THE EXISTENCE OF GOD
FROM
ST. THOMAS AND JEAN-PAUL SARTRE'S
POINT OF VIEW

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According to St. Thomas Aquinas, an understanding of the objects which are known through our senses will furnish us with strong reasons for belief in God. Thus the starting point of each of his Five ways of demonstrating the existence of God is a consideration of some feature of the world of our experience.

The first way demonstrates the necessity of a first mover, the second the necessity of a first efficient cause, the third of a necessary being, the fourth of a perfect being, and the fifth demonstrates the necessity of a ruler of the universe.

ST. THOMAS'S FIVE WAYS

The First Way

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 moved is moved by another, for nothing can be moved except it is in potentiality to that towards which it is moved; 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 moved must be moved by another. If that by which it is moved be itself moved, then this also must needs be moved 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 moved by the first mover; as the staff moves only because it is moved by the hand. Therefore, it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, moved by no other; and this everyone understands to be God.

The Second Way

The second way is from the nature of efficient cause. In the world of sensible things 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 one only. 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

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 be corrupted, and consequently, it is possible for them to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which can not-be at some time is not. Therefore if everything can not-be, then at one time there was nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist begins to exist only through 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 admit 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

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 most 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 of heat, is the cause of all hot things, as is
said in the same book.   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

The fifth way is taken from the governance of the
world.   We see that things which lack knowledge, such
as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evidence
from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same
way, so as to obtain the best result.   Hence it is
plain that they achieve their end, not fortuitously,
but designedly.   Now whatever lacks knowledge cannot
move towards an end, unless it be directed by some
being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the
arrow is directed by the archer.   Therefore, some
intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are
directed to their end; and this being we call God.[1]

Analysis of St. Thomas's Five Ways

The First Way

St. Thomas starts his first way by noting that there is

motion in the world. Then he states the first proposition

of the proof: "whatever is in motion is put in motion by another" because a thing cannot be the cause of its own movement. In the second proposition, St. Thomas explains that all movement is the "reduction" of potentiality to actuality. It is perhaps easier to understand this process by examining the motion itself. For instance, I lift up my leg to take a step forward. While it was standing still, my leg possessed the potentiality of becoming lifted. The action of lifting it made potentiality actual.

The third proposition is that the things which are moved must be in potentiality in the respects in which the things which cause movement in them are in actuality. A thing cannot be both in potentiality and in actuality in the same respect, that is, it cannot be both moved and mover in the same respect.

In the fourth, fifth, and sixth propositions, St. Thomas states that if a thing cannot be in actuality and at the same time in potentiality in relation to the same thing, as shown in proposition 3, it follows that it cannot be both *mover* and *moved* in relation to the same thing. In other words, it cannot move itself.

The seventh proposition is that nothing in the material world has the cause of its movement in itself. A thing moves because of something else. For instance, the basketball is moved by the hands, the hand by the arms, the arms by the nerves which are controlled by the brain, and there are other things that keep the brain in motion, etc.

However, these moved movers cannot regress to infinity, because then there would be no first mover.[2]

The eighth and concluding proposition is that, there must be the first mover which starts all the secondary movers in motion, which first mover we call God.

The Second Way

In his second way, sometimes called the causal argument, St. Thomas's first proposition is that it is impossible for anything to be the cause of itself.

The second proposition of this proof is that "in efficient causes it is impossible to go on to infinity." St. Thomas is referring here to series of subordinate causes "...in this series, each of the lower members essentially depends upon every one that is higher."[3]

The third proposition is that if we assume there is no first cause, then it follows that there could be neither intermediate causes nor effects. However, it is clear that things are happening, being caused and causing other things to happen, all around us. Therefore, it is necessary to suppose that there is a "first cause" which does not depend on any other causes to exist but is independent and uncaused.

The conclusion of this argument is that there must be a first efficient cause which causes the second, the second causing the third, etc... This "first cause" we call God.

The Third Way

In St. Thomas's third way, from contingency and necessity, the first proposition is that there are contingent beings in the world. All the contingent things are those things which have not existed at some time or another. In other words, all contingent things at one time or another had no existence.

In the second and third propositions, St. Thomas further explains that if all things were contingent, it would mean that there was a time when absolutely nothing existed.

And in the fourth proposition he asserts that if this were true, there would be nothing in existence at this very moment because anything which does not exist cannot begin to exist except by the agency of something which has existence. This fourth proposition is based on Aristotle's parmenidean dictum, "Out of nothing, nothing comes." If at any time in the past nothing existed, there would be nothing now.

Since we can experience through the senses that things do exist now, the conclusion of this proof is that not everything which exists is contingent, and that there must be a necessary being, which we call God.

The Fourth Way

The first proposition of this way is that there are different degrees of being in things since "'more' and 'less' are predicated of things, according as they resemble

in their different ways something which is the maximum."

The second proposition of this fourth way is that "the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus." Therefore, that there must be a cause of every perfection in every being.

The conclusion is that "there exists something which is the cause of being in all existing things", and we call this "something" God.

The Fifth Way

The fifth way of St. Thomas, sometimes called the "teleological argument," has for its first proposition that "things which lack intelligence...act for an end." This proposition is based on the principle of finality, "every agent acts for an end."

The second proposition of this fifth way is that whatever lacks knowledge cannot move towards an end, unless it is directed by some knowledge and intelligent being. This proposition is based on the principle that "it belongs to the reason to direct to the end, which is the first principle in all matters of action....."[4]

The conclusion of this fifth way is that some intelligent being exists which directs all natural things to their end. This "intelligent being" is God.

The first and second ways of demonstrating the existence of God are not arguments that there must have been a first mover or a first cause at some time in the *past*,

rather it refers to the present.[5] When St. Thomas says that "we cannot proceed to infinity in this way", i.e., in tracing the cause of movement, he does not mean an infinite regression in time back into the past, but the movement in the world at the present. In fact, he rejects the notion that a temporal series of causes and effects cannot regress to infinity. There is no reason (apart from relevation) to suppose that the world has not always existed. Aristotle's doctrine that the world is beginningless cannot, according to St. Thomas, be disproved. His point is that there must be a first mover not in the sense of 'earliest' mover but in the sense of 'primary' mover, because without "a mover which is not itself moved or a cause which does not itself depend on the causal activity of a higher cause, it is not possible to explain the motion or the causal activity of the lowest member."[6] In other words, if there is no first unmoved mover now, then there is no motion or change in this world now. Likewise the first efficient cause does not exist, then there is no causal activity. Since we know through the senses that things in the world change, there must be a first unmoved mover. In the same way there must be a first efficient and independent cause to cause the dependent efficient causes in the world. These two arguments lead us to see the necessity of belief in an unmoved mover or a first cause, which is the source of all movement and change in the world.

In the third argument, St. Thomas proceeds from the

"contingent" to the "necessary." He starts with the statement that there are certain things in nature that come into being and perish, and thus are capable of being or not being.[7] Such things are now called 'contingent beings.' He then says that it is impossible for all things to be of this kind, because anything which is capable of not existing at some time or other does not exist, and at some time no contingent beings would have existed, in which case there would be nothing in existence now, because things cannot come into existence by themselves.

Since, however, it is obvious that contingent things do exist now, we are forced to conclude that not everything is contingent. There must be at least one non-contingent or necessary being that causes contingent beings to exist.

In the fourth way, St. Thomas starts from the fact that in speaking of things we use words such as more and less, good, better and worse, true, less true, and more true, and so forth. St. Thomas's point is that our use of the terms good, better and worse means that there is something which possesses being in a greater degree than anything else. This fourth argument points to the fact that there must exist a "highest" in each class of things when we use the degrees of comparison.[8] In the same way there must also exist something which possesses being in the highest degree. In other words, there must exist a "supreme being" which causes all existing things to be and to be what there are.

In the fifth way, St. Thomas wants to show that there

must be an intelligent being who gives the order which is to
be found in nature.[9] "For non-intelligent material things
certainly do not cooperate consciously in view of a
purpose."[10] The argument begins by stating the fact that
there are things which appear to work towards a goal not by
chance, but by purpose. The fact is that things which have
no knowledge do not move towards a goal unless they are
guided by someone or something which does possess knowledge
or intelligence, e.g., an arrow by an archer.[11] Mainly,
St. Thomas wants to argue that purpose and not chance is
behind the process of nature. As an arrow is directed to
the target by an archer, unintelligent natural things are
directed to their goal by one who possesses intelligence.

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE' ATHEISM

Sartre's atheism is based upon two arguments: the
intrinsic contradiction in the notion of God and the
impossibility of creation.

I. The Intrinsic Contradiction in the Notion of God

In this argument, Sartre presents the problem of human
nature that discloses itself as the problem of God as well.
For instance, he states that "man cannot avoid trying to
combine being in-itself and being for-itself in a superior
synthesis: this is the most essential drive of his nature.
What he could avoid doing, but usually does, is to project
this synthesis into another world and endow it with

actuality."[12]   It is important here to understand Sartre's

two opposite modes of being, namely being for-itself

(pour-soi) and its' contraposition being in-itself (en soi).

Sartre identifies man as being for-itself which is

consciousness.   Everything else besides man, lacking human

consciousness, belongs in the category of being in-itself.

Consciousness is always of something, and it transcends the

objects of the world by differentiating the objects from the

conscious self as subject.   For instance, a table will have

alternative meanings depending upon what a particular person

chooses to use it for, to serve dinner or to write a letter.

A forest will mean one thing to a hunter and something else

to a camper.   Consciousness which is always of something can

be compared to a mirror.   A mirror has content only when

objects are reflected in it.   Of itself, it is empty.   In a

very similar manner, consciousness has no content except the

objects which it reflects.   These objects are always 'other

than consciousness itself.'

Sartre asserts that the illusory union of the for-

itself and the in-itself is the same as the God of religious

belief.   Sartre's argument is that there can never be a

unified notion of being that combines within itself the

properties of being in-itself (en-soi) and being for-itself

(pour-soi).   For Sartre, God is not a real transcendent

being but only the directional limit of man's self-

transcending activity.   Therefore, it would be impossible to

have   an   actual   God,   because   the   notion   of   God   is

contradictory. God would be "both necessary and contingent, and eternally immobile and temporally active." In other words, God would have both a close compression of being and the distance produced by consciousness. God, then, is the hypothetical reconciliation of two modes of being that Sartre believes can never be reconciled. Therefore, there can never be a really existent God.

II. The Impossibility of Creation

Similarly, Sartre presents an argument against God's existence based on the nature of creation. He views the world as being-in-itself. It is just simply being there. It does not exist for any purpose nor because it necessarily follows from or is caused by something else. It is 'uncreated,' i.e. without any dependence on any other being. "Being-in-itself is gratuitous for all eternity." Similarly, what is not present does not exist, says Sartre. Things are entirely what they appear to be, and apart from appearance, there is nothing. To say there is nothing besides the existing appearance means for Sartre that there is no God. Sartre argues that the divine subjectivity cannot be interrelated with the objective order of things. Sartre reasons:

> If being were present in the divine subjectivity, it would be a purely intrasubjective mode of being. As such, it could never represent an objective world and could never rouse in the divine subjectivity a will to create the objective order of things. The point of this objection is lost unless it be recalled that consciousness is defined precisely as a lack of being,

> in the sense of the In-itself. Hence it would seem to
> follow that every aspect of subjectivity is permeated
> by this absence of being and impotence to account for
> the existence of the In-itself. This would militate
> against a creation of being *ex nihilo*, that is, without
> drawing upon some previous stuff.[13]

Sartre's argument is based on the grounds of his ontology
that human consciousness is subject to the "in-itself."
However, as one commentator on Sartre puts it, "since human
subjectivity is pictured as a fortunate accident clinging to
the surface of being and forever dependent upon this morass,
it is concluded that the origin of natural being cannot be
ascribed to a creative act of a divine consciousness,"[14]
In addition, from the fact objective reality cannot have
been is created by a deity, we should not conclude that it
creates itself. In that event it would be self-caused
(*causa sui*), which would require that it precede its own
existence, which is impossible.[15] Thus objective reality
is neither self-caused nor caused by a deity. It must
therefore by uncaused and hence unexplainable, i.e. absurd.

The purpose of all Sartre's arguments is to embrace the
notion of man living in a world without God. For Sartre,
the absurdity of reality, which follows from its not being
created, is the beginning of man's self-development,
liberty, and dignity. If there is no God in this world,
then everything is permitted and human beings are free. In
addition, he declares that man has freedom and dignity only
if belief in God is banished. For this reason, his aim is
to eliminate Christian faith at all costs.

According to Sartre, we are left alone to create ourselves by our own acts. Existentialism arises from his need to affirm this life and nothing else despite its loneliness and futility. Man is supremely free because he is nothing more than the sum of his actions, that is, he has no other reality than his own acts. Sartre further insists that even if God does exist, He is the Enemy of man, preventing man from making himself what he is to become.

DO SARTRE'S ARGUMENTs UNDERMINE ST. THOMAS'S DEMONSTRATIONS?

Sartre's first argument, that there is an intrinsic contradiction in the notion of God, depends on his theory of the modes of being, namely being in-itself and being for-itself. He defines the two modes of being in a material way and then applies them to God. Obviously, Sartre overlooks the theory of the modes of being when he applies them with the concept of a purely actual being. Based on the modes of being theory, Sartre then asserts that it would be impossible to have an actual God, because it would be contradictory to the notion of God itself, for the infinite actuality of God would prevent Him from having the same mode of being as the in-itself since "in an infinitely actual being, self-identity would be achieved precisely by self-presence as a conscious act of being."[16]

In the theory of the modes of being, Sartre only shows that prime matter and intelligence cannot be the same, but he does not mention that being and intelligence cannot

coincide in an infinitely actual being. In addition, Sartre's theory only aims to demonstrate that a conscious mode of being is required for a being of infinite actuality. Therefore, it is unclear whether or not Sartre can show that an infinitely actual being is not demanded by the structure of finite existence.[17] Sartre views the world as being-in-itself. It is just simply being there. It does not exist for any purpose nor because it necessarily follows from or is caused by something else. Against this, St. Thomas's third way states that all contingent things at one time or another had no existence, including the world, and since anything which does not exist cannot come into existence except by the agency of something which has existence, the fact that things do exist now forces us to the conclusion that there is an agent which exists necessarily, and this we call God. It is hard to see how Sartre could refute this argument.

Sartre's second argument, the impossibility of creation, would, if sound, undermine St. Thomas's demonstration of God's existence, but this argument does not appear to be sound, for even if Sartre's theory that the infinite actuality of God would prevent Him from having the same mode of being as the in-itself is right, it does not follow that He could not know the possible structure of this other mode of being and hence be able to will its existence.[18]

ENDNOTES

1.   St. Thomas Aquinas, <u>Summa Theologica</u>.   Trans.
The Fathers of the English.   Dominican Province in 22
vol. (London: Burns oates &   Washbourne, 1920),
I,II,III, 90,

2.   St. Thomas Aquinas. <u>De Veritate</u>. Trans.   James
V. McGlynn, S.J.   in three volumes. (Chicago: Henry
Regnery Co., 1953). Vol. II, Q. 2, art. 10, p. 107.

3.   Summa Theologiae, II.

4.   F.C. Copleston. <u>Aquinas.</u> (Baltimore: Penguin
Books, 1961), p. 87-8.

5.   Copleston,   <u>Aquinas,</u> 88.

6.   Copleston,   <u>Aquinas,</u> 88.

7.   Copleston,   <u>Aquinas,</u> 89.

8.   Copleston,   <u>Aquinas,</u> 84.

9.   Copleston,   <u>Aquinas,</u> 84.

10.   Copleston,   <u>Aquinas,</u> 91.

11.   Copleston,   <u>Aquinas</u>, 91.

12.   Copleston,   <u>Aquinas</u>, 91.

13.   James Collins, <u>The existentialists,</u> (Chicago:
Henry Regnery Company, 1952), p.65.

14. Collins,   <u>The existentialists,</u> 68.

15. Collins,   <u>The existentialists,</u> 68.

16. Collins,   <u>The existentialists,</u> 70.

17. Collins,   <u>The existentialists,</u> 66.

18. Collins,   <u>The existentialists,</u> 67.

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