

is testing your skill in assessment rather than description, so make sure that you include evaluative comment rather than just a presentation of what Gaunilo said. Do you think Gaunilo was making a fair point? When Anselm replied to Gaunilo, did he give a satisfactory response or does Gaunilo's criticism still stand? You might want to argue that there have been other criticisms (such as those of Kant) that have been more successful than Gaunilo's; this would be a valid line of argument, as long as you also deal with the issues explicitly raised in the question.

Cosmological arguments

The basis of the cosmological argument is that the universe cannot account for its own existence. Why do things exist at all – why is there something, rather than nothing? There must be a reason, the argument says, for the existence of the universe, and this reason has to be something which is not part of the physical world of time and space.

This argument has a very long history. Plato, in *Timaeus*, argued that everything must have been created by some cause. Aristotle argued that behind the series of cause and effect in the world there must be an Unmoved Mover, and the Kalam argument in Islam is an attempt to show that the universe must have a cause and is not the result of an infinite regress (an endless chain going back for ever).



Cosmological arguments ask: why is there something, rather than nothing? Why is the universe here at all? They conclude that there must be a cause for the existence of everything – and that cause must be God.

Aquinas and the cosmological argument in the Five Ways

In the Middle Ages, cosmological arguments were used by Thomas Aquinas in his 'Five Ways' (*Quinque viae*), which were ways of demonstrating the existence of God through inductive argument, based on observation and evidence.

Aquinas (1224/5–74) is generally accepted to be the greatest of all the mediaeval philosophers and theologians. He lived at a time when the works of Aristotle had recently been rediscovered by Europeans – they had been forgotten, but preserved by Arab philosophers, and in Aquinas' time they had only recently come to light because of Christianity's contact with Islam. Aristotle's work was (and still is) immensely impressive, both because of its range and because of its common-sense appeal to logic. It was seen by many mediaeval church leaders as a threat, because it offered an alternative, and very attractive, way of understanding the world – a way which did not depend at all upon Christian doctrine. Aquinas was among the thinkers who believed that it was necessary to find out where Aristotelian thought and Christian thought could be compatible; he could see the dangers of putting believers in a position where they were forced to choose between Christianity and common sense. A key goal for Aquinas was to show how faith and reason could work alongside each other. He was an enormously intelligent man (and apparently an enormous man, too) with an attractive personality. He soon became well-known within the Church, working as an adviser to the Pope as well as producing a huge amount of writing.

In Aquinas' view, knowledge of God could be reached in two very different ways. One is through revelation, where God chooses to reveal the truth to people, for example through the words of the Bible. The other is through our own human reason (which Aquinas thought was given to us by God for this very purpose). Aquinas thought that if we applied reason to the evidence that we see around us, we can reach valuable truths.

Key points

- Aquinas was very much influenced by Aristotle.
- Aquinas believed that faith and reason could be combined in order to reach a better understanding of God.
- The 'Five Ways' explain Aquinas' arguments for the existence of God.

Aquinas presented five ways of showing that God exists, because he was convinced that although the existence of God was not self-evident, it could be demonstrated with logical thought. He wrote about the Five Ways in his book *Summa Theologica*, which was written for Christian believers rather than with the intention of persuading others

to convert. The book, which was never finished, is over 4000 pages long, and only two of these pages are devoted to the arguments for the existence of God, but these have become some of Aquinas' most famous ideas.

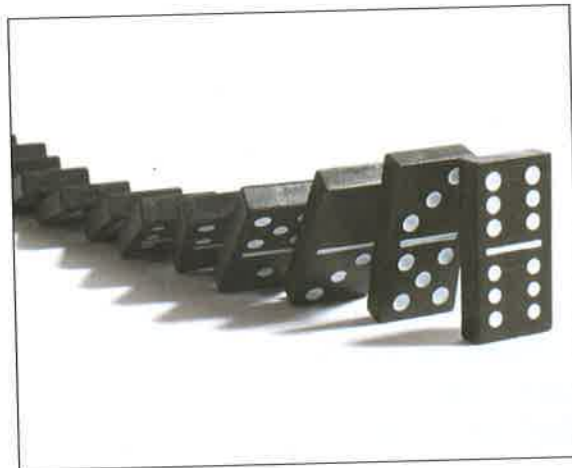
Of Aquinas' Five Ways, the first three are different variants of the cosmological argument. Aquinas based his argument on two assumptions:

- (a) the universe exists
- (b) there must be a reason why.

All but the most sceptical would agree with (a); however, not all would agree with (b). Some people, such as Bertrand Russell and Richard Dawkins, are happy to accept that the universe just is, without moving to the conclusion that there should be some reason for it. Aquinas, however, took as a starting point the view that there must be some explanation of why anything exists at all.

First Way – The Unmoved Mover

In his First Way of establishing God's existence, Aquinas concentrated on the existence of change, or motion, in the world. He considered the ways in which objects move, or grow or change in state (for example, become hotter or evaporate). His argument, closely following that of Aristotle, was that everything which is in motion, or changing, has to be put into motion, or changed, by something else. In this way, Aquinas (and Aristotle before him) produced a kind of pre-Newtonian understanding of the physics of motion. Things stay the same unless some force acts upon them to make them change or move. As things are, to our observation, changing and moving, then they must have been set in motion by something; Aquinas thought that this sequence of one thing moving another could not be infinite, but that there must have been an Unmoved Mover to set the whole thing off.



Aquinas argued that nothing in the universe would be in motion unless it was being moved by something else.

Aquinas also argued that if a change is brought about in Thing A by Thing B, then Thing B must have the characteristics of the change it brings about. For example, if Thing B makes Thing A hotter, then Thing B must itself be hot, or if Thing B makes Thing A darker, then Thing B must itself be dark. Peter Cole, in his book *Philosophy of Religion* (Hodder Murray, 2004), explains: 'What is potentially x is not actually x, yet the actual x can only be produced by something that is actually x'.

This is how Aquinas writes it:

The existence of God can be proved in five ways. 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 in motion is put in motion by another, for nothing can be in motion except it is in potentiality to that towards which it is in motion; 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 ...

Therefore, whatever is in motion must be put in motion by another. If that by which it is put in motion be itself put in motion, then this also must needs be put in motion 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 put in motion by the first mover; as the staff moves only because it is put in motion by the hand. Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God.

The emphasis of Aquinas' argument was on dependency, rather than going back in time until a beginning was found; he was using the idea that God sustains the universe, and trying to show that we would not have a universe of change, vitality and motion without a First Mover. The continued changes and movements are because of the continued existence of a mover 'which we call God'.

Second Way – The Uncaused Causer

This argument is very similar, except that it replaces the idea of change and motion with the concept of cause. Every 'effect' has a 'cause', Aquinas argued; **infinite regress** is impossible; therefore there must be a First Cause 'which we call God'.

Here, Aquinas concentrates on the idea of 'efficient cause', borrowing terminology

Key term

infinite regress – a chain (in this case, a chain of causes and effects) going infinitely back in time with no beginning, rather like the chicken and the egg idea.

directly from Aristotle. Aristotle had been very interested in the question of why things exist – not only why they exist in the form that they take, but also why they exist at all – and Aquinas was enthused by the same ideas. When Aristotle had considered the nature of causation, he came to the conclusion that ‘cause’ works at four different levels, which he named the material cause, the efficient cause, the formal cause and the final cause. By ‘efficient cause’, Aristotle meant the agent which makes something happen – so, for example, the baker kneading the dough is the efficient cause of the bread, or the musician pulling the bow across the strings is the efficient cause of the music.

The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause. In the world of sense 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 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. ...

Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.



Aquinas used Aristotle's ideas about 'efficient cause', where Aristotle had said that for every cause, there is an agent which brings it about. The efficient cause of violin music would be the violinist.

Aquinas took up Aristotle's understanding of causes, to argue that things do not cause themselves in this way – they cannot be their own agents. Therefore, he said, there must be a first efficient cause, and this would be God.

Third Way – Contingency

In his Third Way, Aquinas argued that the world consists of contingent beings, which are beings that begin and end, and which are dependent on something else for their existence. Everything in the physical world is **contingent**, depending on external factors for its existence. Things are contingent in two ways: they depend on something having brought them into existence in the first place (for example, volcanic rock depends on there having been the right minerals, sufficient heat and so on to form it), and they also depend on outside factors for the continuation of their existence (for example, plants depend on the light from the sun). Since the time of Aquinas, we have become more aware of the existence of ‘eco-systems’, and have learned more about how the existence of one species depends very much on the existence of another and on natural resources; some would argue that these discoveries add support to the points Aquinas made.

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 corrupt, and consequently, they are possible to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by 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 postulate 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.

Aquinas is arguing here that we can agree that everything in the universe is contingent. Contingent things need something else to bring them into existence, so nothing would have ever started – there would still be nothing – unless there is some other being, capable of bringing other things into existence but being independent of everything else, or **necessary**. It would have to be a being which is not caused, and which depends on nothing else to continue to exist – and this, Aquinas thought, would be God.

Key term

contingent – depending on something else.