ARTICLE PRESENTATION, EXAMPLE 2: AQUINAS
PHI 101: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY
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1. BEARINGS/BIO: Briefly describe the assigned philosopher/author and state the name of the assigned material (e.g., book, article, website, etc.) that you are presenting. Print and pass around a picture of the philosopher, and give the class a brief overview of the philosopher's life – e.g., birth and death dates, the historical time period, the work the article is taken from, other famous works, etc. You can find information about the philosophers in the back of our book (Notes on the Philosophers, p. 591) or on the Web.


Aquinas' Life: St. Thomas Aquinas was born in Rocasecca near Aquino in Italy in 1225, and died in 1274. He was educated by Benedictine monks and was expected to stay in the Benedictine order but later joined the Dominican order (known as the intellectual elite of Europe, at the time, but (1) the order had little political power (unlike the Benedictine order) and (2) Aquinas would merely preach to the poor, so this move upset his parents very much). Aquinas entered the Dominican Order, and his mother had his brothers (soldiers) kidnap him and held him for several months trying to get him to change his mind. He didn’t, so they let him go. Then he studied at universities in Naples, Cologne, and Paris. While at Cologne and then Paris, he studied under Albertus Magnus, or Albert the Great; Aquinas’ nickname is “The Scholar.” He was the most prolific and widely respected philosopher and theologian of the medieval period, and of his voluminous works the best known are his two massive compendia of philosophy and theology, the *Summa contra Gentiles* and the *Summa Theologiae*. Aquinas’ thought was strongly influenced by Aristotle, and his commentaries on Aristotle’s works were influential in securing widespread acceptance of Aristotle’s ideas in Western European universities. Aquinas’ operating principle was to reconcile the philosophical and scientific teachings of Aristotle on the one hand with Christian doctrine on the other, which is known as Scholasticism. He operated under the following principle: Aristotle is correct unless what he says conflicts with the Church; in these cases, Aquinas would argue that the Church is right and Aristotle is wrong. In fact, of these 5 ways of proving God’s existence, the first three of them appear in principle in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Finally, on or around 12/6/1273, “while he was saying mass, something happened to Aquinas that left him unable to go on writing or dictating. He himself saw the occasion as a special revelation. When Reginald of Piperno, his principal secretary and long-time friend, pressed him to know what had happened, Aquinas explained to him that everything he had written seemed like straw to him by comparison with what he had seen and what had been revealed to him. He believed that he had at last clearly seen what he had devoted his life to figuring out and, by comparison, all he had written seemed pale and dry. Now that he could no longer write, he told Reginald, he wanted to die.” He died 3 months later on March 7, 1274 and was eventually made a Catholic Doctor and Saint.

2. OVERVIEW: Briefly describe what the author’s main thesis or point is, in the assigned material. What is the argument?

What is the issue? Why is this issue important? How does the author support his or her position? Does the author make any assumptions in order to make his or her argument (if so, mention them)? Is the author making any objections against his or her opponents’ position(s) (if so, mention them)? Mention the author’s examples if possible, and bring in your own, contemporary or personal, examples whenever possible – it helps students understand the material better.

[What is Aquinas’ main thesis or point?] Aquinas is trying to argue in five different ways that God exists with principles and actual arguments that Aristotle made.

[What are the arguments?]

a. The First Way: Motion. Here’s my rendition of the argument:

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1. Whatever is in motion is moved by something else, since nothing undergoes motion except in so far as it is potentially moveable. [Why? See premises 2 – 5.]

2. [SUB-ARG: To prove premise 1, Aquinas argues as a sub-argument: Things that move in the active sense are in actuality moving.]

3. Nothing can be brought into actuality except by something which is itself in actuality (e.g., fire, being actually hot, makes wood, which is hot in potentiality, hot in actuality).

4. It is not possible for the same thing to be, at the same time, and in the same respect, both in actuality and in potentiality (e.g. what is actually hot cannot be potentially hot at the same time in the same respect).

5. So it is impossible (at the same time in the same respect) that something should be both mover and moved, or that it should move itself. So whatever is in motion is moved by something else—premise 1.

6. If this “something else” is itself moved, it must in turn be moved by something else, and so on.

7. But the sequence of movers cannot continue ad infinitum. [SUB-ARG: If the movers were infinite, there would not be any first mover, and hence nothing would move anything else, since subsequent moving things do not move unless moved by an original mover; Aquinas’ EX: a stick does not move unless moved by a hand.]

8. So it is necessary to arrive at a first mover that is moved by nothing else.

9. This first (unmoved) mover is understood as being God.

b. The Second Way: Efficient Cause (Cosmological Argument). “Cosmological,” from the Greek word kosmos, meaning “world,” “universe,” or “orderly structure.” Efficient cause = “what initiated or produced the relevant movement or change” (413). My rendition of the argument:

1. It is impossible for any natural thing to be the efficient cause of itself (i.e., a thing cannot be the complete and sufficient source of its own existence).

2. [SUB-ARG: In order to cause itself, a thing would have to precede itself (e.g., in order for me to be the source of my own existence, I would have to exist before I existed, which is impossible).]

3. It is impossible for a series of efficient causes to go on ad infinitum.

4. [SUB-ARG: There is a first cause in every series, a final effect, and intermediate causes.

5. So if there was not a first cause in the series of efficient causes, there will be no intermediate efficient causes or final effects.

6. And if the series of efficient causes stretches back ad infinitum, there will be no final effect and no intermediate efficient causes, which is definitely not the case.]

7. Therefore, there must be a first efficient cause and this everyone calls “God”.

c. The Third Way: Necessity. This argument uses the necessary/possible (or contingent) distinction.

1. There are many “possibles” that exist (= things that can both be and not be).

2. It is impossible that everything is only possible. [SUB-ARG: Because if something has the possibility of not being, then at some time or other it lacks being; if all things have the possibility of not being, at some time there was nothing at all. But then there would still be nothing, which is not true.]

3. So there must be something that is necessary.

4. But everything that is necessary has to have a cause of its necessity or no cause; but the cause of the necessary items cannot continue ad infinitum.

5. So it is necessary to suppose (or posit) a being exists that has its own necessity (which does not receive its necessity from anything else) and that causes necessity in other things.

6. Therefore, this necessary being is what we call “God”.

d. The Fourth Way: Degree (or Gradation). Here’s my rendition of this argument:
1. Some things are more or less good, noble, and true, but “more” and “less” are used in reference to how close they are to what is the greatest of its kind (e.g., something is hotter if it is closer to what is hottest).

2. So there is something that is truest, best, and noblest.

3. Things that are truest are greatest in being (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* II).

4. So the “something” that is truest, best, and noblest is greatest in being.

5. The greatest in any kind is the cause of everything of that kind (e.g., fire has the greatest heat, so it causes everything hot to be hot).

6. So there is something that is the cause of being and goodness and every other perfection in things.

7. So, since God is the name for the cause of all perfections, God exists.

Note two things: (1) This argument assumes that there is a hierarchy or ladder of being: inanimate objects (e.g., dirt, rocks, chairs, cars), plants, animals, and humans, and that the higher one ascends the ladder, the more being that entity has. E.g, a worm has more being than dirt, a dog has more being than a worm and a person more being than a dog. The “Great Chain of Being” is extended to angels and God. (2) Unlike the previous three arguments, this argument attempts to show that God is the “best being,” is all good, all knowing, etc.

c. The Fifth Way: Design (Teleological Argument). Teleological thinking is a way of explaining things in terms of their ultimate goals or ends; or understanding things functionally in terms of the relationship of the parts to the whole. (Greek: *telos* = end, or goal; e.g., adulthood is the *telos* of infancy. The oak tree is the *telos* of the acorn.)

1. Some things that lack knowledge (e.g., “natural bodies”) work for the sake of a goal or end. [SUB-ARG: That is, they always or often act in the same way to pursue what is best; this shows that they reach their goal not by chance but by directness.]

2. But things that lack knowledge do not tend towards a goal unless they are guided by something with knowledge and intelligence (e.g., an archer directs an arrow).

3. So there is some intelligent being by whom all natural things are directed to their goal or end.

4. This intelligent being is the being we call God.

**What is the issue?** The issue here is pretty much identical to the issue with Anselm’s argument: that is, the issue whether or not God exists, and what properties, characteristics, qualities or features God has.

**Why is this issue important?** Same for Anselm: If God exists, it may change the way the whole world acts, depending on the qualities of God, what God wants, if we can know what God wants, and so on! God’s existence is a fundamental metaphysical question that could become an assumption for other arguments concerning ethics, etc., depending upon its answer.

**Does Aquinas make any assumptions? His opponent?** Aquinas is assuming in ARGs 1, 2, and 3 that there is only ONE being that can have the power of being the first unmoved mover, the first uncaused cause, and the first uncaused necessary cause. ARG4 assumes that God is not just the most powerful being, but that God is ALL powerful (and the same with “most good v. All-Good, and most knowledgable v. All-Knowing. ARG5 assumes that an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good being is the “intelligent designer” of the world, and not just some designer smart enough, good enough, and powerful enough to create what we see. Aquinas is not objecting to anyone per se, but his opponent is the atheist, and the philosophers who believe that the issue of God is merely a matter of faith and cannot be proven.

3. **Clarification:** Is there anything about this material that you did not understand (after looking up unclear or unknown words, etc.)? What are you confused about? What did not make sense in the reading? What questions would you ask if you could talk to this philosopher right here and now? [Note: This is where I want everyone to be really honest and tell me if they were confused about ANYTHING! You will not have points taken off from your presentation for asking questions — answering questions will only increase everyone’s understanding of the material.]
I didn’t really have any points of confusion, since I’ve presented this material before. Now I will answer your questions from your article summaries.

4. **PRAISE/CRITICISM/ANALYSIS**: What do you think about the author’s argument or point? Do you agree and why or why not? Do you have any objection(s) to the author’s argument? If so, how do you suppose the author would respond to it (or them)? Do you have a better idea, and if so, what is it? How does this author’s position or argument compare with other authors’ positions or arguments already presented?

**Praise:**
Despite all the objections below, each of these arguments is still being defended in some form or other today. [However, if you want to defend one of them, you must be able to address these objections below.]

**General objections:**
**OBJ to ARGS 1-5:** Aquinas uses the following phrase often (or something similar) when concluding his arguments: “This being we call God.” But think about Santa Claus for a moment, and this argument: “There must be a cause for all of the presents that are under Christmas trees on Christmas morning; this being we understand as Santa Claus; so Santa Claus exists.” The thrust of the objection is, does having a name for something automatically show that that thing exists?

**Specific objections to all five arguments:**

I. **ARGUMENT FROM MOTION:**

**OBJ:** (Strong OBJ): Fallacy committed! Either the (1) Non Sequitur, (2) False Alternatives, or (3) Argument from Ignorance Fallacy, may have been committed: Why?

**For (1), the Non Sequitur fallacy:** The conclusion that God exists may not follow from the premises. Consider these two arguments by analogy:

- **EX1:** Every physicist probably believes in Newton’s Laws of Motion (at least for medium-sized physical objects), that there must be movers of things to get these things to move, that there must be a first mover, etc., but not all physicists are led to the certain conclusion that God exists. Note that physicists do NOT have to say that the Big Bang IS the beginning of the universe. They can claim not to know. But to say that we CAN know that it IS God who is the first mover, has not been proven.

- **EX2:** Isn’t this ARG significantly similar to a detective’s arguing, “We’ve shown through our general evidence that Smith could not have killed himself, so we know that someone or something HAD to have killed Smith. Therefore, it’s Bill Jones!”?

**For (2), False Alternatives:** Aquinas’ ARG seems to give two possibilities – EITHER there is no First Mover, OR the First Mover is God. What’s the reasonable third alternative Aquinas neglects? That there is a First Mover, but we simply do not know for certain what it is. Put it this way: Aristotle originally used this argument to prove that a “Deist” God exists – that is, a perfect God who creates the world and then does not interact in any way with it; now Aquinas is trying to use the identical argument to show that the “Theist” or Christian God exists [everything just mentioned except God does interact with humans through bringing floods, answering prayers, etc.]. This shows that the premises of this argument do not show for certain that “this” version of God exists.

**For (3), Argument from Ignorance:** Humankind has wondered for thousands of years what caused the universe to exist. The overwhelming percentage of us just simply do not know. So to go from “there must be a first mover” and (something similar to, though it’s not in the text!) “no one has proved that God did not create the universe” to “God exists,” would seem to take us from what we do not know to a definite conclusion.
OBJ2: (Strong OBJ): Even if this ARG establishes that there must be a first mover, it fails to prove that God (i.e., the God that Aquinas is trying to prove exists) exists. That is, it does not show that the first mover is all-powerful, all-knowing, or all-good. The first mover just has to be able to move itself and put other things into motion. An alternative hypothesis is the Big Bang.

OBJ3: (Strong OBJ): Aquinas argues that the first mover has to be actually moving when it puts the first “something else” into motion, but he also thinks God is eternal (that is, not in time) and immutable (that is, never changes). If God is eternal, how can God be always or even ever in motion? (What do we make of the Genesis “on the seventh day, God rested” passage – isn’t this impossible if Aquinas is correct that God actually moved to create the universe but never changes?) Moreover and related, how can God be eternal and never changing, if God must be actually moving all the time (in order to never change), which implies that God is in time?

OBJ4: (Strong OBJ): If energy can neither be created nor destroyed, how would God be able to create more energy? If God’s energy is transferred to planets, trees, and the universe in the creation of the universe, then God has changed, right? But Aquinas holds that God is immutable (unchangeable).

OBJ5: (Weak OBJ): Has Aquinas soundly showed that there MUST be an “original mover” – why can there not be a sequence that goes backward to infinity? How do we know that time is linear and not circular? [This is weak because one cannot merely claim that time is cyclical or circular and win the argument – one must prove either that time is linear or circular – it is a good question, but doesn’t prove Aquinas wrong, on the one hand. But on the other hand, he or his defenders must prove that time is linear and not merely assume it.]

OBJ6: (Weak OBJ): Why can’t there be more than one first mover, if Aquinas is correct that there must be a first unmoved mover? [This is weak because the objector is allowing for God to exist, but just asking about whether there could be more than one god.]

OBJ7: (Weak OBJ): Why is the first mover (God, according to Aquinas) the exemption to the “nothing can move itself” rule? One cannot answer, “Because God is special” without begging the question – the argument is supposed to prove that God exists, not assume God exists in order to attribute other characteristics to God. Possible Aquinas REP: Because there must be a first mover, and there cannot be a first mover if it cannot be unmoved by something else.

II. ARGUMENT FROM CAUSE:

OBJ1: (Strong OBJ): Fallacy committed! Either the (1) Non Sequitur, (2) False Alternatives, or (3) Argument from Ignorance Fallacy, may have been committed: Why?

For (1), the Non Sequitur fallacy: The conclusion that God exists may not follow from the premises. Consider these two examples:

- EX1: Every physicist probably believes in Laws of causation (at least for medium-sized physical objects), that there must be causes of things, that there must be a first cause, etc., but not all physicists are led to the certain conclusion that God exists. Note that physicists do NOT have to say that the Big Bang IS the beginning of the universe. They can claim not to know. But to say that we CAN know that it IS God who is the first mover, has not been proven.

- EX2: Isn’t this ARG significantly similar to a detective’s arguing, “We’ve shown through our general evidence that Smith could not have killed himself, so we know that someone or something HAD to have killed Smith. Therefore, it’s Bill Jones!”?

For (2), False Alternatives: Aquinas’ ARG seems to give two possibilities – EITHER there is no First Cause, OR the First Cause is God. What’s the reasonable third alternative Aquinas neglects? That there is a First Cause, but we simply do not know for certain what it is. Put it this way: Aristotle originally used this argument to prove that a “Deist” God existed – that is, a God who creates the world and then does not interact in any
with with it; now Aquinas is trying to use the identical argument to show that the “Theist” or Christian God is true. This shows that the premises of this argument do not show for certain that “this” God (that is, God with certain characteristics) exists.

**For (3), Argument from Ignorance:** Humankind has wondered for thousands of years what caused the universe to exist. The overwhelming percentage of us just simply do not know. So to go from “there must be a first cause” and (something similar to, though it’s not in the text!) “no one has proved that God did not create the universe” to “God exists,” would seem to take us from what we do not know to a definite conclusion.

**OBJ2:** (Strong OBJ): Even if this ARG establishes that there must be a first cause, it fails to prove that Aquinas’ version of God (i.e., all-powerful, all-knowing, or all-good) exists. The first uncaused cause just has to be able to cause itself and cause other things. An alternative hypothesis is the Big Bang.

**OBJ3:** (Weak OBJ): Has Aquinas soundly showed that there MUST be an “original cause” – why can there not be a sequence that goes backward to infinity? How do we know that time is linear and not circular? [This is weak because one cannot merely claim that time is cyclical or circular and win the argument – one must prove either that time is linear or circular – it is a good question, but doesn’t prove Aquinas wrong, on the one hand. But on the other hand, he or his defenders must prove that time is linear and not merely assume it.]

**OBJ4:** (Weak OBJ): Why can’t there be more than one first cause, if Aquinas is correct that there must be a first uncaused cause? [This is weak because the objector is allowing for God to exist, but just asking about whether there could be more than one god.]

**III. ARGUMENT FROM NECESSITY:**

**OBJ1:** (Strong OBJ): Fallacy committed! Either the (1) Non Sequitur, (2) False Alternatives, or (3) Argument from Ignorance Fallacy, may have been committed: Why?

**For (1), the Non Sequitur fallacy:** The conclusion that God exists may not follow from the premises. Consider these two examples:

- **EX1:** Every physicist probably believes in Newton’s Laws of Motion (at least for medium-sized physical objects), that there must be a cause of things, that there must be a first cause, etc., but not all physicists are led to the certain conclusion that God exists. Note that physicists do NOT have to say that the Big Bang is the beginning of the universe. They can claim not to know. But to say that we CAN know that it IS God who is the first mover, has not been proven.

- **EX2:** Isn’t this ARG significantly similar to a detective’s arguing, “We’ve shown through our general evidence that Smith could not have killed himself, so we know that someone or something HAD to have killed Smith. Therefore, it’s Bill Jones!”?

**For (2), False Alternatives:** Aquinas’ ARG seems to give two possibilities – EITHER there is no First Cause, OR the First Cause is God. What’s the reasonable third alternative Aquinas neglects? That there is a First Necessary Cause, but we simply do not know for certain what it is. Put it this way: Aristotle originally used this argument to prove that a “Deist” God existed – that is, a God who creates the world and then does not interact in any with with it; now Aquinas is trying to use the identical argument to show that the “Theist” or Christian God is true. This shows that the premises of this argument do not show for certain that “this” God (that is, God with certain characteristics) exists.

**For (3), Argument from Ignorance:** Humankind has wondered for thousands of years what caused the universe to exist. The overwhelming percentage of us just simply do not know. So to go from “there must be a first necessary cause” and (something similar to, though it’s not in the text!) “no one has proved that God did not create the universe” to “God exists,” would seem to take us from what we do not know to a definite conclusion.
OBJ2: (Strong OBJ): Even if this ARG establishes that there must be a first necessary cause, it fails to prove that Aquinas’ version of God (i.e., all-powerful, all-knowing, or all-good) exists. The first uncaused necessary cause just has to be able to cause itself and cause other things. The only characteristic of a necessary cause is that it must exist – it cannot not exist (see also Anselm’s third section of his argument for further elaboration). An alternative hypothesis is the Big Bang.

OBJ3: (Strong OBJ): This argument denies an infinity of “possibles,” or contingently existing things, as follows: “If something has the possibility of not being, then it lacks being at some point.” How is this true? If I tell you that it’s possible that you fail my class, even if you take it over and over, is it NECESSARY that you WILL fail it at some point? It hardly seems so. If it’s possible for ANYTHING to happen, does that thing HAVE to happen eventually? Again, this does not seem plausible.

OBJ4: (Weak OBJ): Has Aquinas soundly showed that there MUST be a “first unnecessary cause” – why can there not be a sequence that goes backward to infinity? How do we know that time is linear and not circular? [This is weak because one cannot merely claim that time is cyclical or circular and win the argument – one must prove either that time is linear or circular – it is a good question, but doesn’t prove Aquinas wrong, on the one hand. But on the other hand, he or his defenders must prove that time is linear and not merely assume it.]

OBJ5: (Weak OBJ): Why can’t there be more than one first necessary cause, if Aquinas is correct that there must be a first uncaused necessary cause? [This is weak because the objector is allowing for God to exist, but just asking about whether there could be more than one god.]

IV. ARGUMENT FROM DEGREE OR GRADATION:
OBJ1: (Strong OBJ): Premise 2 states: “So there is something that is truest, best, and noblest,” but is the truest, best, and noblest necessarily ALL perfect, all knowing, etc.? For example, I may be the ugliest person in the room, but does that make me the ugliest possible being in the universe that will ever or could ever exist? Or, if we locate the most powerful thing in the universe, is that thing therefore ALL-powerful? If not, this is not the God that Aquinas is interested in proving exists.

OBJ2: (Strong OBJ): How does this argument show that there must be ONE thing in the universe that has all of these characteristics simultaneously? Doesn’t all evidence point to our thinking that some ONE thing in the universe seems to be the most powerful, another thing seems to be the most beautiful (and it’s not the same thing), another thing seems to be the most intelligent, etc.?

OBJ3: (Strong OBJ): The causal principle stated in premise 5 seems fallacious: “The greatest in any kind is the cause of everything of that kind.” If person X is the tallest person in the world, how can person X be meaningfully said to be the cause of every other tall person? Obviously not. Would the most powerful thing in the universe necessarily be the cause of every other powerful thing? Again, not that we can tell. Sure, it’s possible, but that it is POSSIBLE that God exists is not the same thing as proving that God MUST exist, right?

V. ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN:
OBJ1: (Strong OBJ): This argument MAY be a good explanatory hypothesis for the designer’s being intelligent, but it does not show that God is perfect, all-powerful, all-knowing, and/or all-good. So this is not the God that Aquinas is trying to prove exists.

OBJ2: (Strong OBJ): Alternative hypothesis for the designer of the universe: Evolution (that is, natural selection, where natural selection is the view that whatever physical or genetic property enables an organism to survive better will occur more frequently, and whatever does not promote the survival of a species will occur less frequently) could be the designer.
OBJ3: (Strong OBJ): Is the world really that well designed? Then why is there evil, suffering, and why is the earth supposed to get scorched by the sun at the end of its “lifetime,” when the sun expands? Why is this evidence of perfect design? [Note that we will return to this question when we read Leibniz VI.5 “The Problem of Evil” soon.]

OBJ4: (Strong OBJ): The argument says that things that lack knowledge (Cottingham says “non-conscious objects” and Aquinas says, “natural bodies”) serve a goal and have an aim. First, Aquinas says that they “ALWAYS” or “OFTEN” act for the sake of a goal. Isn’t “often” a key word? What about the natural bodies that he admits sometimes do not? Second, what is the goal or aim of stones? Not some stones, being used for whatever purpose, and not the usefulness of some stones to humans, but of every stone? What about garbage (a non-conscious object)? Who is intelligently designing either stones or garbage? What about the goals of twigs, or used gum?

OBJ5: (Strong OBJ): See Hume’s article (VI.6 “Against the Design Argument”), which we’ll cover in the class soon, where Hume asks questions such as:

(5.1) Isn’t this a really weak analogy, saying that nature is like a man-made machine, so there must be some intelligence behind it?
(5.2) Can we infer causes backwards, after the fact, when we have no experience with creating universes or witnessing others creating universes, and where we only are experiencing a unique effect (namely, the way the world is right now, and there’s only one universe, from what we know)? And:
(5.3) Have we really experienced the whole universe to verify that the ENTIRE universe is really well-designed and directed?
(5.4) Has anyone actually experienced the beginning of the universe to witness its cause?

*I’m not sure how Aquinas would respond! What do you think?*