ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

Philosophical Texts

SELECTED AND TRANSLATED WITH NOTES AND AN INTRODUCTION BY THOMAS GILBY

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ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

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inasmuch as it is actual, because to set in motion is naught else than to bring a thing from potentiality to actuality, and from potentiality a subject cannot be brought except by a being that is actual; actually hot makes potentially hot become actually hot, as when fire changes and alters wood. Now for the same thing to be simultaneously and identically actual and potential is not possible, though it is possible under different respects; what is actually hot cannot simultaneously be potentially hot, though it may be potentially cold. It is impossible, therefore, for a thing both to exert and to suffer motion in the same respect and according to the same motion.

If that which sets in motion is itself in motion then it also must be set in motion by another, and that in its turn by another again. But here we cannot proceed to infinity, otherwise there would be no first mover, and consequently no other mover, seeing that subsequent movers do not initiate motion unless they be moved by a former mover, as stick by hand.

Therefore we are bound to arrive at the first mover set in motion by no other, and this everyone understands to be God.

*Summa Theologica, 1a. ii. 3*

123. Having indicated that the attempt to prove God’s existence is not hopeless from the outset, we proceed now to fix on the arguments of philosophers and theologians alike, beginning with Aristotle who sets off from the concept of change. His argument takes two directions, of which the first is as follows.

Everything in a process of change is set in motion by another. Our senses tell us that things are in motion, the

1 Cf. 145, 423.  
2 Physics, 256*6.  
3 Cf. Physics, 241b24, 257*33.
sun for instance. Therefore they are set in motion by another. Now this setter-in-motion is either itself in motion or it is not. If not, then we have our conclusion, namely the necessity of inferring a motionless mover which we term God. But if it is itself in motion then it must be set in motion by another. Either we have an infinite series or we arrive at a changeless mover. But we cannot go back infinitely. Therefore we must infer a first changeless mover.

There are two propositions to be proved; first, that everything in motion is set in motion by another; second, that an infinite series of things setting and set in motion is impossible.

1 Contra Gentes, 13

124. Since anything set in motion by another is a kind of instrument, all things in motion would be instruments were there no first mover. Furthermore if there were an infinite series of movers and things in motion and no first mover all these infinite movers and things moved would be instruments. Even without expert information one can see something ridiculous in the notion of an instrument that is not moved by a principal: it would be like saying that a saw or axe had been at work in the making of a bunk or chest, but workman none.

145 Opusc. xiii, Compendium Theologiae, 3

125. A thing must exist before it can set another in motion. Motioning presupposes being. If that thing in its turn is subject to motion, well then, some principle that sets it in motion must then be presupposed, and so again and again until we arrive at a being that is motionless in itself though the mover of all others.¹

239, 252 Opusc. x, Exposition, de Causis, lect. 18

¹ Not inert, but so actual as to be still.

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126. Were a thing in motion to move itself this would come about in one of two ways. Either because it was actively initiating motion and passively receiving motion at the same point, or because it was active at one point and passive at another. The former hypothesis is out of the question since it involves being identically actual and potential. Neither will the second hypothesis meet the situation, for given something actively moving by one part and passively set in motion by another part, it would not be singly and wholly the first active mover. What is wholly and essentially so, is prior to what is partially and indirectly so. Consequently a thing that is an active mover through one of its parts cannot be the first mover, for this must be wholly unmotioned.

245 Opusc. XIII, Compendium Theologiae, 4

127. A thing is not subject to motion because it is an agent of motion.

Commentary, III Physics, lect. 4

128. The healer has not necessarily been healed himself. What ultimately initiates motion is itself motionless.

Commentary, VIII Physics, lect. 9

129. Enduring steadfast, yet changing all things.

Exposition, in Psalmos, xxxii. 1

130. All mutables bring us back to a first immutable.

Disputations, XVI de Veritate, 2

131. Those who define change as the process from potentiality to actuality without suddenness anticipate too much. For any process is a kind of change and what happens suddenly is temporal, for it is what happens in a moment of time. Time itself is defined in terms of change.

411 Commentary, III Physics, lect. 2

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132. Note that Plato, who says that movers are in motion,\(^1\) takes the term *motion* in a wider sense than does Aristotle who keeps to its narrowest sense, meaning the actuality still potential of a subject in potentiality, which applies only to quantified and corporeal reality.\(^2\) Whenever Plato speaks of a thing that moves itself not being a body he includes in motion such operations as understanding and thinking. In other contexts Aristotle also adopts this usage, as when he speaks of the first mover moving itself by understanding and willing and loving itself.\(^3\) There is no embarrassment here, for it amounts to the same whether with Plato we arrive at the first thing that moves itself or with Aristotle at the first thing that is altogether motionless.

\(241, 519\)

1 *Contra Gentes*, 13

133. The Platonists held that material things do not move themselves, but that spiritual substances alone are self-moving because they can understand and love themselves. They treat all operations as motions. So also does Aristotle in the *de Anima* when he names sensation and understanding as motions.\(^4\) In that context motion means achieved activity. But in the present proof it means the activity of a thing still in a process of becoming, that is not yet out of potentiality. This does not apply to simple realities. The two doctrines do not disagree in sense, but only in phraseology.

Commentary, *VII Physics, lect.* 1

134. Movement received from another is termed passion; its origin, as implying a beginning from one and a terminating in another, is termed action. Take

\(^1\) *Phaedrus*, 245\(e\); *Laws*, 893\(^b\)–896\(^b\).
\(^2\) *Physics*, 201\(a\)10.
\(^3\) *De Anima*, 433\(^b\)15.
\(^4\) 408\(b\)8.

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away the process of motion, and action will still retain the sense of origin.

*Summa Theologica, Ia. xli. 1, ad 2*

**135.** As meaning the actuality of a thing not yet out of potentiality, motion carries a note of imperfection; as meaning the application of power, motion carries a note of perfection.

*Summa Theologica, Ia. liii. 1, ad 2*

**136.** Rest should be contrasted with the start of motion, not with the climax.

*Commentary, V Physics, lect. 9*

**137.** Aristotle was convinced that motion was everlasting, and time likewise. But his arguments [in the eighth book of the *Physics*] are probable and not cogent, except perhaps as disproofs of some early physical theories about the inception of motion.

*Commentary, XII Metaphysics, lect. 5*

**138.** The most effective proof for God’s existence will even allow for the eternity of the world, despite the apparent handicap. For the argument would undoubtedly run more easily on the supposition that there is a start to the world of change. For then there would obviously be a producing cause, for what is new must be made by something else.

*1 Contra Gentes, 13*

**139.** Perfect immortality implies complete immutability: as Augustine says, every change is a kind of death.¹

*Summa Theologica, Ia. l. 5, ad 1*

¹ *Contra Maximinum, ii. 12.*

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**EXISTENCE OF GOD**

**I40.** Immutability is the strength of God.  
*Summa Theologica, 1a-2ae. lxi. 5*

**I41.** Stability is a necessary condition of happiness—as Aristotle remarks, we do not look upon the happy man as a kind of chameleon.¹  

**I42.** God wake and causes the motions of things. Therefore is he love and the creator of love in others.  
*Opusc. xiv, Exposition, de Divinis Nominibus, iv, lect. 11*

**IV. SECUNDA VIA, THE ARGUMENT FROM EFFICIENT CAUSALITY**

**I43.** The second approach starts from the nature of efficient causality.² Among phenomena we discover an order of efficient causes. But we never come across, nor ever shall, anything that is an efficient cause of itself; such a thing would be prior to itself, which is impossible. It is also impossible to go on to infinity with efficient causes, for in an ordered series³ the first is the cause of the intermediate and the intermediate is the cause of the last. Whether or not the intermediate causes be one or many is irrelevant. Take away the cause and the effect also goes. Therefore if there were not a first among efficient causes—which would be the case in an infinite series—there would be no intermediate causes nor an ultimate effect. This plainly is not the case. A

¹ *The argument follows the plan of the prima via, but deepens to include the being as well as the becoming of the realities about us.*

² *That is a series in essential subordination, or causes depending on another for their causality. The argument abstracts from whether or not a series in accidental subordination, or of events in succession, need ever be closed.*

Retrieved from https://archive.org/details/stthomasaquinasp029194mbp
first cause, generally termed God, must therefore be inferred.

117, 394, 425

Summa Theologica, 1a. ii. 3

144. The intervening causes may be one or many, but the conclusion is not affected. If they be many, then they are all classed together as possessing the character of being intermediaries. Similarly it makes no difference whether they be limited in number or infinite, for so long as they are intermediate causes they never possess the character of a first cause.

If efficient causes were imagined as stretching to infinity it would follow that all causes would be intermediate. For in general one is bound to say that all parts in any infinite system of magnitude or causality must be middle parts, otherwise one part would be first and another part last; both notions are irreconcilable with the infinite, which excludes every limit, either of beginning or of end.¹

162, 418

Commentary, III Metaphysics, lect. 3

145. An infinite series of efficient causes in essential subordination is impossible. Causes essentially required for the production of a determinate effect cannot consequently be infinitely multiplied, as if a block could be shifted by a crowbar, which in turn is levered by a hand, and so on to infinity.

But an infinite series of causes in accidental subordination is not reputed impossible, so long as all the causes thus multiplied are grouped as one cause and their multiplication is incidental to the causality at work. For instance a blacksmith may work with many hammers because one after another breaks in his hand, but that one particular hammer is used after another

¹ Metaphysics, 994a¹⁻b31.
EXISTENCE OF GOD

particular one is incidental. Similarly that in begetting a child a man was himself begotten by another man; for he is father as man, not as son. In a genealogy of efficient causes all men have the same status of particular generator. Hence, for such a line to stretch back to infinity is not unthinkable.

419, 423, 492

Summa Theologica, ta. xlvi. 2, ad 7

146. Man's natural reason tells him that he is under a higher power because of the deficiencies he feels in himself crying out for care and comfort. Whatever that higher may be, it is what all men term God.

332

Summa Theologica, 2a-2ae. lxxxv. 1

V. TERTIA VIA, THE ARGUMENT FROM THE GROUND OF NECESSITY

147. We observe in our environment how things are born and die away; they may or may not exist; to be or not to be—they are open to either alternative. All things cannot be so contingent, for what is able not to be may be reckoned as once a non-being, and were everything like that once there would have been nothing at all. Now were this true, nothing would ever have begun, for what is does not begin to be except because of something which is, and so there would be nothing even now. This is clearly hollow. Therefore all things cannot be might-not-have-beens; among them must be being whose existence is necessary.1

Summa Theologica, ta. ii. 3

148. Necessary reality is always actual; it is never poised between existence and non-existence. It is primary, and were it to disappear nothing would remain.

Commentary, IX Metaphysics, lect. 9

1 The argument derives from Avicenna, Metaphysics, ii. i. 2, 3.

Retrieved from https://archive.org/details/stthomasaquinasp029194mbp
EXISTENCE OF GOD 57

149. Everything that is a possible-to-be has a cause, since its essence as such is equally uncommitted to the alternatives of existing and not existing. If it be credited with existence, then this must be from some cause. Causality, however, is not an infinite process. Therefore a necessary being is the conclusion. The principle of its necessity is either from outside or not. If not, then the being is inwardly necessary. If necessity comes from without, we must still propose a first being necessary of itself, since we cannot have an endless series of derivatively necessary beings.

1 Contra Gentes, 15

150. Substances are the primary realities. Destroy what is primary and everything else goes as well. Were all substances mortal and none of them everlasting, nothing would be permanent and everything would be transient. This is inconceivable.

Commentary, XII Metaphysics, lect. 5

VI. QUARTA VIA, THE ARGUMENT FROM THE DEGREES OF BEING

151. Imaginable objects are congenial to our minds. The notion of growth, like other notions born of quantity and bodies, can be accommodated to spiritual and intellectual things. In bodily quantities greatness is proportionate to seemly perfection; a quantity great in a man would be small in an elephant. Forms are called great when they are perfect. As Augustine remarks, the terms greater and better amount to the same in things not great by weight.¹

1 Summa Theologica, Ia–2ae. liii. 1

152. Quantity is twofold, dimensive quantity or bulk,

¹ de Trinitate, vi. 8

Retrieved from https://archive.org/details/stthomasaquinasp029194mbp
which is found only in bodily things, and virtual quantity, which is estimated according to perfection of form or nature.

The fourth argument is taken from the degrees of reality we discover in things. Some are truer and better and nobler than others, so also with other perfections. But more or less are attributed to different things in proportion as they variously approach something which is the maximum. Hence, there is something truest, and best, and noblest, and in consequence the superlative being, for the greatest truths are the greatest beings. Now the maximum in any order is the cause of all the other realities of that order. Therefore there is a real cause of being and goodness and all perfections whatsoever in everything; and this we term God.

The argument can be gathered from words let fall by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics.* He says that the truest things are also the most real; and again, that there is a superlative truth. One piece of architecture is more sham than another, one more genuine; throughout a comparison is implied with what is true without qualification and most of all. We can go farther and conclude that there is something most real, and this we call God.

That there is a universal cause from which all other things go forth into reality can be established on three bases.

Retrieved from https://archive.org/details/stthomasaquinasp029194mbp
First, a perfection common to many things must be caused in them by a unique cause. A common perfection cannot belong to two things of themselves because of themselves they are distinct from one another; diversity of cause would produce diversity of effect. Now since existence is common to all things, which yet considered of themselves are distinct from one another, it must be attributed to them, not of themselves, but from one cause. This seems to be Plato’s line of reasoning, when before all multitude he expects a unity, a unity not merely of number, but of reality.

Secondly, when one perfection held by many things is shared in differing intensities, then it comes to those imperfectly possessing it from that being which perfectly possesses it. A note positively predicated according to degrees of more or less is judged by close or distant approximation to a constant. For if each thing essentially possessed it, there would be no reason why its strength should be greater in one than in another. The inference is inevitable; that there is one being, most perfect and truly being. This may also be proved from the conclusion that there is a principle of motion wholly motionless and most perfect, from which all other less perfect things must receive their being.¹

Thirdly, that which is by another must be resolved into that which is of itself. We must affirm a being that is its own very being, proved because there must be some one first being, pure act, devoid of composition, from which all other beings are. They are beings by sharing, and their essence is not identical with their existence. This is the argument of Avicenna.²

¹ Cf. Metaphysics, 993b.
² Working from Metaphysics, 1045b, 1049b.

Retrieved from https://archive.org/details/stthomasaquinasp029194mbp
156. What is observed to be in something by participation must necessarily be caused there by that to which it belongs essentially, as when iron is made red-hot by fire. God is his very existence, moreover such subsisting existence cannot but be unique. Consequently all things other than God are not their existence, but share in existence. Things diversified by different degrees of existence, so as to be more or less perfect, must be caused by one first and most perfect being.

175, 204, 207, 436  Summa Theologica, Ia. xli. 1

157. Did eternal mind not exist then no truth would be eternal.

Summa Theologica, Ia. xvi. 7

158. If all created being were wiped out, the pure meaning of essence would still persist; if all human individuals were destroyed, rationality would still remain a predicate of human nature.

VIII Quodlibet, 1, ad 1

159. Because theoretical truths are eternal in their content it does not follow that our minds are eternal, but that there is an eternal foundation somewhere, namely the first truth which is the universal cause containing every truth.

1046  II Contra Gentes, 84

160. Above the human mind there must be set a higher mind, from which our mind receives its powers of understanding. To that which shares and which is mutable and imperfect there must always be presupposed that which is perfect essentially and which is unchanging and perfect. The human spirit is called intellectual by sharing in intellectual power. A sign thereof is that the human spirit is partially and not wholly intellectual; also that it comes to an under-
standing of truth by research and discussion; also that it enjoys imperfect understanding, for it does not understand everything, and even if it did there would have been a transition from potentiality. Therefore some higher mind must exist to kindle our soul into understanding.

161. Plato held that the forms of things subsist in themselves apart from matter, and that by sharing in these ideas, as he called them, the mind knows things; bodily matter becomes a stone by sharing in the idea of stone, our mind knows stone by sharing in the same idea. But since it smacked of heterodoxy to teach that the forms of things existing apart from matter should be creative substances such as pure life and pure wisdom, Augustine, who was imbued with the doctrine of the Platonists, in place of these ideas substituted exemplars existing in the divine mind according to which all things are formed and by the human soul also known.

162. Whatever is good yet not identified with its goodness is said to be good by sharing. A previous good must then be presupposed, from which is received the real form of derivative goodness. To go back to infinity is not possible especially as regards final causes, for indefiniteness is repugnant to the nature of purpose and the good has the force of a purpose or end. We must therefore reach some first good thing, which is not a derivative good by sharing, nor a good by reference to something else, but which is good essentially of itself. And this is God.
EXISTENCE OF GOD

163. Human bliss cannot consist in any created good, for it implies perfect good entirely satisfying the desire; were there still something left to desire it would not be the ultimate end. The object of the will or human appetite is universal good, just as the object of the mind is universal truth. Hence, nothing can still the desire of the will save universal good. There is no repose in any creature, but in God alone. A creature has only a share of good. Therefore God alone can satisfy the will of man, He who fills thy desire with all good things.¹

¹ 145, 744, 767

Summa Theologica, 1a–2ae. ii. 8

VII. QUINTA VIA, THE ARGUMENT FROM FINAL CAUSES

164. Another proof, taken from the governance of things, is introduced by Damascene² and mentioned by Averroes.³ Contrary and discordant elements, it runs, cannot always, or nearly always, work harmoniously together unless they be directed by something providing each and all with their tendencies to a definite end. Now in the universe we see things of diverse natures conspiring together in one scheme, not rarely or haphazardly, but approximately always or for the most part. There must be something, therefore, whose providence directs the universe.⁴

⁴ Two distinct arguments, of which the second is independent, are engaged in the quinta via. The first is the argument from design, based on the concept of external finality, that is the arrangement of different things in a working pattern. The second is the argument from purpose, based on the concept of internal finality, the rationalization of any activity in the light of an end which, at the last analysis, is intellectually appointed.

¹ Ps. cii. 5 (Vulgate).
² De Fide Orthoxoa, i. 3.
³ Commentary, II Physics.
⁴ 703, 1093

1 Contra Gentes, 13

Retrieved from https://archive.org/details/stthomasaquinasp029194mbp
165. We observe that things without consciousness, such as physical bodies, operate with a purpose, as appears from their co-operating invariably, or almost so, in the same way in order to obtain the best result. Clearly then they reach this end by intention and not by chance. Things lacking knowledge move towards an end only when directed by someone who knows and understands, as an arrow by an archer. There is consequently an intelligent being who directs all natural things to their ends; and this being we call God.

*Summa Theologica, Ia. ii. 3*

166. An end must be prefixed to everything that acts by natural necessity; wherefore, say philosophers, the work of nature is the work of intelligence.

*Disputations, I de Potentia, 5*

167. When diverse things are co-ordinated the scheme depends on their directed unification, as the order of battle of a whole army hangs on the plan of the commander-in-chief. The arrangement of diverse things cannot be dictated by their own private and divergent natures; of themselves they are diverse and exhibit no tendency to make a pattern. It follows that the order of many among themselves is either a matter of chance or it must be resolved into one first planner who has a purpose in mind. What comes about always, or in the great majority of cases, is not the result of accident. Therefore the whole of this world has but one planner or governor.

*Contra Gentes, 42*

168. The principle of things is outside the world; so also is their end.

*Summa Theologica, Ia. ciii. 2*

Retrieved from https://archive.org/details/stthomasaquinasp029194mbp
64

EXISTENCE OF GOD

169. One expects the best cause to produce an effect which is best on the whole. However, this does not mean that each part is best when taken in isolation by itself, but only in proportion to the whole. In the case of a higher organism, for instance, its value would be impaired were every part to have the excellence of an eye.

Summa Theologica, 1a. xlvii. 2, ad 1

170. A bodily creature is good in its nature, not unboundedly so, but in a partial and contracted manner. Hence the conflict of one thing with another, though both in themselves are good. Now because they judge things, not in their objective natures, but according as their own private convenience is affected, some people reckon those things to be absolutely evil which are harmful to them, not recognizing that what is harmful in one respect is beneficial in another, as regards either itself or something else.

Summa Theologica, 1a. lxi. 1, ad 2

171. If we wish to register the purpose of any whole and of its parts we should mark first, that each part is for its own proper activity, thus eye for seeing; second, that the lower is for the higher, thus senses for mind, or lungs for heart; third, that all parts are for the perfection of the whole, thus matter for form; fourth, that the whole man is for an extrinsic end, namely his enjoyment of God.

So it is with the parts of the universe: each creature exists first for its own proper activity and well-being; second, the lower creatures are for the higher, as plants and beasts are for men; third, each is for the integrity of the whole; last, the whole universe with all its parts is ordered to God as to its end, by copying and showing forth divine goodness to the glory of God.

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Transcending this subordination, rational creatures in a special way have God as their end, for knowing him and loving him, they can reach him by their own activity.

744, 1117

Summa Theologica, Ia. lxv. 2

172. Organs are judged to be homologous or otherwise by the functions that are their purpose, thus the roots of plants, though at the bottom, are like the heads of animals.

Commentary, II de Anima, lect. 8

173. The causality of an end consists in this, that other things are desired for its sake. The more perfect the end so much the more does the desire for it embrace many more things and the farther does it go.

213

1 Contra Gentes, 75

174. The art of sailing governs the art of shipbuilding.

III Contra Gentes, 80

VIII. CONVERGENCE OF THE FIVE WAYS

175. A thing whose existing is other than its essence has its existence caused by another. God is the first efficient cause, and therefore his essence cannot be distinct from his existence.

Existence is the actuality of every form and nature. Goodness and humanity do not signify actual things unless they refer to existents. Existence, therefore, is related to essence as actuality to potentiality. Since there is nothing potential in God, for he is motionless, his essence is not distinct from existence: on the contrary, his essence is his existence.

That which has existence, but is not existence, is a being by sharing. Were the divine essence not the
EXISTENCE OF GOD

divine existence, God would be an existent by borrowing and not by owning. He would not be the first being.

204, 206, 208, 231, 591  Summa Theologica, 1a. iii. 4

176. The arrangement of efficient causes corresponds to the arrangement of final causes. Man is directed to his ultimate end by the motion of the first cause, and to his proximate ends by the motion of subordinate movers, as the soldier is directed to victory by the high command, and to his tactical dispositions by the regimental commander.

Summa Theologica, 1a–2ae. cix. 6