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. At least one thing has a cause.
6. Every causal chain must be (i) circular, (ii) infinite, or (iii) have a first cause.
7. There is a first cause. (3,4,5,6)
8. If there is a first cause, then God exists.

C. God exists. (7,8)

This is a little tricky. There is a sense in which in this example nothing is the cause of itself, because nothing is **directly** the cause of itself. But it still seems like things are **indirectly** the cause of themselves. After all, if A causes B and B causes C, isn't there also a sense in which A causes B?

Let's agree to understand "causes" in our argument as meaning "directly or indirectly causes." Then the kind of causal chain pictured above is ruled out by premise (3).

Aquinas' ultimate aim is not to argue for the existence of a first cause; his ultimate aim is to argue for the existence of God. So the thing we have labeled as a conclusion must actually just be a (derived) premise in the overall argument.

So far, so good. But there is an obvious sense in which our argument so far is incomplete.

Aquinas' first cause argument

Three views about the universe

Aquinas' first cause argument

Two objections to Aquinas

the kalām argument

But who cares whether this is a **valid** argument for the conclusion that God exists? What we care about is whether the conclusion is true - and to be sure of that, we need to know that the argument is sound. Validity is only half the puzzle; the premises also have to be true.

This argument is valid, and seems to be a plausible interpretation of the piece of text we've been looking at.

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or (iii) have a first cause.

3. Nothing is the cause of

5. At least one thing has a

to itself.

(i) circular, (ii) infinite,

then God exists.

cause.

2. Nothing is prior to itself.

C. God exists. (7,8)

6. Every causal chain must be

causal chains.

7. There is a first cause.

8. If there is a first cause,

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$(3, 4, 5, 6)$

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interpretation of the piece of

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

particles described?

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

first cause, then

8. If there is a

God exists.

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

God has, but the Big Bang does not.

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

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

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

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

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.

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arguments **against** simple atheism. Whether they also amount to

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

we will return.

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

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

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.

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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 —

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

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.

must have come to exist at a certain time.

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

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

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.

**Three views
about
the universe**

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