

6. The 8 Attributes of God

Since our knowledge of God is impossible, we can only know God by negation and by analogy. So then, what can we say about God through reason? Although the list is not strict, Thomas lists eight general attributes of God that can be known from reason by way of negation:

1. Does God have parts? God does not have parts because he is not created. He is not a composite of existence and essence because for God these are one in the same. He is also not a composite of form and matter. He is not built like a physical body or a machine. He is without parts. You cannot speak of "part of God" or even "half of God." God doesn't have parts that can be separated for measurement. In Latin, the fancy word for "not having parts" is *simplex*. The word likely derives from a combination of *sine* ("without") and *plex* ("fold"), meaning "without folds." The opposite word *complex* means "with folds." Thus, God is without parts. He is simple. God is simple (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3).

2. Does God have the potential to improve? No, God cannot improve. Aristotle noted to be perfect is to be fully actualized. If you could possibly run faster than you are currently running, then you're not running perfectly. So the question here is whether God is fully actualized or whether he has potential to be even better than he is. According to the Third Way and Fourth Way, God is most fully actualized. There is nothing lacking in him or we would speak of him as being itself. So then, since we deny potentiality in God (He can never improve), we say he is perfect. God is perfect (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 4).

3. Is there anything more desirable than God? According to Aristotle, a good is something desired. Now is there anything more desirable than God—the First Cause and final goal of the entire universe? Is a candy bar more desirable? No. Is a car more desirable? No. Is an angel more desirable? No. God is greater than all these things. So He is the greatest good (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 5-6).

4. Is God limited in any way? The Second Way defines God as the First Efficient Cause of all things. As such, God is not limited by time, space, or any other form of finitude. Thus, God is infinite (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 7).

5. Is God limited by location? God is not limited to a certain place. Using the First Way, we know that God is the Unmoved Mover. Since God does not move, he is not here and then later there. He does not move from location to location. Rather, since he is the efficient cause, he is present always and everywhere. Consequently, God is everywhere or omnipresent (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 8).

6. Does God change? God does not change. Change is related to motion, and God is the Unmoved Mover. Furthermore, change entails a lack of perfection. If God changed, he would either become better or worse. However, as we saw in the question about God's perfection, God has no potential to become better. He is already best; he cannot change or mutate. He is therefore immutable (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 9).

7. Can God be measured by time? Thomas defines eternal as something not measurable by time. Now time is intimately related to change since the two go hand in hand. So then, Thomas assumes the eternity of God naturally follows from the immutability of God. It is also obvious if God is the Unmoved Mover, he is not in the chain of events flowing through time. God is therefore eternal (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 10).

8. Can God be more than one?

God cannot be more than one God. Thomas sums up with a one-two punch based on God's simplicity and infinity. Since God is without parts (simple), he cannot be divided. Moreover, he is unbounded (infinite). It follows then there can only be one God. There can only be one Unmoved Mover and only one First Cause. There cannot be multiple First Causes. So then God is one (*Summa theologiae* 1,11).

These eight attributes, as you can see, follow from the Five Ways of demonstrating God. We did not appeal to the Bible, to saints, or to Church documents to reach these conclusions. These attributes are, in a sense, contained in the definitions of the Five Ways. Now that we have established what the uncreated God is not (for example, not finite and not changing), let's examine the way in which humans know created things through sensation.