

# The cosmological argument and the teleological argument

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Cosmological and Teleological Arguments In Summa Theologiae, St. Thomas Aquinas formulates what is known as the Cosmological argument for the existence of God. He uses the basic principle, according to which every cause has an effect, to show there must have been a first cause in the causal sequence that began the Universe:

We see in the world around us that there is an order of efficient causes. Nor is it ever found (in fact it is impossible) that something is its own efficient cause. If it were, it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Nevertheless, the order of efficient causes cannot proceed to infinity, for in any such order the first is cause of the middle (whether one or many) and the middle of the last. Without the cause, the effect does not follow. Thus, if the first cause did not exist, neither would the middle and last causes in the sequence. If, however, there were an infinite regression of efficient causes, there would be no first efficient cause and, therefore, no middle causes or final effects, which is obviously not the case. Thus, it is necessary to posit some first efficient cause, which everyone calls " God". (Aquinas).

Here we can see that Aquinas derives the principle of causality upon which his argument is based from his experience of the world around him. When Aquinas looks at the world, he realizes there is always an order of cause followed by effect, but no event is ever its own cause or something without a cause. He also rules out the explanation that there could be an infinite regress of causes because, when he looks at the world around him, there is always a first cause in the sequence. Therefore, there must be a first cause for the creation of the Universe, and that cause is God.

There are a couple of problems with Aquinas's argument that are

immediately apparent. The first is that he makes a false and unjustified assumption that it is impossible for the causal chain to regress to infinity. There is no reason to assume this, and it is perfectly plausible that the Universe has always existed. In fact, this account would work better with Aquinas's principle that every cause has another cause prior to it because if there was a first cause that cause would have to have been caused itself, which according to Aquinas is impossible. The second is that, even if it is true that there was a first cause that does not necessarily entail another cause prior to it, the first cause was God. That cause could have been something else, such as the Big Bang.

The second theory for God's existence coming from experience is the teleological argument formulated by William Paley:

In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone and were asked how the stone came to be there, I might possibly answer that for anything I knew to the contrary it had lain there forever; nor would it, perhaps, be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I had found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place. I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given, that for anything I knew the watch might have always been there. Yet why should not this answer serve for the watch as well as for the stone? Why is it not as admissible in the second case as in the first? For this reason, and for no other, namely, that when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive—what we could not discover in the stone—that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose ... [The] mechanism being observed ... the inference we think is inevitable, that the watch must have

had a maker (Paley).

In this passage, Paley reasons that in his experience of the world, things seem to have some order or design. If you found a watch on the ground, you would assume it had to have been created by someone. You would not assume that the watch had always been there or that it came from nothing. But things in nature are just as complex and intelligently ordered, so why not assume that the world had to have a creator? Paley concludes that just as the watch had to have had a maker, the world must have had one as well, and that creator was God.

It seems to me that the teleological argument is more plausible. The problem I have with it is that there is no reason to assume the world did not come about through natural physical and geological processes, and that life did not evolve on this planet. Still, I am sympathetic to Paley's account, because the world is sufficiently complex to evoke wonder about how it came about. The cosmological argument, however, is too abstract for me to find it plausible. It comes more from a theoretical principle about causality than from one's experience of the world, and I tend to favor arguments from experience.

#### Works Cited

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