

# THERE IS A GOD

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## FOREWORD

This little book is for God. It is also for those men and women, especially young men and women, whom those others who are campaigning against God are trying to reach and influence. In Ireland, as elsewhere, there are people who are not trained philosophers, but who are under the necessity or with the desire of knowing the reason of the Truth, and of the Hope, that is in them. To these, this little book offers a slight garnering of the wisdom of St. Thomas Aquinas. It is offered, not because it is his, but because it is true. Truth is its own guarantee. And Truth is simple. But because of its very simplicity Truth is not easy for the human mind—in so many ways a divided mind—to grasp. The mastering of Truth involves, as St., Thomas himself wrote: "much labour of study." These pages, then, cannot pretend to be easy reading; but their author has tried to make them as simple as can be, for those who seek the Truth.

A WIDESPREAD campaign has been proclaimed in our time against God, "anti-God," and in France there is a society which vaunts the title "Sans Dieu," without God. If there be a God, these movements must stand self-condemned. And yet the very names they assume seem to attest the existence of God: a nonentity would not be so opposed. At any rate it is obvious that the main question, in a sense the only question at issue is: Is there a God? The persistence and increasing violence of the anti-God campaign call for a marshalling of all forces, including every intellectual argument, that stand for God. Pope Pius XI has stated the issue:

"To stand for or against God; on this choice hangs the fate of the world. In politics, in finance, in morality, in science and in art, in the State, in Society (civil and domestic), in the East, in the West—everywhere this choice must be made, and its consequences are decisive." (*Caritate Christi Compulsii*, 3-5-'32). This little book is for God. Its aim is to put before those who want to know them some of the arguments by which reason itself is able to find an answer to the question: Is there a God? Five arguments are selected. They are those that appealed most to St. Thomas Aquinas. Pope Pius XI has said of them that "they are today, as they were in the middle ages, the most cogent of all arguments." (*Studiorum Duce*m, 29-6-1923).

## THE QUESTION AT ISSUE

Before attempting to deal with any question whatsoever, it is necessary to be clear as to what the question is about. It is foolish to answer any question until one knows just what the question is. If, for instance, one is asked whether A is greater than B, it is necessary before answering to be informed as to what is A and what is B. Or, to take another example, if a child is asked to see whether there is a boat on the river or a person at the door, it must be supposed that he already knows the meaning of the words boat and river, person and door. So if one is asked a question about God, for instance: Does God exist?, it is necessary from the outset to know, at least in a general way, what the word "God" means. This consideration, which seems so elementary that one hesitates to propose it, is overlooked time and again in modern controversy. Professor J. B. S. Haldane, for instance, who himself recognises the necessity of a proper definition, refers in a recent controversy with Mr. Arnold Lunn (1), to the modern confusion of thought when he says (P. 358) : "I am willing to concede to you the existence of God, provided we leave it open whether the word defines a person, the principle of concretion (Whitehead), the goal of our striving (Alexander) or something at present undefined."(2) The confusion caused by such ambiguity is deplorable. On the one hand, some people are undeservedly regarded as atheists, because they deny the existence of what they name "God," although by the name they simply mean something monstrous, a sort of malevolent, or even benevolent, giant whom they have heard that some benighted people think of as lord of life and death. The late Father Peter Finlay, S.J., once made a most forceful appeal to children making a retreat not to think of God the Father as a fierce old gentleman with a beard. But to deny the

1 Published by Eyre and Spottiswoode in a volume: *Science and the Supernatural*.

2 The italics are not in the text.

existence of such a fierce old gentleman, even though some people may have thought of him as God, is not to be an atheist! On the other hand, and here the confusion is still more dangerous, many modernist philosophers cling to the word "God" while rejecting the meaning that attaches to it in common and long-accepted usage. Of these Dr. Inge writes, in *God and the Astronomers*. (1): "We may give modernist philosophers credit for good intentions in retaining the name of God while sacrificing the thing; but it is very confusing to their readers. If by the name God they mean a 'nisus' or a 'principle of concretion,' or 'the ideal tendency of things' or a magnified and non-natural President of the United States, it is a mistake to use a name which has such very different associations." But unfortunately the meaning of words is something that modern thought is often unable to grasp and sometimes completely ignores. One of its representatives appealed to the editor of *Discovery* (October, 1934) : "If the scientist is convinced that the word God is without meaning (for him), why should he object to his writing with this implication?" He did not see that the objection was not to the scientist's humble confession that he did not know what the word "God" meant, but to his proud and impertinent suggestion that nothing could exist of which he was ignorant. As well might he say that some town, whose name was without meaning *for him*, did not exist, as that God did not exist because he did not know what the word God meant. But many so-called, and even self-styled atheists do not really deny the existence of God, for the simple reason that they do not know the very meaning of the word. Thus Professor Julian Huxley in a sentence in which he meant to profess atheism, actually affirms the existence of what he thought to deny: "The advance of natural science, logic and psychology have (sic) brought us to a stage at which God is no longer a useful fiction.. Natural science has pushed God into an even greater remoteness, until . . . He becomes a mere first cause." (2) Professor Huxlev must never have suspected that for St. Thomas Aquinas "a mere first cause" means everything, and it is that precisely "to which everyone gives the name of God." (3) A "mere first cause" is that on which every other cause and every effect and every possibility of cause and effect depend.

It is necessary, therefore, to be clear from the outset as to the meaning of the term God. Until that is defined it is futile to inquire whether God exists.

#### WHAT THE WORD "GOD" MEANS

There is an old saying: *Penes populum est jus et norma loquendi*: common usage determines the meaning of words. Now, in common usage the word God, Deus, Dieu, Dio, Dios, Gott, Theos, not to mention less well-known languages, means a Supreme Being, the First Cause, One Mighty and Strong on whom other things depend, an Intelligence that rules the world. St. Thomas says that people understand by the word God a First Mover Unmoved, an Uncaused Cause, a Being that is Necessary, Supremely Perfect, Good and Wise. Such a being is what the word God signifies, whether or not there be such a being in fact. There may be no such thing as a fairy, but we must know, before we say so, what the word fairy means.

We are now in a position to put the question: Does such a being as has been described exist? Is there in fact a Supreme Being, the Unchanging Source of movement, a First Cause, a Being that cannot not be, a Being all-Perfect, an Intelligence that rules the world: If there is such a being, there is a God.

#### IS IT NECESSARY TO DEMONSTRATE THAT GOD EXISTS

To the question: "Is there a God?" some men in all ages have been found to answer "No." They are called atheists. In our day they glory in the appellation. The inspired Psalmist, God allowing him a freedom of language not countenanced in present-day society, would call them fools:

"The fool hath said in his heart: There is no God" (Ps. xiii. I). But nearly everybody in all ages, Pagan and Christian, and in all countries answers "Yes." Many indeed have erred about the unity and the nature of God, but their error did not interfere with their conviction that there was a God or Supreme Being, by whatever name they called him. Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* has not shaken the truth that belief in God is universal and goes back to the dawn of history. More recent research in the field of anthropology tends rather to confirm it. (*A noteworthy testimony was given by Dr. John M. Cooper, Head of the Department of Anthropology at the Catholic University of America, in a*

*statement to the N.C.W.C. News Service, published in The Standard, January 5th, 1935. "We have," he says, "in different parts of the world, remnants of peoples whose culture represents a carry-over from extremely early pre-historic times. There are a number of such Indian peoples still living in the extreme Northern and extreme Southern portions of the American Continent. Among them are the very simple hunting Cree and Montagnais people of Labrador and of James Bay, the southern extension of Hudson Bay . . . The best modern field student had definitely denied these Cree and Montagnais all belief in anything like a Supreme Being, whereas the close relatives of these peoples . . . such as the Indians of the Atlantic coast line from Maine to Virginia are known to have had such a belief. . . In four expeditions to the James Bay and Western Labrador area in 1927, 1932, 1933, 1934, I have succeeded in discovering among these people—the Cree and Montagnais—a very clear concept and worship of a Supreme Being.")*

But even those who agree that there is a God do not all agree that His existence is a truth that can be, or at least that need be demonstrated. According to Mr. H. G. Wells: "Modern religion bases its knowledge of God entirely upon experience: it has encountered God. It does not argue about God: it relates.(1) Again, Professors Stewart and Tait, in their work, *The Unseen Universe* (2) say: "We assume as absolutely self-evident the existence of a Deity who is the Creator and Upholder of all things." For all such people the existence of God is not a matter of argument at all: it is as immediately clear as that a thing cannot be and not be at the same time. In the history of philosophy, those who hold this view are called ontologists. "Their position is that God is the immediate object of their knowledge, that the first they know is the First Thing there is. Others do not pretend to any such innate conviction about God, but they are willing to accept on faith the fact that God exists. They take it as a truth handed down from generation to generation, held sacred by their fathers, enshrined in the history of their race and of the world; but, they say, there is no proof of it. Those who hold this position are called Fideists and Traditionalists. Kant held expressly that reason's proof of God's existence could not be trusted. This distrust of reason has infected most so-called Rationalists. The result is that "modernists," following Kant, if they admit that God exists, admit it not on the testimony of their intelligence or speculative reason, but simply at the dictate of their moral sense, or sentiment. They regard it as a truth which a necessity of conscience, indeed of human conduct, makes it imperative to hold.

All such views, even such as might seem to exalt the merit and dignity of faith, really strike, as the history of Modernism shows, at the very foundations not alone of belief but of reason. If reason cannot, without faith, know that there is a God, then no man can be expected to believe. Faith means assent to what God teaches. But one cannot reasonably accept anything as God's teaching unless one first has reason to know that God exists. One can no more be expected to accept God's Word without first knowing that there is a God, than one could be expected to accept a message as from the man in the moon without first knowing that there is a man in the moon. If, therefore, faith is to be possible at all, human reason must be able, without faith and without necessary reliance on any mere tradition, to come by its own powers to know, and as the truth is not self-evident to all, even to demonstrate that there is a God. This is the express teaching of the Catholic Church. It was already the teaching of St. Paul: "The invisible things of Him, (God), from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Rom. i. 20). The Council of the Vatican was only voicing the mind of the Church from the beginning when it decreed: "If any one shall say that the one true God, our Creator and Lord, cannot be certainly known by the natural light of human reason through created things, let him be anathema." (Session 4, Canon I de Revelatione). Pius X explained the force of this decree in a fuller statement (Sacrorum Antistitum, September 1, 1910): "God, the beginning and the end of all things, can be known and His existence can be proven with all certainty by the unaided light of reason by means of created things, that is to say, by means of the visible work of creation, as we know, with certainty, a cause from the study of its effects."

#### IS THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT VALID?

A great Saint and Doctor of the Church, Anselm of Canterbury, was one night meditating on the best way to prove to "the fool who says there is no God" that God does and must exist when a solution to the problem flashed upon him "that filled his inmost being," says the ancient chronicler, "with immense joy and gladness." An argument struck him,

so simple and so apparently convincing that he at once penned *An Address to the Fool who says there is no God* with the utmost confidence that the fool would now surely be convinced of his folly. The argument of St. Anselm is known in history as the Ontological Argument. It is clearly to be distinguished from ontologism, according to which, as has just been explained, the question of God's existence is not a subject for argument at all. The Anselmian Argument has appealed in the course of centuries to many thinkers. Philosophers of such diverse outlook as Descartes, Leibniz and Kant have been attracted by it. But others, including St. Thomas, have agreed that were there no better argument than this for the existence of God, there would still be, as even a contemporary of Anselm's put it, a case for the fool!

The pith of the Ontological Argument is that from the very notion that we have of God we can infer that God exists: the very idea of God involves His Existence! There is no need, therefore, to go beyond the meaning of the word for proof that God exists. As St. Thomas interprets it, the argument, according to the mind of St. Anselm, runs: "As soon as the signification of the word God is understood, it is at once seen that God exists. For by this word is signified that thing than which nothing greater can be conceived. But that which exists actually as well as in the mind is greater than that which exists only in the mind. Therefore because as soon as the word God is understood it exists in the mind it also follows that it actually exists."

It may be permissible to put the argument in a different and yet simpler form: It is agreed that by the word God is meant a Necessary Being. But a Necessary Being necessarily exists. Therefore, God necessarily exists.

The first proposition of that argument is clear from what has been said about the meaning of the word God. The second proposition seems also clear. If a necessary being did not exist it would not be necessary! The conclusion therefore follows.

This argument is so plausible that in every age it has its upholders. But it is utterly fallacious, and the fallacy of it did not escape the keen vision of St. Thomas. He exposes it as follows: "Even granted that everyone understands that by this word God is signified a being than which nothing greater can be conceived (or something necessary) . . . it cannot be argued logically that it actually exists, unless it be admitted that there actually exists something than which nothing greater can be conceived; and this precisely is not admitted by those who hold that God does not exist." In other words, it does not follow that God exists because we conceive of Him as a Being which must exist. Existence is indeed implied in the idea of God, but that does not resolve the question: Is there an existing God? I conceive of God as a Necessary Being. But is there in fact a Necessary Being? If there is, it necessarily is. But how can we know that there is? About the nature of everything we can predicate certain things as necessary, that is to say, qualities and attributes that will necessarily be found in them if they exist. Fire, for instance, is necessarily hot and water necessarily wet--the concepts of fire and water imply these properties; but no one may therefore infer the existence of wet water and burning fire. Similarly, if God is, He necessarily is; but it does not follow from the fact that we conceive of him as necessarily existing that therefore He actually exists.

Leibniz in the sixteenth century made a great effort to save the force of the ontological argument by adding a further consideration. He asked it to be granted that is it possible that God exists; that there is nothing absurd in the notion. But, he went on, if God is possible, God is. Possibility in this unique case implies actuality, for if God were not God could not possibly be. The only possible reason for God's existence is God's existence. Since, therefore, the possibility is conceded, God's existence must be conceded.

The objection to this argument is that the only possibility of God's existence that can reasonably be allowed, short of positive evidence, is a notional possibility. That the idea of God involves, so far as one can see; no absurdity implied at most that God is possible as a notion. But whether or not there is, or could be, in fact anything corresponding to that notion is the very question to be resolved. Does there exist, therefore, a Being who is conceived of as Necessary, Supreme, Absolute? Existence is not yet proven.

#### NECESSARY ASSUMPTIONS BEFORE THERE CAN BE PROOF

To prove anything whatsoever it is necessary that there be something already certain from which it may be proved. The mind must have something, some data, to work on. This "something certain" is called evidence. It is something about which there can be no question, something the truth of which is clear. Every right judgment, or conviction, every conclusion come to, must be based on evidence. If, therefore. one is asked to hold that God exists, one must first

be given evidence to justify that verdict.

Proof, then, or demonstration is simply a mental process by which, from certain given evidence, one reaches a conclusion. It is a process of inference, ending in assent; it means coming to a conclusion about something that was in question in the light of truths already evident. An example will make this clear. In a Court of justice proof is looked for a certain charge or allegation. A man is accused, for instance, of theft. To establish whether he be innocent or guilty certain evidence is brought forward. This evidence is weighed by the judge. The judge then, in the light of the evidence, concludes on the question of guilt or innocence, and pronounces sentence, that is to say, gives judgment accordingly.

It follows that for judgment, and for every proof or demonstration, evidence is always necessary. Nothing whatever can be proved unless there is something clear already. A person who is not clear about anything who will accept no evidence, take nothing for granted, is beyond the reach of argument. Such a one cannot be reasoned with, and can never know anything about anything. Hence Aristotle defines demonstration as "a discourse in which certain things being granted, something else necessarily follows on their being true." (1)

Before it can be demonstrated, therefore, that God—a Supreme Being and First Cause—exists, something must be granted to start with. Some evidence must be at hand from which one may conclude that there must be a God. In other words, there must be some truth already clear or evident to the inquirer from which he will be able to infer the truth about which he inquires, namely, whether there is a God.

The question now arises: What is there to go on, what evidence is at hand, what may be assumed, as a point of departure for any demonstration that God exists. It is clear from all that has been said that one cannot suppose that the fact of God's existence is already known; but one must suppose some meaning attaching to the word "God," whether or not God exists in fact. This distinction was overlooked by Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* and by Professor W. R. Matthews, of London University, in his essay "The Idea of God," in *An Outline of Modern Knowledge*.(2) He wrongly thinks that every demonstration offered for God's existence must presuppose the ontological argument, in other words, that one must already know from the very idea one has of God that God exists.

What, then, may one presuppose as beyond the reach of reasonable doubt, in other words, as certain and evident?

St. Thomas Aquinas sets down a bare minimum as necessary for a demonstration that God exists. He asks to be granted simply something that is clear to everybody, and set beyond the possible reach of scientific disproof. He holds that a person must be intelligent, but that he need not be learned, need not know much about anything, in order to be able to arrive at the certain conclusion that there is a God. God's way of making Himself known to His creation is, as Ruskin says, a simple way. He makes Himself known through the voice of nature. One has only to think about what one sees and hears and feels, what is evident through the very senses, in order to learn that there is a God. "Ask the beasts," wrote the inspired writer, (3) "and they shall teach thee; and the birds of the air and they shall tell thee. Speak to the earth and it shall answer thee, and the fishes of the sea shall tell" if there be a God.

The only assumption, therefore, made in the demonstrations that follow is the fact of Nature, that, namely, there is a changing world around us, in which things happen, sometimes according to expectation, sometimes unexpectedly, a world of many things to which, nevertheless, a certain unity of purpose is discernible; a "mysterious universe," certainly, but one about which the human mind can think. That is all that St. Thomas asks to have granted him. On this assumption, that the things we see and hear and feel exist, and that we can think about them, he bases every demonstration that he offers in answer to the question: Is there a God? His arguments, therefore, are absolutely independent of, and unaffected by, what is called modern science. They are based on data that are infra-scientific, none of which science can possibly disprove, and some of which science itself must presuppose. For the scientist must at least assume the existence of a changing world, of what passes before his telescope or under the microscope, of what changes in his test tube: and he must assume that he can think. St. Thomas asks no more.

1 *Prior Analyt. I. c. 1.*

2 *P. 58.*

3 *Job. XII, 7-8.*

## ST. THOMAS'S PROOF

"The existence of God can be proved in five ways."

With this serene confidence St. Thomas opens his reply to the query: *Utrum Deus sit?* Whether God exists? His "five ways" have become classical in the history of thought and have been, through seven centuries, trodden by countless thinkers. No one need pretend that they are the only ways, or even the most popular, by which a soul may come to the conviction that God exists. But after seven centuries they are still firm, and each foothold to the final ascent is still secure. For they are ways built on the bedrock of primary unshakeable evidence, evidence, as has been seen, that all thinking, in any branch of science whatsoever, must presuppose. They are based on first principles, and these are, in Aristotle's phrase, "without presupposition. (1)" Each way is made up of a starting-point, two steps, and a terminus or conclusion. The starting point is in each a fact of everyday experience; the first step an evident principle of thought, namely, the principle of causality (2) from one or another angle; the second step, the bringing of the principle to bear on the fact so as to illustrate its meaning; the conclusion is, in Chesterton's phrase, a conclusion that controls all other conclusions; it is the answer to "the most tremendous question in the world."

We shall set down, before each of the five ways, a short explanation that may help to clarify the argument, but needless to say, St. Thomas's own words should be pondered most.

### THE FIRST WAY

"The first and most manifest way," writes St. Thomas, "is the argument from motion."

The starting-point of this argument is the fact that "in the world some things are in motion." There were philosophers of old who denied even this, but nowadays it is not denied. Modern science seems to hold that everything in nature, even what is called "still life," is in almost frantic motion. The modern tendency is indeed to reduce everything to motion, interpreting everything in terms of evolution. No one at any rate will deny that, as St. Thomas puts it, "it is certain and evident to our senses that some things are in motion." Things change. They may not change their nature, but they change at least their position, their shape, their size, their colour, Change means motion. And it is a fact which modern science confirms that there is no change of any sort, as physics considers change, without local motion. It may be agreed that some things—scientists would say all things—are in motion.

It is well at this stage of the argument to reflect on what motion necessarily implies. Motion is always the actuation of some power, or, in more accurate terms, the partial actualisation of a potency. Every movement has some objective: it is the way to something or somewhere. It means ultimately the acquiring of something. In other words, it means becoming, and becoming must come to something. Different kinds of motion may be distinguished according to what the motion comes to, for instance a new position, a new quality, a new quantity. But in all cases, to be in motion is to be getting something new.

The first step that follows in the argument from the fact of motion is: "Whatever is in motion is put in motion by another." This is clear from what has just been said. A thing cannot get something new from itself: it must get it from something else. This something else from which the thing moved gets its actuation is called the mover. The use of a mathematical symbol may make this clear. Let X represent the thing that is moved: the whole thing and nothing but the thing. Let Y represent movement, the actuation of the thing when it is put in motion. Something new is introduced over and above what was. It is impossible to equate X with X + Y, unless on the supposition that Y = 0. If then the reality of movement be allowed, it must be accounted for by something besides X. X must receive its actuation from another. This other is its mover.

The second step of the argument is: Granted that something is moved or put in motion by another, it must

1. Cf. *IV. Metaphys, c. 3.*

2. *The principle of causality simply states that every effect requires a cause; that, in other words, whatever happens, whatever is made, whatever is done, finds its explanation in something else. Nothing whatever can cause itself: nothing that is brought into being can have brought itself into being. It is brought into being by another. This other is its cause. If a person should see a snowball whizzing towards him, he will rightly infer that it neither made nor moved itself.*

ultimately be moved by a mover that is not put in motion. The reason of this is simply that if every mover were moved, that is to say dependent on another to be set in action, there would be no mover not dependent. All would depend, and nevertheless all would depend on nothing. In a sense, everything would depend on nothing: and nothing would not depend. The absurdity is apparent. Therefore, some mover must be independent. There must be a first in the series not in a mere temporal sense as some have thought, but in the sense that it presupposes no other, that it acts without being acted on, and moves without being moved.

The conclusion therefore is that there is a First Mover that is not moved. Whatever be the nature of this First Mover, the name that is given to It is God. Even in the liturgy there is a hymn that prays to God as the Mover Unmoved.

*O God, the world's sustaining force,  
Thyself unmoved, all movements' source;  
Who from the morn till evening's ray  
Dost through its changes guide the day.*

The same idea has inspired another prayer in the poetry of Alfred Noyes:

*Colours and forms of earth and heaven, you flora;  
Like clouds around a star—the streaming robe  
Of an Eternal Splendour. Let the law  
Of beauty in your rhythmic folds, by night  
And day, through all the universe reveal  
The way of the Unseen Mover to these eyes.*

This first argument of St. Thomas, as it stands in the *Summa Theologica*, is as follows: (1).

"It is certain and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion.

"Now whatever is put 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.

"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 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 to 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 SECOND WAY

The starting point of the second way is the fact that things come into being--things that were not are--things are made. This writing, for instance, is made. If it be asked who is responsible for it the writer must plead guilty: he is the cause of it. But he himself was also made: there was a time when he was not. He owes his being to another. On this fact St. Thomas begins to argue.

The first step of the argument is: Whatever is made is made by another. In other words whatever is made—that is to say, every effect—has a cause. This principle is self-evident if rightly understood. It simply means that whatever

*I The translation used, by kind permission of the Very Rev. Father Provincial of the English Province of the Order of Preachers, is that made by the English Dominicans and published by Burns, Oates and Washbourne. Ltd.*

comes into being receives being from another. Obviously it could not receive it from itself, since it was not in existence until it received it. The alternative is necessary: it received it from another. This other is called its cause.

The second step of the argument is: There can be no cause without a first cause. In other words: There are causes, but there cannot be only causes that themselves are caused. There must be, as the only ultimate explanation of any effect or of any series of subordinate causes, a cause that is not caused, a first in the series of causes.

The conclusion is that there is a First Efficient Cause, which "all men call God."

As the conclusiveness of this argument is often challenged by exponents of "modern thought," it is well to consider their objections. The very weakness of the opposition will establish the force of the proof.

In a poetic form, the objection is put by Swinburne

*Before the growth was the grower, and the seed o'er the plant was sown,  
But what was seed of the sower? And the grain of him whence was it grown?  
Foot after foot ye go back and travail and make yourselves mad  
Blind feet which feel for the track where highway is none to be had.*

Dr. E. W. Barnes, the Anglican Bishop of Birmingham, in his book, *Scientific Theory and Religion*, is more formal in his opposition to the argument just set down. "This argument, he writes (P- 595) "is open to serious objection. There is the logical flaw that we assume an invariable sequence of cause and effect, and yet get to a First Cause which is not an effect. Further, there is no reason why we should not have an indefinite retrogression. Still further, it is most doubtful whether anything resembling efficient causation can be imparted into sequences investigated by science . . . In brief, the argument . . . is derelict."

There are here two infinite charges, and one expression of opinion about the feasibility of introducing the question of causality into purely scientific research. On this last point, we agree with Dr. Barnes that the question of causality is a question for philosophers and that scientists, as such do well to leave it alone. Their preoccupation is simply with antecedent and consequent. As Dr. Barnes himself has put it: "The conception of efficient cause lies outside the realm of science." But in fact scientists, being also men, do speak of causes, and do admit causality. Dr. Barnes good-naturedly twits the scientist with this: "His use of such terms as cause shows of course that he has his own primitive metaphysics. He may well take to heart W. James's aphorism: 'Metaphysics means nothing but an unusually obstinate effort to think clearly.'" (Op. cit. p. 522). As therefore Dr. Barnes himself agrees that "efficient causes exist" (P. 569), it remains to consider his two main charges.

The first charge is founded on the allegation that "we assume an invariable sequence of cause and effect." This is simply untrue. Such an assumption would be meaningless and quite alien to the thought of St. Thomas. We assume simply that where there is an effect here and now there is a cause.

The second charge is implied in the words: "There is no reason why we should not have an indefinite retrogression." But St. Thomas surely never said there was. His argument in fact had nothing at all to say to retrogression. His vision carries him not back through the corridors of time, but down to the very depths of being until it touches the ultimate reality that here and now is causing whatsoever is caused. It is pleasant to find in a thesis accepted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of London the answer to Dr. Barnes on this point: "It (is) clear beyond question that the infinite series which Aquinas had in mind and which he considered vicious was a series involving not temporal but logical (one might also say ontological) priority. His contention was that a succession of dependent entities, each member of which refers us to the one before it, can be rendered intelligible only by positing as its terminus an independent entity which is its own *raison d'etre*, that the notion of a series of this sort without such an ultimate ground is unintelligible and self-contradictory, and that the contradiction cannot be removed by supposing the series to extend to infinity. The dependent implies the independent." (1)

Swinburne, like Barnes, overlooks the real meaning of the principles involved, namely, that no number of subordinate causes, let it be infinite, could explain a single effect. There must be—this is the consideration to which Swinburne could not rise—a cause outside the whole series of dependent causes, of a different order, transcendent, something which is its own *raison d'etre*, the very reason of being itself.

St. Thomas's words will now speak for themselves:

*1 Robert Leet Patterson, The Conception of God in the Philosophy of Aquinas (p. 63).*



"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 in efficient causes it is not possible to go 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 starting point of the third way is the fact that things not only come into being but pass out of it. "They are found," says St. Thomas, "to be generated and to corrupt and consequently they are possible to be and not to be." There are things that can, and do, exist, but need not: they are not necessary. The pessimist Schopenhauer was so much impressed by this fact that he wrote: "The unrest that keeps the never-stopping clock of metaphysics going is the thought that the non-existence of this world is just as possible as its existence" (1) Everyone who reads this will be willing to concede that there is no reason in his nature why he should be, and that the world could get on without him.

The first step in the argument is: If all things were once merely possible, in the sense of unnecessary, nothing would ever be. One might say in a positive sense: Nothing would be necessary: something could not be. Nothing could be: nothing would be. But if there were ever nothing, there could never have been anything. Hence there must have been something always.

The second step of the argument is: This something must have been, that is to say existed, either by a necessity of its own nature or because of something else. But as in the case of efficient causes, it is useless to go on to infinity in necessary things whose necessity derives from another. For whatever about the possibility of an infinite series, an infinite series of dependent entities offers no explanation of itself.

The conclusion is: There must be something which is necessary in itself, the cause of all other necessity, and the reason of every possibility.

St. Thomas thus expresses this argument: "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."

### THE FOURTH WAY

The fourth way is one that many find it hard to follow. Arnold Lunn, though he wrote a book called *Now I See*, confesses that he found it impossible to see this way, and accordingly omits it in his exposition of St. Thomas's arguments in answer to the question: "*Utrum Deus sit?*" It would be a pity if anyone should therefore conclude that this way is not secure and luminous.

*1 The World Will and Representation. quoted by W. James, Some Problems of Philosophy. (p. 38).*

The starting point of the fourth way is that there are in our experience not one thing only but things. These things are simply beings that participate in being. They have this in common, that they are. All things are, but all are not the same. In other words, all are not equally: they are not equally perfect, not equally good. Some are more perfect than others: but each has its own perfection, and each has something that the other has not. Nothing on earth can boast that it is everything that can be, that it is all perfect. Each thing has goodness, perfection, being, truth in greater or less measure: but none is the fulness of being and perfection, goodness and truth. We may say that things as we know them are "not half-bad": they are more or less good, some better than others, some perhaps as good as we could possibly expect. But we look in vain for absolute perfection in this world. Things have a certain value, a certain amount of goodness, truth and beauty but they are not what they have. Theirs is a relative perfection. We do not find amongst them Perfection Itself.

The first step in the argument is: The relative supposes the Absolute. A relative perfection of being in an existing thing can be only a borrowed perfection. This point should be carefully noted, against the objection that the standard of perfection according to which relative perfections are gauged, and reckoned more or less is a purely ideal standard. The essence of this argument is that a thing that has perfection but is not perfection itself must be given what it has. There is a perfection that it shares. And as the thing that has perfection is not merely ideal but actually existing, so also must be the perfection that it shares.

The second step of the argument is: There cannot be merely an infinite series of things that share being and perfection with one another. There would then be still in all only a certain amount of borrowed perfection. The world would not be solvent: nothing would be worth Being. There would be no Source, no Fulness of which all things had received. But, as has been seen, all have received, each in its measure something of being. It follows that there must be a Being from whom all have received.

The conclusion is: There is a Source or Principle, the Perfection of all perfections: something that does not share in being, goodness, truth, nobility, but that is itself Being, Goodness and Perfection: something to which nothing was first given, but from which all things have received: something whose being is not to be measured as any amount, or evaluated as worth this or that, but something of itself worth being: something that could call Itself: I AM.

The argument, as St. Thomas puts it, runs as follows:

"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 uttermost being, for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being, as it is written in *Metaphys 11*.

"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.

"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 starting-point of the fifth way, which many think the easiest, is the fact that although there are many things, they are all in some sense one. There is a unity of order manifest in the world. This fact has impressed men in every age and not least in ours. It is attested even by a writer like Dr. Barnes, for whom "the old theology has perished." "The world," he says, (1) "is full of surprises and perplexities, but it is not chaos. There is Order within it. Reason and beauty and much goodness have gone to its making." For astronomers, the suns and planets in the heavens are "armies of unconquerable law." Chemists and physicists, and indeed scientists in every department of nature study, are offering as time goes on more and more evidence of the reign of universal law. This is indeed the great achievement of modern science, to which, as Sir James Jeans attests, "the universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine."(2) But already in the last century Charles Darwin was so much impressed by his investigations into

natural history that he insisted all through his writing that the world as he found it could not be the result of blind chance. "The understanding," he wrote, "revolts from such a conclusion." And yet Darwin, as Alfred Noyes points out, could only see in the wing of a butterfly:

*The blaze of colour, the flash that lured the eye  
He did not see the exquisite pattern there  
The diamonded fans of the underwing  
Inlaid with intricate harmonies of design,  
The delicate little octagons of pearl  
The moons like infinitesimal fairy flowers,  
The lozenges of gold and grey and blue,  
All ordered in an intellectual scheme,  
Where form to form responded and faint lights  
Echoed faint lights, and shadowy fringes ran  
Like Elfin curtains on a silvery thread,  
Shadows replying to shadow through the whole.(1)*

Neither did Aquinas see that. His argument is based, not on the finality of a butterfly's wing or of a flower or of the human eye, but on the more obvious fact that the world is ordered as a whole: it is a cosmos, something designed, harmonious.

*All that the years discover points one way  
To this great ordered harmony.*

*The first step in the argument is:* Design implies an intelligent designer. This also is confirmed by modern science. "We discover," says Sir James Jeans, "that the universe shows evidence of a designing or controlling power."(2)

The second step is that world design implies a world designer. "The admission of this idea" - "that the world had a plan as the tree seemed to have a plan—brought with it," writes Chesterton, "another thought more thrilling and more terrible. There was Someone Else . . ." (3)

The conclusion is: There is an Intelligence that governs the universe, to which men give the name of God.

"The fifth way," writes St. Thomas, "is taken from the governance of the world. We see that things which look intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end; and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end.

"Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer.

"Therefore, some intelligent Being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end. And this Being we call God."

These then are the Five Ways of St. Thomas. By them anybody who is content to accept the first principles of experience and of thought can come to the conclusion, which no mind that goes straight can miss, that there is a God.

But what God is remains to be determined. And St. Thomas will not hesitate to ask: Whether God is a body? Whether God is good? Whether God is infinite, and so on. He spent his life in answering, as no one else had ever answered, the question that was his preoccupation even as a boy

What is God? What is this First Cause, this Supreme Being, this Absolute? But the arguments which have been set down here prove to the point of demonstration that if by the word "God" is meant a Supreme Being, a First Mover, an Uncaused Cause, a Being that is necessary, an Absolute, a Being that rules the world, then God exists. The alternative is nothing; there is no alternative. In one word:

1 Alfred Noyes *The Unknown God* (p. 156).

2 *Op. cit.* (p. 149).

3 *The Everlasting Man, People's Library Edition* (p. 308).

*If there is something, anything at all, there must be a God.*

*But there is something.*

*Therefore there is a God.*

#### EPILOGUE

"All men are vain in whom there is not the knowledge of God; and who by those good things that are seen, could not understand him that is neither by attending to the works have acknowledged who was the workman . . . For by the greatness of the beauty, and of the creature, the creator of them may be seen so as to be known thereby." (Wisdom XIII. I & 5).

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