The cosmological argument

The cosmological argument is the idea that there was something which began or started the universe. The ancient Greeks Plato (428–348 BCE) and Aristotle (384–322 BCE) called this something a prime mover. The cosmological argument proposes:

- cause and effect are key features of our world
- the very existence of the universe requires an explanation or 'first cause'
- God is this first cause of the universe
- Without a first cause, the chain of cause and effect would stretch infinitely backwards into the past (called 'infinite regress'). This seems impossible: logic suggests there must have been a first cause.

St Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) was a Catholic priest and friar. He is regarded as the Catholic Church's greatest theologian and philosopher. He wrote five arguments to explain the existence of God called the 'Quinque viae'. Three of these connect to the cosmological argument and the idea of a first cause as an explanation for everything that exists.

In pair s, write down examples of the universal law of cause and effect: "X happened because of Y". Which of these would be a good example to back up the cosmological argument? Why?

**Evidence against the cosmological argument**

**The impossibility of a total explanation**

- Bertrand Russell (1872–1970 CE) argued that a total explanation of everything that exists is impossible – all explanations rely on other earlier explanations, and so on.
- Humans should just accept the universe is here; asking why is a question which has no answer.

**The universe as a whole does not need a cause**

- Russell also said that just because everything in the universe needs a cause, it does not mean the universe as a whole needs a cause. We have no experience of universes being caused and created, so we cannot assume it needs a cause.
- David Hume (1711–76 CE) said there is nothing wrong in claiming things can come into existence without a cause.

**The first cause doesn't have to be God**

- Some scientists are happy to use the Big Bang Theory as a suitable explanation for the start of the universe without the need for God.

**What the cosmological argument reveals about God's nature**

Catholics believe the cosmological argument shows the omnipotent nature of God. Omnipotence is the belief that God is all-powerful. The cosmological argument shows that God has the power to do all things – to create a universe from nothing. Therefore his power is limitless.

**Specification focus**

**Cosmological argument**

- the cosmological argument for the existence of God including reference to St Thomas Aquinas,
- the strengths and evidence supporting the cosmological argument,
- what the cosmological argument shows about the nature of God for Catholics, evidence used by atheists to argue against the cosmological argument as evidence for the existence of God.

**Key terms**

Cosmological: relating to the history, structure and dynamics of the universe

Prime mover: the first mover or first cause of all other moving things

**Summary**

- The cosmological argument follows the universal law of cause and effect.
- St Thomas Aquinas proposed God was the first cause of the universe.
- Catholics believe the argument reveals God’s omnipotent nature.
- Atheists argue that the world does not necessarily need a first cause, and there is also no certain proof that the first cause is God.

**Questions**

1. (B) Explain two strengths of the cosmological argument. (4)
2. (D) Assess the importance of God as the first cause for Catholics. (9)