

NATURAL THEOLOGY

*St. Thomas Aquinas' Five Ways to Prove the Existence of GOD
Summa Theologiae, part I, question 2, article 3*

<div>5</div> <div>Ways</div>	1. To begin first with observable phenomenon	2. To apply the principle of causality by asking 'Why?'	3. To assert that tracing the causes cannot go on indefinitely	4. To identify the ultimate cause with God
1. First Way: The Argument From Motion or Change	<p>ST THOMAS: The first and more manifest way is the argument from motion. It is certain, and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion.</p> <p>EXPLANATION: The first way begins when we observe MOTION or CHANGE. This is</p>	<p>ST THOMAS: Now whatever is in motion is put in motion by another, for nothing can be in motion except it is in potentiality to that towards which it is in motion; whereas a thing moves inasmuch as it is in act. For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from</p>	<p>ST THOMAS: If that by which it is put in motion be itself put in motion, then this also must needs be put in motion by another, and that by another again.</p> <p>But this cannot go on to infinity, because then there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover;</p>	<p>ST THOMAS: Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God.</p> <p>EXPLANATION: The proof ends in THE FIRST UNMOVED MOVER. The act can only be explained</p>

	<p>its starting point. (Another name for “motion” is “change”.-- “Motion” = “change”.)</p> <p>Motion = passage from potency to act. Hence, change is passage from potency to act.</p> <p>What do we observe? That things in the world pass from potency to be something to actually being that thing: they change.</p>	<p>potentiality to actuality. But nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality.</p> <p>EXAMPLE GIVEN BY ST THOMAS: Thus that which is actually hot, as fire, makes wood (which is potentially hot) to be actually hot, and thereby moves and changes it. Now it is not possible that the same thing should be at once in actuality and potentiality in the same respect, but only in different respects. For what is actually hot cannot simultaneously be potentially hot; but it is simultaneously potentially cold. It is therefore impossible that in the same respect and in the same way a thing should be both mover and moved, i.e. that it should move itself. Therefore, whatever is in motion must be put in motion by another.</p> <p>EXPLANATION: Nothing can move itself, i.e., can cause itself to come from potentiality to actuality. All motion (passage from potency to act) requires a</p>	<p>seeing that subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they are put in motion by the first mover; as the staff moves only because it is put in motion by the hand.</p> <p>EXPLANATION: In a series of passages from potency to act, one has to ask what is the source of the act in the first place. Though there be an infinite series of movers, these do not provide an explanation on why there is an act in the first place.</p> <p>PETER KREEFT'S EXPLANATION (this applies to the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th arguments): If there is no first cause, then the universe is like a railroad train moving without an engine. Each car's motion is explained proximately by the motion of the car in front of it: the caboose moves because the boxcar pulls it, the boxcar moves because the cattle car pulls it, et cetera. But there is no engine to pull the first car and the whole train. That would be impossible, of course. But that is what the universe is like if there is no first cause: impossible.</p>	<p>by something that originates it or gives rise to it of itself, something that did not receive its act from another, something that is ALWAYS in act. If it is always in act, it has no potency. Therefore, it must be pure act. We call that Pure Act “God”. (Pure Act = God)</p>
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<p>2. Second Way: The Argument via Efficient Causality</p>	<p>ST THOMAS: The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause. In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes.</p> <p>EXPLANATION: The second way begins when we observe CAUSALITY. This is its starting point.</p> <p>What do we observe? That no object causes itself to be or to exist, or to be in a certain way. In other words, some other thing has to cause it to exist or to alter its way of being. The thing that causes it to exist or to alter its way of being is called an efficient cause.</p> <p>(This explanation could be called a subset of the first way. An efficient cause brings about change in another.)</p>	<p>ST THOMAS: There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible.</p> <p>EXPLANATION: This is similar to the explanation in the first way about something not being in act while still in potency, at the same time and in the same respect (application of the principle of non-contradiction).</p>	<p>ST THOMAS: Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or only one. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false.</p>	<p>ST THOMAS: Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.</p> <p>EXPLANATION: The proof ends in the FIRST UNCAUSED CAUSE. We call the First Uncaused Cause "God". (First Uncaused Cause = God)</p> <p>PETER KREEFT'S EXPLANATION: The Big Bang requires a 'Big Banger'.</p>

3. Third Way: The Proof by Contingent and Necessary Objects

ST THOMAS: The third way is taken from possibility and necessity, and runs thus. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to corrupt, and consequently, they are possible to be and not to be.

EXPLANATION: The third way begins when we observe GENERATION AND CORRUPTION. This is its starting point.

What do we observe? We observe that things come to be (are generated) and cease to be (are corrupted). Things that come to be and cease to be do not exist of necessity. In other words, things that come to be and cease to be are contingent.

ST THOMAS: But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there *could have been* nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence--which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary.

EXPLANATION: Suppose that all beings were contingent, that every single one of them did not have to exist, then there could have been a moment in which

ST THOMAS: But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. 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.

ST THOMAS: Therefore we cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God.

EXPLANATION: The proof ends in the NECESSARY BEING. We call the being that of itself exists necessarily "God". (Necessary Being = God)

		<p>none of them existed. If at one time none of them existed, what explains the fact that now, some of them exist? There must be some thing that caused them to exist now, some thing which, in itself, exists of necessity (exists necessarily, not contingently).</p>		
<p>4. Fourth Way: The Argument From Degrees of Perfection</p>	<p>ST THOMAS: The fourth way is taken from the gradation to be found in things. Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble and the like.</p> <p>EXPLANATION: The fourth way begins when we observe DEGREES OF PERFECTION. This is its starting point.</p> <p>What do we observe? In ordinary life, we compare things with each other. Note that St Thomas here uses what are called pure perfections, i.e., perfections which are directly associated with being: true, good, beautiful, noble, intelligent, etc. (He does not make use of perfections such as size, or color, or being some particular kind of thing like horseness.)</p>	<p>ST THOMAS: But "more" and "less" are predicated of different things, according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum, as a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest; so that there is something which is truest, something best, something noblest and, consequently, something which is uttermost being; for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being, as it is written in Metaph. ii.</p> <p>EXPLANATION: The example of fire is only an analogy. It is important to remember that the perfections he is talking of in the proof are pure perfections.</p>	<p>ST THOMAS: Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus; as fire, which is the maximum heat, is the cause of all hot things.</p> <p>EXPLANATION: This step can only be understood if one is speaking of pure perfections (good, true, beautiful....).</p>	<p>ST THOMAS: 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.</p> <p>EXPLANATION: The proof ends in the MOST PERFECT BEING. We call the most perfect being "God". (Most Perfect Being = God)</p>

5. Fifth Way: The Argument From Intelligent Design / Finality

ST THOMAS: The fifth way is taken from the governance of the world. We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result.

EXPLANATION: The fifth way begins when we observe the seeming PURPOSEFULNESS OF NON-INTELLIGENT BEINGS. This is its starting point.

What do we observe? Plants of the same species grow in the same way; birds make nests in the same way; animals of the same species breed in the same way, etc.: the universe seems to work in an intelligent way. We DISCOVER DESIGN in the world around us. Non-intelligent beings are manifestly designed for an end.

ST THOMAS: Hence it is plain that not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end.

ST THOMAS: Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer.

EXPLANATION: This step is not similar to the previous four: it does not appeal to the impossibility of going on infinitely.

All physical laws and the order of nature and life were designed and ordered by an intelligent designer.

ST THOMAS: Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.

EXPLANATION: The proof ends in the MOST INTELLIGENT BEING; or also THE FIRST DESIGNER.. We call the most intelligent being, the first designer "God". (Most Intelligent Being = God)

PETER KREEFT'S EXPLANATION OF THE FIFTH WAY: The argument starts with the major premise that where there is design, there must be a designer. The minor premise is the existence of design throughout the universe. The conclusion is that there must be a universal designer.

Why must we believe the major premise, that all design implies a designer? Because everyone admits this principle in practice. For instance, suppose you came upon a deserted island and found "S.O.S." written in the sand on the beach. You would not think the wind or the waves had written it by mere chance but that someone had

been there, someone intelligent enough to design and write the message. If you found a stone hut on the island with windows, doors, and a fireplace, you would not think a hurricane had piled up the stones that way by chance. You immediately infer a designer when you see design.

When the first moon rocket took off from Cape Canaveral, two U.S. scientists stood watching it, side by side. One was a believer, the other an unbeliever. The believer said, "Isn't it wonderful that our rocket is going to hit the moon by chance?" The unbeliever objected, "What do you mean, chance? We put millions of manhours of design into that rocket." "Oh," said the believer, "you don't think chance is a good explanation for the rocket? Then why do you think it's a good explanation for the universe? There's much more design in a universe than in a rocket. We can design a rocket, but we couldn't design a whole universe. I wonder who can?" Later that day the two were strolling down a street and passed an antique store. The atheist admired a picture in the window and asked, "I wonder who painted that picture?" "No one," joked the believer; "it just happened by chance."

Is it possible that design happens by chance without a designer? There is perhaps one chance in a trillion that "S.O.S." could be written in the sand by the wind. But who would use a one-in-a-trillion explanation? Someone once said that if you sat a million monkeys at a million typewriters for a million years, one of them would eventually type out all of *Hamlet* by chance. But when we find the text of *Hamlet*, we don't wonder whether it came from chance and monkeys. Why then does the atheist use that incredibly improbable explanation for the universe? Clearly, because it is his only chance of remaining an atheist. At this point we need a psychological explanation of the atheist rather than a logical explanation of the universe. We have a logical explanation of the universe, but the atheist does not like it. It's called God.

There is one especially strong version of the argument from design that hits close to home because it's about the design of the very thing we use to think about design: our brains. The human brain is the most complex piece of design in the known universe. In many ways it is like a computer. Now just suppose there were a computer that was programmed only by chance. For instance, suppose you were in a plane and the public-address system announced that there was no pilot, but the plane was being flown by a computer that had been programmed by a random fall of hailstones on its keyboard or by a baseball player in spiked shoes dancing on computer cards. How much confidence would you have in that plane? But if our brain computer has no cosmic intelligence behind the heredity and environment that program it, why should we trust it when it tells us about anything, even about the brain?

OTHER PROOFS

6. Proof from Man's Desire of All Good

- If man, by the irresistible drive of his nature, tends towards universal and boundless good, then such Good actually exists.
- Now, man, by the irresistible drive of his nature, tends towards universal and boundless good.
- Therefore, such Good actually exists.
- We call this Good by the name of "God."
- Therefore, God exists.

7. The Moral Proof

- If man is aware that he is bound by a moral law to avoid evil and to do good, then a lawgiver exists, and ultimately a First Lawgiver.
- Now, man is aware that he is bound by a moral law to avoid evil and to do good.
- Therefore, a lawgiver exists, and ultimately a First Lawgiver.
- We call this Lawgiver by the name of "God."
- Therefore, God exists.

8. The Historical Proof

- If all men of all times have reached the reasoned conclusion that God exists, then He must actually exist.
- Now, all men of all times have reached the reasoned conclusion that God exists.
- Therefore, He must actually exist.

9. Indirect Proof

- A truth is proved indirectly when one shows that its denial leads to impossible consequences.
- Now, the denial of the truth of God's existence is atheism.
- Atheism leads to impossible consequences.
- Atheism therefore cannot be true.
- And if atheism cannot be true, theism must be true.