



SUMMA THEOLOGICA *(in part)*

by:
St. Thomas of Aquinas (1225-1274)

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Part One, Question 2: *The Existence of God*; Third Article – *Whether God Exists?*

Objection 1: It seems that God does not exist; because if one of two contraries be infinite, the other would be altogether destroyed. But the word ‘God’ means that He is infinite goodness. If, therefore, God existed, there would be no evil discoverable; but there is evil in the world. Therefore, God does not exist.

Objection 2: Further, it is superfluous to suppose that what can be accounted for by a few principles has been produced by many. But it seems that everything we see in the world can be accounted for by other principles, supposing God did not exist. For all natural things can be reduced to one principle which is nature; and all voluntary things can be reduced to one principle which is human reason, or will. Therefore, there is no need to suppose God's existence.

On the contrary—It is said in the person of God: "I am Who am" (Ex. 3:14).

I answer that: The existence of God can be *proved* in five ways.

The first and more manifest way is the argument from motion:

- 1) It is certain, and evident to our *senses*, that in the world some things are in motion.
- 2) Now, whatever is in motion is put in motion by [something else].
- 3) [This is true because] nothing can be in motion except it is *in [a state of] potentiality* to that towards which it is *in motion*.

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I have made additions and clarifications in translation (noted with brackets) and have added explanatory footnotes.

- 4) [But] a thing moves [when] it is in [a state of actuality]. For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from [a state of] potentiality to [a state of] actuality. But nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality. Thus, that which is *actually* hot—[like] fire—makes wood—which is [only] *potentially* hot—to be actually hot; thereby [it] moves and changes it.
- 5) Now it is [impossible] that the same thing should be [at the same time] in [a state of] actuality *and* potentiality in [reference to the same thing], but only in [reference to different things]. For what is *actually* hot cannot simultaneously be potentially hot; but it is simultaneously potentially *cold*.
- 6) It is impossible, therefore, that in the same respect and in the same way a thing should be *both* mover and moved, i.e., that it [c]ould move itself.
- 7) Therefore, whatever is in motion must be put in motion by [something else]. [And], if that [which puts it in motion is itself in motion], then [it] also must be put in motion by [something else], and so on.
- 8) But, this cannot go on to infinity; because [if it did], there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover—[because secondary] movers only move [if] they are put in motion by [a primary] mover; e.g., as [a] staff moves only because it is put in motion by [a] hand.

Conclusion: Therefore, it is necessary to arrive at a *first mover*, [which is] put in motion by nothing else; and *this* everyone understands to be ‘God’.

The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause:

- 1) In the world of [material objects] we find there is an order of efficient causes.²
- 2) There is no case known—neither is it, indeed, possible—in which a thing is the efficient cause of itself (for [if] so, it would be prior to itself, which is impossible).
- 3) Now, [among] efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity—[that is] because in all efficient causes following [an] order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the [last] cause—whether the intermediate cause be several, or only one.
- 4) Now, to take away [a] cause is [also] to take away the effect. Therefore, if there [is] no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause(s).

² The notion of “efficient cause” is taken from Aristotle’s theory of causation. He holds that every material event has four distinct causes (e.g., the material, formal, final, and efficient cause) and that complete knowledge of an event requires an understanding of each. Aristotle, *Physics* 194 b17-20, *Posterior Analytics* 71 b9-11, 94 a20.

- 5) But *if*—[among] efficient causes—it [*were*] possible to go on to infinity, [then] there [would] be no first efficient cause; [and *if there were no first efficient cause*], neither [would] there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false.

Conclusion: Therefore, it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of ‘God’.

*The third way is taken from **necessity and [contingency]**, and runs thus:*

- 1) [In nature we find] things that are [capable of existing] and [of not existing],³ since they are found to be [created], and [destroyed], and consequently, they are [capable of] being *and* not [being].
- 2) But, it is impossible for these [these kinds of things] to *always* exist, for [these kinds of things fail to exist at some time].
- 3) Therefore, if everything [were contingent], then at one time there could have been nothing in existence [at all].
- 4) Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by [the agency of] something already existing [i.e., you can’t get something from nothing]. Therefore, if at one time nothing [existed], it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus, even now, nothing would [exist]—which is absurd.
- 5) Therefore, not all beings are [contingent], but there must exist something which is necessary.
- 6) But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not.
- 7) Now, it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another—as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes.

Conclusion: Therefore, we cannot but postulate the existence of some being [which is necessary in itself], and not receiving its [necessity] from another [thing], but rather [it is the cause of necessity] in other [things]. *This* all men speak of as ‘God’.

*The fourth way is taken from the **[degrees of excellence]** to be found in things:*

- 1) Among beings there are some more, and some, less good, true, noble and the like.
- 2) But [the terms] ‘more’ and ‘less’ are predicated of different things, [because] they resemble in different ways something which is the [greatest]—as a thing is said to be

³ The technical term for things which have temporal existence (i.e., things that come and go) is ‘contingent’. The opposite of contingent existence is *necessary* existence. A thing exists necessarily if *it cannot fail* to exist.

‘hotter’ [because] it more nearly resembles that which is *hottest*. [In the same way we say] there is something which is *truest*, something *best*, something *noblest* and, consequently, something which is [greatest in] being—for those things that are greatest in truth are [also] greatest in being, as it is written in *Metaphysics*, Book II (by Aristotle).

- 3) Now the [greatest] in any genus is the cause of all [things] in that genus; as fire, which is the [greatest in] heat, is the cause of all hot things.

Conclusion: Therefore, there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call ‘God’.

*The fifth way is taken from the **governance of the world**:*

- 1) We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for [a purpose], and this is evident from their always acting, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result.
- 2) Hence, it is plain that [it is not by accident], but design, [that] they achieve their end. Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it [is] directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence—as the arrow is shot to its [target] by the archer.

Conclusion: Therefore, some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call ‘God’.

Reply to Objection 1: As Augustine says (*Enchiridion* xi): "Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil to exist in His works, *unless* His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil." This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist, and out of it produce good.

Reply Objection 2: Since nature works for a determinate end under the direction of a higher agent, whatever is done by nature must be traced back to God, as to its first cause. So also whatever is done voluntarily must also be traced back to some higher cause other than human reason or will, since these can change or fail; for all things that are changeable and capable of defect must be traced back to an immovable and self-necessary first principle, as was shown in the [the third and fifth argument above].