St. Thomas was born in 1225 and, while his works were extremely controversial in their time — some were condemned as heretical by the bishop of Paris — he has since come to be regarded as the greatest theologian and philosopher in the history of the Church. His Summa Theologiae from which the arguments we will be discussing were taken — is regarded by many as the definitive philosophical exposition of the

Catholic faith.



Many arguments for God's existence are best thought of as arguments against simple atheism. Whether they also amount to good arguments for the existence of God then depends in part on how seriously you take quasi-theism. This is something to which we will return.

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. Three views universe







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

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

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

and indeed nothing in the universe can be.

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 —

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.

must have come to exist at a certain time.

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

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

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

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

universe is God?

Our first topic is the question of whether God exists.













1. If something were the cause

of itself, it would be prior

3. Nothing is the cause of

(1,2)itself.

6. Every causal chain must be

chains. causal

(i) circular, (ii) infinite,

2. Nothing is prior to itself.

cause.

8. If there is a first cause,

(7,8)C. God exists.

or (iii) have a first cause.

7. There is a first cause.

then God exists.

4. There are no infinite

5. At least one thing has a

itself.

(3,4,5,6)









particles described?

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



first cause, then

God exists.

8. If there is a

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

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

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

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

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

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

Instead, it seems like a defender of the first cause argument 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. But why?

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

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

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.





Here is the central argument of Aquinas' second way - the second of five

proofs that Aquinas gave for the existence of God.









