

Philosophy of God

The five arguments and attributes of God according to St. Thomas Aquinas



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Philosophy Of God - 415



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MAN'S NATURAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

- “The existence of God is one which can be arrived at only through a process of assiduous and careful reasoning”.

- “Man, simply by reason of who he is, a creature made in the image and likeness of God, is in constant possession of a firm knowledge of God’s existence. It is a knowledge with which he is born , and which he can never lose”.

- “Man’s innate knowledge of God, is a confused, obscure knowledge. It is implicit rather than explicit. He knows he desires to be happy, but he does not know that God is the source and the object of that desire”.

- St. Thomas’ Aquinas claims that God’s essence is unknowable since it infinitely surpasses the powers of the human mind.

- Because God is absolutely prior to everything that exists, he cannot be known on the basis of something which causes him. God simply has cause. If there is a God, everything that exists is because of Him.

ARGUMENT FROM MOTION

- By motion St. Thomas' means any kind of becoming or change. Such change or becoming may be occasioned from within the thing itself or from outside of it. He says: “Nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality except by something in a state of actuality”.
- To be in a state of potency, as wood is for heat, means to have an aptitude for greater actuality. Motion of change is that process of coming-to-be where before there was not. Thus the sleeping mind is in potency for active thought as mud is for bricks and catgut for violin strings.
- St. Thomas says: “It is necessary to arrive at first mover, moved by no other, and this everyone understands to be God”.

There must be a first mover. Therefore, there is God.

ARGUMENT FROM CAUSALITY

- In his second way St. Thomas argues for God's existence on the basis of efficient causality. We encountered this notion in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* where it is discussed along with the three other causes, namely, formal, material and final. *An efficient cause is that by which an effect is produced.*
- A final cause is that for the sake of which an effect is produced. For Aristotle the immovable mover moves things by eliciting their love, *"the final cause then moves things because they are themselves moved"*.
- St. Thomas appeals to efficient causality with the claim that a thing cannot be the efficient with the claim that a thing cannot be efficient cause itself. If it were, it would have to pre-exist itself which is metaphysical impossible. In a series of efficient causes, intermediate causes resulting in an ultimate cause demand the acknowledgement of a first cause inaugurating the series. An infinity of causes makes the recognition of intermediate or ultimate causes impossible. We must logically deduce the existence of a first uncaused Cause. Says St. Thomas, *"Therefore, it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives name of God"*.

ARGUMENT FROM CONTINGENCY

- St. Thomas' third way derives from our experiences of the world's contingency. In concrete world, contingency manifests itself in the things coming to be and passing away. Thomas says "We find in nature things that are possible to be and not be since they are found to be generated and to be corrupted, and consequently, they are possible to be and not to be".

The fragility of their existence shows that it is impossible for them always to exist. The assumption, therefore, is not unwarranted that at some time nothing was in existence. But if this were the case, nothing would exist even now owing to the lack of something which bestows existence. St. Thomas says, "Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary".

A necessary being does not derive its existence from another as possible being does. Rather a Necessary Being possesses existence in and of itself. St. Thomas rules out an infinity of necessary beings having their necessity caused by others. The third argument probes the very existence of things to deduce God's existence. Implicit in the argument is a principle fundamental to St. Thomas' whole philosophy, namely, the real distinction between essence and existence.



ARGUMENT FROM CONTINGENCY

- For St. Thomas and the Scholastic, God alone possesses existence in Himself so that his essence is His existence, The existence of all other beings is, therefore, derivative. Recognizing this principle we can understand why Thomas argument from contingency does not stand or fall on the basis of his assuming that at one time nothing existed. Even an eternity of beings passing in and out of existence is derived. St. Thomas' would have ask from whom? From what? His answer: *This all men speak of God.*



ARGUMENT FROM DEGREES OF PERFECTION

St. Thomas appeal to a maximum or perfect standard by which the good, noble, true and the like are measured, we have intimations of Plato's forms. St Thomas says, "There is something which is truest, something best, something noblest, and consequently, something which is utterly being.

St. Thomas founds his argument on the fact that being admits of degrees, either more or less. As Aristotle teaches, the maximum or most perfect being in any genus lends its name to the others therein. Since a thing is not known except through its cause, the maximum within a genus is credited with being the cause of others.

"The ultimate cause of perfection must itself be perfect; it cannot receive its perfection from another, but must be its own perfection: it is self-existing being and perfection" (*History of Philosophy II, Westminster: Newman Press, 1957, p. 334*)

St. Thomas concludes his fourth argument thus, "Therefore there must be also something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness and every other perfection; and this we call God".

ARGUMENT FROM TELEOLOGY

Teleological argument - is an argument which asserts that there is purpose or finality in the world, that nothing ever happens merely by chance, and that no complete account final reference to an all-wise God.

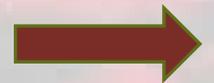
St. Thomas explains how final causality is the end or goal toward which creatures are drawn implies and ultimate final cause. Moreover, the purposeful design according to which creatures behave bespeaks the guiding hand of some intelligent being. St. Thomas clichés his argument , “Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.

“It is impossible for contrasting and incongruous things to be joined harmoniously is a single order other than through the agency of a being that attributes to every and to each thing its tendency toward a determined end”

St. Thomas concludes by saying, *“There must therefore be some being by whose providence the world is governed. This we call God”*.

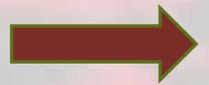
ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

- Simplicity of God: *“There are no parts in God, even if that term were to be understood as referring to purely spiritual entities. There are no real distinction in God, other than those that pertain to the Blessed Trinity.”* God is simply simple because He in his own nature. He is the purest and the simplest of all.
- The perfection of God: *“There is nothing whatever lacking in God”.* As St. Thomas well expresses God is existence itself. God’s perfection can be seen in everything since the very moment of creation until now. His designs of love are infinitely perfect. God the source of all being, has made us man similar to Himself by bringing him into the realm of being; through this we can come to appreciate God’s perfection as we have been created in his very image and likeness.
- The goodness of God: McInerny refers to God’s goodness firstly by bringing forth St. Thomas’ reminder of the metaphysical principle that being and goodness are convertible. Goodness is one of the transcendental attributes of being. Everything that is good we know that comes from the hand of God therefore, He is called the supreme good. God is in himself the first and final cause of creatures simply because He is all good and almighty.



ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

- The infinity of God: McNerny highlights how God is infinite in the sense that He is utterly complete. No addition to His being is in a way possible. The infinity of God is without limits because He is Himself the inexhaustible source of all riches of being. As an end God is the only actually existing infinite being.
- The ubiquity of God: McNerny makes it clear how God is not a material body, meaning he has no extension. He makes sure we can understand the truth of God's ubiquity which consist in as St. Thomas says *"God is said to be in his creation as an agent is present in that upon which he exercises his agency."* God is continuously operating continuously in all things. In summary God's ubiquity means that His presence is in no way confined or limited, as is the case in the common understanding of presence, for to be "in place" as the phrase is normally taken, implies being confined for the present particular place.
- The immutability of God: McNerny explains how when we say that God is immutable we mean that he is utterly unchanging in every aspect of His being. Beautifully he continues by saying how although God acts, He is act, but he doesn't change.



ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

- The eternity of God: He is simply eternal his has no beginning and no end he simply is and will always be. *“God is one in his perfect unity. But he is also one in the sense the he is unique, which imply to say that there is only one God”*. McInerny highlights, “Eternity is duration that is associated more precisely, is one and the same with – the unqualified perfect permanency of being which is that of God and God alone”.
- The unity of God: McInerny explains how, *“God is one in that He is perfect unity. But he is also one in the sense that He is unique, which is simply to say that there is only one God. The oneness or unity of God, follows necessarily from his simplicity. Furthermore, and as implied in what we mean when we say that God is His very nature meaning essence and existence are one in Him. The unity of the universe is a testament to the unity of God. There can only be one God, otherwise there would be chaos, not cosmos”*.

SOME THOUGHTS OF ST. THOMAS OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

“The knowledge of God is the cause of things. For the knowledge of God is to all creatures what the knowledge of the artificer is to things made by his art”.

“Good can exist without evil, whereas evil cannot exist without good.”

“Since God is subsistent being in itself, it is not possible that any perfection relating to being be lacking in Him”.

“All those perfections which in themselves are diverse and even opposed to one another, preexist in God in perfect unity, without the least detriment to His simplicity”.

“God is in all things as containing them”.

“Just as the soul is, in its totality in every part of the body, so God, in His totality, is in each and every thing that exist”.

"Grant me, O Lord my God, a mind to know you, a heart to seek you, wisdom to find you, conduct pleasing to you, faithful perseverance in waiting for you, and a hope of finally embracing you."

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