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World Civilizations

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Reading Questions Ch. 7

Aquinas, "The Five Proofs of God" – pp. 348-351 (the first three arguments are all versions of the "Cosmological Argument" in favor of God's existence)

1) In your own words, explain the Cosmological Argument for God's existence in terms of motion and (similarly) cause and effect. The Cosmological Argument, as explained by Aquinas, is a philosophical argument for the existence of God based on the observation of the world around us, concerning the principle of causality and motion. From my understanding, the principle of causality is that everything in this world has a cause, and that we could trace anything and everything back to a first cause. Furthermore, the principle of motion is the concept that everything is in motion, but can only be in motion if acted upon. Therefore, if we trace back every cause of motion then we can arrive at the first cause of motion, which assumedly would be God.

2) What does an "infinite regress" mean, and why is it so central to the Cosmological argument? An infinite regress means an endless chain of causes and effects stretching back to the beginning of time. According to Aquinas, this endless chain is impossible because there must have been an initial cause to start the chain (God). The Cosmological argument is built on the concept that there was a first and initial cause of motion, while the infinite regress would make this impossible.

3) How is the "third" of the five ways about the contingent existence of everything in the universe? The third of the five ways explains that everything in the world has the potential to not exist, therefore, its existence is not necessary. So Aquinas explains that then there must be a necessary being, someone whose existence is not contingent on anything else. This being would be what caused the existence of all other contingent beings in the universe; this being would be God.

Anselm, "The Existence of God", pp. 345-347 (this is the "Ontological Argument" for God's existence)

1) Explain in your own words what Anselm means by a being "that than which nothing greater can be conceived". Anselm refers to a being "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" as the greatest possible being that we can imagine. He describes this being as perfect in every way, possessing all of the greatest qualities that we can think of, such as being all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good. In other words, it is the most perfect and supreme being we can conceive in our minds.

2) On page 346, what is Anselm's argument about why this greatest possible being *must* exist in reality, by its very nature? In Anselm's argument for this, he argues that existence is an attribute or quality that is greater than non-existence. Therefore, a being that possesses all the greatest qualities, including existence, must necessarily exist in reality, and not just in the mind or imagination. He argues that in order for it to be the greatest being to be conceived, then it must exist in reality because existence is part of its greatness.

Hume, "The Argument from Design", pp. 365-370 (this is Hume's criticism of the "Teleological Argument" for God's existence...)

1) Describe the Teleological Argument as presented on pages 365-366. The Teleological Argument argues that the existence of order and purpose in the natural world provides evidence for the existence of a God who created and designed it. The argument is based on the observation that the natural world exhibits order, complexity, and purpose, which are similar to the order, complexity, and purpose found in human-made artifacts. It argues that there must be a designer who purposefully designed the natural world, hence God.

2) On 367, Hume, through Philo, states that for all we know, "matter may contain the source or spring of order originally within itself, as well as mind does". What do you think he means by this statement and the paragraph it's found in? In this paragraph, Hume, through Philo, is suggesting that the order and complexity we observe in the natural world may not necessarily be the result of a designer or creator, as argued by the Teleological Argument. Instead, it is possible that matter itself contains the source or principle of order, just as the human mind does. Philo suggests that since we have no experience of creating worlds, we have no basis for claiming that the order and complexity we observe in the natural world require a designer or creator. Instead, Philo argues that it is reasonable to assume that matter has inherent properties that allow it to organize itself into the complex systems we see in the natural world.

3) What are some of the problems Hume presents concerning the comparison of the universe to a machine and the assumption that it must also be designed? Some problems he presents include his argument that the comparison of the universe to a machine is flawed due to our limited knowledge and that the analogy is imperfect. He also challenges the assumption that

order and complexity necessarily imply design, suggesting that they may be inherent properties of matter itself. Finally, he argues that the existence of evil and imperfection in the natural world undermines the idea of a perfect and benevolent designer.