropy makes order highly unlikely, yet the universe contains innumerable coinciding cases of order
2. Key evidence is the beauty of the world, and the existence of rational and moral beings whose thought matches the world
3. Darwin explains the selection of species, not their origin, and cannot explain why the universe is so suitable for life

## Other Criticisms

1. We have nothing to compare the universe to, so it is impossible to decide whether it is well 'designed' or not
2. "The universe was certainly not created for us by divine power; it is so full of imperfections" (*Lucretius* II:175, c.60 BC)
3. It is proposed that the order of the world derives from the order of a divine mind, but that too would need explanation

## The Problem of Evil

- The existence of evil in the world (especially 'natural evil' like earthquakes) suggests that there is either malice in it, or no design

Aquinas (Hick p.85): it is an indication of the infinite goodness of God that He can permit evil, and still bring goodness out of it

Mackie (Mitchell pp.92-104): There is a logical contradiction between a benevolent, omnipotent God and a world which contains evil

Plantinga (Mitchell pp.105-120): Mackie is wrong; the conflict requires explanation, but it is not *illogical*

## Modern developments

Cosmological Constants: It has recently been discovered that the most basic constants in physics (e.g. the mass of an electron) are all set at precisely the values needed to produce complex molecules, and hence life, in the universe. Even *very* minute changes in most of them would make life impossible. This suggests the possibility that a conscious mind has designed the universe for life.

This *is* genuinely puzzling (though some people erroneously find it unsurprising, given that we exist to observe the constants).

Possible replies are 1) that there are vast numbers of universes (the 'multiverse'), so it is inevitable that a few of them will have the right physics to support life, or 2) that a selection process has operated on successive universes to produce one which favours life.

# THE MORAL ARGUMENT

## Main Idea

The argument claims that the existence of moral standards which can overrule human authority is proof that there is a supreme authority in the universe who decreed them, or that when we see the good in things we are seeing God, or that a belief in divine justice is an essential part of having moral values.

## Kant's Version (Hick pp.137-143)

1. All rational beings must act according to consistent principles, which are principles which are universally true for the situation
2. Hence, reason leads to the Categorical Imperative ('act according to the principle which can be willed as universally true')
3. The aim is not to be happy, but to be worthy of happiness, which requires a belief in the possibility of justice
4. Clearly justice is not fully possible in this world, so belief in a better world is required by morality
5. Hence rational beings must believe in a place for justice (heaven), a time for justice (eternity), and cause of justice (God)

## Rashdall's Discussion (Hick pp.144-152)

1. Relative morality (e.g. based on evolution) requires no belief in God, but absolute morality (which recognises duty) does
2. We are equipped with reason (through a spiritual Self), and this coincides with the belief that the universe itself is rational
3. We are rationally committed to absolute morality which transcends individuals, so we must believe in a great Mind as its source
4. Belief in absolute morality involves motivation and a belief that the universe has an end, which only belief in God can provide

## Comments on the moral argument

1. Both Kant and Rashdall assume that rationality is independent of the physical world, which it may not be
2. There is *some* justice in this world, and that may be enough as a focus for our hopes and moral commitments
3. Belief in an ideal (such as justice) does not involve belief that it can really happen (e.g. the ideal speed for a sprinter)
4. Maybe there is no absolute morality; this needn't involve total relativism; perhaps there are facts about the best behaviour for humans; Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Hume and Nietzsche all provide alternative models
5. If we admit that there is no justice in this world, that seems to suggest that God does not control it
6. Plato's *Euthyphro* question ('which comes first, God or morality?') suggests that morality may not depend on God's will

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## Argument from Religious Experience (Taylor in Hick pp. 153-163)

- Just as there are acknowledged authorities in moral, sense, and artistic experience, so there should be in spiritual matters
  - Religious experience isn't false just because it is linked to basic feelings like fear or sex, and requires worldly language
  - People who have an attitude of "worship" tend also to command respect, and be leaders in social progress
  - We should start with humility and a recognition of the importance of spirituality, but also recognise reason and science
1. Taylor asks for a disposition to believe, instead of rational neutrality
  2. People who seem to be spiritual authorities, with an air of worship and leadership, may appear misguided to the next generation

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## The 'Hallmark' Argument (Descartes' *Meditations* III)

- The only possible explanation for the concept of a supreme being within our minds is that God placed it there
1. The concept of a supreme being may have been formed (as Hume suggests) by imagining human ideals in combination
  2. The argument might be used to justify the existence of anything we can think of, such as the Loch Ness Monster

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## Argument from Miracles and Testimony (Holy Texts; Hume's *Enquiries* Sect. 90)

- Enormous numbers of people over generations have reported direct experience of God, and of his supernatural actions
  - God has intervened in the world, in the form of miracles, the answering of prayers, and faith healing
1. Hume argues that miracles contravene the laws of nature, which are by far the best supported of all our beliefs
  2. In every account of a miracle, says Hume, it is always more likely that the report is false than that the events are true
  3. Most people, particularly the living, have not had any direct experience of God or of miracles, and prayers usually go unanswered
  4. It seems wrong to use divinely inspired texts to prove God's existence, because God's existence is what gives the texts authority

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## Argument from consciousness

- Materialist explain all developments of living matter by evolution, but this could never explain the emergence of consciousness
  - Intentionality and *qualia* cannot be explained within the laws of physics, so we must believe in something beyond the physical
1. But we should not immediately assume God's existence when faced with the inexplicable (this is 'God-of-the-Gaps')
  2. It may be possible to explain consciousness in materialist terms, perhaps through functionalism or quantum physics

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## Pascal's Wager (*Pensées* III.233, or No. 418)

- Atheists have nothing to lose by believing, but everything to gain if God really exists
1. It seems almost impossible to *make* oneself believe something, if the evidence seems to point the other way
  2. It seems unlikely that God would reward a believer who had such a selfish motive for belief

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## Belief without Reason (Kierkegaard; fideism)

- One may make the *leap of faith*, through sheer intuition, or driven by despair, or from faith in our ancestors' wisdom
1. But if you abandon reason then many other irrational beliefs may seem equally plausible

# THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

## Main Idea

The existence of God can be proved *a priori*, by a logical deduction from the concept of God. If we think clearly about the concept we realise that real existence is an essential part of how we conceive the idea of God. God therefore *necessarily* exists, so that it is impossible for him to not exist.

## Anselm's Argument (Hick pp.25-28)

1. When a non-believing fool (*Psalms*) hears the idea "a being than which none greater can be thought", he understands it
2. The fool knows that this idea exists in his understanding, but if it also exists in reality then that would be greater
3. Also, God cannot be conceived of as non-existent, because that would be less great than a being which necessarily exists
4. The fool is only able to say in his heart "there is no God" because he understands the words, but not the thing itself
5. It is impossible to think of God not existing, because we cannot conceive of him having a beginning or an end

## Gaunilo's Objection (Hick pp.27-29)

1. We might use the same reasoning to deduce the existence of a wonderful "lost island", just from thinking about the idea
2. Anselm denies that his argument would apply to an island, because only God cannot be thought of as non-existent

## Aquinas's View (Hick pp.32-33)

1. The existence of God may indeed be self-evident, but it is not self-evident *to us*, because we do not know the essence of God
2. Also we may self-evidently desire happiness, and God may be man's happiness, but we still don't desire God, through ignorance
3. Atheists (like the fool in *Psalms*) precisely deny the first premise, that there is a thing than which nothing greater can be thought

## Descartes' Version (Meditations V, pp.144-7)

1. We can see how new truth can be deduced from our innate idea of triangles (whose angles necessarily add to two right angles)
2. We have an innate idea of a "supremely perfect being", which must necessarily embody all perfections (as part of the concept)
3. The existence of such a being would clearly be a "supreme perfection", so I am not able to conceive of a God who lacks existence
4. Real existence is therefore as inevitably linked to the concept of a supremely perfect being as a valley is linked to a mountain

## Leibniz's Defence of Descartes (Hick pp.37-39)

1. Descartes' argument is valid, but only if he can demonstrate that we can conceive the idea of a "most perfect being"
2. A perfection is "a simple quality which is positive and absolute, or expresses whatever it expresses without limits"
3. If perfections are "simple" then they cannot be analysed into component parts, and therefore cannot conflict with one another
4. Therefore "perfections A and B are incompatible" cannot be demonstrated, and it is not self-evident, so it must be false

## Hume's Comments (Hick p.96)

1. A statement is not a logical contradiction if we can conceive it clearly (e.g. try conceiving a *round square*)
2. We can clearly conceive the non-existence of any existent thing (including God), so non-existence is never a contradiction
3. So Hume voices the normal empiricist view, that logic could never prove the existence of anything (as this requires experience)

## Kant's Objections (Hick pp.41-47)

1. When we claim to be thinking of "a being with necessary existence", are we are really thinking of anything at all?
2. To say "There is no God" is not a contradiction, because the statement rejects the existence of God along with the concept
3. If the statement "that thing exists" is analytic, then we have added existence to the concept, and made it a "miserable tautology"
4. If "that thing exists" is synthetic (which it must be), then the predicate "exists" can be denied without rejecting the "thing"
5. "Being" is not a real predicate, because you add nothing to a concept (e.g. a hundred thalers) by also asserting that it exists

## Norman Malcolm's Defence (Hick pp.48-68)

1. Malcolm accepts Kant's view that existence is not a predicate, and so the claim that existence is one of God's perfections is false
2. However, it is possible to show that *necessary* existence must be a characteristic of a supremely great being
3. It is reasonable to argue that a thing is "greater" if it is more extensive, independent of other things, and has no limits
4. If God did not exist, nothing could bring such a being into existence, so his existence would be logically impossible
5. Similarly, if God exists then nothing could limit him or take him out of existence, so his existence has to be necessary
6. If we can clearly conceive Anselm's idea of a being with necessary existence, then we realise that his non-existence is impossible

## Other Objections

1. One odd consequence of the argument is that God could not destroy himself (assuming he has *necessary* existence)
2. If the Devil were defined as "a supremely imperfect being" (doubtful!), it might follow that he would necessarily *not* exist
3. If the concept of God requires necessary existence, but all existence is contingent, then Findlay is right that God *cannot* exist
4. The biggest threat to the argument is that the concept "supremely great/perfect being" contains internal contradictions
5. Non-believers might stubbornly deny that they can conceive God (even if believers are lucky enough to be able to do it)
6. The requirement to be "**omnipotent**" leads to well-known paradoxes, such as creating things outside God's power, or false proofs
7. There may be a paradox in the concept of "**omniscience**": how could such a being prove that it knew absolutely everything?
8. A perfect being is required to be "**eternal**", but there seem to be problems with both being *in* time and being *outside* time
9. Though "**moral perfection**" seems required of the concept of a supreme being, non-believers say the evidence (evil) is against it
10. Clearly a supreme being would have a **free will**, but it is unclear that any mind (even a supreme one) can be *sure* that it is free
11. Despite Leibniz's defence, it may be that some perfections are incompatible with one another (for example, justice and mercy)
12. Although Anselm rejects Gaunilo, we may have a concept of a "supremely perfect island", and existence might be part of it
13. However, it might be replied that a supremely perfect island could only qualify as perfect if it matched Anselm's idea of God
14. Descartes' concept of a "**perfect**" being has problems (e.g. *the perfect shoe size* [subjective], or *the perfect universe* [objective])
15. Perhaps contingent existence is not a predicate or a perfection, but would it be good if Adolph Hitler had necessary existence?