

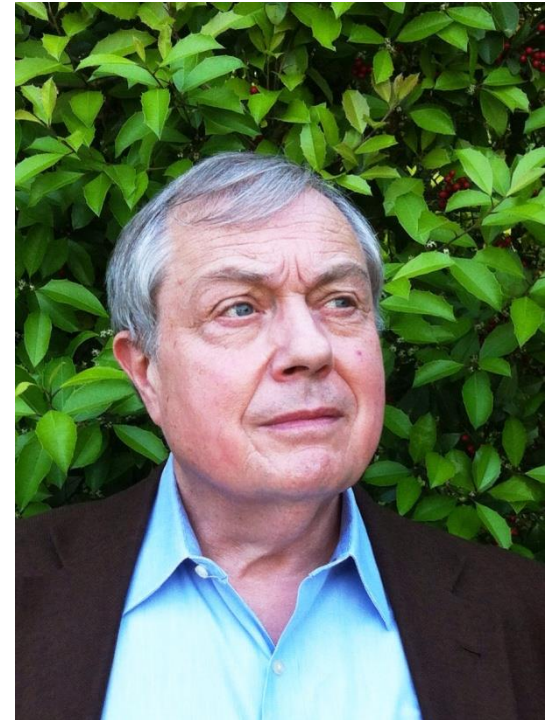


The Cosmological and Ontological Arguments

Is a necessary being possible?

Not Just About God

- Peter van Inwagen focuses on the question: *Why is there something rather than nothing?*
- The only possible answer seems to be that some 'being' is logically necessary.
 - But what kind of thing could exist *necessarily*?



Necessary vs. contingent beings

- A *necessary* being is one that exists in all possible worlds.
- A *contingent* being is one that is possible, but not necessary. Hence it exists in some possible worlds but not in all.
- “By a possible world, we mean simply a complete specification of a way the World might have been, a specification so precise and definite that it settles every single detail, no matter how minor.” (Ontological argument reading, p. 8)

A necessary being might not be *God*

- There are at least these two options:
- God is necessarily existent and is the source of the existence of all other beings; although He was under no compulsion to create anything, of His own free will He made beings other than Himself; His purpose in bringing other beings into existence surpasses human understanding. (standard theism)
- A formless, necessarily existent Chaos is the source of the existence of all contingent beings; swirls and local condensations occur by chance within Chaos, and it is these that give rise to contingent beings.

A necessary being?

- The logical entities discussed in week 1 are usually viewed as necessary (but abstract) beings
 - Propositions, possible states of affairs, concepts, numbers, logical laws, etc.
- A necessary being might be inferred from the existence of contingent beings, which are otherwise inexplicable.
- A “greatest possible being” might exist necessarily
- The ground of logic must be a necessary being
 - since it grounds the existence of necessary beings such as states of affairs and laws of logic.

“Cosmological” arguments

- The general idea of a cosmological argument (for the existence of God) is that God must exist as some kind of ultimate “foundation” of reality.
 - E.g. Aquinas: In the observable world causes are found to be ordered in series ... Such a series of causes must however stop somewhere ... One is therefore forced to suppose some first cause, to which everyone gives the name “God”.
 - Some cosmological arguments conclude that a *necessary* being exists, others that an *uncaused* (or independent) being exists.

E.g. Samuel Clarke

(A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God, 1704.)

1. Whatever exists is either a dependent being or an independent being;

∴ 2. Either there exists an independent being or every being is dependent;

3. It is false that every being is dependent;

∴ 4. There exists an **independent** being;

∴ 5. There exists a **necessary** being.

Necessary vs. independent?

- An independent (uncaused) being is one that exists, even though nothing caused it to exist.
 - How does that differ from a necessary being?
 - Clarke thinks that independent \Rightarrow necessary
 - But not vice-versa, as it seems conceptually possible for a necessary being to be dependent.



- According to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, God the Son is “eternally begotten” of the Father, which seems to mean that the Father *necessarily* causes the Son.
So the Son is a *dependent* being, but still a *necessary* being.

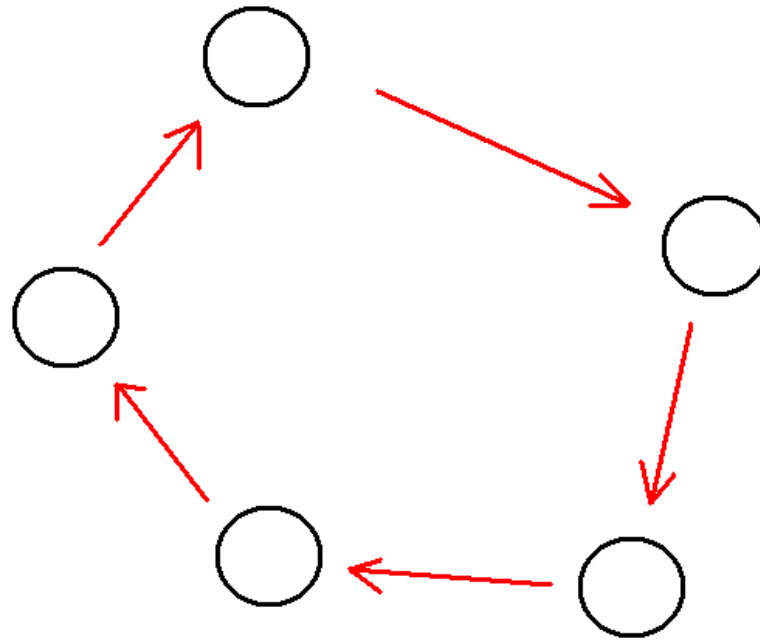
All beings are dependent?

Clarke says it's impossible that "Every being is dependent"

- Why would that be?

- According to Clarke, if every being is dependent then there's a closed loop of causes, or an infinite regress of causes, or a combination of both.
 - (Do you agree?)
- Every dependent being needs a cause. And that cause requires its own cause, etc., *ad infinitum*. Thus we have an infinite regress, unless at some point the chain loops back on itself.

Closed Causal Loop



Is this possible?

Al Farabi (872-950 AD): “But a series of contingent beings which would produce one another cannot proceed to infinity or move in a circle.”

Infinite Regress of Causes

- An infinite regress of causes is a situation where every object or event has a prior cause, which in turn has a prior cause, etc. to infinity. There is *no start* to this sequence. (Like the negative integers, or “turtles all the way down”.)
- Is this really possible?





- “... what reason do we have to deny the possibility of an infinite series of causes and effects that is structured [like the signed integers]? Nothing comes to mind.”

Earl Conee, *Riddles of Existence*, p. 66

(What do you mean, “nothing comes to mind” ???)

(Have you never read Samuel Clarke??)

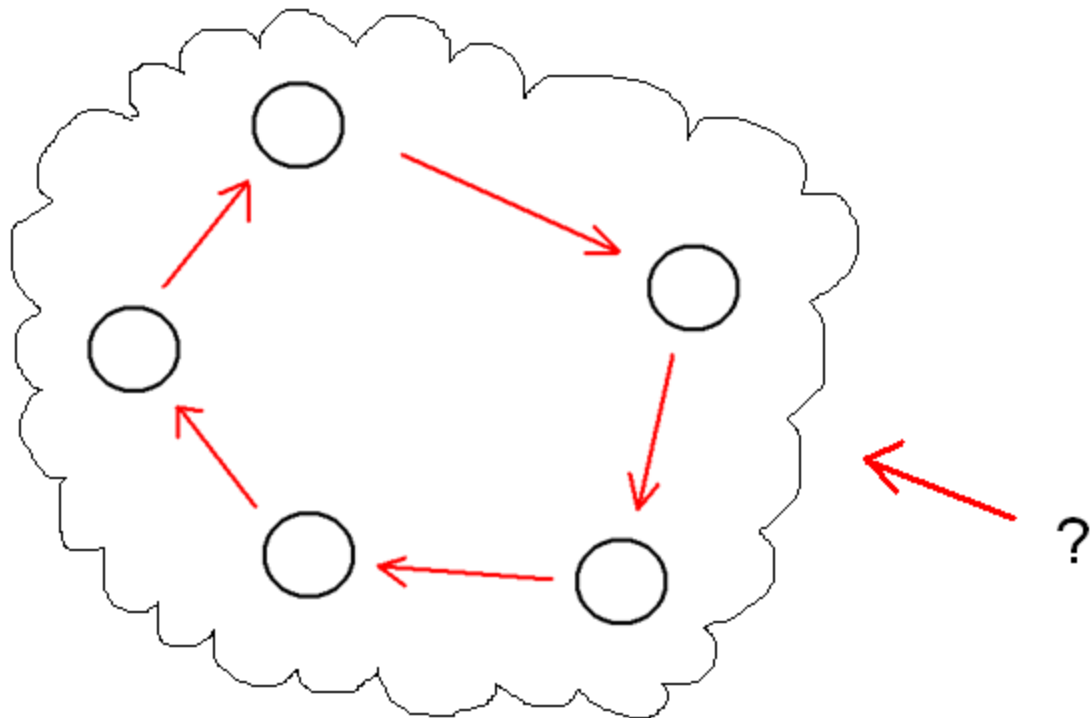
What caused the loop? (or the regress?)

“But if we consider such an infinite series as one entire endless series of dependent beings, it’s obvious that this whole series can’t be caused from **outside** itself because it is stipulated as including all things that are or ever were in the universe.” (Clarke)

Hence such a loop/series itself is an **independent** being! (But that’s a contradiction.)

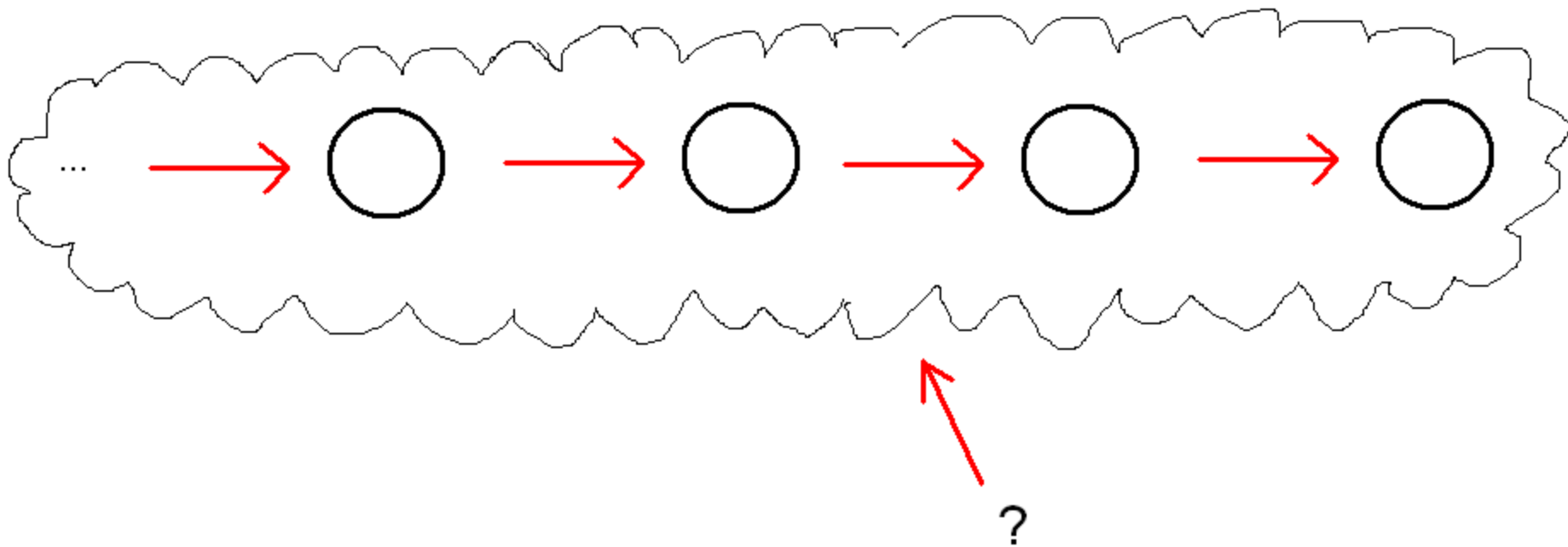
“What caused the whole system?”

- In the case of a closed causal loop, you’ll see that *there is no cause of the loop itself.*



“What caused the whole system?”

- Similarly, for the infinite regress of causes. There is no cause of the whole collection.



- To suppose an infinite series of changeable and dependent beings produced one from another in an endless progression, without any original cause at all, is only pushing out of sight the question about the ground or reason for the existence of things.
- It is really the same as supposing one continued being that had no beginning and will last forever, and that isn't self-existent and necessary in itself, and doesn't owe its existence to any self-existent cause. **And this is directly absurd and contradictory.**

David Hume disagrees

“Also: in such a chain or series of items, each part is caused by the part that preceded it, and causes the one that follows. So where is the difficulty? But the *whole* needs a cause! you say. I answer:

- (1) that the uniting of these parts into a whole, like the uniting of several distinct counties into one kingdom, or several distinct members into one organic body, is performed merely by an arbitrary act of the mind and has no influence on the nature of things.
 - (2) If I showed you the particular causes of each individual in a collection of twenty particles of matter, I would think it very unreasonable if you then asked me what was the cause of the whole twenty. The cause of the whole is sufficiently explained by explaining the cause of the parts.”
- (*Dialogue*, p.36)

Hume-Edwards principle

- William Rowe refers to this as the **Hume-Edwards principle**, and summarises it as:
- If the existence of every member of a set is explained (caused?), the existence of that set is thereby explained (caused?).

Questions?

- Is this a sound principle?

Analogy with knowledge

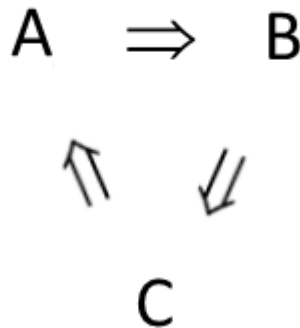
- Does Hume's objection work in the case of knowledge?
- Suppose Hume gives a justification for each of 20 different beliefs. Is it then reasonable to ask for a justification of the whole set?

The analogy looks ok

- N.B. causation and justification do have a very similar structure.
- C cannot cause E unless C first has concrete existence.
 - If C does not occur in fact, then the most we can ever say is that C *would* cause E if C occurred.
- Belief A cannot justify B unless A is itself justified.
 - If A is unjustified, then $A \Rightarrow B$ just means that B *would* be justified, if A were justified.

Circular justification?

- Let's make it just 3 beliefs: A, B and C, for simplicity.
- What if Hume's justifications are $A \Rightarrow B$, $B \Rightarrow C$, and $C \Rightarrow A$?



- Is the belief (A & B & C) justified in that case?
- Answer: No!!

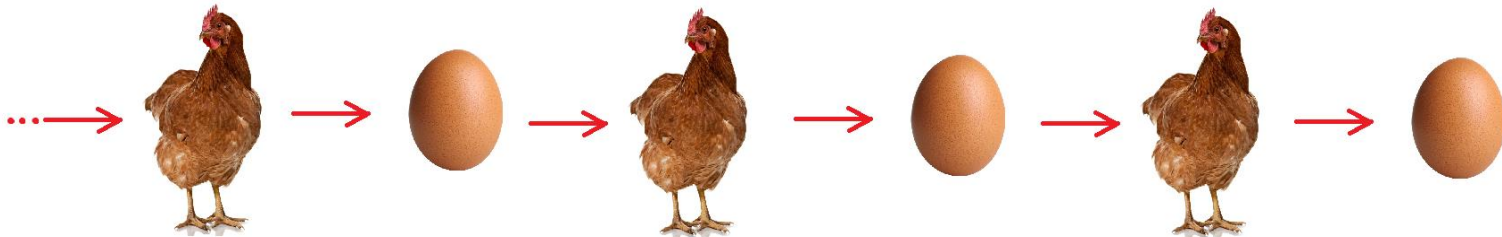
Infinite regress of justification?

- In a similar way, if a series of beliefs has the logical structure shown below, are the beliefs justified?

$\dots \Rightarrow D \Rightarrow C \Rightarrow B \Rightarrow A$

Answer: No.

Pruss: chicken-egg argument

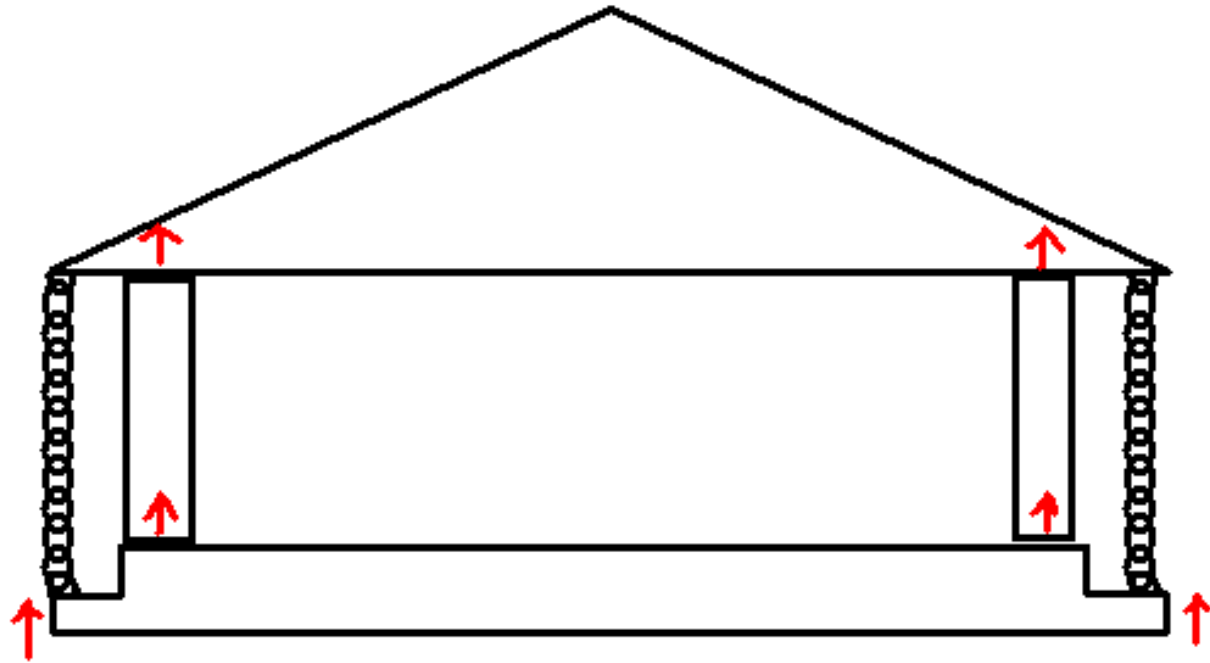


- Consider a chicken-egg causal sequence, as shown above, that has no beginning.
- Now consider {chickens} and {eggs} in the sequence.
 - {chickens} caused {eggs}
 - {eggs} caused {chickens}
- (So we also have a causal circle!)
- Alexander R. Pruss (1998), “The Hume-Edwards Principle and the Cosmological Argument”, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*.

Analogy with construction

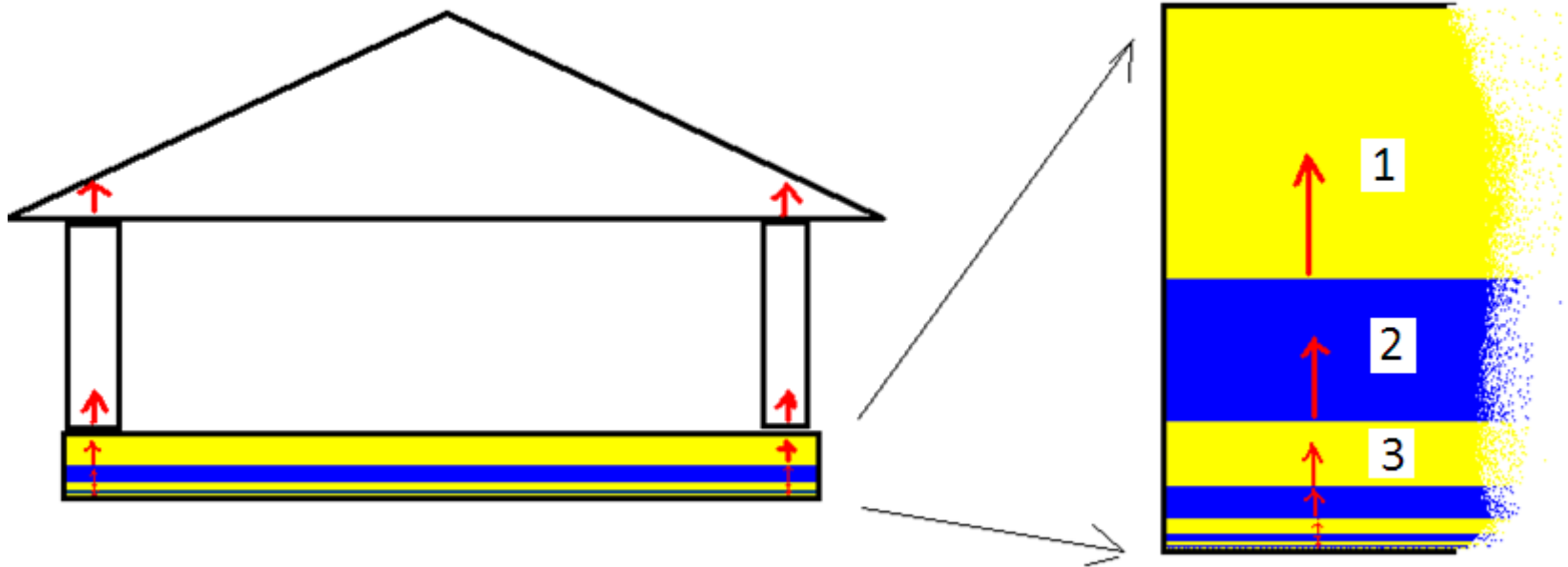
- Does Hume's objection work in the case of construction?
- If I showed you the particular supports of each part of a building, I would think it very unreasonable if you then asked me what was the support of the whole building. The support of the whole is sufficiently explained by explaining the support of the parts."

House in the Sky #1



1. The walls hold up the roof.
2. The floor slab holds up the walls.
3. The floor slab is held up by the roof, by means of chains.

House in the Sky #2

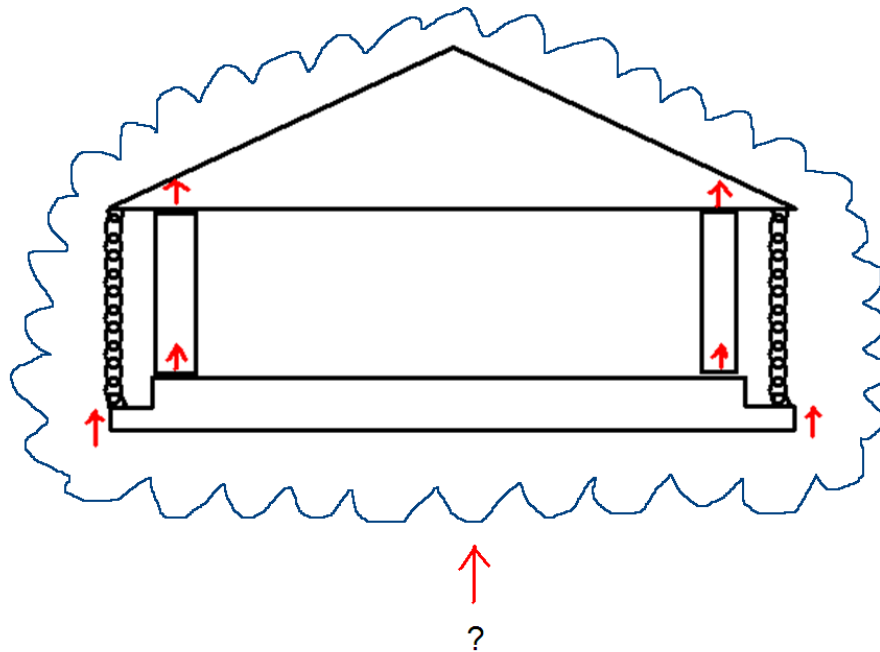


1. Layer 1 (top layer) is supported by Layer 2
 2. Layer 2 is supported by Layer 3
 3. Layer 3 is supported by Layer 4
 4. Layer 4 is supported by Layer 5 ...
- (It's ever-thinner turtles all the way down.)



Why won't they stay in the sky?

- One way to see that they will plummet to the ground is to *consider the whole house as a single object*, and ask what is supporting that. There is nothing, so ...



Independent \Rightarrow necessary?

- On the face of it, ‘independent’ and ‘necessary’ are different concepts, so why should one entail the other?
- The usual reason given is that nothing can exist without a sufficient *reason*, or *explanation*, for its existence.
 - Van Inwagen: “... a necessary being is a being whose non-existence is impossible. Thus, for any necessary being, there is by definition a sufficient reason for its existence: there could hardly be a better explanation of the existence of a thing than that its non-existence would be impossible.”

Principle of Sufficient Reason

- There is a ‘sufficient reason’ for every object that exists, and every event that occurs. Leibniz’s formulation:

“for any true proposition P, it is possible for someone who understands things well enough to give a sufficient reason why it the case that P rather than not-P.”

- An answer to a “why” question is usually an *explanation*.
 - Explanations usually appeal to *causes* of the thing being explained.

What is an explanation?

- Explanation is certainly linked to causation. In general, we explain an object or event by describing its causes.
- E.g. “Why was the train delayed?” “Oh, signal failure outside Clapham Junction.”)
- But explaining something requires more than saying what the cause is. We also need ‘intellectual satisfaction’.

Intellectual satisfaction

Fred: See, I'm mixing the baking soda and the vinegar, and it starts foaming rapidly.

Sally: Yes, but why is foam produced?

Fred: I just told you. The foam is caused by mixing baking soda with vinegar.

Sally: Right. But why does mixing soda with vinegar cause foam?

Fred: Oh. $\text{NaHCO}_3 + \text{CH}_3\text{CO}_2\text{H} \rightarrow \text{CH}_3\text{CO}_2\text{Na} + \text{H}_2\text{O} + \text{CO}_2(\text{g})$.

(An intellectual understanding of the cause, as (e.g.) the chemical formulas, allows a person to “see why” that cause must lead to that effect. Is that what Leibniz meant?)

“it is possible for someone who understands things well enough to give a sufficient reason why it the case that P rather than not-P.”

Intellectual satisfaction

- Explanation should be intellectually satisfying. This means that we can “see”, in our minds, *why* the cause *must* give rise to the effect.
- This requires that the propositions describing the causal chain, connecting the cause to the effect, are *logically* related as well.
- I.e. $\text{Cause} \Rightarrow E_1 \Rightarrow E_2 \Rightarrow \dots \Rightarrow \text{Effect}$

Is PSR true?

- Does everything have an explanation? For event E to be explained in the usual way would require two things:
 - i. E has a cause C
 - ii. E is a logical consequence of C.
- But this is *determinism*. Could determinism be false?

The Principle of Sufficient Reason

- Is PSR just *optimism*?

“The fact, if it is a fact, that all of us presuppose that whatever exists has an explanation of its existence does not imply that nothing exists without a reason for its existence. Nature is not bound to satisfy our presuppositions.”

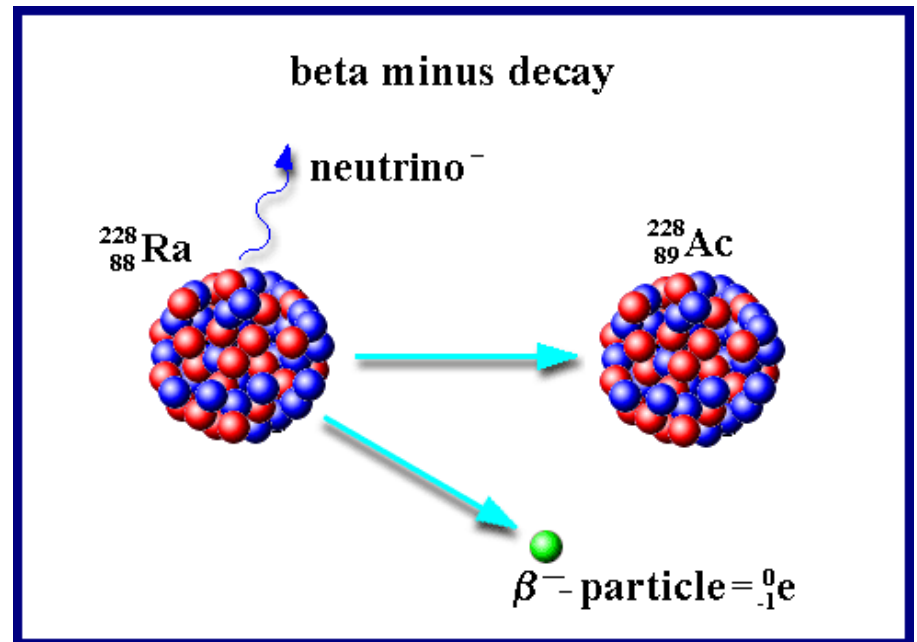


First argument against PSR

- What if Anscombe is right (along with most quantum theorists) that some events are indeterministically caused?
- Such events are not, by definition, logically entailed by their causes (plus the laws of physics).
- Are indeterministic events *explained* by their causes?

E.g. nuclear decay

- Most contemporary physicists think that the decay of an atomic nucleus is a truly random event, unpredictable in principle.
- The *cause* of a β -particle produced in such an event is clear enough. But can we (fully) *explain* the existence of the β -particle, at this time?



Fred: Why did the nucleus decay at time t ?

Sally: It was Radium-228, which is unstable. It has a half-life of 5.75 years.

Fred: But it didn't have to decay ***at time t*** . So why did it decay at t , rather than earlier, or later? Why pick that moment?

Sally: There's no answer to that. These things are ultimately unpredictable.

2nd argument against PSR

- Can we fully explain the existence of contingent beings, somehow in terms of a necessary being?
- Let 'N' be a necessary state of affairs, and 'C' a contingent one. Suppose that N explains C.
- Then N must both cause and determine C.
- See the problem?
- (Answer: If N is necessary, and N determines C, then C is also *necessary*, and hence not contingent.)

Necessarily, N

Necessarily, if N then C

∴ Necessarily, C

$\Box N$

$\Box (N \rightarrow C)$

$\Box C$

$\Box \text{God}$

$\Box (\text{God} \rightarrow \text{Me})$

$\Box \text{Me}$

2nd argument against PSR

- Recall that, according to traditional theism,
- “He was under no compulsion to create anything, of His own free will He made beings other than Himself”
- Apparently this doctrine of divine free will is needed to account for the fact that *created objects are contingent*.
- (The Chaos view invokes ‘chance’ to achieve the same goal.)

- But then note: we cannot *explain* why God created humans, or anything else. There is no logically sufficient cause. There is no (complete) explanation.
- PSR seems false, and certainly of no use to explain why something exists rather than nothing.
 - (van Inwagen argues for this in *Metaphysics*, Ch. 7.)
- PSR is a great expression of the idea that “the world is rational”, but doesn’t seem to fit with the view that the (concrete) World is more than the (abstract) actual world.

- But, since the World is undeniably rational to a high degree, maybe a weaker form of PSR might be true?
- (Van Inwagen explores one such weaker PSR in Ch.7.)
 - “Every being has this feature: the fact that it exists has an explanation.” (p. 171)
 - But he still ends in despair: “We may, finally, conclude that metaphysics can provide us with no answer to the question, Why should there be anything at all? It would seem that the only way to answer this question would be to demonstrate the existence of a necessary being, and we have been unable to do this.” (p. 176)
- Rowe also has a ‘weak’ PSR:
 - “whatever *comes into existence* must have an explanation of its existence”
 - But he notes that the cosmological argument requires the *strong* PSR

Probabilistic PSR (PPSR?)

- Quantum indeterminism can be reconciled with a weakened (and rather natural) version of PSR.

PPSR: Every being and event has (at least) a probabilistic explanation.

God's existence is *logically* necessary?

- If God's existence is logically necessary, then a sufficiently smart and rational person can just see that God exists, in the same way that a smart person can just see that some mathematical theorem is true.
- Many philosophers are very sceptical of the claim that *any* object can exist by logical necessity.
- E.g. Kant (*Critique of Pure Reason*):
“For I find myself unable to form the slightest conception of a thing which when annihilated in thought with all its predicates, leaves behind a contradiction; and contradiction is the only criterion of impossibility in the sphere of pure a priori conceptions.”

Descartes' Ontological Argument

“Just as three-sidedness is a part of the concept of a triangle—the mind cannot conceive of triangularity without also conceiving of three-sidedness—existence is a part of the concept of a perfect being: the mind cannot conceive of perfection without also conceiving of existence.”

1. There is a concept of something maximally perfect, possessing all the perfections
2. The property of existence is itself a perfection

Something that is maximally perfect exists

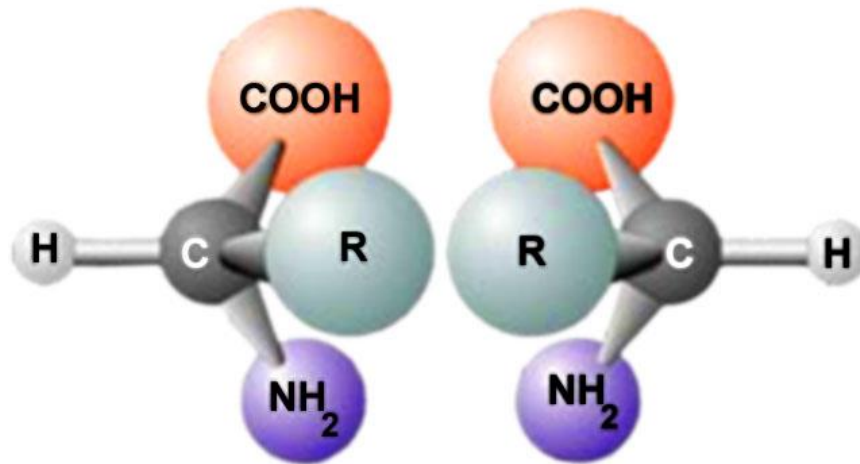
Standard criticism

- Kant: existence isn't a *property* at all.
- There's no *conceptual* difference between a thing that exists and one that does not. Existence is not a conceptual matter. (Even a fictional character includes any concept of existence that there might be.)

Kant (*Critique of Pure Reason*)

“Thus when I think a thing, through whichever and however many predicates I like (even in its thoroughgoing determination), not the least bit gets added to the thing when I posit in addition that this thing is. For otherwise what would exist would not be the same as what I had thought in my concept, but more than that, and I could not say that the very object of my concept exists”

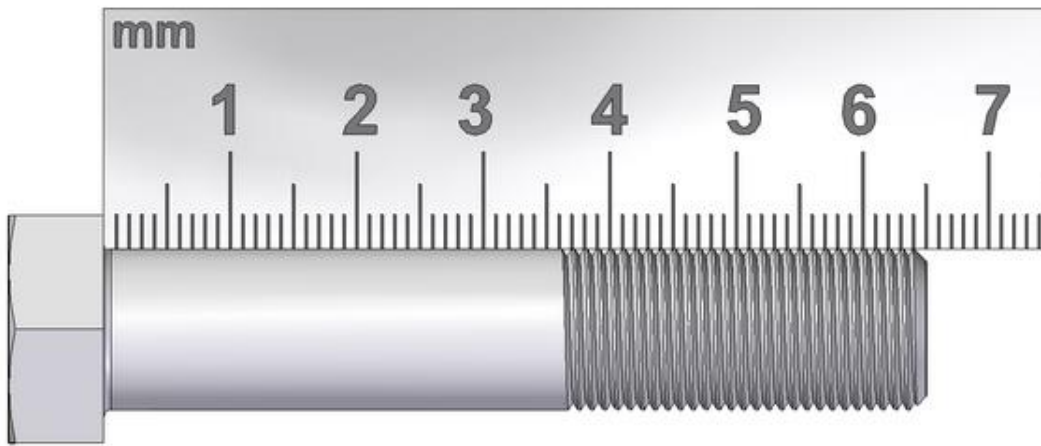
Left-handed isn't a property either?



- There's no definition of "left handed" that does not refer to a *concrete* object. It cannot be abstractly defined, in the way *circle*, *square*, etc. can be.

Length isn't a property?

- Do you have any concept of the length of a single *object*?
- Shouldn't length *relations* be grounded in some feature that each individual object has?



Necessary existence is a perfection?

1. A perfect being has all perfections.
2. Necessary existence is a perfection.

∴ A perfect being has necessary existence.

1. A negmount has all negmontanic properties.
2. Necessary existence is a negmontanic property.

∴ A negmount has necessary existence

Modal Ontological Argument (Plantinga)

- Existence isn't a property. But surely *necessary existence* is? After all, many things that exist (including ourselves) don't possess *necessary* existence.
- And aren't we the worse for it? Putting it another way, suppose you meet a being who claims to be God.

“I'm an omnipotent being, fortunately”, he says.

-- “Fortunately?”

“Well, yes,” he continues, “I might easily have been a regular d-bag like you. I was jolly lucky, really, the way things turned out.”

The Modal Ontological Argument

- This contingent being doesn't match up to our conception of God:
 - If any being is God, then it exists necessarily
 - If any being is God, then it doesn't just happen to have divine attributes (e.g. omnipotence), but has them necessarily.
- Take this conception of God, and add the premise that it's *logically possible* for such a being to exist. Then it follows that God exists.

1. It is logically possible that God exists

 \therefore God exists

Proof:

From the premise, God exists in at least one possible world w . Then by the very concept of God, $\Box(\text{God exists})$ holds in w , and $\Box(\text{God has all the divine attributes})$ holds in w . It follows that God exists in the actual world, with all the divine attributes. Hence God exists. ■

N is, by definition, a necessarily existent being.

1. It is logically possible that N exists

$\therefore N$ exists

Proof:

From the premise, N exists in at least one possible world w . Then by the very concept of N , $\Box(N \text{ exists})$ holds in w . It follows that N exists in the actual world. Hence N exists. ■

Objection

- Is there any reason to accept the premise?
- Perhaps the cosmological argument supplies such a reason?
 1. We know that a first cause exists.
 2. A first cause must be a necessary being
 3. Hence, a necessary being exists
 4. Hence, a necessary being is possible

Objection

- There's still no *intellectual satisfaction* here.
- A logically necessary being should be one that, as a matter of logic, clearly exists.
- What kind of a being could be logically derivable in this way? We still have no idea.
- The only way I can see something existing by logical necessity is if that object is *needed for logic itself*. In that case, as soon as one starts to reason logically, one must accept the existence of that being.
- (Similar to Descartes' "I think, therefore I am")

What are necessary beings like?

- Let's start with “ungodly” necessary beings.
- Conee suggests that *propositions* may exist necessarily. Even in a world with no moose, for example, there is still the proposition (or state of affairs?) “there are no moose”.
- In a similar vein, perhaps mathematical objects, or mathematical facts, are necessary beings?

- Do propositions exist necessarily? In view of their connection to human belief and communication, it seems unlikely. If humans didn't exist, then surely propositions wouldn't either.
- But possible states of affairs are perhaps a different story. E.g. while propositions depend on human culture, etc., the possible states of affairs seem independent and objective.

Is *Logic* itself a necessary being?

- One role that propositions (or maybe states of affairs) have is to provide the science of logic with a subject-matter.
- What is logic *about*, after all, if not propositions, and their operations (e.g. $\&$, \vee , \sim , \supset) and relations (e.g. \Rightarrow)?
- Are the “laws of logic” (e.g. rules of inference and other consequence relations) necessary beings?

Is *Logic* itself a necessary being?

- Logic includes a body of normative rules, designating some inferences as 'valid' and others 'invalid'.
- Are these rules mere cultural products, like norms of etiquette?
 - Surely not. Perhaps then the laws of logic hold across all human cultures, being general truths of human biology?
 - This is not objective enough. The laws of logic are transcendent, holding for all (possible and actual) rational beings.
- Therefore, there must be some kind of being whose existence grounds both states of affairs and logical laws concerning them. Call it 'the ground of logic'.

What is the 'ground of logic' like?

- The ground of logic must be a necessary being, since it grounds the existence of necessary beings such as states of affairs and laws of logic.
- Would the ground of logic have to be a *cogitative* being?
 - Could something (i.e. logic) that seems essentially concerned with *thought* exist in the absence of thinkers?

- Many theists regard logic as “the architecture of God’s mind”.
 - Universals are divine concepts
 - States of affairs are divine thoughts, etc.

Thomas Aquinas:

"Even if there were no human intellects, there could be truths because of their relation to the divine intellect. But if, *per impossible*, there were no intellects at all, but things continued to exist, then there would be no such reality as truth." (*De Veritate* Q. 1, Article II, Reply).

- If God provides the very *framework* for thought, so that without him no thought would exist, then God's existence is a logical necessity. God cannot be rationally conceived not to exist.

- “The idea that the existence of possibilities is rooted in God’s thought seems to have enjoyed some popularity in medieval philosophy; it may represent Leibniz’s considered views on the reality of possible worlds other than the actual; and it is suggested by some remarks of Robert Adams”
- (Michael Loux, *The Possible and the Actual*, 59).

“Augustinian theism [also] provides an attractive explanation [of] the ontological status of the objects of logic and mathematics. To many of us both of the following views seem extremely plausible.

- (1) Possibilities and necessary truths are discovered, not made, by our thought. They would still be there if none of us humans ever thought of them.
- (2) Possibilities and necessary truths cannot be there except insofar as they, or the ideas involved in them, are thought by some mind.

The first of these views seems to require Platonism; the second is a repudiation of it. Yet they can both be held together if we suppose that there is a non-human mind that eternally and necessarily exists and thinks all the possibilities and necessary truths. Such is the mind of God, according to Augustinian theism.”

(Robert Adams, “Divine Necessity”, *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 80, No. 11, 1983, p. 751)