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.

There are a number of questions one could raise about this argument. But let's focus in on one premise:

12. If there is an eternally existing first cause of the universe and everything in it, then God exists.

Could one object to this premise in much the way that we objected to Aguinas' assumption that if there is a first cause, then that thing must be God? How do we know that this eternally existing first cause of the universe is God?

This is a reasonable question. Here is one way which a defender of the kalām argument might respond.

Most theists are less certain that God exists than they are that 2+2=4; most atheists are less certain than God does not exist than they are that 2+2=4. So most of us think that there is some chance that God exists and some chance that God does not exist.

Keeping this in mind, recall the three hypotheses about reality with which we began.

Simple theism God exists, and

God exists, and created the universe.

Simple atheism

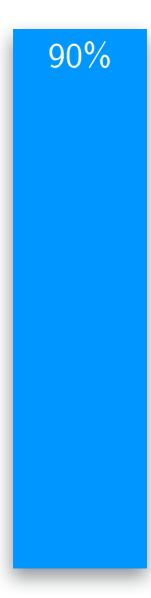
The universe (or perhaps several universes) are all that exists. Nothing created it (or them).

Quasi-theism

The universe was created by something outside of it, but not by God.

If you agree that the kalām argument shows that that there is a beginningless being outside of the universe which caused the universe to exist, that rules out simple atheism. So the simple atheist cannot respond to the argument just by denying (12).

Does the existence of such a being rule out quasi-theism? No. So it looks like the kalām argument should not convince at least some kinds of quasi-theists that God exists.





SIMPLE **ATHEISM**

But if you eliminate simple atheism from the picture, you have to adjust the probabilities you assign to simple theism and quasi-theism. After all, you know that one of these two theories is true -- so the probabilities you assign to them should add up to 100%.





Before encountering the kalām argument, you thought (in this example) that simple theism was 9 times more likely to be true than quasi-theism. Nothing in that argument seems to affect this view; so it looks like you should keep it.







The result (in this example) is that you should now think that simple theism has a 90% chance of being true.



This is just one example. But it illustrates how an argument might (very) substantially increase the probability you assign to its conclusion even if it does not definitively rule out every other possibility.

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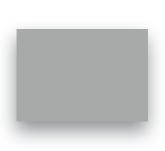
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cause.

itself.

of itself, it would be prior

2. Nothing is prior to itself.

5. At least one thing has a

(1,2)itself.

3. Nothing is the cause of

4. There are no infinite

7. There is a first cause.

1. If something were the cause

chains. causal

or (iii) have a first cause.

6. Every causal chain must be

(3,4,5,6)

(i) circular, (ii) infinite,

8. If there is a first cause,

(7,8)C. God exists.

then God exists.









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

particles described?

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



8. If there is a

first cause, then

God exists.

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

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

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.

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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

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

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.

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

arguments against simple atheism. Whether they also amount to

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

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

we will return.

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





Our first topic is the question of whether God exists.









