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Some Points Regarding The History And Nature Of The Henological Argument For The Existence Of God

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SOME POINTS REGARDING THE HISTORY AND NATURE
OF THE HENOLOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR
THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

by

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Introduction

It is the purpose of this dissertation to acquaint the reader with the Henological Argument for the Existence of God. The word henological is derived from the Greek words _hen_ and _logos_, and has the meaning of one thought or thoughts toward oneness, unity. The name is one thing, the argument is another. Actually, the argument has been proposed or accepted by several philosophers, who formulated or explained the argument in the general setting of their own philosophies. We shall mention these and pay particular attention to the use which St. Thomas Aquinas made of the argument. In its Thomistic setting, the argument is usually referred to as the Argument from the Grades of Perfection.
Chapter I

The Argument as found in the Ancients

PLATO

Ideas form the basis of the philosophy of Plato (428 - 347 B.C.). Ideas are primary, most real, and existing in their own right. Of all the existing Ideas one only is essential, in which other beings have to share. The Being which is now known as God was to Plato the Idea, which Being was singular in perfection, including the quality of beauty. The Platonic manner of proving the existence of this singular Being is difficult to comprehend. It appears that Plato first assumed the existence of such a Being and then based his argument on this assumption.

The true way to see beauty is to begin with the beautiful appearances here on earth and to use them as different levels or stages in the ascent to an absolute Beauty. (1)

(1) Lane Cooper, "Symposium", Plata, New York, Oxford University Press, 1938, 2
While this beauty was limited yet it appeared to be grouped in definite strata, according to degree of perfection or amount of sharing in the Idea. If this line of reasoning is followed, it is easily seen that where stages of perfection is not found by direct observation, such an ultimate exists in another state. Observing degrees of perfection, the more and less good; the more and less true; the more and less beautiful; it naturally follows that in order to have a less and a more there must be a most, from which the others are differentiated by their participation in the ultimate Being, the Idea.

Further, Plato recognized good as more and less. Like his argument from the existence of degrees of perfection, the good, or rather goods, demand ultimate good, God.

In the realm of the intelligible, the ultimate idea to be reached, and barely grasped, is the essential Form of Good; but, once it is perceived, we cannot help concluding that it is the universal source of all things beautiful and right. (2)

ARISTOTLE

Aristotle (384 - 322 B.C.) as is well known, maintained that all Philosophy leads to a consideration of God, and he accepted or proposed several

arguments to prove God's existence. Indeed it was Aristotle who proposed the Argument from Motion, one of the most famous proofs for the existence of God to be found in the history of thought.

God is in a state higher than that state in which man is existing in. The existence or use of the comparative presupposes the superlative which in fact can be nothing else but one. The term better presents a comparison which demands a greater degree, best carries the idea of finality in degree, that above which nothing can be. By these terms, the being which is best, is perfect and, as such, cannot be divided nor be, at the same time, one and multiple.

If, then, God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more. And God is in a better state. And life also belongs to God; for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God's self-dependent actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God. (3)

All natural creation rests in specific classifications, different by perfection. The very

existence of a least and a more perfect specimen leads to the conclusion that where there is a least perfect, and a more perfect, there must, of necessity, be a most perfect. To be absolutely perfect, a being must be perfect in all attributes or qualities, or that being is something less than perfect, and, in this event, is dependent on a more perfect being which is itself the most perfect being, which being is called God. (4)

PLOTINUS

"God is absolute unity, undifferentiated by any act of His will or intellect, or by any predication on our part except the predication of unity and goodness." (5) Created beings come from the Primal One, by a process called emanation, not by a transference of part of the nature of the One Supreme Reality. The first emanation from the One is known as the Intellect, which is identifiable with Plato's World of Ideas. In a manner similar to the emanation of the Nous from the One, the World-Soul is the image of the Nous.

Plotinus (c205 - 270) has based all his system on the assumption that the One, as he described it,

(5) Ibid. 206.
exists. From this assumption he arrives at the existence of lesser being. Once the fact of lesser being is established, Plotinus uses it as the basis for further construction and from this base works up to the existence of the Ultimate Reality, the One.

Unity, the essence of God, emanates from Him and then recognizes itself as His image. "This recognition is the origin of the intellect. The unity of God has now become the intellect, and from this dualistic principle, subsequent emanations proceed," (6)

AUGUSTINE

St. Augustine (354 - 430) admitted the validity of the teleological argument for the existence of God, and also accepted the argument from testimony of conscience. Augustine favored an argument based on the immutability and permanence of the object of our intellectual knowledge. Summarized, the argument follows. Man knows truth and man strives for the good. Nothing is true or good in this world of imperfection except in so far as it participates in the absolute truth and goodness of Him Who never changes. (7)


Augustine knew no alternative except to rise from perfections observed in the universe to an all-perfect Being. That which is true because it participates in the absolute Truth, demands the existence of that final Being who is Truth and Goodness. If an Ultimate Truth does not exist, then no truth at all exists, nothing can be caused by that which is inferior to it. St. Augustine was wont to argue to the existence and perfection of the immutable God from the perfection of the changing things of the world.

**ANSELM**

The philosophical method and contents of the philosophy of St. Anselm (1033 - 1109) contain definite evidence of the Christian Platonism of St. Augustine. The argument which Anselm chooses as the best proof for the existence of God is stated thus, in the following résumé:

We define God as a being, than which nothing greater can be thought. Now, there is in the mind the idea of such a being. But such a being must exist outside of the mind; for, if it did not, it would not be that than which nothing greater can be thought. Therefore, God exists not only in the mind as an idea, but also outside the mind, as a reality. (8)

Anselm formulated an ontological argument, starting from the idea that God is "That than which nothing greater can be thought". (9)


(9) Loc. cit.
he argues that that which exists in reality is greater that that which is only in the mind; since "God is that than which nothing greater can be thought",(10) he exists in reality.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1224 - 1274), at a later date examined and rejected the Argument of St. Anselm. The transition is from the ideal to the real. Anselm began with a purely constructed idea of the highest being which he called the "Highest Conceivable" being and from this idea he reasoned to the actual existence of such a being.

The argument of Anselm was rejected by Thomas Aquinas and his followers, revived by Descartes, attacked by Kant and defended by Leibniz and others. At the present time it has been supplanted to a major degree by the Thomistic proofs.

(10) Loc. cit.
Just as all the principles and all the divisions of philosophy are closely related, so too, an argument for the existence of God is by no means unrelated to the other four arguments for the existence of God. In considering the Henological Argument as found in some of the prominent philosophers of the past, we have treated it alone. However, the philosophers mentioned advanced other reasons for the existence of God. To conclude our treatment of the Henological Argument, let us concentrate briefly on the philosophy of St. Thomas (1225 - 1274) in this matter. He is the great Christian realist who has left to
posterity a grouping of five arguments evidencing God's existence. (11) These are the famous "Quinque vias", one of these is, as we have seen, the Henological Argument, to see its real force we must keep in mind the other four. And above all we must realize that it is permeated with the principle of efficient causality. (12)

The Argument from the Gradation of things as written by St. Thomas Aquinas gives the best treatment of the Existence of God, in line with the idea of Unity. As presented in the Suma Theologica the argument is stated thus:

The fourth was is taken from the gradation to be found in things. Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble, and the like. But 'more' and 'less' are predicated of different things, according as they resemble in their different ways something which is truest, something best, something noblest, which is the maximum, as a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest; so that there is something which is noblest, and, consequently, something which is uttermost being; for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being, as is written in Metaphysics II. Now the maximum of any genus; as fire, which is the maximum of 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. (13)

(12) Plato took a different view of the Argument, having in mind, it would seem, the exemplary cause.

(13) St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Dominican Translation, New York, Benziger Brothers Inc., 1948, I.Q.2, art.3.
The need of a rule, standard or principle was clearly seen by St. Thomas. This standard or principle he called God. The superlative of all being rests in God, the Perfect Being. The direct words of St. Thomas again will be an aid in working toward the argument for the existence of God.

It can be shown from these three sources that God is one. First, from His simplicity. For it is manifest that the reason why any singular thing is this particular thing is because it cannot be communicated to many... Secondly, this is proved from the infinity of His perfection. For it was shown above that God comprehends in Himself the whole perfection of being. If then many gods existed, they would necessarily differ from each other. Something therefore would belong to one which did not belong to another. And if this were a provocation, one of them would be without it. So it is impossible for many gods to exist. Hence, also, the ancient philosophers, constrained as it were, by truth, when they asserted likewise that there was only one such principle. Thirdly, this is shown from the unity of the world. For all things that exist are seen to be ordered to each other since some serve others. But things that are diverse do not harmonize in the same order, unless they are ordered thereto by one. For many are reduced into one order by one better than by many: Because one is the per se cause of one, and many are only the accidental cause of one, in as much, they are in some way one. Since, therefore, what is first is most perfect, and is so per se and not accidentally, it must be that the first which reduces all into one order should be only one. And this one is God. (14)

There exists a world of mineral being, which being exists, but without life, i.e. inanimate.

These mineral beings are without the attributes or qualifications necessary to rule or direct either themselves or other higher grades of matter. Within our world we find a realm of vegetation, which has the quality of life. Because it possess life, vegetation is superior to mineral, yet, vegetation cannot direct mineral being, because it lacks the qualities of the higher orders (Intellect and Will). The third level of perfection embraces the animal kingdom, composed of beings possessed with the power of self-movement.

The fourth grade of perfection is found in man, the rational animal. Man has existence, life, sense faculties, locomotion and greatest of all, the power of intellect, which though imperfect, is still great enough to enable man to rule the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms on earth; yet it is not an independent reality. Man, while more perfect than minerals, vegetables or lower animals is far from perfect. Man has great limitations and men have various degrees of goodness, intelligence, etc.

The Supreme Being must be infinite where man is finite; perfect where man is imperfect; one
where man is many. If there were only multiple beings, there would be no Supreme Being; if there were no Supreme Being there would be no beings. From the order manifest in the lower kingdoms, it is apparent that in the higher realm there be an order or plan. God must be One. Were there more than one God, then each would possess some of the attributes of the others and of necessity a difference would exist which would make one superior to another or others inferior. Unicity, as distinct from infinity, can be deduced from self-existence; and infinity as distinct from unicity is clearly implied in self-existence as such.

Metaphysical necessity requires a supreme principle of all being. If this Supreme Principle were multiple, each necessarily existent, and would of necessity agree in point of necessary existence, they would have to be distinguished by some addition made to one only or to both, and thus either or both must be composite. But no composite being exists necessarily of itself. Therefore, there cannot be several necessary beings, several Gods. (15)

The Supreme Being must be essentially perfect, i.e. absolutely good, true, beautiful and one, in its own right, by reason of its own nature. Now to the five ways.

These arguments proceed in metaphysical fashion to analyze observed causes and effects in the light of this concept and reality of being. Each of the five ways has a different set of observed facts or effects for basis, and after traveling varied paths each arrives at the same ultimate goal, God. Because each argument deals with one particular aspect of the First Being a picture of God is attained by means of the Five Arguments considered collectively.

The Argument from Motion to a First Mover, the first of the five ways, comprises not only local motion but all kinds of qualitative and quantitative change. Any such motion involves a transition from potency and whatever moves is in act. To move demands the ability to communicate being, while to be moved requires the reception of being. That which is moved of necessity must have a mover, and should this mover be, in turn, moved by another again another mover is needed, even to the end, until the ultimate has been
reached, which is the First, Unmoved, Mover.

The second way argue to the existence of a First Efficient Cause, from the consideration of efficient cause. From human experience it is known that effects exist. From experience, man knows causes and effects. Effects demand causes and secondary causes demand additional causes. These causes, not being self-explanatory, depend on superior causes. As in the Argument from Motion, it is impossible to go on indefinitely in a series of cause and effect without finally coming up to the First Cause, that cause on which all other causes depend.

The consideration of the Contingency seen in the universe is the material for the third way. Created being in this universe is surrounded by other being of many types and classifications, (large and small, animate and inanimate, rational and irrational), which are now, but were not always and can and do cease to be. It can readily be seen that if this were the only type of being existent, the world would not and could not exist. A being which can cease to exist cannot be the cause of its own existence. All the above classifications of being exist and will cease
to exist, in fact, at one time they did not exist
since they could not be their own cause, it is
apparent that another being, of itself self-existential brought them into existence.

In this self-existent being, the Necessary
Being, essence and existence are identical and
for that reason existence must be of its very
nature.

The fourth way proceeds from multiplicity to
unity or from the varying degrees of perfection
which are perceived in the universe to the absolute
perfection of its First Cause. The acceptance of
various degrees of perfection in being implies an
approximation to something which is 'most' (true,
good, beautiful, one).

All those beings which in different ways
participate in the perfection of Being,
must of necessity be caused by a First
Being which possesses being in its pleni­tude. This is the reason why Plato remark­
ed that unity must precede multiplicity, and
why Aristotle called that which is being
and truth in the highest degree, the cause
of all being and of all truth. (16)

Garrigou-Lagrange in the following statement explains
the statement of St. Thomas. "The proof from
the degrees of beings does not ascend from the

multiple to the one, without at the same time ascending from the composite to the simple, from the imperfect to the perfect. It is not enough to posit as a principle that 'If the same characteristic is found in various beings, it is impossible for each of them to possess this characteristic, in its own right', but we must add that if a characteristic, the concept of which does not imply imperfection, then this being does not possess it in its own right, but has it from another to whom it belongs in its own right." (17)

The fifth way of demonstration has the ordered multiplicity of things as its empirical basis. Order demands an ordering intelligence. This way is called the teleological proof or the argument from design.

We observe that things which lack thought and cognition as for example, natural bodies, act in view of some definite end. This appears from the fact that they always or at least most of the time act in the same way in order to attain to that which is best for them. From this it is clear that they attain their end not by chance but rather by following a certain intention. But those things which lack thought and knowledge could not strive toward an end unless they were directed to it by some

force or being which possesses knowledge and intelligence, as the arrow is directed by the archer. Therefore, an intelligent being must exist, by which all natural things are directed toward their end. And this being we call God." (18)

The Henological Argument is in a certain sense a summary of all metaphysics, and not merely an ideological argument. It is based upon the concept of being and the grades of perfection of being, and of the principle of causality, demanding as it does a cause for every last item of mobile or imperfect being.

(18) St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, I,Q.2,art.3.
Conclusion

Briefly we have seen that Plato saw the need of a Supreme Being, and that he proposed an argument based on the degrees of perfection visible here on earth. Aristotle, using the idea that the perfect, the best being, cannot be divided nor be one and multiple at the same time, arrived at the belief in one Supreme Being, most perfect and independent of all creation. We next saw Plotinus, and very briefly noted his theory of emanations. In Augustine, we found an argument based on the immutability and permanence of the object of our intellectual knowledge. Anselm, the last of the Ancients considered, saw God as That than which nothing greater can be thought, a Being existing outside the mind, in reality.

Thomas Aquinas used the gradation of things as the ground for one of his arguments for the
existence of God. "....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". (19)

We have seen that St. Thomas did not limit his arguments to one but developed five, (the Quinque via) each of which is independent yet is closely related to each of the others.

The Henological Argument is not the only argument for the existence of God, it is but one of several. It is not right to say that one argument is best, for the argument which is easiest seen by one may be the least understood by another. The Henological Argument for the Existence of God is but one means of "proving" the existence of the Supreme, Ultimate, Uncaused Being which we call God.

(19) St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 2, art. 3.
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