

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.









But right away we have a problem: the text uses a phrase, 'efficient cause,' with which you are likely unfamiliar. A reasonable first strategy is to try out a familiar candidate. So let's suppose that 'efficient cause' just means 'cause,' and see how far that gets us.



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2. Nothing is prior to itself.

1. If something were the cause

of itself, it would be prior

4. There are no finite

to its side.

its self . (1,2)

3. Nothing is the cause of

6. Every causal chain must be

5. At least one thing has a

causal chain.

8: If there is a first cause,

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

7. There is a first cause.

(3, 4, 5, 6)

C. Good exists. (7, 8)

(i) circling; (ii) infighting;



the in God exists.

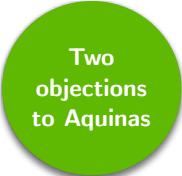
or (iii) have a first cause.



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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

we win! return.

arguments against simple atheism. Whether they attempt to

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

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

first argument we find in the reading from Thomas Aquinas.

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

**Aquinas'
first cause
argument**



Two objections to Aquinas

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

particles described?

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



8. If there is a

first case, then

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

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

God has, but the Big Bang does not.

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

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

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

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



Two objections to Aquinas



the kalām
argument

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

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

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

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 can't 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 met or exist at a certain time.

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 at a certain

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

But let's focus in on one premise:

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


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

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



University is Good?

Our first topic is the question of whether God exists.

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Three views
about
the universe

Aquinas'
first cause
argument



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.

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