

**The Contingency Argument**  
**Philosophy of Religion**  
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1. Beginning points:
  - a. two parts: that there is a special sort of being (e.g., a self-existent being) and that that being has the theistic attributes.
  - b. Two concepts: dependent being—being whose existence is accounted for by the causal activity of other things and self-existent being—being whose existence is accounted for by its own nature.
2. Another version of the Causal Argument:
  - P1. We observe causal series in which one event causes another event which causes still another event.
  - P2. These initial observed cause is itself caused by the activity of other things.
  - P3. Such a causal series can't go back to infinity (i.e., can't be infinitely long).
  - C. Hence, there must be a first member which is not itself caused by any preceding member.

The big problem for the Causal Argument is that P3 is not obviously or demonstratively true. Hence the argument fails as a proof.
3. The Contingency Argument stated:
  1. Every being (that exists or ever did exist) is either a dependent being or a self-existent being.
  2. Not every being can be a dependent being (i.e., It is not possible that every being is dependent).
  3. Therefore, there exists a self-existent being.
4. A Consideration of the First Premise: P1 might seem trivial but it isn't. It would be if it said "Every being is either dependent or not dependent" but that's not what it says. There would seem to be three possibilities and P1 only gives us two of them. So how is P1 to be justified?
5. Enter the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) which says: There must be an explanation
  - a. of the existence of any being.
  - b. of any positive fact whatsoever.

The justification of the PSR is that to deny it is to say that some things happen or have the attributes they do for literally *no reason*. From earthquakes, to plants growing naturally in the woods, to human actions, we think that there is some kind of explanation for why things happen, exist, and have the attributes they have. Now the PSRa is the justification of P1. For if PSRa is true, then there cannot be unexplained beings. But then that leaves only two categories left and each is represented in P1. Two points about the PSR: (i) it does not claim that all (or even any) explanations are known—just that there *is* an explanation or reason for the existence of every entity and for every positive fact; and (ii) it isn't the claim that there is a grand scheme or purpose into which everything fits.

6. A Consideration of the Second Premise Why think that this premise is true?
- a. Because there can't have been an infinite series of past beings? Why not? As long as every being that exists is brought about by a dependent being, then it would seem the PSRa is satisfied. And what is the basis for ruling out the possibility of an infinite series of dependent beings?
  - b. Better reason: because PSRb tells us that there must be a reason for every fact whatsoever. But if there were only dependent beings then there would be a fact for which there was no explanation: the existence of dependent beings. In fact, there are two somewhat different facts at issue here: one is the existence of *dependent beings at all* and that other is the existence of *this particular chain of dependent beings*.
7. Objections to the PSR and the Second Premise
- i. P2 requires treating the chain of dependent beings as though it were itself a dependent being but this isn't the case and if not, then its existence doesn't require an explanation (what with its not existing and all). A collection of stamps isn't itself a stamp.  
 Reply: the friend of the Contingency Argument can grant that the universe is not itself a single, dependent "thing" but still maintain that the collection of things that make up the universe needs an explanation. For example, even if the existence of every human is explained by its parents, the question of why there are humans at all seems legitimate even though that collection isn't itself human.
  - ii. The proponent of the Contingency Argument makes the mistake of thinking that because each member of the chain must have a cause, then the entire chain must have a cause, but this is no more plausible than thinking that because each human has a mother the human race has one.  
 Reply: The Contingency Argument proponent doesn't need to make this bad inference. As long as it is a fact that there are dependent beings, PSRb tells us that there must be an explanation for this fact. If the PSR were limited to PSRa, then this would be a legitimate complaint. But it is not so it is not.
  - iii. The proponent fails to see that once you have given an explanation for each member of a collection of things then you've given the explanation for the collection. There is nothing more to be explained.  
 Reply: But the Cosmo friend will say that to explain a collection is to explain two facts: the existence of each member of the collection and the existence of those kinds of things at all. If the only thing that needed explaining were the first part, then the objector would be right. But it is not so it is not.
  - iv. The PSR is false, or at least there is no good reason to accept it.  
 Reply: two sorts of considerations that support the PSR.
    - i. It is intuitively true: self-evident (yeah, right).
    - ii. Basic presumption of reason (but so what?)