The second way is from the nature of efficient cause. In the world of sensible things we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither, indeed, is it possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause ... Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate, cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.

Here is the central argument of Aquinas' second way - the second of five proofs that Aquinas gave for the existence of God.

Three views about the universe

Two objections to Aquinas

the kidles argument

There are some causes.

Nothing is the cause of itself.

If something were the cause of itself, it would be prior to itself.
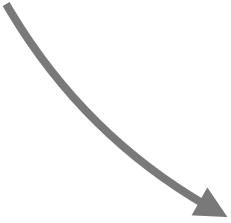
Nothing is prior to itself.

There are no infinite causal chains.

It is pretty clear that this is a derived premise, since we get a long argument for it in the passage immediately following.
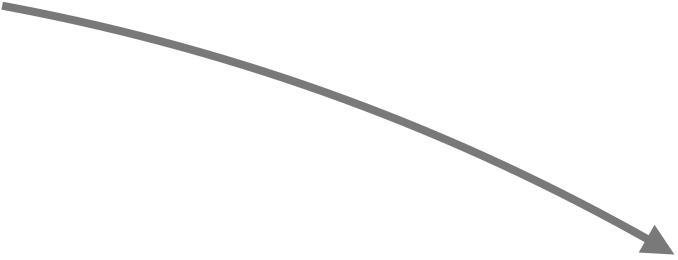
Let's set this difficult passage to the side for now, and see if we can figure out the shape of Aquinas' argument.

There is a
first
cause.

Every causal chain must be (i) circular, (ii) infinite, or (iii) have a first cause.

Now that we have mapped out the structure of the argument, we can put it premise/ conclusion form.

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The Big Bang

The first event in the history of the universe was an explosion of an extremely dense collection of particles, with every particle moving apart from every other particle. This event had no cause - in particular, no being set it into motion - and, further, every subsequent event has been an effect of this event.

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Two objections to Aquinas

the kalām argument

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Two objections to Aquinas

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