

Introduction to Philosophy

Proving the Existence of God: The Cosmological Proof of God's Existence

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

Readings

- Saint Thomas Aquinas, "The Five Ways".
- Michael Martin, "The Cosmological Argument".

Background

In general, the cosmological argument claims that facets of our everyday experience demonstrate that God must exist. For the first three of his "Five Ways", St. Thomas Aquinas begins each argument by citing a familiar fact of experience: Some things are in motion; there are causes and effects; things are generated and corrupted. He then tries to show that each of these facts allow us to reason that God must exist because alternative explanations lead to logical absurdities. In his article, Michael Martin critically examines each of these arguments and is not satisfied by any of them.

Questions

1. For each of his arguments, what assumptions does Saint Thomas Aquinas make and how are they supposed to show that God must exist? Can you generalize the common structure that they all have?
2. What two general problems does Michael Martin see with cosmological proofs? How does he see these occurring in Aquinas' proofs? What other problems does Martin suggest?
3. Given that they reach different conclusions, Aquinas and Martin cannot both be right. Where exactly in their respective arguments do they disagree? Which position is supported by the strongest and most compelling argument?