

In this final part, we will conclude this three-part essay by considering two proofs for the existence of God.

3. A few people have a perfect philosophical knowledge of God. Here we would propose St. Thomas Aquinas as an example of someone who arrived at a radical and penetrating understanding of reality, and we offer two of his arguments for the existence of God for consideration. We ourselves acknowledge that our formulation and understanding of these arguments is subject to our own further cognitive development as we ourselves grow and seek to understand reality as a whole with greater insight and clarity. Rigorous philosophical demonstrations of the existence of God are, after all, one of the highest accomplishments of human reason, and it is likely that we still have some learning to do.

The first argument is from world order. Aquinas often mentions that the order, harmony, and beauty of the world is the starting point for all rational ascent to the existence of God. In one place (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.13.35), he offers an argument for the existence of God that we formulate and update in our own terms as follows:

1. *In the world of Nature, we find things of different natural kinds.*
2. *The many things of different natural kinds each act in different and sometimes opposing ways.*
3. *Even though the many things of different natural kinds act in different and sometimes opposing ways, the world of Nature is coordinated, harmonious, and ordered. (It is ecosystematic.)*
4. *Therefore, there must be something responsible for the coordination and harmony of the many different things in nature.*

Furthermore, it seems that nothing less than God, *e.g.* chance, the laws of nature, the four fundamental forces, or evolution, is a good candidate for that being which is responsible for the harmony and order of the world. We also find various stories about how the human mind

“constructs” the order of the world to be epistemologically problematic and frequently self-defeating.

The second argument is from contingent being. The term “contingent being” here does not at first mean a dependent being. It means a being that exists but does not have to exist. Aquinas is well known for finding within contingent beings a real distinction between *what* it is and *that* it is, *i.e.* its essence and its existence. What a

The Existence of God according to Reason / Part III

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dog is and that the dog is right here and now, are not the same, because anything less than that is an absolutely simple being whose very essence is to exist.

An explanation of his argument best begins with a meditation on contingent beings. All around us we find many things that exist but do not have to exist: the sun, moon, stars, the plants, animals, human beings, even the earth itself. According to the best cosmology we have from physics, once upon a time these things—in fact, everything—did not exist, and so we know they do not have to exist. Each one essentially can fail at being.

When we ponder things that exist but do not have to, things that essentially can fail at being, the mind naturally asks why they exist at all. What gives them being or upholds them? With this question in mind, we formulate an argument from contingency as follows.

We can pick out any particular being, *e.g.* this dog here. It exists, but does not have to exist. *What* it is does not cause, account for, or guarantee *that* it is. Its own nature as a dog does not guarantee it exists or will continue to exist. At any

one point in time throughout its journey in existing, the dog can fail to exist. So its act of existing, *that* it is, must be received or supplied from without. It requires a cause of its very act of existing.

The parents of the dog are not the answer. The parents may be responsible for the dog *coming to be* but they are not responsible for the *being* of the dog here and now. This follows because the dog can continue to be even after its parents pass away. The cause of the dog's coming to be, and the cause of its being, must therefore be distinct.

The matter of the dog is not the answer. The matter of the dog is just as much in need of a cause as is the dog, since the matter of the dog is the dog, and the dog is contingent. The matter of the dog is as contingent as the dog is. Furthermore, there is nothing about *what* matter is to guarantee *that* matter is. This holds both for particular bits of matter, even fundamental particles, as well as for matter in general. Therefore, there must be something outside the dog altogether that makes the dog to be.

Let us now ask about the cause of the dog's being: Is that cause a contingent being? If so, then the cause too must have a cause, and we ask the same question. Is that too a contingent being?

We must arrive eventually at a non-contingent being that is a pure source of existing, something that does not receive its act of existence but only gives acts of existence to other things. Thus, we discover that it is impossible for one thing to receive existence from another *without coming to a source or origin of existence*.

The argument is even more radical when we consider Aristotle's statement that cause and effect are simultaneous in act. Just as the mirror now reflects the light that now shines on it, so too, contingent beings now display the existence they are now receiving from the source.

We present the argument in the following form:

1. *Some beings are contingent beings.*
2. *Every contingent being has a present cause of its very act of existing.*

3. *It is impossible to proceed to infinity in a series of things each of which is the present cause of the very act of existing of the next.*

4. *Therefore, there must be at least one being that presently gives the act of existing to (at least some) contingent beings presently existing, but is not itself contingent.*

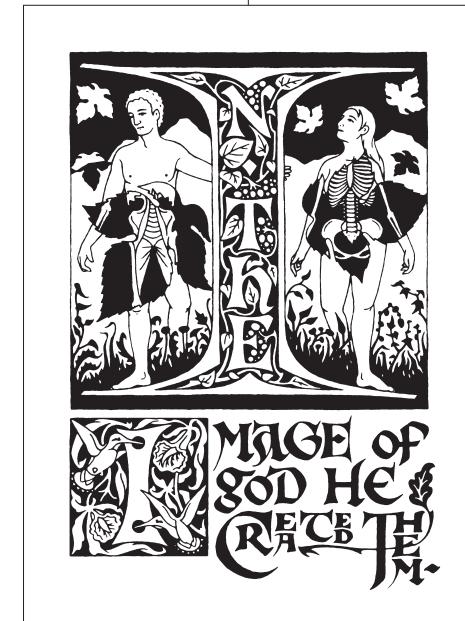
One last point is worth making. A non-contingent being could only be a being whose essence is to be. We cannot conceive of any other way for a being to exist necessarily. The argument thus arrives at Being itself giving being to beings around us.

This argument poses as many questions as it answers, and we are open to objections in order to grow in our own understanding of the truth.

One last question deserves to be raised: Why claim that either of these two arguments arrives at God? Why claim that the cause of all the order in nature is God or that the necessary being that gives being to others is God?

One answer is that the entity arrived at by both of these arguments matches common dictionary definitions of God.

Another answer is that the Bible itself makes the connection between the entity arrived at in these arguments and the God revealed in the bible. In many places, the Bible affirms that the one responsible for the order of the world is God (e.g. **Wis 13: 1-9, Ps 19:1-4, Sir 42:15-43:33**) and in one place the bible, at least traditionally understood, affirms that "I AM" is one of the names of God (**Ex 3:14**). Traditionally, this has been understood to coincide with metaphysical arguments for the existence of God. The philosophers came to the God who also came to Moses. 



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