Three views universe







But even if Aquinas' defense of (4) is unsuccessful, (4) might still be true. When you encounter an argument in which one of the premises is insufficiently well defended by the author, you should always ask: can we do better?

4. There are no infinite causal chains.

One attempt to do better begins with the thought that just because certain mathematical notions make sense, it does not automatically follow that every real world scenario involving those notions makes sense. For example, the idea of negative numbers makes sense. But would it make sense for me to say that I have -16 apples in my refrigerator? insufficiently well defended by the author, you should always ask: can we

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For example, the idea of negative numbers makes sense. But would it



or (iii) have a first cause.

of itself, it would be prior

8. If there is a first cause,

3. Nothing is the cause of

(1,2)itself.

1. If something were the cause

then God exists.

(7,8)C. God exists.

5. At least one thing has a

itself.

cause.

6. Every causal chain must be

7. There is a first cause.

(3,4,5,6)

(i) circular, (ii) infinite,

chains. causal

4. There are no infinite

2. Nothing is prior to itself.





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

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

arguments against simple atheism. Whether they also amount to

we will return.

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

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.





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



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

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

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?

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

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

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

some reason for rejecting the above hypothesis.

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.





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 —

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

and indeed nothing in the universe can be.

the universe came to exist at some time, then it follows that the universe

If one accepts this extra premise, and one accepts the assumption that

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

then that thing would have to be eternal, or have come to exist a certain

If we go with the second option, then it must have had a cause. And

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

But let's focus in on one premise:

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

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

universe is God?

Our first topic is the question of whether God exists.













