



St. Thomas Aquinas: Existence of God

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The beginning of anything and its ceasing to be is brought about by motion or change. But it has been shown that God is altogether unchangeable. He is therefore eternal, without beginning or end.

Those things alone are measured by time which is in motion, inasmuch as time is an enumeration of motion. But God is altogether without motion, and therefore is not measured by time. Therefore in Him it is impossible to fix any before or after. He has no being after not being, nor can He have any not being after being, nor can any succession be found in His being, because all this is unintelligible without time. He is therefore without beginning and without end, having all His being at once, where in consists the essence of eternity.

Everything acts inasmuch as it is in actuality. Whatever then is not all actuality, does not act by its whole self, but by something of itself. But what does not act by its whole self, is not a prime agent for it acts by participation in something else, not by its own essence. The prime agent then, which is God, has no admixture of potentiality, but is pure actuality.

We see in the world some things which are possible to be and not to be. But everything that is possible to be has a cause for seeing that of itself it is open to two alternatives, being and not being. If being is to be assigned to it, that must be from some cause. But we cannot proceed to infinity in a series of causes; therefore we must posit something that necessarily is. Now everything necessary either has the cause of its necessity from elsewhere, or not from elsewhere, but is of itself necessary. But we cannot proceed to infinity in the enumeration of things necessary that have the cause of their necessity from elsewhere, therefore we must come to some first thing necessary, that is of itself necessary and that is God. Therefore God is eternal.

Every corporeal thing, being extended, is compound and has parts, But God is not compound. Therefore God is not anything corporeal. To the king of ages, immortal, invisible, only God. The invisible things of God are understood and discerned by the things that are made. In everything that is not its own essence, quiddity or nature, there must be some composition. But it has been shown that in God there is no composition. God therefore is His own essence. Everything is by its own existence. Whatever then is not its own existence does not of itself necessarily exist. But God does of Himself necessarily exist; therefore God is His own existence.

Augustine said, "There is nothing accidental in God, because there is nothing changeable or perishable." God's own substance is God's own being. Therefore his existence cannot be characterized by any superadded substantial characteristic. God has being in its totality, so not-being is totally removed from Him. All defect is absent from God. He is therefore universal perfection.

Everything imperfect must proceed from something perfect, therefore the first Being must be most perfect. Everything is perfect inasmuch as it is in actuality, imperfect, inasmuch as it is a potentiality, with privation of actuality. That then which is nowise in potentiality, but is pure actuality, must be most perfect, and such is God. The intellect by its one power knows all that the

sentient part knows by several powers, and much more besides. Also, the higher the intellect, the more it can know by one effort, to which knowledge an inferior intellect does not attain without many efforts. Again, the royal power extends to all those particulars to which the divers' powers under it are directed. Thus also God by His one simple being possesses all manner of perfection, all that other beings compass by divers' faculties' yea much more. When there is no more than a mere identify of name between several things, we cannot be led from one of them to the knowledge of another, but from the attributes found in creatures we are led to a knowledge of the attributes of God. Moreover, there is some manner of likeness of creatures to God.

What is may partake of something, but sheer being can partake of nothing. For that which partakes is potentiality but being is actuality. But God is sheer being, as has been proved. He is not then good by prettifications, but essentially so. Every simple being has its existence and what it is in one. If the two were different, simplicity would be gone. But God is absolute simplicity, as has been shown. Therefore the very goodness that is in Him is no other than His own very self. The same reasoning shows that no other good thing is its own goodness, therefore it is said: None is good but God alone.

God is good by essence, all other beings by participation, therefore nothing can be called good except inasmuch as it bears some likeness to the divine goodness. He is therefore the good of all good. Hence it is said of the Divine Wisdom. From this it is further shown that God is the sovereign good. There cannot possibly be two sovereign goods. But God is the sovereign good. Therefore there is but one God. Abstract being is one only, thus whiteness, if there were any whiteness in the abstract, would be one only. But God is abstract being itself, seeing that He is His own being. Therefore there can be only one God.

This declaration of the divine unity we can also gather from Holy Writ. For it is said: Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord and one Lord, one faith. God is all perfect, wanting in no perfection. If then there are several Gods, there must be several thus perfect beings. But that is impossible for if to none of them wants any perfection, nor is there admixture of imperfection in any, there will be nothing to distinguish them one from another. If there are two beings, each necessarily existent, they must agree in point of necessary existence. Therefore they must be distinguished by some addition made to one only or to both of them and thus either one or both must be composite. But no composite being exists necessarily of itself, as has been shown above. Therefore, there cannot be several necessary beings, or several Gods. If there are many Gods the nature of godhead cannot be numerically one in each. There must be therefore something to distinguish the divine nature in this and that God, but that is impossible, since the divine nature does not admit of addition or difference, whether in the way of points essential or of points accidental.

Assume the eternity of the world for they acknowledge God to be the cause of the substantial being of the world, although they think that substance to have been from eternity, saying that the eternal God is the cause of an ever-existing world in the same way that a foot would be the cause of an everlasting foot-print, if it had been from eternity stamped on the dust. Still, even accepting the position thus defined, it follows that the power of God is infinite. Now the measure of active power must be taken according to the measure of potentiality or passivity, for the greater the pre-existing or preconceived passivity, the greater the active required to reduce it to complete actuality. The conclusion remains that, as finite power in producing an effect is conditioned on the potentiality of matter, the power of God, not being conditioned on any potentiality, is not finite, but finite, and so is His essence infinite. To this truth Holy Scripture bears witness: Great is the Lord and exceedingly to be praised, and of his greatness there is no end.

Form the act of understanding in God being identical with His being, it follows necessarily that the act of His understanding is absolutely eternal and invariable, exists in actuality only, and has all the other attributes that have been proved of the divine being. God then is not potentiality intelligent, nor does He begin anew to understand anything, nor does he undergo any change or composition in the process of understanding.

The distinct arrangement and collocation of things must proceed from the intention of some knowing cause. Indeed it seems the power function of intellect to remark the distinction of things. It belongs therefore to the First Cause, which of itself is distinct from all others, to intend the distinct and separate collocation of all the materials of the Universe. God saw all things that he had made and they were very good. Nor is there creature invisible in his sight, but all things are naked and open to his eyes. God's knowledge must be the measure of things, as art is the measure of art, where of perfection of each varies according to its agreement with art. Thus the divine mind stands to things as things stand to the human mind. But any error that arises out of any inequality between the human mind and the thing is not in things, but in the mind. If therefore there were not an absolutely perfect correspondence of the divine mind with things, the error would be in the things, not in the divine mind. There is however no error in the things that is, because each has so much of truth as it has of being. There is then no failure of correspondence between the divine mind and the things that be.

Hence, it is said: God is truthful. God is not like man, that he should kyer. God is light, and there is no darkness in him. God knows the thoughts of minds and the volitions of hearts in virtue of their cause, as He is Himself the universe principle of being. All that in any way is known by God in His knowledge of His own essence. The reality in the soul is that which is in the will or thought. God knows all these varieties of reality. The act of will is the perfection of the agent willing. But the divine being is of itself most perfect, and admits of no superadded perfection, therefore in God the act of His willing is the act of His being. As every agent acts inasmuch as it is in actuality, God, being pure actuality, must act by His essence. But to will is an act of God, therefore God must will by His essence.

The divine being contains the perfection of all being. But living is perfect being, hence animate things in the scale of being take precedence of inanimate. With God then to be is to live. In living things, to live is to be for a living thing is said to be alive inasmuch as it has a soul and by that soul, as by its own proper form, it has being living in fact is nothing else than living being, arising out of a living form. But, in God, Himself is own being, Himself therefore is His own life.

As passive power, or passivity, follows upon being in potentiality, so active power follows upon being in actuality, for everything acts by being in actuality, and is acted upon by being in potentiality. But it belongs to God to be in actuality, and therefore there is suitably ascribed to Him active power, but not passive power.

Hence it is said: Thou art powerful, O lord, and thy power and justice, O God, are even to the highest heaven, in the wonders that thou hast made.

Reference

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