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.









There are some

causes.

Nothing is the cause of itself.

There are two kinds of premises in arguments: independent premises, which are supposed to stand on their own, and derived premises, which are supposed to follow from other premises. Which do you think this is?



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causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a

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

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is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause,

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There are two kinds of premises in arguments: independent

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?



first cause, then

8. If there is a

God exists.

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

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

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

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

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

God has, but the Big Bang does not.

grounds that there can't be an uncaused cause?

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

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. But why?

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

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

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

some reason for rejecting the above hypothesis.

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.

Three views universe









(i) circular, (ii) infinite, or (iii) have a first cause.

of itself, it would be prior

5. At least one thing has a

1. If something were the cause

cause.

itself.

(3,4,5,6)

2. Nothing is prior to itself.

8. If there is a first cause,

4. There are no infinite

7. There is a first cause.

3. Nothing is the cause of

then God exists.

6. Every causal chain must be

(7,8)C. God exists.

chains. causal

(1,2)itself.









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

arguments against simple atheism. Whether they also amount to

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

we will return.

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

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

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





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

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

and indeed nothing in the universe can be.

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

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

the universe came to 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

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

But let's focus in on one premise:

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

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.











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There are some causes.

Nothing is the cause of itself.

which seems to provide a mini-argument for the claim that

We get a hint when we look at the rest of the sentence,

nothing is the cause of itself.

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.