

Aquinas' Cosmological Argument

First Cause Argument

In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, 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, whether the intermediate cause be several, or only one. 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 efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.

Aquinas, Summa Theologica (1273)

Cosmological argument (first cause) (Aquinas 1224-1274)

1. Observation: Everything has a cause (*this is an a posteriori argument*)

2. We have 2 options:
 - a) These causes stretch back to infinity **OR**
 - b) There was a first (uncaused) cause

3. Option a) is absurd

4. Option b) must therefore be correct – there was a first cause

5. The first cause is God

Conclusion: Therefore, God exists

Potential Problems with the Cosmological Argument

1. What's wrong with option a)? Why can't the causes stretch back to infinity?
2. Isn't option b) just as absurd?
3. If everything has a cause, then what caused God?
4. Even if God started the chain of causes, it doesn't mean that it exists now.
5. It can only tell us that God is powerful, not that it is all knowing etc.
6. Do causes really exist *in nature*? Perhaps they are constructs of our minds (Kant).