

Can you find any other problems with either validity or with the premises in each of the two stages? Remember, the best way to do this is to construct counter-examples, showing either (1) how it is possible for premises to be true while conclusions are false (to challenge the validity of inferences) or (2) how it is possible that a premise is false (to challenge the truth of the premises).

Introduction to Philosophy

The Cosmological Proof of God’s Existence

So far, we have examined Saint Anselm of Canterbury’s ontological argument, which is an *a priori*, deductive proof for God’s existence. Recall that *a priori* refers to the mode of justification (the justification does not rely on experience; reason alone is sufficient) and that deduction refers to the mode of inference (the inferences are supposed to provide conclusive support for the conclusion).

In his *Summa Theologica*, the Italian Dominican priest and philosopher, Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274 CE) denies the merit of the ontological proof. Instead, he provides “five ways” attempting to provide an *a posteriori* justification for the claim that God exists (so these justifications do appeal to experience for verification). However, like the ontological argument, these five ways adopt the deductive mode of inference.

The first three ways that Aquinas lays out share a common basic structure. They all . . .

1. Start with an obvious observation about the world,
2. Note how this reveals a chain of cause and effect,
3. Maintain that this chain cannot go backwards forever, and
4. Conclude that there must therefore be a “first cause”, which is God.

Arguments for God’s existence with this structure are known as cosmological proofs. One key assumption in these proofs involves the claim about causal chains in step 3:

The Infinity Thesis:

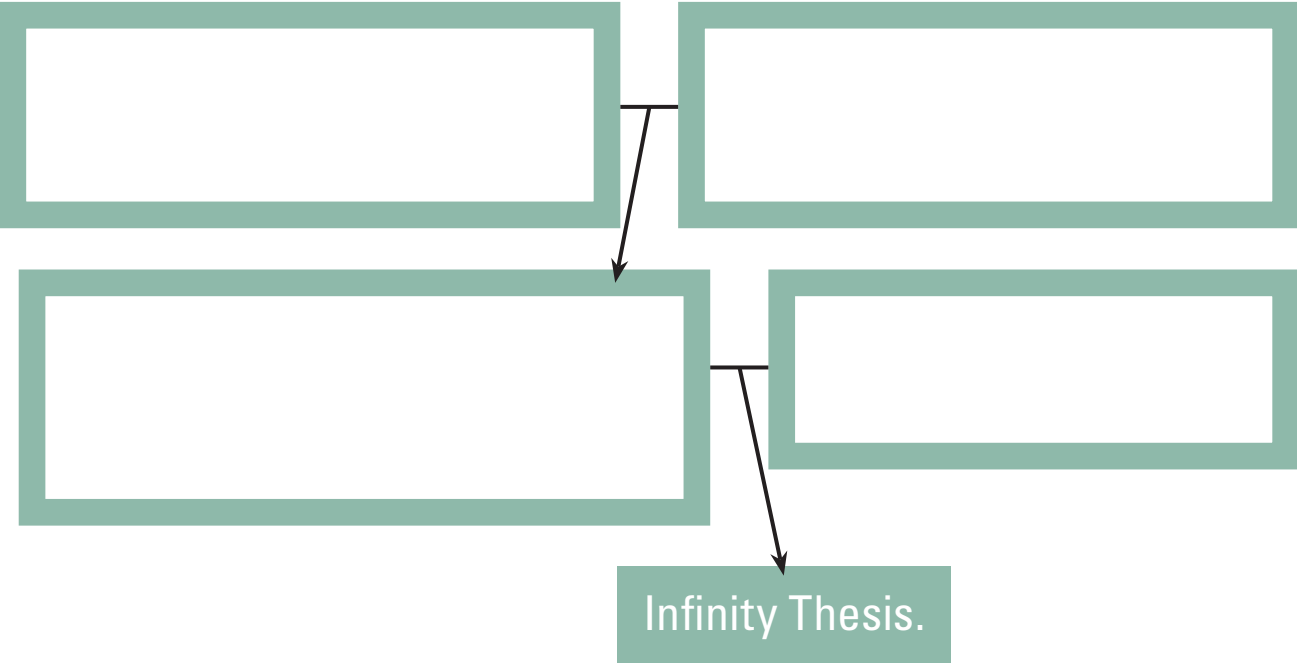
Aquinas gives us a little argument for accepting this thesis:

Subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they are moved by the first mover; as the staff moves only because it is moved by the hand. . . .

Now to take away the cause is to take away its effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause . . ., there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate, cause.

- Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.2.3.

We can diagram this argument as follows:



The contemporary philosophy Michael Martin notes that there are two ways to interpret the infinity thesis, each with a different level of plausibility:

1. The Temporal (Dominos) Interpretation:

2. The Maintenance (Chandelier) Interpretation:

Now Aquinas’ first cosmological proof rests on the obvious observation that there are things are in motion right now. The second relies on the obvious observation that there are events being caused to happen right now. The most complex argument, however, is Aquinas’ third way, which is the cosmological proof based on *contingency*. This proof begins with the obvious observation that contingent things exist right now (in the real world). Recall that contingent things are possible things that do not exist in all possible worlds. The proof follows in two stages:

Stage 1: Show there must exist things that are not contingent but necessary, and

Stage 2: Show that one of these necessary things must be God.

Begin by diagramming stage 1. I have provided its start and end points. Fill in the rest of this part of the argument by adding the missing boxes and arrows:

Obvious Observation:
Contingent things exist right now (in the real world).

There must also exist things that are not contingent, but *necessary*.

Now diagram stage 2. Once again, I have provided its start and end points. Fill in the rest of this part of the argument by adding the missing boxes and arrows:

There must also exist things that are not contingent, but *necessary*.

God exists.

Now that the entire argument is diagrammed, we can assess it for deductive soundness. Recall an argument is deductively sound when (1) it is deductively valid and (2) all its premises are true. In his article, Michael Martin identifies one problem of validity in the argument when he accuses Aquinas of committing the fallacy of composition. What is the fallacy of composition and where does it seem to appear in Aquinas’ argument?