The second way is from the nature of efficient cause. In the world of sensible things we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither, indeed, is it possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. 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. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.



Here is the central argument of Aquinas' second way - the second of five proofs that Aquinas gave for the existence of God.









There are some

causes.

Nothing is the cause of itself.

If something were the cause of itself, it would be prior to itself.

Nothing is prior to itself.





We get one more premise in the next sentence.

There are no infinite causal

causal chains.



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things we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known

everyone gives the name of God.

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of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient

(neither, indeed, is it possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause

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cause.

chains. causal

2. Nothing is prior to itself.

(i) circular, (ii) infinite,

(7,8)C. God exists.

1. If something were the cause

then God exists.

of itself, it would be prior

4. There are no infinite

itself.

3. Nothing is the cause of

(1,2)itself.

(3,4,5,6)

or (iii) have a first cause.

7. There is a first cause.

6. Every causal chain must be

8. If there is a first cause,

5. At least one thing has a





Three views universe







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

we will return.

arguments against simple atheism. Whether they also amount to

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

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

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.

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

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

grounds that there can't be an uncaused cause?

nothing like the Big Bang could genuinely be a first cause. Things like the Big

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?

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.





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

cause. Because the universe — including the Big Bang — has a

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

and indeed nothing in the universe can be.

Bang — must have a cause. So the Big Bang can't be the first cause —

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

But let's focus in on one premise:

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

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

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

Our first topic is the question of whether God exists.











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