Like Aquinas, Scotus believes that our knowledge of God’s existence and nature must be derived from knowledge of creatures. He begins with a key distinction (§45-48):

**Accidentally/incidentally ordered series of causes A-B-C:** B’s causal activity in producing C does not depend upon the continued existence of A. [That B is caused by A is accidental to B’s causation of C.] *Examples:* grandfather-father-son; a line of dominoes

**Essentially ordered series of causes A-B-C:** B’s causal activity in producing C does depend upon the continued existence (and causal activity) of A. [That B is being caused by A is essential to B’s causation of C.] *Example:* intention to stir the soup - moving the hand - moving the soup.

**Implications:**

i) Members of an incidentally ordered series are, taken singly, sufficient to produce their effect; members of an essentially ordered series are not.

ii) The causality of members of an incidentally ordered series is *homogeneous* (all of the same kind); the causality of members of an essentially ordered series differs in kind.

iii) The members of an incidentally ordered series need not occur simultaneously to produce the effect; the members of an essentially ordered series must all occur simultaneously to produce the effect [they are jointly necessary causes].

**The Argument:**

[I neglect details about ‘imparting existence in virtue of another’, which seem to play no significant role.]

1) Every object is either uncaused or caused to exist by something else.

2) There must be a first cause in any essentially ordered series of causes: [§49-54]

   a) An *intermediary* cause is defined either positively (lying between the first and last in a series) or negatively (neither first nor last in a series).

   b) If positively: each intermediary cause derives its causality in virtue of the first cause [implication iii) above]; in any case, there is nothing to prove in this case as we concede a first cause.

   c) If negatively: Scotus provides four separate arguments for the existence of a first cause.

       1) All intermediary causes must themselves require a cause. So if there could be an infinite chain of such causes, the whole chain would require a cause which must be outside the series; and this would be ‘first’ [but not as a regress-stopper].
In fact, Scotus doesn’t think this could happen with an essentially ordered series.

(2c-2) If there were an infinite chain of intermediary causes, and no first cause, then an infinity of causes would have to concur simultaneously to produce the effect; but this is impossible. [Impossible or unintelligible?]

(2c-3) Prior intermediary causes in the chain are more perfect; in an infinite chain, there would occur a cause with infinite priority, and hence it would have infinite perfection. But such a cause would be too excellent to depend upon anything else. [Fallacy: each such cause would be only finitely removed from the effect.]

(2c-4) [The most interesting argument]

1. To have a causal power is not necessarily an imperfection
2. Hence it is possible that a causal power is possessed without imperfection.
3. Whenever a causal power resides in an efficient cause that is only intermediary (i.e., does not produce its effect independently), the causal power is possessed imperfectly. [Assumes an essentially ordered series.]
4. Hence if a causal power can only reside in an intermediary efficient cause, it is not possible that it be possessed without imperfection.
5. So by 2 and 4, there must be a first efficient cause in which a causal power can reside.

(3) Any infinite incidentally ordered series of causes still requires an essentially ordered series (and hence, by (2), a first cause):

(3a) Members of a series of incidentally ordered causes are homogeneous in their causality [implication ii) above]; that is, all have causal power in virtue of a certain form (e.g., fatherhood) that is uniformly present.

(3b) The form itself, existing perpetually and uniformly, requires a cause C; and this cause C must lie outside the series of incidentally ordered causes, because each member of this series only causes the next. [The cause C counts as essential, not incidental: each member of the series has its causal power only in virtue of C. So C cannot be part of the incidental series.]

(3c) Hence there will be an essential cause on which the whole incidentally ordered series depends – and by part (2), a first essential cause.

(4) Hence there is a first efficient cause whose existence is uncaused: God.