

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-7 - 1274)

- Studied the writings of *Aristotle* with Albertus Magnus and became a life-long commentator on them
- Most important work: *The Summa Theologica*
- Canonized in 1323



- Two methods of coming to know something about God:
 - (i) **Faith** (or Revelation) may provide the believer with knowledge of the existence and nature of God and our relation to him—e.g., some of the attributes of God, how we ought to worship God and live according to God’s will, etc.
 - (ii) **Reason**, which can provide only the knowledge that God exists.

The First Way: The Argument from Change

- As our senses show to be true, some things in the world change (e.g., children become adults, acorns change into oak trees, things become hot which were once cold, etc.).
- Those things that do change are always changed by something else.
 - For a thing to change in some respect, it must have the *potential* to change in that respect, and it must be changed in that respect by something else that is itself *actual* in that respect.

- “To cause change is just to draw something out of potentiality into actuality, and this can only be done by something that is in actuality” (pp. 80-81)
 - Wood example: “Something actually hot, like fire, makes wood which is potentially hot become actually hot, thereby changing and altering that wood” (p. 90)

- A thing cannot be simultaneously potentially *F* and actually *F* (e.g., something can't be both potentially hot and actually hot)
- It is therefore impossible for something to both undergo a change (e.g., becoming hot) and to be the cause of that change (its becoming hot).
- “Therefore, whatever undergoes a change must be changed by another thing” (p. 90)

- “And, if this other thing undergoes change, it also must be changed by something else, and so on”
- But this series of changes cannot go back to infinity.
 - If it did, then there wouldn’t be a first or primary cause of change and, therefore, no secondary ones either.
 - “...something can be a secondary cause of change only if it is changed by a primary cause...” (p. 90)
 - Stick example: “a stick moves something only if a hand moves the stick”

- Therefore, there must have been some first or primary cause of change that wasn't itself changed by anything else. God is this first cause of change.

A Closer Look at the Argument

- A general principle about change
 - (PC): A thing only undergoes a change inasmuch as it has a potentiality for being that into which it changes, while a thing only causes change inasmuch as it is actual.
 - Change consists in going from being potentially F to being actually F.
 - If a thing changes by going from being potentially F to being actually F, it must be caused to do so by something which is already actually F.

A crucial assumption

- (A): Nothing can be both potentially F and actually F at one and the same time.
- **It follows from (PC) and (A) that it is impossible for something that undergoes a change to be the cause that very change; *self-caused change* is impossible.**

For next time:

John Perry, “Dialogue on God, Evil, and the
Existence of God,” pp. 133-156

A more formal statement of the argument

- 1. Some things in the world change. (From empirical observation.)
- 2. Whatever changes is caused to change by some other thing (and this other thing is changed by some other thing, and so on). (By (PC) and (A).)
- 3. But the series of changes cannot go back to infinity. (By appeal to primary/secondary cause distinction.)
- 4. Thus, there must have been a first cause of change. (By 2, 3.)

- 5. God is the only being that could be the first cause of change.
- 6. Therefore, God exists.

Objections to the Argument from Change

- **Objection 1**: The second premise of the argument appears to be in direct conflict with the conclusion of the argument (i.e., the notion of God as something that is a cause of change but is itself unchanged and unchangeable).
 - The process of causing a change is surely a kind of change itself (i.e., going from being a *potential* cause of change to an *actual* cause of change).

- **Objection 2**: The third premise (that the series of changes cannot go back to infinity) is false.
 - An infinite series of changes does not include a single primary cause of change the absence of which eliminates the possibility of the existence of all other causes of change.
 - Rather, what explains why A caused B to change is C, and what explains C's changing is something else, D, and so on *ad infinitum*.
 - If the series is infinite, we need not posit a first cause of change.

Aquinas's Third Way: the Argument from Necessity

- The Third Way of proving God's existence concerns "facts about possibility and necessity."
 - It concerns facts about the nature of possible (or contingent) beings and necessary beings.

- **Contingent individual**: any individual that is “generated” (i.e., comes into existence) and “corrupted” (goes out of existence). Any individual that can fail to exist and depends on another thing for its existence is a contingent individual.
- **Necessary individual**: any individual that is not generable or corruptible. Any individual that cannot fail to exist and depends on no further thing for its existence is a necessary individual.
- Every individual is either a contingent individual or a necessary individual.

- **Principle of No Creation *Ex Nihilo* (ExN):**

There is not any individual that can be generated (or brought into existence) from nothing.

- For every individual x that is generated, there exists another individual y that caused x to be generated.
- Something can't come from nothing.

- We find in the world that there exist contingent entities (e.g., humans, animals of all sorts, rocks, plants, and even Michael Jackson).
- But it's impossible that *every* being that exists is a contingent individual.
 - Because “if something *can* fail to exist, there must have been a time at which it *has* failed to exist” (p. 81)

- “Therefore, if everything could fail to exist, there would have been a time at which nothing existed” (p. 81)
- But there couldn’t have been a time at which nothing existed.
 - Because if there was such a time, then nothing would exist in the world now. (Principle of No Creation *Ex Nihilo*)
 - We’ve already observed that contingent individuals do exist in the world now.

- Therefore, not every individual that exists is a contingent individual.

- Therefore, there exists a necessary being.
 - “And this everyone understands to be God” (p. 81)

 - Therefore, God exists.

A restatement of the argument as a *reductio*

P1. All individuals are contingent. (Assumption for
reductio)

P2. There exist some contingent individuals. (By empirical
evidence)

P3. For all individuals x , if x is contingent, then there was
some time t at which x failed to exist. (By def. of
contingent individual)

C1. So, if *all* individuals are contingent, then there is some
time t at which nothing existed. (By P1, P3)

C2. So, there is some time t at which nothing existed. (By
P1, C1, *modus ponens*)

The argument goes on . . .

P4. But it is not possible that there is some time t at which nothing existed.

(i) If there was such a time t , then no contingent individuals would now exist. (By (ExN))

(ii) But there do now exist contingent individuals.
(By P2)

C3. So there is some time t at which nothing existed *and* it is not the case that there is some time t at which nothing existed. ***Contradiction*** (By C2, P4)

. . . and on . . .

C4. Thus, it is not the case that all individuals are contingent; there is at least one individual for which there is no time at which it fails to exist. (By C3, Law of Non-Contradiction; end of *reductio*)

(a) This individual is a necessary individual. (By def. of necessary being)

(b) Everyone understands this being to be God.

C5. Therefore, God exists.

Objections to Aquinas's The Third Way

- Objection 1: The final step in the argument, from the claim that there exists a necessary being to the claim that God (a *unique* necessary being) exists, is *fallacious*.
 - The first of these claims does *not* preclude the possibility of there being many necessary beings.
 - So, the argument does not establish the existence of a unique necessary being (i.e., God).

- Objection 2 (aka The Knockout Punch):
 - Aquinas seems to think that he can pass from the premise that *every contingent being has or will to fail exist at some time* to the conclusion that *there is some time at which every contingent being fails to exist*.
 - But this inference is patently fallacious. It's an example of what logicians call the *quantifier shift fallacy*.

- Examples of the quantifier shift fallacy:

Ex 1:

For every human being, x , there is some y who is the mother of x .

Thus, there is some y , such that for every human being, x , y is the mother of x .

Ex 2:

Everybody loves someone.

Thus, there is someone whom everybody loves.

Aquinas's Fifth Way: the Teleological Argument

- Also known as *the Argument from Design*.
- 'Telos' is Greek for *purpose* or *end*.
- Teleology is the study of the purposes or ends of objects in the natural world.

- We observe that objects in the world, even if they lack consciousness and intelligence, act or behave in purposeful ways (i.e., they act towards some end).
 - E.g., a heart's purpose is to pump blood; a toaster's purpose is to toast things; a carburetor's purpose is to mix air and fuel for an internal combustion engine, etc.
 - Such objects usually achieve their end.

- Among objects of the natural world, there is a *uniformity* (or *regularity*) of behavior.
- Given that such objects quite often behave *uniformly*, it simply cannot be this is explained by appeal to *chance*.
 - It must be that these things act or behave in the way they do *for a purpose* (i.e., *because* it is their purpose).

- “But something that lacks consciousness [and intelligence] can tend towards an end only if directed by something with consciousness and intelligence” (p. 82)
 - Arrow example: The arrow tends toward its target *only because* it is directed by the archer. Moreover, it is the intelligent archer that gives the arrow its target.

Therefore, there must exist some intelligence that “directs everything in nature towards an end, and this we call God” (p. 82)

Objections to Aquinas's Fifth Way

- Objection 1: Modern science has better explanations for the uniformity in nature that leads Aquinas to posit the existence of a divine intelligence.
 - The uniformity, regularity and complexity that adheres in organic systems, for example, is explained by appeal to natural selection (i.e., evolutionary mechanisms).
 - So, no divine intelligence is needed.

- Objection 2: If we agree that objects in the natural world do work towards an end and have a purpose, just as surely as human-made machines do, then we must also agree that imperfections in those objects imply an imperfection in the designer.
 - Some of these objects (e.g., some humans) work toward *evil* ends and purposes.
 - Thus, if God gave such objects their purposes and ends, then either God isn't all that good or he isn't all that powerful.