



# Aquinas' Third Way

## Worksheet 1

### Source

The third way is taken from possibility and necessity, and runs thus. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to corrupt, and consequently, they are possible to be or not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence – which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary. ... Therefore we cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God.

Summa Theologica by St Thomas Aquinas (Pt. 1 Q.2 Art. 3. Cosimo Classics, New York, 2007)

That is: things that are 'contingent'.

If things could possibly not exist then, given all possibilities, at some time these things would not have existed.

This is his basic (and now widely disputed) maxim that nothing comes from nothing. That is: contingent things rely on something else.

It's absurd because right now there are clearly things in existence.

There must exist a 'necessary' thing which causes all the 'contingent' things to come into existence.

### Analysis

Put Aquinas' argument in your own words:

1. Why, according to Aquinas, given infinite time, and only contingent things (possible to be and not to be), would there at some point be nothing?

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2. Why, according to Aquinas, would there not be anything now if at some point there was nothing?

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3. Why, according to Aquinas, should we call that necessary thing God?

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