

From Leibniz, *On Freedom and Possibility*

God produces the best not by necessity, but because he wills it. Indeed, if anyone were to ask me whether God wills by necessity, I would request that he explain what he means by necessity by adding more detail, that is, I would request that he give a complete formulation of the question. For example you might ask whether God wills by necessity or whether he wills freely, that is, because of his nature or because of his will. I respond that God, of course, cannot will voluntarily, otherwise there would be a will for willing on to infinity. Rather, we must say that God wills the best through his nature. "Therefore," you will say, "he wills by necessity." I will say, with Saint Augustine, that such necessity is blessed. "But surely it follows from this that things exist by necessity." How so? Since the nonexistence of what God wills to exist implies a contradiction? I deny that this proposition is absolutely true, for otherwise, that which God does not will would not be possible. For things remain possible, even if God does not choose them. Indeed, even if God does not will something to exist it is possible for it to exist, since, by its nature, it could exist if God were to will it to exist. "But God cannot will it to exist." I concede this, yet, such a thing remains possible in its nature, even if it is not possible with respect to the divine will, since we have defined as in its nature are possible anything that, in itself, implies no contradiction, even though its coexistence with God can in some way be said to imply a contradiction...

Therefore I say: a possible thing is something with some essence or reality, that is, something that can be distinctly understood. For example, a pentagon would remain possible even if we were to imagine that no exact pentagon ever was or would be in nature. However, one should give some reason for why no pentagon ever existed or would exist. The reason for this state of affairs is nothing but the fact that pentagon is incompatible with other things that include more perfection, that is, with other things that include more reality, which, to be sure, exist ahead of that pentagon. But, you infer: therefore it is necessary that it does not exist. This I concede if it is understood in the sense that the proposition, "a pentagon will not exist nor has one ever existed" is necessary. But the claim is false, if it is understood in the sense that the proposition, "no pentagon exists" (abstracted from time) is necessary, because I denied that this proposition can be demonstrated. For the pentagon is not absolutely impossible, nor does it imply a contradiction, even if it follows from the harmony of things that a pentagon can find no place among real things.