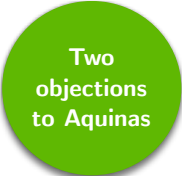**Three views about the universe**

Aquinas' first cause argument

Two objections to Aquinas

the kalām argument

You might remember that, earlier, we mentioned that Aquinas gives us an argument for (4), which we set aside for simplicity at the time. Here's the relevant passage:

8. If there is a first cause, then God exists.

4. There are no infinite causal chains.

"... 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."

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in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the

itself. (1,2)

1. If something were the cause

causal chains

to itself.

$(3, 4, 5, 6)$

5. At least one thing has a

2. Nothing is prior to itself.

of itself, it would be prior

4. There are no infinite

or (iii) have a first cause.

C. God exists. (7,8)

then God exists.

3. Nothing is the cause of

7. There is a first cause.

8. If there is a first cause,

6. Every causal chain must be

(i) circular, (ii) infinite,

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?

God exists.

8. If there is a

first cause, then

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

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

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

God has, but the Big Bang does not.

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

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

grounds that there **can't** be an uncaused cause?

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?

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

some reason for rejecting the above hypothesis.

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

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.

Two objections to Aquinas

the kalām argument

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

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

we will return.

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

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

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

Aquinas' first cause argument

Two objections to Aquinas

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 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

time.

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

universe is God?

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

Could one object to this premise in much the way that we objected to

Our first topic is the question of whether God exists.

Three views
about
the universe

Aquinas' first cause argument

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