

A New Argument for a Necessary Being

Abstract

I present a new argument for a Necessary Being (that is, a necessarily existing concrete object). The argument has just a few premises and relies on a surprisingly modest causal principle—one that is logically weaker than the principle that any beginning *can* have a cause. I shall attempt to show that the argument is superior to any cosmological argument for a Necessary Being developed so far.

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I. Introduction

Many theists believe that God, like abstract objects, is a *necessarily existing* thing: a thing that exists in every possible world (or, a thing that would exist no matter what possible state of affairs were to obtain). *Unlike* abstract objects, however, God is supposed to have the causal capacity to create things: God is supposed to be *both* necessarily existent *and* powerful. A necessarily existing thing that has causal power¹ would certainly be a metaphysically interesting item to have in one's ontology, and that would be so even if we didn't consider that thing a god.² In this paper, I will present a new argument for the existence of a necessarily existing, powerful thing, or a Necessary Being for short.

Traditional arguments for a Necessary Being are typically motivated by the following question: "Why is there something rather than nothing at all?" The arguments then try to show that the most plausible answer to that question is this: things that can fail to exist must have resulted from the activity of a Being whose non-existence is *impossible*—that is, a Necessary Being. So the reason there are things at all is that at least one thing *must be*, and it is the source of explanation for things that need not be.

However, it has proven difficult to say why the existence of contingent (non-necessary) things should have an explanation: perhaps the fact that there are contingent things is a brute, unexplained fact (see, for example, Rowe 1998; Oppy 2009). There was a time when a philosopher might have replied by simply appealing to Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient

¹ Is such that it is possible for it to cause something to exist.

² For an *atheistic* version of a necessarily existing concrete object, see Smith 2001.

Reason—a principle that may be stated this way: every fact either obtains because it *must* obtain or because of external causal factors. She might have then gone on to argue that the fact that there are any contingent things is a fact that need not have obtained, and so, by Leibniz’s principle, it is in need of a cause (or causal explanation). But Leibniz’s principle is rarely appealed these days, in part because the principle is thought to imply that *everything* is necessary³ and in part because not many philosophers regard it as self-evident.

Therefore, *contemporary* proponents of a Necessary Being (Koons 1997, Gale-Pruss 1999, O’Connor 2008, to name a few) have been motivated to build their arguments upon more modest (logically weaker) causal principles. In a recent penetrating critique of cosmological arguments, Graham Oppy (2009) has argued that contemporary cosmological arguments make use of causal principles that are not evident to those who don’t already accept their conclusion. Be that as it may, I will argue that the Modest Cosmological Argument to be presented relies on a causal principle that is more modest than any causal premise used in a cosmological argument developed so far. My goal is to construct a new argument for a Necessary Being that has certain important advantages over previous ones and avoids Oppy-style criticisms.

II. The Causal Principle

I will start by presenting a simple causal principle, which I will use as a stepping stone to motivate a principle in the neighborhood that is slightly more complex, yet more modest. The stepping stone principle is as follows:

(C₁) Any beginning can have a cause.

³ For example, Peter van Inwagen points out that the conjunction of all contingent facts is sufficiently explained only if every fact is necessary or else some contingent fact explains itself (van Inwagen 1983: 202-204). An assumption here is that a *sufficient* explanation is one that *entails* its explanandum. See Pruss 2006.

The principle makes a general claim about beginnings: beginnings can have a cause.⁴ I leave the terms, ‘beginning’ and ‘cause’ undefined. I want them to mean *whatever it is* that ordinary men and woman on the street mean by those terms. But readers are free to understand these terms however they please, as I believe that nothing in the argument hinges on their exact definitions.

The causal premise is noticeably weaker than the more familiar principle that beginnings *actually* have causes: (C₁) only says that beginnings *can* have causes. One might find that plausible on the face of it. But as philosophers, we are trained to consider the potential implications of a claim before automatically accepting it, and with just a moment of reflection, we can see that (C₁) has the following questionable implication: *if* there ever began to be uncaused things, *then* the beginning of uncaused things could have a cause. Since nothing could *cause* uncaused things to begin to exist, (C₁) implies that there could never be a beginning to uncaused things. In other words, (C₁) implies that

(C₂) Beginnings *actually* have a cause.

Although some philosophers may find (C₂) plausible⁵, a number of philosophers question it for various reasons: for example, someone might think that quantum events are not ontologically determined by prior states, and further, that ontological determination is required for causation⁶; someone might think that it is possible for an agent to *begin* to perform a free action without anything causing her to do so; someone might think that the universe had a beginning but was

⁴ One may translate the principles in this argument into a standard logical form; however, I leave them in their more intuitive English forms for ease of presentation.

⁵ E.g., see Rowe 1998: 89.

⁶ Yet, here are a couple ways one might continue to think that beginnings always have causes even while accepting ontological indeterminism: (i) one might have a *probabilistic* analysis of causation; or (ii) one might think that the indeterminism in quantum mechanics is at the level of *types* of states, but that “wave-functions” are collapsed by *singular* causal actions of particles and/or minds.

not caused to begin. If such reasons or background beliefs call into question (C₂) for a person, then those reasons and beliefs should also call into question (C₁) for that person.

On the other hand, if someone has *no* reasons to doubt (C₂) and if she finds (C₁) plausible, then she might accept (C₂) on the basis of (C₁). In general, we can use plausible propositions to teach us about murkier ones. For example, we can use plausible principles of probability to learn Bayes' Theorem; we can use the axioms of arithmetic to learn Fermat's Last Sum; we can use propositions we *remember* to estimate the time of the meeting; we can use plausible propositions about what is morally right or wrong in certain cases to support general moral principles; and so on. Therefore, I think one may use (C₁) to support (C₂), if one finds (C₁) plausible and has no good reason to doubt (C₂).

However, I am not exactly interested in defending (C₁). I mention (C₁) in order to orient us to a principle that is *in the spirit of* (C₁) but does not entail (C₂). Before I present the neighboring principle, let us see if we can understand *why* (C₁) entails (C₂). Here is a reason that comes in two parts. The first part is that (C₁) applies to beginnings that involve changes in *states of affairs*: for example, (C₁) implies that if the state of affairs of *there being uncaused things* begins to obtain, then that beginning can have a cause. Here is the second part: the state of affairs of *there being uncaused things* cannot be *caused* to obtain because it can only obtain by virtue of the existence of an *uncaused* thing.⁷ Therefore, the reason (C₁) entails (C₂) is that (C₁) applies to states of affairs that can only obtain by virtue of something that lacks a cause. Let us now consider a *neighbor* of (C₁) that is not like that:

(C₃) States of affairs that *can* obtain by virtue of the existence of something that has a cause are such that if they were to begin to obtain, that beginning could have a cause.

⁷ When I say that S obtains *by virtue* of the existence of X, I mean that X's existence entails that S obtains.

This principle, though in the spirit of (C₁), has the advantage of not entailing (C₂). (C₃) allows there to be uncaused beginnings because it does not apply to the state of affairs of *there being uncaused things*. It does not apply to that state of affairs because that state of affairs *cannot* obtain by virtue of the existence of something that has a cause.

(C₃) is certainly a modest causal principle as far as causal principles go, but the principle might be made slightly more modest by restricting its scope to beginnings of the exemplification of *intrinsic properties* rather than to obtainings of states of affairs in general. That is, it might be slightly more modest to say this:

(C₄) Intrinsic properties that can be exemplified by something that has a cause are such that if any one were to begin to be exemplified, that beginning could have a cause.⁸

The motivation for (C₄) is to avoid having to worry about *gerrymandered* states of affairs, such as this one: *John's either having a cause in the actual world or not having a cause in the actual world and having no cause in every world distinct from the actual world*. The worry is not due to our knowing that the above state of affairs or any other wild or gerrymandered state of affairs poses a problem for (C₃). Indeed, I do not believe there are any known counter-examples to (C₃). Rather, the worry is that one might not be sure whether there are problematic cases.⁹ That worry may be alleviated somewhat by restricting our scope to *intrinsic* properties, since intrinsic

⁸ I quantify over properties. But if you are a nominalist, fear not: 'property' may be translated as 'predicate' or 'description' and 'is exemplified' may be translated as 'has an extension'. Nominalists are welcome to translate the premises I offer in terms that are acceptable to them.

⁹ Consider, for example, the following state of affairs, which Graham Oppy brought to my attention: *there's being a thing that belongs to a chain of caused objects that begins with an object that has no cause*. Call this state of affairs, T. T can certainly obtain by virtue of something that has a cause: T obtains by virtue of a thing that is itself part of a chain of caused objects. Now suppose that T can begin to obtain. Can T's beginning to obtain then be caused? Someone might think *not* given that T entails a causal chain that begins with *no* cause. On the other hand, someone might argue that T can be caused to obtain by an uncaused object if an object can cause itself to begin to belong to a causal chain by causing other objects. The important point is this: the very debate here may cause someone to worry about whether (C₄) applies to every gerrymandered type under the sun.

properties do not tend to be so wild or gerrymandered (though they could be complex: take, for example, being a spherical, colorful, wet, quick-rolling, slow-spinning, densely-packed ball of rubber bands).

Of course, it is difficult to give a precise account of intrinsic properties. But for the purposes of this argument, it suffices to *stipulate* the following sufficient condition:

- (I) p is intrinsic if there is no external relation r ¹⁰, such that (anyone who fully grasps p , thereby grasps r , and it is not necessary that if p is exemplified by an x , then x bears r to x or one of x 's parts).

The basic idea is that the mark of an *extrinsic* property is a relational component, with the possible exception of properties, like *having parts*, which might be considered to be both relational as well as intrinsic. A virtue of (I) is that it appears to give the right results for at least *paradigm* examples of intrinsic properties, such as being red, being triangular, being happy, or having two hands. Condition (I) also appears to be consistent with paradigm extrinsic properties, such as being to the left of something, not being to the left of something, being such that Sam loves Sue, and so on. Philosophers may quibble over whether (I) accounts well for borderline cases. But the condition suffices for our purposes, which is just to restrict our attention to properties that are less gerrymandered than paradigm extrinsic ones.¹¹

One might prefer to treat (C₄) as a defeasible principle expressed as follows:

¹⁰ By 'external relation', I mean a relation that contingently links its relata: that is, r is external just in case necessarily, for any x s that stand in r , possibly, if those x s exist, they do not stand in r .

¹¹ I hope no one will object to (I) on the grounds that I used a *mental* relation, gasps, in my definition of a supposedly mind-independent feature of properties. My purpose here is merely to restrict out attention to properties that are less conceptually gerrymandered than extrinsic properties tend to be. It is not to give an analysis of nature of intrinsicity. Moreover, it does appear that for any given *extrinsic* property, we are unable to fully grasp that property without thereby grasping a relation. We may use this fact to help us identify extrinsic and intrinsic properties, even if this fact doesn't by itself give us insight into the nature of extrinsicity or intrinsicity. (And perhaps our inability to fully grasp an extrinsic property without thereby grasping a relation *is* a clue to the ontological structure of extrinsic properties, suggesting perhaps that extrinsic properties overlap or contain relational constituents.)

(C₅) For any given property, one has a reason to think (C₄) applies to it, *unless* one has a reason to think that the property in question is an exception to the general rule.

I will offer two pieces of evidence in support of (C₄), which may also be viewed as support for (C₅). The first is based upon considering a wide variety of examples. Consider first the property of being an armchair. That property began to be exemplified when the first armchair was constructed, and of course, that beginning had a cause. Consider next an intrinsic property that has never been exemplified, but could be: being a fifteen-legged animal, say. It is plausible that *if* that property were to begin to be exemplified, that beginning could be caused: imagine an evolutionary process leading to the birth of the first fifteen-legged animal. Next, consider a property of a very small thing: being a proton; it seems that protons *could* originate by way of a cause. The principle seems true for properties of really big things, too. Consider the following list: being a planet, being a solar system, being a galaxy, being a cluster of galaxies. For each property, we have reason to believe that when it began to be exemplified, that beginning had a cause and *ipso facto* can have a cause. The principle seems to hold for a wide *variety* of properties, including these: being a lion, being cabbage, being a factory, being an umbrella, being a person, being a mermaid, being a rock, and so on. The properties in the list do not seem to have anything interesting in common, *except* that they are all intrinsic properties that can *begin to be* exemplified. A simple hypothesis that explains that data is this: *every* intrinsic property that can begin to be exemplified can be caused to be exemplified. We could put the hypothesis this way:

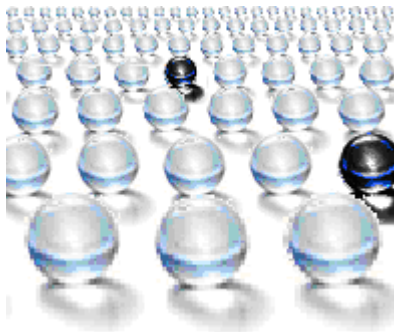
(H) *Being a beginning of an exemplification of an intrinsic property implies being possibly caused.*

The hypothesis accounts for the example cases, and it appears to be among the *simplest* (easiest to grasp) hypotheses about exemplifications of intrinsic properties that accounts for those cases.

In general, we consider simpler hypotheses to be more likely to be true (to have a greater prior probability) than more complicated ones. That is, we tend to consider simpler hypotheses to be better explanations of the data.¹² Therefore, we may consider (H) to be a good—perhaps the *best*—explanation of the empirical and conceptual data given above.

If we accept (H), then we are committed to (C₄), since (H) clearly entails (C₄): (H) says that beginnings of exemplifications of intrinsic properties always can have a cause, and (C₄) is the weaker claim that beginnings of exemplifications of intrinsic properties *that can have instances that have a cause* always can have a cause. Therefore, the first piece of evidential support for (C₄) is that it is entailed by (H), which accounts well for a variety of cases.

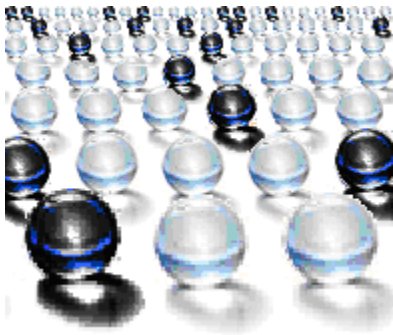
A second piece of evidence for (C₄) may be gleaned by way of *a priori* reflection. Let us abstract away from the *details* of the examples of beginnings and focus on just the idea of *beginning*—or *coming to be*. To help us focus on the nature of beginning, in abstraction from particular types of beginnings, consider first the picture below.



Each clear marble in the picture represents some intrinsic property that is not exemplified. The colored ones represent properties that are exemplified. Now, imagine that all of a sudden, *snap*:

¹² I take this to be one reason why we think that *grue* (being green before 2020 and blue afterward) is not “projectible”: that is, *if* a bunch of emeralds are known to be *grue*, we assume that every emerald is *green* (including any that might exist after the year 2020), *rather than* that every emerald is *grue*. Both hypotheses equally *fit* the data, but the seemingly simpler one strikes us as more likely than the other.

things change. Properties that were unexemplified suddenly *become* exemplified. The situation is illustrated below.



Many of the clear marbles suddenly become colored. A provocative question springs to mind: *Why?* Why did those properties become exemplified? The question seems to call out for an explanation, or at least the *possibility* of an explanation. And that is so *even if* no details about the properties in question are known. In other words, there seems to be an intuitive pull to think that beginnings of an exemplification can be caused. This provides *a priori* evidence in support of (C₄).

III. The Advantage

In this section, I will see how (C₄) compares to the four most modest causal principles of which I'm aware in the contemporary literature on cosmological arguments.¹³ Consider first a principle developed by Richard Gale and Alexander Pruss:

$$(GP) \quad \Box(\forall x ((x \text{ is a contingent [non-necessary] fact}) \rightarrow (\Diamond(x \text{ has a cause}))))).^{14}$$

(GP) applies to contingent facts in general. Consider, for example, the proposition *MT* that a monster truck popped into existence uncaused. According to (GP), if *MT* can be a fact¹⁵, then it

¹³ My presentation of the first three principles is taken largely from, "From States of Affairs to a Necessary Being," *Philosophical Studies* (forthcoming).

¹⁴ Gale and Pruss 1999: 461-76.

can have a cause. But of course, *MT* can't have a cause because the monster truck's existence is uncaused; therefore, (GP) implies that *MT* can't be a fact. By generalizing, (GP) can be shown to entail a version of Leibniz's full blown principle of sufficient reason (viz., necessarily, every contingent fact has a sufficient cause).¹⁶ (C₄), by contrast, does not entail any version of Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason. In a nutshell, (GP) entails (C₄), but (C₄) does not entail (GP); therefore, (C₄) is more modest than (GP).

Let's turn to a second example of a causal principle offered by Robert Koons:

(K) Normally, ($\forall x ((x \text{ is a wholly contingent fact}) \rightarrow (\text{the obtaining of } x \text{ is causally explained}))$), where a *wholly contingent fact* is one which contains only contingent concrete objects.¹⁷

(K) avoids some of the difficulties that (GP) faces.¹⁸ However, (K) is still stronger than (C₄): (C₄) says that certain wholly contingent facts (or events) are *possibly* caused, whereas (K) requires that every wholly contingent fact is *actually* caused.

Consider next the principle in the Kalām cosmological argument:

(W) Whatever begins to exist has a cause.

I think it is reasonable to assume that (W) is a necessary truth, *if* it is true at all.¹⁹ If (W) is a necessary truth, then (W) clearly entails (C₄): for *if* (necessarily) anything that begins to exist has

¹⁵ For ease of presentation, I use the term 'fact' to mean 'true proposition'. I don't thereby mean to imply that there are no "facts" that form a fundamental category of being distinct from propositions.

¹⁶ Gale and Pruss, 2002: 89-99.

¹⁷ Koons 1997: 193-212.

¹⁸ For example, (K) doesn't require that the fact that a Necessary Being creates contingent beings have, or even possibly have, a cause.

¹⁹ But if someone thinks (W), if true, is only a contingent truth, then she may interpret (C₄) so that if it is true, it is true in exactly the worlds in which (W) is true. The term, 'possible' can then be interpreted as 'true in a world in which (W) is true', and 'necessary' as 'true in every world in which (W) is true'. The Modest Cosmological Argument would then have the following more modest conclusion: there is a concrete thing that exists in every

a cause, *then* in any world containing any beginning B, there would be a cause (or causes) of B. On the other hand, (C₄) does not entail (W), since (C₄) allows there to be wholly uncaused beginnings of existence. Therefore, (C₄) is more modest than (W).

Turn, finally, to a causal principle that I recently developed:

(R) $\forall x (x \text{ is a type of contingent concrete object} \rightarrow \diamond(\text{the fact that there is at least one member of } x \text{ is causally explained}))$.²⁰

(R) is similar to (C₄). However, (C₄) is still more modest given that it only applies to properties/types that can *begin* to be exemplified, whereas (R) can apply to types that cannot begin to be exemplified. Suppose, for example, that there cannot be a cause of an eternal concrete object. Then the property, being eternal, would be a counter-example to (R). But that property would not be a counter-example to (C₄), since being eternal is not a property that can *begin* to be exemplified. Therefore, (C₄) is more modest than (R).

IV. The Argument

I am now ready to present the Modest Cosmological Argument (MCA). It is as follows:

1. (C₄)
2. There can begin to be contingent (non-necessary) things.
3. *Being contingent* is an intrinsic property.
4. Some contingent things can have a cause.
5. Therefore, there can be a cause of a beginning to the existence of contingent things [from (1) – (4)].
6. If (5), then there is a Necessary Being.
7. Therefore, there is a Necessary Being.

world in which (W) is true. I believe that would still be an interesting conclusion as far as conclusions of (stage I) cosmological arguments go.

²⁰ [Removed].

We already considered support for (1). Let us look at (2). It says that there can begin to be contingent things. Equivalently: the property, being contingent, can begin to be exemplified. Why think that? One reason one might think so is that it seems possible for there *not to* be contingent things: imagine a world in which all the actual contingent objects are deleted and nothing else is added.²¹ And in general, if a type of thing can *possibly not* be exemplified, then it seems possible for that type to *begin* to be exemplified. For example, we can imagine a beginning to the existence of contingent things as they explode out of an initial singularity. The claim is not that this is actually the case, only that it is broadly logically *possible* for this to be the case. I take this to be a fairly modest premise as far as non-causal premises go in cosmological arguments, and I suspect that many skeptics of a Necessary Being would accept it.

Premise (3) says that being contingent is an intrinsic property. It seems to satisfy the condition I offered for being intrinsic: one can grasp it without thereby having to grasp some external relation. Therefore, I take (3) to be uncontroversial.

Premise (4) states that some contingent things can have a cause. Take *me* for example: I am a contingent thing and my existence was caused some time ago. (If someone thinks there are *no* contingent things, then the conclusion of the argument can be reached even more swiftly: premise (1), some things have causal power; premise (2), no things are contingent; therefore, there is a Necessary Being.)

Given (3) and (4), it follows that the property of being contingent is an intrinsic property that can have instances that are caused, and given (2), it follows that the property of being contingent can begin to be exemplified. Let us call a beginning of the exemplification of the

²¹ True, it is conceptually possible that there *must be* some contingent things or other. However, this seems unlikely because it seems unlikely that for *every possible* collection of contingent things, the non-existence of the members of that collection depends upon the existence of some other contingent thing or things.

property of being contingent, ‘a Beginning of Contingency’. From (C₄), it follows that a Beginning of Contingency can be caused (or causally explained). That is, (5): there can be a cause of a beginning to the existence of contingent things.

Let us turn finally to (6): if (5), then a Necessary Being exists. Why might one think that? Here’s why. Suppose that there is no Necessary Being—a being that, by definition, would exist in all possible worlds. Then, no possible world has a Necessary Being, for if any possible world had a being that exists in *all* possible worlds, then that being would exist in the actual world, too (assuming the modal axiom, S5).²² The result is that if there is no Necessary Being, then it is *not possible* for a Necessary Being to cause a Beginning of Contingency. But neither is it possible for a *contingent* thing to cause a Beginning of Contingency: for the property, being contingent, would *already* have to be exemplified if a contingent object were to cause that property to begin to be exemplified in the first place. In other words, the exemplification of contingency would be explanatorily *prior to* the exemplification of contingency, and that’s circular. Thus, if there is no Necessary Being, then it is not possible for *anything* to cause a Beginning of Contingency, which contradicts (5). Therefore, if there is no Necessary Being, then (5) has the unfortunate vice of being *false*. By contraposition, if (5) is *not* false, then there *is* a Necessary Being. Therefore, it follows from (1) – (6) that there is a Necessary Being.

V. A Way Out

Suppose I am a naturalist. Then I will think that for any possible causal series of contingent things, one of the following will hold: (i) the series is started by an uncaused contingent thing, (ii) it regresses infinitely, or (iii) it is started by one or more Necessary Beings that are *natural*

²² If someone is skeptical of S5, then she may define ‘Necessary Being’ as a causally powerful being that exists in every world for which the accessibility relation is symmetric—that is, a powerful being that exists in every world *w*, such that were *w* actual, our world would still be possible. The conclusion that there is a Necessary Being in *that* sense would surely still be an intriguing conclusion.

objects.²³ Given that (iii) is consistent with the conclusion of MCA, MCA is strictly compatible with naturalism.²⁴ Suppose, however, that I am a naturalist who rejects (iii), perhaps because I think that natural concrete objects must be spatial things and that no spatial thing exists in every possible world. How might I respond to MCA then?

The most promising response I see is to prefer the defeasible version of (C₄), namely, (C₅), and then to offer a reason to think that the principle does not apply to a Beginning of Contingency. For example, I might reason as follows. I see that if (C₅) *did* apply to a Beginning of Contingency, then there would have to be a Necessary Being. But I have reasons to reject the existence of a Necessary Being.²⁵ Therefore, I have a reason to think that (C₅) does not apply to a Beginning of Contingency.

Here is another way to put the reply. We can list intrinsic properties from specific to general: for example, being my Honda Accord, being my Honda, being a Honda, being a car, being a vehicle, being a machine, being an artifact, being a material structure, being a contingent structure, being contingent, being a thing.²⁶ As we read the list from beginning to end, we see that (C₅) is *definitely* true for properties toward the beginning, and it might seem that any break or exception in the list would be arbitrary. However, if I have reasons to reject the existence of a Necessary Being, then those reasons can motivate me to make an exception for the property of

²³ Graham Oppy expressed these options to me.

²⁴ But see Rasmussen, "From a Necessary Being to God" (forthcoming).

²⁵ Or, as Oppy suggested to me, I have good reason to think that one should be no better than undecided about the existence of a Necessary Being. But note: this reason will have to be sophisticated enough to remain intact even after I become aware of the conceptual and empirical data offered in support of (C₄).

²⁶ (C₄) entails that any intrinsic property whose exemplification *cannot be caused* is a property that *cannot begin* to be exemplified. The property of being a thing is a good example: there cannot be a cause of the exemplification of that property because it would *already* have to be exemplified by its cause.

being contingent. The exception won't be arbitrary because I can explain why it should be made. Thus, MCA will not persuade me.

I have no objection to the above reply. However, I have three reasons for thinking that the MCA is still an important argument even if there is a rational way out. First, the way out I offered presupposes that one *actually has* reasons to reject a Necessary Being. If someone is instead undecided about the existence of a Necessary Being, then MCA may incline her to a new belief: she may come to accept the existence of a Necessary Being. Second, I don't believe it is legitimate to make an exception for the property of being contingent in the way I explained *unless* one's reasons for rejecting a Necessary Being are at least as strong as one's total evidential support for (C₄). For, if one's total support for (C₄) is weightier than one's reasons for rejecting a Necessary Being, then one will have a defeater for the belief that there is no Necessary Being. Thus, although someone may conjoin naturalism with the belief that natural objects are contingent to defeat (C₄), someone *else* may instead come to see (C₄) as a defeater for the conjunction of naturalism and the belief that natural objects are contingent. It all depends on how plausible (C₄) seems to one. Finally, if someone sees her rejection of a Necessary Being as a defeater for (C₄), then I think she will have still learned something interesting: she will have learned that not all beginnings—of exemplification of intrinsic properties that can have caused instances—must be capable of having a cause.

VI. Taking Stock

I have presented what may be the most modest cosmological argument for a Necessary Being developed so far. But what about Oppy's recent criticisms of cosmological arguments (Oppy 2009)? Might they reveal that no reasonable naturalist should be persuaded by *this* argument? I don't see how they would. Oppy's central criticism is basically this: there is no evident, neutral

reason to think that there is a non-natural (or *super*-natural) entity responsible for the existence of either the *totality*, the *causal chain*, or the *beginning* of natural objects.²⁷ But I have not argued that natural objects have their origin in a supernatural being. It is perfectly consistent with the premises of MCA that some natural objects spring into being wholly uncaused, or that some are eternal and uncaused. So, Oppy's criticisms of cosmological arguments for a supernatural cause of natural things do not seem to apply to MCA. Oppy assumes that a good cosmological argument would likely take one of the forms of arguments he criticizes, but since MCA doesn't take one of those forms, for all that Oppy says, it remains open whether MCA is in fact a good argument.

Of course, the conclusion of MCA is not that there is a *supernatural* being, but rather that there is a Necessary Being. Still, some naturalists are skeptical of a Necessary Being because they think that a necessarily existing concrete object would not be a natural object. Therefore, if the argument presented here is successful, then it may persuade some naturalists to either accept that some natural objects exist necessarily after all or else to give up naturalism. Whether this argument for a Necessary Being indeed rises to the status of a successful philosophical argument is a question I must leave for the reader to decide. I conclude just this: MCA relies on an unprecedentedly modest causal principle and escapes Oppy's recent criticisms of cosmological arguments.²⁸

²⁷ Oppy carefully supports this claim throughout his paper. One strategy he takes is to point out that causal principles that might be put forward in defense of a supernatural entity typically entail that the event of this entity's creating (causing or explaining) natural things should *itself* have a cause or explanation. And those principles that don't entail that are not themselves both evident and neutral.

²⁸ Special thanks to [removed] for their helpful feedback on earlier drafts.

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