

# “The” Cosmological Argument

## Stage I

1. **Causal Premise**: Everything of type T has a cause.  
[note: cause  $\neq$  purpose].
2. *Something* of type T exists.
3. There is a reason X for thinking that there is a *First Cause* of things of type T.

## Stage II

4. The *First Cause* can be identified with God.

# A *Leibnizian* Cosmological Argument:

Why is there *something* rather than *nothing* at all?

Preliminary definitions and concepts:



**A being:** something that has properties or features.

**A contingent being:** a being whose existence is not necessary.

**A necessary being:** a being whose existence is necessary.

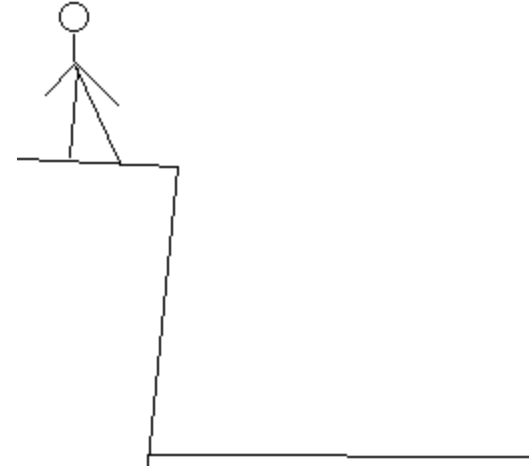
**A contingent fact:** a fact that is not necessary.

# Two Kinds of “Necessary”

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- Epistemic Necessity:

- “I *know* it’s true with certainty.”
- E.g. “I exist.”



- Objective Necessity:

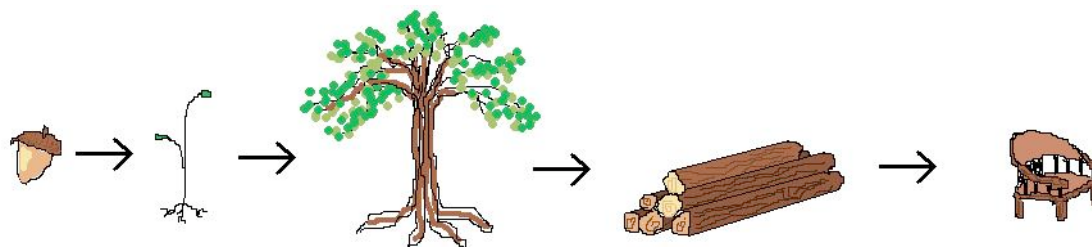
- Physical Necessity: Whatever must be true, *given* the laws of physics.
  - E.g. If you walk off a cliff, it is physically necessary that *you will fall*.
- **Metaphysical Necessity**: Whatever must be true, *no matter what*.
  - E.g. No object is **completely red** and **completely green**.
  - E.g. No person is the number 15.

# Now for the Argument, Stage I:

1. Something contingent exists.
2. *If* there are contingent beings, there must be a **First Cause** of them: Why? Because, *otherwise*, “[w]e cannot find in any of the individual things, or even in the entire collection and series of things, a sufficient reason for why they exist” (Leibniz).

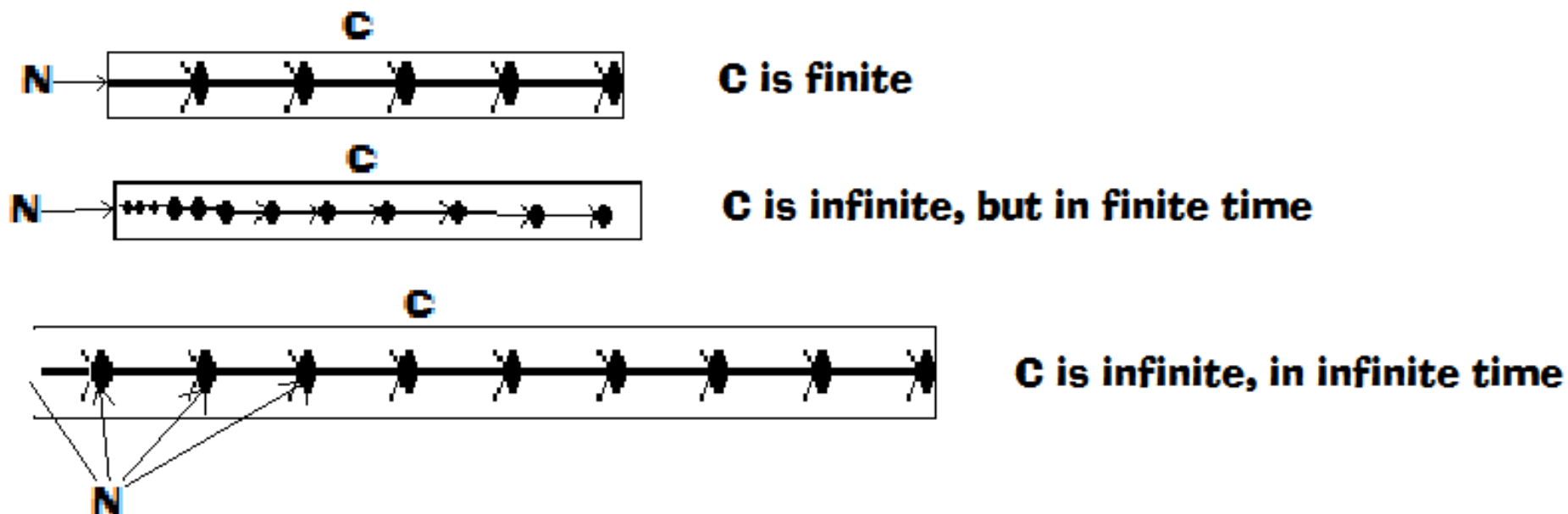
We are assuming **Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR)**: for every contingent fact **F**, there is a sufficient reason *why* **F** obtains rather than not.

PSR implies a **Causal Principle**: If a **being** or **causal chain** of beings is contingent, then that **being** or **causal chain** of beings has a cause (external to it).



3. Therefore, there is a **First Cause** of contingent beings.

# Some Pictures of the Causal Principle



**N** is the *First Cause*, and **C** is the *entire causal chain* of contingent beings.

For any causal chain **C** of contingent things, there must be a cause of **C** that's "outside" of **C**. Such a cause is what I call the *First Cause* of **C**.

# Objections

1. If everything has a cause, then what caused God?

**But**, the argument only claimed that *contingent* things have a cause.

2. Maybe the universe is *eternal*.

**But**, “it is no answer to the question, why a thing exists, to state *how long* it has existed” (Taylor).

3. PSR entails that *everything* is necessary:

a. Let **F** be the fact *that N explains the contingent facts*.

b. **F** is *not* contingent:

Why? Because if **F** is contingent, then **F** is one of *the contingent facts* that **N** explains. This leads to a **problem of circularity**: How can the fact *that N explains the contingent facts* be *itself* one of *the contingent facts*?

c. But if **F** is not contingent, then *everything* is necessary.

# Rowe's Reply

**Weaken PSR:** **WPSR** should state this: for every collection of contingent beings, there should be a causal explanation as to why those contingent beings exist rather than *others* or *none at all*.

Thus, although it's not true that *just any* contingent fact *whatsoever* has an explanation (a reason or cause), those facts about the **existence** of contingent things do have an explanation.

**A remaining worry:** If there are exceptions to **PSR**, how do we know that there are no exceptions to **WPSR**, too?

**Rowe concludes:** it may be *reasonable* to believe **WPSR**, but no one *knows* that it's true.

**Question:** Can you think of **other** versions of **PSR** that can still be used to reach the same conclusion (the conclusion that there is a **First Cause** external to **C**)?

# Stage II: Is the First Cause “God”?

N is a *necessary being* (or beings).

1. Suppose N were *not* a *necessary being*.
2. Then, N would be a *contingent being*.
3. Then, N would be part of C.
4. But N is *not* part of C (see previous slide).
5. Therefore, N is a *necessary being*.
6. Therefore, N is an *eternal being*.



# Other Features?

*Most* Leibnizian cosmological arguments stop at a Necessary Being. To identify additional features, we may consider looking to other classical arguments for God, such as an argument from design.

But *some* cosmological arguments do try to go further:

- N is **simple** and **unique**: Occam's razor.
  - N is *maximally great*?
- N is **infinite** in its basic (uncaused) attributes: Robert Koons (1997).
  - For any attribute that N has to a finite degree **D**, it's possible for N to have it to a slightly greater or lesser degree.
  - Thus, it's having an attribute to a finite degree is a contingent fact that requires a cause.
- N is a **personal agent**: Gale-Pruss (1999). Rasmussen (forthcoming).

# Is Leibniz's Cosmological Argument a *Good* Argument?

## Rowe's Answer:

An argument can be **good** even if it's not a **proof**.

An argument can be **good** even if its conclusion turns out to be false.

“Possibly, then, the theist is entitled to claim that the Cosmological Argument is an acceptable argument for theistic belief, that it shows the reasonableness of belief in God, even though it does not demonstrate the existence of God” (Rowe).

# Is Leibniz's Cosmological Argument the *Best* Cosmological Argument?

## **Probably not:**

For recent work on the argument, see

Richard Gale and Alexander Pruss, "A New Cosmological Argument," <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/ap85/papers/NewCosmo.html>

Robert Koons, "A New Look at the Cosmological Argument," <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/philosophy/faculty/koons/cosmo.pdf>

Rasmussen, "From States of Affairs to a Necessary Being," <http://www.UntamedLion.com/p1.htm>

Rasmussen, "From a Necessary being to God," <http://www.UntamedLion.com/p2.htm>