

# Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God

Thomas Aquinas (1224/1226–1273) was a prolific philosopher and theologian. His exposition of Aristotle's philosophy and his views concerning matters central to the Christian faith had a huge impact upon the Church and later philosophers. Below you can find the arguments for God's existence from his *Summa Theologiae* and *Summa Contra Gentiles*. I have adapted the translations provided by the English Dominican Fathers.

**Reading Aquinas:** several of Aquinas's works, including the *Summa Theologiae* [ST], take the form of a *disputatio* — a question and answer form which was often used for teaching in medieval universities. In reading the ST keep in mind that Aquinas first describes objections to his view before giving his view (in the **Reply**) and (typically) responding to the objections.

## *Summa Theologiae* Ia Q2: Does God Exist?

Because the chief aim of sacred doctrine is to teach the knowledge (*cognitio*) of God, not only as He is in Himself, but also as He is the principle (*principium*) of things and their end (*finis*) — especially of rational creatures — as is clear from what has been already said. Therefore, in trying to expound this doctrine, we shall discuss issues: concerning God [ST part I]; concerning the rational creature's advance towards God [ST Part II]; concerning Christ Who, as man, is our way to God [ST part III]. The consideration of God will be divided in three parts. We shall consider:

- (1) whatever concerns the Divine Essence [questions 2–26];
- (2) whatever concerns the distinctions of Persons [questions 27–43];
- (3) whatever concerns the procession of creatures from Him [questions 44–119].

Concerning the Divine Essence, we will consider:

- whether God exists [question 2];
- the manner of His existence, or, rather, what is not the manner of His existence [questions 3–13];
- whatever concerns His operations, i.e. His knowledge (*scientia*), will (*voluntas*), power (*potentia*) [questions 14–26].

Concerning the first, there are three points of inquiry:

- Article 1. Is the existence of God self-evident (*per se notum*)?
- Article 2. Is the existence of God demonstrable?
- Article 3. Does God exist?

## Article 1. Is the existence of God self-evident?

It seems that the existence of God is self-evident (*per se notum*).

**Objection 1:** You see, those things are said to be self-evident to us the knowledge (*cognitio*) of which is naturally implanted in us, as we can see in regard to first principles. But as Damascene says (*De Fide Orth.* i, 1,3), “the knowledge of God is naturally implanted in all.” Therefore the existence of God is self-evident.

**Objection 2:** Further, those things are said to be self-evident which are known (*cognoscere*) as soon as the terms are known, which the Philosopher (1 *Post. An.* iii) says is true of the first principles of demonstration. Thus, when the nature of a whole and of a part is known, it is at once recognized that every whole is greater than its part. But as soon as what the name “God” signifies 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 (*in re*) and mentally is greater than that which exists only mentally (*in intellectu*). Therefore, since as soon as the word “God” is understood it exists mentally, it also follows that it exists actually. Therefore that God exists is self-evident.

**Objection 3:** Further, that truth exists is self-evident. For whoever denies the existence of truth, grants that truth *does* exist. For if truth does not exist, then it is true that truth does not exist. Further, if there is anything true, there must be truth. But God is truth itself “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn. 14:6). Therefore that God exists is self-evident.

**On the contrary,** No one can consider the opposite of what is self-evident; as the Philosopher (*Metaph.* iv, lect. vi) states concerning the first principles of demonstration. But the opposite of the fact that God exists can be considered: “The fool said in his heart, There is no God” (Ps. 52:1). Therefore, that God exists is not self-evident.

**Reply** A thing can be self-evident in either of two ways: on the one hand, self-evident in itself, though not to us (*secundum se et non quoad nos*); on the other, self-evident in itself, and to us. A proposition (*propositio*) is self-evident because the predicate is included in the essence (*ratio*) of the subject, e.g. “Man is an animal,” for animal is contained in the essence of man. If, therefore the essence of the predicate and subject be known to all, the proposition will be self-evident to all; as is clear with regard to the first principles of demonstration, the terms of which are common things that no one is ignorant of, such as being and non-being, whole and part, and such like. If, however, there are some to whom the essence of the predicate and subject is unknown, the proposition will be self-evident in itself, but not to those who do not know the meaning of the predicate and subject of the proposition. Therefore, it happens, as Boethius says (*Hebdom.*, the title of which is: “Whether all that is, is good”), “that there are some common concepts (*conceptiones*) of the mind self-evident only to the learned, as that incorporeal substances are not in space.” Therefore I say that this proposition, “God exists,” of itself is self-evident, for the predicate is the same as the subject, because God is His own existence (*Deum est suum esse*) as will be hereafter shown (Q[3], A[4]). Now because, concerning God, we do not what He is (*non scimus de Deo quid est*), the proposition is not self-evident to us; but needs to be demonstrated by things that are more known to us, though less known in their nature — namely, by effects.

**Reply to Objection 1:** To know that God exists in a general and confused way is implanted in us by nature, inasmuch as God is man's beatitude. For man naturally desires happiness, and what is naturally desired by man must be naturally known to him. This, however, is not to know absolutely (*simpliciter*) that God exists; just as to know that someone is approaching is not the same as to know that Peter is approaching, even though it is Peter who is approaching; for many there are who imagine that man's perfect good which is happiness, consists in riches, and others in pleasures, and others in something else.

**Reply to Objection 2:** Perhaps not everyone who hears this word "God" understands it to signify something than which nothing greater can be thought, seeing that some have believed God to be a body. Yet, granted that everyone understands that by this word "God" is signified something than which nothing greater can be thought, nevertheless, it does not therefore follow that he understands that what the word signifies exists actually, but only that it exists mentally. Nor can it be argued that it actually exists, unless it be admitted that there actually exists something than which nothing greater can be thought; and this precisely is not admitted by those who hold that God does not exist.

**Reply to Objection 3:** The existence of truth in general is self-evident but the existence of a Primal Truth is not self-evident to us.

## Article 2. Is the existence of God demonstrable?

It seems that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated.

**Objection 1:** For it is an article of faith that God exists. But what is of faith cannot be demonstrated, because a demonstration produces scientific knowledge; whereas faith is of the unseen (Heb. 11:1). Therefore it cannot be demonstrated that God exists.

**Objection 2:** Further, the essence (*quod quid est*) is the middle term of demonstration. But with regard to God we cannot know what He is, but only in what He is not; as Damascene says (De Fide Orth. i, 4). Therefore we cannot demonstrate that God exists.

**Objection 3:** Further, if the existence of God were demonstrated, this could only be from His effects. But His effects are not proportionate to Him, since He is infinite and His effects are finite; and between the finite and infinite there is no proportion. Therefore, since a cause cannot be demonstrated by an effect not proportionate to it, it seems that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated.

**On the contrary,** The Apostle says: "The invisible things of Him are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Rom. 1:20). But this would not be unless the existence of God could be demonstrated through the things that are made; for the first thing we must know of anything is whether it exists.

**Reply,** Demonstration can be made in two ways: One is through the cause, and is called "*propter quid*" and this is to argue from what is prior absolutely. The other is through the effect, and is called a demonstration "*quia*"; this is to argue from what is prior relatively only to us. When an effect is better known to us than its cause, from the effect we

proceed to the knowledge (*cognitio*) of the cause. And from every effect the existence of its proper cause can be demonstrated, so long as its effects are better known to us; because since every effect depends upon its cause, if the effect exists, the cause must pre-exist. Hence the existence of God, in so far as it is not self-evident to us, can be demonstrated from those of His effects which are known to us.

**Reply to Objection 1:** The existence of God and other like truths about God, which can be known by natural reason, are not articles of faith, but are preambles to the articles; for faith presupposes natural knowledge, even as grace presupposes nature, and perfection supposes something that can be perfected. Nevertheless, there is nothing to prevent a man, who cannot grasp a proof, accepting, as a matter of faith, something which in itself is capable of being scientifically known and demonstrated.

**Reply to Objection 2:** When the existence of a cause is demonstrated from an effect, this effect takes the place of the definition of the cause in proof of the cause's existence. This is especially the case in regard to God, because, in order to prove the existence of anything, it is necessary to accept as a middle term the meaning of the word, and not its essence, for the question of its essence follows on the question of its existence. Now the names given to God are derived from His effects; consequently, in demonstrating the existence of God from His effects, we may take for the middle term the meaning of the word "God".

**Reply to Objection 3:** From effects not proportionate to the cause no perfect knowledge of that cause can be obtained. Yet from every effect the existence of the cause can be clearly demonstrated, and so we can demonstrate the existence of God from His effects; though from them we cannot perfectly know God as He is according to His essence (*essentia*).

### Article 3. Does God exist?

**Objection 1:** It seems that God does not exist; because if one of two contraries (*contrarii*) be infinite, the other would be altogether destroyed. But the word "God" means that He is infinite goodness. If, therefore, God existed, there would be no evil discoverable; but there is evil in the world. Therefore God does not exist.

**Objection 2:** Further, it is superfluous to suppose that what can be accounted for by a few principles has been produced by many. But it seems that everything we see in the world can be accounted for by other principles, supposing God did not exist. For all natural things can be reduced to one principle which is nature; and all voluntary things can be reduced to one principle which is human reason, or will. Therefore there is no need to suppose God's existence.

**On the contrary,** It is said in Exodus (3:14), by the person of God: "I am Who I Am" (*ego sum qui sum*).

**Reply,** The existence of God can be proved in five ways. The first and more manifest way is the argument from motion. It is certain, and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion. Now whatever is moved is moved by something else (*omne*

*autem quod movetur, ab alio movetur*), for nothing can be moved unless it is in potentiality with respect to that towards which it is moved; whereas a thing moves inasmuch as it is in act. You see, motion (*motus* [cf. *kinēsis*]) is nothing other than bringing something from potentiality to actuality. However, something cannot be brought from potentiality to actuality except by some being that is in actuality (*de potentia autem non potest aliquid reduci in actum, nisi per aliquod ens in actu*). Thus, that which is actually hot, e.g. fire, makes wood, which is potentially hot, to be actually hot, and thereby moves and changes it (*et per hoc movet et alterat ipsum*). But it is not possible that the same thing should be in actuality and potentiality in the same respect at the same time, 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 (*aliquid sit movens et motum*), i.e. that it should move itself. Therefore, whatever is moved must be moved by another. If that by which it is moved is itself moved, then this also must be moved by something else, and that thing again by something else. But this cannot go on infinitely, 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 in motion by the hand. Therefore one must arrive at a first mover not moved by another and this all understand to be God.

The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause. In the sensible world 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 then it would be prior to itself (*prius seipso*), which is impossible. Now, in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all *ordered* efficient causes, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate causes be several, or only one. Now [in this case], when the cause is removed so is the effect. Therefore, if there's 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 is taken from possibility and necessity, and is like this. We find that there are things which possibly are and are not (*invenimus enim in rebus quaedam quae sunt possibilis esse et non esse*), since they are found to be generated and corrupted, and consequently, they possibly are and are not. But it is impossible that all the things which are should be this way, because that which may possibly not be *is not* at some time (*impossibile est autem omnia quae sunt, talia esse, quia quod possibile est non esse, quandoque non est*). So if everything may possibly not be, then at one time there was nothing in reality (*si igitur omnia sunt possibilis non esse, aliquando nihil fuit in rebus*). Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing because that which is not does not begin to be unless it does so through something which is. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to be; and nothing would now be in existence — but this is false. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must be something which is necessarily. 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 must posit something which exists necessarily through itself, and does not have the cause of its necessity from elsewhere, but rather is the cause of necessity in others. This all men speak of as God.

The fourth way is taken from the gradation found in things. One finds some things are more and less good, true, noble and so on. But “more” and “less” are said of different things, as they approach (*approprinquo*) in their different ways something which is the maximum, as a thing is said to be more hot because it more closely approaches that which is hottest; so that there is something which is truest, something best, something noblest and, consequently, something which most is (*maxime ens*); for those things which are most true most are (*quae sunt maxime vera, sunt maxime entia*), as is said in *Metaph.* ii. Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus. For instance, fire, which is the maximum 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 is taken from the governance of the world. We see that things which lack cognition, 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 aim at what is best. Hence it is plain that not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end. Now whatever lacks cognition cannot aim (*tendere*) towards an end, unless it is directed by something cognising and intelligent; 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.

**Reply to Objection 1:** As Augustine says (*Enchiridion* xi): “Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil to exist in His works, unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil.” This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist, and out of it produce good.

**Reply to Objection 2:** Since nature works for a determinate end under the direction of a higher agent, whatever is done by nature must needs be traced back to God, as to its first cause. So also whatever is done voluntarily must also be traced back to some higher cause other than human reason or will, since these can change or fail; for all things that are changeable and capable of defect must be traced back to an immovable and self-necessary first principle, as was shown in the body of the Article.

## *Summa Contra Gentiles* Book I

### CHAPTER X: OF THE OPINION OF THOSE WHO AVER THAT IT CANNOT BE DEMONSTRATED THAT THERE IS A GOD, SINCE THIS IS SELF-EVIDENT

[1] There are some persons to whom the inquiry seeking to demonstrate that God exists may perhaps appear superfluous. These are the persons who assert that the existence of God is known through itself [or self-evident] (*per se notum*), in such a way that its

contrary cannot be entertained in the mind. It thus appears that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated; this may be seen from the following arguments.

[2] Things are said to be known through themselves that are known just as soon as the terms are known. For instance, upon knowing what a whole is and what a part is, you know immediately that every whole is greater than its part. Something like this applies when we say that God exists. For by the name God we understand something than which a greater cannot be conceived (*nam nomine Dei intelligimus aliquid quo maius cogitari non potest*). This is formed in the intellect by one who hears and understands the name "God". As a result, God must exist already at least in the intellect. But He cannot exist solely in the intellect since that which exists both in the intellect and in reality is greater than that which exists in the intellect alone. But nothing can be greater than God, as the very definition (*ratio*) of the name points out. Accordingly, that God exists is known through itself, as being clear from the very signification (*significatio*) of the name "God".

[3] Again, it is conceivable (*cogitari potest*) that there is something whose non-existence cannot be conceived. Clearly, this is greater than the thing whose non-existence can be conceived. Thus if God Himself could conceivably not be, then something greater than God would be conceivable. This, however, is contrary to the account (*ratio*) of the name ["God"]. It remains then that it is known through itself that God exists.

[4] Furthermore, those propositions (*propositiones*) ought to be the most evident (*notissimas*) in which the same thing is predicated of itself, for example, man is man, or whose predicates are included in the definition of their subjects, for example, man is an animal. Now, in God, as will be shown in a later chapter, it is the case that His being is His essence (*suum esse est sua essentia*), so that the same answer is given to the question of what He is and whether he exists. Thus, when "God exists" is said, the predicate is consequently either the same as the subject or at least included in the definition of the subject. Hence, that God exists is known through itself.

[5] Further, those things known naturally are known through themselves, for we do not come to know these things through an effort of inquiry. But that God exists is naturally known since, as will be shown later on, the desire of man naturally tends towards God as towards the ultimate end. The proposition that God exists is, therefore, self-evident.

[6] Similarly, that through which all other things are known ought itself to be known through itself. Now, God is of this sort. For just as the light of the sun is the principle (*principium*) of all visible perception, so the divine light is the principle of all intelligible knowledge; since the divine light is that in which intelligible illumination is found first and in its highest degree. That God exists, therefore, should be known through itself.

[7] From these and similar considerations, some think that the fact that God exists is known through itself in such a way that its contrary cannot be thought (*cogitari*) by the mind.

## CHAPTER XI: REFUTATION OF THE FOREGOING OPINION AND SOLUTION OF THE AFORESAID ARGUMENTS

[1] In part, the above opinion arises from the custom by which from their earliest days people are brought up to hear and to call upon the name of God. Habit, and especially habit in a child comes to have the force of nature. As a result, what the mind is steeped in from childhood it clings to very firmly, as something known naturally and self-evidently.

[2] In part, however, the above opinion comes about because of a failure to distinguish between that which is known by itself absolutely (*notum per se simpliciter*) and that which

is self-evident relative to us (*quoad nos per se notum*). That God exists is, absolutely speaking, known through itself, since what God is is His own being (*quod Deus est, sit suum esse*). Yet, because we are not able to grasp (*concipere*) in our minds what God is, that God exists remains unknown relative to us. So, too, that every whole is greater than its part is, absolutely speaking, known through itself; but it would be unknown to one who could not grasp the nature of a whole. Hence it comes about, as it is said in *Metaphysics* II [Ia, 1], that “our intellect is related to the most knowable things in reality as the eye of an owl is related to the sun.”

[3] And, contrary to the point made by the first argument, it does not follow immediately that, as soon as we know the signification of the name God, the existence of God is known. It does not follow first because it is not known to all, even including those who admit that God exists, that God is that than which a greater cannot be conceived. After all, many ancients said that this world itself was God. Furthermore, nothing of this sort should be understood from the interpretations of the name God the Damascene puts forward [*De fide orthodoxa* I, 9]. What is more, granted that everyone should understand by the name God something than which a greater cannot be conceived, it will still not be necessary that there exist in reality something than which a greater cannot be conceived. For a thing and the definition of a name (*ratio nominis*) are posited in the same way. Now, from the fact that what is indicated by the name “God” is grasped (*concipere*) by the mind, it does *not* follow that God exists other than in the intellect. Hence, that than which a greater cannot be conceived will likewise not have to exist save only in the intellect. From this it does not follow that there exists in reality something than which a greater cannot be conceived. No difficulty, consequently, befalls anyone who posits that God does not exist. For it is not a difficulty that something greater can be conceived than anything in reality or in the intellect except to the person who admits that there is something than which a greater cannot be conceived in reality.

[4] Nor, again, is it necessary, as the second argument advanced, that something greater than God can be conceived if God can be conceived not to be. For that He can be conceived not to be does not arise either from the imperfection or the uncertainty of His own being, since this is most manifest in itself. It arises, rather, from the weakness of our intellect, which cannot behold God Himself except through His effects and which is thus led to know His existence through reasoning.

[5] This enables us to solve the third argument as well. For just as it is self-evident to us that a whole is greater than a part of itself, so to those seeing the divine essence (*essentia*) in itself it is supremely self-evident that God exists because His essence is His being. But, because we are not able to see His essence, we arrive at the knowledge of His being, not through God Himself, but through His effects.

[6] The answer to the fourth argument is likewise clear. For man naturally knows God in the same way as he naturally desires God. Now, man naturally desires God in so far as he naturally desires supreme happiness, which is a likeness of the divine goodness. On this basis, it is not necessary that God considered in Himself be naturally known to man, but only a likeness of God. It remains, therefore, that man is to reach the knowledge of God through reasoning by way of the likenesses of God found in His effects.

[7] So, too, with the fifth argument, an easy solution is available. For God is indeed that by which all things are known, not in the sense that they are not known unless He is known (as obtains among self-evident principles), but because all our knowledge is caused in us through His influence.



## CHAPTER XII: OF THE OPINION OF THOSE WHO SAY THAT THE EXISTENCE OF GOD CANNOT BE PROVED, AND THAT IT IS HELD BY FAITH ALONE

[1] There is a certain opinion, held by some other people, contrary to the position mentioned above, through which the efforts of those seeking to prove that God exists would be rendered futile. For they say that the fact that God exists cannot be discovered through reason, but it is only accepted through the path of faith and revelation.

[2] What led some persons to hold this view was the weakness of the arguments which had been brought forth by others to prove that God exists.

[3] Nevertheless, the present error might erroneously find support in its behalf in the words of some philosophers who show that in God essence and being are the same, i.e. that that which answers to the question of what it is and whether it exists are the same. Now, following the way of the reason we cannot arrive at a knowledge of what God is. Hence, it seems likewise impossible to demonstrate by reason that God exists.

[4] Equally, according to the logic (*ars*) of the Philosopher, as a principle to demonstrate whether a thing exists we must accept what the name signifies [*Posterior Analytics* II, 9]; and the *ratio* signified by a name is its definition (*ratio vero significata per nomen est definitio*) — again according to the Philosopher [*Metaphysics* IV, 7]. If that is right, then, having set aside a knowledge of the divine essence or quiddity (*quidditas*), no path will remain to demonstrate that God exists.

[5] Again, if, as is shown in the *Posterior Analytics* [I, 18], the knowledge of the principles of demonstration takes its origin from the senses, whatever transcends all sense and sensibles seems to be indemonstrable. That God exists appears to be a proposition of this sort and is therefore indemonstrable.

[6] The falsity of this opinion is shown, first, from the art of demonstration which teaches us to arrive at causes from their effects. Then, it is shown from the order of the sciences. For, as is said in *Metaphysics* [IV, 3], if there is no knowable substance higher than sensible substance, there will be no science higher than physics. It is shown, thirdly, from the pursuit of the philosophers, who have striven to demonstrate that God exists. Finally, it is shown to us by the truth in the words of Paul: “For the invisible things of God... are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made” (Rom. 1:20).

[7] Nor, contrary to the first argument, is there any problem in the fact that in God essence and being are the same. For this is understood concerning the being by which God subsists in Himself (*de esse quo Deus in seipso subsistit*). But we do not know of what sort this is, just as we do not know His essence. The reference is not to the being that signifies the composition of intellect. For thus the existence of God does fall under demonstration; this happens when our mind is led from demonstrative arguments to form such a proposition of God whereby it expresses that He exists.

[8] Now, in arguments proving the existence of God, it is not necessary to assume the divine essence or quiddity as the middle term of the demonstration. This was the second view proposed above. In place of the quiddity, an effect is taken as the middle term, as in demonstrations *quia*. It is from such effects that the meaning of the name God is taken. For all divine names are imposed either by removing the effects of God from Him or by relating God in some way to His effects.

[9] It is thereby likewise evident that, although God transcends all sensible things and the senses, His effects, on which the demonstration proving His existence is based, are

nevertheless sensible things. And thus, the origin of our knowledge in the senses applies also to those things that transcend the senses.

### CHAPTER XIII: ARGUMENTS IN PROOF OF GOD'S EXISTENCE

[1] We have now shown that the effort to demonstrate the existence of God is not a vain one. So let us proceed to set forth the arguments by which both philosophers and Catholic teachers have proved that God exists.

[2] We shall first set forth the arguments by which Aristotle proceeds to prove that God exists. The aim of Aristotle is to do this by two paths, beginning with motion.

[3] Of these ways the first is as follows. Everything that is moved is moved by another (*omne quod movetur, ab alio movetur*). That some things are in motion—for example, the sun—is evident from the senses. Therefore, it is moved by something else that moves it. This mover is itself either moved or not moved. If it is not, we have reached our conclusion—namely, that it is necessary to posit some unmoved mover; and this is said to be God. If it is moved, it is moved by another mover. We must, consequently, either proceed to infinity, or we must arrive at some unmoved mover. Now, it is not possible to proceed to infinity. Hence, we must posit some prime unmoved mover (*primum movens immobile*).

[4] In this proof, there are two propositions that need to be proved, namely, [a] that everything that is moved is moved by something else; and [b] that in movers and things moved one cannot proceed to infinity.

[5] The first of these propositions (i.e. [a]) Aristotle proves by three paths. The first path is as follows. If something moves itself, it must have the principle of its own motion in it; otherwise, it is clearly moved by something else. Furthermore, it must be primarily moved. This means that it must be moved by reason of itself (*moveatur ratione sui ipsius*), and not by reason of a part of itself, as happens when an animal is moved by the motion of its foot. For, in this sense, a whole would not be moved by itself, but a part, and one part would be moved by another. It is also necessary that a self-moving being be divisible and have parts, since, as it is proved in the *Physics* [VI, 4], whatever is moved is divisible.

[6] On the basis of these suppositions Aristotle argues as follows. That which is held to be moved by itself is primarily moved. Hence, when one of its parts is at rest, the whole is then at rest. For if, while one part was at rest, another part in it were moved, then the whole itself would not be primarily moved; it would be that part in it which is moved while another part is at rest. But nothing that is at rest because something else is at rest is moved by itself; for that being whose rest follows upon the rest of another must have its motion follow upon the motion of another. It is thus not moved by itself. Therefore, that which was posited as being moved by itself is not moved by itself. Consequently, everything that is moved must be moved by another.

[7] Nor is it an objection to this argument if one might say that, when something is held to move itself, a part of it cannot be at rest; or, again, if one might say that a part is not subject to rest or motion except accidentally, which is the unfounded argument of Avicenna. For, indeed, the force of Aristotle's argument lies in this: if something moves itself primarily and through itself, rather than through its parts, that it is moved cannot depend on another. But the moving of the divisible itself, like its being, depends on its parts; it cannot therefore move itself primarily and through itself. Hence, for the truth of the inferred conclusion it is not necessary to assume as an absolute truth that a part of a being moving itself is at rest. What must rather be true is this conditional: if the part were

at rest, the whole would be at rest. Now, this proposition would be true even though its antecedent be impossible. In the same way, the following conditional proposition is true: if man is an ass, he is irrational.

[8] Secondly, Aristotle proves the proposition ([a]) by induction [*Physics* VIII, 4]. Whatever is moved by accident is not moved by itself, since it is moved upon the motion of another. So, too, as is evident, what is moved by violence is not moved by itself. Nor are those things moved by themselves that are moved by their nature as being moved from within; such is the case with animals, which evidently are moved by the soul. Nor, again, is this true of those beings, such as heavy and light bodies, which are moved through nature. For such beings are moved by the generating cause and the cause removing impediments. Now, whatever is moved is moved through itself or by accident. If it is moved through itself, then it is moved either violently or by nature; if by nature, then either through itself, as the animal, or not through itself, as heavy and light bodies. Therefore, everything that is moved is moved by another.

[9] Thirdly, Aristotle proves the proposition ([a]) as follows [VIII, 5]. The same thing cannot be at once in act and in potency with respect to the same thing. But everything that is moved is, as such, in potency. For motion is the act of something that is in potency inasmuch as it is in potency. That which moves, however, is as such in act, for nothing acts except according as it is in act. Therefore, with respect to the same motion, nothing is both mover and moved. Thus, nothing moves itself.

[10] It is to be noted, however, that Plato, who held that every mover is moved, understood the name motion in a wider sense than did Aristotle. For Aristotle understood motion strictly, according as it is the act of what exists in potency inasmuch as it is such. So understood, motion belongs only to divisible bodies, as it is proved in the *Physics* [VI, 4]. According to Plato, however, that which moves itself is not a body. Plato understood by motion any given operation, so that to understand and to judge are a kind of motion. Aristotle likewise touches upon this manner of speaking in the *De anima* [III, 7]. Plato accordingly said that the first mover moves himself because he knows himself and wills or loves himself. In a way, this is not opposed to the reasons of Aristotle. There is no difference between reaching a first being that moves himself, as understood by Plato, and reaching a first being that is absolutely unmoved, as understood by Aristotle.

[11] The second proposition, namely, that there is no procession to infinity among movers and things moved ([b]), Aristotle proves by three paths.

[12] The first is as follows [VII, 1]. If among movers and things moved we proceed to infinity, all these infinite beings must be bodies. For whatever is moved is divisible and a body, as is proved in the *Physics* [VI, 4]. But every body that moves some thing moved is itself moved while moving it. Therefore, all these infinities are moved together while one of them is moved. But one of them, being finite, is moved in a finite time. Therefore, all those infinities are moved in a finite time. This, however, is impossible. It is, therefore, impossible that among movers and things moved one can proceed to infinity.

[13] Furthermore, that it is impossible for the abovementioned infinities to be moved in a finite time Aristotle proves as follows. The mover and the thing moved must exist simultaneously. This Aristotle proves by induction in the various species of motion. But bodies cannot be simultaneous except through continuity or contiguity. Now, since, as has been proved, all the aforementioned movers and things moved are bodies, they must constitute by continuity or contiguity a sort of single mobile. In this way, one infinity is moved in a finite time. This is impossible, as is proved in the *Physics* [VII, 1].

[14] The second argument proving the same conclusion is the following. In an ordered series of movers and things moved (this is a series in which one is moved by another according to an order), it is necessarily the fact that, when the first mover is removed or ceases to move, no other mover will move or be moved. For the first mover is the cause of motion for all the others. But, if there are movers and things moved following an order to infinity, there will be no first mover, but all would be as intermediate movers. Therefore, none of the others will be able to be moved, and thus nothing in the world will be moved.

[15] The third proof comes to the same conclusion, except that, by beginning with the superior, it has a reversed order. It is as follows. That which moves as an instrumental cause cannot move unless there be a principal moving cause. But, if we proceed to infinity among movers and things moved, all movers will be as instrumental causes, because they will be moved movers and there will be nothing as a principal mover. Therefore, nothing will be moved.

[16] Such, then, is the proof of both propositions ([a] and [b]) assumed by Aristotle in the first demonstrative route by which he proved that a first unmoved mover exists.

[17] The second path is this. If every mover is moved, then this proposition is true either by itself (*per se*) or by accident (*per accidens*). If by accident, then it is not necessary, since what is true by accident is not necessary. It is possible, then, that no mover is moved. But if a mover is not moved, it does not move: as the adversary says. It is therefore possible that nothing is moved. For, if nothing moves, nothing is moved. This, however, Aristotle considers to be impossible—namely, that at any time there be no motion. Therefore, the first proposition was not possible, since from a false possible, a false impossible does not follow. Hence, this proposition, every mover is moved by another, was not true by accident.

[18] Again, if two things are accidentally joined in some being, and one of them is found without the other, it is probable that the other can be found without it. For example, if white and musical are found in Socrates, and in Plato we find musical but not white, it is probable that in some other being we can find the white without the musical. Therefore, if mover and thing moved are accidentally joined in some being, and the thing moved be found without the mover in some being, it is probable that the mover is found without that which is moved. Nor can the example of two things, of which one depends on the other, be brought as an objection against this. For the union we are speaking of is not essential (*per se*), but accidental.

[19] But, if the proposition that every mover is moved is true by itself, something impossible or difficult likewise follows. For the mover must be moved either by the same kind of motion as that by which he moves, or by another. If the same, a cause of alteration must itself be altered, and further, a healing cause must itself be healed, and a teacher must himself be taught and this with respect to the same knowledge. Now, this is impossible. A teacher must have science, whereas he who is a learner of necessity does not have it. So that, if the proposition were true, the same thing would be possessed and not possessed by the same being—which is impossible. If, however, the mover is moved by another species of motion, so that (namely) the altering cause is moved according to place, and the cause moving according to place is increased, and so forth, since the genera and species of motion are finite in number, it will follow that we cannot proceed to infinity. There will thus be a first mover, which is not moved by another. Will someone say that there will be a recurrence, so that when all the genera and species of motion have been completed the series will be repeated and return to the first motion? This would

involve saying, for example, that a mover according to place would be altered, the altering cause would be increased, and the increasing cause would be moved according to place. Yet this whole view would arrive at the same conclusion as before: whatever moves according to a certain species of motion is itself moved according to the same species of motion, though mediately and not immediately.

[20] It remains, therefore, that we must posit some first mover that is not moved by any exterior moving cause.

[21] Granted this conclusion—namely, that there is a first mover that is not moved by an exterior moving cause—it yet does not follow that this mover is absolutely unmoved. That is why Aristotle goes on to say that the condition of the first mover may be twofold [VIII, 5]. The first mover can be absolutely unmoved. If so, we have the conclusion we are seeking: there is a first unmoved mover. On the other hand, the first mover can be self-moved. This may be argued, because that which is through itself is prior to what is through another. Hence, among things moved as well, it seems reasonable that the first moved is moved through itself and not by another.

[22] But, on this basis, the same conclusion again follows. For it cannot be said that, when a mover moves himself, the whole is moved by the whole. Otherwise, the same difficulties would follow as before: one person would both teach and be taught, and the same would be true among other motions. It would also follow that a being would be both in potency and in act; for a mover is, as such, in act, whereas the thing moved is in potency. Consequently, one part of the self-moved mover is solely moving, and the other part solely moved. We thus reach the same conclusion as before: there exists an unmoved mover.

[23] Nor can it be held that both parts of the self-moved mover are moved, so that one is moved by the other, or that one moves both itself and the other, or that the whole moves a part, or that a part moves the whole. All this would involve the return of the aforementioned difficulties: something would both move and be moved according to the same species of motion; something would be at once in potency and in act; and, furthermore, the whole would not be primarily moving itself, it would move through the motion of a part. The conclusion thus stands: one part of a self-moved mover must be unmoved and moving the other part.

[24] But there is another point to consider. Among self-moved beings known to us, namely, animals, although the moving part, which is to say the soul, is unmoved through itself, it is yet moved by accident. That is why Aristotle further shows that the moving part of the first self-moving being is not moved either through itself or by accident [VIII, 6]. For, since self-moving beings known to us, namely, animals, are corruptible, the moving part in them is moved by accident. But corruptible self-moving beings must be reduced to some first self-moving being that is everlasting. Therefore, some self-moving being must have a mover that is moved neither through itself nor by accident.

[25] It is further evident that, according to the position of Aristotle, some self-moved being must be everlasting. For if, as Aristotle supposes, motion is everlasting, the generation of self-moving beings (this means beings that are generable and corruptible) must be endless. But the cause of this endlessness cannot be one of the self-moving beings, since it does not always exist. Nor can the cause be all the self-moving beings together, both because they would be infinite and because they would not be simultaneous. There must therefore be some endlessly self-moving being, causing the endlessness of generation among these sublunary self-movers. Thus, the mover of the self-moving being is not moved, either through itself or by accident.

[26] Again, we see that among beings that move themselves some initiate a new motion as a result of some motion. This new motion is other than the motion by which an animal moves itself, for example, digested food or altered air. By such a motion the self-moving mover is moved by accident. From this we may infer that no self-moved being is moved everlastingly whose mover is moved either by itself or by accident. But the first self-mover is everlastingly in motion; otherwise, motion could not be everlasting, since every other motion is caused by the motion of the self-moving first mover. The first self-moving being, therefore, is moved by a mover who is himself moved neither through himself nor by accident.

[27] Nor is it against this argument that the movers of the lower spheres produce an everlasting motion and yet are said to be moved by accident. For they are said to be moved by accident, not on their own account, but on account of their movable subjects, which follow the motion of the higher sphere.

[28] Now, God is not part of any self-moving mover. In his *Metaphysics* [XII, 7], therefore, Aristotle goes on from the mover who is a part of the self-moved mover to seek another mover—God—who is absolutely separate. For, since everything moving itself is moved through appetite, the mover who is part of the self-moving being moves because of the appetite of some appetible object. This object is higher, in the order of motion, than the mover desiring it; for the one desiring is in a manner a moved mover, whereas an appetible object is an absolutely unmoved mover. There must, therefore, be an absolutely unmoved separate first mover. This is God.

[29] Two considerations seem to invalidate these arguments. The first consideration is that, as arguments, they presuppose the eternity of motion, which Catholics consider to be false.

[30] To this consideration the reply is as follows. The most efficacious way to prove that God exists is on the supposition that the world is eternal. Granted this supposition, that God exists is less manifest. For, if the world and motion have a first beginning, some cause must clearly be posited to account for this origin of the world and of motion. That which comes to be anew must take its origin from some innovating cause; since nothing brings itself from potency to act, or from non-being to being.

[31] The second consideration is that the demonstrations given above presuppose that the first moved being, namely, a heavenly body, is self-moved. This means that it is animated, which many do not admit.

[32] The reply to this consideration is that, if the prime mover is not held to be self-moved, then it must be moved immediately by something absolutely unmoved. Hence, even Aristotle himself proposed this conclusion as a disjunction: it is necessary either to arrive immediately at an unmoved separate first mover, or to arrive at a self-moved mover from whom, in turn, an unmoved separate first mover is reached.

[33] In *Metaphysics* II [Ia, 2] Aristotle also uses another argument to show that there is no infinite regress in efficient causes and that we must reach one first cause—God. This is as follows. In all ordered efficient causes, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, whether one or many, and this is the cause of the last cause. But, when you suppress a cause, you suppress its effect. Therefore, if you suppress the first cause, the intermediate cause cannot be a cause. Now, if there were an infinite regress among efficient causes, no cause would be first. Therefore, all the other causes, which are intermediate, will be suppressed. But this is manifestly false. We must, therefore, posit that there exists a first efficient cause. This is God.

[34] Another argument may also be gathered from the words of Aristotle. In *Metaphysics* II [Ia, 1] he shows that what is most true is also most a being. But in *Metaphysics* IV [4] he shows the existence of something supremely true from the observed fact that of two false things one is more false than the other, which means that one is more true than the other. This comparison is based on the nearness to that which is absolutely and supremely true. From these Aristotelian texts we may further infer that there is something that is supremely being. This we call God.

[35] The Damascene proposes another argument for the same conclusion taken from the government of the world [*De fide orthodoxa* I, 3]. Averroes likewise hints at it [In II *Physicorum*]. The argument runs thus. Contrary and discordant things cannot, always or for the most part, be parts of one order except under someone's government, which enables all and each to tend to a definite end. But in the world we find that things of diverse natures come together under one order, and this not rarely or by chance, but always or for the most part. There must therefore be some being by whose providence the world is governed. This we call God.

#### **CHAPTER XIV: THAT IN ORDER TO ACQUIRE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IT IS NECESSARY TO PROCEED BY THE WAY OF REMOVAL**

[1] We have shown that there exists a first being, whom we call God. We must, accordingly, now investigate the properties of this being.

[2] Now, in considering the divine substance, we should especially make use of the method of removal. For, by its immensity, the divine substance surpasses every form that our intellect reaches. Thus we are unable to apprehend it by knowing what it is. Yet we are able to have some knowledge of it by knowing what it is not. Furthermore, we approach nearer to knowledge of God insofar as through our intellect we are able to remove more and more things from Him. For we know each thing more perfectly the more fully we see its differences from other things; for each thing has within itself its own being, distinct from all other things. So, too, in the case of the things whose definitions we know. We locate them in a genus, through which we know in a general way what they are. Then we add differences to each thing, by which it may be distinguished from other things. In this way, a complete knowledge of a substance is built up.

[3] However, in the consideration of the divine substance we cannot take 'what' (*quid*) as a genus; nor can we derive the distinction of God from things by differences affirmed of God. For this reason, we must derive the distinction of God from other beings by means of negative differences. And just as among affirmative differences one contracts the other, so one negative difference is contracted by another that makes it to differ from many beings. For example, if we say that God is not an accident, we thereby distinguish Him from all accidents. Then, if we add that He is not a body, we shall further distinguish Him from certain substances. And thus, proceeding in order, by such negations God will be distinguished from all that He is not. Finally, there will then be a proper consideration of God's substance when He will be known as distinct from all things. Yet, this knowledge will not be perfect, since it will not tell us what God is in Himself.

[4] As a principle of procedure in knowing God by way of removal, therefore, let us adopt the proposition which, from what we have said, is now manifest, namely, that God is absolutely unmoved. The authority of Sacred Scripture also confirms this. For it is written: "I am the Lord and I change not" (Mal. 3:6); ... "with whom there is no change" (James 2:17). Again: "God is not man... that He should be changed (Num. 23:19).

## CHAPTER XV: THAT GOD IS ETERNAL

[1] From what we have said it is also apparent that God is eternal.

[2] Everything that begins to be or ceases to be does so through motion or change. Since, however, we have shown that God is absolutely immutable, He is eternal, lacking all beginning or end.

[3] Again. Those beings alone are measured by time that are moved. For time, as is made clear in *Physics* IV [11], is “the number of motion.” But God, as has been proved, is absolutely without motion, and is consequently not measured by time. There is, therefore, no before and after in Him; He does not have being after non-being, nor non-being after being, nor can any succession be found in His being. For none of these characteristics can be understood without time. God, therefore, is without beginning and end, having His whole being at once. In this consists the nature of eternity.

[4] What is more, if it were true that there was a time when He existed after not existing, then He must have been brought by someone from non-being to being. Not by Himself, since what does not exist cannot act. If by another, then this other is prior to God. But we have shown that God is the first cause. Hence, He did not begin to be, nor consequently will He cease to be, for that which has been everlastingly has the power to be everlastingly. God is, therefore, eternal.

[5] We find in the world, furthermore, certain beings, those namely that are subject to generation and corruption, which can be and not-be. But what can be has a cause because, since it is equally related to two contraries, namely, being and non-being, it must be owing to some cause that being accrues to it. Now, as we have proved by the reasoning of Aristotle, one cannot proceed to infinity among causes. We must therefore posit something that is a necessary being. Every necessary being, however, either has the cause of its necessity in an outside source or, if it does not, it is necessary through itself. But one cannot proceed to infinity among necessary beings the cause of whose necessity lies in an outside source. We must therefore posit a first necessary being, which is necessary through itself. This is God, since, as we have shown, He is the first cause. God, therefore, is eternal, since whatever is necessary through itself is eternal.

[6] From the everlastingness of time, likewise, Aristotle shows the everlastingness of motion [*Physics* VIII, 1], from which he further shows the everlastingness of the moving substance [VIII, 6]. Now, the first moving substance is God. God is therefore everlasting. If we deny the everlastingness of time and motion, we are still able to prove the everlastingness of the moving substance. For, if motion had a beginning, it must have done so through some moving cause. If this moving cause began, it did so through the action of some cause. Hence, either one will proceed to infinity, or he will arrive at a moving cause that had no beginning.

[7] To this truth divine authority offers witness. The Psalmist says: “But You, Lord, endure forever”; and he goes on to say: “But You art always the selfsame: and Your years shall not fail” (Ps. 101:13, 28).