

Key concepts

- Inductive reasoning is a posteriori (post experience), depending on empirical evidence to reach a possible and most probable conclusion.
- The cosmological argument uses the evidence of the existing and contingent universe as the basis for its argument in suggesting an origin – a first cause.
- Aquinas presented three arguments based upon motion (change), causes and contingent existence. All motions, causes and contingencies necessitate a first cause that is unmoved, uncaused and necessary.
- First way: motion. An object has the potential to become something different; it is motion, or change, that transforms potential into something else. Potential and actual are two different states of being and it is the actual state of another entity that moves the potential in one thing towards its own actual state. There is a constant state of movement in the world but an infinite regress would mean no first mover and therefore no movement now which is illogical. There must be a First Mover; this is what we call God.
- Second way: cause. Nothing that exists could be self-caused (by being in both actual and potential states simultaneously) since this would mean that existed in order to bring itself into existence; this is illogical. An infinite regress of causes would mean no First Cause and hence no causes now. There must be a First Cause; this is what we call God.
- Third way: contingency. Contingent (temporary) beings have the possibility of not existing. This means that at one time there must have been no beings in existence. Nothing cannot bring something into existence; therefore, there must be an original being that is non-contingent; this necessary being is God.
- The Kalam argument is an ancient Arabic argument based similarly on the notion of a First Cause. William Lane Craig developed the Kalam argument.
- Craig acknowledged that everything has a cause for its existence that is both temporal and temporary. The universe began to exist and no scientific explanation can provide a causal account for this since an actual infinite is not possible. Therefore, there must be a different understanding of the universe as potentially infinite to which temporal events can be added. This notion of a potentially infinite universe necessitates a First Cause which is best explained by the notion of a personal being such as God.

Key words

AQUINAS
INDUCTIVE
A POSTERIORI
EMPIRICAL
FIRST CAUSE
CONTINGENT
INFINITE REGRESS
POTENTIAL
ACTUAL
NECESSARY
KALAM
WILLIAM CRAIG
TEMPORAL
TEMPORARY
CAUSAL
ACTUAL INFINITE
POTENTIAL INFINITE
PERSONAL AGENT

Key quotes

'... nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality.'
(Thomas Aquinas)

'There is no case known... in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself.'
(Thomas Aquinas)

'I think that it can be plausibly argued that the cause of the universe must be a personal Creator. For how else could a temporal effect arise from an eternal cause?'
(William Lane Craig)

'Empiricists claim that sense experience is the ultimate source of all our concepts and knowledge.'
(John L. Mackie)

'The only way to have an eternal cause but a temporal effect would seem to be if the cause is a personal agent who freely chooses to create an effect in time.'
(William Lane Craig)

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

Some philosophers see this as a scientifically sound and evidence-based argument. It is verified by other supporting arguments also (cumulative).

Others would argue that the conclusion is flawed; it is only one possibility by nature of it being inductive. It becomes a groundless explanation.

Some would argue that an infinite regress is possible without a first cause and that Craig's notion of a personal agent is a false dichotomy.

Key questions

Can an inductive argument be strong enough for proof?

Are the challenges enough to destroy the cosmological?

Is a First cause a credible conclusion?

Are there any alternative explanations or conclusions to be drawn from the debate?