M20HSS316-ITP/Assignment-2/20171114/CSE

Aquinas' First Cause Argument

September 2020

Given below are the questions raised by Stitch and Donaldson against Aquinas' First Cause Argument

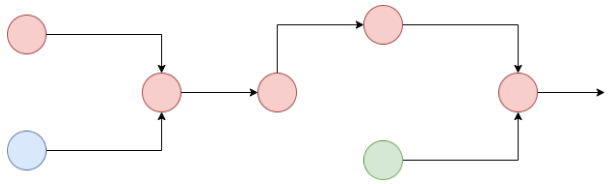
1 Stitch and Donaldson's Questions

1.1 Why can't a causal chain extend backwards infinitely?

This question challenges the premise **8-12**, most specifically premise **12**, that is 'An ordered series of efficient causes cannot precede infinitely.'
Stitch and Donaldson argue that why can't causal chains (which are essentially **Directed Acyclic graphs**, where each node is an event) extend infinitely in both directions.
The reason given by Aquinas for premise **12**, in premises **8-11** is that if a causal chain precedes infinitely then there can be no first cause.Absence of a first cause implies that there are no intermediate events, which is a contradiction.
This reasoning seems to work but can be broken down. I will discuss this in my questions section.

1.2 Why must there be a single first cause?

This is a very brilliant question posed by Stitch and Donaldson and was also my first thought after reading Aquinas' theory.
This question primarily challenges premise **14** 'An ordered series of efficient causation terminates in an uncaused cause.'
This argument is completely valid as a DAG can have multiple source and sink nodes.(Also shown in figure below).Also, multiple causal chains can be independent from one another with different independent sources.
Aquinas doesn't explicitly mention this in his premises, as he only argues about existence of at least one single source for a causal chain but doesn't deny the existence of multiple sources. In this sense, Aquinas' argument is ambiguous.



1.3 Even if there is a first cause, why must it be a divine act of creation?

In this question, Donaldson and Stitch challenge the validity of premise **15** 'This uncaused cause is God'.
They argue that even if we accept all the previous premises as true, last premise/definition is still somewhat ambiguous. It 'defines' the first cause as god, but does not elaborate as what exactly is god. Is it a heavenly entity that caused the first chain of actions like big bang which eventually created the universe or is it just a name given to the special first event.
We are not provided with enough information to resolve the above ambiguities, so as a result Stitch and Donaldson's question seem very valid to me.

1.4 Even if the universe has a creator, why assume that the creator still exits, and is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good?

This is also a very valid question raised but Stitch and Donaldson, which challenges premise **15** 'This uncaused cause is God'.
Even though we assume all the premises to be correct and define the first cause as God, there does not exist any premise which defines/elaborates on the nature of this God.It is very valid to raise such a question on the completeness of the Aquinas' 15 step argument.

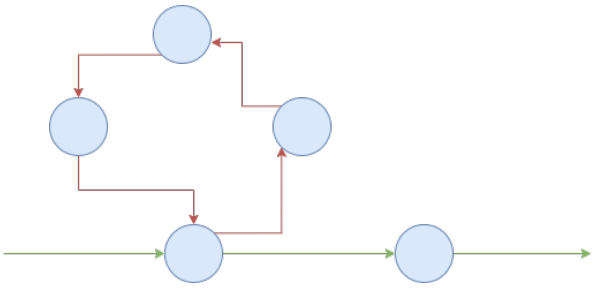
Almost all the questions raised by Stitch and Donaldson are valid and logically sound. They seem to target particular premises. Also, there are some premises that could have been targeted but have not been targeted.

In the next section I will raise some questions and try to answer one of them from the point of view of Aquinas.

2 My Questions

2.1 Why can't causal chains be circular?

In this question, I want to challenge the premise **5** 'It is not possible for X to be an efficient cause of itself'.
The question is based on a presumption of linearity of time. What if progress



of time is not linear but curved, but the gradient is so small that we don't feel the curvature and assume that it is linear for all practical purposes.
Let me explain with a simple example: It is a well known theorem of euclidean geometry that the sum of 2 sides of a triangle is greater than the third side. This works fairly well for all our geometrical purposes, until we consider triangles comparable to the size of earth. If we draw a triangle big enough. on a curved surface we can easily prove that the theorem seizes to hold.
In my opinion, same argument can hold for time as we perceive causal sequences as chains but actually they are loops.
If this is true, then an event can be cause of itself. (Like some action in future effects the past, which sounds absurd but cannot be denied in my opinion). If this were true then Stitch and Donaldson's first question would also hold that causal chains can extend infinitely backwards.
So, I guess this argument is worthy enough to be considered by Aquinas.

2.2 If a cause is removed from a causal chain, why should the effects be removed?

This is a very interesting and valid question as Aquinas' steps leads to the conclusion that there should be at least one source. But it does not stop us from having multiple sources, as it does not have a premise against this.
So, if we consider multiple source causal chains then it is not necessary that removing the source/cause necessarily removes the effect.

2.3 Aquinas' Reply to my question of circular causal chains

In this section, I would try to mimic Aquinas' thinking process and try to answer the question stated above about existence of circular causal chains.
If circular causal chains were possible, it would be only possible if travelling back in time is possible. This would imply time travellers exist and are living in our society and influencing our actions.
But, as we have no evidence of any time travel instance for millions of years of human existence we can for all practical purposes assume that time moves linearly.
Also, travelling back in time and changing things changes the future as well so,

it is highly unlikely that travelling to past will be feasible as our actions in the past can change the possibility of our travelling back in time.
So, we can safely assume that causal chains are linear.