

Arguments for the Existence of God

(BT005)

Thomas Aquinas' Five Ways

#1: Argument from Motion:

- 1) A thing cannot be moved unless it has a potential for movement.
- 2) If its potential for movement is to be actualized, something actual must set it in motion.
- 3) Nothing can set itself in motion, since it is impossible to be simultaneously actual and not actual at the same time (i.e., hot and not hot, sitting and not sitting, moving and not moving, etc.).
- 4) If that by which something is moved is in turn itself moved, as in the case in all our experience, then a third mover must be posited, and so on ad infinitum.
- 5) An infinite regress of these moved movers, however, is unintelligible
- 6) Therefore, there must be a first Unmoved Mover, whose existence is necessary. We call that being God.

Summary: Since we observe things in motion, and since each motion is caused by another, there must be an Unmoved Mover that set the first thing in motion.

#2: Argument from an Efficient Cause (Cosmological Argument):

- 1) Everything we encounter in the natural order is an effect of a cause.
- 2) Nothing in the natural order can be the cause of itself. To meet the conditions necessary to be the cause of itself, a thing would have to exist prior to itself, which is an absurdity.
- 3) It is not reasonable to accept the idea of an infinite regression of efficient causes in the natural order; an ultimate grounding is required.
- 4) Hence, there must be a first Efficient or Uncaused Cause, which is the ultimate and necessary source of all cause-and-effect relationships. This is God.

Summary: Since everything in the natural order is the effect of a cause, and since an infinite regression of causes is illogical, there must be an ultimate first Uncaused Cause that caused all effects. This is God.

#3: Argument from Quality of Possession:

- 1) When we judge things comparatively with respect to positive characteristics - such as truth, goodness or like properties - we do so in terms of something that is the maximum of the quality of perfection in question.
- 2) That which is the maximum of the quality in question must be the cause of the quality in all the things that possess it (by the way, this sounds a lot like Plato's concept of Forms, Ideas, Prototypes and Essences).
- 3) Contingent possession of a quality of any kind (goodness, hotness, truthfulness, etc.) requires some other being that possesses it essentially (as a part of its essence).
- 4) Therefore, we must acknowledge one ultimate source of all goodness, truth, and being, and this is God.

Summary: Since each quality (such as truth or goodness) must be measured against a standard of perfection of that quality, there must be a being, God, that possesses that quality perfectly.

#4: Argument from Necessary and Contingent Existence:

- 1) In the natural order, things come into existence and they perish. Such beings are contingent.
- 2) Anything that is contingent, and therefore capable of nonexistence, has also come into being and hence at some point did not exist.
- 3) Therefore, there must have been a time when nothing was in existence
- 4) But, if this is true, nothing would exist because nonexistent brings cannot generate their own existence.
- 5) But clearly things do exist now, which means there must be a being that exists necessarily and caused all other beings to exist.
- 6) Therefore, we must acknowledge the existence of one necessary being, God, that causes the existence of all others, but is not itself caused.

Summary: The natural order is full of contingent beings that at one time did not exist. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that at one time nothing existed. Since no being can create itself, there must be a necessary being, God, which caused all others to exist.

#5: Argument from Design (Teleological Argument):

- 1) In the natural order, even things that lack knowledge (natural bodies, for example) still function in patterned and ordered ways.
- 2) This occurs with such regularity that it is absurd to think that it is due to chance.
- 3) The presence of pattern or design in that which lacks knowledge points to the reality of a transcendent directing intelligence (that which lacks knowledge cannot be said to move itself toward the fulfillment of a purpose).
- 4) Some intelligent being must exist through whom "all natural beings are directed to their end; and this being we call God."

Summary: The order and design of things without knowledge demands an intelligent designer, God, who directs them toward their appointed purpose or end.

St. Augustine's Argument from Truth

- 1) There are some necessary and unchangeable truths (ideas), i.e., $1 + 3 = 4$.
- 2) But a finite mind, such as mine, is not unchangeable.
- 3) An unchangeable truth cannot be based in a changeable, finite mind.
- 4) Therefore, there must be an infinite, unchangeable mind (that is, God) which is the basis for all unchangeable truths.

Rene Descartes' Argument from the Perfect Idea

- 1) I have imperfect ideas (for example, *I doubt*).
- 2) But one cannot know the imperfect unless he knows the perfect.
- 3) However, an imperfect mind cannot be the source of a perfect idea.
- 4) Therefore, there must be a perfect mind, which is the source of my idea of perfection.

Thomas Aquinas' Cosmological Argument (simplified)

- 1) Finite, changing things exist.
- 2) Every finite, changing thing must be caused by another.
- 3) There cannot be an infinite regress of causes.
- 4) Thus, there must be a first Uncaused Cause of every finite, changing thing that exists.

Aquinas' Argument from Necessary & Contingent Existence (simplified)

- 1) Every effect, by its very nature, needs a cause.
- 2) Every contingent being is an effect.
- 3) Hence, every contingent being is caused.
- 4) Therefore, it follows that the cause of every contingent being is not contingent, but Necessary (that is, God).

St. Anselm's Ontological Argument – 11th Century (radically simplified)

- 1) God is by definition the most perfect Being conceivable.
- 2) The most perfect Being conceivable cannot lack anything.
- 3) But if God did not exist, He would lack existence.
- 4) Therefore, God must exist.¹

Charles Hartshorne's Argument from the Idea of a Necessary Being

- 1) The existence of a Necessary Being must be either:
 - a) an impossible existence,
 - b) a possible, but not necessary existence, or
 - c) a necessary existence.
- 2) It cannot be impossible, since it is not a contradiction in terms to affirm 'a Necessary Being necessarily exists'
- 3) It is a contradiction to affirm that a Necessary Being (one that cannot not exist) is a possible being (one that can not exist).
- 4) Therefore, a Necessary Being necessarily does exist.

The Anthropological Argument

- 1) Man is moral, intelligent and living.
- 2) All morality, intelligence and life must have their base in some being who defines morality and intelligence, and who gives life.
- 3) This being is God (cf. **Psalm 94:9, Acts 17:28-29**).

¹ Read the full text of St. Anselm's argument in the appendix to this study.

Immanuel Kant's Argument from Morality

- 1) Introduction: Immanuel Kant rejected not only the ontological argument but the teleological and cosmological arguments as well, based on his theory that reason is too limited to know anything beyond human experience. However, he did argue that religion could be established as presupposed by the workings of morality in the human mind ("practical reason").
- 2) God's existence is a necessary presupposition of there being any moral judgments that are objective, that go beyond mere relativistic moral preferences.
- 3) Such judgments require standards external to any human mind--that is, they presume God's mind.

Sources

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The Ontological Argument of St. Anselm

(Proslogion)

*Here it is: the most famous, the most mystifying,
the most outrageous and irritating philosophical argument of all time!
Read it carefully and see what you think.*

And so, Lord, you who give understanding to faith, give me, so far as you know it to be profitable, to understand that you are as we believe; and that you are that which we believe. And, indeed, we believe that you are a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Or is there no such nature, since the fool says in his heart, there is no God? (Psalms 14:1). But, at any rate, this very fool, when he hears of this being of which I speak - a being than which nothing greater can be conceived - understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his understanding; although he does not understand it to exist.

For, it is one thing for an object to be in the understanding, and another to understand that the object exists. When a painter first conceives of what he will afterwards perform, he has it in his understanding, but he does not yet understand it to be, because he has not yet performed it. But after he has made the painting, he both has it in his understanding, and he understands that it exists, because he has made it.

Hence, even the fool is convinced that something exists in the understanding, at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived. For, when he hears of this, he understands it. And whatever is understood, exists in the understanding. And, assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater.

Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.

And it assuredly exists so truly, that it cannot be conceived not to exist. For, it is possible to conceive of a being which cannot be conceived not to exist; and this is greater than one which can be conceived not to exist. Hence, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, can be conceived not to exist, it is not that, than which nothing greater can be conceived. But this is an irreconcilable contradiction. There is, then, so truly a being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist; and this being thou art, o Lord, our God.

So truly, therefore, do you exist, o Lord, my God, that you cannot be conceived not to exist; and rightly. For, if a mind could conceive of a being better than you, the creature would rise above the Creator; and this is most absurd. And, indeed, whatever else there is, except you alone, can be conceived not to exist. To you alone, therefore, it belongs to exist more truly than all other beings, and hence in a higher degree than all others. For, whatever else exists does not exist so truly, and hence in a less degree it belongs to it to exist. Why, then, has the fool said in his heart, there is no God (Psalms 14:1), since it is so evident, to a rational mind, that you do exist in the highest degree of all? Why, except that he is dull and a fool?