

Third Way of St. Thomas Aquinas

The third way is taken from the possible and the necessary, and is thus.

I. We find among (real) things some that are possible to be and not to be.

A. since they are found to be generated and corrupted,

B. and consequently, (they are) able to be and not to be.

II. But it is impossible for all the things-that-are to be like this

A. for what is possible not to be, at some time does not exist.

B. If, then, all things are possible not to be, at some time there was (would have been) nothing real.

C. But if this were true, (then) even now there would be nothing, because
i. what does not exist, does not begin to exist, except through something that does exist.
ii. If therefore there (ever) was nothing existing, it would have been impossible that something (anything) would begin to be,
iii. and in this way, there would (now) exist nothing.
iv. This is clearly false.

III. Therefore not all beings are (merely) possible, but there must be something real which is necessary.

IV. But every necessary thing either has a cause of its necessity from another, or it does not have (such a cause).

V. It is not possible that one should proceed to infinity in necessary things which have a cause of their necessity, just as neither (was it possible) in efficient causes, as has been proved.

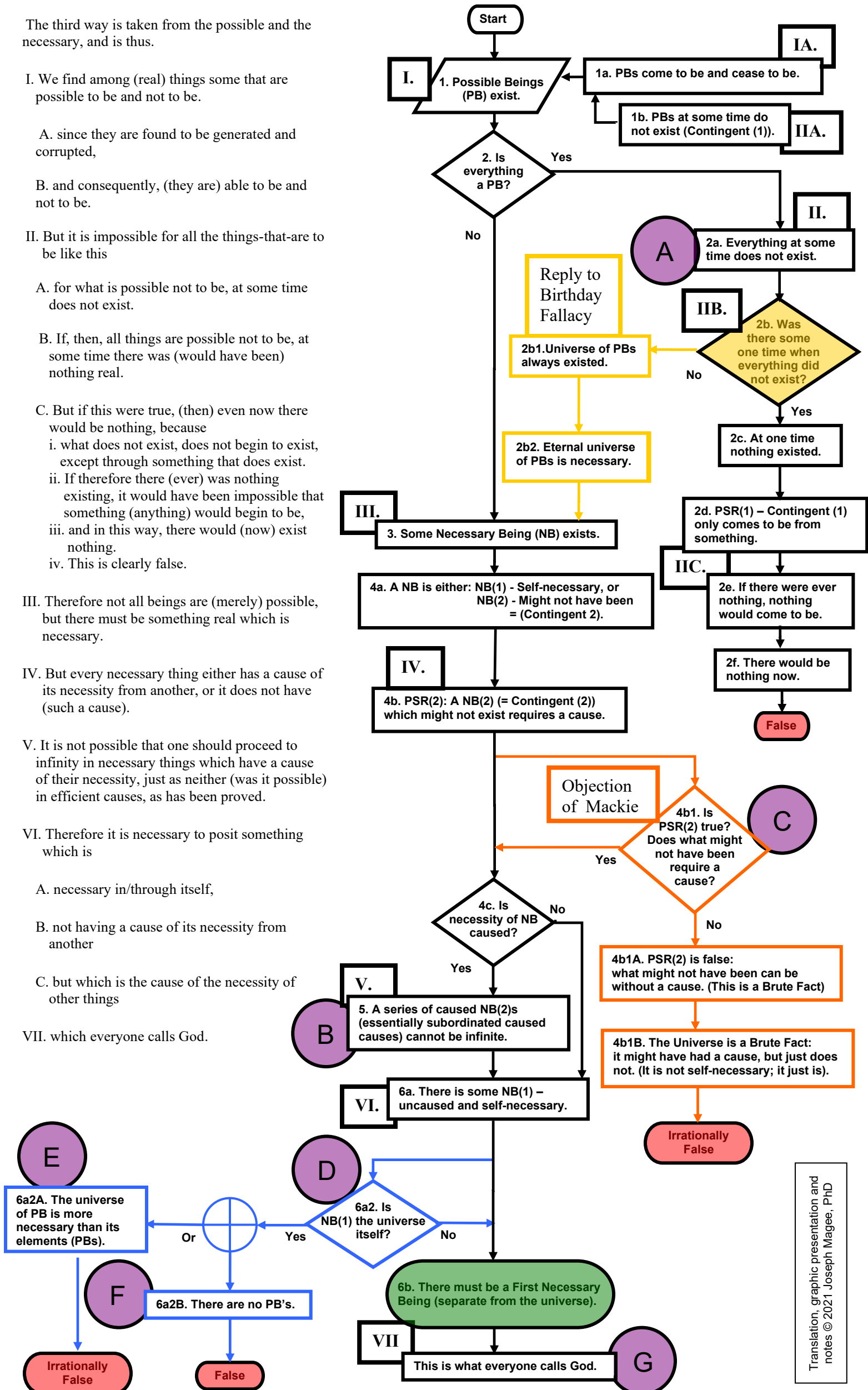
VI. Therefore it is necessary to posit something which is

A. necessary in/through itself,

B. not having a cause of its necessity from another

C. but which is the cause of the necessity of other things

VII. which everyone calls God.



Notes:

A. Objection: Aquinas commits the Birthday Fallacy: since every possible being at some time does not exist, there is some one time when every (and all) possible being does not exist. Aquinas does not consider that an eternal universe satisfies Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) (1) [every possible being has its own particular cause(s)] but the Universe as a whole does not require a temporal beginning (e.g., the Big Bang or some prior beginning). The temporal succession of possible beings could have been going on forever, with each thing caused, but no cause of the whole temporally eternal series.

Reply: An eternal universe would be a Necessary Being, which is all that is claimed. For more, see my paper "[The Alleged Birthday Fallacy in Aquinas's Third Way.](#)"

B. An Infinite Regress in simultaneously acting caused causes is impossible (see [First Way](#) and [Second Way](#)).

C. Objection (J.L. Mackie): A Brute Fact might not exist (it is not Necessary (2) (i.e., self-necessary)) but it does without any cause. The Universe has no cause. It just is.

Reply: This is mere irrationality. The only time this concept of "Brute Fact" is ever invoked is when one declares (without any evidence) that the Universe does not need or have an explanation. It is never invoked when people encounter other contingent things or anomalous events, for example, [fast radio bursts](#) or [transient lunar phenomenon](#). To seek and to expect there to be explanations is just what it means to be rational, even if the explanations are not yet known or understood. If the objector were to invoke "Brute Facts" with any consistency, he/she would completely undermine science, and indeed, their own day-to-day living. The "Brute Fact" alternative to seeking an explanation for the Universe should not be taken seriously.

D. Objection: The Universe is the Self-Necessary Being.

E. Option 1: The Self-Necessary Universe is comprised only of possible beings.

Reply: The Universe would then be more necessary than the things of which it is exclusively comprised, as though a wall comprised of only red bricks were not red. This is irrationally false.

F. Option 2: The Self-Necessary Universe is comprised of only necessary beings; there are no possible beings. Mass/energy (or whatever underlies them) is what exists in the primary sense, and it has always existed. Everything composed of it (protons, atoms, planets, cells, animals, you and I) exist in a secondary sense, as an arrangement or state of this more basic (and more real) stuff. The secondary arrangements of mass/energy (or whatever underlies them) come and go, but the substrate (and so the Universe) cannot not exist.

Reply: This denies the first premise of the proof with which we started: some of the real things that exist are possible beings. For more on the self-contradicting nature of the scientific materialism underlying this objection, see the blog post [Scientific Materialism Is No Alternative . . .](#)

G. Aquinas relies on his Christian faith to identify the First Necessary Being as God. See the essay "[This everyone calls God.](#)"