

Fort Bend Christian Academy – Apologetics

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**A Modern Presentation of Aquinas' Second Way**

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## **Introduction**

Cosmological arguments have been formed for thousands of years, with traces as far back as Plato, for they try to answer an age old question: how did everything get here? In essence, all cosmological discussions, proofs, and arguments deal with the origin of our universe. It is only natural for man to eventually ask the question, for our minds naturally tend to wonder how and why things are the way they are. It is in this field of questioning that many theologians have tried to direct the human mind toward the evidence of an omnipotent being, commonly called a god. If the religious man could prove that his deity caused our existence, then that deity is easily claimed authoritative and worthy of praise, which is the religious man's goal and message to humanity. Therefore, Christian cosmological proofs for the existence of God have been important to many philosophers throughout all of Christian history.

It is through the study of this history that one discovers a theologian named Thomas Aquinas, and his five ways to prove God's existence. The first three are cosmological in form, through motion, causality, and contingency. It is his second way, the uncaused causer, which most directly intrigues itself with the questions of the origin of the universe. This causation argument is very clever, and with a little help from modern context, is very convincing today. Some have tried to deny it, but at large, the reformed causation argument is untouched by its opposition.

## **Historical Review**

### **Plato**

Plato's works include the first hints of Cosmological appeal to prove theism. In fact, he is considered the "creator of philosophical theism."<sup>1</sup> These inklings can be found in two of his writings: *Timaeus* and the *Laws*. In *Timaeus*, a dialogue text, Timaeus builds the case for a first cause. "Now everything that comes to be must of necessity come to be by the agency of some cause, for it is impossible for anything to come to be without a cause...Further, we maintain that, necessarily, that which comes to be must come to be by the agency of some cause."<sup>2</sup> However, Plato hardly develops these thoughts into a clearly stated theistic argument. Instead, these are established truths that are agreed upon by the whole party.

In the *Laws* chapter X, however, the philosopher builds a bigger argument from the principle of motion. In this text, Plato is determined to justify the importance of the laws by proving the existence of gods, and refuting atheism.<sup>3</sup> His argument can be formulated as thus:

1. *Everything is in motion.* This point is fairly obvious through observation. Plato forms ten different types of motion before he reaches this point.<sup>4</sup>
2. *Anything in motion is either moved by an outside force or moves itself.* These two types of motion, Plato exclaims, can describe all motion. "The one kind of motion is that which is permanently capable of moving other things but not itself; the other is permanently capable of moving both itself and other things by process of combination and separation,

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<sup>1</sup> Craig, William Lane. *Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz*. (Oxford: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Pub Co, 1997), 1234.

<sup>3</sup> Craig, William Lane. *Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz*. (Oxford: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Pub Co, 1997), 1551.

increase and diminution, generation and destruction.”<sup>5</sup> An example of a self-moved mover would be any person or animal that controls his own motion. We move inanimate objects, which would be the former type of mover described.

3. *Self-movers must be the initial source of motion.* All motion dependent upon something else must be traced to a self-mover. For the wheels of a cart to move, the axles must spin. This chain will continue until it reaches the horse or man pulling it, who is self-moved. This principle must be applied to motion of stars, planets, and things like light and sound. These things are dependent upon other factors, like gravity of other objects, or the creation of the light and sound to begin with. Therefore, these motions must trace to an ultimate self-moved mover.

With these points, Plato fathered the first form of the Cosmological Argument. His reasoning was advanced for his time, and very similar to the modern, theistic arguments, even though he used it to prove polytheism.

### **Aristotle**

Aristotle, a student of Plato, furthered his teacher’s argument, and made significant changes that were ultimately deemed necessary for the modern Cosmological Argument today. First off, his idea of motion was distinctly different than Plato’s. His categories of motion lead him to a different conclusion. “In order to fully appreciate Aristotle’s cosmological argument, we must understand his distinction between potency and actuality.”<sup>6</sup> To Aristotle, motion is the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Craig, William Lane. *Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz*. (Oxford: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001), 20.

change from potency to actuality. Magnets have the potential to move through a magnetic field, due to attraction. This motion only occurs once the magnet's potentiality is transferred to actuality, or when the magnet is actually moved through a magnetic field. With this perspective, Aristotle forms this argument in *Physica*.<sup>7</sup>

1. *Motion is caused by an outside force.* Aristotle claims that any motion present would have to be controlled by anything other than that which is moving. To turn the potential into the actual, a substance of actuality must cause it, therefore being an outside entity.
2. *The outside forces can be traced to self-movers.* Just like Plato, Aristotle affirmed that certain things are self-movers, but he does not stop here to claim an initial source of motion, as Plato did in his studies.
3. *Even these movers need a cause, which points to an unmoved mover, who is eternal.* To prove this, Aristotle explains that one being cannot be fully self-moved; some part of it must be influenced by some outside force. If there was a completely self-moved being, it would need to be fully actual, yet still potential. This clearly contradicts itself, for potency requires a lack of actuality. This brings us to the inevitability of a supreme being, lacking potency.

This tweak that Aristotle has inserted proves very beneficial.<sup>8</sup> In *Metaphysics*, he once again states his claim for an unmoved mover. "If it does not act, there will be no movement. Further,

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<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *Physica*, 8. 1-6. 250b5-260a15; 8. 10. 266a10-267b25.

<sup>8</sup> This tweak refers to the change from Plato's self-moved mover to an unmoved mover. If modern day Cosmological Arguments claimed a self-moved mover, the argument would seem ridiculous. Aristotle's argument aligns with the current Christian theist philosophy of a God outside of space and time, therefore unmoved. "The conception of God as Prime Mover and the conception of God as Creator are alike in three respects: the immateriality, the immutability, and the perfection of the Divine Being." (Mortimer 187) Aristotle's Prime Mover necessarily requires these three characteristics because of the concept of an unmoved mover.

even if it acts, this will not be enough, if its essence is potency; for there will not be eternal movement: for that which is potentiality may possibly not be. There must, then, be such a principle, whose very essence is actuality.<sup>9</sup> In this text Aristotle once again claims the necessity of a fully actual being, in reference to motion.

### Anselm of Canterbury

In *Monologion*, Anselm reasons his own form of Cosmological Argument. His case takes its form through existence, or contingency. It is stated as thus:<sup>10</sup>

1. *Whatever exists...exists only through something.* Although many Atheists today would argue this fact, the point seems obvious to Anselm, because he takes little time supporting it. “For it is impossible even to conceive of something existing through nothing. Whatever exists, then, exists only through something”<sup>11</sup> This point could also be seen as building a case for contingency in all things created within this universe.
2. *There is either one or more than one thing through which all existing things exist.*
3. *If there are more than one, then they are either themselves reducible to some one thing through which they exist, or each of them exists individually through itself.* According to Anselm, if multiple beings have the same power to self-exist, then the power they possess is the one substance through which all things exist. “In order for each to exist through itself, there must of course be some single power-to-exist-through-oneself (or some single

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<sup>9</sup> Craig, William Lane. *Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz*. (Oxford: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001), 33.

<sup>10</sup>Words in italics come directly from: Brian Davies (Editor), G. R. Evans (Editor) St. Anselm, *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works (Oxford World's Classics [Paperback]*. publication place: Error, 2008) , 13.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

nature-of-existing-through-oneself) that each possesses.” In other words, the way in which these beings can self-exist would be the ultimate source or method that establishes all existence.

4. *Therefore there is necessarily some one thing through which all existing things exist.*

This argument does not deal with causation of motion, but its Cosmological form was crucial to apply to theism. Anselm helped transform ancient thoughts into theistic evidences, consequently carrying cosmological thought into the Twelfth Century.

### **Thomas Aquinas**

Before breaking down Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* to single out its Cosmological proof for God's existence, the book must be given context by looking into Aquinas' life. "Because his philosophy is worked out within the context of faith, to understand Thomas properly it is necessary to focus primarily upon his theological work... Thomas is a theologian who begins with God before moving to creatures, quite unlike any separated philosophy, ancient or modern."<sup>12</sup> When philosophers read Aquinas, they tend to write him off for reaching to a conclusion too quickly, and being closed minded to his results. However, his goal in these writings was not apologetic in nature. "In the thirteenth century, however, the existence of God was not really a question. Thomas entered upon his proofs, not because God's existence was in any doubt, as later, but, on the contrary, because it is a genuine question, and a thoroughly theological one."<sup>13</sup> Once the theological context of *Summa Theologica* is realized, Aquinas' Cosmological arguments can overcome petty objections of hasty conclusions, and can be better

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<sup>12</sup> Healy, Nicholas M., *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian of the Christian Life*, (Oxford: Ashgate Pub Ltd, 2003), 13.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

understood. His first two arguments, Way One and Way Two, are Cosmological, and are outlined as follows:

**Way One (Unmoved Mover)<sup>14</sup>:**

1. *Some things are in motion.*
2. *Whatever is moved is moved by another.* When supporting this point, Aquinas employs Aristotle's motion theory. "For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality" (Aquinas 17). Aristotelian motion appealed to Aquinas, for it more clearly displayed the fact that motion requires another, in form of actuality, to convert potentiality.
3. *But this cannot go on to infinity.* According to Aquinas, if there were an infinite series of movers, there would be no first mover, and therefore no motion. "Subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they are moved by the first mover" (Aquinas 17).
4. *Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, moved by no other, and this everyone understands to be God.*

**Way Two (Uncaused Causer):**

1. *There is an order of efficient causes.* The term efficient cause means: "acting directly to produce an effect."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Text in italics is directly from: Aquinas, St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, (Complete English ed. 5 vols. Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1981), 17.

<sup>15</sup> Farlex, Inc. *The Free Dictionary: Definition of Efficient*. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/efficient>. (accessed December 4, 2011).

2. *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.* At this point, Aquinas is specifically addressing the cause of existence. This is another instance where Aquinas sides with Aristotle over Plato. Although some beings can cause themselves to do certain activities, no one can cause their own existence.
3. *Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity.* This explanation from Aquinas is much like that in Way One, when he stated that without a first, there cannot be subsequent.
4. *Therefore, it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name God.*

It is significant to note that most of Aquinas' Cosmological philosophy is taken from Aristotle. In fact, he even credits Aristotle as a source for the Uncaused Causer in *Summa Contra Gentiles*.<sup>16</sup> Most theologians before Aquinas used Platonic philosophy when dealing with cosmology, most notably Augustine of Hippo. "Where they disagreed with Thomas was over the usefulness of this particular philosophy, over whether or not it was appropriate or even possible to attempt to bring together Aristotle and the tradition of theology represented most authoritatively by Augustine."<sup>17</sup> Because of the differences in studies, Aquinas' arguments of an uncaused causer are much more valid than Augustine's self-caused arguments. Also, Aristotle's view of finite motion and change parallels the Christian belief of a creator who made finite time.

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<sup>16</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1. 13.

<sup>17</sup> Healy, Nicholas M., *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian of the Christian Life*, (Oxford: Ashgate Pub Ltd, 2003), 10.

Examples of this are also found in Aquinas' *DeEnte*, where finite motion is presented as the change from the potential to the actual.<sup>18</sup>

### **David Hume**

Although Hume never specifically addresses Aquinas' Five Ways, his views of cause and effect directly conflict with others before him. Hume states that no one can infer a cause based on an effect. "There is always the possibility of the post hoc fallacy – namely, that things happen after other events (even regularly) but are not really caused by them... One can never know causal connections."<sup>19</sup> Hume himself gives an example in the *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, which involves bread.<sup>20</sup> There are actual observations of a slice of bread: texture, color, smell, or taste. However, we also attribute its effects as observations as well, namely its nourishment. According to Hume, assuming that all bread will nourish you is illogical, for you cannot be sure that it always will. "If we be, therefore, engaged by arguments to put trust in past experience, and make it the standard of our future judgment, these arguments must be probable only."<sup>21</sup> This form of agnosticism can be applied to cosmological thinking of cause and effect as well. Agnostics would say that any causal connection not observed first hand cannot be logically inferred as necessary, but probable. Therefore, inferring a chain of causes one has not seen, and stating what kind of cause must be present, cannot be known, and at best a guess.

### **Immanuel Kant**

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<sup>18</sup> Davies, Brian, ed. *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*. (New York: Oxford University Press), 143.

<sup>19</sup> Geisler, Norman L. *Christian Apologetics*. (Oxford: Baker Academic), 15.

<sup>20</sup> Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 114.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 115

Kant was also skeptic, and would agree with Hume's analysis of cause and effect. However, in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, he offers another refutation of Cosmological proofs. Kant's skeptic nature caused him to believe that it was improper to make any definite statement concerning a god. Therefore, he says that Aquinas wrongly claims in his conclusion that his God "necessarily" exists. "I find that the existence of this thing can never be represented by me as absolutely necessary, and that, whatever it may be that exists, nothing prevents me from thinking its non-existence."<sup>22</sup> If something can possibly be conceived as non-existent, then it is not necessary. Since Kant conceived of a godless universe, God is not necessary. By this thinking, Kant sees the use of "necessary existence" as the same as in the Ontological Argument.<sup>23</sup> Because of Kant's reasoning, he concluded that the philosopher may never state that God necessarily exists, but only offer ideas to make his case more probable.

### **Thesis Proof**

Aquinas's second way, while a beautifully crafted cosmological argument, needs some clarification to be an effective argument for God's existence today. It does not explicitly reach the conclusion of a being outside of the universe, although it comes extremely close. An atheist can determine that the universe itself is the uncaused causer, for there is nothing within the second way that prevents that conclusion. "Even if one grants that a chain of causes cannot extend back indefinitely... it just isn't obvious that the uncaused, first cause is the kind of thing

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<sup>22</sup> Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. (Unified ed. Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Pub Co), 515.

<sup>23</sup> The ontological argument attempts to prove that God is necessary by definition of His nature, therefore stating that God necessarily exists through human reason.

which we'd want to call God."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, some deeper connections must be made to prove Aquinas's argument, which require a reworded argument that is more direct.

Before this argument is presented, the term causal power must be understood. Causal power is the ability to actively cause events to take place. A simple example of this can be seen through motion: a man picks up a rock and throws it. In this situation, the man has causal power to affect the rock. Another characteristic of causal power is its transferability to other objects. In accordance to the previous example, the rock is given causal power by the man when it is given enough force to fly through the air. Moreover, if it hits a branch, it transfers causal power to it, maybe even enough to break it and cause it to fall to the ground. A property of causal power that is crucial to understand is its criteria for origin. The only beings which can generate causal power must have an intellect and will to use the power. Inanimate objects cannot create their own causal power; it must be bestowed to them by a being which fulfills the criteria for origin of causal power. The rock can hit the branch, which can hit another tree and knock another branch down, but in order for any of it to have occurred, some source of causal power must have originated in a being with an intellect and will. The rock has neither intellect nor will to throw itself into the branch.

When Aquinas formed the uncaused causer, he did not create a linear string of causes that follow a timeline. Instead, he established a hierarchical system of causal power. "It is unlikely that Aquinas was thinking of a series of causes (or movers) stretching into the past. His argument actually suggests a hierarchy of causes here and now."<sup>25</sup> If Aquinas was explaining a linear series

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<sup>24</sup> Stangroom, Jeremy. *Little Book of Big Ideas*. (Chicago Review Press), 18.

<sup>25</sup> Thompson, Mel, *God – Thought or Experience?*, 86-87.

of effects, then he was merely restating the first way, and not forming a new argument. However, it is obvious that Aquinas means to make a new argument, hence titling it the second way. This hierarchy of efficient causes further validates the idea of causal power.

With this understanding of causal power, Aquinas's uncaused causer can be modernized. When looking at the universe as a whole, there is no denying that it has causal power. This power moves planets, drives intermolecular forces, and is the cause for all effects within the universe. In the end, every train of causal power can be traced back to the causal power of the universe. The causal power of all humans come essentially from the food they eat, to the plants that grow, to the sun that energizes them, to the universe that powers the sun. It is also clear that the universe does not have an intellect or will. The universe, according to the atheist, causes everything through the random collisions of particles, with no intelligent interference whatsoever. So the question arises: where did the universe derive its causal power? If it cannot be its own source of causal power, the atheist cannot answer the question.<sup>26</sup> Without an intellect or a will, the universe cannot generate its ability to cause these events to occur. If this is the case, the universe cannot be the ultimate source for causal power, and there must be another being which is. However, nothing bound by the universe can be the source, for it is dependent upon the causal power of the universe, which would create an impossible cycle. If something within the universe was the ultimate source of cause, it would have to somehow bestow the universe with causal power. This could not be, for nothing inside the universe could obtain causal power before the universe itself, for before the universe has causal power, there would be no power for motion or existence within the universe. Because of the universe's lack of criteria for origin of causal

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<sup>26</sup> The belief that an infinitely old universe needs no source of causal power will be addressed on the following page.

power, a conclusion must be made that a being outside the universe, which fulfills the criteria, must exist in order to bestow that power to the universe. A syllogism summarizing this argument is as follows:

1. Any object with causal power can bestow that power upon other objects.
  2. The only objects which can generate causal power must have an intellect and a will.
  3. The universe as a whole does not have an intellect or a will.
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4. Therefore, there must necessarily exist a being outside the universe with an intellect and will that generates and bestows causal power upon the universe.

This presentation of Aquinas' argument does a better job of proving that the ultimate source of cause must come from something other than the universe by putting criteria on the original source of causal power. It also helps distinguish it from the first way, as Aquinas intended it to be. The Five Ways are all independent arguments from each other, even though ways one and two follow the same structure. By reconstructing Aquinas' thoughts into a different form, the second way may not be as overshadowed by the first way than it normally is.

### **Rebuttals**

There are a few objections that arise in response to this argument, but none of them effectively refute it. Some atheists would say that the universe has always existed, and therefore needs no origin of causal power. This statement assumes that either the universe can regenerate causal power or has an unlimited amount of it. However, without an intellect or will, the universe

cannot regenerate causal power, which has already been discussed. Likewise, the universe cannot have an unlimited amount of causal power, for then it would be the source of it. If the ultimate source of causal power was a will-less, thoughtless object, other objects similar to it in this respect could acquire causal power on their own, which is not the case. If the universe, being an inanimate object, could derive its own causal power, couldn't the rock derive its own as well? In all cases of beings which can generate causal power, an intellect and will are mandatory elements. Therefore, even if the universe is infinitely old, it cannot be the ultimate source of causation.

Hume's opposition to cause and effect relationships would be a stretch to apply to this argument, because of the way he views causes and effects. When Hume declares that one cannot infer the cause from the effect, he assumes cause and effect in linear respects. His argument attacks any instance in which an event occurs within time. However, as it has already been stated, Aquinas' cause is not linear, but a system describing the degrees of source of causal power, which is a hierarchy. However, Hume's ideas could be a source of objection; one could say that a need for a source of cause for the universe is not necessary. This is simply a skeptical position taken, but it assumes two options: either a source for the universe's causal power is needed or not needed, but neither can be known for certain to be correct. However, the later position was concluded to be impossible in the previous rebuttal, and therefore cannot be an option. By process of elimination, it can be fully concluded that the universe needs a source of causal power, and the skeptical position cannot be taken.

Kant's objection previously presented can be applied to this argument as well. The term necessary, according to Kant, is improper. Because Kant can imagine a world without a god, then

a god cannot be necessary. However, without the necessary facts, one could imagine anything, even things that cannot be possible. For example, if one knows very little about anatomy, they could imagine a living human without a heart. Effectively, Kant is claiming that the heart is not necessary for human life, to follow the analogy. Once the right facts have been understood, however, it then becomes impossible to imagine a heartless person. Just the same, this argument provides the facts that would make it impossible to imagine reality without a being with an intellect and will bestowing causal power upon the universe. By proving every point within the syllogism to be true, it then becomes impossible for one to imagine a godless universe. Therefore, Kant's objection is only applicable if an argument has not been presented, or has been presented inaccurately, so it is not an effective refutation.

### **Conclusion**

By effectively presenting Aquinas' second way in a more explicit manner, a solid proof for God's existence can now be presented to today's world, which is much more technical and exact than Aquinas' culture. This argument leaves the atheist with no answer to an extremely important question of the source of causation. Without an answer, the atheistic worldview becomes inadequate to deal with any source of causation, rendering it useless. Moreover, it further validates the fact that a theistic worldview is necessary to explain causation. By having a modern form of cosmological argument with more precise terms and conclusion, it can now be an effective way to argue the necessity of a god, and equips theists with another weapon. Because of the ideas concerned with causal power, the necessity a god's existence can now be

fully understood by anyone within the present American culture, which requires exact information with absolute conclusions.

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