Three views universe







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 Bang — must have a cause. So the Big Bang can't be the first cause and indeed nothing in the universe can be.

If one accepts this extra premise, and one accepts the assumption that the universe came to exist at some time, then it follows that the universe 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 then that thing would have to be eternal, or have come to exist a certain time.

We can put this together with pieces of the argument from Aquinas to give us the following kalām argument (named after the school of Islamic thinkers who developed several versions of it).

THE KALĀM FIRST CAUSE ARGUMENT

- 1. If something were the cause of itself, it would be prior to itself.
- 2. Nothing is prior to itself.
- 3. Nothing is the cause of itself. (1,2)
- 4. There are no infinite causal chains.
- 5. Everything which begins to exist at some time must have a cause.
- 6. Every causal chain must be (i) circular, (ii) infinite, or (iii) have a first cause.
- 7. Everything which begins to exist at some time must have a beginningless first cause. (3,4,5,6)
- 8. The universe and everything in it began to exist at some time.
- 9. There is a beginningless first cause of the universe and everything in it. (7,8)
- 10. If there is a beginningless first cause of the universe and everything in it, then God exists.

C. God exists. (9,10)

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10. If there is a beginningless first cause of the

8. The universe and everything in it began to exist at

(9,10)C. God exists.

6. Every causal chain must be (i) circular, (ii)

universe and everything in it, then God exists.

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

But let's focus in on one premise:

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

Could one object to this premise in much the way that we objected to

universe is God?

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

Our first topic is the question of whether God exists.















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

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

arguments against simple atheism. Whether they also amount to

we will return.

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

first cause argument we find in the reading from Thomas Aquinas.

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



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

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

particles described?



8. If there is a

God exists.

first cause, then

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

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

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

God has, but the Big Bang does not.

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

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 one 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 could genuinely be a first cause. Things like the Big

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

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

some reason for rejecting the above hypothesis.

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

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

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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of itself, it would be prior

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(7,8)C. God exists.





