

The Geislerian Argument for God

Examining Norman L. Geisler's Thomistic
Argument for God

C. T. Haun

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The Geislerian Argument for God:
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Christopher Travis Haun

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Chapters

Introduction	6
Historical Context	11
Geisler's Articulations of the VCA & PAFB	18
The VCA/PAFB in 4-5 Points	22
The VCA/PAFB in 6-7 Points	22
The VCA/PAFB in 10-13 Points	24
The PAFB in 18 Points	26
Strengths of the PAFB	29
Impervious to the Valid Criticisms of the Other Args for God	29
Young Earth Creationists May Prefer It	30
The PAFB Leads to a Very Specific and Biblical God	34
The God of Classical Theism	34
The Self-Existent YHWH of Exodus 3:14	35
The Continuing-Cause God of Colossians 1:16-17	37
The God Paul Preached to the Pagan Philosophers	40
Weaknesses of the PAFB	45
John F.X. Knasas's Criticism	45
J.T. Bridges's Criticism	53
Is the PAFB too Abstruse?	46
Starting with Existence Rather than Existants?	59
Etienne Gilson and Armand Maurer Disagree	62
Actualizing the Potential of the PAFB	71
Monism or Dualism?	71
Sharpening the PAFB Technically	74
Putting the Cookies on the Lower Shelf	76
Conclusion	79

Appendices

1 A Catalog of the Arguments used by Norm Geisler	82
2 Ed Feser's Thomistic Argument for God	84
3 Joseph Owens's Thomistic Argument for God	94
4 John F.X. Knasas's Thomistic Argument for God	102
5 Gaven Kerr's Thomistic Argument for God	107
6 John Wippel's Thomistic Argument	110
7 Garrigou-LaGrange's Argument for God	113
8 The Rassmussen-Pruss Argument	118
9 Barry Miller's Argument from Existence	124
10 Apostle Paul's Argument in Acts 17	130
11 Brother Benignus's Argument	136
12 Jules Brady's Argument	139
13 Frederick Wilhelmsen's Argument	145
14 Louis Marie Régis's Argument	151
15 Attempts to Restate Geisler's PAFB	160

Abbreviations

<i>De Ente</i>	<i>De Ente et Essentia / On Being and Essence</i>
HCA	the Horizontal Form of the Cosmological Argument
VCA	the Vertical Form of the Cosmological Argument
PAFB	the Philosophical Argument from Being
<i>PoR</i> ¹	<i>Philosophy of Religion, 1st Edition, 1974</i>
<i>PoR</i> ²	<i>Philosophy of Religion, 2nd Edition, 1988</i>
PSR	the Principle of Sufficient Reason
LSB	Legacy Standard Bible
ESV	English Standard Bible
<i>ST</i>	<i>Summa Theologica</i> (or <i>Summa theologiae</i>)
<i>ScG</i>	<i>Summa contra Gentiles</i>
OEC	Old Earth Creationist
YEC	Young Earth Creationist

Preface

This is not a great book. It is little more than an expansion of an assigned research paper I wrote for an elective course on metaphysics. It is neither a dissertation nor a thesis. It is not the seasoned musings of a veteran professor. It is just a term paper that ended up being considerably longer than the assignment called for.

It was also an exploration that did not end up with a decisive conclusion. The investigation was rather ambitious. Perhaps overly so. I knew of some problems but did not know the solutions when setting sail. I wanted to try to understand Norm Geisler's favorite argument for God, understand why his argument had not gained wide acceptance and acclaim among other Thomists, and look for opportunities to improve its logic and its articulation. I wondered if comparing his argument with other similar "metaphysical arguments" from other existential Thomists might show either a missing step or perhaps a more universal way of wording the argument. And might there also be a pathway to a healthy synthesis with the contingency arguments which sound so similar? And how might Aquinas's five ways—especially his third way—fit in with all of this? In Tolkien speak, is it possible to forge one ring to rule them all?

With some refinement of logic and language, might we proceed to present an argument for God that would be more comprehensible and persuasive not just to the small tribe of existential Thomists but

perhaps also to Aristotelian Thomists and Analytical Thomists too? But then why stop there? What about the transcendental Thomists, continental philosophers, and secular-oriented analytical philosophers? Could it also be used to help bring Parmenidean monists and Neoplatonic dualists to make their way towards classic theism? And, aside from metaphysicians in one philosophy or another, what about the agnostics who are actively seeking answers to life's heaviest questions but are not convinced by the usual arguments for God? Is Geisler right in saying that this is the most fundamental and powerful argument for God? Could Geisler's argument be reprised as a silver bullet argument that takes down werewolves when nothing else can? Could it offer a new lock picking tool that lifts the stubborn tumblers that other arguments don't work on?

While no such silver bullet or universal lock pick tool awaits you at the end of this book, perhaps this book contains some of the tools and raw material with which we can forge such tools. This is a book for thinkers who are eager to exercise their logic muscles and have their thinking stretched. It should have value to those of us who enjoy pondering metaphysical dualism and their implications for the necessary being we call God. It should also prove valuable to those who find pleasure in seeking God with the mind and meditating on his majesty and mystery.

Lest there be any uncertainty about it, I am cautiously optimistic about the insights of the existential Thomists (or Thomistic existentialists) into the nature of reality and the implications for the certainty that there must be a theistic God. I think they may have

latched onto something profound. I am on their side and rooting for them from the stands. I would go further and say that I am officially now one of them were it not for the fact that I am not entirely sure I have understood them adequately. Even if I give them the benefit of the doubt, I worry about their insights fading into obscurity due to the jargon making it inaccessible.

Without pretending to have any mastery over metaphysics, I have flirted lightly with Thomistic arguments for God for four decades and recently finished a master's degree in theology with a concentration on metaphysics from a school that has a strong Thomistic bias. Norm Geisler introduced me to the arguments for God in the early 1990s. Later he was my favorite professor in my undergraduate studies in the 1990s and my graduate studies at VIU. And he was a mentor and friend too. He talked me into enrolling at Veritas International University (VIU) for a master's degree and recommended in no uncertain terms that I give as much focus as possible on Thomistic metaphysics. While he got me hooked on Etienne Gilson's books in 2015, I confess that I did not really sink my teeth into Aquinas's *De Ente*, the *Summa*, and books by Fredrick Wilhelmsen, Joseph Owens, and John F. X. Knasas until 2024. While not a novice, I am a journeyman at best.

I believe I have begun to intuit and realize the profound truth that Norm and other existential Thomists have realized. But with such depths or heights, the realization unfortunately seems to suffer from the problem of ineffability that mystics who claim to have encountered the transcendent suffer from. It takes some time and mental effort to get it. It does not just "click" right away for most. And

once it clicks, it is not easy to pass it on. It resists attempts to communicate to neophytes and even those with the greatest mastery on the topic seem to struggle to make their ideas clear. This book is in one sense my first real attempt to make sense of their insights, digest it more, and attempt to begin to articulate it for myself.

Regarding the use of GenAI, I should be transparent about the fact that while the *chapters* of this book were *not* written with the assistance of machine learning, the *appendices* were. I used Grok 4.x by xAI's LLMs extensively in the making of most of the appendices of this book. On the plus side, Grok 4.x seems to lead the way in terms of neutrality according to the metrics at neutralityproject.org. On the unfortunate side, I was not aware at the time that Grok 4.x had some of the highest hallucination rates according to the current Vectara Hallucination Rates data. I am not aware of any hallucination in the appendices yet. But it offers additional reasons to not put full faith in the output of an LLM. While I am not particularly worried that any hallucination would hurt this book, as always, let us not assume that the sorites and syllogisms there have full fidelity with what they were tasked to represent. It seems like Grok succeeded rather admirably at the tasks I gave it. And it seems like this endeavor—having an LLM articulate arguments from various books—may be a fine job for LLMs to do. The intent here was to take advantage of the powerful-but-imperfect machine intelligence to feed and foster human abductive and deductive logic.

As LLMs become more capable at dealing with logic and language, and hopefully become less inclined to hallucinate, I'll be sure to use whichever LLM is least prone to hallucination in any

future revisions of this book. Perhaps in time, and perhaps if this turns into a PhD dissertation topic for me, I will rework the sorites and polysyllogisms of the appendices out for myself under my own steam. Until then, the LLM representations are there to save time, save work, and provide grist for the mill. It is likely that I will revise and refine this book in the future. This is a work in progress. It is not a great book. But hopefully it will be valuable to a few thinkers nevertheless.

In the meantime, constructive criticism is welcome. Please feel free to contact me through <https://cthaun.tech/contact> or email me at [cthaun\[at\]outlook\[dot\]com](mailto:cthaun[at]outlook[dot]com). While this first edition of this book is for sale at amazon.com and presumably future editions will be as well, it is likely that the same content of this edition and probably future editions as well will probably be posted for free as PDFs at one or more of these locations:

- <https://normangeisler.com/godargs>
- <https://bastionbooks.com/godargs>
- <https://ves.academia.edu/CTHaun>
- <https://cthaun.tech/papers>

Introduction

When presenting his case for the credibility of the Christian faith, apologist Norman L. Geisler would typically launch a salvo of five types of arguments for God: First, one or more variations of what he called the “horizontal form” of the cosmological argument (or HCA). Since there was a beginning, there must be a Beginner. Second, one or more variations of what he called the “vertical form” of the cosmological argument (or VCA). Since there are contingent beings which cannot account for their own existence, a Being whose essence is identical to his existence must account for their existence. Third, two variations of the teleological argument. Designs imply a Designer. Fourth, the moral argument. Since there are absolute moral laws, there must also be an absolute moral Legislator. Fifth, the argument from religious need—which he would often interweave with the argument from meaning. We have an actual need for God and therefore there really must be a God to satisfy that real need. We need for meaning in life that only God can provide and therefore there must be a God to provide that meaning.

Geisler divides cosmological arguments into either horizontal (HCA) and vertical (VCA) forms. To visualize horizontal in this sense, imagine a timeline starting at the left with a beginning point and moving to the right on the X-axis as time goes by from beginning, to past, present, and future. The HCA reasons backwards (from right to left) along this X-axis from effects through causes to see the first cause of the beginning. Vertical, by contrast, ignores the X-axis entirely, reasoning upwards on the Y-axis of being from the bottom

(unnecessary, finite, changing, contingent beings) up through the chain of causes, to the top where the Necessary Being would be represented. Being flows down from the top to the bottom and reasoning from effects to causes goes up to the source. Independent of time, the VCA focus on the present cause of our existence as much as it does the past causes. Other philosophers of religion use similar divisions.¹

Of these five ways, he gave strategic priority to the two types of cosmological arguments. Of the various forms of the cosmological argument, he gave priority to the VCAs over the HCAs. Of the various forms of the VCAs, he held that the contingency arguments in the tradition of Leibniz, which include the principle of sufficient reason (PSR) in their premises, were weaker than the VCA in the thomistic tradition that starts with existence/being and does not rely on the PSR. Between 1947 and 2017, Geisler refined his own articulation of the thomistic VCA which he would later call “the philosophical

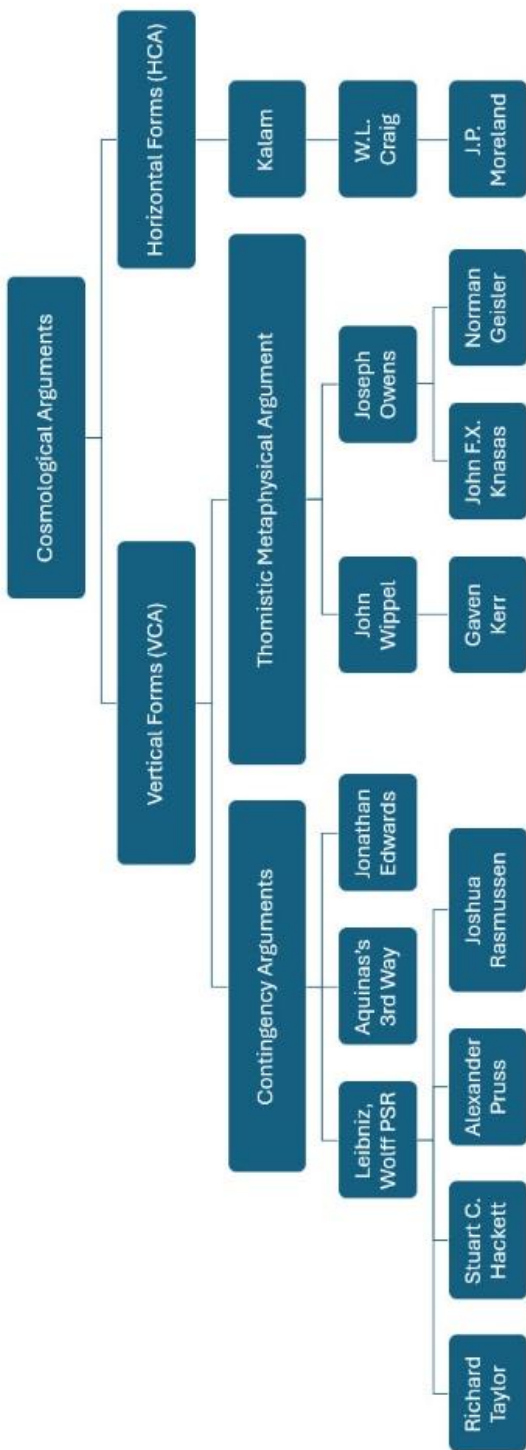
¹ C. Stephan Evans divides cosmological arguments into “non-temporal versions” (i.e., VCA) and “temporal versions” (i.e., HCA).¹ C. Stephan Evans and R. Zachary Manis, *Philosophy of Religion: Thinking about Faith, Second Edition* (IVP Academic, 2009), 68. Similarly, Brian Davies classifies cosmological arguments under either “God and Sufficient Reason” (one major form of the VCA—but not the only one) and “God and the Beginning of the Universe” (HCA). Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion, 4th Ed.* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 51-58. After tutelage from Geisler, and while citing Geisler’s *PoR*, J.P. Moreland subdivides the cosmological argument into three forms: the Thomist argument, the Leibnizian argument, and the Kalam argument. J. P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Baker, 1987), 15-18. Others similarly may categorize forms of the cosmological argument into modal (requiring the PSR, the principle of sufficient reason), temporal (kalam), and ontological (Thomistic).

argument from being” (PAFB). Of all the arguments for God, his PAFB seemed to be the most fundamental, profound, strategic, powerful, unassailable, and fascinating. This was the argument which he hoped to see more investment and development into by other Christian philosophers and apologists.

Of course, Geisler was not the only one who attempted to articulate the metaphysical argument inspired by Aquinas. While the existential argument for God was not original to Thomas Aquinas, Aquinas’s *De Ente* seems to be the fountain that provides the stream for most subsequent attempts to articulate the argument. The argument does not belong to any one thinker and there is no standard form of it and no standard name for it. Geisler himself calls it many things: “the Metaphysical Proof for God,” “the Metaphysical Argument,” the Metaphysical proof, “Aquinas’s basic argument for God,” “the cosmological argument in existential form,” (5) “an amplification of Thomas Aquinas’s argument in *De Ente et Essentia*,” “a philosophical argument from being,” one form of the vertical cosmological argument, and more. Ed Feser calls it “the Thomistic Argument.” Ambrose Little calls it the “metaphysical argument” and “the *Essentia* argument.” John F.X. Knasas calls it “*De Ente* reasoning” and “the *De Ente* proof.” J.P. Moreland classified it as “the Thomist Argument” form of the cosmological argument. Travis Campbell called it “the Thomistic Cosmological Argument.” Win Corduan calls it “the cosmological argument of Thomas Aquinas.” The most common name for it would probably be “the thomistic metaphysical

argument.”² Since Geisler’s own preferred name for his argument was “a philosophical argument from being,” his favorite articulation the VCA will be referred to here as the PAFB. His final articulation of his PAFB is what may be called the Geislerian Argument for God.

²Norman Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Bastion Books, 2025), 169-174, 190; Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Baker, 2013), 272; Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (Ignatius Press, 2017), 117-145; Ambrose Little, “A Metaphysical Argument for the Existence of God (Aquinas 101),” The Thomistic Institute, YouTube video, posted August 19, 2024, <https://youtu.be/wHhvt2ERrUI>. C.f., Ambrose Little, “How the *Essentia* Argument for God’s Existence Works (Aquinas 101),” The Thomistic Institute, YouTube video, posted November 11, 2024, <https://youtu.be/F1anAMDsQ5w>; John Knasas, *Thomistic Existentialism and Cosmological Reasoning*. (Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 7, 292; J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City*, 15. “What is the Thomistic Cosmological Argument? | Dr. Travis Campbell,” Reasons to Believe, YouTube video, posted July 27, 2016, https://youtu.be/_8hK6qWyzqI. And Travis Campbell, “What are the critiques of the Thomistic cosmological argument? | Dr. Travis Campbell,” Reasons to Believe, YouTube video, posted July 29, 2016, <https://youtu.be/O-f2c55MyK4>; Corduan, *No Doubt About It*, 109.



Historical Context

Books that defended the Christian faith were few and far between in the early 1970s. Even more rare were scholarly textbooks that gave serious logical arguments for the existence of God.³ The mainline Christian thinkers contextualized their faiths to the arguments of Hume, Kant, Darwin, Freud, and others that was corrosive to rational belief in theism. The fundamentalists, in full intellectual retreat from the world, had no interest in or ability to argue logically for God. And even though the so-called Neo-Evangelical movement that began was driven by many leaders who were eager to engage the culture, the academy, and the mainline contextualizers, few had any powerful, logically persuasive arguments for God.⁴

³ In *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims: Approaches to Apologetics* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1976), Gordon Lewis, the Vice President of the Evangelical Philosophical Society, provided a survey of some of the books that were assigned in some theological seminaries. The main thinkers discussed were J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., Stuart C. Hackett, Gordon H. Clark, Cornelius Van Till, Earl E. Barrett, and Edward Carnell.

⁴ Some of the key leaders of the Neo-Evangelical movement that began in 1947 include Harold John Ockenga, Carl F. H. Henry (who appreciated Geisler's bibliology but marginalized his apologetic voice), Edward John Carnell, Billy Graham (who embraced much of Geisler's apologetics), Charles E. Fuller, Bernard Ramm, and Kenneth Kantzer. While all of these men all had fervent and abiding faith in the God of the Bible, and were eager to see belief in God spread, few, if any, had a formidable arsenal of philosophical reasons to share with nontheists to try to persuade them to believe in God. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Geisler, who, as legend has it, was sort of a cross between Billy Graham and Thomas Aquinas, became one of the most influential leaders of the conservative wing of this movement. He also was one of the few metaphysical and epistemological Thomists in the movement.

Into this void, Geisler published two ground-breaking books—*Philosophy of Religion* in 1974⁵ and *Christian Apologetics* in 1976.⁶ *Philosophy of Religion* (PoR) was selected as one of the top “Choice Evangelical Book of the Year” for in 1975 by the editors of *Christianity Today* magazine.⁷ In 1976, Gordon Lewis listed PoR as a new approach with great potential.⁸ Evangelical publishing companies Baker and Zondervan helped make these books accessible to scholars, clergy, and laity. The merits of these books established Geisler as a leader in evangelical circles on philosophy

⁵ Norman L. Geisler, *Philosophy of Religion* (Zondervan, 1974). The book was revised and expanded. Norman Geisler and Winfried Corduan. *Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd Edition (Baker Book House, 1988). In this paper, the original edition will be abbreviated as PoR¹ and the second edition as PoR². The first edition was an expansion of Geisler’s doctoral dissertation “Religious Transcendence: Some Criteria” (1970). Dissertations. Paper 1020. http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/1020. Winfried Corduan wrote his master’s thesis, “Existential Causality in the Cosmological Argument,” while at TEDS (1970-73) with Geisler as his advisor. Corduan helped Geisler refine his articulation of the Thomistic metaphysical argument and promoted a very similar VCA, based on Aquinas’s *ST*, I.2.3, in Winfried Corduan, *No Doubt About It: The Case for Christianity* (Broadman & Holman, 1997), 109-121.

⁶ Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Baker Book House, 1976). The revised and expanded second edition was published by Baker Academic in 2013.

⁷ *Christianity Today*, “Choice Evangelical Books of 1974,” March 14, 1975, Vol. 19, No. 12, 20–23. This was during a time when, unlike today, the editors of *Christianity Today* were conservative evangelicals and the magazine was a conservative alternative to the theologically liberal *Christian Century* magazine.

⁸ Gordon Lewis, *Testing Christianity’s Truth Claims: Approaches to Apologetics* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1976). Lewis gave an honorable mention to Norman Geisler for his 1974 book *Philosophy of Religion* in an appendix titled “Other Modern Approaches” that includes Francis Schaeffer, Os Guinness, Clark Pinnock, John Warwick Montgomery, George I. Mavrodes, Arthur F. Holmes, Josh McDowell, Bernard Ramm, and C.S. Lewis. Only a few of these thinkers included classical apologetics arguments for God and few of their books were well known among American seminary professors.

and classical apologetics. He established the Evangelical Philosophical Society in 1976 and served as its first president. He also taught philosophy of religion courses at some of America's most prestigious evangelical seminaries and debated secular humanists in public debate on the existence of God at universities no less than seven times between 1973 and 1984.⁹

In Chapters 6-8 of *PoR*, Geisler surveys five forms of the teleological argument, seven forms of the moral argument, seven forms of the ontological argument, sixteen forms of the cosmological argument. He also examines some of the objections and weaknesses of these arguments. In Chapter 8, he enumerates a specific form of the cosmological argument that reasons from "limited existence and by use of the principle of existential causality [proceeds] finally to an unlimited Cause of all existence."¹⁰ While not rejecting the most refined forms of the teleological, moral, ontological, horizontal cosmological arguments, and contingency cosmological arguments, he surprises us by conceding that several of the criticisms of them (by Hume, Kant, and others) are valid. He seems somewhat neutral in disposition to these many traditional arguments, neither fully embracing them nor rejecting them. He does not try to defend all points of all pro-God arguments against the skeptics and critics. Nor does he retreat into fideism or a fideism-adjacent stance after

⁹ A partial list of Geisler's debates are posted at <https://normangeisler.com/about>. Audio recordings of some of these debates may be available through <http://NGIM.org>.

¹⁰ Norman Geisler, *PoR*¹, 224. Also, Norman Geisler and Winfried Corduan, *PoR*², 207.

conceding some ground. He rather champions one specific argument for God—the existential, thomistic, vertical form of the cosmological argument.¹¹ That is his strongest argument, impervious to the daggers of Hume and Kant. Once that champion takes the battlefield, any weaknesses in the other lesser arguments become somewhat moot and the lesser arguments for God become good supplemental, auxiliary troops on the field.

Similarly, in Chapter 9 of his book *Christian Apologetics*, Geisler again grants the validity of some of the arguments against some of the traditional arguments for God—such as granting Kant’s criticism of Leibniz’s reliance on the PSR in his contingency argument—and proceeds, in Chapter 10, to “present an argument for the existence of the theistic God described in the Bible” that is essentially “an amplification of Thomas Aquinas’s argument in *De Ente et Essentia*. . .” and is extremely similar to (almost identical to) the existential Thomistic argument in *PoR*.¹² In his premier, scholarly apologetics textbook, the *only* argument for God he offers is the thomistic

¹¹ It is *cosmological* because it begins with a feature of our *cosmos*—either finite beings or finite being in the cosmos or as the cosmos itself. It is existential in that it begins with existence, reason by existence, and concludes with existence. It is Thomistic because (a.) “Aquinas’s argument is based on existential undeniability” (*PoR*¹, 190; *PoR*², 175), (b.) while “Anselm (in *Monologium*), Aquinas, and Scotus all had strong forms of it [the cosmological argument in existential form]” (*PoR*¹, 226, fn 18; *PoR*², 207, fn 20), and (c.) Geisler’s argument is predicated on Aquinas’s “*On Being and Essence*, chapter 7; *Summa Theologica* 1.2.3; 1.3.4; 1.44.1; *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.13.” (*PoR*¹, 225, fn. 1; *PoR*², 175, fn. 1).

¹² Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd edition (Baker, 2013), 265, 272, 268.

argument. There are no favorable mentions of the other arguments at all.

Geisler continued to develop his PAFB until 2015 and continued to champion it to the end of his ministry in 2018. In 2015, he published the booklet *God: A Philosophical Argument from Being*.¹³ This was a slightly revised and expanded derivative of the PAFB in the second edition (2013) of his *Christian Apologetics*. He was eager to have others critique it in the hopes of improving it. He also wanted it to be a stand-alone book as it was one of the most important fruits of his six decades of pondering thomistic metaphysics with apologetic application. It was his final articulation of his PAFB. He completed a PowerPoint slideshow for talks on the PAFB in 2013 but there is no record of him having delivered a lecture on it.

His PAFB also figured prominently in his last public lecture. In 2017, at the National Conference on Christian Apologetics, hosted by Southern Evangelical Seminary, Geisler gave what he thought could well be his last public lecture. He was recovering from a stroke in his occipital lobe and knew his ability to speak publicly was in its twilight. He would officially retire from all ministries a year later and passed out of this life into the next soon after. His time left to speak to the Church and to the world was short. He chose to speak at least one last time on the apologetic issue he deemed most critical to the world and the church.¹⁴ The biggest problem apologists face in our

¹³ Norman Geisler, *God: A Philosophical Argument from Being* (Bastion Books, 2015).

¹⁴ The video recording of Geisler's talk may be found at <https://normangeisler.com/thomism/>. See 28:20–43:48 of the embedded video

post-modern world is the “death of God” in western civilization and the subsequent death of truth. Abject relativism in epistemology, semantics, history, hermeneutics, philosophy, teleology, and morality were the fruits of skepticism about theism.

The solution Geisler recommended was a recovery of the reductive foundationalism of Thomas Aquinas (against the deductive foundationalism of Descartes and Spinoza). Once the first principles of existence, identity, non-contradiction, excluded middle, causality, and analogy are recovered, the argument for God from being (PAFB) was a natural outworking. To him, the first principles of thought and the PAFB were two sides of the same coin. Whereas the world—especially the academic world in western civilization—settled for *no God* and therefore *no truth* (in keeping with Romans 1:18-32) the way back would be to *know truth* and, as a result, to *know God* exists. The problem was a suppression of truth about God

titled “Defending the Faith in a Post-Modern World”, 2017. Or see the transcript of the talk at <https://normangeisler.com/defending-the-faith-in-the-postmodern-world/>. Also compare Norman Geisler, “First Principles,” *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Baker, 1999), 253, for a thirteen-point variation of the PAFB which correlates six of the points to first principles. Interestingly, in his updated article on “First Principles,” in *The Big Book of Apologetics* (Baker, 2012), 170-172, he expands the list of first principles and drops the numbered list demonstration for God’s existence using first principles. He does, however, continue to connect first principles to a logical flow from contingent being (like us) to Necessary Being (God). Also compare with Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd edition, 128-129. He draws some inspiration from Louis Regis, *Epistemology* (Macmillan, 1959) and states, “From these principles, many other undeniable conclusions can be drawn, such as either a being is contingent or necessary; a necessary being cannot cause another necessary being; every being that is caused to exist is a contingent being; and so on.”

leading to the suppression of the truth about the truth. The solution would be to recover the truth about the truth (i.e., reductive foundationalism, first-principles of thought) and God as existing and giving existence to all else that exists would be the logical outworking of those first-principles.

As an apologist, this was, in a sense, his last will and testament. Or, to put it another way, it was the hill he was resolute to die on. And this is essentially what his PAFB attempts. There are several undeniable first principles of reality that we discover and cannot escape whenever we think, speak, or write about reality. Once those first principles are recognized, there is no escape from the conclusion of God as creator.

Geisler's Articulations of the VCA/PAFB

Taking a stair-step approach from his more succinct, dense, compressed expressions of the PAFB to the unpacked, expanded versions of the argument should assist us in understanding Geisler's argument and its evolution. Before we examine Geisler's PAFB in detail, it may be helpful to examine some of the simpler VCAs that funnel into it. In his *Systematic Theology*, Geisler articulated four three-point vertical cosmological arguments. All four have strong thomistic flavors. One seems to echo Aquinas's "third way" (from contingent beings to Necessary Being), another echoes Aquinas's "first way" (from potency to Pure Act), and the others seem to contribute to the VCA/PAFB in other ways.

1	Whatever exists but can/could not exist needs a cause for its existence, since the mere possibility of existence does not explain why something exists. The mere possibility for something is nothing (i.e., no-thing).	If everything were contingent, then it would be possible that nothing existed.	Whatever changes passes from a state of potentiality (potency) for that change to a state of being actualized (act). That is, all changing beings have act(uality) and potency in their very being. If not, then all change would involve annihilation and re-creation, which is impossible without a Cause, since nothing cannot	Every part of the universe is right now dependent for its existence.
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			produce something.	
2	But nothing cannot produce something.	But something does exist (e.g., I do), and its existence is undeniable, for I have to exist in order to be able to affirm that I do not exist.	But no potentiality can actualize itself, any more than the potential for steel to become a skyscraper can actualize itself into a skyscraper.	If every part is right now dependent for its existence, then the whole universe must also be right now dependent for its existence.
3	Therefore, something necessarily exists as the ground for everything that does exist but can not exist. In short, it is a violation of the principle of causality to say that a contingent being can account for its own existence.	Thus, if some contingent being now exists, a Necessary Being must now exist, otherwise there would be no ground for the existence of this contingent being.	If no potency can actualize itself, and yet at least one being is actualized (e.g., me), then ultimately there must be something that is Pure Actuality (with no potentiality), otherwise there would be no ground for why something now exists that has the potential not to exist.	Therefore, the whole universe is dependent right now for its existence on some Independent Being beyond itself. ¹⁵

Geisler is favorable towards, but not fully satisfied with, all four of these VCAs. He seeks to go beyond them and beyond Aquinas's famous five ways, piercing deeper into the metaphysical substrate

¹⁵ Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Vol. One: Introduction, Bible* (Bastion Books, 2025), 30.

that provides the firm bedrock on which they stand.¹⁶ Their echo in his PAFB should be obvious. But while these are vertical arguments, and therefore ontological rather than temporal, they are not, strictly speaking, metaphysical arguments. They begin with *beings* rather than with *being* itself. In his PAFB, he will attempt to start with being itself. In harmony with Geisler, James Lehrberger elaborates:

Properly speaking, God is not another being, not a being at all, not even the Supreme Being, but the pure Act of Being, pure “IS,” pure “To-Be.” So much is this the case that it is only by analogy that one can say “God exists” and “John exists”. John is a being who exists by virtue of receiving his act of existing from God whereas God is the Act of Existing Himself. . . . This understanding reaches to the core of Aquinas’ metaphysical demonstration of the existence of God. ... The *Summa Theologiae*’s famous “five ways” of proving the existence of God are not strictly metaphysical arguments, for they are rooted in beings rather than in being; the act of existence plays no role in them. Aquinas develops his properly metaphysical argument for the existence of God in *On Being and Essence* [*De ente et essentia*].¹⁷

¹⁶ Having found a few gold nuggets nestled at the surface, he picks deeper into the rock to try to tap into the seam or vein of gold. Geisler believes that behind Aquinas’s five proofs for God—or at least the first three—there is “one basic argument that can be found in Aquinas’s tiny but influential work, *On Being and Essence*.” Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas*, 169, 190.

¹⁷ James Lehrberger’s introduction to Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence* (Routledge, 2017), xxii, xxvi fn. 26. Wilhelmsen agrees, “Thomas advanced five proofs . . . The most cogent metaphysically. . . is the demonstration from contingency. Given that I am not my being, given that being takes no root in me, given that I am nothing by nature, my being is caused by a Principle outside myself which can only be Pure Being. . . . These proofs are probably all valid . . . All of them have in common the fact that they being from some being or from some aspect of things in being

Following Aquinas's *De Ente*, he recognizes that there are two kinds of being that exist: (1) being (and beings) that do not have identical essences (whatness) and existence (thatness) and (2) Being that does have identical essence and existence. Once this "real distinction" is recognized, the natural progression of logic is that the first kind of being must rely upon the second type of being for existence. If the unnecessary type of being exists, the necessary type of Being must exist to give the gift of existence to the unnecessary being(s).

The VCA/PAFB in 4-5 Points

Continuing a stair-step approach, here below we may compare Geisler's four-point articulation of the PAFB from 1990 (in the left-side column) with his five-point articulation from 1991:

1	<i>Finite, changing things exist.</i> For example, me. I would have to exist to deny that I exist; so either way, I must really exist.	Changing beings exist.
2	<i>Every finite, changing thing must be caused by something else.</i> If it is limited and it changes, then it cannot be something that exists independently. If it existed independently, or necessarily, then it would have always existed without any kind of change.	All changing beings are composed of act and potency.
3	<i>There cannot be an infinite regress of these causes.</i> In other words, you can't go on explaining how this finite thing causes this finite thing, which causes this other finite thing, and on and on, because that really just puts off the explanation indefinitely. It doesn't explain	No potency can actualize itself.

and then proceed to reason to the existence of the first cause of that being or aspect." Ibid., 80.

	anything. Besides, if we are talking about why finite things are existing right now, then no matter how many finite causes you line up, eventually you will have one that would be both causing its own existence and be an effect of that cause at the same moment. That is nonsense. So no infinite regress can explain why I am existing right now.	
4	Therefore, there must be a first uncaused cause of every finite, changing thing that exists. ¹⁸	Only Pure Act can actualize being.
5		So, all finite beings are actualized by Pure Act. ¹⁹

The VCA/PAFB in 6-7 Points

Here below we can compare Geisler's 6-point outline from 1988 on the left, his 7-point outline from 2015 in middle column, and his 6-point outline from 2016 on the right:

¹⁸ Norman L. Geisler and Ron M. Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask* (Victor Books, 1990), 18-19 and *When Skeptics Ask*, 2nd Edition, (Baker, 2013), 12-13.

¹⁹ Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas*, 170. On page 190, Geisler summarizes the argument: "Beginning with the undeniable fact that some changing, finite being exists, Aquinas argues convincingly that there must be an infinite, eternal, unchanging Cause of this finite being. For if something comes to be, then Something must always have been. Nothing cannot cause something, so something must always have been."

1	Some limited, changing being(s) exist.	Something exists (e.g., I do).	Things change (e.g., come to be or cease to be in some way.)
2	The present existence of every limited, changing being is caused by another.	Nothing cannot produce something.	But change is passing from potency to actuality.
3	There cannot be an infinite regress of causes of being.	Therefore, something exists eternally and necessarily.	And whatever changes is composed of potency and act.
4	Therefore, there is a first Cause of the present existence of these beings.	It exists eternally because if ever there was absolutely nothing, then there would always be absolutely nothing because nothing cannot produce something.	But potency cannot actualize itself; only an actuality can actualize something.
5	The first Cause must be infinite, necessary, eternal, simple, unchangeable, and one.	It exists necessarily because everything cannot be a contingent being because all contingent beings need a cause of their existence.	Neither can another composed being actualize; it needs some actualizer to actualize it.
6	This first uncaused Cause is identical with the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. ²⁰	I am not a necessary and eternal being (since I change)	Therefore, every composed being is actualized by pure Act (God.) ²¹
7		Therefore, both God (a Necessary Being) and I (a contingent being) exist (= theism). ²²	

²⁰ Geisler, *PoR*², 175

²¹ Geisler, *A History of Western Philosophy, Volume 1: Ancient and Medieval*, 284.

²² Geisler, *God: A Philosophical Argument from Being* (Bastion Books, 2015), 3. Geisler condenses the outline into ten points in *Christian Apologetics* (Baker, 2013), 268.

The VCA/PAFB in 10-13 Points

Compare below the thirteen-point argument from 1999 on the left with the ten-point PAFB from 2013 on the right:

1	Something exists (e.g., I do).	Some things undeniably exist (e.g., I cannot deny my own existence).
2	I am a contingent being.	But my nonexistence is possible, for I am not a necessary Being but one that changes or comes to be.
3	Nothing cannot cause something.	Whatever has the possibility not to exist is currently caused to exist by another.
4	Only a Necessary Being can cause a contingent being.	There cannot be an infinite regress of current causes of existence.
5	Therefore, I am caused to exist by a Necessary Being.	Therefore, a first uncaused cause of my current existence exists.
6	But I am a personal, rational, and moral kind of being (since I engage in these kinds of activities).	This uncaused cause must be infinite, unchanging, all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-perfect.
7	Therefore, this Necessary Being must be a personal, rational, and moral kind of being, since I am similar to him by the Principle of Analogy.	This infinitely all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good Being is what is meant by a theistic God.
8	But a Necessary Being cannot be contingent (i.e., not-necessary) in its being which would be a contradiction.	Therefore, a theistic God exists.
9	Therefore, this Necessary Being is personal, rational, and moral in a necessary way, not in a contingent way.	This God who exists is identical to the God described in the Bible.
10	This Necessary Being is also eternal, uncaused, unchanging, unlimited, and one, since a Necessary Being cannot come to be, be	Therefore, the God described in the Bible exists. ²³

²³ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd. Edition, 268.

	caused by another, undergo change, be limited by any possibility of what it could be (a Necessary Being has no possibility to be other than it is), or to be more than one Being (since there cannot be two infinite beings).	
11	Therefore, one necessary, eternal, uncaused, unlimited (= infinite), rational, personal, and moral being exists.	
12	Such a Being is appropriately called "God" in the theistic sense, because he possesses all the essential characteristics of a theistic God.	
13	Therefore, the theistic God exists. ²⁴	

²⁴ Geisler, "First Principles" in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 253. This material was not carried over to the updated article on first principles in Geisler's *The Big Book of Christian Apologetics*.

The PAFB in 18 Points

Geisler's final and most expanded articulation of his PAFB is an eighteen-point sorite with twelve nested sub-points:

- 1) **Being is.** That is, something exists.
- 2) **Being is being.** A thing is identical to itself.
- 3) **Being is not non-being.**
- 4) **Either being or non-being.** Something cannot both exist and not exist at the same time.
- 5) **Non-being cannot cause being.** Nothing cannot cause something.
- 6) **A caused being is similar to its Cause.**
- 7) **A being is either necessary or contingent but not both.**
- 8) **A necessary being cannot cause another necessary being to come to be.**
- 9) **A contingent being cannot be the efficient cause of another contingent being.**
- 10) **A necessary being is a being of Pure Actuality with no potentiality.**
- 11) **A Being of Pure Actuality cannot cause another being with Pure Actuality to exist.**
- 12) **A being that is caused by a Being of Pure Actuality must have both actuality and potentiality.**

- 13) Every being that is caused by a being of Pure Actuality must be both like and dislike its Cause.**
- 14) I am a contingent being.**
- 15) But only a necessary being can cause a contingent being to exist.**
- 16) Therefore, a Necessary Being (of Pure Actuality) exists who caused me (and every other contingent being there may be) to exist.**
- 17) This Necessary Being of Pure Actuality (with no potentiality) has certain necessary attributes:**
- A. It cannot change (= is *immutable*)
 - B. It cannot be temporal (= is *eternal*)
 - C. It cannot be material (= *immaterial*)
 - D. It cannot be finite (= *infinite*)
 - E. It cannot be divided or divisible (= *simple*)
 - F. It must be an *uncaused* being since it is a necessary being
 - G. It must be only *One* being
 - H. It must be infinitely knowing (= *omniscient*) Being
 - I. It must be all-powerful (*omnipotent*) Being
 - J. It must be an absolutely *morally perfect* Being
 - K. It must be a *personal* Being
 - L. This being is appropriately called "God."
- 18) Therefore, one infinite, uncaused, personal, morally perfect, all-knowing, all-powerful Being who caused all finite being(s) to exist exists. This is what is meant by a theistic God. Hence, a theistic God exists.²⁵**

²⁵ Geisler, *God: An Argument from Being*, 3-5. This booklet contains expansions of each point. Geisler's 2013 edition of *Christian Apologetics* (266-

268) has almost identical verbiage but was expressed in fifteen points while its slightly revised and expanded expression in *God: An Argument from Being* has eighteen. The differences are rather negligible and they illuminate one another mildly. Both books contain further exposition of each point that are not presented here.

Strengths of the PAFB

Impervious to the Valid Criticisms of the Other Arguments for God

In his *Philosophy of Religion*, his *Christian Apologetics*, and a few of his other books, Geisler explains how some of the criticisms of many of the arguments for God are valid. He corrects some criticisms and grants validity to others. For example, he grants that a few of the criticisms of the PSR in the Leibnizian contingency cosmological argument are correct. In insisting, for example, that everything needs a cause, it leads logically to an infinite regress of causes rather than to God as an uncaused first-cause.²⁶ This is just one example among many for judging the Thomistic PAFB impervious to the daggers that could deflate the other arguments for God, including other VCAs.

John F.X. Knasas echoes:

Leibniz's thinking about existence in [his] proofs is. . . remarkably shallow. Hence, Kant and others could easily raise objections to the proofs. The remedy to that shallowness brings me to Thomistic Existentialism. My thesis is that among proponents of Thomistic Existentialism one can find a more nuanced understanding of existence that avoids the debilities found in Leibniz's understanding. In other words, it makes cosmological reasoning cogent.²⁷

Aquinas's *De Ente* reasoning holds the promise of avoiding the standard objections to cosmological reasoning as they are

²⁶ Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd edition, 258.

²⁷ John Knasas, *Thomistic Existentialism and Cosmological Reasoning*, 2

prompted by Leibniz's reasoning or by arguments indebted to Leibniz.²⁸

In conclusion, in [Thomistic Existentialism,] Aquinas appears to have thought through the meaning of the existence as an act in far greater depth than Leibniz and with far greater consistency than the analytics. ... Aquinas's efforts to understand existence payoff in a more cogent cosmological argument for God than the classic [Leibnizian] form. This more cogent argument, properly understood, is central to all of Aquinas's God proofs. ... both secular thinkers and Thomists engaged in cosmological debate would profit by a reconsideration of Thomistic Existentialism.²⁹

Young Earth Creationists May Prefer It

While the HCA for God traces the chain of effects and causes back to a first cause in time, the vertical cosmological argument is atemporal, not based on time. The HCA tends to be gaining popularity among those who embrace Einstein's theory of general relativity and the hot big bang model. Old Earth Creationists tend to like the HCA. Young Earth Creationists (YEC) tend to shy away from the big bang theory—especially with its dating of the universe into the billions of years.

As already established, Dr. Geisler was a proponent of the HCA but he was more attracted to the VCA. Some might wonder if he was attracted to HCA because he was an OEC. Others might wonder if he was attracted to the VCA because he was a YEC. Geisler never took a firm stance on the YEC versus OEC debate. He was one of the staunchest defenders of creationism but never fully embraced one

²⁸ Ibid., 69.

²⁹ Ibid., 313-314.

age dating system over the other. In keeping with YECs, he held to early dates for the global flood in Noah's age,³⁰ the tower of Babel, and the creation of Adam and Eve. Those events occurred in the last 10,000 years or less. As to the age of our universe, he exhibited considerable flexibility. In harmony with the judgments of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, a multi-denominational, conservative evangelical think-tank, he defended the right for evangelicals to interpret Genesis with either YEC or OEC interpretations.³¹

It is true that he encouraged and assisted astronomer-apologist Hugh Ross (OEC) to start the Reasons to Believe organization. While he expressed some admiration for Hugh Ross's creation model and dating, he never officially endorsed Ross's model as his own. In 2017, Dr. Geisler attended the annual National Conference on Christian Apologetics and paid close attention to the debate between Hugh Ross (OEC) and Jason Lisle (YEC). Even though he judged that Ross's presentation was considerably stronger than Lisle's in that engagement, he did not an official side on the YEC versus OEC debate.³² While not entirely convinced by the theory, Geisler was

³⁰ As of 2017, Geisler was convinced that Noah's flood occurred around 2,400 B.C. and the rest of the flood hypothesis in Philip Ernest Williams, *Noah's Flood* (Charlotte, NC: Christian Leaders & Scholars Press, 2015).

³¹ Norman Geisler, "Does Believing in Inerrancy Require One to Believe in Young Earth Creationism?" <https://normangeisler.com/does-believing-in-inerrancy-require-one-to-believe-in-young-earth-creationism>. (Posted after 2011. Accessed December 6th, 2025).

³² I sat beside Norm at this conference, heard his comments during the debate, and discussed the debate with him after it concluded. While he did not

hopeful that OEC and YEC theories could possibly being reconciled without contradiction if time stretched as the universe expanded like physicist Gerald Schroeder proposed.³³ While he never settled for Shroeder's relative-time view, it was this view that intrigued him the most and gave him some hope that OEC and YEC could somehow both be correct in their view of the age of the universe and the earth.³⁴ With it, he may have been inclined to give a both-and answer to the question of whether he was either OEC or YEC.

take a final position on the controversy, he did judge Dr. Lisle's argument for YEC to be quite anemic.

³³ Gerald L. Schroeder, *Genesis and the Big Bang: The Discovery of Harmony Between Modern Science and the Bible* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990). Also, Gerald L. Schroeder, *The Science of God: The Convergence of Scientific and Biblical Wisdom*. New York: Free Press, 1997. In 2011, Schroeder updated his view of the six 24-hour days of Genesis One to suggest that there were 7.1 billion years compressed into day one, 3.6 billion years in the second, 1.8 billion in day three, 0.89 billion years in day four, 0.45 billion years in day 5, and 0.23 years in day six. See Gerald Schroeder, "The Age of the Universe," <http://www.geraldschroeder.com/AgeUniverse.aspx>. (Posted after 2011. Accessed November 30th, 2025).

³⁴ Geisler wrote: "The Relative Time View claims the Earth is both young and old, depending on how it is measured. Gerard Schroeder, a Jewish physicist (in *Genesis and the Big Bang*), argued that measured by God's time when He created the universe it was only six literal days of creation. But measured by our time, the creation of the universe is billions of years old." Norman Geisler, "Does Believing in Inerrancy Require One to Believe in Young Earth Creationism?" <https://normangeisler.com/does-believing-in-inerrancy-require-one-to-believe-in-young-earth-creationism>. (Posted after 2011. Accessed December 6th, 2025). In personal conversations with the author of this paper between 2011 and 2017, Geisler expressed cautious optimism towards Schroeder's reckoning possibly being able to reconcile the OEC-YEC controversy. He did not express certainty about it and did not indicate that all the important details had been worked out in his mind using Schroeder's theory.

Either way, Geisler did consider both the big bang theory and the second law of thermodynamics to be evidences of a beginning and, therefore, a Beginner. His use of the HCA with the current scientific consensus shows that he was more than merely receptive to the scientific data. However, he also demonstrated caution and wisdom while anticipating a future weakness in the science-heavy HCAs:

The scientific support for the premise that the universe had a beginning in time rests on the big bang model for the origin of the cosmos and on the second law of thermodynamics. . . At this point all one can say is that as long as the scientific consensus runs in sympathy with this conclusion, the argument is convincing. But who is to say what scientists will conclude tomorrow? Although the present scientific evidence indicates a temporal universe, this only makes the conclusion plausible from a scientific perspective, not demonstrable from a philosophical standpoint.³⁵

He preferred a philosophical argument to a science-based argument. Science may favor a beginning point for the universe for now. But there may be new discoveries, new equations, and new hypotheses that cause many to doubt the big bang theory, the second law of thermodynamics, Einstein's General Relativity theory, and other scientific trends that for now favor a beginning point. In the future, scientists may play at philosophy and offer alternatives to a beginning. If so, the HCA may suffer some loss of weight and the VCAs may receive renewed interest and import.

³⁵ Geisler, *PoR*², 172.

The PAFB Leads to a Very Specific and Biblical God

The God of Classical Theism

Geisler's main criticism of the HCA was that where it may succeed in arguing from a beginning and therefore to a beginner, it fails to indicate that the beginner must be the God of the Bible. Logically, the beginner could be a deistic, rather than theistic God. It could a finite god, like Plato's Demiurgos or a god like Zeus. Its beginner is too generic. By contrast, the God proved by the PAFB concludes is an extremely specific one—a Being who is being itself (his existence is the same as his essence). He is not a being; he is Being itself. He is not an existent; He is existence. He is necessary being, not a contingent being. He is substantial being rather than an accidental being. This Being cannot change, be temporal, material, finite, divided, caused, multiple (in essence), less than omniscient, less than omnipotent, less than absolutely perfect, or less than personal. Of all the possible gods and Gods to choose from in the pantheon of possible causes, the God of the PAFB narrows the possibilities down to a very specific and narrow selection. There is no room for the god-world models of pantheism, panentheism, finite godism, polytheism, open theism, neoclassical theism, etc. The door is closed to every conceivable god except the God of classical theism—the God of the Bible.

If the God of Abraham is capable of change, as some theological liberals put it, if he is composed of both act and potency like we are, rather than being pure act, as the Thomists phrase it, then several problems are raised. As one example, if God is "in process" like we are, there is no guarantee that he will be able to keep any of his

promises, oaths, covenants to any people or people groups. Such is the situation with a god who has the potential to change his attitudes, his mind, his promises.³⁶ He may have said that our salvation is by grace alone and through faith alone one day but a thousand years from now he may change his mind. But even more fundamental than that, if the God of Abraham is composed of both act and potency, there is room for—and indeed a philosophical *need* for—something more ultimate than that finite, changing god. There has to be something behind, below, or above that god, so to speak, which is pure, actualized existence with no potential for change. If there is something more metaphysically fundamental than God, then that God would just be a god and not really qualify as the biblical God (described in passages like Isaiah 40, for example). There would be something greater than this god which we should instead call God.

The Self-Existent YHWH of Exodus 3:14

When the God of Jacob told Moses to confront the Egyptian Pharaoh, Moses asked his God to identify himself. The Pharaoh

³⁶ The prophet Samuel anticipated and corrected the problem of biblical use of phrases that make it seem, phenomenologically speaking, as if the God of Jacob can change his mind. In 1 Sam. 15:10, 35, it sounds like God regretted his action of sovereignly setting Saul on the throne of Israel as their first human king. Samuel clarified the reality of the situation as God “will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret” (1 Sam. 15:29; c.f., Num. 23:19, Mal. 3:6) and explained that Saul’s rejection of God was the cause of God’s rejection of Saul. The cause of God’s appearance of change was not actually God changing his mind but just an expected change in relationship based upon Saul having changed his own mind (15:26-28). Missing Samuel’s correction, some Bible interpreters assume wrongly the phenomenal language of God changing his mind describes a reality of God being able to change his mind.

believed in many gods of varying degrees of might (e.g., Amun-Ra, Osiris, Isis, Horus, etc.) and even held himself to be divine. If Moses were to tell him that the God of the Hebrews was commanding this god to let the Hebrews go, it could be important to identify God with some specificity. God expressed his name to Moses for Moses to express to Pharaoh. His name was, as best we can translate it, “I AM WHO I AM . . . I AM” (Exodus 3:13-16 LSB). Aquinas is famous understanding this unique name to indicate that the God of Jacob was not just the self-existent one, not just uncreated and eternal being, but existence/being itself—the only being whose essence was existence and whose essence and existence were the same.

Many Neo-Thomists of the 20th and 21st centuries affirm this and acknowledge it as profound in some way. But it was the existential Thomists—Etienne Gilson, Joseph Owens, Frederick Wilhelmsen, Norman Geisler, Armand Maurer, Jacques Maritain, etc.—who recognized in God’s name the most important clue to understanding reality, both seen and unseen. When the realization is made that there is uncreated, eternal, unchanging, infinite being, and there is also created, contingent, changing, finite, analogous being, the latter type of being leads logically—or even begs for—the former type of being. When such an argument is made for God, as in the PAFB, the identification of the God of the PAFB is naturally made with the God named YHWH in Exodus 3:14.

This YHWH proceeded to make himself known by his mighty acts to Pharaoh, the Egyptians, the Israelites, and the surrounding nations (Joshua 4:23-24). In the ten plagues, YHWH methodically defeated and embarrassed many of Egypt’s most important gods—

Hapi, god of the Nile river, Hekhet, the goddess of frogs and fertility, Kheprer, the self-generated god of insects, Apis, the bull and an embodiment of Ptah and Re, Imhotep, the god of medicine and healing, Sekmet, the goddess of plagues, Nut, the goddess of the sky, Amon-Re, the sun god of resurrection, and more.³⁷ YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob/Israel, and Moses, demonstrated to everyone that he alone was in control of life, death, existence, and non-existence. He actualized living things out of matter (Exod. 8:16-19). He was not a lesser god who had been created by other forces. He was the uncreated creator of all that was created. He was revealing himself not simply as a god who was bigger than all the other gods; He was revealing himself as being in a different class of being than mere men and gods.

The Continuing-Cause God of Colossians 1:16-17

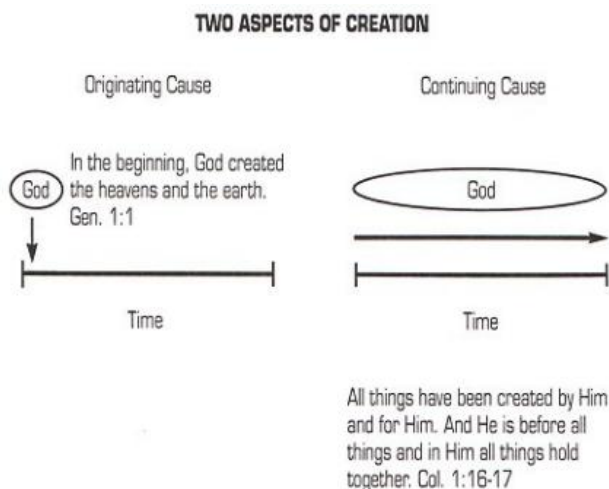
Likewise, the God the VCAs lead our reason to is very naturally identified with the God the Apostle Paul described as “And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17 LSB). The HCA lends itself to Col. 1:17A, but not to 1:17B. The VCAs, and especially Geisler’s PAFB, fit both Col. 1:17A and 1:17B well. Paul was affirming the need for a VCA. Geisler made the connection:

Now that we have seen [in the HCA] that the universe needs a cause of its *beginning*, let’s move on to the second form of the argument [the VCA]. This argument shows that the universe needs a cause of its existence *right now*. *The universe needs a*

³⁷ John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Baker, 1997), 108-113.

cause for its continuing existence. Something is keeping us in existence right now so we don't just disappear. Something has not only caused the world to come into being (Gen. 1:1) but is also continuing and conserving its existence in the present (Col. 1:17). The world needs both an originating cause and a conserving cause. In a sense, this question is the most basic question that can be asked, "Why is there something rather than nothing?"³⁸

He then gives a four-point articulation of the VCA/PAFB and opines, "This argument shows why there must be a present, conserving cause of the world, but it doesn't tell us very much about what kind of God exists. How do we know that this is really the God of the Bible?"³⁹ He answers his own question with the following graphic that quotes Col. 1:16-17 and connects his philosophical God with the biblical God:



³⁸ Geisler, *When Skeptics Ask*, 1990, 18.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 19.

In his commentary on Colossians, Geisler elaborated:

1:16–17. The third characteristic of Christ is that **by Him all things were created**. In fact, **all things were created by Him** (*di' autou*, instrumental Cause) **and for Him** (*eis auton*, final Cause), and **in Him** (*en autō*) they **hold together** (He is the constituting or conserving Cause). Christ is not only the One through whom all things came to be, but also the One by whom they continue to exist. Two other New Testament verses parallel this description of Christ: “Through Him all things were made” (John 1:3), and Christ the Son is the One “through whom [the Father] made the universe” (Heb. 1:2). The Father, then, is the ultimate Source (efficient Cause), and the Son is the mediating Cause of the world. The Son was the “master Workman” of Creation, “the beginning (*archē*) of the Creation of God” (Rev. 3:14)⁴⁰

Unlike some who argue that “the God of the Philosophers” is nothing like the God of the Bible, Geisler recognizes that the God his philosophy leads to is the same God the Apostle Paul described.

Moreover, this argument supports theism without leaving any room for deism. The kalam cosmological argument, by contrast, can leave the seeker of truth at the doorstep of deism or some type of “finite godism” worldview without necessarily nudging them into the camp of classical theism. This God did not wind the machine up, let it go, and step away. Instead he is “creating” (or, to use a softer word, sustaining) all of creation presently, actively, continually, and voluntarily. He did not leave us as orphans. His sustenance of creation may, for example, explain the so-called strong nuclear force that holds subatomic particles in their atomic nuclei. If the strong

⁴⁰ Norman Geisler, “Colossians,” in J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, Vol. 2 (Victor Books, 1985), 673.

nuclear force is just a natural law legislated by a supernatural Legislator, the way God keeps everything that exists in existence would be even deeper, more profound, more mysterious, more fundamental than that.

The PAFB does a better job than all other arguments for God at leading to classical theism and the God of the Bible—of both Old and New Testaments. It dovetails remarkably well with the LORD (YHWH/I AM) of the Old Testament (e.g., Exodus 3:14, Isaiah 44-51, Deuteronomy 6:4) and the LORD Jesus Christ described in the New Testament (e.g., Colossians 1:1-2:15, Romans 4:17, 10:9, Philippians 2:11, Acts 2:36, John 20:28, and Revelation 1:8). While the PAFB could simply lead the seeker to a non-descript and nameless God, a “God of the Philosophers” as Blaise Pascal once put it, and as some others lampoon it, it could also segue quite well to faith in the biblical God the Father and his son, the LORD Jesus Christ. The criteria created by this idea of God, in so far as it is reached through this robust philosophical argument, offers a high bar. Only the God of the Bible meets and matches that criteria. The model of God offered by Deism, for example, is left far behind as he created in the past and does not create/sustain in the present.

The God Paul Preached to the Pagan Philosophers

Even though Paul was a “Hebrew of Hebrews” (Philippians 3:5 LSB) who earned his doctorate degree in rabbinic law, so to speak, with the renown Rabbi Gamaliel as his advisor (Acts 22:3), his background was a Roman citizen “of no insignificant city” (Acts 21:39 LSB). Tarsus was a rival to Athens and Alexandria as a philosophical powerhouse. Paul knew enough Hellenistic

philosophy and poetry to quote Epimenides (Acts 17:28, Titus 1:12), Aratus (Acts 17:28), and Meander. In 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:2, Paul exhibits considerable familiarity with and appreciation of Pericles funeral oration.⁴¹ When the Apostle Paul reasoned with poorly educated Greek pagans in Lystra, he gave them a teleological argument (Acts 14:17). But when he reasoned with highly educated Stoic and Epicurean philosophers in Athens, he arguably gave an argument for God from being/existence. The compressed version of the argument takes ninety seconds to read:

For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to inhabit all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.' Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to suppose that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the craft and thought of man. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now commanding men that everyone everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a

⁴¹ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 94-101.

day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He determined, having furnished proof to all by raising Him from the dead.” - Acts 17:23-31 (LSB)

Paul likely spoke for more than ninety seconds. Imagine it expanded into at least a ten-minute monologue. Who knows? Perhaps Paul spoke for thirty minutes before he was interrupted. It is likely that Luke’s account is distilled and compressed.

At the very least Paul was schooling these pagan thinkers on elementary, traditional, monotheistic, Hebraic metaphysics. He was talking to philosophers in a relatively sophisticated dialect of Greek. He strategically quoted two of their philosopher poets while correcting their views. He was using a few terms that metaphysicians tend to use: being/existence and divine nature.⁴² As his core of his ministry was portrayed as one of reasoning, of giving logical arguments in the attempt to persuade others,⁴³ it is no stretch to assume he was making an argument and presenting a case to

⁴² The Greek word translated in English as either being or existence here is ἔσμεν (17:28), the plural form of the verb εἰμί, “to exist.” Its noun form is οὐσία which, in classical Greek philosophy (Plato, Aristotle, etc.) was used to denote being, essence, reality, or substance and, in the Greek New Testament, meant one’s wealth or estate. In the *De Ente*, Aquinas noted at the outset that “*ousia* in Greek means the same as our *essentia*” (which is our term existence). Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, 2nd Edition (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1968), 35.

⁴³ E.g., Acts 9:20-22, 13:43; 14:1-3, 17:1-18, 18:4-28, 20:20-24. C.f., 2 Corinthians 5:11,20, 10:5-3. Also see Joseph M. Holden and Christopher T. Haun, “How Do We Understand the Relationship Between Faith and Reason?” in William A. Dembski, Joseph M. Holden, and Casey Luskin, eds., *The Comprehensive Guide to Science and Faith: Exploring the Ultimate Questions about Life and the Cosmos* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2021), 40-42.

these pagan philosophers. The fact that some doubted, some believed, and some said they would like to hear more (Acts 17:32-34) indicates that an argument of logical persuasion was made.

While we cannot unpack Paul's argument with full certainty and fidelity, his argument does lend itself well to an unpacking in the tradition of existential Thomism. His argument seems to be a VCA that argues, much like the Aquinas-Geisler PAFB, from unnecessary beings that possess the gift of being to the Necessary Being that gives being to all other beings. (For a more verbose attempt to unpack Paul's argument, see Appendix 10.)

Paul's agreement with the Stoics that "in Him we live and move and exist" (LSB) or "in Him we live and move and have our being" (ESV) and "we are his offspring" makes it classifiable as an existential argument. While it harmonizes well with the Thomistic concept of "participated being," it neither affirms metaphysical monism nor eliminates the other category of "substantial being." This is not a blanket approval of Stoic, Neo-Platonic, or any other pagan metaphysic. The entire speech corrects their faulty views. But these are favorable quotations of their poets which establishes some common ground between the two worldviews and talk about how our type of finite being "participates" in God's type of infinite being. It is not the monistic participation of the Parmenides→Plato→Plotinus model but the dualistic participation described by Aquinas.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ See chapter 7, "Participated Being," of Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* for elaboration on participated being. Aquinas was

The logic of his PAFB resonates harmoniously with the logic of Paul's preaching to the Stoics. Geisler is in good company here with Aquinas and Paul. He is not creating a caricature God of the Philosophers that others can knock down as a strawman. He is arguing philosophically in ways that seem nearly identical to the way Paul argued and the conclusion seems to leave us with the God of the Bible.

borrowing a term and concept that was well known in the Parmenides-Plato-Neoplatonist tradition. But he corrected the concept to match with biblical data and classical theism. Geisler writes that Aquinas studied "Avicenna and Averroes, the pantheist interpretations of Aristotle via Plotinus and Neo-Platonists. ... Averroes was a highly rationalistic pantheist while Plotinus was a mystical pantheist. Aquinas is credited with stopping the flow of pantheism [in Europe] by using apologetics successfully." Geisler, *History of Western Philosophy*, vol. 1, 271-272.

Weaknesses of the PAFB

There may be room for improvement with Geisler's PAFB and other thomistic articulations of the metaphysical argument. Even if its logic is sound, there may be challenges in the way it is articulated in words.

John F.X. Knasas's Criticism

In early 2019, professor emeritus John F.X. Knasas, a protégé of Joseph Owens, read and endorsed Geisler's book *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal*, which contains the five-point form of Geisler's Thomistic PAFB. He also read and commented upon Geisler's booklet *God: A Philosophical Argument from Being*, which contains the 18-point form of the PAFB.⁴⁵ But his "endorsement [was] not the strongest." He stated that the books:

... fail to showcase the central achievement of Aquinas' philosophical thought – his notion of existence as *actus essendi*. The word "being" is used to translate two Latin terms in Aquinas that have different meanings. One Latin word is "ens." Its meaning is an existent, or that which is. One could also associate the meaning with what we call the fact of the thing. The other Latin word is "esse." What it stands for is best conveyed by an analogy used by Aquinas: just as a man is called a runner by his act of running, so too the man is called a being (*ens*) by his act of existing (*esse*). There is more than the facticity sense of being in Aquinas; there is also being in the sense of the act in virtue of which the thing is a fact. "Being" in the *esse* sense has a central place in Aquinas' metaphysical demonstration of

⁴⁵ Personal e-mail correspondence from John F.X. Knasas to Christopher Haun dated 1/25/2019.

God's existence, for example, in his *De Ente et Essentia*. Unfortunately, Prof. Geisler metaphysical demonstrations of God use either a very general notion of actuality that does not see actuality as constituted by *esse* [in his book on Thomas Aquinas] or use a notion of being that equates it simply with that which exists (see the glossary of the short book on God [*God: A Philosophical Argument from Being*]). As such Prof. Geisler's account of Aquinas is more like the traditional Thomists, e.g., Garrigou-Lagrange, and different from existential Thomists, e.g, Owens. ... if theology is to attain maturity, it requires a philosophy of being based upon the act of being. ... to beat philosophical challenges (e.g., Hume's challenges to a cause for facticity), it has to undergo the supplement of being as *esse* or *actus essendi*.

This critique surprised me. I expected one protégé of Aquinas→Gilson→Owens who devoted much of his life to "*De Ente* reasoning" to be delighted to see the work of another protégé of Aquinas→Gilson→Owens who was doing very similar *De Ente* reasoning in parallel. But such was not the case. I expected that Geisler's PAFB was saturated with the profound insights of *esse* versus *ens* and the *actus essendi*. Knasas's naysaying forced me to wonder if there was room for improvement in Geisler's PAFB along the lines he suggested. I was left wondering if Geisler built his PAFB more along the lines of the logic left by the neo-scholastic Thomist Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange than Gilson and Owens.

It also caused me to doubt my own command of the difference between the *fact* of existence and the *act* of existence. Alternatively,

perhaps Knasas, after teaching existential Thomism for decades, became overly focused on the *actus essendi*.⁴⁶

The influences on Geisler's metaphysical thinking are clear in his writings, his citations, his list of recommended books for aspiring philosophers and apologists, and his assigned reading for his syllabi in the courses on metaphysics which he taught. He holds the *De Ente* as "possibly his most important work."⁴⁷ In order of priority to Geisler, he seems to recommend:

- 1) Étienne Gilson *Being and Some Philosophers* (1949)
- 2) Étienne Gilson *God and Philosophy* (1941)
- 3) Joseph Owens *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (1963)
- 4) Thomas Aquinas *On Being and Essence (De Ente et Essentia)*
- 5) Étienne Gilson *Unity of Philosophical Experience* (1937)
- 6) Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange's *God: His Existence and Nature* (1934)
- 7) Louis Marie Regis. *Epistemology* (1959)
- 8) Louis Marie Regis. *Thomas and Epistemology* (1946)
- 9) Frederick Wilhelmsen, *Man's Knowledge of Reality* (1959)⁴⁸

Of these books, all of the authors are in the Existential Thomist camp except for Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange and Louis Marie Regis, who are in the Neo-Scholastic/Aristotelian Thomist camp. The

⁴⁶ While I am not accusing Knasas of being overly monomaniacal about the *actus essendi*, some other Thomists have challenged him on perhaps taking it too far. See Joshua P. Hochschild, Joshua P. "Review of *Thomistic Existentialism and Cosmological Reasoning* by John F. X. Knasas. *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, vol. 84, no. 1, Jan. 2020, pp. 168–172. Also see the dialogue between Knasas and John Brundgardt at <https://johnbrundgardt.com/2025/03/13/debate-with-knasas/>.

⁴⁷ Geisler, *History of Western Philosophy*, vol. 1: *Ancient and Medieval*, 273.

⁴⁸ These are listed at <https://normangeisler.com/thomism>.

inclusion of Garrigou-LaGrange towards the end of the list suggests that Knasas's criticism could be partially right. Perhaps Geisler's PAFB was partially predicated upon the arguments for God of Garrigou-LaGrange's interpretation of Aquinas than he did on Joseph Owens's interpretation.⁴⁹

But Geisler is clearly at heart an Existentialist Thomist, very much in line with Owens. In an article on Aquinas he wrote:

The heart of Aquinas's metaphysics is the real distinction between essence and existence in all finite beings. Aristotle had distinguished between actuality and potentiality, but he applied this only to form and matter, not to the order of being. Aquinas argued that only God is pure being, pure actuality, with no potentiality whatsoever. Hence, the central premise of Thomistic thought is "act in the order in which it is act is unlimited potency." God alone is pure act(uality) without form. Angels are completely actualized potentialities (pure forms), and man is a composition of form (soul) and matter (body) with progressive actualization. ... God alone *is* being (I Am-ness). Everything else *has* being. God's essence is identical to his existence; it is of his essence to exist. God is a necessary being. He cannot *not* exist. Neither can God change, since he is without potentiality to be anything other than he is. Likewise, God is eternal, since time implies a change from a before to an after. But as the *I-Am* (Exod. 3:14), God has no *befores* and *afters*. . . ⁵⁰

⁴⁹ While beyond the scope of this present paper, some raw material has been included in several appendices to this paper to make it easier to help myself and others compare the Geisler's PAFB with artificial intelligence generated approximations of competing/complementary sorites for the existence of God from Joseph Owens, John F.X. Knasas, Reginald Garrigou-LeGrange, Gaven Kerr, Ed Feser, and others.

⁵⁰ Norman Geisler, "Thomas Aquinas," in Walter A. Elwell, Ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker, 1984), 1091.

This helps explain his PAFB. It echoes it and forms the core of it. Perhaps Knasas needed to see it worded differently and more strongly.

If we assume with Knasas, for the sake of discussion, that Geisler's PAFB could be improved by shifting away from a Garrigou-LaGrange style of argumentation to an argument that really embraces *esse*, the *actus essendi*, the act of existence, then we run into the problem of the challenge to understand the concept ourselves, appreciate its supposed profound implications, and, perhaps an even greater challenge, communicate it effectively to others. After teaching existential Thomistic metaphysics for decades, Knasas, who studied directly under Joseph Owens, said the hardest hurdle for his students of Thomism to surmount is understanding the *actus essendi*, or the act of existence, the act of being.⁵¹

While Knasas has written extensively on the topic, it could be argued that he has not made this allegedly profound, elusive, challenging truth clear to his readers and students. Of all the living existential Thomists today, he should be the most qualified in the world to help us understand it. But he can only bring us to its doorstep. Tasking Grok 4.1 by xAI to focus its analysis on several of Knasas's books and articles with the simple question "what is the

⁵¹ Flynn, Patrick. "Thomistic Existentialism and Cosmological Reasoning w/ Dr. John Knasas," YouTube video, 1:58:30, Posted by Philosophy for the People, January 7, 2023, <https://youtu.be/knj6--CCKuQ>. Timestamp for this quote is unavailable.

actus essendi?" the LLM produces several lines of text that talk about it and around it. But no clear, singular definition arises.

It seems as if Knasas intuitively something very profound in the *De Ente* specifically, and in the entire Aquinas corpus more broadly, loves to talk about it, and talks around it, but arguably never quite explains it in ways that most thinkers can readily understand. The closest analogs he comes up with are "the act of running" and "the act of speaking" being acts of runners and speakers, the act of existence is the act by which a thing exists.⁵² Whereas we may perform the acts of running or the acts of speaking upon ourselves, we cannot cause the act of existence to occur to/for ourselves. The drift to God as the actualizer of our existence is a natural one when the act of existence is realized or granted. In another interview, Knasas said:

Most famous of the Existential Thomists were Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain. They proposed a more fundamental description of being in terms of existential act. The Existential Thomists use what they regard as Aquinas' philosophically novel doctrine of *esse*, or *actus essendi*. The "existence of a thing" does not mean simply the fact of the thing, though ordinary conversation does leave it at that. Philosophical reflection discerns that the thing's existence is an act of the thing somewhat similarly as a man's running and speaking are other acts, though existential act is unique in its basicness and fundamentality to the thing. In creatures, the act of existing is participated; in the creator it is subsistent. Such a first cause is

⁵² Around minute 10:01 in interview titled "Thomistic Existentialism and Cosmological Reasoning w/ Dr. John Knasas" <https://youtu.be/knj6--CCKuQ>. Published January 2023.

identifiable with the God of Judeo-Christian revelation who in the Vulgate told Moses that his name was “*Ego sum qui sum*.”⁵³

As far as I can so far determine, Knasas never attempted to go out on the limb by articulating his own version of the thomistic metaphysical argument for God in a formal sorite. He wrote much about the argument but never restated it in his own words. (See Appendix 4 for an approximation of Knasas’s sorite and Appendix 7 for an approximation of Garrigou-LaGrange’s sorite.)

Richard Howe and Thomas Howe, existential Thomists who were close colleagues and coauthors with Geisler, make an admirable attempt to make the argument simple in their *Why Trust the God of the Bible* booklet. They give a simple 3-point syllogism for a VCA:

- (1) Whatever is composed requires a composer.
- (2) Every aspect of physical reality is composed.
- (3) Therefore, every aspect of physical reality must have a composer.

And they invest a fair amount of ink into making the act of being, Pure Act, and existence and essence intelligible to the reader. They illustrate it with an analogy of a composer of music composing complex music in his or her mind, but that music not being

⁵³ From “John Knasas on Thomistic Metaphysics, Past, Present and Future,” <https://www.innerexplorations.com/philtxt/john.htm>. Accessed December 6th, 2025.

actualized until a musician plays the music for others to experience.⁵⁴ This attempt is rather laudable.

Perhaps other analogies and illustrations should be considered. IT Pros and Devs, such as myself, for example, may be more captivated by analogic of the software developer who writes computer code on a developmental machine, compiles the code, saves the code in a code repository in the cloud or otherwise running on other computers. This is followed by a computer administrator deploying the code to a server, a virtual server, a virtual container, or serverless-function where it can run.

The potential to exist is there. In some ways, the code does exist before it is run as a program. It exists in the mind of the developer first and then on the developer's developer machine. But it is not running. It has not been executed or launched. Then it sort of exists in a very high form of potential in the distribution pipeline. It can be copied or moved to another substrate that the code is intended to run on. But even after it is moved there, it is not yet running. Its potential has not been actualized until the administrator either manually causes the code to run, pulling the trigger on it, so to speak, or schedules something in the system to execute the code on a schedule. This complex orchestration of formal causes, material

⁵⁴ Richard G. Howe, Thomas A. Howe, Doug Potter, Adam Tucker, and Christina Woodside. *Why Trust the God of the Bible? A Short Case for the Truthfulness of Christianity*. (Southern Evangelical Seminary, 2016), 8-14. This analogic may be echoed in Ed Feser, "The Distinction of Essence and Existence | Prof. Edward Feser," Thomistic Institute Podcast, 1:24:55, Posted April 22, 2024, <https://podcast.thomisticinstitute.org/the-distinction-of-essence-and-existence-prof-edward-feser>.

causes, exemplar cause, final cause, efficient cause, and what might be termed actualizing cause of the effects are glimpsed. No analogy is perfect when pressed but perhaps may still help to make a single point connecting the unknown to the known.

Whether I have done justice to the concept of the “act of existence” or not here is fully debatable. Perhaps I missed the point. Being/Existence is not actually a thing that be-s or exists. It is an “act” and somehow an act (or actualizer or actualization) is not a thing. This is just my best way of making sense of the incomprehensible at present. If the act of existence is the key to it all, as Knasas seems to suggest, how can we understand such an arcane and impenetrable concept? Why have they not explained it well? And how can we defend and commend it if we understand it internally but cannot articulate this mystery to others?

J.T. Bridges’s Critique

In 2025, J.T. Bridges, an existential Thomistic philosopher and professor of philosophy of religion at one of the seminaries co-founded by Norm Geisler, examined Geisler’s final 18-point articulation of Geisler’s PAFB. He agreed with Dr. Knasas’s criticisms and judged the PAFB to be not represent Aquinas’s *De Ente* and the existential Thomist tradition properly. Paraphrasing his critique, the *actus essendi* is not part of the thing that exists. *Existence* and *existents* are confused at the start. Geisler confuses an existent (e.g., “myself”) as if it is a principle of the act of being. Existence (*esse*) is not a principle of identity. It is not from the existent thing. The thing does not have existence in its own essence but has it from another—

ultimately from God. Existence is not part of what it is and should not be included in its identity.⁵⁵

Moreover, the argument derails in the first premise: “Being is.” Paraphrasing again, he cautioned that the ambiguity here could (and based on the way it is worded, should) be taken in a Platonic rather than Thomistic sense. To start with “Being is,” seems to make being into an essence. It is like saying existence must exist. Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* argued against Plato on this point long ago and Geisler’s wording runs the risk of bringing us back to Plato’s view, regardless of the fact that Geisler did not hold Plato’s view. In response, perhaps part of the problem is not so much in what Geisler was attempting to say but in how it was stated in that particular variation of his PAFB. Many of his other attempts to articulate the PAFB do not start with “Being is.” Perhaps he was just trying to say, “nothing is conceptually prior to *esse*.” He was attempting to argue that there are first principles of thought (such as “Being is.”) that lead naturally to theism.

The constructive criticism from Knasas and Bridges would have been welcomed by Geisler between 2013 and 2018. He was seeking exactly that type of feedback.⁵⁶ But, unfortunately, it came too late to reach him.

⁵⁵ Personal email correspondence between J.T. Bridges and Christopher Haun dated September 5th, 2025.

⁵⁶ In a personal email dated April 3rd, 2015, Norman Geisler asked me to publish his *God: A Philosophical Argument from Being* booklet through Bastion Books. He also welcomed any corrections and made it clear that three other readers were offering feedback.

Perhaps the difficulties were mainly a matter of wording. Perhaps he would have enjoyed arguing for his position the way it is. Or perhaps he was attempting to argue in the *spirit* of an existential Thomist and did not quite produce the *letter* of it. Or perhaps Aristotelian Thomism did not mix well with Existential Thomism in this case and the former overwhelmed the latter. While his full response is impossible to imagine, it is safe to assume that Geisler would encourage other Thomists to master the insights of the *De Ente*, master the insights of Gilson, Owens, Wilhelmssen, and other existential Thomists, and consider ways to improve the articulation of the Thomistic metaphysical argument.

To post “Being is” certainly sounds a lot like “Being be-s” and “Existence exists” and “Realness is real.” Rather than starting with “Being is,” perhaps he should have instead started with, “Something really exists,” “Stuff that exists really does exist,” “Existence is not an illusion,” “Stuff really does exist outside of your mind in a real world,” “Stuff either exists or it does not exist. It does exist,” or “Do not deny existence,” or such. Perhaps it was the same thing to him. Perhaps not. Regardless, it can derail the argument as it tries to leave the gate.

First Principles of Thought

In starting with “Being is,” it is very possible that he was trying to show how the first principles of thought lead necessarily and naturally to God. Geisler was developing this approach as late as 2017. The following paragraphs are reproduced from a transcript of his last public lecture:

What are the First Principles?

In the reductive foundationalism, first principles that lead to certain knowledge are either self-evident statements or statements where the predicate term is reducible to the subject term. Consider this statement: every *contingent* being has a *cause*. Now that is not obviously self-evident but it is reducible to the self-evident. Contingent means could not-be. But non-being cannot cause being. Hence, every contingent being has a cause.

Well, what are first principles? The knowledge is possible because of first principles. What are the first principles on which we can base our certain knowledge? First principles defined in a reductive view. Self-evident statement, a statement where the predicate term is reducible to the subject term. Take, for example, “Every contingent being has a cause.” Now that is not obviously self-evident, but it is reduced to the self-evident. The contingent means could not be. Contingent is something that is, but might not be. But non-being cannot cause being. Hence, every contingent being has a cause. The reason that you and I can be certain about the principle, say for example, of causality, is it is reducible to a first principle.

Some First Principles Listed

Once you understand these first principles, we can know things with certainty, prove certain things. The first one we call the **Law of Existence: “Being is” (i.e., Something exists. e.g., I do)**. That is self-evident. Without the obvious certainty that something exists, we cannot know anything. Principle number two, the **Law of Identity: “Being is being” (B is B)**. We cannot deny it without affirming it. Third, the **Law of Non-Contradiction: “Being is not non-being” (B is not non-B)**. The law of non-contradiction is one of the three fundamental laws of thought that are literally undeniable. Fourth, the **Law of Excluded Middle: “Either Being or non-being” (Either B or not B)**. Something either is or it is not—but it cannot be and not be at the same time. Fifth, the **Law of Causality: “Non-being cannot cause being” (Non-B $\nrightarrow$ being)**. Nothing cannot cause something. As Julie Andrews famously sang, “Nothing comes from nothing. Nothing ever could!” Sixth, the **Law of Analogy: “An effect is similar to its efficient cause” (B $\rightarrow$ b)**. Seventh, therefore, God

exists—that is, a first, uncaused Cause exists that is similar to us (his effects).

First Principles Lead to God

Now notice, just taking the six basic laws themselves, all of which are self-evident, you can arrive at certain knowledge. You can be sure of the conclusion that follows from them. If these laws are true, then God must exist. God exists. The first uncaused cause of all that exists is similar to its effect.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), a famous American theologian and philosopher, also held that first principles lead us to believe in God. He argued: (1) Something undeniably exists. (2) Nothing cannot cause something. (Nothing can only cause nothing.) (3) Therefore, something exists eternally and necessarily. (4) A personal, intellectual, and moral being undeniably exists (e.g., me, you). (5) Hence, a personal, intellectual, moral, external, and necessary Being exists (i.e., God).⁵⁷ He used several of the first principles to make one of the most profound proofs for the existence of God. And he wrote this proof around the age of nineteen years of age!⁵⁸

Geisler's first premise of his PAFB clearly echoes the first of the first principles of thought, the self-evident law of existence. It seems then like he is using it to say, in essence, "It is undeniable that something exists. Let us not waste our time questioning that. Either nothing exists or something exists. It is something that exists. There is no need to doubt existence itself."

⁵⁷ Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies," No. 27a, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, *The "Miscellanies," Entry Nos. a–z, aa–zz, 1–500*, ed. Thomas A. Schafer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 213.

⁵⁸ Norman L. Geisler, "How to Defend the Faith In a Postmodern World," https://normangeisler.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Norman-L.-Geisler_Defending-the-Faith-in-a-PostModern-World_2017.pdf

Perhaps Geisler should have avoided the B=B (Being is Being) type of formula here. Most would say that the first law of logic, or the first of the first principles of thought, is the Law of Identity, or A=A. Following Aristotle's *Metaphysics* IV, it usually presented as meaning only that "Each thing is identical to itself." Aquinas does not seem to coin the phrase "being is being" (or *ens est ens*, much less *esse est esse*). Scotus may be closer to being the source of that phrase in discussions of the univocity of being. And Geisler has been known at times to part from pure Thomism to include some Scotism—at least when it comes to the topic of analogical language.⁵⁹ But it is unclear to me presently if Geisler would also incorporate some Scotism into his concept of analogical being.

Based on my knowledge of the Thomistic thinkers that impacted Geisler's thinking the most, and which he cited, recommended, and assigned as textbooks the most, the main source for his thinking about first principles and how that leads to God is probably Louis Regis's book *Epistemology*. If so, he may be affirming that "The first object attained by the intellect is being" and "The principle of identity expresses the self-evidence of being: what is, is."⁶⁰ (An attempt to create an argument for God from Regis's writings is found in Appendix 14.)

Regardless of which influences drove him to write "Being is," the articulation of the first principles should be built into his sorite

⁵⁹ See Matthew J. Coté, "Through a Glass Darkly: A Primer on Analogy & God-Talk," December 2025, <https://normangeisler.com/analogy/>.

⁶⁰ Louis Regis, *Epistemology* (Macmillan, 1959), 43, 57.

without abbreviations or unencrypted and uncompressed premises. Even if we give him the benefit of the doubt about the use of “Being is” in the first premise not meaning that being exists, it still derails or disqualifies the argument from the start without further expansion.

Starting with *Existence* rather than *Existents*?

Or perhaps Geisler was attempting to start with Existence rather than existents. Joseph Owens, the Thomistic existentialist philosopher, recommended arguing for God from existence/being:

Other [non-metaphysical] arguments may vividly suggest the existence of God, press it home eloquently to human consideration, and for most people provide much greater spiritual and religious aid than difficult metaphysical demonstration. But on the philosophical level these arguments are open to rebuttal and refutation, for they are not philosophically cogent. Remaining on the side of the nature of any observable object or event, one reaches cogently no further than a finite nature or agent. Only from the starting point of existence, which is not a nature in the finite thing, does the human mind encounter ... a path for cogent reasoning to existence as a nature, that is, to the existence of God.⁶¹

But presumably we can only argue from effects to the cause of the effects. So normally we take some aspect of creation—and it could be almost any aspect of creation—and argue that it needs a designer, creator, and/or sustainer. So how do we get from things that exist (existents) to existence itself? Or, more provocatively, can we take a shortcut and move directly to existence/being itself while skipping existents?

⁶¹ Joseph Owens, “Aquinas and the Five Ways,” *The Monist*. 1974.

It is possible that Geisler was attempting to start with existence itself when he began with “Being is.” It is possible he was attempting to make “existence as a nature,” to quote Owens, as his first premise? This is, after all, an existential Thomistic argument by a thinker who was intoxicated by Thomistic existentialism. We should expect him to fast track it to Existence as quickly as possible. He called his PAFB a “philosophical argument from being” and classified it as a metaphysical argument. Whether starting with Existence (rather than existents) in premise one was really what he was attempting to do is questionable. And whether that tack succeeds or not is also questionable.

Assuming for the sake of discussion that he did attempt to begin with Existence/Being in premise one, he seems forced to retreat back to existents (e.g., “I do.”) in the second premise.

Win Corduan’s articulation of the same basic argument, which he worked with Geisler in developing, offers more explanation for their first premise in the sorite:

Something exists. Anything will do. I exist. You exist. The universe exists. A flower exists. My pen exists. It does not even have to be a material object. If you doubt this statement, your doubting exists, and that is good enough. In short, if you find anything controversial in the statement that something exists, you are reading something into it; and that “something” would have to exist, and you would have to exist in order to read it into the statement. ... I am not out to prove the existence of any one thing with my statement. I am just asserting a reasonable truth, namely

that something exists. We can stop with “my doubting exists” if we really care to. Let us agree that something exists.⁶²

This may provide additional insight into what Geisler was ultimately trying to say. And indeed it harmonizes perfectly well with Geisler’s other articulations of the HCA where he too begins with “Something exists.” In the PAFB, Geisler makes it clear: “That is, something exists.” Whereas Geisler in the PAFB stated “Being is,” Corduan instead states, “Something exists.” This is a little like saying, “Some existing thing really exists,” or “Some real thing is really real,” or “Some being really be-s.” They both seem to be saying that because existents (such as you and me) exist, we cannot deny existence itself. If existents exist then existence itself cannot be denied.

There is no doubt that both Geisler and Corduan would be quick to affirm that existence/being itself is *not* an essence, substance, existent, entity, or being. It is doubtful that either were trying to say that is the case. They were just attempting to start from a starting point that every rational person should be able to join them at. However, perhaps due to limitations of all of our finite minds, or perhaps due to limitations of the English language, their wording could place the reader on that edge of that precipice. It is challenging to figure out how to avoid that. Being is not a concept, but we obviously have a concept of being. The moment we try to argue from

⁶² Winfried Corduan, *No Doubt About It*, 109-110. Corduan references Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica*, I, Q2, A3, as the source for his adaptation of this cosmological argument.

existence is the moment we conceptually start to speak of existence/being as a real thing.

In the mind of the Thomist, existence is neither a thing, a property of a thing, an existent, an entity, nor a being among other beings. It is rather the act by which a thing is. Existence does not have existence. It is the act of existence, the act of being, the actualization of what could potentially exist become something that actually exists among other real things. Being does not be. Existing does not exist. Acting does not act. Actualization itself does not need to be actualized. Realization does not realize. But the moment we begin to think or talk or write about it, the moment we sort of have to treat it like it is a real thing? If we need to make the leap from existents to existence, must we find a way to articulate that we are talking about existence as if it exists, realness as if it is real, being as if it be-s, but that none of that is the case and we are just limited by thought and language? Or should we content ourselves to focus on the existents, argue that their existence is contingent on something that does not have contingent existence? If we have to abandon existence for existents, then are we not just re-articulating Aquinas's third way and abandoning the quest for a truly metaphysical argument?

Is the PAFB too Abstruse?

Unfortunately, the PAFB unfortunately does not seem to lend itself well to short talks, short chapter sections, and short debates.⁶³

⁶³ In a personal correspondence between David Geisler and Christopher Haun, dated April 24, 2025, David confirmed that Frank Turek, Don Deal, and some of Norm Geisler's other proteges agreed that Norm's PAFB tends to be hard for most people to grasp on a deep level. This is why the VCA/PAFB was

The 18-point PAFB may tend to lack appeal to those who have not invested the equivalent of a semester of formal study into the subject metaphysics/existence/being in the tradition of Aquinas's *De Ente*. Where he had the freedom to choose just one argument, Geisler would choose the PAFB to focus on. In his more scholarly books, he invariably included one or more of the thomistic forms of the VCA and preferred to focus on the PAFB.⁶⁴

Despite seeing the VCA/PAFB as the strongest argument for God, Geisler tended to dispense with it in favor of the HCA when making a cumulative case for God. In several of his popular level apologetics books, and particularly those books that were co-authored with others, Geisler left all forms of the VCA out relied instead upon the

not included in the first edition of the best-selling book by Geisler and Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004). Expectations were set for Frank Turek to include a small addition of a VCA to the second, revised and expanded edition of the book to be published by Crossway in October 2026, in line with Richard G. Howe, Thomas A. Howe, Doug Potter, Adam Tucker, and Christina Woodside. *Why Trust the God of the Bible? A Short Case for the Truthfulness of Christianity* (Southern Evangelical Seminary, 2016), 7-11.

⁶⁴ E.g.: *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Bastion Books, 2025); *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd Edition (Baker, 2012); *Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd Edition (Wipf & Stock, 2004); *God: A Philosophical Argument from Being* (Bastion Books, 2015); "God, Evidence for → *A Cause Right Now*," *The Big Book of Apologetics* (Baker, 2012), 196; "First Principles," *The Big Book of Apologetics* (Baker, 2012), 170-172; "The Universe Needs a Cause for its Continuing Existence," *When Skeptics Ask, 2nd Ed.* (Baker, 2013), 12-13; *Twelve Points that Show Christianity is True* (NGIM, 2016, 2025), 28-30; *Systematic Theology: In One Volume* (Bastion Books, 2011, 2021), 24-25; *Systematic Theology: Volume One: Prolegomena and Bibliology* (Bastion Books, 2002, 2025), 28-31. For more detail, see Appendix 1.

HCA, teleological, moral, and religious need arguments instead. (See Appendix 1.)

The reason he did this was that the VCA arguments, and particularly his existential thomistic PAFB, tend to be more challenging for most people to grasp and appreciate. Even though the PAFB was to Geisler his philosophically strongest argument, it was also the least likely argument to have an impact on popular audiences. Whereas the HCA and teleological arguments tended to have a more considerable persuasive appeal to those with higher appreciation for modern science, the moral and religious need arguments tended to have more persuasive power for those with higher axiological IQs or sensitivities. Meanwhile the VCA forms tend to appeal more to those with greater ability to ponder being and causality.

Can the thomistic metaphysical argument be used effectively in public debates with atheists? A proper analysis of the few recorded debates Geisler had with atheists in the 1970s-1980s was unfortunately not performed for this paper. However, Geisler is on record for saying that in several of his debates with atheists used a slightly modified version of Richard Taylor's famous illustration of two people walking in the forest, finding a large, glass ball, pondering why it is there, and reasoning that if big balls need causes, bigger balls (like the earth, planets, solar systems, galaxies, galaxy clusters) also need causes, and the biggest ball of all (the cosmos)

also needs a cause.⁶⁵ This is noteworthy because Geisler judged Taylor's contingency cosmological argument to suffer from the same flaws that all those in the Leibniz-Wolffian tradition suffer from.⁶⁶ But he was still willing to use Taylor's condensed version of his argument when trying to make his own argument intelligible. It suggests that instead of using a cumbersome, abstruse ten-point or eighteen-point PAFB argument in debates, he opted instead for a simpler version of a VCA that was easier to visualize, may have implied the PSR tacitly, and helped win debates.

In his last public lecture, Geisler gave a hearty recommendation for a simple, five-point VCA argument made by the brilliant Jonathan Edwards while he was a young man. Geisler represented his argument this way: (1) Something undeniably exists (e.g., I do); (2) Nothing cannot cause something; (3) Therefore, something externally and necessarily exists; (4) A personal, intellectual, and moral being undeniably exists (e.g., I do). (5) Hence, a personal, intellectual, moral, eternal, and necessary Being exists (i.e., God does.)⁶⁷ This demonstrates a willingness to use arguments that are

⁶⁵ Richard Taylor, *Metaphysics*, 4th ed. (Prentice Hall, 1992), 120. Geisler and Bocchino borrow this illustration in *Unshakable Foundations* (Bethany House, 2001), 87-88. Geisler also mentions this illustration as one of his favorite illustrations that he used many times over multiple years in public debates with atheists. "Norman Geisler interviewed by Apologetics315," YouTube video, 1:00:13, Posted by Apologetics315, August 23, 2011, <https://youtu.be/JPENKGBQEXY>, minute 26:45-28:25.

⁶⁶ Geisler, *PoR*², 168-169.

⁶⁷ Norman Geisler, "Defending the Faith in a Post-Modern World", 2017. <https://youtu.be/kxhePYpgHjM>. Minute 39:20-43:50. Geisler is likely referring to Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies," No. 27a, in *The Works of Jonathan*

not firmly in the Thomistic tradition, but which are harmonious to it. It also suggests an attempt to find a simpler form of the VCA to use. He said that he used an argument like this in personal evangelism and saw more than one person converted to theism by it.⁶⁸

In 2017, Richard G. Howe, holder of the Norman Geisler Chair of Apologetics at Southern Evangelical Seminary, used a *De Ente* based metaphysical argument for God against atheist Dan Barker in a debate.⁶⁹ Howe had taught thomistic metaphysics to graduate students for several years before this and likely used Joseph Owens's textbooks. For this debate he may have taken some additional inspiration and material from Gaven Kerr's *Aquinas's Way to God*. He described it as "probably the best book on this subject that I've read ... in years" and stated, "that is the proof I gave to you tonight—although the version I gave to you tonight was my own before I read his book. ... It is tremendous philosophically speaking" (Minute 1:56:21).

Regarding Joseph Owens's book *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: The Collected Papers of Joseph Owens*, Howe through down the gauntlet saying, "I defy any atheist to read Joseph Owens and sustain their atheism philosophically. . ." (minute 1:57:18). Did

Edwards, vol. 13, *The "Miscellanies," Entry Nos. a–z, aa–zz, 1–500*, ed. Thomas A. Schafer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 213.

⁶⁸ Apologies but I lost the citation for this assertion. I remember it but cannot seem to remember where I heard it. To be populated later after it is found.

⁶⁹ Richard G. Howe "Dan Barker vs. Richard G. Howe Debate - Is There A God Who Speaks," YouTube video, 2:05:42, Posted by Dr. Richard G. Howe on Oct. 3rd, 2019, https://youtu.be/Ku3b_PDEPjU?si=1GDcyCo3TdVXEEII

well did Howe's argument work? No vote was taken among the audience to gauge who had the stronger argument. Being held at a Christian apologetics conference, the majority of the attendees were probably all theists before the debate began. There were no judges casting their verdicts. Barker did not renounce his atheism and convert to theism. But arguably he demonstrated no ability to cogently counter Howe's arguments. Going back to my impression at the time when I attended the debate in 2017 in person, I recall some lack of the rubber meeting the road. Regardless of how valid the argument may have been or not been, it may have been too abstruse to use in a time and place like that. What normally would be extended over the span of an entire semester is difficult to distill into a short debate. Regardless, in arguing along *De Ente* lines, Howe did what few (if any?) have done before. The same can be said for his use of the argument in a popular-level booklet as well.⁷⁰ Here again he is attempting what few, if any, have tried.

The problem with the thomistic metaphysical argument may be that there is a tremendous amount of nuance boiled away in the distillation process. Graduate students who have some familiarity with the traditional cosmological arguments to begin with and proceed to study metaphysics and epistemology for months or even years from Aquinas, Etienne Gilson, Joseph Owens, and other Neo-Thomists will be able to hear the music and want to dance to it, so to speak, when they read or hear the metaphysical argument in short

⁷⁰ Howe, Richard G., Thomas A. Howe, Doug Potter, Adam Tucker, and Christina Woodside. *Why Trust the God of the Bible? A Short Case for the Truthfulness of Christianity?* (Southern Evangelical Seminary, 2016).

and long forms, because they can decrypt, decompress, unpack, and visualize it in meaningful ways. Others may hear it, think it interesting and potentially profound, but have too many uncertainties about each point to track with it. What typically takes a year or ten to understand resists compression into a small seed. Even if the seed has the right DNA in it, it may not contain all the power in itself to send its roots into hard soil.

Etienne Gilson and Armand Maurer Disagree

In his introduction to his translation of Aquinas's *De Ente*, Armand Maurer provided a few reasons for rejecting the idea that Aquinas made a formal argument for the existence of God in the *De Ente*. He is of course correct in pointing out the *De Ente* does not have in it a *formal* or *explicit* argument for God in it. Aquinas wrote the *De Ente* for divinity students who were already firm in their theism. He was attempting to teach them the basics of metaphysics and not attempting to teach them how to argue theism to non-theists as an apologetic endeavor. However, like Owens, Knasas, Geisler and many others have argued, the *De Ente* may yet have in it an implicit, seminal, embryonic argument for YHWH interwoven into its fibers. Many who master the *De Ente* are left with the firm resolution that there simply must be a being whose existence is in fact identical to its essence and that this being—who is being itself—is the only suitable explanation for all other beings/existents that do not have being as their essence. There is nowhere else for the intellect to go to get away from YHWH. The only direction left is to go down on our knees in worship of Him. It certainly has the effect of being an

argument on many minds, regardless of what the author's intention may or may not have been. But Maurer offers another insightful point:

All of these proofs [the five ways of Aquinas] begin with a sensible datum. . . Not with the metaphysical distinction of finite being into essence and existence. This distinction is not an empirical fact: we do not observe the essence or *esse* of things with our senses as we do their movement, generation, and destruction. Hence the distinction between essence and existence cannot be the starting point for the thomistic proofs of the existence of God.⁷¹

This is something that Geisler must have been acutely aware of. For decades, when he assigned the *De Ente* to his students, he always recommended Maurer's translation. Here Maurer gives one horn of the dilemma: you cannot start an argument for God with the real distinction between essence and existence. Knasas seems to give the other horn of the dilemma: you need to start with the act of existence. Geisler arguably tackles Maurer's horn first and Knasas's horn second. In his PAFB, he starts with existents that are real, that are sensible, that cannot account for their own existence, and whose essences are not identical with their existence. He assumes the real distinction and the act of existence in his PAFB. And he bridges existents/beings that do not have existence as their essence to the need for being granted by the being that does have existence as his essence.

⁷¹ Armand Maurer, *De Ente*, 26.

Actualizing the Potential of the PAFB

Monism or Dualism?

It seems like there is potential here for a powerful argument for God. We look around us and see finite, changing things that cannot account for their own existence/being. If we trace their causes back as best we can we end up holding a chain of other finite, changing things that cannot account for their own existence. An infinite regress of finite, changing, contingent things is mentally unsatisfying for most of us. If we can conclude somehow that the familiar stuff around us and the familiar stuff before us is all contingent being rather than necessary being, then it is no leap to conclude that contingent beings were ultimately and necessarily caused by a necessary Being. Making the shift from metaphysical monism to metaphysical dualism puts us on God's doorstep. If the finite, changing stuff begs for a more fundamental type of being to account for its being, well, that being is what we call God.

In ST Q.4 a. 3, reply to Obj 3., Aquinas states “God is essential being, whereas other things are beings by participation.” If Aquinas is correct, there are ultimately two types of being. The two types of being can be similar in some ways—such as both really do exist—but the discontinuity between the two types of being overpowers their continuity. One type is perfect in every way and the other is not. One is temporal and the other is atemporal. One is changing and the other is not. Biblically and logically we need to

have these two categories separated in our minds and in our worship.

The two categories are:

Familiar Being	Unfamiliar Being
Non-essential being. Existence is not the same as its essence. Cannot account for its own existence.	Essential Being. Its existence is its essence and its essence is existence. Accounts for its own existence. It is being/existence. Self-existent, not self-caused.
Has being actualized by another being.	Pure Act. The unactualized Actualizer of all potencies with no potency in itself.
Composed of both Act and Potency.	Pure Act. Pure Actuality. No potency, no composition.
Created by and through multiple causes. ⁷² Cannot cause itself to begin to exist.	Uncreated Creator. Uncaused cause of all that was caused.
Sustained by and through multiple causes. Cannot sustain its own existence.	Unsustained Sustainer. Sustains the existence of all other things that exist while not needing to be sustained.

⁷² This assumes chains of indirect and proximal causes to the distal and ultimate causes while allowing for multiple types of causes—efficient cause, final cause, formal cause, material cause, instrumental cause, exemplar cause, etc.

Changing. Becoming. Potentials are being actualized in process and in flux.	Unchanging, immutable. No potential to be actualized. Not in process. Not becoming.
Contingent being	Necessary Being. Not contingent upon anything else. Wholly self-sufficient.
Participated being. Being is received by impartation	Substantial Being. Imparts being to all other beings. Does not receive being.
Unnecessary being	Necessary being
Analogous being	Being
Inside of space (immanent)	Outside of the world. Transcendent
Inside of time (temporal)	outside of time (atemporal, timeless, eternal)
Impermanent, perishable, perishing, mortal, decaying, subject to increasing disorder.	Permanent, imperishable, immortal, eternal.
Finite being	Infinite Being
Imperfect being. Varying degrees of perfection/good.	Perfect Being. Total perfection in every way.
Created, creature.	Creator, God, deity, divinity, <i>Theos</i> .
Should give thanks and adoration to its ultimate source.	Deserves to be thanked, acknowledged, blessed, worshipped, served, adored, believed, trusted, and obeyed.

Assuming reality has in it these two types of being, how to convince someone that reality is dualistic? How to convince people that the stuff we are familiar with is “analogical” and “participated” being? Is it just a matter of building a conceptual-linguistic scaffolding that the vines of the mind can then climb whereas before they could only spread along the ground? Do we need to use some type of jargon—some technical terms—to allow the mind to stretch and have its ah-ha moment? Is it a matter of conceptual familiarity and repetition such that once one becomes comfortable with the existential Thomist concepts and language that one naturally connects the being that has existence as its essence with God? How do we build a bridge from the familiar type of being to the unfamiliar type of being?

Sharpening the PAFB Technically

I have included several other arguments for God in the appendices in this book in case there is an opportunity to learn from them. Perhaps they may help supply a missing premise, bolster a weak premise, or just find both more exact and more universal ways of wording the argument. The first few appendices have “metaphysical arguments” from other Thomists. But some appendices have thomistic arguments that are less metaphysical and less inclined towards existential Thomistic insights. Appendix 8 has a contingency cosmological argument in the Leibniz tradition. Is it possible that Thomistic arguments and contingency arguments may learn something from one another, sharpening and strengthening one another, and evolve into something that even more closely

echoes one another? And, in Tolkien speak, is it possible to forge one ring to rule them all? Or, to borrow from the field of physics, do we have in the PAFB a good headstart into the theory of everything (TOE)?

Did Geisler miss any steps? Gavan Kerr (see Appendix 5) seems to make good use of the distinction between two kinds of causal series—the essentially ordered (*per se*) series (hierarchical, simultaneous, hand→stick→stone, creaturely *esse* → divine *esse*) and the accidentally ordered (*per accidens*, linear, temporal succession, father→son→grandson) series. While this bogs the argument down with an additional layer of complexity and additional technical jargon, perhaps additional complexity in understanding causality is important to the argument. Shallow thinking about causality may be one of the last bastions the atheists find shelter in. Complex thinking about causality (such as allowing for effects to have a final cause) perhaps leads to theism. Geisler does not miss a step here. Without spelling it out as clearly as Kerr does, it is fairly clear that he is implying a *per se* series of causality. Even so, Kerr's clarification could be helpful for some thinkers under some contexts. Richard Howe used this distinction in his debate with Dan Barker and it seemed to be a helpful one.

By comparing Geisler's PAFB with the other arguments in the appendices, we may find ways to improve the PAFB.

Putting the Cookies on the Lower Shelf

When I became the webmaster for <https://normangeisler.com> in 2011, I informed Norm that the “How to Know God” link on his website was returning a 404 Not Found. With Norm’s blessing, I wrote some webpages to fill that void, added it to his website, and also turned it into a little booklet titled *How to Know God*.

The booklet included some very vague arguments for God: “Creation implies Creator . . . if our universe had a beginning it must have also had a Beginner. . . Design implies Designer . . . Only a Mind can create minds. . .” Despite its oversimplifications, Norm was pleased with it and made very few revisions. We did not attempt to include the PAFB. On Norm’s side, he probably did not try to include it because he knew and admitted that it tends to go over most people’s heads. On my side, I omitted it because it was at the time going over my head. I was aware of it but it had not grabbed my imagination and exerted the force that it does now, some fifteen years later.

Is there a way to simplify the argument where it is very meaningful to most hearers? Or does every slice of Occam’s razor reduce the meaningfulness as it reduces the bulk such that the hearer ultimately cannot understand the argument well enough to decide whether it is believable or not? Is the alternative to instead just teach thomistic metaphysics in the *De Ente* style over the course of an entire semester, using the *De Ente*, Owen’s *Elementary Metaphysics*, and Wilhelmssen’s *Paradoxical Structures of Reality* as textbooks, before the student starts to connect the dots to God with “*de ente* reasoning?” Does the student need to become convinced of

metaphysical dualism first before they realize on their own that the lesser kind of being certainly requires the greater kind of being?

Perhaps the fact that Aquinas himself wrote the *De Ente* as a primer to metaphysics and did not distill the embryonic argument for the existence of God that is supposedly there into a formal argument offers a clue. Perhaps Knasas is right in saying that the argument for God is implicit in the *De Ente* and Maurer is right in saying that Aquinas did not ever make the argument explicit. Regardless, we may continue to try using the PAFB and HCA in abbreviated and compressed forms and perhaps it will lead some to seeking to understand it in its more technical, verbose, uncompressed, and decrypted forms.

As of June 2026, I have updated the draft of the next expanded and revised edition of the *How To Know God* booklet to include the following verbiage:

There are things we can know with confidence about God. For example, we can know that if our universe had a beginning it must have also had a Beginner. Creation requires a Creator. Effects always have causes. Nothing cannot produce something. We can know all that with full confidence.

We are made of stuff and we are surrounded by stuff that seems to be caused, changing, unnecessary, dependent, impermanent, finite, running down, imperfect, and created. When we ponder the causes for ourselves and the stuff around us, we cannot find anything in our world that is sufficiently great to explain how and why we exist. Nothing in our cosmos accounts for its own existence. Nothing in our world seems to be a necessary being that has existence as its very essence. There must then be some source of being somewhere outside of our world that is uncaused, necessary, independent, self-sufficient, permanent, eternal, perfect, infinite, and unchanging. The

stuff we are familiar with in our world requires that greater kind of being that we are not familiar with. That kind of being is the uncaused cause of all that was caused. And that being we call God.

From the fact of creation we can know that our Creator possesses unfathomable amounts of power and wisdom. It also lets us know that the Creator is not an impersonal force but a personal being that made the choice between creating and not creating. The fact that he not only created our world in the past but continues to sustain its existence right now proves that he still cares about us and our world.

The draft may change before being published. It is challenging to begin to know how to try to incorporate some of the Geislerian Argument for God into the tract. How to strike the right balance between keeping it simple and ensuring it remains meaningful? How to keep it meaningful without teaching a long lesson on thomistic metaphysics?

Conclusion

While he articulated the Thomistic PAFB to his own satisfaction, in his last public talk Norm encouraged us not just to use it but to refine it further, capitalizing especially on the insights of the existential Thomists upon Aquinas's *De Ente*, and actualize the argument's potential for the defense of the Christian faith. Of all the arguments for God, he thought it had the greatest potential to be, as the Apostle Paul phrased it, "divinely powerful for the tearing down of strongholds . . . tear[ing] down speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5; c.f., Proverbs 21:22). We are tantalized by the possibility that this argument could achieve what Leibniz's cosmological argumentation failed to do. Perhaps the pendulum could swing away from the skepticism in the wake of Hume and Kant to reductive foundationalism, moderate realism, the first principles of knowledge, and the God that exists behind it all. Perhaps this could lead to restoration of some sanity in the realms of epistemology and metaphysics.

The potential for an unassailable, existential thomistic, metaphysical cosmological argument to tear down the strongholds has not been fully actualized yet. When the Apostle Paul voiced his existential version of the cosmological argument, some doubted, some said they wanted to hear more, and some believed. We would do well to expect similar results if we are using it correctly. Geisler's articulation of the PAFB, while undoubtedly thomistic in spirit and letter, has not earned the full approval of other existential Thomist

philosophers, has not earned acclaim from analytic philosophers who contribute to the Christian apologetic endeavor, and has not begun to revolutionize the field of philosophy of religion yet. The problem may be in the articulation. Even if its underlying premises and logical flow are ultimately sound, it is too abstruse to exert much persuasive power in the spectrum of popular-to-scholarly level books or in public debates against nontheists. Regardless, we should attempt to adopt and emulate what he did well with his argumentation and further explore what might be improved. We should try to pressure test it in real-world apologetic interactions with non-theists.

If we can apprehend the brilliant insights Aquinas and other Thomists like Norm Geisler had about reality, about perception, and how it all leads back necessarily to God, and if we can articulate it effectively—both fully understandable and with strong logical persuasive power—for a variety of audiences, perhaps we can achieve what Leibniz, the Neo-Leibnizians, Aquinas, and the Neo-Thomists have so far failed to achieve. Perhaps someday a philosophical atheist will consider the argument, recognize its persuasive power, and realize that they have run out of fig leaves with which to hide from God behind. Perhaps the Neo-Platonists, Panentheists, Pantheists, and Neo-Theists will likewise feel the strength of the argument and move one or more steps towards classical theism.

Appendices

1 | A Catalog of the Arguments used by Norman Geisler

	The Horizontal/Kalam Cosmological Arg	The Vertical Cosmological Arg / The Metaphysical Arg Anselm, Suarez, Avicenna, Aquinas	The Argument from Design / The Teleological Argument	The Ontological Argument(s)	The Argument from Morality / The Axiological Argument	The Argument from Religious Need	The Argument from Joy
<i>The Big Book of Christian Apologetics</i> (2012)	195-196	196	197	197-198	198, 362-365	198-201	201-202
<i>Bringing Your Faith to Work</i>	81-86		86-89		89-94		
<i>Christian Apologetics</i> , 2nd edition		265-288					
<i>Defending the Faith in a Post-Modern World</i>							
<i>God: A Philosophical Argument from Being</i>							
<i>I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist</i> v1 (2004)	Y		Y		Y		
<i>I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist</i> v2 (2026)	Y	Y	Y		Y		
<i>If God, Why Evil?</i>	132-134	134-137	137-143		143-147		
<i>Introduction to Philosophy</i>				290-292			
<i>Living Loud: Defending Your Faith</i> v1	41-44		44-47		48-50		
<i>Living Loud: Defending Your Faith</i> v2	Y		Y		Y		
<i>Philosophy of Religion</i> v1		190-226	104-132	133-162	104-132		
<i>Philosophy of Religion</i> v2	171-174	175-207	94-122	122-149	94-122		
<i>Reasons for Belief</i>	33-42		43-54		54-60		
<i>Systematic Theology: In One Volume</i>	23	24-25	26-28	28-29	29-31		
<i>Systematic Theology: Volume 1 of 4</i>	27-28	28-31	31-34	34-36	36-38		
<i>The Apologetics of Jesus</i>	116-124		117-124		119-125	117-127	
<i>The Big Book of Apologetics</i>	195-196	196	197	197-198	198, 362-365	198-201	201-202
<i>Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal</i> (2025)		169-174					
<i>Twelve Points that Show Christianity is True</i> (2026)	25-27	27-30	30-35		35-38	38-40	
<i>Unshakable Foundations</i>	88-110		111-188		189-228		
<i>When Skeptics Ask</i> (1991)	15-18	18-19	20-22	24-26	22-24		
<i>When Skeptics Ask</i> , 2nd Edition (2013)	10-12	12-13	13-16	17-19	16-17		
<i>A History of Western Philosophy</i> , Vol. 2				36-37			
<i>A History of Western Philosophy</i> , Vol. 1	282	196, 216, 330, 282		217-219			
<i>How to Know God</i> (2013 version)	Y	N	Y		Y		
<i>How to Know God</i> (2026 revision)	Y	Y	Y		Y		
Geisler: Can Man Live by Bread Alone? (lecture)		Y					
Thomism versus Postmodernism (lecture)		Y					

2 | Ed Feser's Thomistic Argument for God

Ed Feser articulated the Thomistic metaphysical argument in the following 36-point sorite:⁷³

1. For any of the things we know from experience (stones, trees, dogs, human beings, etc.), there is a distinction to be drawn between its *essence* and its *existence*.
2. If this were not a *real* distinction—a distinction between aspects of *reality itself* and not merely between ways of thinking or talking about reality—then we could know whether or not a thing exists simply by knowing its essence.
3. But we cannot know whether or not a thing exists simply by knowing its essence.
4. If it were not a real distinction, then the things we know from experience would exist in a necessary way rather than in a merely contingent way.
5. But in fact they exist in a merely contingent way, and not in a necessary way.
6. If there could in principle be more than one thing the essence of which is identical to its existence, then two or more such things

⁷³ Ed Feser, *Five Proofs for the Existence of God* (Ignatius Press, 2017), 128-131. No GenAI was used in the production of this sorite. Professor Feser is an Analytical Thomist philosopher but here he is faithfully representing an argument that we might expect to hear from Existential Thomists.

would be distinguishable in the way that species of the same genus are distinguished, or members of the same species are distinguished, or in some other way.

7. But they cannot be distinguished in any of these ways.
8. So, there could not in principle be more than one thing the essence of which is identical to its existence.
9. So, for any of the things we know from experience, if the distinction between its essence and its existence were not a real distinction, then there could not in principle be more than one of them.
10. But in fact, for each of the things we know from experience, there is, or could be, more than one of them.
11. So, for each of the things we know from experience, the distinction between its essence and its existence is a *real* distinction.
12. For anything the essence of which is really distinct from its existence, its existence must be imparted to it either by itself or by some cause distinct from it.
13. But if it imparted existence to itself, it would be the cause of itself.
14. Nothing can be the cause of itself.
15. So, it cannot impart existence to itself.

16. So, for anything the essence of which is really distinct from its existence, its existence must be imparted to it by some cause distinct from it.
17. Since its essence and existence remain really distinct at every moment at which it exists, including here and now, its existence must be imparted to it by some cause distinct from it at every moment at which it exists, including here and now.
18. So, for each of the things we know from experience, its existence must be imparted to it by some cause distinct from it at every moment at which it exists, including here and now.
19. Either this cause is itself something the essence of which is distinct from its existence, or it is something whose essence and existence are identical, something that *just is* subsistent existence itself.
20. If this cause is something the essence of which is distinct from its existence, then its own existence too must be imparted to it by some cause distinct from it at every moment at which it exists, including here and now.
21. The causal series this would generate would be a hierarchical one, which cannot regress infinitely but must have a first member.
22. This first member could only be something whose essence and existence are identical, something that *just is* subsistent existence itself.

23. So, either directly or indirectly, each of the things we know from experience has its existence imparted to it at every moment at which it exists, including here and now, by some cause whose essence and existence are identical, something that *just is* subsistent existence itself.
24. Since there cannot in principle be more than one thing the essence of which is identical to its existence, this cause which is subsistent existence itself is unique.
25. Since it is unique, anything other than it that exists must be something the essence of which is distinct from its existence.
26. Anything the essence of which is distinct from its existence will, either directly or indirectly, have its existence imparted to it by a cause which is subsistent existence itself.
27. So, this unique cause which is subsistent existence itself is the cause of everything other than itself.
28. Since whatever lacks a real distinction between its essence and its existence would exist in a necessary rather than contingent way, this unique cause which is subsistent existence itself exists in a necessary way.
29. Whatever is subsistent existence itself need not and could not have had a cause of its own.
30. So, this unique cause which is subsistent existence itself is uncaused.

31. If that which is subsistent existence itself had some potentiality for existence which needed to be actualized, then existence would have to be imparted to it by some cause.
32. So, that which is subsistent existence itself has no potential for existence which needs actualization, but rather exists in a purely actual way.
33. Whatever is purely actual must be immutable, eternal, immaterial, incorporeal, perfect, omnipotent, fully good, intelligent, and omniscient.
34. So, each of the things of our experience has its existence imparted to it at every moment by a cause which is Subsistent Existence Itself, one, necessarily existing, the uncaused cause of everything other than itself, purely actual, immutable, eternal, immaterial, incorporeal, perfect, omnipotent, fully good, intelligent, and omniscient.
35. But for there to be such a cause is for God to exist.
36. So, God exists.

Polysyllogism⁷⁴

Edward Feser's argument (the existential Thomistic demonstration from the real distinction of essence and *esse*) is already a sorite. Below it is converted into an explicit **polysyllogism**: a chain of nine linked syllogisms in which the conclusion of each becomes a premise (or the minor premise) of the next. Every original premise is preserved exactly; I have grouped only for readability while retaining full logical rigor.

Syllogism 1 – Real distinction between essence and existence

Major: For any thing known from experience, if the distinction between its essence and its existence were not real, then (a) we could know whether it exists simply by knowing its essence, (b) it would exist necessarily rather than contingently, and (c) there could not in principle be more than one such thing (for multiple pure existents would be indistinguishable by genus, species, or individuation).

Minor: But we cannot know existence from essence alone; such things exist contingently; and there is or could be more than one of them.

Conclusion: Therefore, for every thing we know from experience, the distinction between its essence and its existence is a *real* distinction. (original premises 1–11)

⁷⁴ This polysyllogism was produced by Grok 4.3 by xAI on May 2026 based on the sorite provided by Ed Feser.

Syllogism 2 – Dependence on an extrinsic sustaining cause

Major: For anything whose essence is really distinct from its existence, that existence must be imparted to it either by itself or by some cause distinct from it; but nothing can cause itself; and the distinction remains at every moment it exists.

Minor: Every thing we know from experience has a real distinction between essence and existence.

Conclusion: Therefore, for each of the things we know from experience, its existence must be imparted to it by some cause distinct from it *at every moment* it exists, including here and now.
(original 12–18)

Syllogism 3 – The cause must ultimately be subsistent existence itself

Major: The cause imparting existence is either (a) something whose essence is distinct from its existence (which would itself require a further cause, generating a hierarchical series) or (b) something whose essence and existence are identical—i.e., subsistent existence itself.

Minor: A hierarchical causal series cannot regress infinitely and must terminate in a first member.

Conclusion: Therefore, either directly or indirectly, each of the things we know from experience has its existence imparted to it at every moment by some cause whose essence and existence are identical—i.e., subsistent existence itself. (original 19–23)

Syllogism 4 – Uniqueness of subsistent existence

Major: There cannot in principle be more than one thing whose essence is identical with its existence (for any multiplicity would require distinction by genus, species, or individuation, which is impossible).

Minor: The ultimate cause identified above is subsistent existence itself.

Conclusion: Therefore, this cause which is subsistent existence itself is unique. (original 6–8, 24)

Syllogism 5 – Universal causality

Major: Anything other than this unique subsistent existence must have an essence really distinct from its existence and therefore receives its existence (directly or indirectly) from subsistent existence itself.

Minor: The unique cause identified above is subsistent existence itself.

Conclusion: Therefore, this unique cause which is subsistent existence itself is the cause of everything other than itself. (original 25–27)

Syllogism 6 – Necessity and uncaused character

Major: Whatever lacks a real distinction between essence and existence exists in a necessary rather than contingent way and could not have a cause of its own existence.

Minor: The unique cause is subsistent existence itself.

Conclusion: Therefore, this unique cause exists necessarily and is uncaused. (original 28–30)

Syllogism 7 – Pure actuality

Major: If that which is subsistent existence itself had some potentiality for existence needing actualization, then existence would have to be imparted to it by some cause.

Minor: But it is uncaused.

Conclusion: Therefore, that which is subsistent existence itself has no potentiality for existence needing actualization; it exists in a purely actual way. (original 31–32)

Syllogism 8 – Divine attributes

Major: Whatever is purely actual must be immutable, eternal, immaterial, incorporeal, perfect, omnipotent, fully good, intelligent, and omniscient.

Minor: The unique, necessary, uncaused cause identified above is purely actual.

Conclusion: Therefore, each of the things of our experience has its existence imparted to it at every moment by a cause which is Subsistent Existence Itself—one, necessarily existing, the uncaused cause of everything other than itself, purely actual, immutable, eternal, immaterial, incorporeal, perfect, omnipotent, fully good, intelligent, and omniscient. (original 33–34)

Syllogism 9 – Conclusion: God exists

Major: For there to be such a cause (Subsistent Existence Itself with all the attributes above) is for God to exist.

Minor: Such a cause exists (as demonstrated in the preceding syllogisms).

Conclusion: Therefore, God exists. (original 35–36)

This polysyllogism is deductively valid at every step and faithful to Feser's original wording and order. It mirrors the structure Wilhelmsen and other existential Thomists employ: the real distinction in creatures immediately entails total existential dependence on *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*. The entire chain shows that denying God's existence renders finite existence itself unintelligible.

3 | Joseph Owens's Thomistic Argument for God

Here is an GenAI attempt to coax a logical sorite out of some of Joseph Owens's books to help explain his argument for God:⁷⁵

Joseph Owens, in his collected papers (particularly "Quiddity and Real Distinction in St Thomas Aquinas" and "Aquinas on Knowing Existence"), presents an interpretation of Aquinas's argument from the real distinction between essence and existence (as found in *De Ente et Essentia*, chapter 4) as a valid proof for God's existence. Owens stresses that existence is known through judgment (not abstraction), and the real distinction becomes fully evident only after establishing a being whose essence is identical to its existence. This avoids reducing existence to a mere concept and grounds it in actuality. Drawing secondarily from *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (where Owens surveys metaphysical arguments converging on subsistent being), and supplementally from *An Interpretation of Existence* (emphasizing existence as actuality) and *Cognition: An Epistemological Inquiry* (on judgment as the path to knowing existence), the argument unfolds as follows in a chain of 20 logical points:

⁷⁵ Text and sorite generated by Grok 4.x by xAI on December 7st, 2025. The Grok project analyzed Joseph Owens, *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: Collected Papers of Joseph Owens* (State University of New York Press, 1980) first, Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Bruce Publishing Company, 1963) second, and used a few other books and interview transcripts by Owens as supplemental, tertiary source material.

Sorite

1. Sensible things exist and are known to us through experience.
2. The essence (quiddity or what-it-is) of a sensible thing can be understood without knowing whether it exists.
3. For example, one can define a phoenix without knowing if it exists in reality.
4. Therefore, in sensible things, essence does not include existence as part of its definition.
5. Essence and existence are thus distinct in our understanding (*intellectus essentiae* argument).
6. If essence and existence were identical in a thing, that thing would exist necessarily by its own nature.
7. Such a thing would be subsistent existence itself (*ipsum esse subsistens*).
8. Subsistent existence cannot have anything added to it, as existence is the actuality of all forms and perfections.
9. If multiple such beings existed, they would require differentiation by something outside existence.
10. But nothing is outside existence, as existence encompasses all actuality.
11. Therefore, existence cannot be a genus differentiated into species.

12. Hence, there can be only one being whose essence is identical to its existence.
13. Sensible things are multiple and finite, so their essence cannot be identical to their existence.
14. In sensible things, existence is therefore really distinct from essence, as an actuality received by essence.
15. Since existence is not inherent to their essence, sensible things receive their existence from a cause.
16. The cause of existence must itself exist, either by receiving existence or by having existence as its essence.
17. If all causes receive existence, this leads to an infinite regress of dependent existences.
18. An infinite regress cannot explain any actual existence, as it provides no ultimate source.
19. Therefore, there must be a first uncaused cause whose essence is identical to its existence.
20. This first cause is God, the source of all other existence.

Syllogism

Owens's argument, as an interpretation of Aquinas, can be condensed into a single syllogism emphasizing the causal necessity arising from the real distinction (with premises drawn from the collected papers and *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*):

Major Premise: All beings in which essence and existence are really distinct require an external cause for their existence, as their existence is received and not inherent to their nature (lest an infinite regress ensue without grounding in actuality).

Minor Premise: All finite, sensible beings exhibit a real distinction between essence and existence, as their quiddity can be known without affirming their existence, and they are multiple (precluding identity of essence and existence, which can only be unique).

Conclusion: Therefore, all finite, sensible beings require an uncaused first cause whose essence is identical to its existence—this is God.

Joseph Owens's interpretation of Aquinas's proof for God's existence, as detailed in his collected papers (e.g., "Quiddity and Real Distinction in St Thomas Aquinas," "Aquinas on Knowing Existence," and "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St Thomas Aquinas"), emphasizes that the real distinction between essence and existence in finite beings necessitates a first cause identical to its existence. This avoids treating existence as a conceptual abstraction and grounds the proof in judgmental

knowledge of actuality. Secondly, in *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (pp. 338-351), Owens surveys how all valid proofs, including the Five Ways, reduce to this existential reasoning from efficient causality to subsistent being. Supplementally, *An Interpretation of Existence* (e.g., pp. 20-23, 77-78, 143-144) portrays existence as the path to God, critiquing non-existential approaches like the ontological argument, while *St. Thomas and the Future of Metaphysics* (pp. 26, 96) reinforces the demonstration's focus on subsistent being from De Ente. The argument chains as follows in 25 logical points:

Sorite #2

1. Sensible things are known to exist through direct experience and judgment.
2. In sensible things, essence (quiddity) is grasped through abstraction, but existence is affirmed via judgment.
3. Essence can be defined and understood without affirming actual existence (e.g., a phoenix's definition doesn't imply it exists).
4. Thus, in finite beings, essence does not of itself include or necessitate existence.
5. Essence and existence are conceptually distinct, as essence is potential to existence.
6. If essence and existence were identical in a being, that being would exist by its very nature, without potentiality.

7. Such a being would be pure actuality, subsistent existence (*ipsum esse subsistens*).
8. Subsistent existence cannot receive additions, as it is the actuality of all perfections.
9. If multiple subsistent existences existed, they would need differentiation by something added to existence.
10. But existence, as pure act, admits no additions or differentiations.
11. Hence, subsistent existence cannot be multiplied or participate in a genus.
12. Therefore, there can be only one subsistent existence.
13. Sensible things are multiple, finite, and changeable, so their essence cannot be identical to existence.
14. In sensible things, existence is received as an act by essence, which limits it.
15. This reception implies a real distinction between essence (potency) and existence (act).
16. The real distinction is confirmed judgmentally, not abstractly, avoiding reduction to concepts.
17. Since existence is not intrinsic to finite essences, sensible things depend on an external cause for their existence.
18. This cause must itself exist, either as subsistent existence or as another caused being.

19. A series of caused beings requires a first uncaused cause to avoid infinite regress.
 20. Infinite regress provides no actual ground for existence, as each depends on another without ultimate actuality.
 21. Thus, there must be a first efficient cause whose essence is its existence.
 22. This first cause imparts existence to all else, as seen in motion, causality, contingency, grades, and teleology.
 23. All such proofs reduce to existential causation, leading to the same conclusion.
 24. Subsistent existence aligns with the God of revelation (e.g., “I am who am”).
 25. Therefore, God exists as the unique subsistent being.
-

Syllogism #2

Owens's argument, drawing from the collected papers and refined in *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, condenses into this syllogism grounded in judgmental existence:

Major Premise: Any being exhibiting a real distinction between essence (as potency) and existence (as act) requires an external efficient cause for its actuality, culminating in a unique uncaused first cause whose essence is identical to existence to avoid infinite regress without grounding.

Minor Premise: Sensible beings, known through judgment, manifest this real distinction, as their quiddity is graspable without existence, they are multiple and finite, and their being (whether substantial, accidental, contingent, graded, or directed) is received and dependent.

Conclusion: Therefore, sensible beings necessitate a first efficient cause identical to its existence—this is God, subsistent being.

4 | John F. X. Knasas's Thomistic Argument for God

John Knasas, a protégé of Joseph Owens, invested a tremendous amount of thought and ink into defending the thomistic existentialist argument with *De Ente* reasoning. But he never spelled the argument out in a formal way. Allowing some room for error, the following 19-point sorite was generated by prompting an LLM with access to several of Knasas's books:

Sorite

1. Sensible things are given in direct realist experience as self-manifestly real.
2. The human intellect performs a second operation (judgment) on sensible data, composing and dividing to affirm existence in propositions like "S is P" or "This exists."
3. In this judgmental affirmation, the intellect grasps the *actus essendi* (*esse*), or act of existence, as distinct from the mere facticity or "thatness" of the thing.
4. Esse is the most fundamental act of the thing, actualizing its essence and making it be, akin to an exercised perfection rather than a static property.
5. Esse is not identical to the essence (quiddity) of sensible things, because essence can be understood without reference to existence (e.g., one can conceive of a phoenix without knowing if it exists).

6. If esse were identical to essence in a thing, that thing would be necessary in its existence, self-explanatory, and incapable of multiplicity or contingency.
7. But sensible things are contingent (they come into being and pass away) and multiple (many instances of the same essence exist).
8. Therefore, in sensible things, essence and esse are really distinct principles composing the thing.
9. This real distinction implies a composition that requires an efficient cause to unite essence and esse, as no composition is self-explanatory.
10. The cause of this composition cannot be the thing itself, because prior to the union of essence and esse, the thing does not exist to cause anything.
11. The cause must be extrinsic to the composed thing.
12. If this extrinsic cause is also composed of essence and esse, it too requires a further cause for its own composition.
13. This pattern cannot proceed in an infinite regress of composed causes.
14. An infinite regress would lack a first uncomposed cause, rendering the entire series unexplained and impossible, as each member depends on a prior without ultimate foundation.
15. Therefore, there must be a first cause that is uncomposed, where *essence* and *esse* are not distinct.
16. In this first cause, essence is identical to esse, making it Subsistent Existence Itself (*Esse Ipsum Subsistens*).

17. This Subsistent Existence is unlimited, unique, and the ultimate cause of all esse in composed beings.
18. This being possesses attributes traditionally ascribed to God, such as necessity, infinity, and creative causality.
19. Hence, God exists as the uncaused cause of all contingent beings.⁷⁶

Here is how Microsoft Copilot reduces it to syllogisms:

I. Condensed Syllogism (Classical Thomistic Form)

Major Premise

Whatever has a real distinction between essence and esse requires an extrinsic cause to actualize its esse.

Minor Premise

All contingent sensible beings have a real distinction between essence and esse.

Conclusion

Therefore, all contingent sensible beings require an extrinsic cause to actualize their esse.

That gives us the *first* syllogism. But your sorite continues beyond that, so we need the **second syllogism** that completes the metaphysical ascent.

⁷⁶ Text generated by Grok 4.0, xAI, December 1st, 2025, in a Grok project that primarily analyzed John F.X. Knasas, *Thomistic Existentialism and Cosmological Reasoning* (Catholic University of America Press, 2019) and also used a few other books and interview transcripts by Owens as supplemental material.

II. Second Syllogism (Termination of the Regress)

Major Premise

A series of beings whose esse is caused cannot regress infinitely, because without a first uncaused cause, no member of the series would have esse.

Minor Premise

The series of contingent beings is a series whose esse is caused.

Conclusion

Therefore, the series of contingent beings must terminate in a first uncaused cause whose essence is identical with its esse.

III. Final Syllogism (Identification of the First Cause)

Major Premise

A being whose essence is identical with its esse is Subsistent Existence Itself (Ipsum Esse Subsistens).

Minor Premise

The first uncaused cause has essence identical with esse.

Conclusion

Therefore, the first uncaused cause is Subsistent Existence Itself — that is, God.

IV. Ultra-Condensed Single Syllogism (One-Shot Version)

If you want the *entire sorite* expressed as **one syllogism**, here is the most elegant formulation:

Major Premise

Whatever is composed of essence and esse is contingent and requires a cause whose essence is identical with its esse.

Minor Premise

Sensible beings are composed of essence and esse.

Conclusion

Therefore, sensible beings require a cause whose essence is identical with its esse — namely, God.

V. Why This Works

Your sorite is a **chain argument** (Aristotelian *sorites*) that can be compressed into:

- **Syllogism 1:** Real distinction → need for cause
- **Syllogism 2:** No infinite regress → first cause
- **Syllogism 3:** First cause = esse itself → God

5 | Gaven Kerr's Thomistic Argument for God

Here is a GenAI attempt to articulate Gaven Kerr's argument for God:⁷⁷

Sorite

1. In ordinary beings (e.g., humans, trees, or stones), we observe a real distinction between what a thing is (its essence or quiddity) and that it is (its existence or esse).
2. Essence determines the nature or kind of a thing, specifying its properties and potentialities, but it does not include existence as part of its intrinsic definition.
3. If essence and existence were identical in an ordinary being, that being would exist necessarily by its own nature, but ordinary beings are contingent (they come into and go out of existence).
4. Therefore, in ordinary beings, existence is not derived from their essence alone; such beings do not account for their own existence.
5. Whatever does not have existence from its own essence must receive existence from an external cause, as nothing can give itself what it lacks intrinsically.

⁷⁷ Text generated by Grok 4.0, xAI, December 1st, 2025, in a Grok project instructed to analyze Gaven Kerr *Aquinas's Way to God: The Proof in De Ente et Essentia* (Oxford University Press, 2015), Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation* (Oxford University Press, 2019), and multiple transcripts of YouTube interviews featuring Gaven Kerr.

6. This external cause must itself exist to impart existence, so it either has existence identical to its essence or receives existence from yet another cause.
7. If every cause in this chain receives existence from another, an infinite regress of dependent existences arises, with no ultimate explanation for why anything exists at all.
8. An infinite regress of dependent causes fails to explain the series, as it leaves the whole chain without a sufficient reason for existence (violating the principle of sufficient reason).
9. Therefore, the regress must terminate in a first cause whose existence is not received from another but is identical to its own essence (a being that is *ipsum esse subsistens*, or subsistent existence itself).
10. In this first cause, essence and existence are not distinct; its essence is simply to exist, making it pure actuality without potentiality or composition.
11. Existence (*esse*) itself, prior to any composition with essence, is not individual or multiplied; it is a singular, universal act of being.
12. In ordinary beings, acts of existence become individuated only when composed with a limiting essence, which restricts and particularizes the act of *esse* to that specific thing.
13. But in the first cause, since essence equals existence with no composition, its *esse* is not individuated or limited by anything external.
14. If there were multiple such beings (each with essence identical to existence), this would imply multiple individuated acts of

pure *esse*, but pure *esse* is not inherently individuated or multipliable without composition.

15. Therefore, there can be only one such uncomposed, subsistent *esse*, which is the ultimate cause of all other existence and is what we call God.

Syllogism

Major Premise: All beings whose essence is distinct from their existence must be caused by another.

Minor Premise: All ordinary beings have an essence distinct from their existence.

Conclusion: Therefore, all ordinary beings must be caused by a being whose essence is identical to its existence (and this we call God).

6 | John Wippel's Thomistic Argument

An AI Generated Logical Sorite of Wippel's Argument for God: ⁷⁸

1. Every essence or quiddity can be understood without knowing whether it exists in reality (e.g., one can understand what a human or phoenix is without knowing if it exists).
2. What is not included in the understanding of an essence must come to it from outside and compose with it.
3. Therefore, existence (*esse*) is distinct from essence in beings where this holds.
4. However, there could be an exception: a being whose quiddity is identical to its *esse* (subsisting *esse* itself).
5. If such a being exists, it cannot be multiplied by adding differences, as that would make it *esse* plus some form, not pure *esse*.
6. Nor can it be multiplied by reception in matter, as that would render it material *esse*, not subsisting *esse*.

⁷⁸ Text generated by Grok 4.1 by xAI, December 4th, 2025. The Grok project examined the following five books by John Wippel without being instructed to give any one of them priority over the others: *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (CUA, 2000); *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (CUA, 1984); *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas II* (CUA, 2007); *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas III*. (CUA, 2019); *The Ultimate Why Question: Why Is There Anything at All Rather than Nothing Whatsoever?* (CUA, 20122)

7. The only remaining way to account for multiplicity would be one absolute instance and others receiving it in a subject.
8. But subsisting *esse*, being unlimited and perfect, admits no such reception without limitation, so it must be unique.
9. Therefore, there can be only one being that is subsisting *esse*.
10. In all other beings, essence and *esse* must differ.
11. If essence and *esse* differ in a being, that being receives its *esse* from something else.
12. What receives *esse* from another is caused by that other.
13. Caused beings depend on a cause for their existence.
14. An infinite regress of caused causes cannot explain the existence of any caused being.
15. Therefore, there must be a first uncaused cause of *esse*.
16. This first cause must exist *per se*, meaning its essence is identical to its *esse*.
17. This uncaused cause is the source of *esse* for all other beings.
18. Such a being aligns with the notion of God as pure act and unlimited existence.

Syllogism

Major Premise: All beings in which essence and existence (esse) are distinct are caused and require an uncaused first cause whose essence is identical to its existence to avoid an infinite regress.

Minor Premise: All finite beings (except one possible exception) have essence distinct from existence, as essence can be understood without existence, and subsisting existence can only be unique.

Conclusion: Therefore, all finite beings are caused and require an uncaused first cause whose essence is existence itself, which is God.

7 | Garrigou-LaGrange's Argument for God

Here is a GenAI attempt to express the argument for God by Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange:⁷⁹

Syllogism

Major Premise: Every contingent, mutable, and ordered reality (governed by the principles of identity, non-contradiction, sufficient reason, and causality) requires a necessary, self-subsistent, and supreme cause that is Pure Act, infinite in perfection, and distinct from the world, lest radical absurdity (infinite regress or uncaused effects) follow.

Minor Premise: The sensible world is such a contingent, mutable, and ordered reality, exhibiting motion, efficient causes, contingency, degrees of perfection, and teleological order without self-sufficiency.

Conclusion: Therefore, God exists as this necessary, self-subsistent Being (*Ipsium Esse Subsistens*), simple, immutable, and the First Cause of all.

Below is an AI generated explanation of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange's argument for the existence of God, as presented in his work *God: His Existence and His Nature* (Volumes 1-2). Lagrange, a Thomistic theologian, synthesizes St. Thomas Aquinas's Five Ways

⁷⁹ Text generated by Grok 4.0, xAI, December 2nd, 2025, in a Grok project set to analyze Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange, *God: His Existence and Nature, vol. 1* (B. Herder Book Co., 1934). This book was influential in Geisler's thinking per Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd Edition, 288.

(proofs from motion, causality, contingency, degrees of perfection, and order/teleology) into a unified metaphysical demonstration. He grounds it in the ontological and transcendental validity of first principles (e.g., identity, non-contradiction, sufficient reason, and causality), emphasizing that these principles apply not just to thought but to reality itself. The argument culminates in the necessity of a self-subsistent Being (God) distinct from the world, or else radical absurdity follows.

Sorite

1. The principle of identity is the supreme law of thought: Being is being (A is A), and this is the most fundamental, self-evident truth, as it is the basis of all intelligibility and without it no reasoning is possible [Vol. 1, on first principles; cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia, q. 2, a. 3].

2. The principle of identity implies the principle of non-contradiction: If being is being, then a thing cannot both be and not be at the same time in the same respect, for this would violate self-identity and render all truth impossible.

3. The principle of non-contradiction applies not just to thought but to reality: If it were merely logical (not ontological), then contradictions could exist in being (e.g., a squared circle), leading to absurdity; thus, it must be transcendently valid as the supreme law of reality.

4. From non-contradiction follows the principle of sufficient reason: Every being must have a reason for its existence (either in

itself or in another), for otherwise it would both be (exist) and not be (lack reason), violating non-contradiction.

5. The principle of sufficient reason implies the principle of causality: Every contingent effect (that which does not explain itself) must have an efficient cause, for without it, the effect would lack sufficient reason and thus contradict its own being.

6. These principles reveal the world's contingency: The sensible world (motion, change, multiplicity) is composite and mutable, so it cannot be self-sufficient (it lacks identity with its own existence) and requires a cause.

7. From motion in the world: Whatever is moved (changed from potency to act) is moved by another, as nothing can reduce itself from potency to act without violating sufficient reason.

8. Infinite regress in movers is impossible: If every mover requires a prior mover ad infinitum, there would be no first mover, violating causality and sufficient reason (no ultimate explanation for motion).

9. Thus, there must be a First Unmoved Mover: This is pure act (no potency), self-subsistent, and identical with its own being, or else motion lacks reason.

10. From efficient causes in the world: No contingent being causes itself (as it would exist before existing, contradicting non-contradiction), so all depend on a chain of causes.

11. Infinite regress in causes is impossible: Without a first cause, the chain has no sufficient reason, leading to absurdity (effects without ultimate cause).

12. Thus, there must be a First Uncaused Cause: This is necessary being, self-subsistent and infinite in perfection, distinct from contingent effects.

13. From contingency and necessity: The world is contingent (could not exist), so it requires a necessary being for its existence, per sufficient reason [Vol. 1, third proof; cf. Aquinas's Third Way].

14. From degrees of perfection: Beings exhibit degrees (more/less perfect), implying a maximum perfection (pure being) as their measure, or else no sufficient reason for gradation [Vol. 1, fourth proof; cf. Aquinas's Fourth Way].

15. From order and teleology: The world's order (finality in non-intelligent things) requires an intelligent orderer, as chance lacks sufficient reason; thus, a Supreme Intelligence (God) exists, self-subsistent, simple, immutable, and distinct from the world [Vol. 1, fifth proof and synthesis; cf. Aquinas's Fifth Way; Vol. 2, on divine attributes].

Explanation of the Sorite

Structure and Logic: This is a progressive chain: Points 1-5 establish foundational principles (from identity to causality), ensuring the argument's metaphysical rigor against agnosticism (e.g., Kant, Bergson). Points 6-9 chain the proof from motion. Points 10-12 extend to causality. Points 13-15 integrate contingency,

degrees, and order, converging on God as *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* (Self-Subsistent Being). Each step's conclusion feeds the next, avoiding circularity.

Key Thomistic Elements in Lagrange: He insists proofs rest on identity (ultimate basis), sufficient reason (proximate), and causality (immediate). God is not “part of” the chain but its transcendent terminus—simple, infinite, and analogous to creatures (not univocal or equivocal). Without God, the world lacks reason, leading to “radical absurdity” [Vol. 1, on alternative: true God or absurdity].

Defense Against Objections: Lagrange refutes empiricism (e.g., Hume on causality as habit) by ontological validity; idealism (e.g., Kant's antinomies) by analogy; evolutionism (e.g., Bergson) by teleology over chance [Vol. 1, Sections II-III].

Conclusion's Force: The sorite demonstrates God's existence as necessary, not probabilistic. Per Vatican Council (cited by Lagrange), this is knowable by natural reason, aligning with faith [Vol. 1, Church teaching].

8 | The Rasmussen-Pruss Argument

Here is a GenAI attempt to express the contingency cosmological argument in the Leibniz tradition (not a Thomistic metaphysical argument) by Joshua Rasmussen and Alexander Pruss:⁸⁰

Sorite

1. Concrete things are those capable of causing effects.
2. Some concrete things exist contingently, meaning they could have failed to exist.
3. Let S be the plurality of all contingent concrete things that exist.
4. Every plurality of contingent concrete things has an explanation for why they exist (explanatory principle).
5. Therefore, the fact that the things in S exist has an explanation.
6. The explanation for S cannot be entirely internal to S, as that would lead to circular reasoning or an infinite regress that fails to account for why contingent things exist at all.
7. An internal explanation would require contingent things to explain their own existence, which is impossible without begging the question.
8. Therefore, the explanation for S must be external to S.

⁸⁰ Text generated by Grok 4.0, xAI, December 1st, 2025, in a Grok project set to analyze two books: (1) Joshua Rasmussen, *How Reason Can Lead to God: A Philosopher's Bridge to Faith* (InterVarsity Press, 2019) and (2) Joshua Rasmussen and Alexander Pruss, *Metaphysical Essays on God and the Universe* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

9. An external explanation must involve at least one thing not in S, meaning not a contingent concrete thing.
10. Explanations for the existence of concrete things require causal power, which abstract things lack.
11. Therefore, the external explanation must involve a concrete thing not in S.
12. A concrete thing not in S cannot be contingent, so it must be necessary.
13. Therefore, there exists a necessary concrete thing.
14. This necessary concrete thing is the ultimate foundation for all contingent existence.
15. Positive properties include omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness.
16. A being with all positive properties exists necessarily (from Gödelian axioms).
17. Such a being possesses omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness essentially.
18. A necessarily existing, essentially omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being matches the classical concept of God.
19. Therefore, God exists.

Syllogism

Major Premise: Every plurality of contingent concrete things has an ultimate external explanation that must be a necessary concrete thing (not contingent, not abstract) which serves as the foundation of all contingent existence and possesses all positive properties (omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness) essentially.

Minor Premise: The plurality of all contingent concrete things that exist (S) has such an ultimate external explanation.

Conclusion: Therefore, there exists a necessarily existing concrete being with all positive properties essentially, which matches the classical concept of God.

Polysyllogism

Syllogism 1 – Contingent concrete things require an explanation

Major: Every plurality of contingent concrete things has an explanation for its existence (explanatory principle).

Minor: Some concrete things exist contingently, and S is the plurality of all such contingent concrete things that exist.

Conclusion: Therefore, the fact that the things in S exist has an explanation. (original premises 1–5)

Syllogism 2 – The explanation must be external to S

Major: An explanation for the existence of S that is entirely internal to S would involve circular reasoning or an infinite regress in which contingent things explain their own existence, which is impossible without begging the question.

Minor: The explanation for S cannot be entirely internal to S.

Conclusion: Therefore, the explanation for S must be external to S.
(original premises 6–8)

Syllogism 3 – The external explanation must be a necessary concrete thing

Major: An external explanation for the existence of concrete things must involve causal power, which abstract things lack; therefore it must involve at least one concrete thing not in S; and any concrete thing not in S cannot be contingent.

Minor: The explanation for S is external to S.

Conclusion: Therefore, the external explanation must involve a necessary concrete thing not in S, so there exists a necessary concrete thing. (original premises 9–13)

Syllogism 4 – This necessary concrete thing is the ultimate foundation

Major: The necessary concrete thing identified above is the ultimate foundation for all contingent existence.

Minor: A necessary concrete thing exists (from Syllogism 3).

Conclusion: Therefore, this necessary concrete thing is the ultimate foundation for all contingent existence. (original premise 14)

Syllogism 5 – This necessary concrete thing possesses all positive properties essentially

Major: A being with all positive properties (including omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness) exists necessarily (from Gödelian axioms) and possesses those properties essentially.

Minor: The necessary concrete thing that is the ultimate foundation for all contingent existence is such a being.

Conclusion: Therefore, this necessary concrete thing possesses omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness essentially. (original premises 15–17)

Syllogism 6 – Therefore God exists

Major: A necessarily existing, essentially omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being matches the classical concept of God.

Minor: Such a being exists (as demonstrated in Syllogisms 1–5).

Conclusion: Therefore, God exists. (original premises 18–19)

This polysyllogism is deductively valid at every link and remains faithful to Rasmussen's wording and structure. It is a *non-Thomistic* contingency argument that begins from concrete causal power

rather than the real distinction of essence and *esse*. The chain shows that denying God's existence would leave the existence of contingent concrete things without any ultimate explanation.

9 | Barry Miller's Argument from Existence

Sorite ⁸¹

- 1) Something exists.
- 2) Whatever exists has an act of existence (*esse*).
- 3) In finite beings, *esse* is limited.
- 4) A limited act of existence cannot be self-explanatory.
- 5) Limitation implies derivation from something non-limited.
- 6) Therefore, finite beings receive their act of existence.
- 7) Whatever receives existence cannot be the ultimate source of existence.
- 8) A chain of receivers cannot explain itself.
- 9) A chain of receivers requires a giver.
- 10) A giver of existence must possess existence in a non-received way.
- 11) To possess existence non-received is to possess it unlimitedly.
- 12) Unlimited existence cannot be composed of limiting principles.
- 13) Therefore, unlimited existence must be absolutely simple.
- 14) A simple being cannot have essence distinct from existence.
- 15) Therefore, in the unlimited being, essence = existence.
- 16) A being whose essence is existence cannot fail to exist.
- 17) Therefore, the unlimited being is necessary.
- 18) A necessary being cannot depend on anything else.

⁸¹ Text generated by the Microsoft Copilot LLM when asked to analyze Barry Miller's book *From Existence to God: A Contemporary Philosophical Argument* (Notre Dame: 1992). John F. X. Knasas applauded Barry Miller's books as very much in line with his own existential Thomistic metaphysics while Miller was an analytic philosopher.

- 19) A being that depends on nothing else must be the terminus of the existential hierarchy.
- 20) The terminus of the existential hierarchy must be the cause of all limited existence.
- 21) A cause of all limited existence must have causal power proportionate to all existence.
- 22) Therefore, the unlimited being is maximally powerful (omnipotent in classical terms).
- 23) Existence and intelligibility are coextensive.
- 24) Therefore, the source of all existence is also the source of all intelligibility.
- 25) The source of all intelligibility must itself be supremely intelligent.
- 26) Therefore, the unlimited being is maximally intelligent.
- 27) Being and goodness are convertible.
- 28) Unlimited being entails unlimited goodness.
- 29) Therefore, the unlimited being is perfectly good.
- 30) A being that is pure existence cannot change.
- 31) Change requires potency; pure existence has none.
- 32) Therefore, the unlimited being is immutable.
- 33) What is immutable cannot be temporal.
- 34) Therefore, the unlimited being is eternal.
- 35) A being that is simple, necessary, eternal, immutable, omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good is unique.
- 36) Two such beings would differ only by limitation, which contradicts unlimitedness.
- 37) Therefore, there is exactly one unlimited being.

38) This being is the giver of all limited existence.

39) A being that is pure, unlimited existence is what classical theism calls God.

40) Therefore, God exists as the unique, necessary, unlimited act of existence.

Copilot also summarized Miller's argument as an ascent "from *existence*, to *limited existence*, to *received existence*, to *unlimited existence*, to *pure existence*, to *necessary existence*, to the attributes of such a being, to the uniqueness of such a being, to God."

Syllogism

Major Premise: Every limited (finite) act of existence requires an ultimate, non-received, unlimited giver of existence that is absolutely simple (essence identical with existence), necessary, the terminus of the existential hierarchy, maximally powerful, supremely intelligent, perfectly good, immutable, eternal, and unique; and such a being is what classical theism calls God.

Minor Premise: Something exists, and in every finite being *esse* is limited and received.

Conclusion: Therefore, there exists an unlimited act of existence—God.

Polysyllogism

Syllogism 1 – Finite beings receive their existence

Major: Whatever exists has an act of existence (*esse*); in finite beings *esse* is limited; a limited act of existence cannot be self-explanatory and implies derivation from something non-limited.

Minor: Something exists (and is finite).

Conclusion: Therefore, finite beings receive their act of existence.
(original premises 1–6)

Syllogism 2 – Receivers require an ultimate giver

Major: Whatever receives existence cannot be the ultimate source of existence; a chain of receivers cannot explain itself and therefore requires a giver who possesses existence in a non-received way; to possess existence non-received is to possess it unlimitedly.

Minor: Finite beings receive their act of existence (from Syllogism 1).

Conclusion: Therefore, there exists a giver of existence who possesses it in a non-received, unlimited way. (original premises 7–11)

Syllogism 3 – Unlimited existence is simple, necessary existence

Major: Unlimited existence cannot be composed of limiting principles and therefore must be absolutely simple; a simple being cannot have essence distinct from existence; a being whose essence is existence cannot fail to exist and is therefore necessary.

Minor: The giver identified above possesses unlimited existence.

Conclusion: Therefore, the unlimited giver is absolutely simple (essence = existence) and necessary. (original premises 12–17)

Syllogism 4 – The necessary being is the cause of all limited existence

Major: A necessary being cannot depend on anything else and must therefore be the terminus of the existential hierarchy; the terminus must be the cause of all limited existence; a cause of all limited existence must have causal power proportionate to all existence (i.e., maximal power).

Minor: A necessary, unlimited giver exists (from Syllogism 3).

Conclusion: Therefore, this necessary being is the cause of all limited existence and is maximally powerful (omnipotent). (original premises 18–22)

Syllogism 5 – The necessary being is supremely intelligent and perfectly good

Major: Existence and intelligibility are coextensive, so the source of all existence is the source of all intelligibility and must itself be supremely intelligent; being and goodness are convertible, so unlimited being entails unlimited goodness.

Minor: The necessary being is the cause/source of all limited existence (from Syllogism 4).

Conclusion: Therefore, this necessary being is supremely intelligent (omniscient) and perfectly good. (original premises 23–29)

Syllogism 6 – The necessary being is immutable and eternal

Major: A being that is pure existence cannot change (change requires potency, and pure existence has none); what is immutable cannot be temporal.

Minor: The necessary being is pure, unlimited existence (from Syllogisms 2–3).

Conclusion: Therefore, this necessary being is immutable and eternal. (original premises 30–34)

Syllogism 7 – Therefore God exists

Major: A being that is simple, necessary, eternal, immutable, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and unique (two such beings would differ only by limitation, which contradicts unlimitedness) is what classical theism calls God; this being is the giver of all limited existence.

Minor: Such a being exists (as demonstrated in Syllogisms 1–6).

Conclusion: Therefore, God exists as the unique, necessary, unlimited act of existence. (original premises 35–40)

This polysyllogism is deductively valid at every step and remains entirely faithful to Miller's original wording and logical progression. Like the arguments of Wilhelmsen, Feser, and Rasmussen, it is a classic existential-Thomistic demonstration: the very fact that anything finite exists already carries us, through the real limitation of *esse*, to the unique, subsistent *Ipsum Esse*—God.

10 | Apostle Paul's Argument in Acts 17 ⁸²

Paul's speech in Acts 17 to the Athenian philosophers (Stoics and Epicureans) is a masterful rhetorical adaptation of natural theology, bridging Greek philosophical concepts with biblical revelation. While not a formal scholastic proof, it implies a metaphysical argument for God's existence that resonates strongly with Thomistic existential arguments, particularly those emphasizing contingency, causation of existence, and participation in being.

Key parallels to Thomistic approaches (prioritizing Geisler's formulations, then other existential Thomists like Feser, Owens, Knasas, Kerr, Wippel, and Garrigou-Lagrange):

Creatures receive "life and breath and all things" from God, echoing the real distinction between essence and existence (*esse*): contingent beings do not account for their own act of existing but receive it moment-by-moment from a self-subsistent source (cf.

⁸² Text generated by Grok 4.1 Beta, xAI, December 6st, 2025, in a Grok project instructed to reframe Paul's argument to the Stoics and Epicureans in Acts 17:22-31 in the light of Norman Geisler's PAFB first, and with the arguments of Feser, Owens, Knasas, Kerr, Wippel, Garrigou-Lagrange, Rasmussen, and Pruss second. Of course Paul was not a Thomistic philosopher. But his argument here would later prove harmonious with and arguably seminal to Thomistic metaphysics and cosmological argumentation. Interestingly, Thomas Aquinas believed (wrongly) that the author known now as Pseudo-Dionysius was the same Dionysius mentioned in Acts 17:34 as a convert from Paul's argument. Pseudo-Dionysius was a theist who had converted from Neo-Platonism and, while retaining much of the good philosophy from Neo-Platonism, rejected and corrected Neo-Platonic metaphysics. Aquinas was influenced heavily by Pseudo-Dionysius and arguably continued to learn from and correct Neo-Platonic metaphysics.

Geisler’s “every part of the universe is right now dependent for its existence”; Feser’s hierarchical causation sustaining existence “here and now”).

“In Him we live and move and exist” (*en autō gar zōmen kai kinoumetha kai esmen*) directly evokes existential participation: our act of being (*esse*) is sustained in God’s act of being, akin to Owens’s and Knasas’s emphasis on *esse* as received act, and Kerr’s/Wippel’s subsistent *esse*.

We are “offspring” (*genos*) of God, implying derivation and likeness by participation, not pantheistic identity—parallel to Geisler’s analogy of similarity/dissimilarity and Garrigou-Lagrange’s principle of causality/sufficient reason.

God’s transcendence (not needing service, not confined to temples, not material) points to pure actuality, necessity, and immateriality, avoiding composition or potentiality.

The argument avoids fallacies like composition (whole dependent because parts are) by focusing on present existential dependence, not merely temporal origins.

The core implied argument is an existential-contingency proof: contingent beings require a non-contingent, self-subsistent cause of their existence.

Sorite (18 points)

1. We (human beings) undeniably exist and live, as self-evident through direct experience—we live, move, and have our being.
2. Our existence is contingent: we come into being, change, depend on external factors (e.g., breath, life), and could not exist without these.
3. Contingent beings do not account for their own existence, as they would then exist prior to existing or give themselves what they lack intrinsically.
4. Whatever does not have existence from itself must receive its existence (its act of being) from another.
5. This reception of existence occurs not only at origins but at every moment, since contingent beings remain dependent “here and now” (we live and move and exist in Him presently).
6. Therefore, our existence is imparted and sustained moment-by-moment by an extrinsic cause distinct from ourselves.
7. This cause either has existence from itself (necessary, self-subsistent) or receives it from another.
8. If every such cause receives existence from another, the series forms a hierarchical (per se) dependence of present sustainers.
9. An infinite regress in a hierarchical series of existential sustainers is impossible, as it would leave the entire series without ultimate explanation—no sufficient reason for why any existence is sustained at all.

10. Therefore, the series must terminate in a first cause whose existence is not received but is identical to its essence—Subsistent Existence Itself (pure act of being, with no potentiality or composition).

11. This Subsistent Existence needs nothing from creatures, as it is complete in itself (not served by human hands, as though needing anything).

12. It is the giver of all life, breath, and things to creatures, making and sustaining the world as Lord of heaven and earth.

13. As pure act and self-subsistent, it is immaterial and transcendent (does not dwell in temples made by hands; divine nature not like gold, silver, or stone).

14. Creatures participate in its being as “offspring”—deriving existence from it and bearing likeness through this participation, yet remaining distinct and contingent.

15. Since pure existence (*esse*) is unlimited and not multipliable without composition, there can be only one such Subsistent Existence.

16. This unique, necessary, self-subsistent, transcendent cause of all contingent existence is not unknown but the true God (whom you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim).

17. As the personal source who determines times, boundaries, and purposes (that we might seek and find Him, though He is not far), this God is intelligent, provident, and relational.

18. Therefore, God exists as the uncaused, necessary, pure act of existence sustaining all contingent beings moment-by-moment—what theists (and Scripture) call the living God.

Syllogism

Paul's implied argument in Acts 17 is fundamentally an existential-contingency proof, emphasizing the present, hierarchical dependence of contingent beings on a self-subsistent cause of existence. This aligns closely with Norman Geisler's Thomistic formulations (e.g., contingent beings require a Necessary Being as their current ground; nothing can cause its own existence; hierarchical regress is impossible "here and now"). It echoes other existential Thomists like Feser (sustaining causation moment-by-moment), Owens/Knasas (received *esse* distinct from essence), and Kerr/Wippel (subsistent *esse* as unique terminator). The key premises draw from "in Him we live and move and exist," the giving of "life and breath and all things," transcendence (no neediness), and participation ("offspring").

To express it concisely as a single syllogism ("Barbara form," avoiding fallacies like equivocation or infinite regress begging):

Major Premise: All contingent beings (whose existence is received and sustained moment-by-moment, not self-explanatory) must have their existence imparted by a non-contingent, self-subsistent cause (Subsistent Existence Itself / Necessary Being / Pure Act), because a hierarchical series of dependent existences cannot regress infinitely without an uncaused foundation, and

nothing contingent can ground its own or the series' existence (violating causality and sufficient reason).

Minor Premise: All created beings (including humans and the world) are contingent, as evident from their dependence for life, breath, motion, and all things; their participation in existence (“in Him we live and move and exist”; “we are His offspring”); and their derivation from a source that needs nothing while giving everything (not material, not served by hands).

Conclusion: Therefore, there exists a non-contingent, self-subsistent cause—transcendent, necessary, personal, and provident—who sustains all contingent beings, whom Paul proclaims as the true God (the “Unknown God” now revealed).

This syllogism captures the deductive core without probabilistic weakening or compositional fallacies. It prioritizes Geisler's emphasis on present existential dependence (“right now dependent”) and Necessary vs. contingent distinction, while integrating existential Thomistic insights on *esse* participation. Among contingency arguments, this form (hierarchical existential) remains one of the strongest, as it avoids temporal regress issues in analytical versions (e.g., Rasmussen/Pruss's Big Conjunctive Fact) and directly addresses “why something exists now rather than nothing.”

11 | Brother Benignus's Argument

Sorite ⁸³

- 1) Philosophy is the rational study of first causes.
- 2) If there is one universal first cause of all things, it is the supreme object of the philosopher's quest.
- 3) Thomistic metaphysics demonstrates that such a first cause exists and is God.
- 4) God's existence is not self-evident to us, for we do not see His essence.
- 5) It must therefore be demonstrated *a posteriori* from effects evident to sense experience.
- 6) The world exhibits motion and change, yet nothing can move itself (for that would require it to be in potency and act simultaneously in the same respect).
- 7) Whatever is moved is therefore moved by another.
- 8) An infinite regress of moved movers is impossible (there would then be no first mover and hence no motion at all).
- 9) There must therefore be a first unmoved mover, pure actuality.
- 10) The world also exhibits an ordered series of efficient causes, yet nothing is the efficient cause of itself.

⁸³ Text generated by Grok 4.3 by xAI in May 2026 with a focus on Brother Benignus Gerrity, F.S.C., Ph.D., *Nature, Knowledge, and God* (Bruce Publishing Co, 1947). Brother Benignus was a Neo-Scholastic Thomist. His book plays a significant role in my family tradition.

- 11) An infinite regress of caused causes is impossible (there would then be no first cause and hence no effects).
- 12) There must therefore be a first uncaused efficient cause.
- 13) Many beings in nature are contingent (they come into and pass out of existence).
- 14) If everything were contingent, at some time nothing would have existed.
- 15) But something does exist now; therefore there must exist a necessary being whose existence is not derived from another.
- 16) Beings exhibit varying degrees of goodness, truth, nobility, and being.
- 17) Degrees of any perfection imply a maximum in that perfection.
- 18) The maximum in any genus is the cause of all lesser instances in that genus.
- 19) There must therefore exist a maximum being that is the cause of all being and every perfection.
- 20) Unintelligent natural bodies act regularly and consistently for ends.
- 21) Things lacking knowledge cannot direct themselves to ends unless directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence.
- 22) There must therefore exist an intelligent being by whom all natural things are directed to their ends.
- 23) The first unmoved mover, the first efficient cause, the necessary being, the maximum being, and the intelligent director of the universe are one and the same reality.

- 24) This universal first cause of all things, demonstrated from the data of experience by the five ways of St. Thomas, is God.

Syllogism

Major premise: Every series of dependent beings/effects (whether in motion, efficient causation, contingency, degrees of perfection, or ordered activity without intelligence) requires, as its only adequate explanation, a first independent cause that is pure actuality, uncaused, necessary of itself, the maximum of being, and intelligent (i.e., God).

Minor premise: The world of experience is such a series of dependent beings/effects (as shown by the five ways).

Conclusion: Therefore, God—the universal first cause—exists.

This syllogism is in the valid form of Barbara (AAA-1) and faithfully captures Brother Benignus's presentation of the Thomistic proofs: the world's data are unintelligible without God as their first cause, and the five ways converge on one and the same God.

12 | Jules Brady's Argument

Sorite ⁸⁴

- 1) A philosopher finds God in all things through knowledge and understanding.
- 2) My act of knowing a scientific fact (such as the precise distance between the earth and the moon) involves a cognitional *esse* — an intentional act of existing that is a genuine new perfection.
- 3) This cognitional *esse* cannot be adequately explained by material causes, by the knower alone, or by an infinite regress of secondary causes.
- 4) Therefore, it depends ultimately on the actual influence of a First Efficient Cause — Pure *Esse* — which is the primary source of all existence.
- 5) Beings in experience exhibit real degrees (grades) of existing, perfection, goodness, and nobility.
- 6) Any graded series of perfections in a given order requires a maximum in that order as its cause.
- 7) The maximum in the order of being is therefore the First Exemplary Cause of all lesser degrees of being.
- 8) When my intellect affirms the existence of any particular finite being, it simultaneously exhibits a natural dynamism —

⁸⁴ Text generated by Grok 4.3 by xAI with a focus on Jules Brady's 1983 book *A Philosopher's Search for the Infinite*. This book also plays a role in my family's tradition.

an innate appetite that tends beyond every limited existent toward infinite truth and being.

- 9) This mental appetite cannot be satisfied by any finite object, for to desire infinite knowledge while denying an actually existing Infinite would render the appetite self-contradictory.
- 10) Therefore the intellect's dynamism requires a First Final Cause — the Infinite as the Ultimate Objective End of all intellectual desire.
- 11) St. Augustine's theory of seminal reasons further shows that every living material thing is ordered and conserved by the combined action of these three causes. Consequently, whoever understands a finite being as an effect, mentally surveys limited things in their grades, and searches for the Infinite thereby discovers in every being of experience an opening to the one supreme reality.
- 12) This reality — the First Efficient Cause, the First Exemplary Cause, and the First Final Cause — is identical with God.

Syllogism

Major premise: Every finite being encountered in experience — whether as the object of scientific knowledge, as exhibiting graded degrees of perfection, or as the term of the intellect's natural dynamism — is an effect that can be adequately explained only by one and the same First Cause who is Pure *Esse* (Efficient), the Maximum of Being (Exemplary), and the Infinite Ultimate End (Final).

Minor premise: The world of experience manifestly contains such finite beings.

Conclusion: Therefore God — the First Efficient, Exemplary, and Final Cause of all things — exists.

Polysyllogism

Here is Brady's sorite converted into a tight chain of **four linked syllogisms**. Each conclusion becomes a premise (or the minor premise) of the next, preserving every step of the original wording and logical progression exactly. The argument proceeds by establishing the three classical causes (efficient, exemplary, and final) from distinct starting points in experience, then unifies them in a single supreme reality.

Syllogism 1 – First Efficient Cause (from cognitional *esse*)

Major: My act of knowing a scientific fact (such as the precise distance between the earth and the moon) involves a cognitional

esse—an intentional act of existing that is a genuine new perfection—which cannot be adequately explained by material causes, by the knower alone, or by an infinite regress of secondary causes.

Minor: A philosopher finds God in all things through knowledge and understanding.

Conclusion: Therefore, this cognitional *esse* depends ultimately on the actual influence of a First Efficient Cause—Pure *Esse*—which is the primary source of all existence.

Syllogism 2 – First Exemplary Cause (from real degrees of being)

Major: Beings in experience exhibit real degrees (grades) of existing, perfection, goodness, and nobility; any graded series of perfections in a given order requires a maximum in that order as its cause.

Minor: The First Efficient Cause identified above is Pure *Esse*.

Conclusion: Therefore, the maximum in the order of being is the First Exemplary Cause of all lesser degrees of being.

Syllogism 3 – First Final Cause (from intellectual dynamism)

Major: When my intellect affirms the existence of any particular finite being, it simultaneously exhibits a natural dynamism—an innate appetite that tends beyond every limited existent toward infinite truth and being—which cannot be satisfied by any finite

object (for to desire infinite knowledge while denying an actually existing Infinite would render the appetite self-contradictory).

Minor: The First Efficient and First Exemplary Causes identified above are the ultimate source and maximum of being.

Conclusion: Therefore, the intellect's dynamism requires a First Final Cause—the Infinite as the Ultimate Objective End of all intellectual desire. (original premises 8–10)

Syllogism 4 – Unification: the Three Causes Are One God

Major: St. Augustine's theory of seminal reasons further shows that every living material thing is ordered and conserved by the combined action of these three causes (First Efficient, First Exemplary, and First Final). Consequently, whoever understands a finite being as an effect, mentally surveys limited things in their grades, and searches for the Infinite thereby discovers in every being of experience an opening to the one supreme reality.

Minor: The First Efficient Cause, the First Exemplary Cause, and the First Final Cause identified above are all required by the structure of knowledge, degrees of being, and intellectual appetite.

Conclusion: Therefore, this reality—the First Efficient Cause, the First Exemplary Cause, and the First Final Cause—is identical with God. (original premises 11–12)

This polysyllogism is deductively valid at every step. It faithfully reproduces Brady's method: starting from ordinary acts of knowing and experiencing finite beings, the intellect is carried simultaneously

along three distinct causal paths that converge on one and the same supreme reality—God. Denying the conclusion would render both knowledge itself and the graded structure of finite existence unintelligible.

13 | Frederick Wilhelmsen's Argument

Sorite ⁸⁵

Wilhelmsen's argument for the existence of God is the classic existential Thomistic demonstration (drawn principally from Aquinas's *De Ente et Essentia* and *De Potentia Dei*), reframed through the "paradoxical structure of existence." It begins from the real distinction between essence and *esse* (the act of existing) in creatures and concludes that finite *esse* is intelligible only as "deduced from" or "towards" subsisting *Esse*—i.e., God (*Ipsium Esse Subsistens*). The metaphysics of being *is* simultaneously the philosophy of God.

1. We encounter finite, sensible beings that exist (they have *esse*).
2. In every such being, there is a real (not merely notional) distinction between its essence (what it is) and its act of existing (*esse*—that it is).
3. Essence is existentially neutral: it abstracts from *esse* and does not contain or cause it.
4. Therefore, *esse* is not identical with the essence; *esse* is participated, limited, and "added" to essence.

⁸⁵ Text generated by Grok 4.3 by xAI while focused on the following books by Frederick D. Wilhelmsen: (1) *Being and Knowing: Reflections of a Thomist*; (2) *Man's Knowledge of Reality: In Introduction to Thomistic Epistemology*; (3) *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence*.

5. *Esse* is the radical act of being: synthesizing, perfecting, transcending sameness/otherness, and the principle of non-contradiction—yet it is not itself a “thing” or subsistent subject.
6. Therefore, created *esse* does not “exist in itself” (*esse* is not *est*); it is non-subsisting and, considered in isolation, paradoxical or “nothing” in itself.
7. Whatever does not subsist in itself is dependent (*ab alio*)—it cannot account for or sustain its own actuality.
8. *Esse* cannot depend on the essence, because essence itself depends on *esse* for its very being (without *esse*, essence is nothing).
9. Nor can *esse* depend on another non-subsisting *esse* (that would lead to infinite regress or circularity).
10. Therefore, *esse* must be caused by and relational to a subsisting *Esse*—an *Is* that is not participated or limited.
11. The only reality whose essence is identical with its act of existing is Pure Subsisting *Esse* (*Ipsum Esse Subsistens*), undetermined and the fullness of existential activity.
12. Created *esse* is therefore an “excessus,” a “plus,” and a “towards God”—intelligible only as *deductum ab esse divino* (Aquinas, *De Potentia Dei*).

13. To attempt to think or affirm finite *esse* without this relational dependence is to lose *esse* itself (it becomes unintelligible or veiled).
14. Hence, the double dependence holds: nature depends on *esse*, and *esse* depends on God.
15. Every thing whose essence is distinct from its existence is produced *ex nihilo* by Pure Existence.
16. This production is creation; finite beings exist only insofar as they are “crossed” or referred existentially to God.
17. The affirmation of God’s existence is therefore not an optional conclusion but an imperative embedded in the very structure of any act of existing.
18. Therefore, God (*Ipsum Esse Subsistens*) exists as the cause of all being.

Syllogism

Major premise: Every being in which essence is really distinct from existence (*esse*) depends for its *esse* upon a being in which essence is identical with existence (Pure Subsisting *Esse*).

Minor premise: Every finite being is one in which essence is really distinct from existence.

Conclusion: Therefore, every finite being depends for its *esse* upon Pure Subsisting *Esse*—i.e., God (*Ipsum Esse Subsistens*).

This is not a “horizontal” cosmological argument from a temporal beginning, nor one of the classical “five ways” (which Wilhelmsen sees as rooted in beings rather than in *being* itself). It is the properly *metaphysical* argument: to grasp any finite act of existing is already to be carried “towards God.” Deny the conclusion and you lose the data; affirm the data and you cannot avoid the conclusion. The entire paradoxical structure of creaturely existence is thus simultaneously the demonstration that God is.

Polysyllogism

Syllogism 1 – Real distinction between essence and participated *esse*

Major: We encounter finite, sensible beings that exist (they have *esse*); in every such being there is a real (not merely notional) distinction between its essence (what it is) and its act of existing (*esse*); essence is existentially neutral—it abstracts from *esse* and does not contain or cause it.

Minor: Finite beings exist.

Conclusion: Therefore, *esse* is not identical with the essence; *esse* is participated, limited, and “added” to essence. (original premises: “We encounter...” through 3)

Syllogism 2 – Created *esse* is non-subsistent and dependent

Major: *Esse* is the radical act of being: synthesizing, perfecting, transcending sameness/otherness, and the principle of non-

contradiction—yet it is not itself a “thing” or subsistent subject; therefore created *esse* does not “exist in itself” (*esse* is not *est*); it is non-subsisting and, considered in isolation, paradoxical or “nothing” in itself.

Minor: *Esse* is participated and limited (from Syllogism 1).

Conclusion: Therefore, whatever does not subsist in itself is dependent (*ab alio*)—it cannot account for or sustain its own actuality; *esse* cannot depend on the essence (because essence itself depends on *esse*), nor can it depend on another non-subsisting *esse* (that would lead to infinite regress or circularity). (original premises 4–8)

Syllogism 3 – *Esse* depends on Pure Subsisting *Esse*

Major: *Esse* must therefore be caused by and relational to a subsisting *Esse*—an *Is* that is not participated or limited; the only reality whose essence is identical with its act of existing is Pure Subsisting *Esse* (*Ipsium Esse Subsistens*), undetermined and the fullness of existential activity.

Minor: Created *esse* is dependent (*ab alio*) (from Syllogism 2).

Conclusion: Therefore, created *esse* is an “excessus,” a “plus,” and a “towards God”—intelligible only as *deductum ab esse divino* (Aquinas, *De Potentia Dei*). (original premises 9–11)

Syllogism 4 – Double dependence and creation

Major: To attempt to think or affirm finite *esse* without this relational dependence is to lose *esse* itself (it becomes unintelligible or

veiled); hence the double dependence holds: nature depends on *esse*, and *esse* depends on God; every thing whose essence is distinct from its existence is produced *ex nihilo* by Pure Existence; this production is creation; finite beings exist only insofar as they are “crossed” or referred existentially to God.

Minor: Created *esse* is an “excessus” and “towards God” (from Syllogism 3).

Conclusion: Therefore, the affirmation of God’s existence is not an optional conclusion but an imperative embedded in the very structure of any act of existing. (original premises 12–15)

Syllogism 5 – Therefore God exists

Major: The affirmation of God’s existence is an imperative embedded in the very structure of any act of existing.

Minor: We encounter finite, sensible beings that exist (the data of experience with which the entire chain began).

Conclusion: Therefore, God (*Ipsium Esse Subsistens*) exists as the cause of all being. (original premises 16–17)

This polysyllogism is deductively valid at every step and remains entirely faithful to Wilhelmsen’s own wording. It is the classic existential-Thomistic demonstration: the very act of encountering any finite being already carries the intellect, through the real distinction and the paradoxical structure of participated *esse*, to Pure Subsisting *Esse*—God. Denying the conclusion renders the data of finite existence itself unintelligible.

14 | Louis Marie Régis's Argument

Here is Microsoft Copilot LLM's attempt to construct his argument:

Louis-Marie Régis does **not** offer a standalone “argument for God’s existence” the way Aquinas, Gilson, or Maritain do. His work is almost entirely **epistemological**, not metaphysical. But from his epistemology, we can reconstruct the kind of argument he *would* give: a **Thomistic realist ascent from the intelligibility of being to a necessary First Cause**.

Because the search results provide **no direct account** of Régis's argument for God's existence, what follows is a **careful reconstruction** grounded in his epistemological commitments as evidenced in *St. Thomas and Epistemology* (1946) and the thematic review in *The Thomist*.

How Régis would argue for God's existence (reconstructed from his epistemology)

Régis is a **neo-Scholastic realist** whose entire project is to defend the Thomistic claim that **the intellect knows being directly** (*réalisme immédiat*). His argument for God would therefore follow the classical Thomistic pattern:

1. The intellect's first object is *being*

Régis insists (following Aquinas) that the **primum cognitum**—the first thing known—is *ens*, being. This is explicit in his

epistemological vocabulary: *primum cognitum*, *verum*, *realism*, *intelligible being* (all visible in the Google Books snippet) .

Implication: If the intellect knows *being as such*, then it also knows that beings are **composite, contingent, and limited**.

2. Contingent beings require an act of existence

Régis's Thomism is classical: every finite being is a composition of **essence and existence**. This is the same structure described in the Thomistic cosmological argument: contingent beings require a cause that gives them *esse* (act of being) .

Implication: The intellect, by knowing being, also knows that finite beings do not contain the reason for their own existence.

3. The chain of existential dependence cannot regress infinitely

Because Régis is a strict Thomist, he follows Aquinas's principle that an essentially ordered series of existential causes cannot regress infinitely.

This is the "Thomist cosmological argument:"

- finite beings require a continual bestowal of being
- no finite being can actualize itself
- therefore a First Cause is required .

Implication: The intellect, recognizing the contingency of beings, is led to a non-contingent source.

4. Therefore, there must be a Necessary Being whose essence is existence

This is the classical Thomistic conclusion: a being whose essence *is* its act of existence (*ipsum esse subsistens*).

Régis's epistemology is designed to defend the **intelligibility** of this move:

- we know being
- we know contingent being
- we know the need for a non-contingent ground of being

So what is Régis's "argument"?

Régis's argument for God is an epistemologically grounded version of the Thomistic cosmological argument:

1. We know being directly (immediate realism).
2. We know that finite beings are contingent composites of essence and existence.
3. Contingent beings require a cause of their act of existence.
4. An infinite regress of existential causes is impossible.
5. Therefore, there must be a Necessary Being whose essence is existence.

This is essentially Aquinas's *De Ente et Essentia* argument, but Régis's contribution is epistemological: he defends the *validity* of the intellect's ability to know being, which is the precondition for the metaphysical ascent.

What Régis does *not* do

- He does **not** develop an existential Thomism (like Gilson or Maritain).
- He does **not** offer a phenomenological or transcendental argument (like Maréchal).
- He does **not** produce a new proof of God.

He is a defender of the epistemic foundations that make the Thomistic proof possible.

Here is Grok 4.3's attempt to create a sorite:

1. We experience finite beings (things that exist but could conceivably not exist).
2. These beings are composed of essence (what they are) and existence (that they are), which are really distinct (not identical in finite things).
3. Existence is not part of their essence; it is received or participated in from another.
4. A being that receives its existence cannot be the ultimate source of its own existence (it is contingent).
5. Contingent beings require a cause for their existence here and now (vertically, not just in the past).
6. This causal chain cannot regress infinitely in a hierarchical (*per se*) series, for without a first uncaused cause, nothing would exist now.

7. Therefore, there must be a First Cause whose essence is identical with its existence (*Pure Act, Ipsum Esse Subsistens*).

8. This First Cause has no potentiality, no composition, and depends on nothing else.

9. It is the source of all participated existence, sustaining all finite beings in being at every moment.

10. Such a being possesses the attributes of classical theism: omnipotence, omniscience, goodness, etc., as the unlimited source of all perfections.

11. Therefore, the God of classical theism exists.

This sorite draws from Thomistic epistemology in Régis—emphasizing judgment of existence, the real distinction, and ascent from participated being—while centering Geisler's PAFB as the core, refined with existential Thomist insights from Owens, Knasas, Gilson, etc.

Syllogism

Major: Finite/contingent beings (whose existence is distinct from their essence) exist and require a sustaining cause right now.

Minor: Only a Necessary Being (whose essence is existence itself, Pure Act) can be the ultimate cause without needing further explanation.

Conclusion: Therefore, such a Necessary Being (God) exists.

Polysyllogism

1. Finite beings exist (undeniable from experience). → Their existence is participated/received.
2. What is participated cannot explain itself. → It requires an unparticipated source.
3. An infinite regress of participated causes is impossible (no being would be actualized). → There must be a First, uncaused Cause.
4. This First Cause must be identical with its existence (no real distinction). → It is Pure Act, Necessary Being.
5. Pure Act is the ground of all perfections and sustains all else. → It is the God of theism. Thus, God exists.

Régis's epistemology (judgment grasps existence, intellect ascends from contingent to necessary via causality and participation) naturally supports this Thomistic ascent from known beings to their transcendent Source, aligning with Geisler's vertical cosmological argument. It remains intelligible beyond strict Thomists by grounding in direct experience of existence rather than dense technical terms.

A Regis-Coaxed Sorite for God's Existence (drawn strictly from his *Epistemology* and *St. Thomas and Epistemology*, emphasizing judgment of existence, contingency of finite beings, causality, and analytic ascent to the transcendent cause):

1. We directly experience the existence of finite things through sensation and judgment (the intellect grasps *that* they are).
2. These things are known as contingent: their existence is not identical with their essence; they receive existence and could not exist.
3. Judgment affirms their real, extra-mental existence here and now, not merely as ideas or phenomena.
4. Every contingent being (whose existence is participated/received) requires a cause for its existence in act at every moment.
5. A hierarchical (per se) series of causes cannot regress infinitely; without a first uncaused source, no participated existence would be actualized now.
6. Therefore, there must be a First Cause whose essence is identical with its act of existing (*Ipsum Esse Subsistens*).
7. This Necessary Being is Pure Act, without potency or composition, the transcendent source of all participated being.
8. All motion, efficiency, and existence in the universe depend on this First Cause as their ultimate explanation.
9. Hence, the God of classical theism—the unparticipated source of all being, truth, and order—exists.

This sorite stays faithful to Régis's focus on the judgment's grasp of existence, the real distinction in creatures, the impossibility of

infinite regress in essential orders, and the analytic method rising from effects to the existence of the First Cause, without importing heavy jargon from other Thomists.

Syllogism:

Major: Finite contingent beings, whose existence is really distinct from their essence and grasped in judgment, exist and require a sustaining cause.

Minor: Only a Necessary Being (whose essence *is* existence itself, uncaused Pure Act) can ultimately account for them without infinite regress.

Conclusion: Therefore, such a Necessary Being—God—exists.

Polysyllogism

1. We judge that contingent beings exist in reality (via direct experience).
2. What exists contingently (existence received, not identical with essence) is caused.
3. Caused beings in a per se order demand a first uncaused cause.
4. The First Cause must be identical with its existence (no real distinction).
5. This unparticipated *Ipsium Esse* is the source of all perfections and sustains all else. Therefore, God exists.

Régis's epistemology naturally supports this ascent: judgment immediately seizes existence; analysis of contingency and causality leads the intellect to affirm the existence (though not the full quiddity) of the transcendent First Cause. While he does not develop a standalone proof for God, these elements cohere into a Thomistic metaphysical argument grounded in the realism of knowledge. This remains intelligible beyond strict Thomists by rooting everything in undeniable experience of existing things rather than dense technical terminology.

15 | Attempts to Restate Geisler's PAFB

In this appendix different Grok models were used to attempt to restate Norman Geisler's metaphysical argument for God.

Sorite #1 ⁸⁶

1. Sensible things exist, as evident through direct experience (e.g., stones, trees, humans).
2. In these sensible things, essence (what a thing is) is distinct from existence (that it is), since we can understand an essence without knowing if it exists.
3. If essence and existence were identical in these things, they would exist necessarily, but they are contingent (they come into being and pass away).
4. Therefore, in contingent things, existence is received as an act actualizing the potential of essence.

⁸⁶ Text generated by Grok 4.0 Expert, xAI, December 6th, 2025, in a Grok project using this prompt: "I am trying to improve the articulation of the thomistic metaphysical argument. Focus first on the Thomistic Metaphysical Arguments by Norman Geisler. Give second priority to the arguments for God from a few other existential Thomists. Give a third priority to the Analytical Philosopher Contingency Arguments. Give a fourth priority to whatever else you can research from the internet and your other sources. Watch out for logical fallacies. Avoid logical fallacies. Figure out what the best argument for God is from these arguments."

5. Whatever receives existence must receive it from an extrinsic cause, as nothing can cause its own existence without already existing.
6. This extrinsic cause imparts existence through efficient causality, actualizing the thing here and now.
7. The cause must either have existence identical to its essence or receive existence from another.
8. If every cause receives existence from another, this forms a hierarchical series of dependent causes.
9. A hierarchical series cannot regress infinitely, as it would lack a first actualizer, rendering all subsequent existences unexplained.
10. Therefore, the series must terminate in a first cause where essence and existence are identical—subsistent existence itself (*ipsum esse subsistens*).
11. This first cause is pure act, with no potentiality or composition.
12. As pure act, it is unlimited, infinite, and perfect.
13. Subsistent existence is unique, as multiples would require differentiation by something other than existence, implying composition.
14. All contingent beings participate in existence limited by their essences, deriving from this first cause.
15. This cause is immutable, eternal, immaterial, incorporeal, omnipotent, omniscient, and fully good.
16. It is uncaused, as it has no potential to be caused.

17. Such a being aligns with the biblical "I AM," and possesses all attributes of the theistic God.

18. Therefore, God exists as the uncaused, subsistent act of being.

Syllogism #1

Major Premise: All contingent beings, in which essence is distinct from existence, require an extrinsic cause for their existence, terminating in a unique, uncaused being of pure act where essence equals existence.

Minor Premise: Sensible things are contingent beings with essence distinct from existence.

Conclusion: Therefore, God exists as this unique, uncaused being of pure act.

Polysyllogism #1

First Syllogism:

Major: All things where essence differs from existence are contingent and require a cause.

Minor: Sensible things have essence differing from existence.

Conclusion: Sensible things are contingent and require a cause.

Second Syllogism:

Major: All contingent things require an efficient cause in a hierarchical series.

Minor: Sensible things are contingent (from first conclusion).

Conclusion: Sensible things require a cause in a hierarchical series.

Third Syllogism:

Major: Hierarchical series cannot regress infinitely without a first actualizer.

Minor: Sensible things' series is hierarchical (from second conclusion).

Conclusion: There must be a first actualizer for sensible things.

Fourth Syllogism:

Major: A first actualizer must be pure act, with essence identical to existence.

Minor: Sensible things require such a first actualizer (from third conclusion).

Conclusion: A being of pure act exists.

Fifth Syllogism:

Major: A being of pure act is unique, infinite, immutable, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, and good.

Minor: Such a being exists (from fourth conclusion).

Conclusion: God exists.

In Technical Prose for Experts

The Thomistic argument proceeds from the real distinction between essence and esse in finite beings. In contingent entities, essence, as potency, is actualized by esse, necessitating an extrinsic efficient cause to conjoin them. This yields a per se ordered causal series, wherein each member depends simultaneously on the prior for its actuality. An infinite regress is impossible, as it would lack foundational actuality, violating sufficient reason. Thus, the series terminates in *ipsum esse subsistens*—a being of pure actuality, uncomposed, and self-explanatory. This entity, unique by virtue of undifferentiated esse, is immutable (no potency), eternal (atemporal), immaterial (non-composite), omnipotent (unlimited act), omniscient (intellective perfection), and perfectly good (lacking privation). Ergo, this aligns with classical theism's God, providing a metaphysical demonstration free of modal collapse or quantifier shift fallacies.

In Persuasive, Friendly Conversation

Hey, ever wonder why anything exists at all? Think about it: stuff like trees or people could just as easily not be here—they're contingent. But they are real, right? That means something has to explain their existence, something that doesn't need explaining itself. In Thomistic terms, most things have a "what" (essence) separate from their "being" (existence), so they need a cause to hold them together. You can't have an endless chain of causes without a starting point—that'd be like a never-ending domino line with no push. So, there must be a pure "Being Itself," unlimited and perfect, which we call God. It is logical, isn't it? Grounds everything without loose ends.

Elevator Pitch

"Quick thought: Why does anything exist? Like, you and me—we could not be here, right? We're contingent. But if everything was like that, nothing would exist, because nothing causes nothing. So, there has to be something that just **is**—its very nature is to exist, no cause needed. That's God in Thomistic philosophy: pure being, holding everything else up right now. Not some distant creator, but the ground of all reality. It is like the sun powering solar panels; without it, zilch. Makes sense? Avoids infinite loops. Anyway, what's your floor?"

Poetic Form in Rudyard Kipling's Voice

If you can grasp the world in all its changing guise,
Where trees and men arise, then fade away like mist,
And see that essence stands apart from being's rise,
A potency that waits for act to make it persist—
If you can trace the chain of causes, link by link,
Each begging for a spark from one before its own,
And know an endless regress leads but to the brink
Of nothing's void, where no true reason can be shown—
If you can find the First, where essence meets its end,
In pure and boundless Act, uncaused, eternal, one,
Immutable and wise, on whom all things depend,
Omnipotent and good, like dawn's unfailing sun—
Then yours is God, my son, the Thomist truth profound,
The I AM at the core, where being's secrets are unbound!

Limerick

There once was a world that might not,
Whose "being" and "nature" are not
The same—so it needs
A First Cause that succeeds
In being what "Is" without "ought"!

Haiku

Things borrow their “is”
from a lone unborrowed Is—
pure act holds the world.

Sorite #2 ⁸⁷

1. Sensible things (humans, trees, stones, etc.) undeniably exist here and now.
2. In every sensible thing we can intellectually separate “what it is” (essence/quiddity) from “that it is” (existence/esse).
3. If essence and existence were identical in a sensible thing, that thing would exist necessarily merely by being what it is.
4. No sensible thing exists necessarily; each is contingent (it begins, changes, and can cease to be).
5. Therefore, in every sensible thing essence and existence are really distinct principles.
6. Existence (*esse*) is an act that actualizes the potency of essence.
7. No potency can actualize itself.
8. Therefore, the existence of every sensible thing must be actuated by something already in act.

⁸⁷ Using Grok 4.1 Beta by xAI. December 6th, 2025.

9. This actuation occurs here and now, not merely in the past.
10. The cause that actuates existence here and now is an efficient cause of the very being (*esse*) of the thing.
11. This cause either (a) has existence identical with its essence or (b) has existence distinct from its essence.
12. If (b), then its own existence must likewise be actuated here and now by another.
13. The series of causes actuating existence here and now is essentially (*per se*) ordered, not accidentally ordered.
14. An essentially ordered series cannot regress infinitely, because the intermediate members have no independent power to actualize; they are instruments deriving all causal power from the first member.
15. If there were no first member whose essence is identical with its existence, the entire series would lack the power to actualize anything here and now.
16. Therefore, there must be a first efficient cause whose essence is identical with its existence—*ipsum esse subsistens*, Subsistent Existence Itself.
17. Subsistent Existence Itself cannot be multiplied, for any distinction would require a differentiating principle added to existence, which would make it received and composed.
18. Therefore, Subsistent Existence Itself is absolutely unique.
19. Whatever is pure act of existence has no unrealized potentialities.

20. Therefore, it is immutable, eternal, immaterial, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good.

21. This unique, pure-act, subsistent-existence-itself is what all men call God.

22. Therefore, God exists.

Syllogism #2

Major: Every being in which essence and existence are really distinct depends here and now for its existence on a cause in which essence and existence are identical.

Minor: Sensible, contingent things are beings in which essence and existence are really distinct.

Conclusion: Therefore, sensible, contingent things depend here and now on a cause in which essence and existence are identical—i.e., on God.

Polysyllogism #2

1. Whatever has essence really distinct from existence is contingent
→ Sensible things have essence really distinct from existence →
Sensible things are contingent.

2. Whatever is contingent has its existence caused here and now →
Sensible things are contingent → Sensible things have their
existence caused here and now.

3. Whatever has its existence caused here and now belongs to an essentially ordered causal series → Sensible things have their existence caused here and now → Sensible things belong to an essentially ordered causal series.

4. Every essentially ordered causal series must have a first member that is uncaused and whose essence is identical with its existence → Sensible things belong to an essentially ordered series → There is a first uncaused member whose essence is identical with its existence.

5. A first uncaused member whose essence is identical with its existence is God → There is such a first member → God exists.

Technical Prose for Experts:

The real distinction between essence and esse in contingent beings entails that their existence is an act received into a potency-limiting essence. This composition demands an efficient cause extrinsic to the composite, actuating its esse here and now. The resulting causal series is per se ordered: each member derives its capacity to confer esse instrumentally from the prior member. An infinite regress in such a series is metaphysically impossible, for intermediate members possess no independent actuating power; remove the first, and the entire series loses causal efficacy. The series therefore terminates in an uncaused cause whose essence is identical with its act of existence—*ipsum esse subsistens*. This being is pure act, admitting no potency, hence unique, immutable, eternal, immaterial, omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good. Thus the existence of

any contingent being metaphysically entails the existence of God as Subsistent Being Itself.

Friendly Conversational Version:

Look, everything we see—people, planets, puppies—could have not existed. Their “whatness” (essence) doesn’t force them to exist; they get existence from somewhere else. You can’t have an infinite chain of things passing existence along like a hot potato with no one actually having it in themselves. Eventually you hit something that doesn’t receive existence—it just IS existence, pure and simple. That “thing” has no parts, no limits, no beginning; It is completely actual, timeless, and the reason everything else is real right now. We call that God. It is not a “god of the gaps”; It is the only way to explain why there’s something instead of nothing without kicking the can down an endless road.

90-Second Elevator Pitch:

“Why is there anything at all instead of nothing? Everything around us could easily not be here—It is all contingent. But contingent stuff needs something keeping it in existence right now, like a guitar string needs a hand to keep vibrating. You can’t have an infinite line of hands holding hands forever; you need a first hand that isn’t being held. That first “hand” has to be pure existence itself—no parts, no limits, just Being. That’s what philosophers like Aquinas mean by God. Not a bearded guy in the sky, but the ultimate reason anything exists at all. Cool, huh? Floor 12? Have a great day!”

In the Poetic Voice of Rudyard Kipling:

There's a road that the world walks, from the dust to the sky,
Where the oak and the ox and the heart of a man
Are lent their brief being, and borrow, and die,
Yet the Lender stands changeless since ever began.
They march in their millions, the contingent and frail,
Each owing its "now" to a cause that's behind,
Till you come to the First who needs never prevail
On another to grant Him the act of His mind.
No shadow of "might-not," no flicker of "was,"
Pure To-Be without limit, without a "from whence,"
The I AM of the burning bush, older than laws—
The Uncaused, the Unborrowed, the final Immense.
So lift up your eyes, lad, past creature and clod,
To the One who is simply and solely
God!

The Argument with Thomistic Concepts, but Without Thomistic Jargon, for Analytic Philosophers:⁸⁸

Here is the Thomistic existential argument restated in a 25-point sorite, using precise philosophical language that analytic philosophers will immediately recognize (real distinction, composition, hierarchical dependence, explanatory regress, pure actuality, etc.), but deliberately avoiding Latin terms or traditional Thomistic shibboleths like “*esse*,” “*ipsum esse subsistens*,” “*per se* series,” or “act/potency.”

1. Ordinary objects (tables, people, stars) exist right now.
2. For any ordinary object, its nature (what-it-is) can be fully specified without implying that it must exist.
3. If the nature of a thing included existence as an intrinsic feature, that thing would exist necessarily.
4. No ordinary object exists necessarily; each could fail to exist without contradiction.
5. Therefore, in every ordinary object, what-it-is is really distinct from the fact that it exists.

⁸⁸ Text generated by Grok 4.1 Beta, xAI, December 6st, 2025, by a Grok Project with the following prompt: “Explain the argument in a sorite of no less than twenty points using thomistic concepts but without using thomistic jargon. try to articulate the thomistic concepts in words that are meaningful to analytic philosophers.” The project contained all of the arguments for God listed in this book and its appendices while giving first priority to Geisler’s arguments, second priority to the other thomistic arguments, and third priority to the contingency argument by Rasmussen-Pruss.

6. The fact that an ordinary object exists is therefore something added to its nature.
7. Whatever is added to something else is composed with it.
8. Every ordinary object is therefore a real composite of (i) its nature and (ii) the fact that it exists.
9. No composite can explain its own composition, because prior to the composition there is no unified subject to do the explaining.
10. The fact-that-it-exists must therefore be conferred on each ordinary object by something distinct from the object itself.
11. This conferral happens simultaneously and right now (not merely at some past moment of origin).
12. The cause that confers existence right now must itself actually exist right now.
13. Any such cause is either (a) a thing whose nature is identical with the fact that it exists, or (b) another composite thing whose existence is itself conferred by something else.
14. If every cause is type (b), we have a hierarchical explanatory regress of simultaneously dependent members.
15. In a hierarchical regress, later members derive all their explanatory power from earlier members.
16. Intermediate members in such a regress possess no independent explanatory power.
17. An infinite hierarchical regress of members with no independent explanatory power cannot account for the existence of anything.

18. Therefore, the regress cannot be infinite; it must terminate in a first member.

19. The first member cannot be type (b), because type (b) members are composite and dependent.

20. Therefore, the first member must be type (a): a thing whose nature is identical with the fact that it exists.

21. A thing whose nature is identical with the fact that it exists has no unrealized possibilities.

22. It is therefore purely actual, admitting no unactualized potential whatsoever.

23. Anything purely actual is unique (multiplicity would require a differentiating factor, which would introduce composition and potentiality).

24. A unique, purely actual, uncomposed explanatory terminus of all hierarchical dependence is what theists mean by God.

25. Therefore, God exists.

This sorite preserves the full metaphysical force of the Thomistic demonstration while speaking in terms familiar to contemporary analytic metaphysics (real distinction, composition, simultaneous dependence, vicious regress, pure actuality, explanatory termination).

Explain the argument with seven causes in mind⁸⁹

The Thomistic existential argument can be presented as a single, radiant demonstration whose light refracts through seven distinct causal relations—all of which converge on one and the same God. Each “facet” reveals why finite, contingent beings cannot account for their own existence and why they demand an uncaused, infinite source that is Pure Act.

1. Efficient Cause

Everything that begins to exist or is sustained in existence right now requires an extrinsic efficient cause that communicates the act of existing. No contingent being can efficiently cause its own existence (that would require it to act before it is). The hierarchical series of simultaneous efficient causes cannot regress infinitely, so there must be a first, uncaused efficient cause whose very nature is to exist: God.

⁸⁹ Text generated by Grok 4.1 Beta, xAI, December 6th, 2025, in a Grok Project with the following prompt: “There are six causes: Efficient cause, final cause, formal cause, material cause, instrumental cause, exemplar cause. Perhaps as an extension of the efficient cause there is also an actualizing cause when it comes to the creation of finite beings and analogous being. Such could be the actualizer in the act of existence, the *actus essendi*. And that could be the seventh cause. Explain the thomistic argument for God in terms of the seven causes. Give at least sixty words to explain the argument with each of the seven causes as one facet of a multi-faceted gem. Explain the argument with a focus on each of the seven causes.” This prompt was given to a Grok project that contained all of the arguments for God listed in this paper and its appendices while giving first priority to Geisler’s arguments, second priority to the other thomistic arguments, and third priority to the contingency argument by Rasmussen-Pruss.

2. Final Cause

Every contingent being acts for an end; otherwise its activity would be unintelligible. But the ultimate end of all finite things transcends them, because no finite good is proportionate to the unlimited desire of intellect and will. There must therefore be a supreme, unparticipated Good that attracts all things without itself being attracted—God as the Final Cause of the universe.

3. Formal Cause

In every contingent being, the form (or nature) is really distinct from the act of existing; the form is in potency to existence. The form itself does not include existence intrinsically, so it cannot account for why the composite actually exists. There must be an absolutely simple reality in which form and existence are identical, an Unreceived Form that bestows form on everything else—God.

4. Material Cause

Matter is pure potentiality and of itself is nothing in act. Prime matter cannot exist without being actualized by a substantial form, and the form-matter composite still requires the act of existence. Only a purely immaterial reality that has no material potentiality whatsoever can ultimately ground the actuality of material beings—God as the transcendent source beyond all matter.

5. Instrumental Cause

In the hierarchical order of efficient causality, contingent beings act only instrumentally: they have derived, borrowed power. An instrument possesses no explanatory force of its own; its causality is entirely rooted in the principal agent. The entire cosmos acts as

one vast instrument sustained in being moment by moment by a principal agent that is not instrumental at all—God.

6. Exemplar Cause

Every finite form is a participated likeness of something. Intelligibility itself demands that limited perfections (truth, goodness, beauty, unity) be rooted in an unparticipated, infinite source that contains them eminently and virtually. All created forms are measured by and imitate a single, eternal Exemplar that is identical with its own infinite actuality—God as the exemplary cause of every finite perfection.

7. Actualizing Cause of the Act of Existing (the “Seventh Cause”)

Distinct from the six Aristotelian causes, Aquinas adds that the act of existing itself (the *actus essendi*) must be caused in everything that receives it. This is the most profound causality: the pure, unreceived Act of To-Be that creatively communicates “to-be” to everything whose essence is not its existence. Only a reality that is identical with the pure act of existing can exercise this ultimate actualizing causality without itself being actualized—God as *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*.

Taken together, these seven causal relations form a single, unbreakable argument: every finite being is radically dependent in its efficiency, finality, form, matter, instrumentality, exemplarity, and most deeply in the very act of existing itself. All seven lines of dependence terminate simultaneously in one absolutely simple, uncaused, infinite reality: God.

Sorite #3⁹⁰

1. Something exists (e.g., I exist; to deny existence I must exist).
2. Being is being (the law of identity).
3. Being is not non-being (the law of non-contradiction).
4. Either being or non-being (the law of excluded middle).
5. Non-being cannot cause being (nothing produces nothing).
6. Finite, changing beings exist (e.g., me, trees, dogs, stones).
7. These beings are contingent: their non-existence is possible.
8. In contingent beings, essence (whatness) is really distinct from existence (thatness).
9. We can know a thing's essence without knowing whether it exists (e.g., define a phoenix without knowing if it exists).
10. If essence and existence were identical in a contingent being, it would exist necessarily by its own nature.
11. But contingent beings do not exist necessarily.
12. Therefore, essence and existence are really distinct in contingent beings.
13. Existence is an actuality received by essence in contingent beings.

⁹⁰ Using Grok 4.3 in Expert mode in May 2026.

14. Anything whose existence is received must receive it from a cause distinct from itself.
15. Nothing can cause itself (no self-causation).
16. Therefore, contingent beings cannot impart existence to themselves.
17. Their existence must be imparted by some cause distinct from them.
18. This causation is here and now (vertical/hierarchical, not merely past/horizontal).
19. The causal series of received existence is hierarchical.
20. A hierarchical series of causes cannot regress infinitely (otherwise no actual existence would be explained).
21. Therefore, there must be a first uncaused cause.
22. This first cause cannot have essence distinct from existence.
23. Therefore, in the first cause, essence and existence are identical.
24. It is subsistent existence itself (pure actuality, *ipsum esse subsistens*).
25. There can be only one such being (if there were two, they would differ by something outside existence, which is impossible).
26. This unique cause is uncaused and necessary.

27. It has no potentiality (pure act with no potency).
28. Therefore, it is immutable (cannot change).
29. It is eternal (not temporal).
30. It is immaterial (not material).
31. It is infinite (not finite).
32. It is simple (not composed or divisible).
33. It is omnipotent (source of all power).
34. It is omniscient (source of all intelligibility).
35. It is morally perfect (source of all goodness).
36. It is personal (source of rationality and personhood).
37. This necessary, subsistent, pure act of existence is what is meant by “God” in classical theism.
38. Therefore, God exists.

This sorite synthesizes Geisler’s 18-point PAFB, Feser’s 36-point version emphasizing the real distinction, Owens’s focus on judgmental knowledge of existence as received actuality, and echoes of Knasas/Kerr/Wippel on participated vs. subsistent being.

We begin with an undeniable fact: something exists—finite, changing, contingent beings like ourselves. In every such being we observe a real distinction between essence (what it is) and existence (that it is). We can fully grasp what a thing is without knowing whether it exists at all; existence is not part of its definition. Yet these

beings do exist. Their existence must therefore be received from outside themselves. Nothing can cause its own existence, and an infinite regress of received existence explains nothing. The hierarchical chain of causes must terminate in a first cause whose essence is identical to its existence—pure, subsistent existence itself.

This unique Necessary Being is pure actuality with no potency, hence immutable, eternal, immaterial, infinite, and simple. It is the uncaused source of all other being, imparting existence here and now to every contingent thing. It is omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, and personal—the God of classical theism, the self-existent “I AM” of Exodus 3:14, the continuing sustainer of Colossians 1:17, and the God Paul proclaimed to the philosophers in Acts 17.

No other kind of god (pantheistic, panentheistic, finite, or deistic) satisfies the logic. Only the God whose essence is existence can account for contingent beings without leaving existence unexplained. Geisler’s Philosophical Argument from Being, refined by Feser’s precision on the real distinction and Owens’s emphasis on existence as received actuality, shows that the very fact of our existence demands this God. The argument is impervious to Humean or Kantian objections because it rests on first principles and the undeniable reality of participated being. Thus, God exists.

Here is an attempt by a Grok 4.0 xAI project to give priority to all of Norm Geisler’s VCAs and PAFB articulations while attempting to have synthesis with other Existential Thomists and with my own attempts to make sense of Geisler, Owens, Knasas, Maurer, and

others. I start with attempts to tackle both horns of the Maurer-Knasia's dilemma, proceed to attempt to give additional synthesis of Thomistic arguments with one another, and then attempt to strip the arguments of Thomistic jargon, making it more friendly to analytic philosophers and other thinkers.

Polysyllogism #3

Argument 1:

- (1) Every thing whose essence (what it is) is distinct from its existence (that it is) is contingent and must have its existence caused (actualized) by another, since it cannot cause itself (as that would require pre-existing to exist, which is absurd) or sustain an infinite regress of causes (as that would leave the entire chain unexplained, violating sufficient reason).
- (2) Every thing we know from experience (e.g., humans, trees, stones) has an essence distinct from its existence, as we can understand its essence without knowing if it exists, and it exists contingently (it can come to be, change, or cease without contradiction).
- (3) Therefore, to explain the existence of these contingent things without absurdity, there must exist a first uncaused cause whose essence is identical to its existence (Subsistent Existence Itself, or Pure Act), which actualizes all others and is what we call God (necessary, unique, immutable, eternal, infinite, omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good).

Argument 2:

- (1) Every thing that exhibits degrees of existence (or being, *esse*)—with some having more intensive or fuller existence equated to greater perfection (e.g., via higher actuality like life or intellect) and others less (due to essence limiting the act of existence as potency)—is contingent and must have its limited, graduated existence caused (actualized) by another, since it cannot actualize its own degrees (as that would require pre-existing with fuller perfection, which is absurd) or sustain an infinite regress of limited causes (as that would leave all degrees unexplained, violating sufficient reason).
- (2) Every thing we know from experience (e.g., rocks with mere subsistence having less existence/perfection than humans with rational souls) exhibits varying degrees of existence/perfection, as their essences are distinct from and restrict their existence, making them less than fully existent or perfect (participating in *esse* analogically without possessing it subsistently).
- (3) Therefore, to explain these varying degrees of existence/perfection without absurdity, there must exist a first uncaused cause that is unlimited, perfect being (with no degrees or limitations), pure act without potency, whose essence is identical to its existence (Subsistent Existence Itself, or *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*), which actualizes all lesser degrees and is what we call God (necessary, unique, immutable, eternal, infinite, omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good).

Argument 3:

- (1) Every being whose *actus essendi* (act of existence) is distinct from its essence—composing act and potency—cannot actualize its own existence, as no potency can self-actualize (that would require pre-existing actuality, which is absurd) or sustain an infinite regress of actualizers (leaving all existence unexplained, violating sufficient reason and causality).
- (2) All things we know from experience (e.g., changing, contingent beings like humans or stones) have an *actus essendi* that actualizes a distinct, potential essence, as we can conceive their essence without their existence, and they undergo change from potency to act.
- (3) Therefore, to explain their actualized existence without absurdity, there must exist a first actualizer that never needed to become actualized—because it is always fully actualized as Pure Act with no potency—whose essence is identical to its *actus essendi*, and which actualizes all others; this is what we call God (necessary, unique, immutable, eternal, infinite, omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good).

Argument 4:

- (1) Every thing that could have failed to exist (a contingent thing) must have its existence explained by something else, since it cannot explain itself (that would require it to exist before it exists, which is impossible) or rely on an endless chain of similar things (that would leave everything unexplained, going against the idea that facts should have reasons).

- (2) All things we know from experience (such as people, trees, or rocks) could have failed to exist, as we can imagine what they are like without assuming they must exist, and they change, begin, or end.
- (3) Therefore, to explain why these things exist without leaving it unexplained or impossible, there must be at least one thing that could not have failed to exist (a necessary thing) which explains all the others; this necessary thing is what we call God (one of a kind, unchanging, timeless, unlimited, all-knowing, all-powerful, and completely good).

Argument 5:

- (1) Every thing that could possibly not exist (a contingent thing) requires an explanation for why it does exist from something outside itself, because it cannot explain its own existence (that would mean it exists before it exists, which is impossible), and an endless chain of such things would provide no ultimate explanation (leaving why anything exists unanswered).
- (2) All things we directly experience (like people, animals, plants, or rocks) could possibly not exist—we can clearly imagine what they are without them having to exist, and they begin, change, or end.
- (3) Therefore, to fully explain why these contingent things exist, there must be a foundation that could not possibly not exist (a necessary thing) outside the chain of contingent things; this necessary foundation, unique and unlimited in power and perfection, is what we call God.

Sorite #4 ⁹¹

Grok: Here is Norman L. Geisler's core argument for God—his favorite “vertical” or metaphysical form, drawn straight from the document's detailed presentations of his 4-point, 5-point, 6-point, 10-point, 13-point, and final 18-point versions. I have expanded it into a clear, 38-point logical sorite (well within the 21-to-50-line request) while keeping Thomistic terms light and always explained in parentheses. It draws first and foremost on Geisler's own wording and structure, then weaves in the existential Thomist insights of Joseph Owens (existence grasped in judgment), John F. X. Knasas (the act of being as the deepest starting point), and Étienne Gilson (being as the “first known” and most radical act). Second priority goes to the appendices by Feser, Owens, Knasas, and Wilhelmsen (real distinction of essence and act-of-existing, participated being as

⁹¹ Sorite, syllogism, polysyllogism, poems, and commentary produced by Grok 4.3 Expert by xAI on May 2026 with the following prompt: I am trying to improve Norm Geisler's argument for the existence of God. I want to make it intelligible to Thomists and non-Thomists. I want it to include the insights of the existential Thomists like Owens, Knasas, and Gilson. Focus first and foremost on the arguments for God by Norman Geisler in that document. Give second priority to the arguments in the appendices by Feser, Owens, Knasas, and Wilhelmsen. Give third priority to the arguments in the appendices by Kerr, Wippel, Barry Miller. Give fourth priority to the arguments in the appendices by Garrigou-Lagrange, Jules Brady, and Benignus. Give fifth priority to the argument by Rassmussen and Pruss. Give sixth priority to the appendix 11 with the Apostle Paul's argument in Acts 17. Attempt to restate Norm Geisler's argument for God in a way that is not very heavy on the thomistic jargon (you can use thomistic jargon but if used, be sure to explain it in parenthesis) and expresses the argument in more than twenty lines and less than fifty-one lines as a logical sorite. Also express it as a polysyllogism and as a simple syllogism. Next, express it as a poem in the voice of Rudyard Kipling, as a limerick, and as a haiku.”

“towards God,” and the paradoxical structure of finite existence). Later priorities (Kerr, Wippel, Miller, etc.) are used only where they sharpen Geisler’s own steps without adding jargon.

1. Something exists right now—I myself exist, and so do the things around me.
2. Existence is not the same as a mere idea or concept in my mind; it is real.
3. Every existing thing has an “act of existing” (what Thomists call *esse*—the actual “to-be” that makes it real here and now).
4. In the things we experience, there is a real difference (not just a way of talking) between *what* a thing is (its essence) and the fact *that* it exists (its act of existing).
5. The “what it is” part does not automatically include or cause the “that it exists” part—otherwise we could know a thing exists just by thinking about its definition.
6. But we cannot know existence just from definitions; we know it directly in judgment (as Owens and Gilson emphasize).
7. Therefore the act of existing is limited and “added” to the essence in every finite thing.
8. A limited act of existing cannot explain itself; it is participated, received, and dependent right now.
9. Non-existence (pure nothing) cannot cause existence—nothing comes from nothing.

10. Every limited, received act of existing must be caused by something else that gives it existence moment by moment.
11. A chain of things each receiving existence from another cannot explain the whole chain (it would be like a circle of borrowers with no bank).
12. Therefore there must be a first, un-received giver of existence—an ultimate source that does not receive its own act of existing from anything else.
13. This ultimate source cannot be limited or composed of parts that could be otherwise (Geisler’s “Pure Actuality” with no potentiality).
14. A being whose essence is identical with its act of existing (essence = *esse*) cannot fail to exist; it is necessary.
15. Only one such being is possible—two unlimited acts of existing would collapse into one (there cannot be two infinities).
16. This Necessary Being is therefore one, simple, and uncaused.
17. Because it is the source of all limited existence, it must be infinitely powerful (omnipotent in classical terms).
18. Existence and intelligibility go hand in hand; the source of all existence is therefore the source of all intelligibility.
19. The source of all intelligibility must itself be supremely intelligent (omniscient).

20. Being and goodness are two sides of the same coin; unlimited being therefore means unlimited goodness.
21. The Necessary Being is perfectly good.
22. A being that is pure, unlimited act of existing cannot change (change requires potentiality, which it lacks).
23. What cannot change is eternal and outside of time.
24. It is therefore immutable and eternal.
25. It cannot be material, because matter involves limitation and potentiality.
26. It is therefore immaterial and personal (a mind, not an impersonal force).
27. Finite things exist only because they are “referred” existentially to this Necessary Being right now (Gilson’s and Wilhelmson’s insight of participated being as “towards God”).
28. To deny this dependence would make the very act of existing we experience unintelligible.
29. The affirmation of this Necessary Being is therefore not optional; it is built into the structure of any real existence we encounter.
30. This Necessary Being possesses all the attributes classical theism ascribes to God.
31. It is the uncaused cause of everything else.

32. It is one, simple, necessary, eternal, immutable, immaterial, omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good.
33. These are exactly the characteristics of the God described in the Bible (the "I AM" of Exodus 3:14).
34. Geisler's argument therefore reaches the theistic God, not a generic "first cause."
35. The same logic Paul used in Acts 17 (addressing the Athenians) flows naturally from this metaphysical starting point.
36. Every finite being we encounter is, right now, dependent on this one unlimited Source.
37. Therefore the God of classical theism exists as the unique, necessary, unlimited Act of Existence.
38. Hence, God exists.

Syllogism #4

Major Premise: Every limited, received act of existing (found in everything we experience) requires, right now, an ultimate un-received Source whose essence is identical with its act of existing—one, simple, necessary, eternal, immutable, immaterial, omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good.

Minor Premise: Such limited, received acts of existing are directly evident in our experience.

Conclusion: Therefore that unique, un-received Source—God—exists.

Polysyllogism #4

Syllogism 1 – Real limited existence

Major: Everything we experience has a real distinction between what it is and the fact that it exists; the act of existing is limited and received.

Minor: Something exists right now.

Conclusion: Finite things have a participated, dependent act of existing right now.

Syllogism 2 – Need for an ultimate giver

Major: A limited, received act of existing cannot explain itself or the whole chain of receivers.

Minor: Finite things have a participated, dependent act of existing (Syllogism 1).

Conclusion: There must be an un-received, ultimate giver of existence.

Syllogism 3 – The giver is Pure Actuality

Major: An un-received giver cannot be limited or composed; it must be Pure Actuality with no potentiality.

Minor: The ultimate giver identified above is un-received.

Conclusion: The giver is a Necessary Being of Pure Actuality.

Syllogism 4 – Necessary Being is unique and simple

Major: Only one being can have essence identical with its act of existing; multiplicity would introduce limitation.

Minor: The Necessary Being of Pure Actuality has essence identical with its act of existing.

Conclusion: This Necessary Being is one, simple, and uncaused.

Syllogism 5 – Attributes of power, knowledge, and goodness

Major: The source of all limited existence must be infinite in power, the source of all intelligibility must be supremely intelligent, and unlimited being must be perfectly good.

Minor: The Necessary Being is the source of all limited existence.

Conclusion: It is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good.

Syllogism 6 – Immutability and eternity

Major: Pure, unlimited Actuality cannot change or be in time.

Minor: The Necessary Being is Pure Actuality.

Conclusion: It is immutable and eternal.

Syllogism 7 – Therefore God exists

Major: A unique, simple, necessary, eternal, immutable, immaterial, omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good Being who causes all finite existence right now is what classical theism calls God.

Minor: Such a Being exists (Syllogisms 1–6).

Conclusion: Therefore God exists.

In the voice of Rudyard Kipling

When the last lamp flickers low in the watchman's lonely hall,
And the world that seemed so solid stands a breath from utter fall,
There comes a quiet question that the heart must answer true:
"Why does aught exist at all, and how does it hold on through?"
From the stone beneath my boot-heel to the thought that stirs my brain,
Every limited flicker of "to be" cries out for the Cause again.
Not the first push in the morning, nor the last spark at the close—
But the very act of being, that each moment must suppose.
So the finite bows its head and the Necessary stands alone,
Pure Act that needs no other, the great "I AM" upon the throne.
East and West may wrangle, and the skeptics spin their thread,
But the being in my marrow knows the Giver of the bread.
By the law of cause and limit, by the judgment plain and stark,
We are carried past the finite to the Everlasting Ark.

Haiku

Finite beings breathe—
One Act, unborrowed, sustains.
God: the "I Am" now.

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