A SHORT summary of St. Thomas Aquinas’s Five demonstrations for the existence of God

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

The first way is the argument from motion (change). Before we get too deep into this, I want you to notice something about motion in general. If I put a pen on the table and no one and nothing causes it to move then it will remain there forever unmoved. So this is what we need to see: whatever is moving is put into motion by something else. Now let’s take a look at the world. Things are moving. Cars are moving because someone is pressing on the gas. The ocean is moving because the earth is moving. Clouds are moving because of wind; the wind is moving because of atmospheric pressure; the atmosphere is under pressure from temperature changes caused by the sun, etc. Now something is responsible for all this motion. Whatever is itself unmoved and the cause of all motion, this we call God!

The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause. Everything is caused by something else. I did not create myself. I was caused (brought into existence) by my parents. My parents were brought into existence by my grandparents, etc. Nothing is the cause of itself. A clay pot does not create itself. Everything is created by something else. Whatever is the creator of all things and is itself not created, this we call God!

The third way is taken from “possibility and necessity”. This one is kind of complicated but it goes like this: nothing can come from nothing and something must come from something. Something cannot come from nothing. Because our world exists, because I exist, there must be something which necessarily exists which is the root of all existing things. This fundamental, necessary something, this we call God!

The fourth way is taken from the gradation to be found in things. We call some things good and some things better. But above all this we call something the “best”. Whatever is the best good, the best love, the most noble, the most…you get my point. This best of all things, this best of beings is not some existing thing; it is existence itself! This we call God!

The fifth way is taken from looking at nature and how it seems like nature always acts purposefully. Without being told, plants point themselves toward the sun, birds flock together and head south, caterpillars become butterflies. There doesn’t seem to be uncontrolled randomness in nature, instead we see patterns and predictability. 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. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.

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1 Summarized by Tom Mar—any errors herein contained are my own. 2009
ST 1: Question 2: Article 3: 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." (Exodus 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. It is certain, and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion. 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 potentiality to actuality. But nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality. 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. 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. But this cannot go on to infinity, because then
there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover;
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. Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover,
put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God.

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

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. 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. 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. 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.

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. 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. 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. 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. 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. Hence it is plain that not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end. 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. 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 to Objection 2.** Since nature works for a determinate end under the direction of a higher agent, whatever is done by nature must needs 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 body of the Article.