



## Essential Philosophy with Dr. David Schenk

### Lesson 8: Aquinas' Cosmological Argument for the Existence of God

#### Outline:

##### Background to the Cosmological Argument

- Cosmological arguments don't claim that God's existence is evident from pure logic—cosmological arguments claim that God's existence is far more likely than God's inexistence because of *the available, observable evidence around us*.
- Both Aquinas' Second Way and Samuel Clarke's Version of the Cosmological Argument derive from *commonsense intuitions people have*.
  - For example: The physical universe is huge, containing billions and billions of galaxies, with billions of stars in each galaxy. All of this had to appear somehow, rather than just popping into existence. This question arises from an intuition that asks, "What put the universe here?" It must have been a really powerful being—and God perfectly fits that mold.
- Cosmological arguments are very old, but Dr. Schenk begins with St. Thomas Aquinas' "Second Way" Argument, part of Aquinas' "Five Ways" to prove the existence of God.

##### Modern vs. Aristotelian Understanding of Causation

- Aquinas relies on *Aristotle's notion of causation*, which is that causation is a substance, or a kind of thing with the power or capacity to make something new happen in the universe.
  - For example: Human agency is a substance or thing that allows Dr. Schenk to wear a button-down shirt with or without a tie.
  - For Aquinas, this notion of causation means that causal explanations must terminate in a substance with innate powers capable of making something happen.
- *Modern causation* entails that efficient causation is all there is; causation is a relation between events.
  - For example: Event A is the causal source for Event B.



Aquinas' Second Way (See Blackboard at 13:35)

### **Aquinas' Second Way Cosmological Argument**

- (1) The world has in it various series of cause and effect.
- (2) Nothing can cause itself.
- \* (3) No causal series can proceed backward in time infinitely.
  
- (4) ∴, there must exist a First Cause that is itself uncaused.
- > (5) This uncaused cause is God

- Notes on Aquinas' Second Way
  - Premise (1) is a straightforward, empirical observation.
  - Premise (2) implies that things cannot cause themselves to exist—a thing needs a power to do that, and once a thing has a power it already exists.
  - Premise (3) implies that all causal series must terminate in a substance with an innate power—causal chains cannot move backward infinitely because then they would not terminate in a substance with a power.
  - In Premise (4), since there must be a thing that has not been caused, then that thing must have a great deal of power—in Premise (5) it is inferred that this thing is the being God.
  - You could argue that a different type of universe-making being exists (remember Dr. Schenk's "Gumby"?), but that would be circuitous and complex—God is the being who fits this bill perfectly.

Samuel Clarke's Version (See Blackboard at 20:20)

### **Samuel Clarke's Version**

- (1) Whatever contingently exists must have a cause.
- (2) A cause always directly precedes its effect.
- \* (3) The causal chain cannot extend backward in time infinitely.
  

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- (4) ∴, there must exist a First Cause.
- (5) That cause must be a necessary being (lest it too beg a cause).
- (6) ∴, there must exist a necessary being that created the universe.
- > (7) That Being is God.



- Notes on Samuel Clarke's Cosmological Argument (Begins at 18:22)
  - Clarke's rather popular version of the CA uses a more contemporary understanding of causation - it recognizes that events are contingent, but it argues that whatever is contingent must have a cause.
  - Aquinas doesn't talk about *contingent beings vs. necessary beings*, while Clarke does.
  - In Premise (4), there must exist a First Cause where the causal chain terminates, and that termination happens with a necessary being (5).
  - The only necessary, universe-making being who fits the bill is God (6 and 7).
- Proof for Premise 3 of Samuel Clarke's Version (See blackboard at 28:00)
  - Note: If you fear math, feel free to skip this part of the lecture! However, it is not difficult to follow along.
  - This math-based proof for Premise (3) of Clarke's Version was given to Dr. Schenk by a friend in graduate school. It uses *modern set theory*.
  - This proof relies on a *reductio ad absurdum*, or "reduction to absurdity," argument, which assumes that Premise (3) is false and carries that assumption out to its absurd end.