The Argument From Motion

Simplified Summary of the Argument:

We all know things around us are constantly changing. Water turns into steam, people grow, lamps turn on. But when something changes, it means it's going from "could be" to "actually is." For example, when a cold cup of tea becomes hot, that heat had to come from somewhere — maybe from a kettle, which got its heat from the stove, which got its energy from electricity, and so on.

Now, here's the key point: all of these things only have the power to heat or change something right now because they're getting that power from something else. The tea isn't heating itself — the stove is doing that. But the stove also isn't powering itself — it's getting energy from somewhere else. This creates a chain of things that are all passing on activity or power to the next thing right now. It's not about who started it in the past, but what's holding it all together in the present.

But here's the problem: if every link in that chain is just borrowing its power from something else, and there's no first source that has power *all on its own*, then the whole system collapses. It's like plugging in your phone charger to another charger, and that one into another, and so on — if there's no outlet at the start giving real power, nothing gets charged.

So there must be something that doesn't borrow power from anything else — something that doesn't need to be changed or helped. It just is pure power, pure actuality. It doesn't depend on anything, but everything depends on it. That's what we call God — not just someone who started the universe long ago, but the one who holds everything in existence and activity right now, like the foundation that keeps all things going.

DEFINITIONS:

Motion/Change (Aristotelian/Thomistic sense) – The reduction of potentiality to actuality; that is, the actualization of a potential *insofar as it is potential*. This means when something that *can* be a certain way (i.e., potential) *becomes* that way (actual), it is in motion. This obviously includes physical movement, but is not limited to it. Instead, it includes *all* change, such as change in quality (like heating up), quantity (like height or width), or state (like changing color or growing).

- **Simplified**: Motion is when something changes from what it could be into what it actually becomes. It's not just "moving" like walking or rolling, or being pushed. It can be *any* kind of change, like getting hotter, colder, bigger, older, or even going from not existing to existing.
    - **Example 1**: *Melting Ice* –
      Potential: Ice has the potential to be water.
      Actual: When it melts, that potential becomes actual.

So this example of motion is a change from solid to liquid.

- **Example 2**: *Learning a Skill* –
  Potential: A student has the potential to understand how to divide fractions.
  Actual: When they study and understand it, that potential becomes actual.
  This is an example of motion as a change in knowledge, not physical movement, but real change.

Potential – The capacity or possibility for something to be in a certain way, even though it is not that way yet. In metaphysics, potential refers to a way something *could* be, but *isn't yet*. It only becomes actual when something brings it into reality. Potential exists in things that are able to change.

- **Simplified**: Potential is what something *could become*, even if it's not like that right now. It's the "can be" or "could happen" part of change.

  - **Example 1: A Seed Becoming a Tree** –
    Potential: A seed has the potential to become a tall tree.
    Actual: If it gets water, sunlight, and time, it grows and becomes a tree.
    The seed had the potential inside it, even before anything happened.

  - **Example 2: Cold Water Getting Hot** –
    Potential: A glass of cold water has the potential to become hot.
    Actual: When you heat it in a microwave or put it in the sun, it becomes warm.
    That warmth wasn't there yet, but it was possible—it was a potential.

Actual (or Act) – The fulfillment or realization of a potential; it is what something **is** in reality, here and now. In metaphysics, actuality is the state of *being* rather than *becoming*. A thing is actual when it no longer just has the potential to be something—it **is** that thing. Actuality is what makes something real and present, rather than merely possible.

- **Simplified**: Actual means something is real right now. It's not just something that could happen—it *has* happened. It's what something actually is, not what it could be.

  - **Example 1: A Lit Candle** –
    Potential: A candle has the potential to be lit.
    Actual: When it is burning, it is no longer just possible—it's really happening.
    The flame is the **actualization** of what the candle could be.

  - **Example 2: A Grown Tree** –
    Potential: A seed had the potential to become a tree.
    Actual: When you see a tall oak tree, that potential has been fulfilled.
    The tree is the actuality that once existed only as a possibility in the seed.

Passive Potency – The real capacity in a thing to be changed or actualized by something else. It is "passive" because the thing **cannot bring itself into act**—it needs something else (an actual cause) to do it. Passive potency belongs to things that are capable of receiving motion or change.

- **Simplified**: Passive potency means something can be changed, but it **can't change itself**. It has to be acted on by something else to become what it can be.

    - **Example 1: Clay Being Molded** –
      Potential: A lump of clay has the potential to become a bowl.
      Passive Potency: The clay can't shape itself—it needs a potter to do that.
      The clay receives the change—it doesn't cause the change.

    - **Example 2: Wood Being Set on Fire** –
      Potential: A log has the potential to burn.
      Passive Potency: The wood doesn't ignite itself—it needs a spark or flame to activate that potential.
      The wood receives the change from something already on fire.

Active Potency (or Actualizing Power) – The real ability or power in something to **bring about change** in another thing by actualizing its potential. It is called "active" because it is the **source** of motion or change—it acts on something else that has passive potency. Only something that is *already actual* in some way can activate the potential in something else.

- **Simplified**: Active potency means something has the power to **cause change** in something else. It can make something go from what it could be to what it actually becomes.

    - **Example 1: A Flame Lighting a Candle** –
      Active Power: The flame already burning has the power to light another candle.
      It causes the second candle's potential to be lit to become actual.
      The first flame is an *actualizer*.

    - **Example 2: A Teacher Explaining Math** –
      Active Power: The teacher already understands math.
      The student has the potential to understand, but needs the teacher's help.
      The teacher's knowledge actualizes the student's potential to learn.

- **Note**: In classical theology, **God** is the ultimate source of all active potency. He does not receive motion or change from anything else but has the power to actualize all things. His active power is **not grounded in potentiality**, but in the fact that He is **pure act**—fully actual with no potential in His being.

Pure Act (Actus Purus) – A being without passive potency, and therefore unchangeable; such is God alone. A *mixed act* (*actus mixtus*) is a being with passive potency and is therefore changeable. Because Pure Act has no potential left to be fulfilled, it cannot be changed, moved, or improved—it is fully actual. Pure Act is also the cause of all other things that go from potential to actual.

- **Simplified**: Pure Act means something that is **fully real** with **no potential** left to become anything else. It doesn't change, it doesn't grow, and nothing can be added to it. Only **God** is Pure Act—everything else has potential and can change.

    - **Example 1: God vs. Creation** –
      God is Pure Act—He doesn't get better, worse, stronger, older, or smarter.

But everything else—people, animals, stars—has some kind of potential and can change.
That's why only God is unchangeable and independent.

- **Example 2: A Lit Flame vs. Fire Itself** –
  A single flame is a mixed act—it's real and burning, but it can go out, get bigger, or be moved.
  But if fire itself existed in its fullness without needing anything else, never changing or fading, that would be closer to Pure Act.
  (Of course, only God truly fits this—He is not just *on fire*, He **is** existence itself.)

Per Se Causal Series (Essentially Ordered / Hierarchical Series) – A series of causes where each member depends **right now** on the one before it in order to act. The earlier causes must continue to exist and operate for the later ones to have any power at all. If you remove the first cause, the entire chain **immediately collapses**, because the causes later in the chain do not act independently.

- **Simplified**: This kind of chain is like a line of things holding each other up **right now**. If you take away the first thing, the rest can't keep going—they fall apart.
  - **Example 1: Hand–Stick–Stone** –
    A hand moves a stick, and the stick moves a stone.
    The stick has no power to move the stone unless the hand is moving it *right now*.
    If the hand stops, the stick stops, and so does the stone.
  - **Example 2: Train Cars Pulled by an Engine** –
    Train cars move because the car in front is pulling them, but none of the cars can move on their own.
    If you remove the **engine**, the cars immediately stop.
    Each car depends right now on the engine's power being passed through the line.
  - **Example 3: Ceiling Lamp Hanging from Chains** –
    A ceiling lamp is hanging from a chain, which is hanging from another chain, which is hanging from a hook in the ceiling.
    If you remove the **ceiling hook**, the entire chain falls and the lamp crashes.
    Each part depends *right now* on the one above it holding it up.
  - **Example 4: Power Strip Chain (Extension Cords)** –
    A laptop is plugged into a power strip, which is plugged into another extension cord, which is plugged into a wall outlet.
    If you **unplug the wall outlet**, everything loses power *immediately*.
    None of the cords generate their own power—they depend on what came before.
- **Can It Go Back Forever?** No. A per se causal series cannot regress infinitely. This is not about time or events happening long ago. We are not asking, "Did something happen first in the past?" We are asking: "Where does the power to cause change come from *right now*?" Each cause in this kind of chain derives its power **in the present moment** from the one **higher**/before it. If you never arrive at a first cause that has power on its own, then nothing in the chain would be able to act right now.

Just like:

- If there's no engine powering the train cars right now, they won't move.
- If no electricity is coming from the outlet, none of the devices in the chain can run.

So there must be a first cause that does not borrow its power from anything else—a cause that is Pure Act, fully actual with no dependency. That is what we mean by God in the argument from motion.

Per Accidens Causal Series (Accidentally Ordered Series) – A causal chain in which each member can act **independently** once it has been caused. The later members in the chain **do not depend right now** on the earlier members to continue acting. The earlier cause may have started the chain, but it doesn't need to keep operating for the rest to continue. A common example is a father begetting a son, who then begets another—the son's ability to act doesn't depend on his father still existing or acting.

- **Simplified**: This kind of chain is where one thing causes another, and then it's done. The next thing can keep going without needing the first thing anymore.
- **Example 1: Family Line** – A grandfather causes (begets) a father, who causes (begets) a son. But the son doesn't need his father to keep existing in order to live his life or have children. Once the cause happens, the effect can act on its own.
- **Example 2: Dominoes Falling** – One domino knocks over the next, and then the next one keeps falling on its own. The first domino no longer needs to be involved. Each effect follows the previous one in time, but does not need ongoing support from it.
- **Example 3: A Builder Constructing a House** – A builder builds a house. Years later, the house still stands, even if the builder has died. The house no longer depends on the builder to keep existing. The cause brought it into being, but no longer supports it.

Can It Go Back Forever?

Yes, a **per accidens** causal series **can** go back forever *in theory*, because the members of the chain **do not depend on each other now** to keep acting. This type of series deals with **past causes** whose effects continue **on their own**. So the existence or activity of the earlier members doesn't affect the later ones *in the present*.

- A son can exist without the grandfather still being alive.
- A house can stand even after the builder is gone.
- So even if this chain had no beginning, it wouldn't stop anything from happening now.

How It Differs from a Per Se Series:

- A **per se** series is like a chain of cords all plugged into each other—if you unplug the first one, *everything* stops working **right now**.

- A **per accidens** series is like a row of people passing a baton—each can run after receiving it, and doesn't need the earlier runners anymore.

This is why **only a per se causal series requires a first cause** to explain present motion. That's what the **Argument from Motion** is concerned with: causes that must be acting **now**, not just what happened long ago.

Principle of Proportionate Causality – Whatever is in the effect must in some way be in the cause—either formally (in the same way), virtually (as a contained power or capacity), or eminently (in a higher, more perfect mode of being). A cause cannot give what it does not in some way possess. This principle helps explain how something can only bring about an effect if it already has, in some manner, what the effect will be.

- Simplified: A cause can't give what it doesn't have. Whatever is found in the result must already be in the cause, either exactly, as a hidden ability, or in a better way.

Formal Containment – The cause possesses the exact same form as what it causes in the effect.

- Example 1: A hot stove causes heat in a pot. The stove and the pot both have the same quality—heat. So the stove causes heat formally, by having that exact quality itself.

- Example 2: A person gives someone money from the cash in their wallet. The money exists in the exact same way in the giver as it does in the receiver. The cause (the wallet) and the effect (the money received) share the same form: actual money.

Virtual Containment – The cause does not have the form itself, but it has the power or capacity to bring about that form. The effect exists virtually in the cause, as a directive ability, not as an actual form.

- Example 1: A seed virtually contains a tree. The seed doesn't have branches or leaves inside it, but it has the natural power to grow into a tree. The tree's form exists in the seed as a potential, not an actual structure.

- Example 2: A match virtually contains fire. The fire isn't there yet, but the match has the power to create it. The flame is not in the match in the same form, but as a built-in ability.

- Example 3: A person gives money by writing a check. The check isn't itself money, but it has the power to bring about the effect of transferring funds. The money is not present in the check, actually, but virtually.

Eminent Containment – The cause does not have the same form, but it contains the perfection of the effect in a higher or more excellent way. The cause is greater than the effect and contains it in a more noble mode of being.

- Example 1: An intellect can produce the idea of triangularity. The mind is not shaped like a triangle, but it understands and can form the concept. It eminently contains the triangle, not as a shape, but as an idea—something more universal and abstract.

- Example 2: A person gives money by authorizing a bank transfer. They don't hand over money physically or write a check. Instead, they possess executive authority over the account and move funds through a command. The cause (the bank authority) contains the effect (the money transferred) eminently, in a superior mode of power.

The Argument from Motion (Premise by Premise)

1. Some things change (i.e., undergo motion or transition from one state to another).
2. But change is the actualization of potential — the reduction of something from potential to actual.
3. Therefore, some things reduce from potential to actual. (From P1 and P2)
4. Whatever goes from potential to actual is brought into actuality by something that is already actual, since a potentiality cannot actualize itself.
5. Therefore, some things are actualized by other actually existent things. (From P3 and P4)
6. If some things are actualized by other things, then there exist essentially ordered chains of actualizers, where the power to act is derived here and now from a prior actual cause.
7. Therefore, there are essentially ordered chains of actualizers. (From P5 and P6)
8. If a chain of essentially ordered changes were infinitely long, then there would be no first member from which the causal power ultimately derives.
9. But if there were no first member in such a series, none of the subsequent members could be actualized, because each depends on prior causes for its power to act.
10. But things do in fact change — i.e., subsequent members are actualized.
11. Therefore, there must be a first member in the essentially ordered chain of change. (From P8–P10)
12. If there is a first member in an essentially ordered series of actualization, it must be something that is not itself actualized by anything else — that is, something that is pure actuality (an unactualized actualizer).
13. If there exists an unactualized actualizer — a being that is pure actuality — then that being is what we call God.
14. Therefore, God exists. (From P11–P13)

The Argument from Motion (Concise Version)

1. **Change exists** — some things go from potential to actual.
2. **But potential cannot actualize itself**; only something already actual can bring about actuality.
3. Therefore, whatever changes is actualized by something else.

4. This leads to a chain of actualizers — each depending on something else to cause its change here and now.
5. An infinite chain of such actualizers is impossible because, without a first actualizer, nothing could be actualized.
6. But change does occur, so the chain must terminate in a **first actualizer**.
7. This first actualizer must have no potential — it is **pure actuality**, not itself caused or changed by anything else.
8. A being of pure actuality is what we mean by **X**.
9. **Therefore, X exists.**

Argument Against infinite regress in per se causal series

Major Premise (P1): In a per se causal series, each member receives its causal power *here and now* from the member before it.

Minor Premise (P2): If there is no first member with causal power in itself (i.e., not derived from another), then no member in the series has causal power.

Conclusion (C1): Therefore, if a per se causal series had no first member, no member of the series would have causal power.

Empirical Observation (P3): Some members of per se causal series *do* have causal power (e.g., the hand moving the stick, the fire heating the pot, the power strip chain functioning).

Final Conclusion (C2): Therefore, a per se causal series cannot regress infinitely. It must terminate in a first cause that has causal power in itself — that is, a first unmoved mover or pure act.

Modus Tollens or **Reductio ad Absurdum** on 2 and 3

From Unity to Omniscience: The Attributes of the Unactualized Actualizer

1. There exists a purely actual actualizer. (From the previous argument)
2. If there were more than one purely actual actualizer, they would have to differ by some feature.
3. But for two things to differ, one must have what the other lacks — which implies some unactualized potential.
4. A purely actual actualizer has no potentiality, by definition.
5. Therefore, there cannot be more than one purely actual actualizer.
6. So, the purely actual actualizer is one (i.e., unique).

Immutability and Eternity

1. If the purely actual actualizer could change, it would go from potential to actual in some respect.
2. But it has no potential, so it cannot change.
3. Therefore, it is immutable (unchangeable).
4. Whatever changes exist in time, since time is the measure of change.
5. But the purely actual actualizer is immutable.
6. Therefore, it is eternal (outside of time).

Immateriality and Incorporeality

1. If it were material, it would be composed of form and matter, which entails potentiality (e.g., parts could be rearranged).
2. But it has no potential.
3. So, it is immaterial.
4. If it had a body (were corporeal), it would be material.
5. But it is immaterial.
6. So, it is incorporeal.

Perfection and Goodness

1. To be imperfect is to have a privation — a lack of some actuality that ought to be present.
2. But the purely actual actualizer has no unactualized potential.
3. So, it has no privation and is therefore perfect.
4. To be less than fully good is to fall short of some actuality due to privation.
5. But the purely actual actualizer has no privation.
6. Therefore, it is fully good.

Omnipotence

1. Power is the capacity to actualize potentials.
2. All actualized potentials are either actualized by the purely actual actualizer or by chains that terminate in it.
3. So, all power ultimately derives from it.
4. To be the source from which all power derives is to be omnipotent.

Intellect and Omniscience

1. Whatever is in an effect must be in the cause either formally, virtually, or eminently (the principle of proportionate causality).
2. The purely actual actualizer is the cause of all things.
3. Therefore, the forms or patterns of all things must exist in it in some way.
4. But they do not exist in it as they do in material particulars.
    a. The forms of things cannot exist in the purely actual actualizer **formally**, because God is not a composite being Nor can the forms exist in God **virtually**, because **virtual containment implies passive potency** — the unrealized capacity to bring something about. But the purely actual actualizer has **no passive potency at all**, by definition. To say that God contains forms virtually would mean that He has powers not yet actualized, which would make Him **not Pure Act**, and therefore **not God**.
    b. Virtual containment also belongs to **instrumental causes** — beings that bring about effects only when combined with external factors (e.g., a match producing fire when struck). But God is not an instrument; He is the **first cause** and acts **through Himself**, not by potential.
    c. Therefore, the only possible way the forms of things can exist in the purely actual actualizer is **eminently** — that is, in a **higher, more excellent mode of being**. This is the mode proper to **intellect**, which contains all forms **immaterially, universally, and perfectly**.
    d. Thus, the forms of all things must exist in God **as ideas in a divine intellect**, not in the same way they exist in material things, nor as potential powers, but as **perfect, immaterial intelligibles**.
5. So, they exist in it in an abstract manner, as in the intellect.
6. Therefore, the purely actual actualizer has intellect.
7. Since the forms of all things exist within this intellect, nothing lies outside its scope.
8. Therefore, it is omniscient.

Conclusion

1. So, the purely actual actualizer is one, immutable, eternal, immaterial, incorporeal, perfect, fully good, omnipotent, intelligent, and omniscient.
2. But to be the unique, purely actual cause of all things with these attributes is what we mean by God.
3. Therefore, God exists