

The five ways - thomas aquinas critical thinking example

[Philosophy](#), [Freedom](#)



1. Aquinas claims that he has five arguments that God exists. Do you think that he really has five different arguments? The first argument has to do with motion and movers, and the second argument has to do with cause and effect. Are they distinct arguments or just variations of the same argument?

There are examples of cause and effect that do not involve motion, so they are distinct.

2. Assume that Aquinas is right and there must be a prime mover or a first cause. Why must this first cause be God? That is, God is traditionally defined as a being that is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. Does Aquinas provide any reasons for thinking that the prime mover has these qualities?

None of the arguments that have to do with an initial cause suggest all-encompassing power, presence or kindness.

3. Aquinas states that it is impossible for something to be its own efficient cause - that is, it is impossible for something to be the cause of itself. But then the reasons that there must be a first efficient cause, on the grounds that a chain of causation couldn't go back forever. Where did that first cause come from? It couldn't be self-caused, by its own reasoning. If it is eternally existing, then how is eternal existence any more plausible than an infinite chain of causes?

A set of causes that leads back to a deity or eternal force makes more sense than a set that never ends, since everything has a beginning.

4. Aquinas seems to assume that there can be degrees of being (which God has in the greatest amount to the maximum extent). What does this mean?

Degrees of being appear to consist of “ complexity” and “ form,” moving from inorganic matter to God.

5. Aquinas claims that the lesser degrees of various qualities are only possible if there is some being that possessed the maximum of these qualities. This, things can be more or less good, more or less hot, etc. only if there is something with maximum goodness and something that is the hottest thing. The cause of “ being, goodness, and every other perfection in things.” Aquinas dubs God. But what about nonbeing, perfect evil, flawless ignobility, and the like. Is there some being with those qualities or that is responsible for them? Is this God? An anti-God? What is an anti-god?

If something can absolutely contain a quality, something can also contain absolutely none of it.

6. According to Aquinas, natural bodies always act for an end. What does he mean? What is a natural body. What is it to act for an end?

The natural body is the physical element of one’s being. Acting for an end means to work toward a goal.

7. Aquinas explains things like motion, order, and existence by appealing to God. Do you think that science has or will have good explanations for these things? If so, then why believe that God is anymore than an explanatory placeholder, filling the gap until a better explanation comes along?

A chain of infinite causes is just a different kind of placeholder – but one that can't make sense on its own.

The Watchmaker. William Paley

1. You're walking across an open field and find a watch (imagine that you've never seen one before.) How could you tell that the watch was made by someone? Consider the objects in the room you're in. how do you know that they were made by someone, even though you weren't there when it was done?

It would contain objects that I have not seen in nature, and it contains components that move together.

2. What can you tell about who made the watch by observing it? WHY are you sure that it wasn't made by, say, a really smart chimp?

If it's new to me, then it's beyond the competence of a chimp. Even the primates in "Rise of the Planet of the Apes."

3. What is the purpose of the watch? How can you tell what its purpose is by observing it?

I can't if I don't have a linear sense of time.

4. Paley asks us to consider "the works of nature" How is nature like the watch? How is it different?

The functions in the works of nature are more self-evident.

5. Paley is offering us an argument from analogy. How does that analogy support the claim that God exists?

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The watch is to the maker as the complex works of nature are to God.

The Wager, Pascal

1. Pascal maintains that you must make a decision as to whether God exists. Why couldn't one simply withhold judgement and not have an opinion at all? There are many things about which you probably don't have an opinion - whether Monarchs are the world's largest butterfly, whether tachyons exist, whether the next winner of the Kentucky Derby will be born in Virginia. Why must you have an opinion on God's existence?

My opinion about the existence of tachyons does not have a possible effect on my eternal fate.

2. Pascal likens God's existence to a coin toss. Do you think he is right that it is a 50-50 chance whether God exists?

No, but the choice to believe doesn't have to be any more complicated than that flip.

3. Pascal claims that if you believe in God, and God exists, then you win big. What do you win? What evidence does Pascal provide of a payout?

Eternal salvation – and Pascal discusses that as the reward.

4. Pascal claims that if you do not believe in God, and yet God really does exist, you lose big. What is the downside of being wrong? What is the evidence of this downside?

If you're wrong, and God exists, then you risk eternal damnation.

5. Pascal thinks that if there is no God, then it doesn't matter if you falsely believe that God exists. You don't lose anything by being wrong. Do you agree?

If theism leads to a ethical, peaceful life, then you don't lose anything by being wrong.

6. Could Pascal's reasoning be used to show that it is in your own self-interest to believe in other gods, like Osiris, Bacchus, Thor, Huitzilopochtli, Krishna, Ganesh, or does it work only for the Christian God?

Self-interest only works if some sort of salvation awaits. Belief in the Norse gods, for example, brings no such reward.

7/ If the Wager doesn't get you to believe in God, what does Pascal at the end of his article as a way to become a believer?

He refers to himself as a man who has knelt in prayer to God and uses that to recommend himself as a source of knowledge.

B. C Johnson, The problem of Evil.

1. What is the problem in the problem of evil? How is it connected to the concept of God?

If the concept of God includes omnibenevolence and omnipotence, then evil should not be allowed to exist.

2. How should we define "evil" what makes an event evil and not just something we don't like?

Evil goes against universal standards of right and wrong – not just standards of convenience.

3. What does Johnson mean by “moral urgency”? How does the need for moral urgency justify God in allowing evil?

4. Is there an important moral difference between evil that humans cause and natural events, like floods or earthquakes that cause evil?

Yes – the difference is the ethics of intention. When humans cause evil, it is generally through malicious intent. While earthquakes do cause tragedy, there is no intent for evil to happen. Some exceptions, of course, would be the rain of volcanic ash on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis, and the flood, which were both designed as punishment.

5. Is there too much evil in the world?

Any evil unchecked is too much evil. However, in the current existential situation, there is no way to eliminate all evil.

A solution to the problem of evil - Elenore Stump.

1. Stump's proposed solution to the problem of evil depends upon assuming that human beings have free will. How reasonable is this assumption? This question is worth revisiting after you read the articles on free will in the next section.

If God already knows what you are going to do, do you really have free will? I view this as being similar to the free will of characters in a book. If you've read the book, you know what the characters are going to do. However, each

time they reach key decisions in the plot, with each rereading, they still don't know what they are going to do, so in that sense, they have free will.

2. Stump thinks that the right approach to the problem of evil is to examine a specific theology in more detail. She looks at Christianity. Are there resources in other monotheistic religions like Judaism or Islam which offer alternative ways to escape the problem of evil?

While Judaism and Islam also argue that their deity is omnipotent, in other religions, such as Buddhism, there is no combination of omnipotence and omnibenevolence that makes the existence of evil a contradiction.

3. The three Christian beliefs that Stump thinks will help address the problem of evil are: Adam fell; natural evil entered the world as a result of Adam's fall; after death, depending on their state at the time of their death, human beings either go to heaven or go to hell. How plausible do you think these assumptions are?

All three examples have free will in common – established by God, who knew that evil would come to pass.

4. If one must accept - without any evidence - as much Christian theology as Stump does to make her solution to the problem of evil work, how effective is her approach? Would it persuade an atheist or agnostic who doubts God's existence because of the problem of evil? If not, isn't she merely preaching to the choir?

It would depend on the atheist/agnostic. The person in question would need to have experienced the sense of redemption central to Christianity to be prepared for Stump's solution.

5. If human beings have defective free wills, why (according to Stump) can't God just repair them/ he is omnipotent, after all.

According to the New Testament, repair comes after death, when believers enter heaven.

6. Stump maintains that moral and natural evil serves to make people recognize their own sinfulness and, by doing so, come to desire that God fix their defective wills so that they sin no more. Stump admits that she has no evidence for the empirical claim that suffering drives people to God. Does it seem reasonable to you? Why wouldn't suffering instead drive people away from believing in a God who could stop their suffering but declines to do so?

Suffering does drive some people away, but it creates a pain that only God can heal. If they reach that point of healing, the suffering that came before can be said to have brought them to God.

7. Stump holds that God causes (or at least allows) agony and death of children in infants because it is in their own best interests. Why does she believe this? Does this seem reasonable to you?

I do not agree with this argument. I do not know why either agony or death would be in a child's best interests.