

Saint Thomas Aquinas, “Summa Theologica”

80-82

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Five Proofs of God’s Existence

Proof #1: The First Cause of Change

Stage 1:

1. Some things in the world change.
2. To change something is to “bring out” its potentiality.
3. Only something actual can bring about something’s potentiality.
 - “Thus, something actually hot, like fire, makes wood which is potentially hot become actually hot” (81).
4. Thus, nothing causes itself to change.
 - The wood’s potential to be hot cannot make it actually hot.
5. Therefore, everything that changes is made to change by something else.
 - If a is changed, that is because b changed it.
 - If b is changed, that is because c changed it.
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Stage 2:

6. Things have changed in this world.
7. If the chain of causes went back forever there would be no first cause of change.
8. But if there’s no first cause of change then there’s nothing that’s the second cause of change, nor third, fourth...
9. But when we see things change, we’re seeing something in that chain of causes.
10. Thus, there is a first cause of change.

Claim: This first cause of change is God.

Proof #2: The First Cause of Existence

1. In the world of the senses, if something were to cause itself to come into existence (if it were an “efficient cause” of itself), it would have to exist prior to itself.
2. But it’s impossible for a thing to exist prior to itself.
3. Thus, in the world of the senses, nothing can be its own “efficient cause”; nothing can bring itself into existence.
4. But there are things in the world of the senses.
5. Something must have caused them to exist.
6. If the thing that caused them to exist were not efficient, it must have been caused by something else, and so on and on.
7. Thus, we must posit something at the beginning of the causal chain that is its own efficient cause, something that caused itself to exist.

Claim: The first cause of existence is God.

Proof #3: The Cause of Non-Necessarily Existent Things

1. Some things can either exist or fail to exist.
2. If something *can* fail to exist, there must have been a time at which it *has* failed to exist.
3. If everything could fail to exist, there would have been a time at which nothing existed.
4. But, if there had been such a time, there would not be anything in the world now.
5. But there are things in the world.
6. So something must have brought these things into the world.

7. Thus, not everything in the world can either exist or fail to exist; some things must necessarily exist.
8. But if something necessarily exists, either this necessity is or is not caused by something else.
9. If it is, then on we go looking for what caused it.
10. But we can't go back to infinity.
11. Thus, there must something that causes the necessity of other things.

Claim: The cause of the necessity of other things is God.

Proof #4: The Cause of the Best

1. Some things are found to be better, truer, or nobler than others.
2. Something is said to have more or less of a quality according to its distance from a maximum.
 - The hotter a thing is, the closer it is to that which is maximally hot.
3. Therefore, there is something maximally good, true, and noble.
4. The greatest thing of a kind is the cause of everything of that kind (as fire, the hottest thing is the cause of everything hot).
5. There must be something that is the cause of the things that are maximally good (hot, noble, true, *etc*).

Claim: The cause of those most perfect things is God.

Proof #5: The Cause of Things Pursuing an End

1. Even things that lack consciousness act for a purpose.
2. They almost always act in the same way, and they tend towards what is best.
3. Thus they achieve their ends on purpose, not by accident.
4. But something that lacks consciousness can tend towards an end only if directed by something with consciousness and intelligence.
5. Thus, there is some intelligence that directs everything in nature towards an end.

Claim The intelligence that directs everything in nature towards an end is God.

Objection #1 to God's existence:

1. When we use the word 'God', we mean 'something infinitely good'.
2. But if one of a pair of contraries is infinite, the one that is not infinite must not exist.
3. Goodness and badness are contraries.
4. If God exists then there can be no badness in the world.
5. But there is badness in the world.
6. Thus, god does not exist.

Reply:

1. "If God is supremely good, He would allow bad things to exist in the world only if He were so powerful and good that He could even bring good out of bad.
2. God is supremely good.
3. Thus, he allows the bad to exist only because he can bring good out of it.

Objection #2 to God's existence:

1. If we can account for everything without supposing God exists, we shouldn't suppose that God exists.
2. We can account for everything.
3. Thus, we shouldn't suppose that God exists.

Reply: Go see proofs 1 and 2.