

# Cosmological Argument

St. Thomas Aquinas

Excerpt from *Summa Theologica*

# Existence of God

- **Theism**

- I know that God exists.
- I have good reasons to believe that God exists.

- **Agnosticism**

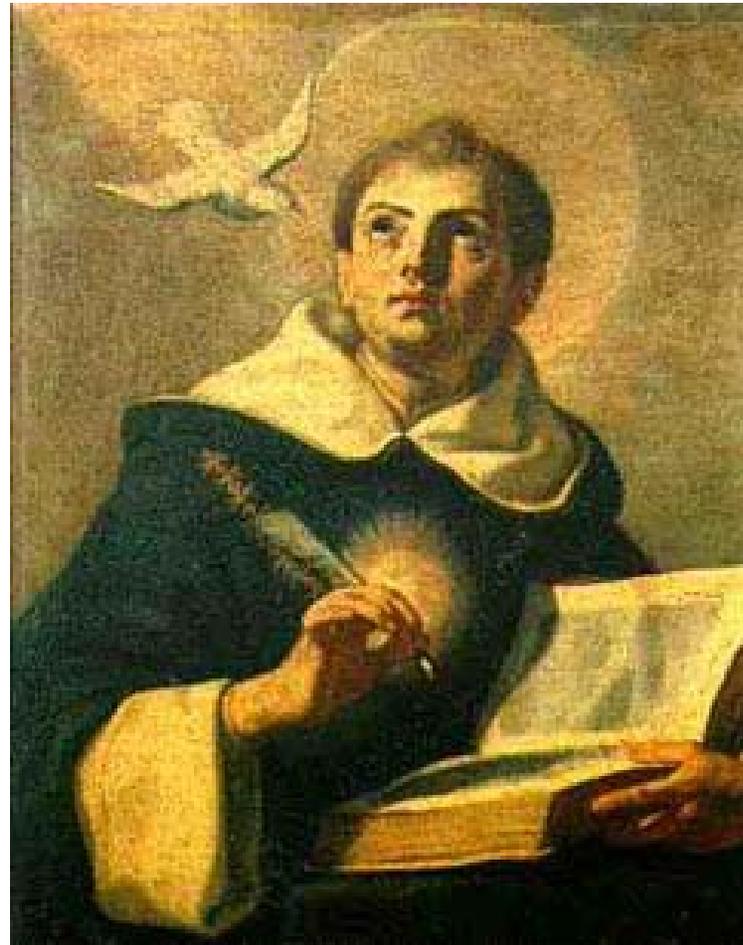
- I don't know whether God exists or not.
- I don't have good reasons to believe God exists or not.

- **Atheism**

- I know that God does not exist.
- I have good reason to believe that God does not exist.

# St. Thomas Aquinas

- One of the greatest scholastic philosophers
- Scholastic philosophers: philosophers who use philosophical method, reason and argumentation to explain and justify Christian doctrine
- Systematized Catholic theology and philosophy. His views are in use to this day.
- Merged Aristotle's views with Christian doctrine



# Cosmological Arguments

- A group of arguments based on some feature of the cosmos, namely the origin of the cosmos
- Main Idea:
  - we see that all events are caused and that all things are brought into existence by something existing prior to them.
  - But what caused the universe to occur? What brought it into existence? It was God.
- Aquinas offers 5 similar arguments (5 ways to God)

# The Second Way

- Argument

1. Things around us are caused by previous things
2. Everything that exists is caused
3. The chain of causes and effects cannot go back in time indefinitely (an infinite regress)
4. Therefore, there must be an uncaused cause or 'first cause'
5. The first cause is God
6. Therefore, God exists

- That God exists is known with certainty
- What kind of knowledge?
  - Recall, that there are two kinds: knowledge by reflection (a priori knowledge) and knowledge by sense experience (empirical knowledge)
  - That God exists is known *a priori* – because the premises in the argument are known strictly by reflection, except premise 1 – it known empirically

# Objection 1

- Even if it works, the cosmological argument only establishes that there is a creator
- A further argument is needed to show that whatever the 'first cause' is, it is all good, all powerful, and all knowing
- **Reply:** The cosmological argument is a first step towards a proof for the existence of God of religion.
- Let us take the charitable approach, accept this reply and see whether the cosmological argument establishes that there must be a creator of the universe.

# Objection 2

- Recall, premise 2: Everything that exists has a cause
- But, if everything must have a cause, what caused God – what brought God into existence?
- **Reply:** There is a difference between the natural (spatio-temporal) and the supernatural (something beyond natural)
- All natural events are caused
- But, some supernatural events are not caused
- The idea of causation does not have to extend to the super-natural world, which is where God exists anyway

# Revised Argument

- Revised Argument
  1. Things around us are caused by previous things
  2. Every **natural** thing that exists is caused
  3. The chain of causes and effects cannot go back in time indefinitely (an infinite regress)
  4. Therefore, there must be an uncaused cause or 'first cause'
  5. The first cause is God
  6. Therefore, God exists

# Objection: Supernatural Causation

- Let's push the view that there is a difference between super-natural and natural.
- How is it possible that there can be interaction between the two realms? How is it that God, who exists in the super-natural realm, causes something to happen in the natural world? How can something spatio-temporal (natural) even occur if it wasn't acted on by something else which is spatio-temporal (natural)?

# Infinite Chain of Causes?

- Is it possible for a chain of causes to go back to infinity?
- The reason why Aquinas rejects the possibility of infinitely long chain of causes is not clearly stated in the text
- Edwards' helps make the case for Aquinas – but then shows that it doesn't work. Ultimately, Edwards objects to premise 3

- Here is Edwards' explanation of Aquinas' claim that there cannot be an infinite chain of causes:
- $A \rightarrow B \dots W \rightarrow X \rightarrow Y \rightarrow Z$
- Z stands for something presently existing, e.g. (Z) Chelsea Clinton, (Y) Hilary Clinton, (X) The mother of Hilary Clinton
- Aquinas: **whenever we take away the cause, we also take the effect;** if Hilary Clinton had not lived, Chelsea would not have lived.
- If we accept that there is an infinite series of events, we are "taking away" the initial cause and without the first cause we can't have the second, and without the second we can't have the third, and then we can't have Z either. But, we know that Z exists, so there cannot be an infinite chain of causes.

# Edward's Reply

- Aquinas did not distinguish between two statements:
  - 1. (first cause) A did not exist
  - 2. (first cause) A is not uncaused
- An infinite series of causes implies (2) i.e. A is caused
- But, it does not imply (1); A could still exist
- So, Aquinas has not show that there is anything wrong with an infinite series

# Reason Against Innate Ideas

- Locke gave several reasons to reject innate ideas
- If an idea is innate then it ought to be universally agreed upon, but it is not
- But Locke says that ideas are not universal, since “children and idiots have not the least apprehension or thought of them.”
- Example: According to Descartes, the cogito is an innate idea, and one would expect that both adults and children know this idea since they one would think equally have it. But children do not know anything about the cogito, and some adults don't do either.

# Reason Against Innate Ideas

- Locke: “To make reason discover [innate knowledge] is to say that the use of reason discovers to a man what he knew before.”
- But this “is in effect to say that men *know and know them not at the same time.*”
- To say that a person both knows and does not know the same thing at the same time violates the law of contradiction.

# Rationalism: Innate Ideas

- Descartes' Innate Ideas: Cogito, Clear and Distinct Ideas, logical laws
  - if  $p \ \& \ q$  then  $p$  (e.g. If John is happy & John is good then John is Happy)
  - If  $p$  then  $q$ , and  $\neg p$ , so  $q$
- The process of reflection appears to be a process of clarification
- What we are clarifying seems to be already there, “built in” as it were, we just weren't aware of it, or hadn't clearly thought about it

# Chomsky on Innate Language

- The vocabulary (in the tens of thousands) and knowledge of grammatical rules of 6 year olds is enormous
- empirical evidence available to children is insufficient to distill among alternatives for each grammatical rule they end up knowing by the time they are six or seven. So, there a grammar must be innately known.
- babies know a universal grammar, which they use to learn their native language
- The universal grammar allows us to distinguish between expressions which are properly grammatical, even though we may have never heard them before