

# History of Philosophy A: Lecture Seven

## 1. Aquinas's First Way

“Of these ways the first is as follows. Everything that is moved is moved by another. That some things are in motion—for example, the sun—is evident from sense. 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 we must posit some unmoved mover. This we call 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.”

Again, let's run that argument through our intellectual fingers and get to grips with what's going on. We'll do a *close reading* of the text as we did with Anselm. Remember, this is an important skill!

(1) Something moves.

That's uncontroversial.

(2) If  $x$  moves then  $x$  is moved by something else,  $y$ .

(3) Something is moved by some other thing – call it  $a$ . [from (1) and (2)]

(4)  $a$  is either moved by something else, or it isn't. [Premise]

Note that this is meant to be *trivially true*. An instance of the 'law of excluded middle'

(5) If  $a$  isn't moved by something else, there is an unmoved mover. [by definition]

(6) If  $x$  is an unmoved mover, then  $x$  is God [Premise]

(7) If  $a$  is moved by something else, then either *that thing* is moved by something else or not. [Premise]

Again, a trivially true instance of the law of excluded middle.

(8) As we can re-run (4) – (7) for everything, there is either an unmoved mover or a chain of movers that goes on for infinity. [Premise]

(9) There can't be an infinite chain of movers. [Premise]

(10) There is an unmoved mover [from (8) and (9)]

(11) God exists [from (6) and (10)]

## 2. What Does Aquinas Mean By 'Move'?

So you *might* be thinking along the following lines. You see a rock rolling down a hill. What moved it? The wind! But what put the *wind* in motion? The movement of the Earth! What made the Earth move? Etc. Until we either go for infinity (which Aquinas says can't happen) or we stop at the Unmoved Mover (which is, presumably, God).

This would be the wrong way to think about it! This isn't how Aquinas sees things. That discussion from the previous slide was of a *temporal succession* of causes (i.e. something put the earth into motion, which *then* put the wind into motion which *later on* managed to put the rock into motion). It's about causes arranged *over time*. There *is* a cosmological argument for the existence of God along those lines – we'll look at it next lecture! But when Aquinas talks about moving and movers, he's not talking about these kind of things.

In some ways, the latin phrase that Aquinas used (*motus*) translates badly into 'motion'. It's closer (though not exactly the same as) 'change'. Following Aristotle he thought there were three kinds of change:

*Change in place* (Going from one place to another)

*Change in quality* (Going from being one way to being another)

*Change in quantity* (Going from being a certain number of things to a different number)

But none of this had anything to do with changing/moving *over time*. Aquinas thought there *could* be infinite chains of events stretching back in time. There *could* be an event at one time, caused by another event at an earlier time, which was caused by an event at a yet earlier time and so on and so forth, for eternity. He uses the example of sons descended from fathers going on for eternity.

So what *does* he mean when he uses the word *motus*? Take walking. You're moving. But you're *being moved* by something else. Namely, a part of you – your legs. Your moving requires another mover – your

legs. And this isn't a *temporal* succession. It's not as if your legs move *first* and *then* you go into motion. It happens *simultaneously*.

Or, alternatively, imagine being in a car. You're moving. But you're moving *because* of the motion of the car. The car moves you, but does so *simultaneously* with its moving. So there's no temporal ordering of moving – *not in the sense that Aquinas means*. So it is a *non-temporal* chain of causes Aquinas is thinking.

### 3. Relying on Aristotle

Aquinas goes into (2) and (9) in-depth. In the case of each, he relies upon Aristotle, and what he says in his *Physics*, to (allegedly) prove each of them. Indeed, in each case he gives *three* proofs from Aristotle. I'm going to (briefly) look at only some of them. Feel free to consider the others on your own!

### 4. In Support of (2)

So, is it the case that everything that moves must be moved by something? That is, can somethings move by themselves and only by themselves? (Remember, by 'move' we don't just mean *change in place* but other kinds of changes as well.)

As I say, Aquinas has *three* reasons (all allegedly straight from Aristotle) to demonstrate this. Take the first. Aquinas says that if something moves *by itself*, and nothing else moves it, it must be 'primarily moved' (that is, it cannot be moved in virtue of one of its parts – like you and your legs). But, says Aquinas, this is impossible.

If the parts of the object were moving, then the whole would be moving in virtue of *them*. So the parts must be at rest i.e. unmoving. But then the whole as to be at rest *as well*. It's not as if your parts can stay where they are, whilst you head off without them! And this works for other cases of *motus* – if part of you changes in, say, quality (say your skin turns tanned) then the whole changes (*you* become tanned). But then the whole's being at rest must depend upon the part's being at rest. Similarly, its being in motion depends upon the parts being in motion. So it *must* be that the object only moves in virtue of its parts.

### 5. In Support of (9)

Let's look at the justification Aquinas gives for the premise that there cannot be an infinite chain of movers – that is, why can't I be moved by something, which is moved by something else, which is in turn moved by something else etc. The first argument he gives relies upon actual and potential infinities. If there were an infinite number of movers, then there would be an infinite amount of motion in a finite amount of time. We'll talk about potential/actual infinity next lecture, so let's leave them it be for now. Let's look at the second.

Take a finite chain of movers. The first mover moves the second thing, which moves the third etc. which moves the last thing (the 'moved thing'). So you have a first mover, a bunch of *intermediate* movers and the moved thing. But the intermediate movers won't do the job alone. They need the first mover to get going. Without a first mover, there can be no movement at all.

Now imagine an infinite chain with no first mover (just going on and on). Well in that case *all you have* are intermediate movers. So, as we know intermediate movers aren't enough to move things on their own, there could be no movement. So there *has* to be a first mover.

### 6. Bringing Things to a Close

A lot of historical philosophy is about *closely reading* extracts. Indeed, *a lot of philosophy* is about this as well! The Aquinas extract is a mere three pages, but as you can see it packs a lot in. All we've done is looked at a few paragraphs. For instance, the *other* ways that Aquinas tries to prove those contentious premises haven't even been mentioned! And there's a fair bit to each of them. Remember, consulting **reputable** secondary sources is fair game!

Also note that we've completely ignored one of the contentious premises. But maybe that's less *my* fault and more that Aquinas just doesn't talk about it that much. And maybe it's very important what Aquinas would say about it. Finally: keep bearing in mind that when Aquinas talks about 'motion' he doesn't just mean going from one place to another. He means various kinds of change; and moreover, his worry is to do with *non-temporal* chains of such 'movement'.

Aquinas also has two other ways that are basically 'cosmological' in nature. We haven't talked about those, but you can have a look at them in your own time if you want. They too rely upon infinite chains of 'non temporally successive' facts.