

# Comments on final drafts of minipapers

PHIL 13195

Again, overall, I thought that the papers were very good for first papers in philosophy. Some thoughts:

- Making sense of Aquinas's argument involves ruling out two things: that there can be an infinite causal chain, and that anything can cause its own existence. The first gets the result that there must be a first cause. The second gets the result that that cause must be uncaused. These are separate points which many of you failed to distinguish.
- When you lack an argument for a claim, it is often tempting to say that that claim is true "by definition." This is almost always false, and a bad way to argue. You should ask: is this really a claim which any user of the expressions who understood their meaning would see to be true? If not, it is not true by definition.
- Often giving a valid reconstruction of an argument means adding premises which are not explicit in the author's presentation of that argument. For example: Aquinas's argument that an infinite causal chain is impossible is, on some plausible reconstructions, invalid. Do you should ask yourself: what premise would need to be added to make it valid?
- Do not argue by rhetorical question.
- A student in this class set a new record, by (in response to his/her objection to Aquinas's argument) constructing a 27 premise valid argument every premise of which was used in deriving the conclusion. Congratulations, \_.