

Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*

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Theology

- According to Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), *Theology* is the study of God:
 - Whether God exists,
 - What God's attributes are,
 - How God is related to created things.
- There are two ways in which theology might be conducted:
 - Through the authority of divine revelation,
 - Through the use of natural reason.
- If one rejects divine revelation, then articles of faith cannot be used as first principles of theology.
- So natural reason is useful in theology.

How To Prove That God Exists

- The existence of God is not self-evident to human reason.
 - If it were, then we would know that God exists from his essence,
 - But we do not know God's essence.
- The existence of God is not known through an understanding of God as that than which nothing greater can be thought.
 - Understanding that than which nothing greater can be thought implies only that it exists in the mind.
 - For a proof that God exists, it must be conceded that that than which nothing greater can be thought exists in reality.
 - But someone denying the existence of God will not concede this point.
- The only remaining way to prove God's existence is by showing that God is the cause of effects which are more evident to human reason than is the existence of God.

The Five Ways

- Aquinas presented five arguments from natural effects to the existence of a divine cause.
- These arguments are known as the “five ways” of proving God’s existence.
- The model for these arguments is found in the metaphysics of Aristotle.
- We will focus on two of the arguments and not cover the arguments from:
 - Motion,
 - Contingency,
 - Gradation.

The Argument from Causality

- The basic idea of the argument from causality is that there must be a first efficient cause:
 - An efficient cause is an agent that brings about a change in something else.
1. Nothing can be prior to itself.
 2. An efficient cause in nature is prior to its effect.
 3. So, no efficient cause in nature is the effect of itself. [1,2]
 4. For any effect x in nature, x has an efficient cause.
 5. So, for any effect x in nature, there is an efficient cause y that is distinct from x. [3,4]
 6. If there is no efficient cause that is not an effect, then there is an infinite chain of efficient causes. [5]
 7. There is no infinite chain of efficient causes.
 8. So, there is an efficient cause of an effect in nature that is not itself an effect. [6,7]
 9. An efficient cause that is not an effect is God.
 10. So, God exists. [8,9]

The Argument from Governance

1. Natural bodies act so as to obtain the best results. [Aristotle]
2. Acting so as to obtain the best results is acting on the basis of knowledge of the end. [*Contra* Aristotle]
3. So, natural bodies act on the basis of knowledge. [1,2]
4. Many natural bodies act on the basis of knowledge without having knowledge. [3, observation]
5. If a natural body acts on the basis of knowledge without having knowledge, then it is directed by a being that has such knowledge.
6. So, many natural bodies are directed by a being that has knowledge of their ends. [4,5]
7. A being who directs natural bodies toward their ends is God.
8. So, many natural bodies are directed toward their ends by God. [6,7]
9. So, God exists. [8]

Limitations of the Arguments

- The arguments from natural effect to divine cause have an inherent limitation.
- The effects are finite, while God is infinite.
- So the role of God as cause in each of the arguments does not yield perfect knowledge of God's essence.
- Together, the five arguments (if successful) only establish the existence of beings with the following features:
 - A mover that is not moved,
 - A cause that is not an effect,
 - Unable not to exist,
 - Possessing a maximum of goodness and all perfections,
 - Director of all natural things.
- Hume in the eighteenth century exposed a limitation of the arguments not acknowledged by Aquinas.
 - A unitary God *would* explain all the effects, but several different beings as causes *could* explain them.

The Argument from Evil

- One of the chief problems with the notion of a perfectly good and powerful God is how evil can exist.
- Aquinas formulates the problem in this way:
 1. If God exists, then goodness is infinite, and there is no evil in the world.
 2. There is evil in the world.
 3. So, God does not exist. [1,2]
- One response, given by followers of Plato, is to deny the second premise.
 - Evil has no being, but instead is a “privation” or lack of being.
- Aquinas allows that the second premise is true, so he denies the truth of the first premise.
- Aquinas claims that God allows evil in order to produce the good.
 - This strategy in philosophy is called “compatibilism.”
 - In this case, the existence of God and of evil are claimed to be compatible with each other.