BENE SCRIPSISTI
DE ME THOMA

The Cosmological Argument

Overview

Cosmological Arguments

- Reminder: Anselm thought we can show God's existence just by paying attention to what *concept* of God we have.

- Cosmological arguments disagree: they proceed from some observation.

- The "big idea": the existence of the universe demands some reason / cause / explanation.

Cosmological Arguments

There are various versions:

1. The kalām cosmological argument: the universe must have had a beginning and only God could have brought this about; we need a free cause to cause something to exist in a specific time.

2. Sufficient Reasons (Leibniz): every contingent thing must have a reason for its existence; the universe as a whole is contingent.

3. Causes (Aquinas)

Aquinas (1224/25–1274)

- Commentaries on Aristotle
- *On Essence and Existence*
- Commentaries on the sayings of the Church Fathers (ed. by Peter Lombard; the *Sentences*)
- *Summa Theologiae*
- *Summa contra Gentiles*

The *Summa Theologiae*
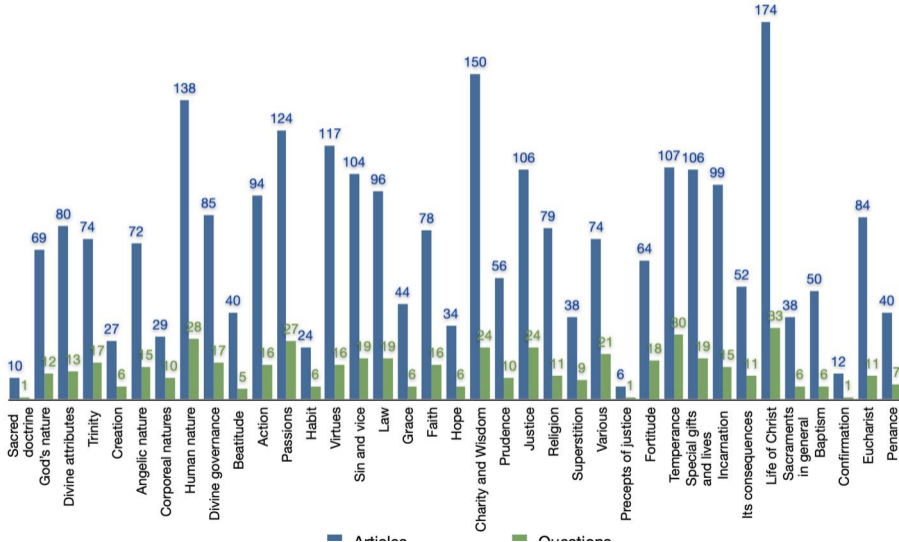
Cosmological arguments

Aquinas
The Summa

The 5 Ways: Overview

Second way
P_1
P_2
P_3 & P_4 & P_5
P_6 & P_7
P_8
The result

How to Read the *Summa*?

The general structure:

1. The title: usually a yes/no question
2. Objections to Aquinas's own position:
   1. Obj. 1
   2. Obj. 2
   3. etc.
3. "But on the contrary..." (*sed contra*) – some consideration, often by authority, why we should take Aquinas's view seriously
4. Aquinas's own view and his arguments for it
5. Response to the objections
   1. Response to obj. 1
   2. Response to obj. 2
   3. etc.

Reminder

1. Is it reasonable to believe something that we cannot demonstrate?
   - Clifford: no. It is morally wrong for anyone, everywhere, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.
   - Pascal: yes, but not anything
   - Aquinas: yes, but not anything

2. **Proving the existence of God:**
   - Anselm: the ontological argument
   - **Aquinas: The Five Ways**

The Five Ways: Overview

- Five distinct arguments
- Heavily rely on Aristotle
- Unlike Anselm: based on experience
- Analyzing the arguments:
    - What is the observational premise? Is it true?
    - What other principles are used? Are they implicit or explicit?
    - If the argument is successful, what does it prove?
- The 5 Ways:
    1. Argument from change (motion)
    2. **Argument from efficient causality (cosmological argument)**
    3. Argument from possibility and necessity
    4. Argument from the gradation of beings
    5. Argument from the governance of the world

The Second Way: *ST* I, q. 2, a. 3

The second way is from the nature of efficient causes. For we find that there is an order of efficient causes among sensible things. But we neither find nor is it possible for something to be the efficient cause of itself; for then it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now it is not possible to proceed infinitely among efficient causes. The reason is that, in any ordered series of efficient causes, the first is the cause of the intermediary and the intermediary causes the last, whether the intermediaries are many or only one. But if you take away the cause, you take away the effect. Hence if there were not a first efficient cause, then there would not be either an intermediate cause or a last cause. But if the series of efficient causes were to proceed infinitely, then there would be no first efficient cause and thus no last effect or intermediate efficient causes, which is obviously false. Therefore it is necessary to posit some first efficient cause, which everyone names God.

The Second Way

P_1 Everything has an efficient cause. [Observ. p.]

P_2 Nothing can be the efficient cause of itself. [Ass.]

∴ P_3 There is a causal chain of things that is not circular [1 & 2]

P_4 This causal chain of things is either finite or infinite. [Self-evident]

P_5 If the causal chain of things is finite, we have a first member. [Self-evident]

P_6 The causal chain of things cannot be infinite. [Ass.]

∴ P_7 Something exists, which is the first cause of all things. [4,5,6]

P_8 We call such a thing God.

∴ Therefore, God exists. [7,8]

P_1: Everything has an efficient cause

- Cause = explanation
- Efficient cause = identifying the thing through which something came to be
- Does everything in nature have an efficient cause?
  - This is — at least partly — an empirical question; we have never observed things just popping into existence
  - Science would say so; we find these causes in nature (e.g., the efficient cause of physical motion, of living things, etc.)
  - Even more, science has to assume that everything has a cause: otherwise it would be illegitimate.

P_2: The efficient cause of a thing is not the thing

- Causes are explanations
- If something causes itself, that just means that there is no explanation for it.
  - E.g.: "What caused the Sun to come into existence?" "It just caused itself; it popped into existence out of nothing."
- Similarly for parts: the part itself is something that needs explaining
  - E.g.: "What caused the Earth to exist?" "Australia."
  - We are asking for *total* causes ($=$ what completely explains the thing)

P_3: Therefore, there is a non-circular causal chain

- This follows from 1 & 2: since everything has a cause, and causes cannot go in circles, we have a causal chain of things.
- Do we need just one chain? – Aquinas thinks not, or at least we don't know it at this point. (He will demonstrate later that there can only be 1 first cause.)
- Every straight (non-circular) chain is either finite or infinite — so is ours.
- If we have a finite causal chain, that just means there is a first member, which is the cause of all the rest of the chain.

P_6: The causal chain of things cannot be infinite

- Remember that in our chain, everything only acts because the previous cause causes it to act – similarly to how in a train, every car moves because the previous car is pulling it to move, or, in a straight electrical chain of lightbulbs, one bulb only lights up because the previous one does too.

- So here is the crucial question: if we have an infinite chain of causes, where does this causal activity come from?

- Aquinas thinks it must come from *somewhere*. But it cannot come from the infinite causal chain itself (since that's precisely what is in question); so it must come from something outside of it, which amounts to saying that the causal chain is not infinite, after all.

P_7 : Therefore, something exists, which is the first cause of all things.

We all such a thing (the cause of all things) 'God'

- This is again an empirical question about language
  - So suppose I did not speak English, and asked: "What is the word for that supernatural being that caused everything to exist?"
  - You would probably immediately know that I am talking about God.

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What If The Argument Is Sound?

- Gives only a very generic idea of God:
  - God is not part of nature ($=$ supernatural)
  - God is the cause of everything
- We do *not* get specific items of the Christian faith, such as:
  - God is personal
  - God is loving
  - Trinity
  - Incarnation
- Reminder: Aquinas thinks that we can prove *some* truths of religion (God exists, and some attributes), but almost nothing specifically Christian — we need to get those by faith.

The Five Ways

1. Argument from change (motion)
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The Five Ways

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The result

	Observation premise	**Conclusion**
1st	There are things in motion	There exists a first mover
2nd	Everything natural has an efficient cause	There exists a cause of the universe
3rd	Some things are generated and perish	There exists a first necessary being
4th	Some things are more or less good	There exists something which is maximally good
5th	Some things act with regularity	There exists an ultimate end of all things