

The Cosmological Argument

Handout
8 Sep 2002

1. What we mean by 'God'

Traditional definition: a God is an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being.

2. Intuitive idea behind the cosmological argument

3. The Principle of Sufficient Reason

For every truth, there is a fully satisfying explanation, or sufficient reason, for its being true.

Does anyone really believe that this is *always* true? Here are some hard cases:

Why is it the case that all dogs are dogs?

Why is it the case that all bachelors are unmarried?

Why is $1 + 1 = 2$?

More hard cases, for those who believe in God:

Why does God choose to create this world rather than that world?

Why does God exist?

Why does God necessarily exist?

Why does God have such-and-such nature?

Conclusion: the PSR needs to be restricted somehow. Perhaps it should be restricted to *contingent* truths.

4. Clarke's cosmological argument

Suppose that there are only contingent beings, and consider the "series" of all contingent beings: call this series S.

1. The fact that S exists has an explanation (from PSR).
2. An explanation of the fact that S exists cannot itself be a fact about contingent beings.
3. But an explanation of the fact that S exists must involve some being or other.
4. Therefore, there is at least one necessary being (contradicting our initial supposition).

5. Hume's "twenty particles" objection

'Did I show you the particular causes of each individual in a collection of twenty particles of matter, I should think it very unreasonable should you afterwards ask me what was the cause of the whole twenty. This is sufficiently explained in explaining the cause of the parts.'

6. Van Inwagen's cosmological argument

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7. Van Inwagen's objection to the PSR

- (A) A necessary truth cannot be the (fully satisfying) explanation of a contingent truth.
- (B) The complete truth about contingent matters—the conjunction of all contingent truths, or the truth '*this* possible world is the real world'—cannot have a contingent truth as its (fully satisfying) explanation.
- (C) Therefore...

8. Hume on “necessary existence”

'Nothing that is distinctly conceivable implies a contradiction. Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent. There is no being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction.'