

## Objections To The Cosmological Argument

**The Cosmological Argument:** In Hume's *Dialogues*, part 9, the character Demea begins by summarizing the Cosmological Argument. Everything, he says, has a cause or a reason. If we ask what causes something, it is some prior thing; and as we go back in the chain of causes, we find that either: (1) the chain of causes or reasons goes back infinitely, or (2) that chain terminates in some first (necessarily existing) cause.

He then argues that option (1) is impossible. For, even if there were an eternal, infinite chain of causes, the CHAIN ITSELF would still require some (necessarily existing) cause or explanation. The argument may be summarized as follows:

1. Everything that exists must have some cause or reason for its existence. This cause may be either (a) Something external to itself (i.e., a "dependent" being), or (b) Something internal to itself (i.e., a "necessary" being).
2. It is impossible for every being to be a dependent being (for, even if there were a beginningless, infinite series of them, the whole series itself would still require some cause or explanation for its existence).
3. Therefore, at least one necessary being exists (and we call this God).

**Objections to the Cosmological Argument:** Cleanthes then raises a number of objections to this argument. These are:

1. Denying the conclusion: Even if this argument were successful, Cleanthes asks why it must be the case that the necessary being is God? He asks, "why may not the material universe be the necessarily existent being?" For, it seems at least conceivable that matter could contain the reason or explanation for its own existence within itself. That is, it could be a part of the NATURE of matter that it MUST exist.

[Clarke thinks that the existence of the universe can only be explained by a "self-existent" being; i.e., one that contains the reason for its own existence within itself. He calls this God. But, is the concept of a self-existent being coherent? If it IS coherent, why doesn't this concept permit the UNIVERSE itself to be a "self-existent being? Why is God the only sort of self-existent being that Clarke permits?]

2. Denying premise 2: Cleanthes raises two problems with premise 2:

- a. First, it doesn't even make SENSE to ask what is the cause of something that has existed eternally. To ask what caused the infinite series of causes pre-supposes that there is something PRIOR to or BEFORE that chain. But, that is senseless.
- b. Second, it seems that, to provide an explanation for every PART in a group of things JUST IS to provide an explanation for the whole. For instance, if I have a collection of 20 coins, and I gave you a complete explanation of the causes and reasons of EACH individual coin, it would be rather odd to then ask, "But, what is the explanation for the whole twenty?" Rather, the explanation for the whole JUST IS the 20 explanations for all of the individual parts. But, every part of the infinite series of causes DOES have an explanation; namely, the prior cause. For every individual in the series, the one before it is its explanation.

**Conclusion:** Hume concludes that the Cosmological Argument is not a conclusive proof for the existence of God. Hume seems to suggest that the universe might have existed for eternity, and this infinite series does not require an additional cause or explanation that is outside of the series.

[Note: What might Hume say in light of more recent evidence that the universe did, in fact, have a beginning? On some versions of Big Bang theory, all matter and energy—and even space and time!—just came into existence out of nothingness. Must Hume admit defeat in this case?

Review premise 1 of Deemea's argument. It is assumed that EVERYTHING has a cause or reason for its existence. But, is this true? Hume does not attack premise 1, but is such an attack possible? It seems that, if the universe DOES have a beginning, then we can only avoid the conclusion of a necessary cause of the universe if we deny that everything must have a cause.]