

Philosophy 302

Mediaeval Philosophy

Lecture 4



Benozzo Gozzoli, *The Triumph of St Thomas Aquinas*, 1471

Summa Theologiae, I, q.2, art. 1.

Is the existence of God self-evident?

Three arguments that it is:

Argument 1:

(1a) What is naturally implanted in our minds is self evident

(1b) Knowledge of God is implanted in our minds.

THEREFORE (1c) It is self-evident that God exists.

Argument 2:

(2a) A claim is self-evident if it accepted as as
the words it contains are understood.

(2b) As soon as 'God' is understood,
'God exists is accepted.

THEREFORE (2c) 'God exists' is self-evident.

Argument 3:

(3a) If truth exists, then truth exists.

(3b) If truth does not exist, 'truth does not exist'
is true.

(3c) If 'truth does not exist' is true, then truth
exists.

Therefore (3d) Truth necessarily exists (and
self-evidently).

But (3d) God is truth.

THEREFORE (3e) 'God exists' is self-evident.

Aquinas' Position: The existence of God is not
Self-Evident:

We must distinguish:

(a) ' X is Y ' is (a) *self-evident in itself*

= the meaning of ' X ' includes the meaning of ' Y '

whether or not anyone properly understands the
meanings of ' X ', and ' Y '.

(b) ' X is Y ' is *self-evident for us*

= ' X is Y ' is self-evident in itself and we
understand the meaning of ' X ' and ' Y '

‘A bachelor is male’ is self-evident in itself and self-evident to all of us.

‘A platypus is a mammal’ is self-evident in itself but not self evident to all of us.

**‘GOD EXISTS’ is self evident in itself
but not self-evident to any human being.**

Aquinas' Replies to the Arugments:

(To 1) We know God only in a confused way.

(To 2) Understanding does not imply existing.

(To 3) The existence of truth is self-evident,
the existence of the Truth (= God) is not.

Summa Theologiae, I, q.2, art. 1.

Explaining the Existence of God

An Explanation of WHY (‘propter quid’) something is
so:

A heavenly body which is near the earth
does not twinkle,

The moon is near the earth;

Therefore the moon does not twinkle

Scientific Demonstration - the 'middle term' is
the definition

All humans are **mortal rational animals**, [Definition]

All **mortal rational animals** are able to laugh [Property]

Therefore all humans are able to laugh.

The **middle term** is the definition of a human being

The definition gives the nature, or essence, of a human being

The proof argues from cause to effect

It EXPLAINS WHY humans are able to laugh

A Scientific Explanation of the Existence of God

Every thing which satisfies the definition D exists,
God satisfies the definition D ;

Therefore GOD EXISTS.

Since we cannot know the definition of God we cannot demonstrate the existence of God in this way.

So we cannot explain why god exists

SO ANSELM'S ARGUMENT
CANNOT BE USED TO
PROVE THE EXISTENCE OF
GOD

Demonstrating the Existence of God

A Demonstration THAT ('quia') something is so:

A heavenly body which does not twinkle is
near the earth,
The moon does not twinkle;;

Therefore the moon is near the earth

The proof argues from effect to cause

An Argument from Effect to Cause for Existence of God

- (1) Certain kinds of effects exists,
- (2) The cause of these effects is properly described with the description '*D*',

Everyone agrees that '*D*' is a description of God;
Therefore, GOD EXISTS.

THE FIVE WAYS

The First Way
From Change

THE FIRST WAY: The clearer way - from change.

[Change here is accidental change in quantity, quality or place]

1.1. It is certain, and confirmed by sense, that things in the world change.

1.2. Whatever is changed is changed by something else.

Proof:

a. Something changes by becoming actually what it is potentially.

b. Something changes something else in so far as it, the changer, is actually what the changed thing is potentially.]

c. To change something is simply to cause it to pass from potentiality to actuality.

d. Something can be caused to pass from potentiality to actuality only by something which is already actual.

e. It is not possible for something to be potentially and actually something in the same respect at the same time.

E.g. what is actually hot cannot be potentially hot, but only potentially cold.

Therefore: It is impossible that the same thing is with respect to the same change, both the changer and the changed — that is it is impossible for something to change itself.

Therefore: Whatever is changed is changed by something else.

1.3. If the changer is itself changed, it must be changed by something else.

1.4. The sequence of changed changers cannot go on to infinity.

Proof: If it did, then there would be no first changer, and consequently no other changer.

Proof: Second changers change only because they are changed by a first changer.

E.g. the stick moves only because it is moved by the hand.

1.5. Therefore: There must be a first cause of change which is itself changed by nothing.

Such a being everyone calls God

That is, everyone agrees that ‘the first cause of change which is itself changed by nothing’ is a description of God.

The Second Way
From Efficient Causation

THE SECOND WAY: From the nature of efficient causation.

2.1. We observe an order of prior and posterior in efficient causes.

2.2. Nothing is the efficient cause of itself.

2.3. The series of efficient causes cannot be infinite.

Proof: The argument again is that if the first cause is removed then so is the effect.

2.4. Therefore: There must be a first efficient cause.

Such a being everyone calls God

The Third Way
From Possibility and Necessity

THE THIRD WAY: From the possible and necessary.

3.1 There are in the world things whose non-existence is possible.

Proof: It is obvious that most things are generated and corrupted.

3.2 Not all things can be possible in this sense — i. e. have a merely contingent existence.

Proof:

(a) anything whose non-existence is possible does not exist at all times,

(b) if all things were such that their non-existence is possible, then at some time nothing at all would have existed,

(c) but if nothing existed, it would have been impossible for something to come into existence,

(d) so nothing would now exist — which is obviously false.

(e) Therefore: There must be something whose existence is necessary — there is no time at which it does not exist.

3.3 The existence of something whose existence is necessary is either (a) a caused by something else or (b) not caused by something else.

[3.4 If (b), then there exists a being whose existence is necessary and not caused by something else.]

3.5 If (a), since, as shown in The First Way, there cannot be an infinite series of caused beings, there must be a necessary being whose existence is not caused by something else.

3.5 Therefore: There is something whose existence is necessary *per se*, i.e. of itself — the cause of its necessity is not distinct from it, but rather it is the the cause of the existence of all other necessary and possible being.

Such a being everyone calls God

The Fourth Way
From The Gradation Of Things

THE FOURTH WAY: From the gradations found among things.

4.1. We observe that some things are more or less good, true, noble, etc., than other things.

4.2. Things are said to be more or less X in so far as they approach that which is X to the greatest degree.

Example: something is more hot as it approaches the maximal degree of heat.

4.3. Therefore: There is something which is, truest and best and most noble, and consequently the maximal being.

Proof: By the authority of Aristotle: Aristotle says the maximally true are the maximal beings.

4.4. Whatever is maximal of a kind is the cause of everything else of that kind.

Example: The maximal heat is the cause of all other heat.

4.5. Therefore: There is something which is the cause of all being, goodness, and any perfection.

Such a being everyone calls God

The Fifth Way
From The Goal Directedness Of Things

THE FIFTH WAY: From the government of things.

5.1 We see that things which lack the power of thought act on account of a goal.

Proof: They are observed always or often to act in the same way — and what follows is what is best.

So it is clear that it is due to intention rather than chance that they arrive at their goal.

5.2 Things which lacked the power of thought could not tend to a goal unless they were directed by something aware, and intelligent.

Example: an arrow is *directed* to its goal by an archer.

5.3 Therefore: There is something by which all natural things are directed to a goal.

Such a being everyone calls God