

# One Regress to God

By Dennis Lange

Thomas Aquinas was an Italian priest who, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, formulated five arguments for the existence of God. Those arguments are still presented by believers today and questioned by atheists and agnostics. The second argument of Aquinas is the argument of first cause:

“In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or only one. Now to take cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.”<sup>1</sup>

The Kalam cosmological argument, a version of Aquinas’s argument, is worded this way:

Premise 1: Everything that begins to exist has a cause.

Premise 2: The universe began to exist.

Conclusion 1: Therefore, the universe must have a cause.<sup>2</sup>

Skeptics, however, say that the argument involves an infinite regress. A regress takes a step backward and an infinite regress takes an infinite number of steps backward. An infinite regress is “a fallacy in which the argument proposes an explanation, but the mechanism proposed stands just as much in need of explanation as the original fact to be explained – and indeed it stands in need of the same kind of explanation, so it is tempting to apply the explanation to itself.”<sup>3</sup>

Richard Dawkins wrote, “A designer God cannot be used to explain organized complexity because any God capable of designing anything would have to be complex enough to demand the same kind of explanation in his own right. God presents an infinite regress from which he cannot help us to escape.”<sup>4</sup> Another skeptic said that the problem comes in the end, in the assumption that there must be a first cause (God). Dawkins said, “They (believers – DL) make the entirely unwarranted assumption that God himself is immune to the regress.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, atheists say that making God an exception is special pleading,

Never trust a skeptic.

It was Dawkins who said that using God to explain organized complexity would mean that God was Himself complex enough to demand the same kind of explanation. Dawkins was correct about the complexity of God, but wrong about the necessity of an explanation of how He came into existence. In rewording Dawkins' view, Susan Beckhardt wrote, "If everything must be created by something more complex than it, then the universe must have been created by something more complex, namely God. But then God must have been created by a god even more complex, and so on, so we have an infinite hierarchy of gods, which is clearly absurd."<sup>6</sup> Again, the reworded complaint of Dawkins and other atheists contains a germ of truth which isn't explored.

What kind of complexity?

The Creator would have to have more knowledge (intelligence, creativity, ingenuity, etc.) and more power than that which He created. The One who created the human brain would have greater wisdom than man that He created. The One who created the sun would have greater power than it.

The infinite regress clamored for by atheists would mean an infinite number of steps, each of which would increase the knowledge and power of the next entity. However, there is another possibility, that instead of an infinite number of steps, we regress step by step with more knowledge added to knowledge and more power added to power, ultimately resulting in an entity of infinite knowledge and power.

That's exactly what the Bible reveals about God. He is infinite in knowledge and power - omniscient and omnipotent.

"Shall any teach God knowledge?" (Job 21:22). The question is rhetorical. No one can teach God knowledge because God has all knowledge. There is none greater than He. "He is perfect in knowledge" (Job 36:4). If there were something God didn't know, He wouldn't be perfect in knowledge. If there were a being greater than God who knew more than God, then God wouldn't be perfect in knowledge but less than that greater being. The prophet Isaiah wrote, "With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge and informed Him of the way of understanding?" (Isa.40:14). God consulted with no one and was taught by no one, because He is omniscient, all-wise, all-knowing. God speaks again through Isaiah: "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'" (Isa.46:10). The apostle John said, "in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things" (I John 3:20). And the Psalmist agreed, saying, "Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite" (Ps.147:5).

Jehovah, the God of the Bible, is the Almighty God (Gen.17:1; Rev.19:6; 21:22). Having all might leaves no room for another to have more. Gen.18:4 asks, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Again, the question is rhetorical and the obvious answer is "no". Nothing is too difficult for God because He has all power. He's omnipotent. Jesus said, "With God, all things are possible" (Matt.19:26). Why? Because He is both omniscient and omnipotent. He has both the wisdom, understanding, and knowledge to create everything and the power to accomplish that task. There is none greater. "For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself" (Heb.6:13).

When we regress by adding power upon power and knowledge upon knowledge until we come to the being that is all-powerful and all-knowing, we reach an end to the regress. Since God is omnipotent, there is none with greater power to create Him. Since God is omniscient, there is none with greater knowledge to design Him. The omnipotent and omniscient God who created the universe is eternal, always existing.

The one who says that “there’s no reason why God gets to be exempt” from a cause is simply wrong. It isn’t “special pleading” that God doesn’t need a cause. The atheist Richard Dawkins is wrong when he says that God would “demand the same kind of explanation in his own right.” Dawkins is wrong when he says, “God presents an infinite regress from which he cannot help us to escape.” Omnipotent and omniscience *does* mean God is uncaused, eternal.

Not only are atheists wrong in saying there is no reason to exempt God from needing a cause, but they are also wrong in multiplying god after god after god, inventing an infinite regress where none is demanded by the situation. In “The Fountains of Paradise”, Arthur C. Clarke used the character “Starglider” to say, “If you assume that the universe can be quote explained unquote as the creation of an entity known as God, he must obviously be of a higher degree of organization than his product. Thus, you have more than doubled the size of the original problem, and have taken the first step on a diverging infinite regress. William of Ockham pointed out as recently as your fourteenth century that entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily. I cannot therefore understand why this debate continues.”<sup>7</sup> Since God is omnipotent and omniscient and therefore eternal, uncaused, there is no need for an infinite regress of gods, each with a bit more power, knowledge, and ability than the previous one. The ones who multiply entities needlessly, violating Ockham’s Razor, are atheists, who had supposed that multiplying such entities in an infinite regress would help them escape from God.

“He who sits in the heavens laughs; He scoffs at them” (Ps.2:4).

It is the Bible that reveals the solution to the origin of the universe and solves all problems, real and those imagined by atheists. It is the holy scriptures that gives the reason why the regress isn’t infinite and halts at one step. It is the word of God that cuts out all unnecessary entities since Jehovah in His omnipotence and omniscience is the maker of all things, and stretched out the heavens by Himself, spreading out the earth all alone (Isa.44:24).

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/web%20publishing/aquinasFiveWays.htm>

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalam\\_cosmological\\_argument](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalam_cosmological_argument)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=infinite%20regress>

<sup>4</sup> Dawkins, Richard, The God Delusion (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 2006), p.109

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.77.

- <sup>6</sup> Beckhardt, Susan, “Is Infinite Regress a Problem?”,  
<http://intrinsicallyknotted.wordpress.com/2008/08/19/is-infinite-regress-a-problem/>
- <sup>7</sup> <http://www.christianthinker.net/serendipity/index.php?/archives/284-Starglider-on-God-as-an-explanation.html>