

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.









Let's start with the second sentence. Our goal is to come up with a simple, straightforward way to state the main point of this sentence. We always want to use language which is as simple and clear as possible.

There are
some
causes .



Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will

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

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case known (neither, indeed, is it possible) in which a thing is found to

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because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of

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impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity;

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There are

Might defend (8) by saying that this hypothesis is impossible, on the

ground that there can't be an uncaused cause, like the explosion of

particles described?



first case, then

8. If there is a

Goodixists.

Instead, it seems like Aquinas has to argue that nothing like the Big

Bang could genuinely be a first cause. Things like the Big Bang have to

have a cause; but things like God don't.

which was an uncaused cause would have to have other properties, which

God has, but the Big Bang does not.

And that is, in a way, exactly what Aquinas tried to do (though of course

he did not have the Big Bang in mind). He tried to argue that something

Might defend (8) by saying that this hypothesis is impossible, on the

grounds that there can't be an uncaused cause?

Bang have to have a cause; but things like God don't. But why?

nothing like the Big Bang and even first class. Things like the Big

Instead, it seems like a defender of the first cause argument has to argue that

simple atheism. So it looks as though, if we are to believe (8), we must have

some reason for rejecting the above hypothesis.

This would appear to be a description of a world in which there is a first

cause, but God does not exist. And it appears to be entirely consistent with

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 into motion - and, further, every subsequent event has been an effect of this event.




Three views
about
the universe

Aquinas'
first cause
argument



Two objections to Aquinas



the kalām
argument

good arguments for the existence of God then depends in part on

arguments against simple atheism. Whether they attempt to


Many arguments for God's existence are best thought of as

how seriously you take quasi-theism. This is something to which



Let's turn then to our first argument for the existence of God: the

first argument we find in the reading from Thomas Aquinas.



Aquinas'
first cause
argument



Two objections to Aquinas

the kalām
argument

and indeed nothing in the universe can be.

Bang — must have a cause. So the Big Bang can't be the first cause —

On this view, everything which begins to exist at some time must have a

cause. Because the universe — including the Big Bang — has a

beginning in time, the universe as a whole — again, including the Big

the universe can't exist at some time, then it follows that the universe

If one accepts this extra premise, and one accepts the assumption that

was caused to exist by something outside the universe.

And then there are just two options — that thing must be eternal, or it

must have come to exist at a certain time.

If we go with the second option, then it must have had a cause. And

time.

then *that* thing would have to be eternal, or have come to exist at a certain

But let's focus in on one premise:

There are a number of questions one could raise about this argument.

Could not object to this premise in much the way that we objected to

Aquinas' assumption that if there is a first cause, then that thing must

Universe is Good?

be God? How do we know that this eternally existing first cause of the

Our first topic is the question of whether God exists.

A large red circle with a slight drop shadow, containing the text "Three views about the universe" in white. The text is centered and arranged in three lines.

Three views
about
the universe

Aquinas'
first cause
argument

causal chain.

4. There are no finite

C. Good exists. (7, 8)

to its side.

7. There is a first cause.

3. Nothing is the cause of

its self . (1,2)



or (iii) have a first cause.

1. If something were the cause

(i) circling; (ii) infighting;

5. At least one thing has a

6. Every causal chain must be

of itself, it would be prior

(3, 4, 5, 6)

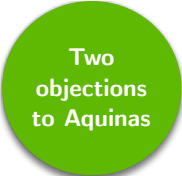
2. Nothing is prior to itself.

8: If there is a first cause,

Q. 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

the in God exists.





Two
objections
to Aquinas



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Let's have a look at the next sentence. How would

you state this claim in simple language?

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