Philosophy of Religion

2. The Cosmological Argument

Can the Cosmological Argument (or any variant thereof) provide a convincing demonstration of the existence of God? If not, can anything of value be salvaged from it?

General Overviews

Rowe, William L., "Cosmological Arguments", in Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (eds), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion* (Blackwell, 1999), pp. 331-7.

Reichenbach, Bruce, "Cosmological Argument", in the online Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cosmological-argument/.
(This usefully discusses the views of William Lane Craig, author of *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Lebiniz*, Macmillan, 1980. It also refers to work by Alexander Pruss on the Principle of Sufficient Reason (2006), which features in the Faculty reading list.)

Almeida, Michael, *Cosmological Arguments*, Cambridge Elements in the Philosophy of Religion, 2018.
(A short book of 99 pages, this goes a fair bit deeper than the discussions above, and includes a lot of discussion of recent literature, some of which gets fairly technical. Don't feel under any pressure to read it all, but you might find it useful for reference on points where you'd like more detail, or to get an overview of recent discussion and see alternative approaches.)

Classic Sources

Aquinas, Thomas, "The Five Ways", from *Summa Theologiae*, reprinted in many collections.

Leibniz, G. W. F., "On the Ultimate Origin of Things" (1697), reprinted in many collections.

Hume, David, *Treatise of Human Nature* I iii 3 "Why a Cause is Always Necessary"; *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* Section IV Part i; *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* Part ix.
(Note that the argument attacked in the *Dialogues* is most like Samuel Clarke's version of the Cosmological Argument, though the points generally carry over to other versions also. For more on Hume's discussion, see John Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, chapter 4.)

Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A592 to 630.
(Kant famously argues that the Cosmological Argument depends on the Ontological Argument – this isn't really main line, but if you want to see some discussion of Kant's claim, there is a short article by Everett J. Nelson in Philosophical Review 1935 at:
http://www.jstor.org/view/00318108/di981090/98p0692l/0
and a longer discussion by Donald P. Smith in the European Journal 2003, arguing on the other side but giving plenty of other more recent references, at:
http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/links/doi/10.1111/1468-0378.00183/enhancedabs/.)

Other Important Discussions

Mackie, J. L., *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford, 1982), chapter 5.
(Highly recommended for discussion both of traditional versions of the Cosmological Argument, and also of Swinburne's "inductive" version – see below.)

Swinburne, Richard, *The Existence of God* (Oxford, 1979), chapter 7. (Swinburne has a distinctive view of the Argument, seeing it less as a deductive proof of a first divine cause, than a suggestive pointer to the advantages of ultimate "personal" explanation. It would be good to read his chapter, but you can probably get the gist well enough from Mackie ...)

Peter Millican, Hertford College Oxford, October 2023