

The Third Way – An argument from possibility and necessity

Note: This argument is a reductio. A reduction ad absurdum is a way of arguing that seeks to establish a thesis by deriving an absurdity from the denial of that statement. We're left with accepting the thesis because to reject it would lead to an absurdity. You'll recall that Anselm's Ontological argument employed a reductio.

1. "We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be", i.e., contingent beings.
2. Everything is either necessary or contingent.
3. Suppose that everything were contingent.
4. "It is impossible for these [contingent beings] always to exist, for that which can not-be at some time is not."
5. Therefore, at one time there was nothing. [3, 4]
6. "That which does not exist begins to exist only through something already existing."
(HW 526)
7. Therefore, there is nothing now. [5, 6]
8. But wait! There is something now!!
9. Therefore [3] has to be false.
10. And so there is a necessary being and that being is God [2].