Cosmological Arguments

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The Puzzle of Existence

Why does anything exist?

It is easy to take for granted the existence of things. Trees exist. You exist. The words on this page exist. The existence of things is familiar. But the fact that things exist is far from insignificant. Why are there *any* things? Why isn't there instead simply *nothing at all*?

To gain appreciation for the question, imagine you are walking along a sidewalk by a park. Out of the corner of your eye, you notice a strange light coming from behind some slides. You walk past the slides and discover a large, glowing purple cube.[1] If you are like me, you would wonder what that cube is and how it got there. Maybe someone manufactured the cube for the kids to play on. Who knows? Whatever the case, you probably do not think this cube just snapped into existence from nowhere and from nothing. Rather, you would expect some explanation, even if you have no idea what the explanation could be.

The expectation of an explanation appears to be a very general expectation that applies to anything we might encounter. Whether we see a random cube or words on a page, we expect there is some explanation of its existence. Moreover, it does not seem to matter if the item in question is something we have experienced before. I have no experience with purple cubes in

[1] Richard Taylor tells a story of encountering a sphere in a forest to illustrate the same puzzle. See *Metaphysics* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1992), 84–94.

parks, yet if I saw a purple cube at a park, I would expect there to be *some* explanation (such as in terms of a manufacturer). I assume you would, too.

The expectation of an explanation leads to a puzzle, however. For consider reality as a *whole*. Reality has a whole cannot have any further explanation. For there is nothing real external to reality as a whole; so nothing external to reality can provide a further explanation of reality itself. How, then, can reality as a whole exist? If a random cube must have some explanation, how can some random reality exist without any explanation?

The puzzle is in seeing how anything, whether small or big, could exist without any further explanation. Consider that mere differences between things do not seem to account for a difference with respect to whether something has some explanation. Suppose you witness some people assembling some yellow swings at a park. Here you see an explanation of the swings. But now consider again the purple cube. Differences between the cube and the swings seem irrelevant: if swings have an explanation, so do cubes. In general, no differences (age, size, color, contents) between things seem relevant to enable something to be unexplained. The mere fact that something *exists*, whatever it is, seems to call for an explanation.

We can account for—*explain!*—these observations by this general principle:

The Principle of Universal Explanation (PE): everything must have some explanation (in terms of something else).

PE is a version of the *Principle of Sufficient Reason*, which in its most unrestricted form says that everything has some sufficient reason or (sufficient) explanation.[2] If PE is true, then that would make sense of our expectations of an explanation. We expect an explanation because we *see*, by

[2] For a defense of this principle, see Alexander Pruss, *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: a Reassessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

the light of reason, that everything in general must have an explanation. This principle makes sense of why we expect a random cube at a park would have some explanation for being there.

However, PE leads us to a paradox. For PE is incompatible with this principle about reality as a whole (*all of it together*):

The Principle of Unexplained Existence (PU): reality in total cannot have an explanation (in terms of anything beyond itself).

We can demonstrate that PU is true using a proof by contradiction. For suppose PU is not true. Then reality in total *can* have an explanation in terms of something else. Yet, anything *else* would fail to be real; for reality in total includes *everything that is real*. It follows that reality in total *cannot* have any (real) explanation beyond itself. This result contradicts the supposition that reality *can* have some (real) explanation beyond itself. Therefore, PU is instead true.

There is a puzzle here about expecting explanations. On the one hand, it seems that things have an explanation. On the other hand, we see that reality in total must be an exception to this general rule. For there cannot be any (real, external) explanation of reality as a whole. We can convert these observations into a paradoxical argument against all existence:

1. Everything must have some explanation (PE).
2. Reality in total cannot have an explanation (PU).
3. Therefore, there is no reality in total.
4. If *anything* exists, then there is the total of all that exists (reality in total).
5. Therefore, nothing exists.

This argument is guided by intuitive principles: PE and PU. Yet, from these principle, it follows that nothing exists, not even you, these words, or this very argument. This conclusion is intolerable. Surely, *something* exists.

The paradox of existence helps highlight the *significance* of existence. It is not immediately obvious how anything could exists. Take any random reality out of a hat, whether a giant cube or a giant universe, and it seems it should have *some* explanation of its existence. Yet, a total reality cannot have any explanation beyond its own contents. This result suggest that our particular reality is special in some strange way: unlike a shiny purple cube, our reality (in total) is somehow able to exist without any external explanation of its existence. The question is, *how*?

I invite readers to pause to think for a while about this question. Put down this book. Go take a walk. Come back. I believe that pondering this puzzle of existence can help you unlock greater insights into the ultimate nature of reality.

The question of how anything can exist (and how any realm can exist without an external explanation) gives life to *cosmological arguments*. Cosmological arguments are about the total structure of reality. A cosmological argument seeks to show how reality could have a structure of *causes* or *explanations*, where some portion of reality is fundamental (uncaused and unexplained) and special. While these arguments are normally associated with arguments for the existence God, one can also view a cosmological argument as a tool for investigating how anything can exist at all.

In this chapter, I will provide a general overview of how cosmological arguments work. First, I'll describe a general structure that unifies cosmological arguments. Second, I will present two classical versions of a cosmological argument. Third, I will show some general strategies philosophers have used to seek to identify the nature of fundamental reality via a second stage of the cosmological argument. I will close with a few questions that highlight what is at stake in assessing cosmological arguments in relation to the puzzle of existence.

The General Cosmological Argument

Cosmological arguments have a two-stage structure. Here is the general structure of a typical cosmological argument:

Stage 1 (foundation):

Step 1 (*dependence principle*): Anything of type T is *dependent* on something (e.g., an explanation, cause, ground, condition, etc.).

Step 2 (*linking step*): For reason R, the total chain of T things depends on a *foundation* of them (which is not itself of type T).

Result: Therefore, is a foundation of T type things.

Stage 2 (identification):

Step 3 (*attribute analysis*): For reasons Q, a foundation of T things would have attributes in set A.

Step 4 (*divine concept*): Only God could have attributes in set A.

Result: Therefore, God exists.

Let us look closer at each step. The first step is a *dependence principle,* which says that certain things (at least) depend on other things in some way. The dependence principle is the engine of the argument. Every cosmological argument depends on a dependence principle to get running.

Cosmological arguments differ by which engine (dependence principle) they install. Dependence principles vary in two ways: (i) by *scope*, and (ii) by *specification* of dependence. To illustrate, consider the principle that every turtle has a cause. Here the scope is on turtles. This principle specifies the way turtles are dependent: turtles are dependent on some *cause*.

Cosmological arguments are not just about turtles, of course. They widen the scope. Here are some common scopes: events, contingent facts, collections of contingent things, states of affairs, among others. Different principles also provide different specifications of dependence, such as these: dependence on an explanation, a possible explanation, a prior condition, a producer, a ground, or a cause. By mixing and matching different scopes with different specifications, one can develop a range of different dependence principles. (Later, we will consider two classic principles in cosmological arguments that focus on beginnings and contingent things, respectively.)

The next step is the *linking step*. This step links the dependence principle to the target conclusion—that there is some foundation of the items in question. Proponents of cosmological arguments typically employ one of two general strategies to support this step. One strategy involves giving some reason to think the chain of items in question is *finite*. For example, suppose one has reason to think there was a *first* turtle; the chain of turtles coming from turtles is finite. Then one can use a dependent principle to deduce that the first turtle depends on something that is *not a turtle*. This something would be a "foundation" (source, cause, or explanation) of turtles.

A second type of support focuses instead on the *nature* of the chain, not its length. To illustrate this strategy, suppose we widen the scope of our dependence principle so that it applies to chains of turtles. One might think that no matter how many turtles are connected together, whether finite or infinite, there should be some way to explain the entire chain of turtles. In that case, one might think any chain of turtles (of *any* length) would depend on more fundamental elements of reality (e.g., atoms, energy fields, or God). Then one may use a dependence principle

to deduce that there is a foundation of turtles, *irrespective* of the number of turtles that have existed. The idea is that all turtle chains are dependent by their nature.

It is important to emphasize that this second strategy leaves open the prospect of an infinite regress of causes. Sometimes people associate cosmological arguments with arguments for a *first cause*, or with a reason to think that a certain type of chain must be finite. However, some of the most famous cosmological arguments leave open infinite chains, as we shall see.[3] These arguments may *imply* that some foundation is ultimate (uncaused and unexplained), but they do not depend on first showing that some chain is finite.

Next, if we take the dependence and linking steps, we then arrive at the conclusion of stage 1. The conclusion is that there is some *foundation* of certain items in question, whether turtles, physical events, the universe, contingent things, etc. This "foundation" stage prepares the way for the "identification" stage of a cosmological argument.

The identification stage seeks to identify the *nature* of the foundation discovered in stage 1. This second stage of a cosmological argument is less well-known than the first stage, but there have been a number of developments and discussions of this stage in recent literature. I will point to a few examples later in this chapter.[4]

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[3] See, for example, Alexander Pruss, "The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument," in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, eds., W. L. Craig and J. P. Moreland (New Jersey: Blackwell, 2009), 24–100.

[4] For a discussion of certain older lines, see Timothy O'Connor, "From First Efficient Cause to God: Scotus on the Identification Stage," in John Duns Scotus: Metaphysics and Ethics, eds., L. Honnefelder, R. Wood & M. Dreyer (Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1995), 435–54.

As with the first stage, we can divide the second stage into two steps. The first step seeks to uncover certain attributes of the foundation. One common method here is to make use of the dependence principle again. For example, consider the principle that turtles are dependent. This turtle-dependence principle entails that any *foundation* of all turtles would not itself be a turtle. From here we uncover reasons to think that a foundation (of turtles) would not have any attributes that would indicate that it is actually a turtle. For example, the foundation of turtles probably does not have *turtle legs*, for anything with turtle legs would probably be a turtle.

The final step is the theological step. Here we consider whether the attributes identified in the previous step would comprise a *divine nature*—or a being we may call "God." For example, suppose contingent, limited, and temporary things have a foundation in terms of something that is non-contingent, unlimited, and eternal. We may then consider whether this foundation would qualify as being "God" (on a certain concept of "God"). I will expand upon the second stage after we have a closer look at examples of stage 1.

We have now seen the key steps in the general structure of a cosmological argument. By seeing the general structure, we have a blueprint for developing more specific versions. This blueprint equips us to not only examine traditional cosmological arguments, but also to explore new arguments. Perhaps some reader will develop an original cosmological argument by crafting an engine (dependence principle) that has certain advantages over previous models.

An Argument from Beginnings

Let us think again about the general puzzle of existence. The puzzle arises from the observation that we expect an explanation of things. The puzzle then is about how reality *in total*

could exist without any external explanation. How can any reality—of any shape or size—exist without an external explanation?

One idea is to narrow the scope of explanations to *beginnings*. Perhaps whatever *begins* has some explanation. We can convert this idea into a cosmological argument that seeks to uncover a source (or foundation) of beginnings. A common version of this argument is called a *kalām* cosmological argument, which seeks to uncover a cause of (at least) our physical universe.[5] Here is the structure of this general type of argument:

Step 1 (*dependence principle*):

1. Whatever begins has a prior condition (PB).

Step 2 (*linking step*):

2. There is no prior condition of reality in total.
3. Therefore, reality in total never began.
4. If reality in total never began, then reality includes a beginningless source.

Result:

5. Therefore, reality includes a beginningless source.

Consider each step. Step 1 gives us the dependence principle: whatever begins has a prior condition. For sake of modesty, this principle leaves open the nature of the prior condition. The prior condition may help explain the beginning, but the explanation here need not be deterministic.

Why think (1) is true? There are two general types of reasons philosophers sometimes give. The first type is *from experience*. For example, if you blink, you experience your blink coming from a prior state of reality. In general, we never experience something begin without

[5] See William Lane Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

any cause or condition. We do not see cubes, spheres, or any other objects, appearing randomly and arbitrarily without any cause or condition. Instead, we experience a *causal order*: new things come from prior things. Moreover, if there were no causal order, we would not be able to conduct scientific experiments or make meaningful predictions. Our experience with productive science, then, is also evidence in support of (1).

One way to further develop an argument from experience is in terms of an inference to the *best explanation*. We often use inference to the best explanation to extrapolate beyond our local experiences. For example, consider gravity. We experience gravity on earth, but we have no direct experience of gravity on remote planets in other galaxies. Still, we expect that gravity also applies to any planet. While it may be logically *possible* that apples on Jupiter would float in mid-air, it is not probable. A general law of gravity seems to best explain our local experiences with gravity. In the same way, one might think that a general law of cause and effect best explains our local experiences with causes and effects. While uncaused beginnings may be *logically possible*, it may seem that a general law of cause and effect would—like a general law of gravity—best explain our local experiences.

On the other hand, a question to consider is whether there might be remote or unusual exceptions to the general principle. Some philosophers have suggested that perhaps an uncaused beginning could be *far away* from our ordinary experience, such as in the quantum realm or in the early stage of the universe. Could there be a relevant difference between the local beginnings we experience and the beginning of the *whole of reality*? This question is worth pondering.

A second type of consideration sometimes proposed in support of (1) is from evident intuition (reason). Some things seem intuitively true, such as that 2 + 2 = 4, or that people cannot become numbers. Some philosophers have suggested that it also seems intuitively true that things

don't come from nothing. By reason, one sees that from nothing, comes only *nothing*. Thus if *something* comes to exist (or begin to happen), there must already be something prior. This principle, one might think, is a *first principle*: it is evident in its own right ("self-evident"). In response, some philosophers have wondered whether this principle is truly self-evident or without exception.

A third strategy is to combine reason and experience. Perhaps experience helps one see that at least *some* beginnings depend on a prior condition. Then, one might use reason to extrapolate. For example, suppose a beginning of a turtle depends on a prior condition. Then it may seem that a beginning of a *snake* would equally depend on a prior condition. After all, differences between turtles and snakes seem irrelevant. In general, one might think that no mere difference between types of beginnings (size, shape, contents, etc.) could make a difference with respect to having some prior condition. In that case, one may reason to regard (1) as a general principle that applies uniformly to all beginnings.

Note that the reasons given in support of steps in a cosmological argument need not be conclusive *proofs*. Proponents of cosmological arguments typically offer supports as a way of making *more probable* the premises. Thus, one could think that a cosmological argument can provide *some reason* in support of its conclusion, even if one does not regard it as a conclusive proof.

Consider, next, the linking step. This step is designed to link the dependence principle to the conclusion that there is some *beginingless foundation* of all beginnings. As indicated in the previous section, there are two strategies one might use to motivate the linking step. First, one might argue that the chain of beginnings is finite. This is the common strategy when giving an argument from beginnings. This strategy in turn divides into two types: first, there are arguments

from contemporary science of physical reality, which seek to show that (at least) our physical universe had a beginning;[6] second, there are arguments from paradoxes with infinity in general or infinite chains in particular.[7] Now if the chain is finite, then there is a *first* beginning. By (1), this first beginning requires a prior condition, C, which would then be a *beginningless* source (foundation) of beginnings.

Alternatively, one may seek to motivate this linking step by considering the *nature* of the chain. While this strategy is not typically associated with cosmological arguments from beginnings, it is an option open for exploration. For example, someone might argue that the general *kind* of thing that can begin must depend presently on a more fundamental layer of reality. Recently, a number of physicists theorize that the most fundamental physical layer is a quantum field.[8] Suppose this field cannot be created or destroyed, or else it depends on a more fundamental layer that cannot be created or destroyed. In that case, even if there were an infinite regress of causes of beginnings within the quantum field, there would still be fundamental level of reality which it itself never began.

If one follows these steps to the conclusion, then there is a beginingless portion of reality. This conclusion inspires additional questions. Why does this beginningless reality exist? What is its fundamental nature? These questions point to the *identification stage* of the cosmological argument (which we will return to later). They also point us back to the puzzle of existence.

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[6] See William Lane Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

[7] For recent arguments against infinite chains, see Alexander Pruss, *Infinity, Causation, and Paradox* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[8] Carlo Rovelli, *Reality is Not What it Seems* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2014).

William Rowe illustrates the call for a further explanation by describing a fictional scenario involving an *eternal star*. Rowe observes that if some star were producing light from all of eternity, then both the star and the light would be eternal. Yet, the star would provide a deeper explanation of the light. This scenario illustrates a general principle: while something may be eternal, it can still depends on a *more fundamental explanation*. In general, it may seem that the mere *age* of a thing, even an eternal age, would not provide the ultimate explanation of that thing. For this reason, even if there is a beginnningless portion of reality, one may still wonder why it exists.

We will next consider an argument that attempts to uncover a more ultimate explanation of things, whether those things begin or are eternal.

An Argument from Contingency

Another classical type of cosmological argument is about *contingent* things. A contingent thing is something that can exist but can also *not* exist. For example, a shoe can exist, but a shoe don't *have to exist*; there could fail to be any shoes. One might think contingent things call for an explanation. This idea inspires the *argument from contingency*, which attempts to show that there is a non-contingent foundation of contingent things.

Here is a version of an argument from contingency:

Step 1 (*dependence principle*):

1. Whatever is contingent has a prior condition (PC).

Step 2 (*linking step*):

2. The total chain of contingent things is contingent.
3. Therefore, there is a necessary foundation (a prior condition) of contingent things.

The first step is the engine of the argument: whatever is contingent has a prior condition. A contingent thing is something that could possibly have not existed. The notion of possibility here is *metaphysical possibility*. This notion is broader than *physical* possibility, since physical possibility depends on the *actual physical laws*. Metaphysical possibility is broader and allows for *different* physical laws. A metaphysically impossible thing would be precluded from any possible physical reality. For example, it is metaphysically impossible that there are square-circles, colorless red objects, or true contradictions. These things are not possible in any physical universe. A contingent thing, then, is anything whose non-existence is metaphysically possible—i.e., possible in some possible reality.

To minimize complexity, we can limit the scope of (1) to purely contingent things—i.e., contingent things that have no non-contingent components. So the principle says that purely contingent things depend on a prior condition. We can assume for sake of argument that at least some things are contingent. If instead everything is non-contingent, then we may proceed to the second (identification) stage of the cosmological argument to see what the total non-contingent reality might be (most fundamentally).

What reasons might support (1)? As with the dependence principle in the argument from beginnings, (1) is generally motivated by two types of support: *experience* and *reason*. From experience, one might argue that every contingent thing we know in experience has some prior condition, and then that (1) provides the best account (or explanation) of our experiences. Alternatively (or additionally), one might argue that it is a principle of reason that, in general, contingent existence calls for some further explanation. For take any object O, and suppose that O is contingent. Then O *could* exist, but need not. One might expect that O would have some prior condition to help explain why O *actually* exists (rather than not). This expectation does not

depend on knowing particular details about O, such as that O has a certain shape or color. Rather, the mere fact that O is contingent may itself suggest that O should have some explanation.

The next step links the dependence principle to the conclusion that there is a necessary foundation. Once again, there are two general strategies for motivating this step. First, one might seek to show that the chain of contingent things is finite. If the chain of contingent things is finite, then there is a *first* contingent thing, which (by the dependence principle) depends on some prior condition. A prior condition of the first contingent thing would be a non-contingent (i.e., necessarily existent) foundation of contingent things.

More commonly, however, arguments from contingency leave open the length of the chain of contingent things. The common strategy instead draws attention to the *nature* of the chain: just as a floor made from white tiles is itself white, a chain made from contingent things is itself contingent. After all, a continent thing *can be absent from reality* (by definition). If any member of a chain were absent, then that particular chain would not be exactly the same (even if other members remain present). Then we can apply the dependence principle to the contingent chain: a contingent chain (of any length) depends on a prior condition.

To minimize assumptions, a proponent of this argument need not suppose that a chain of things is itself an *individual thing*. One may instead apply the dependence principle to *plurals* of contingent things. The idea then is that any plural of contingent things, whether finite or infinite, depends on a prior condition. A motivation for applying the principle to plurals is that groups also depend on prior conditions; it is not easier for a flock of *twenty* birds to just exist without any explanation (or condition) than for a *single* bird to exist without an explanation (or

condition). Similarly, one might think it is no easier for an infinite stack of turtles to exist, without any explanation, than for a single turtle to exist without any explanation.[9]

One standard objection to this premise is that it commits a *fallacy of composition*. This is the fallacy of assuming a whole thing inherits the properties of its parts. The problem is that wholes do not necessarily inherit *all* the properties of their parts. For example, a whole stack of turtles is not itself a turtle. According to this objection, then, perhaps the whole chain of contingent things is not itself contingent.

This objection helps us separate different ways one might try to support an argument from contingency. If one seeks to support the linking step by relying on a general inference from parts to wholes, then the fallacy of composition would indeed seem to undercut that support. However, proponents of cosmological arguments typically appeal to other supports. For example, William Rowe suggests we consider the specific inference from *contingent* parts to a *contingent* whole. One idea here is that if *any* link in a chain is contingent (possibly absent), then that exact chain is not necessary; so the exact chain is contingent. Alternatively, one might argue that a principle of explanation applies to chains of contingent things, irrespective of their length. For example, if there were an infinite series of turtles coming from turtles, one might think there should be further explanation of the series (why *turtles*?). In these way, one might infer that any chain of purely contingent things would depend on some prior condition or explanation. (Note that if a chain of contingent things were *not* contingent, then the chain would have necessary

[9] For a development of this line, see Alexander Pruss and Joshua Rasmussen, *Necessary Existence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 33–68. To explore additional pathways in arguments for a necessary foundation, see www.necessarybeing.com.

existence—in which case we may proceed to the identification stage of the contingency argument.)

If this argument is sound, then there is a necessary portion of reality, which acts as a foundation (cause or source) of contingent things. Next, we will consider how one might investigate the nature of a foundational, necessary reality.

The Identification Stage

There are two general strategies for investigating the nature of fundamental reality. The first is from the *effects*. Here one considers things we see in the world, such as consciousness, morality, beauty, reason itself, an orderly universe, etc. Then one considers what kind of a reality might have the resources or powers to produce these effects. According to this strategy, the first stage of the cosmological argument is a backbone for developing other types of arguments (from design, from consciousness, from morality, etc.). A second strategy focuses instead on directly analyzing the nature of a foundational reality. We will examine this second strategy.

To see how one might analyze foundational reality, suppose the conclusion of the first stage of the contingency argument is true. There is some necessary foundation of contingent things. Let 'N' name the total of this necessary reality, *whatever it is*. There are two attributes of N that can act as tools for uncovering additional attributes. First, N has *necessary existence* (by definition). Second, there is no prior condition that provides a more fundamental explanation of N—since N is the *total* of the necessary reality. In this sense, N (in total) has *independent*

existence. We may now consider what sort of reality could have both necessary and independent existence.

To illustrate a general type of reasoning, consider first an argument for thinking that N is not an ice cube:

1. No ice cube has necessary or independent existence.
2. N has necessary and independent existence.
3. Therefore N is not an ice cube.

This conclusion may seem uninspiring. You probably were not wondering whether ultimate reality might be an *ice cube*. However, it is interesting to see how, in general, we might uncover additional attributes of N. Here we see that ice cubes are not necessary, since ice cubes can melt. This tells us at least *something* about N. We can use this same reasoning to deduce many other things about N. For example, N is not a pile of sand, a mountain, a planet, a galaxy, a flock of birds, or any contingent or dependent material stuff. By seeing what N is *not*, we narrow the options for what N could be.

So what could N be? This question takes us back to the puzzle of existence. The puzzle is about seeing how something could be exempt from a further explanation. We can solve the puzzle if we can identify something—some *nature*—that would not appear to require a further explanation.

Consider, first, some additional attributes that do not appear relevant. Not *shapes*: whether an object is shaped like a turtle or a triangle, it seems its shape could (and would) depend on some explanation. Same for color: if fundamental reality were *blue*, it seems there could (and would) be some explanation of its being blue; why blue and not green? Similarly,

none of these attributes seem relevant to being unexplained: size, mass, being made of snow, being made of electrons, or any combinations of these. What difference could be relevant?

There is a nature that is classically thought to be relevantly different from the rest. This nature is *purely perfect*. A purely perfect nature would include positive properties, like being able to make a great world. It would also lack arbitrary limits and boundaries that detract from its perfection. This idea gives rise to the following argument for N's perfection:

1. Only a perfect reality (something with a purely positive fundamental nature) would have both necessary and independent existence.
2. N has necessary and independent existence.
3. Therefore, N is perfect.

In recent literature, three reasons have been offered in support of (1). First, it has been suggested that being perfect *explains* why N would have perfectly robust, necessary existence.[10]

Second, it has been suggested that being perfect successfully *predicts* other positive aspects of N, including N's ability to be a source or ground of positive aspects of reality (consciousness, knowledge, beauty, order, and goodness).[11]

Third, it has been suggested that *imperfect* things would be limited or contingent in respects that call for a further explanation.[12] The idea here is that imperfect things do not appear relevantly different from other things—like turtles, trees, particles, and planets—that can have a further explanation. If that is right, then any portion of reality that has no further, outside

[10] Ryan Byerly, "From a Necessary Being to a Perfect Being," *Analysis* 79, no. 1 (2019): 10-17.

[11] Felipe Leon and Joshua Rasmussen, *Is God the Best Explanation of Things* (London: Palgrave, 2019), 253–72.

[12] Joshua Rasmussen, *How Reason Can Lead to God* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2019), 136–51.

explanation (for example, N) would not be fundamentally like these other things. It would not be fundamentally blue or square, for example, since these call for further explanation. Instead, the fundamental portion of reality would be fundamentally perfect (or maximally great). According to this third idea, we can see why the chain of explanations bottoms out if fundamental reality has a perfect nature, for something with a perfect nature is precisely the right kind of thing to be able to exist without a further explanation.

These considerations are just an opening sketch. Possible replies will depend on one's total view of reality and one's interpretation of each step. In the next section, I will offer a few final questions for your consideration.

Reflection Questions

I close with three big picture questions relevant to assessing the significance and soundness of cosmological arguments.

1. *Could a material universe exist without any further explanation?*

We have considered reasons one might expect an explanation of things. But could there be a good reason to think that asking "why" should stop with our universe? Could a universe have a purely natural, impersonal foundation that does not require any further explanation? Related: could some type of physical thing (or fact) be *relevantly different* from physical things (and facts) that have a further explanation? Why or why not?

2. *Can the identification stage of a cosmological argument solve the puzzle of existence?*

Suppose fundamental reality is supreme or purely perfect. Could a supreme foundation account for how reality can exist *without an external explanation*? Or is there a better account? In general, what account (if any) of fundamental reality makes the *best sense* of how there can be any reality in the first place?

3. *Do cosmological arguments prove too much?*

Is the conclusion of a cosmological argument too good to be true? Does the existence of a purely perfect foundation, for example, fit with all our other observations about the world?

For Further Reading

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