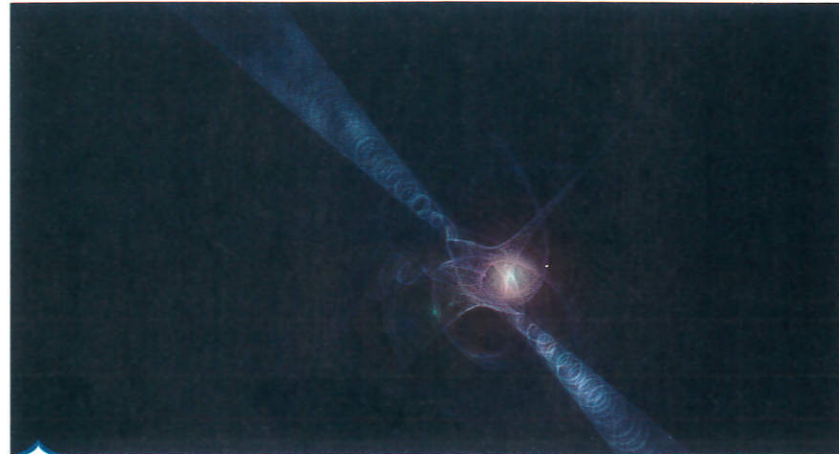


1.2 The First Cause argument



A Was God the first cause of the universe?

The First Cause argument

Some theists would use the existence of the universe to prove the existence of God. They would argue that:

- Everything that exists was caused to exist.
- The universe exists, so it too must have a cause.
- There had to be something eternal (without beginning or end) that was not caused by anything.
- The eternal first cause is God.
- Therefore God exists.

This is called the First Cause argument. It is given this name because it is arguing that the first cause of the universe is God. The First Cause argument is also known as the **cosmological** argument. The First Cause or cosmological argument tries to prove that there is a perfect and well-ordered universe, and a world in which we live (cosmos), rather than nothingness, because God brought the cosmos into existence. Theists argue that the universe is perfect because it was created by God and is not the result of random chance.

We are able to trace a series of events back in time. For example, you can trace the events of your life back to the moment of your birth, you can continue back to when your parents met and so on. When we follow this series of events back in time, there are two possibilities: either there is a starting point when the universe began and set everything going, or there is no starting point and the universe does not have a beginning. The universe goes back into infinity.

A theist would accept the first possibility that the universe had a beginning. The start of the chain of events that has led to the present time was caused by something outside the universe, and this was God. Some theists argue that if there was not a beginning to the universe, then there would be no adequate explanation for the existence of the universe and all that is in it.

Objectives

Examine the First Cause argument.

links

Look back to page 9 to be sure that you know the meanings of the terms 'theist', 'atheist' and 'agnostic'.

Key terms

Cosmological: referring to the origin and structure of the universe.

Creation: the act by which God brought the universe into being.

Study tip

Make sure that you understand what is meant by the First Cause argument and are able to explain it.

St Thomas Aquinas's First Cause argument

St Thomas Aquinas was a Christian who lived in the Middle Ages. Aquinas believed that the universe had a beginning. He argued that, as things cannot cause themselves to come into existence, then the universe must have been caused to exist by something outside the universe. Aquinas argued that this first cause of the universe was God. If God had not caused the universe to begin, then there would be no universe and therefore we would not exist. As we can see for ourselves that the universe exists, then it must have had a creator to begin it, and that creator is God.

First Cause argument and time

Some people use the fact that we are able to measure time as evidence that the universe had a beginning, because to measure time we need a starting point. A theist would argue that the measurement of time is evidence that the universe had a beginning and that this beginning was caused by God.



B St Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

Beliefs and teachings

Many Christians believe that the First Cause (cosmological) argument is supported by the **creation** account in Genesis 1:1–3. The Genesis account states that before the universe was created only God existed and at God's command the process of creation began.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light.

Genesis 1:1–3

Discussion activity

With a partner, in a small group or as a whole class, discuss the following statement: 'The existence of the universe proves that God exists.' Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer, showing that you have thought about more than one point of view.

Activities

- 2 Explain the First Cause (cosmological) argument for the existence of God.
- 3 'The First Cause argument is supported by creation stories.' Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer, showing that you have thought about more than one point of view. Support your answer with reference to religious creation stories.

Activity

- 1 Read Genesis 1 and 2:1–3 (The Days of Creation). Make notes on what happened at each stage of creation.



C There are several creation stories in Hinduism. Here Vishnu appears, resting on the great serpent ANANTA, floating on the cosmic ocean.

Extension activity

Using the internet and/or a library, find out more about St Thomas Aquinas's cosmological argument.

Summary

You should now be able to explain the First Cause argument, and discuss why some people think that the argument proves that God exists.