

Classical Proofs for God's Existence (cont.)

Before we take up the discussion of the classical proofs for God's existence, let me briefly address a question I was asked during the break. A student asked me to share my own position on the analogy of being. Basically, the analogy of being was a philosophical construction; it was a bad idea—there is no analogy of being (this is the position taken by Calvin as well). Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The biblical metaphysic has God on one side of the line and all that is not God on the other side of the line. We're on the 'not God' side of the line. Everything about us is on this side of the line. Yes, the issue of analogy is important for us; we will talk about this later. We *do* know God analogically, but there is no ontological correspondence between God and ourselves. Even the language of man as the *imago dei*, the image of God in Genesis 1:26-28, does not suggest that human beings are little carbon copies of God. It rather suggests that we have been dynamically called to image, reflect, represent God within the created order. The problem is that we simply look at ourselves and make conclusions about God. I hope I'm doing the same thing Calvin was doing in the first five chapters of the *Institutes*.

We are not going to know God outside of how He reveals Himself biblically. There *is* an analogical knowledge going on, but it is an analogy of the common world. It is an analogy that God enters into the world and acts as a participant in it—that is not an ontological correspondence. It is God saying, "You see that? I am like that. You see that? That's how I relate. You see those other things? I am kind of like that." It is an epistemological analogy. We will talk more about that issue next week as we take up the issue of names, roles, and historical acts.

Now let us turn to arguments for the existence of God. When we think of proofs or arguments for God's existence, we naturally think of Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas' contribution to this discussion is of major importance. In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas spoke of five ways of proving God's existence, or five ways that God's existence can be shown through intellectual analysis. He did that by arguing from the effects of nature to their cause. But even before Aquinas, we need to talk about Anselm of Canterbury, who proposed what is certainly the most famous of all so-called proofs for God's existence—the ontological argument. We want to look at Anselm and his ontological argument from the *Proslogian*, which was written in 1079. Anselm begins by offering a definition of God. He said God is 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived.' You have to repeat that about three times in your head before you figure out what he is saying. Further, he said that the idea of such a being is one thing; the reality of such a being is another. And to exist in reality is better than to exist only in the mind. Therefore, 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' must exist both in reality and in thought. Now there is a rather obvious logical weakness in the argument, although it must be stressed that Anselm himself did not consider it either an argument for God's existence or a proof. The weakness was brought out by Anselm's critic Guanilo, who wrote a little thing called "A Reply on Behalf of the Fool," referring to the fool of Psalm 14:1: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Guanilo criticized Anselm's ontological argument this way: he said, imagine a lovely island, an island so lovely that a more perfect island cannot be imagined. By Anselm's thinking, that island must exist, in that the reality of the island is necessarily more perfect than the mere idea of the island. Anselm responded: come on, Guanilo, God is not an island. And perfection isn't part of our definition of islands but it is part of our definition of God. There's no analogy between islands and human thoughts but there *is* an analogy between God and humans. But this quite frankly missed Guanilo's objection. The objection is that Anselm has created a fundamental category error. He has confused the order of being and the order of knowing.

Emmanuel Kant saw this very clearly in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He argued that a merchant cannot multiply his wealth simply by moving the decimal place in his books. We might wish it were true that we could do that, but we cannot; either the money exists or it does not. To exist in the mind is one thing, to exist in reality is really something very different. Conceiving of having more money has little to do with the matter one way or another. In other words, beliefs must be justified by states of affairs outside of the mere belief. Now, that is about all I want to do with the ontological argument. I should point out that even though it has been criticized, just as I have criticized the argument, an entire army of philosophers have redone it and redone it and redone it. Theistic philosophers on one side keep coming back to the ontological argument, and non-theistic philosophers on the other side keep trying to knock it down. Today, the ontological argument has become very complex indeed. We only looked at the original and fairly simple form here.

This prepares us to turn now to Thomas Aquinas and his five ways. Before we get started I should note that these five proofs were not completely original. Most of them, in fact, go back to Aristotle, who had already spoken of God as the first cause and the last end of the world. His first three arguments are all spoken of as cosmological arguments and are really just three different ways of saying the same thing, of stating the same argument. [Student question: Why do we need to explain God outside of His revelation?] We will come back to that issue later, but I'll say briefly that generally we like the idea of God; we do not want the reality of God. The God that we have in Scripture is a personal being; no, that is too abstract, He is a person. And persons always come with expectations. You have expectations about me as your professor, and you're right to. You have personal moral expectations about every other person, including people in government, and you are right to. Again, we like the idea of God, but we do not like the obligations, and that is a kind of judgment. But we will come back to those kinds of issues.

Thomas' first argument for the existence of God was the argument from motion. As I said before, this argument is not original. It is stated in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and an older version is found in Plato. It goes like this: the world is not static. Rather, it is always moving; it's dynamic. The question is, why did nature come to be in motion? Why is not nature static? If we assume that rest is the natural order of things, and motion is unnatural, then we must explain motion. Following that tradition as it was originally set down by people like Plato and Aristotle, Aquinas argued that everything that moves is moved by something else. Things do not just move. For every motion, there is a mover. And each thing which moves something else is itself moved. Think of balls on a pool table. Even though the cue ball hits the 6 ball and drives the 6 ball into the pocket, the cue had to strike the cue ball. So everything that moves something else is itself moved. Thus, Aquinas argued that there's a whole series of causes of motion lying behind the world as we know it. Now unless there's an infinite series of movers—the 8 ball hits the 6 ball which hits the 5 ball which hits the 39,375 ball, and so on and so forth—unless there's an infinite series of these movers, then there must be a single mover at the origin of the series. From this original cause of motion, all other motion is ultimately derived, and the first in the series is the mover, or as Aquinas put it, he is unmoved. It is unmoved because it's the source of all movement. Should it be moved, some other mover stands behind it, in effect moving it, and then the mover who moved it would be the first mover. Thus God is the Unmoved Mover. It is helpful to think of Thomas' statement that God is a rock. You are on the beach and there is a big rock at the shoreline. The rock does not move; everything moves around it, but in effect the rock caused you to move because you had to move around it. So the rock moved you. And Thomas said, "God is like that rock." All is in movement around Him, even though He is unmoved.

Second, the argument from causation. We notice that we live in a world that is full of causes and effects. Every effect has a cause. Again, things do not just happen. The principle behind all of these cosmological arguments is the principle of sufficient reason: the cause for an effect must be at least as

great as the effect. A way you can state that somewhat crudely is, chickens do not give birth to rocket scientists. Or, something never sprang from nothing. Therefore, the universe cannot be uncaused. The principle of sufficient reason says the universe must be caused by something, but how can a mutable, contingent, dynamic world be uncaused? It cannot happen, so it must be caused. And it cannot produce these effects within itself because there is no internal principle of causation. Thus Aquinas concluded that God is the first cause. (Each of these first three arguments are versions of the same argument, so you can get simpler each time; the first one has 6 points, the second has 5 points, and third has 3 points because you're using the same deductive reasoning.)

The third argument is the argument from contingency. We notice that the world contains creatures which do not exist necessarily. The world has creatures that are contingent; they are dependent. As contingent beings, our existence requires an explanation (again, sufficient reason). How is it that we exist? What happened to bring us into existence? Something comes into being only because another causes it. Our being is an effect. So these three arguments are really the same argument but you are just changing the language. In this argument, we trace everything back to a necessary being. By looking at the world, seeing its reality, using the principle of sufficient reason, and denying an infinite series of regressions we conclude, or Aquinas concluded, that God is the Unmoved Mover, the first cause, the necessary being. We could spend a lot of time with those three arguments, but it really is not necessary.

Fourth, the argument from morality, or the moral argument. The Enlightenment philosopher Emmanuel Kant is usually cited as the originator of the moral argument, but Aquinas had already put forth a version of it several hundred years before. Aquinas said people of different cultures and beliefs recognize certain basic universal moral values and obligations such as truth, goodness, and nobility. Where do these moral ideas come from? What causes them? One might pause and note that this argument ("if you look at all the cultures of the world there are universals in those cultures") would be under fire today. Aquinas further argued that these values cannot be derived from the material world. Why? The principle of sufficient reason. Material things only exist on a material plane. And moral values imply a moral plane, which transcends the merely material. The merely material cannot produce morality, cannot produce moral reflection. There must be something which is itself true, good, and noble. Again, the principle of sufficient reason. How is it that human cultures have a sense of these things? Because there must be that thing that causes them. And this something, which is inherently true, good, and noble, brings into being our ideas of truth, goodness, and nobility.

The fifth argument, the argument from design. This is sometimes called the teleological argument. Versions of the teleological argument pre-date Aquinas by many millennia; they go back to the very beginnings of philosophical thought. The argument from design may be the most popular and intelligible of all the arguments. I think it's the one that makes the most intuitive sense to people. The Enlightenment thinker Voltaire put the argument in rather simplistic terms when he said, "If a watch proves the existence of a watch maker, but the universe does not prove the existence of the great architect, then I consent to being called a fool." Aquinas put it a little differently; he said, things in our experience appear to serve ends, ends beyond their devising or their control. What we see is that there is evidence of purpose all around us. The world we live in is not willy-nilly; it is ordered and things have functions. But all of this order, these functions, this purpose implies a plan, a purposer: someone or something with the capacity to execute its purposes. And thus, (1) things serve ends beyond their own devising, (2) the purposefulness of creation implies a purposer, and (3) God is the designer of the universe. Writing in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, A.J. Hoover (in his article "Arguments for the Existence of God") shows how inherently intuitive the teleological argument is:

No one can deny the universe. No one can deny that the universe seems to be designed. Instances of purposive ordering are all around us. Almost anywhere can be found features of being that show the universe to be basically friendly to life, mind, personality, and values. Life itself is a cosmic function—that is, a very complex arrangement of things, both terrestrial and extra-terrestrial, must obtain before life can subsist. The earth must be just the right size, its rotation must be just right, its distance from the sun must be within certain limits, its tilt must be correct to cause the seasons, its land-water ratio must be a delicate balance. Our biological structure is very fragile. A little too much heat or cold and we die. We need light, but not too much ultraviolet. We need heat, but not too much infrared. We live just beneath an air screen shielding us from millions of missiles every day. We live just ten miles above a rock screen that shields us from the terrible heat under our feet. Who created all these screens and shields that make our earthly existence possible? Once again, we're faced with a choice. Either the universe was designed or it developed all these features by chance. The cosmos is either a plan or an accident.

Hoover goes on to discuss the notion of chance, in a very engaging little argument. He says that chance contradicts the ways we ordinarily explain things. You see, an appeal to chance is not an explanation at all. It is an appeal to agnosticism, an agnosticism which violates all the canons of science. So when a scientist looks at any immediate reality, he operates under the assumption that we live in a regular, predictable, and knowable universe, one in which the orderly procession of cause and effect holds. Yet, when the naturalist comes to ultimate or metaphysical questions—questions like the origin of the universe—he abandons the principle of sufficient reason and he appeals to chance. This is a very good point made by Hoover.

Hoover further argues that an appeal to the doctrine of evolution does not dismantle the teleological argument. In fact, evolution does not negate design. All it does is introduce a mechanism for purposive instrumentality, which must in turn be explained. Evolution is not an explanation; it is something which itself must be explained.

Let's return to the more general issue of the teleological argument. People such as David Hume and Emmanuel Kant were extremely suspicious of natural theology. Both of them affirmed the teleological argument, but Hume in a less forceful way than Kant. But the teleological argument has had a real bite for people since the beginning of time.

Roman numeral IV, an assessment of Aquinas' argument. It should be noted that most of Aquinas' arguments are pretty similar. Each depends on tracing a causal sequence back to its origin, and identifying that origin as God. But I would like to suggest here that we really misunderstand what Aquinas is about if we seriously take his so-called 'five ways' as proofs. Some philosophers have suggested that Aquinas was seeking to actually prove the existence of God by these arguments. But I doubt it. You see, the *Summa* is a truly massive work—it is over 4000 pages in length, but he spends no more than two pages on the five ways. The entire discussion is very short, and he never calls them proofs. Like Anselm, Aquinas was seeking an intellectual analysis of what he already believed. I think what Aquinas was doing was apologetics. And if you recall, the apologists were concerned about defending the reasonability of the faith: You're within your intellectual rights to believe. I think that is what Thomas Aquinas was doing as well. He did not believe in God because of any of these arguments any more than Anselm believed in God because of the ontological argument. Both of them believed because of God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ and Scripture. They both say that, and quite frankly, Aquinas expects his readers to share that belief. He does not expect his readers to get to that point and say, "Ahha! There must be a God!" He does not believe that he must prove God's existence.

So I think what we actually have here are classical apologetics, rather than real proofs that would bring unbelievers to faith.

Having said that, it does have to be noted that philosophers and theologians after Aquinas started talking about the five ways as proofs and have treated them ever since as proofs. That is why we are talking about them this way as well. At least part of the reason is that Aquinas did tend to be pretty much of a rationalist. As a matter of fact, he went so far as to define faith as intellectual assent to propositions. Now with that kind of definition of faith, and with the kinds of approaches to theology that he took, it is understandable that people would treat the five ways as proofs, even though I doubt very highly that they were intended as such.

Letter 'B' in your outline: As proofs, Aquinas' five ways fail, and I think they fail badly. First of all, it seems (at least as I read them) that each assumes what it seeks to prove. That is to say, that the points in the arguments sometimes appear to be mere conveniences that will get you to the conclusion. Outside of the assumptions, they prove nothing. Actually, maybe they *do* prove something. Maybe they say more about *us* than they say about God. So rather than proving that God exists, they may prove that we need to believe in God.

Second, why should any or all of these arguments lead to only one God? There is no reason to assume that there is only one God from these arguments. It certainly is not proven that there is only *one* unmoved mover. Maybe two got together and were both unmoved but moved other things. There is no reason to assume one single first cause, necessary being, locus of all truth, or single designer.

Third, why not an infinite regression of causes? Remember Thomas just said 'no' to this idea but he did not prove it. And he knew he was not proving it; that is one of the reasons I do not think he is trying to get proofs. One cannot demonstrate that the series is finite. You have to assume it.

Fourth, interestingly, none of Aquinas' five ways shows that God continues to exist. That objection, by the way, does not apply to Anselm's ontological argument. You see, the five ways speak only to the beginnings of the experienced conditions.

Fifth, the God who is spoken of in these arguments is not necessarily the God of biblical revelation. As a matter of fact, if these arguments lead to any deity, it is not the deity of the Bible. It is Aristotle's god, a god who at the end of the day is a rather cold and underwhelming deity, for Aristotle insisted that God is an impersonal principle. God is not a person. Imagine praying, "O great Unmoved Mover, O First Cause, O Necessary Being!" It just does not ring true.

Now this last should capture our attention. Far too often Christians have accepted uncritically the methodologies of pagan philosophy for thinking about God, and we have simply tried to baptize them. The fact is that Greek metaphysics does not lead to the personal God of Scripture. It does not lead to a God who enters into personal, covenantal relationship. Method and content always go together. Methods are not neutral. Philosophical methodologies are not value-neutral; they are value-laden. The Greeks were not seeking to know the God with whom we have to do; they were seeking to understand a purely human world. There was a kind of secularism that was part of the Greek philosophical mind. They wanted an impersonal God, a God who cannot place an obligation upon man, and consequently a God who cannot save.

This brings us to 'C,' Counting the cost. Whenever natural theology and the kinds of processes we have been talking about have been particularly strong in the history of the church, the tendency has been for

the church to fall into a kind of deism. Deism is the idea that God is the Creator, but He has no present involvement in the world. Further, deism has always tended toward an impersonal view of God, ala Aristotle. A good example here is John Locke's essay concerning human understanding, written 1690. In that essay, Locke developed an idea of God which became very characteristic of English deism. Locke wrote, "Reason leads us to the knowledge of this certain and evident truth that there is an eternal, most powerful and most knowing being." The attributes of this being are those that human reason recognizes as being appropriate for God. Locke said, "Having considered which moral and rational qualities are suited to the deity, we enlarge every one of these with our idea of infinity [supererogation] and so putting them together, we make our complex idea of God." This is the whole agenda of Greek natural theology, In other words, the idea of God is made up of human rational and moral qualities, projected into infinity.

Armed with that kind of method, the deists of the next century (the 18<sup>th</sup> century) would throw out the Bible and Christianity. An example is Matthew Tindal, who in 1730 wrote *Christianity As Old As Creation*. He claimed that Christianity is no more than a re-publication of natural religion, a religion which comports with human reason. Reason stands above all religion and judges religion because it is human reason which is finally deified here. Whatever does not fit with reason must be rejected as superstitious myths. What gets rejected here? The idea of a God who enters into historical relationship, the idea of a God who cares about *you*, the idea of a God who is incarnate, the idea of a God who dies, the idea of a God who can act in the world. These ideas make no sense according to deism. Quickly, deistic ideas found their way across the continent. They would influence people like Voltaire, Lessing, and Kant, and they would come to North America, where they formed the fundamental confessional convictions of some of the founding fathers.

Mere theism, a mere belief in God, is never a virtue. *Yahweh* says, "Worship Me, not God in the abstract, not the idea of God, not what your mind tells you I must be like, but worship Me as I have revealed Myself." It is interesting that throughout the Old Testament, Israel was charged to choose between *Yahweh* and Baal.

Tindal said that Christianity is little more than a restatement of the religion of reason, but it is only where it is a restatement of the religion of reason that Christianity is true. General ideas like divine justice and the being of God are true, but they get told through a series of superstitious stories. Thus someone like Thomas Jefferson will go through and edit the Bible, edit the miracles of Scripture, because they do not fit with reason.

As we finish, let me address a few of the questions you have raised. First, it is true that some people are indeed moved to faith by the types of arguments that Aquinas proposed. C.S. Lewis was. There is *something* to them. But I would not want to call them proofs. And again, as I read Aquinas, I do not think he would want to call them proofs.

Second, when postmodern people and naturalists reject the idea of universal morality, are they guilty of going back in an infinite regression of physical causes in the world? Yes. One does run into the problem of sufficient reason. Pure naturalists do have to project that somehow you get from inanimate matter to animate matter, from animate to sentient being, from sentient being to moral consciousness, and they have a real problem making those kind of category leaps. It seems to me the principle of evolution itself cannot do it. There is a violation of sufficient reason. You *do* have to entertain some kinds of explanations for those mechanisms. The Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson argues that these kinds of things are purely functions of genetics, that a moral sense is part of our need to defend the mechanism. But this raises all kinds of problems. What happens with altruism? He has a whole chapter in one of his

books on the altruism gene, which does not seem to me to track very well. People have to jump through many hoops to try to get around the principle of sufficient reason, to make those leaps from non-sentient to sentient, from sentient to self-consciousness, etc.

Third, I do not think there is a great difference, quite frankly, between natural religion and classical theism. Again, I did not try to define classical theism. I just assumed that what we were going to do then was classical theism and therefore that would be the definition. I would not define them very differently except to say that natural theology or natural religion is the process. Natural religion is the process which says we can come to a reasonable and credible knowledge of God apart from the sources of particular revelation, and the product then could be called classical theism.

As a matter of fact, the category of classical theism is going through a renaissance today because of the issue of process theism. Ron Nash, in one of his books, claimed that there are only two options before us. There is either process thought or classical theism. Well, I think there are more options than that. But what is happening today is that many people see the problems with process philosophy—and they should—and they react to it by thinking, “You cannot get further away from process philosophy than classical theism.” This is true so they think that classical theism must be a good idea.

Remember that Calvin wanted to affirm natural revelation—a creational revelation, a revelation in providence, and a revelation in human conscience. However, he was very careful to stipulate that as fallen creatures, that knowledge of God in the world is limited. It is like me without my glasses on—I have a sense that you are there standing in front of me but I am not exactly sure what color your eyes are. Romans 1 tells us that while we have a sense that someone is in the room and we know we are accountable, we do not know the full shape of His face, we do not know the name. Now, one could argue that by God’s common grace He upholds enough of the deposit of His revelation in creation and other general revelational means that people like Plato and Aristotle and Philo and other philosophers have come to some real knowledge about God. But the problem here is getting two philosophers to agree on anything. At that point, it becomes a little bit funny actually. Plato is not Aristotle; as a matter of fact, the two of them disagree on a lot. Even within Greek metaphysics, there is an awful lot of variety; we have a tendency to compress it into one thing, and I do too. But the reality is that it is highly malleable. The funny thing about ideas is, you can change them. And you can make them fit in different ways. They are very different from persons and events and rocks and trees. There is a kind of logic to that argument of common grace that would uphold some real knowledge of God. But then the problem is, okay, which knowledge, which statements, which assertions? Certainly there must be some out there that are true. That just makes sense, just on probabilistic argument, right? But how do I judge those? Again, the argument comes back to the revelation of Scripture, that particular revelation, and we are right back where Calvin was with *sola scriptura*—the Bible as the norm of norms. It is more than possibly true that people, by whatever means, have come to assertions about God that are true. But how am I going to judge those? What is going to be the canon or the criterion by which I am going to make a discerning judgment?

Lastly, at the end of A.J. Hoover’s quote on the teleological argument, what does he mean by the notion of ‘chance’ in the evolutionary argument? He simply means that they throw out the principle of sufficient reason, they throw out the cause and effect analysis they are used to, and plead a kind of agnosticism. But chance itself is not an explanation. It seems to me that naturalists will talk about a purpose, but that purpose will be a purely imminent purpose within the universe, such as we see in botanists who will talk about cells who seek to defend themselves. That is a purpose statement, so it is not throwing out purpose altogether. I do not think if one talks about a purpose, that one is automatically

a theist. However, they are throwing out their own basic scientific method, and the principle of sufficient reason and they are just appealing to some kind of chance event.