

IS THERE A METAPHYSICAL PROOF OF GOD'S EXISTENCE?

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Abstract. What determines whether the procedures for proving the affirmative statement of God's existence may be called a proof? Certainly, it is necessary that all premises be true and that a reliable inference schemata be applied. One premise appears to be the most critical in the theistic argument. This premise is the principle of sufficient reason. I hold the view that the principle of sufficient reason cannot be found among the premises of any metaphysical explanation of reality, so I suggest that the terms 'proof' and 'argument' not be used. Instead, we could speak of ways of acquiring discursive knowledge of God and ways of indirect substantiation of God's existence.

I.

In natural theology the procedures used to acquire a philosophical knowledge of God are usually called an 'argument', a 'proof' or a 'way'. It should be noted, though, that these terms, in particular 'argument' and 'proof', are perceived differently by different authors. How could the process of knowledge leading to the affirmation of God's existence be characterised in logical and methodological categories?

Let us begin not with the philosophical statements but with the theological ones – the testimonies of faith of the Church. Such terms as 'proof' or 'argument' cannot be found in the dogmatic constitution *Vaticanum I* (*Dei Filius* no. 20)¹ quoted by *Vaticanum II* (*Dei verbum* no. 6) or *Catechismus*

¹ „Eadem sancta mater Ecclesia tenet et docet, Deum, rerum omnium principium et finem, naturali humanae rationis lumine e rebus creatis certo cognosci posse” (DS 3004).

Catholicae Ecclesiae (no. 36). The Holy Scripture (Wis. 13:1-9; Rom. 1:20) and the dogmatic statement of Vaticanum I mention only the knowledge of God. The terms ‘proof’ or ‘argument’ can be found in non-dogmatic texts and they do not convey a logically and methodologically precise sense. In such texts only negative remarks are made about their not being scientific or experimental proofs or arguments. This is understandable when one considers that a scientific and experimental description cannot be applied when discussing the truth about God as a result of Who God is.

Keith E. Yandel assumes the following standard differentiation between proof and argument:

‘...a proof is a valid argument with true premises... An argument consists of premises intended to provide support for a conclusion. An argument is valid if it is logically impossible that the premises be true and the conclusion be false. Any argument of the form *If A then B, A; therefore B*, for example will be valid’ (Yandel 2002, p. 169).

Yandel provides us with the following definition of an empirical proof of God’s existence:

‘...an empirical proof of God’s existence is an argument that is valid, has at least one logically contingent truth among its premises, has only true premises, and has *God exists* as its conclusion’ (Yandel 2002, p. 181).

The author notices that each version of the empirical (we might say, a posteriori) proof assumes the principle of sufficient reason (Yandel 2002, pp. 182-183). Yandel provides a critical analysis of different ontological and empirical arguments (including St. Thomas Aquinas’ ways) and concludes that these arguments are not proofs that extend our knowledge (Yandel 2002, pp. 169-211).

Stanisław Kamiński presents this matter in a different light. Reflecting on whether the procedures for acquiring a knowledge of God (Thomas Aquinas’ five ways are the main focus) deserve to be designated as ‘proofs’, Kamiński differentiates between three meanings of this term. In a general sense, a proof is any substantiation (justification) of a thesis, or, even, a thing or circumstances that the thesis has in its favour. In a more strict sense, a proof is any reasoning that reliably substantiates a judgment made on the basis of some prior judgments. In its strictest sense, a proof is a piece of deductive reasoning based exclusively upon reliable principles of logical inference which substantiates a given thesis on the strength of theses which have already been accepted.

According to Kamiński, the five ways of St. Thomas Aquinas may be referred to as proofs in the second, stricter sense. However, they may also be treated as arguments in favour of the statement 'God exists'. Kamiński views argumentation as a rational eristic procedure; as something intermediate between proof (demonstration) and persuasion; as substantiation established not only on the level of syntax and semantics but also pragmatics; as a substantiation which, more typically than proving (demonstration), is not based only upon the principles of deductive logic (Kamiński 1989, pp. 223-224).

The distinctions drawn by Kamiński can be found in the works of Zofia J. Zdybicka, who applies the terms: 'proof', 'argument' and 'way' to designate the procedures for proving the veracity of the statement of God's existence. The author presents the following as the typical structure for metaphysical proofs of God's existence:

1. The starting point is formed by empirical statements of the existence, in existing reality, of various states, such as, for instance change or contingent existence.
2. Interpretation of the relevant state leads to the statement that this state is not an independent being.
3. Substantiation of the claim that God exists is provided in accordance with the principle of sufficient reason: for its final explanation, the interpreted state of being requires that we accept the existence of a necessary being as the sole and final ontic reason for the existence of the contingent being in question. (Zdybicka 2001, p. 689).

What determines whether the procedures for proving the affirmative statement of God's existence may be called a proof? Certainly, it is necessary that all the premises be true and that a reliable inference schemata be applied. One of these premises appears to be the most critical in the theistic argument. This premise is the principle of sufficient reason. The author clearly states that 'the „motor” of any metaphysical argument for God's existence is the principle of sufficient reason. ... The principle of the reason for being qua being allows for the boundaries of the empirical world to be crossed and for a well-grounded final solution to be provided' (Zdybicka 2006, p. 314). The key problem in our considerations is the principle of the reason for being. The principle of the reason for being, or in a wider sense – the principle of sufficient reason, or simply the principle of reason, was first explicitly formulated by Gottfried W. Leibniz. In Leibniz's phi-

osophy the principle of reason functions as a logical principle; a principle of becoming, a principle of existing and a principle of what is best. What Leibniz stated clearly, although with a special meaning conditioned by the entirety of his philosophy, had in a way been present in philosophy since antiquity, when people were searching for the causes of all becoming (in particular, Aristotle's theory of the four causes) and for proper arguments for their statements. The history of the principle of reason is a complex one; it was influenced by the ideas of, for instance, Christian Wolff, Christian A. Crusius, Imanuel Kant, Artur Schopenhauer, the Neo-Scholastics and Martin Heidegger (Engfer 1989).

The principle of sufficient reason has always been controversial. Leibniz used a priori arguments (by pure reason), as well as empirical (inductive) and pragmatic ones (Gut 2007). Some find the principle self-evident and analytical (Scholastics), others have tried to prove it (Christian Wolff), indirectly substantiate it (Krapiec 1959, pp. 187-191, 1978, pp. 165-169) or indicate the undesirable consequences stemming from its rejection (Stepień 1964, pp. 69-75). Franciszek Sawicki claims that the human mind does not perceive this principle as a self-evident truth and, that extended to the whole of reality, the principle constitutes only a postulate of the human mind, a mind that cannot bear the thought that a being could exist without a reason, since in such a case the being would be obscure (Sawicki 1925, 1931). Some, like Mario Bunge, treat the principle as an „epistemological rule of procedure” (Bunge 1959, p. 229). There are also some (for instance John L. Mackie) who simply question the general version of the principle (‘everything must have sufficient reason’) (Mackie 1997, p. 110). The problem posed by the principle is a significant one. In our everyday life we find rationality and causality. We look for an answer to the question ‘why?’ and we often manage to obtain it. Scientific cognition provides us with explanations. The entire realistic philosophy is an extensive process of explaining the reality, that is searching for real reasons in the inner structure of being and as well as for reasons with respect to the being of the outer beings explained. This is how statements regarding God, the first being, are created; as are also statements concerning the structure of the human being, that is the human soul and its faculties, etc.

II.

It seems that with respect to the principle of sufficient reason and the knowledge of God's existence, the following may be stated:

1. Any attempts to prove the principle of sufficient reason, including by means of showing that the opposite statement leads to contradiction, will assume that the principle applies (vicious circle paralogism) (Moskal 2007, pp. 71-87).

2. The principle that 'All that exists has its reason for being, either «inside of it» or «outside of it» (Krapiec 1978, p. 165) cannot be formulated so as to serve as a ground for proving philosophical theses by indicating that their negation would lead to a contradiction, namely, that a being would exist if it existed and, on the other hand, it would not exist if its reason did not exist. Metaphysics is a means of explaining reality by indicating its reasons for being. It is not, however, a means of making the world free from absurdity (contradiction). Considering such a state of affairs, an affirmative statement of God's existence provides the only a final explanation of the world. Nevertheless, we cannot say: 'God or absurdity'². We are not compelled, under pain of contradicting ourselves, to assume that God exists. We have the following alternative: 'God or no final reason and no final explanation'.

3. It seems that the issue of the reason for being should be presented as follows. Having a cognitive contact with the world we see that the world is intelligible. We notice reasons for being in the world. In some cases beings have their reasons for being inside of them, and in other cases outside of them, in other beings. Seeing this rationality justifies a further search for reasons for being, asking such questions as 'why?', 'what for?' or 'thanks to what?' We do find answers to these questions, though this process is gradual and not without a certain difficulty. (In philosophical cognition, in realistic metaphysics, we want the answer we get to be the only possible explanation). We later put to the test the answers we are provided with: we

² The words of Étienne Gilson prove to be a very instructive example here: '«God or absurdity», said one very serious Thomistic theologian. I wish I believed this is so... If we had no other choice than between God and absurdity, we would certainly have fewer atheists than we actually do' (Gilson 1996, p. 174-175).

search for confirmation, verification or falsification. Various test methods are used in our everyday life, different ones are used in the various sciences and different ones still in philosophy.

4. With respect to the theistic thesis, a confirmation may be obtained in several ways:

4.1. An affirmative statement of God's existence can be found in various approaches to the explanation of the different elements of reality. St. Thomas himself proposed 'five ways' though these are not the only possible paths one may take to search for the final reasons for being.

4.2. The affirmation of God's existence allows us to interpret numerous facts regarding experience, for instance- the human search for sense and the desire to experience complete happiness, human freedom in comparison to created goods, and the voice of conscience. This also allows us to interpret extraordinary occurrences (miracles), the 'demands' of religion and of prophets who follow revelations, as well as various religious experiences.

4.3. However, it is not the case that from the statement 'God exist' one may infer some empirically verifiable consequences, i.e. consequences that would serve as a ground for confirmation (or verification) or disconfirmation (falsification) of the theistic thesis. For instance, one cannot infer from the statement 'God exists' that God will create the world or cause miracles. It is not the case that if God exists, He will of certainty create the world or heal someone. Nor can one infer, from the statement 'God exists', that there will be no evil in the world. If God exists, it does not follow that there will be no war. Thus, the existence of evil does not serve as a ground for falsifying the statement 'God exists'³. 4.4. A confirmation of the theistic thesis is also

³ It is common knowledge that the existence of evil is a starting point for many anti-theistic arguments. When it comes to a short introduction to this issue and a presentation of significant works devoted to it, see, for instance the following: (Peterson 2002, van Inwagen 2005, Gale 2007) See also the monograph: Mieczysław A. Krąpiec. *Dlaczego zło?* (Krąpiec 1995). A short discussion presenting the argument from evil can be found in the works of St. Thomas Aquinas: 'It seems that God does not exist; because if one of two contraries 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'. St. Thomas replies to this difficulty as follows: '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'. (*Summa Theologica* I q. 2 a. 3 arg. 1 and ad 1). Quotation from: St. Thomas Aquinas (1921)

provided by that we call an affective or experimental knowledge of God. This is the knowledge that can be obtained by those who love God and who live for God. One of the signs of this knowledge is, as St. Thomas Aquinas puts it, 'certainty of mind' and 'safety of affectivity' (Moskal 2006).

III.

Since the principle of the reason for being ('All that exists has a reason thanks to which it exists and is what it is') cannot be found among the premises of any metaphysical explanation of reality, I suggest that the terms 'proof' and 'argument' not be used. Instead, we could refer to ways of acquiring discursive knowledge of God and ways of indirect substantiation of God's existence (proving the veracity of the statement 'God exists')⁴. A metaphysical substantiation of God's existence is the metaphysical explanation of some aspects of reality which are not self-evident. The statement that God exists is the only possible explanation; in the metaphysical explanation God appears as the only final reason for the world we experience⁵.

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⁴ This remark concerns not only the natural knowledge of God but also the possibility of other metaphysical proofs, for instance the existence of the human soul or the soul's faculties.

⁵ To contrast, let us observe that in Richard Swinburne's natural theology the existence of God is only more rather than less probable. This results from the author's applying inductive arguments. (Swinburne 1979).

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