On the Existence of God

St. Barnabas Church, Ottawa

2018

**Contents**

[The God of Abraham and the Philosopher’s God 2](#_Toc514662986)

[The Cosmological Argument 3](#_Toc514662987)

[The Argument from Design 4](#_Toc514662988)

[The Ontological Argument 9](#_Toc514662989)

[The Problem of Evil 10](#_Toc514662990)

# The God of Abraham and the Philosopher’s God

## What are we trying to prove when we prove the Existence of God?

### Philip Melanchthon

### [Loci Communes](https://calvinistinternational.com/2017/05/05/the-god-of-the-philosophers-and-the-god-of-the-theologians/) (1559, trans. JAO Preus & Calvinist International)

In order that we may come to a definition of God, I will make a comparison of two of them. One definition is a truncated endeavor by Plato. The other is a complete one which has been handed down in the church and derives from the words of John the Baptist. Plato says, “God is the eternal mind, the cause of good in nature.” Now, though this definition by Plato is set up in so learned a way that it is difficult for those with little training to judge as to what is lacking, nevertheless, because it still does not describe God as He has revealed Himself, a clearer and more appropriate definition is required. The definition is: “God is an eternal mind, that is, a spiritual essence, intelligent, the eternal cause of good in nature, that is, a truthful, good, just, almighty Creator of all good things, of the whole order in nature, and of human nature, all of which are directed to a certain orderly goal, that is, obedience. Plato has included all of these things. But they are still the thoughts of the human mind which, even though they are true and learned and developed on the basis of sure and demonstrable evidence, nevertheless are in need of an addition to tell us what kind of God He has revealed Himself to be. Therefore we must turn to the second definition: God is a spiritual, intelligent essence, eternal, truthful, good, pure, just, merciful, free, immeasurably powerful and wise, the eternal Father who has begotten His Son from eternity as His own image; the Son who is the coeternal image of the Father; and the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, as the Deity has been revealed in the sure Word; that the eternal Father with the Son and the Holy Spirit created and preserves the heaven and the earth and all creatures; and among the human race, which was created to be in His image and to be obedient to Him, He has chosen for Himself the church so that by this church the one and true Deity might be revealed with sure and certain witness through the Word which has been given by the prophets and apostles, so that He might be recognized, invoked, and worshiped according to that divinely given Word; and all religions should be condemned which devise other gods, and this true Deity should be glorified in eternal life.

# The Cosmological Argument

## Does the Existence of this world show the Existence of God?

### Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz

### [On the ultimate origination of things](http://www.leibniz-translations.com/index2.php) (1697, trans. Lloyd Strickland)

Besides the world or aggregate of finite things, there is a certain dominant unity, not only as the soul is dominant in me, or rather as the self is dominant in my body, but also in a much more noble way. For the dominant unity of the universe not only rules the world, but also constructs or makes it; and it is superior to the world and, so to speak, extramundane, and it is thus the ultimate reason of things. For a sufficient reason for existence cannot be found in any single thing alone, nor in the whole aggregate and series of things. Let us imagine that the book of the elements of geometry has always existed, one always copied from another; it is evident that, even if a reason can be given for the present book from a past one, from which it was copied, nevertheless we shall never come upon a full reason no matter how many past books we assume, since we would always be right to wonder why such books have existed from all time, why books existed at all, and why they were written in this way. What is true of books is also true of the different states of the world; for a subsequent state is in a way copied from a preceding one (although according to certain laws of change). And so, however far back you go to earlier states, you will never find in those states a full reason why there should be any world rather than none, and why it should be such as it is. Therefore, even if you should imagine the world eternal, because you still suppose only a succession of states, and because you will not find a sufficient reason in any of them, and indeed no matter how many states you assume you will not make the least progress towards giving a reason, it is evident that the reason must be sought elsewhere. For in eternal things, even if there is no cause, we must nevertheless realize that there is a reason, which in persisting things is their very necessity or essence, but in the series of changeable things, if this is imagined a priori to be eternal, it would be the very prevailing of inclinations, as will soon be clear, whereby reasons do not necessitate (by an absolute or metaphysical necessity, where the contrary implies a contradiction), but incline. From this it is evident that not even by supposing the eternity of the world can we escape the ultimate, extramundane reason of things, i.e. God.

Therefore the reasons for the world lie hidden in something extramundane, different from the chain of states, or the series of things, the aggregate of which constitutes the world. And so we must pass from a physical or hypothetical necessity, which determines the later states of the world from the earlier, to something which is of absolute or metaphysical necessity, for which a reason cannot be given. For the present world is physically or hypothetically necessary, but not absolutely or metaphysically necessary. That is, by assuming that the world was ever in such and such a state, it follows that such and such states will arise in future. Therefore since the ultimate ground must be in something which is of metaphysical necessity, and there is no reason for an existing thing except from an existing thing, it follows that some single being must exist of metaphysical necessity, i.e. one whose essence is existence. And thus something exists that is different from the plurality of beings, i.e. from the world, which, as we have granted and shown, is not of metaphysical necessity.

# The Argument from Design

## Do certain complex objects prove the existence of God?

### William Paley

### [Natural Theology: Evidences Of The Existence And Attributes Of The Deity](http://darwin-online.org.uk/content/frameset?itemID=A142&pageseq=1&viewtype=text) (1802)

CHAPTER I

In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone, and were asked how the stone came to be there; I might possibly answer, that, for any thing I knew to the contrary, it had lain there for ever: nor would it perhaps be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I had found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place; I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given, that, for any thing I knew, the watch might have always been there. Yet why should not this answer serve for the watch as well as for the stone? why is it not as admissible in the second case, as in the first? For this reason, and for no other, viz. that, when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive (what we could not discover in the stone) that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose, e. g. that they are so formed and adjusted as to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day; that, if the different parts had been differently shaped from what they are, of a different size from what they are, or placed after any other manner, or in any other order, than that in which they are placed, either no motion at all would have been carried on in the machine, or none which would have answered the use that is now served by it. To reckon up a few of the plainest of these parts, and of their offices, all tending to one result:-- We see a cylindrical box containing a coiled elastic spring, which, by its endeavour to relax itself, turns round the box. We next observe a flexible chain (artificially wrought for the sake of flexure), communicating the action of the spring from the box to the fusee. We then find a series of wheels, the teeth of which catch in, and apply to, each other, conducting the motion from the fusee to the balance, and from the balance to the pointer; and at the same time, by the size and shape of those wheels, so regulating that motion, as to terminate in causing an index, by an equable and measured progression, to pass over a given space in a given time. We take notice that the wheels are made of brass in order to keep them from rust; the springs of steel, no other metal being so elastic; that over the face of the watch there is placed a glass, a material employed in no other part of the work, but in the room of which, if there had been any other than a transparent substance, the hour could not be seen without opening the case. This mechanism being observed (it requires indeed an examination of the instrument, and perhaps some previous knowledge of the subject, to perceive and understand it; but being once, as we have said, observed and understood), the inference, we think, is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker: that there must have existed, at some time, and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer; who comprehended its construction, and designed its use.

I. Nor would it, I apprehend, weaken the conclusion, that we had never seen a watch made; that we had never known an artist capable of making one; that we were altogether incapable of executing such a piece of workmanship ourselves, or of understanding in what manner it was performed; all this being no more than what is true of some exquisite remains of ancient art, of some lost arts, and, to the generality of mankind, of the more curious productions of modern manufacture. Does one man in a million know how oval frames are turned? Ignorance of this kind exalts our opinion of the unseen and unknown artist's skill, if he be unseen and unknown, but raises no doubt in our minds of the existence and agency of such an artist, at some former time, and in some place or other. Nor can I perceive that it varies at all the inference, whether the question arise concerning a human agent, or concerning an agent of a different species, or an agent possessing, in some respects, a different nature.

II. Neither, secondly, would it invalidate our conclusion, that the watch sometimes went wrong, or that it seldom went exactly right. The purpose of the machinery, the design, and the designer, might be evident, and in the case supposed would be evident, in whatever way we accounted for the irregularity of the movement, or whether we could account for it or not. It is not necessary that a machine be perfect, in order to show with what design it was made: still less necessary, where the only question is, whether it were made with any design at all.

III. Nor, thirdly, would it bring any uncertainty into the argument, if there were a few parts of the watch, concerning which we could not discover, or had not yet discovered, in what manner they conduced to the general effect; or even some parts, concerning which we could not ascertain, whether they conduced to that effect in any manner whatever. For, as to the first branch of the case; if by the loss, or disorder, or decay of the parts in question, the movement of the watch were found in fact to be stopped, or disturbed, or retarded, no doubt would remain in our minds as to the utility or intention of these parts, although we should be unable to investigate the manner according to which, or the connexion by which, the ultimate effect depended upon their action or assistance; and the more complex is the machine, the more likely is this obscurity to arise. Then, as to the second thing supposed, namely, that there were parts which might be spared, without prejudice to the movement of the watch, and that we had proved this by experiment,--these superfluous parts, even if we were completely assured that they were such, would not vacate the reasoning which we had instituted concerning other parts. The indication of contrivance remained, with respect to them, nearly as it was before.

IV. Nor, fourthly, would any man in his senses think the existence of the watch, with its various machinery, accounted for, by being told that it was one out of possible combinations of material forms; that whatever he had found in the place where he found the watch, must have contained some internal configuration or other; and that this configuration might be the structure now exhibited, viz. of the works of a watch, as well as a different structure.

V. Nor, fifthly, would it yield his inquiry more satisfaction to be answered, that there existed in things a principle of order, which had disposed the parts of the watch into their present form and situation. He never knew a watch made by the principle of order; nor can he even form to himself an idea of what is meant by a principle of order, distinct from the intelligence of the watch-maker.

VI. Sixthly, he would be surprised to hear that the mechanism of the watch was no proof of contrivance, only a motive to induce the mind to think so:

VII. And not less surprised to be informed, that the watch in his hand was nothing more than the result of the laws of metallicnature. It is a perversion of language to assign any law, as the efficient, operative cause of any thing. A law presupposes an agent; for it is only the mode, according to which an agent proceeds: it implies a power; for it is the order, according to which that power acts. Without this agent, without this power, which are both distinct from itself, the law does nothing; is nothing. The expression, "the law of metallic nature," may sound strange and harsh to a philosophic ear; but it seems quite as justifiable as some others which are more familiar to him, such as "the law of vegetable nature," "the law of animal nature," or indeed as "the law of nature" in general, when assigned as the cause of phænomena, in exclusion of agency and power; or when it is substituted into the place of these.

VIII. Neither, lastly, would our observer be driven out of his conclusion, or from his confidence in its truth, by being told that he knew nothing at all about the matter. He knows enough for his argument: he knows the utility of the end: he knows the subserviency and adaptation of the means to the end. These points being known, his ignorance of other points, his doubts concerning other points, affect not the certainty of his reasoning. The consciousness of knowing little, need not beget a distrust of that which he does know.

CHAPTER II

Suppose, in the next place, that the person who found the watch, should, after some time, discover that, in addition to all the properties which he had hitherto observed in it, it possessed the unexpected property of producing, in the course of its movement, another watch like itself (the thing is conceivable); that it contained within it a mechanism, a system of parts, a mould for instance, or a complex adjustment of lathes, files, and other tools, evidently and separately calculated for this purpose; let us inquire, what effect ought such a discovery to have upon his former conclusion.

I. The first effect would be to increase his admiration of the contrivance, and his conviction of the consummate skill of the contriver. Whether he regarded the object of the contrivance, the distinct apparatus, the intricate, yet in many parts intelligible mechanism, by which it was carried on, he would perceive, in this new observation, nothing but an additional reason for doing what he had already done,--for referring the construction of the watch to design, and to supreme art. If that construction without this property, or which is the same thing, before this property had been noticed, proved intention and art to have been employed about it; still more strong would the proof appear, when he came to the knowledge of this further property, the crown and perfection of all the rest.

II. He would reflect, that though the watch before him were, in some sense, the maker of the watch, which was fabricated in the course of its movements, yet it was in a very different sense from that, in which a carpenter, for instance, is the maker of a chair; the author of its contrivance, the cause of the relation of its parts to their use. With respect to these, the first watch was no cause at all to the second: in no such sense as this was it the author of the constitution and order, either of the parts which the new watch contained, or of the parts by the aid and instrumentality of which it was produced. We might possibly say, but with great latitude of expression, that a stream of water ground corn: but no latitude of expression would allow us to say, no stretch of conjecture could lead us to think, that the stream of water built the mill, though it were too ancient for us to know who the builder was. What the stream of water does in the affair, is neither more nor less than this; by the application of an unintelligent impulse to a mechanism previously arranged, arranged independently of it, and arranged by intelligence, an effect is produced, viz. the corn is ground. But the effect results from the arrangement. The force of the stream cannot be said to be the cause or author of the effect, still less of the arrangement. Understanding and plan in the formation of the mill were not the less necessary, for any share which the water has in grinding the corn: yet is this share the same, as that which the watch would have contributed to the production of the new watch, upon the supposition assumed in the last section. Therefore,

III. Though it be now no longer probable, that the individual watch, which our observer had found, was made immediately by the hand of an artificer, yet doth not this alteration in anywise affect the inference, that an artificer had been originally employed and concerned in the production. The argument from design remains as it was. Marks of design and contrivance are no more accounted for now, than they were before. In the same thing, we may ask for the cause of different properties. We may ask for the cause of the colour of a body, of its hardness, of its head; and these causes may be all different. We are now asking for the cause of that subserviency to a use, that relation to an end, which we have remarked in the watch before us. No answer is given to this question, by telling us that a preceding watch produced it. There cannot be design without a designer; contrivance without a contriver; order without choice; arrangement, without any thing capable of arranging; subserviency and relation to a purpose, without that which could intend a purpose; means suitable to an end, and executing their office, in accomplishing that end, without the end ever having been contemplated, or the means accommodated to it. Arrangement, disposition of parts, subserviency of means to an end, relation of instruments to a use, imply the presence of intelligence and mind. No one, therefore, can rationally believe, that the insensible, inanimate watch, from which the watch before us issued, was the proper cause of the mechanism we so much admire in it;--could be truly said to have constructed the instrument, disposed its parts, assigned their office, determined their order, action, and mutual dependency, combined their several motions into one result, and that also a result connected with the utilities of other beings. All these properties, therefore, are as much unaccounted for, as they were before.

IV. Nor is any thing gained by running the difficulty farther back, i. e. by supposing the watch before us to have been produced from another watch, that from a former, and so on indefinitely. Our going back ever so far, brings us no nearer to the least degree of satisfaction upon the subject. Contrivance is still unaccounted for. We still want a contriver. A designing mind is neither supplied by this supposition, nor dispensed with. If the difficulty were diminished the further we went back, by going back indefinitely we might exhaust it. And this is the only case to which this sort of reasoning applies. Where there is a tendency, or, as we increase the number of terms, a continual approach towards a limit, there, by supposing the number of terms to be what is called infinite, we may conceive the limit to be attained: but where there is no such tendency, or approach, nothing is effected by lengthening the series. There is no difference as to the point in question (whatever there may be as to many points), between one series and another; between a series which is finite, and a series which is infinite. A chain, composed of an infinite number of links, can no more support itself, than a chain composed of a finite number of links. And of this we are assured (though we never can have tried the experiment), because, by increasing the number of links, from ten for instance to a hundred, from a hundred to a thousand, &c. we make not the smallest approach, we observe not the smallest tendency, towards self-support. There is no difference in this respect (yet there may be a great difference in several respects) between a chain of a greater or less length, between one chain and another, between one that is finite and one that is infinite. This very much resembles the case before us. The machine which we are inspecting, demonstrates, by its construction, contrivance and design. Contrivance must have had a contriver; design, a designer; whether the machine immediately proceeded from another machine or not. That circumstance alters not the case. That other machine may, in like manner, have proceeded from a former machine: nor does that alter the case; contrivance must have had a contriver. That former one from one preceding it: no alteration still; a contriver is still necessary. No tendency is perceived, no approach towards a diminution of this necessity. It is the same with any and every succession of these machines; a succession of ten, of a hundred, of a thousand; with one series, as with another; a series which is finite, as with a series which is infinite. In whatever other respects they may differ, in this they do not. In all equally, contrivance and design are unaccounted for.

The question is not simply, How came the first watch into existence? which question, it may be pretended, is done away by supposing the series of watches thus produced from one another to have been infinite, and consequently to have had no-such first, for which it was necessary to provide a cause. This, perhaps, would have been nearly the state of the question, if no thing had been before us but an unorganized, unmechanized substance, without mark or indication of contrivance. It might be difficult to show that such substance could not have existed from eternity, either in succession (if it were possible, which I think it is not, for unorganized bodies to spring from one another), or by individual perpetuity. But that is not the question now. To suppose it to be so, is to suppose that it made no difference whether we had found a watch or a stone. As it is, the metaphysics of that question have no place; for, in the watch which we are examining, are seen contrivance, design; an end, a purpose; means for the end, adaptation to the purpose. And the question which irresistibly presses upon our thoughts, is, whence this contrivance and design? The thing required is the intending mind, the adapting hand, the intelligence by which that hand was directed. This question, this demand, is not shaken off, by increasing a number or succession of substances, destitute of these properties; nor the more, by increasing that number to infinity. If it be said, that, upon the supposition of one watch being produced from another in the course of that other's movements, and by means of the mechanism within it, we have a cause for the watch in my hand, viz. the watch from which it proceeded. I deny, that for the design, the contrivance, the suitableness of means to an end, the adaptation of instruments to a use (all which we discover in the watch), we have any cause whatever. It is in vain, therefore, to assign a series of such causes, or to allege that a series may be carried back to infinity; for I do not admit that we have yet any cause at all of the phænomena, still less any series of causes either finite or infinite. Here is contrivance, but no contriver; proofs of design, but no designer.

V. Our observer would further also reflect, that the maker of the watch before him, was, in truth and reality, the maker of every watch produced from it; there being no difference (except that the latter manifests a more exquisite skill) between the making of another watch with his own hands, by the mediation of files, lathes, chisels, &c. and the disposing, fixing, and inserting of these instruments, or of others equivalent to them, in the body of the watch already made in such a manner, as to form a new watch in the course of the movements which he had given to the old one. It is only working by one set of tools, instead of another.

The conclusion of which the first examination of the watch, of its works, construction, and movement, suggested, was, that it must have had, for the cause and author of that construction, an artificer, who understood its mechanism, and designed its use. This conclusion is invincible. A second examination presents us with a new discovery. The watch is found, in the course of its movement, to produce another watch, similar to itself; and not only so, but we perceive in it a system or organization, separately calculated for that purpose. What effect would this discovery have, or ought it to have, upon our former inference? What, as hath already been said, but to increase, beyond measure, our admiration of the skill, which had been employed in the formation of such a machine? Or shall it, instead of this, all at once turn us round to an opposite conclusion, viz. that no art or skill whatever has been concerned in the business, although all other evidences of art and skill remain as they were, and this last and supreme piece of art be now added to the rest? Can this be maintained without absurdity? Yet this is atheism.

CHAPTER III

This is atheism: for every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater and more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation. I mean that the contrivances of nature surpass the contrivances of art, in the complexity, subtility, and curiosity of the mechanism; and still more, if possible, do they go beyond them in number and variety; yet, in a multitude of cases, are not less evidently mechanical, not less evidently contrivances, not less evidently accommodated to their end, or suited to their office, than are the most perfect productions of human ingenuity.

# The Ontological Argument

## Does God exist by definition?

### St. Anselm of Canterbury

### [Proslogion](http://www.uta.edu/philosophy/faculty/burgess-jackson/Anselm,%20Proslogion.pdf) (1077–1078, trans. Sidney Norton Deane)

[Chapter 2] And so, Lord, do thou, who dost give understanding to faith, give me, so far as thou knowest it to be profitable, to understand that thou art as we believe; and that thou art that which we believe. And indeed, we believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Or is there no such nature, since the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God? But, at any rate, this very fool, when he hears of this being of which I speak—a being than which nothing greater can be conceived—understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his understanding; although he does not understand it to exist.

For, it is one thing for an object to be in the understanding, and another to understand that the object exists. When a painter first conceives of what he will afterwards perform, he has it in his understanding, but he does not yet understand it to be, because he has not yet performed it. But after he has made the painting, he both has it in his understanding, and he understands that it exists, because he has made it.

Hence, even the fool is convinced that something exists in the understanding, at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived. For, when he hears of this, he understands it. And whatever is understood, exists in the understanding. And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater.

Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.

# The Problem of Evil

## Does the existence of Evil show that God does not Exist?

The problem of evil can be summed up as a set of apparently incompatible beliefs.

1. God loves everyone and wants the best for everyone.
2. God is all powerful.
3. Evil exists.

As Christians, how do we show that these apparently incompatible beliefs are compatible after all?

### Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz

### [Theodicy](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/17147/17147-h/17147-h.htm#page49) (1710, trans. E. M. Huggard)

[This passage is the very end of the *Theodicy*. It recapitulates the argument in a dialogue form. -HH]

**Laurentius (Lorenzo) Valla’s Story**

I intended to finish here after having met (as it seems to me) all the objections of M. Bayle on this matter that I could find in his works. But remembering Laurentius Valla's Dialogue on Free Will, in opposition to Boethius, which I have already mentioned, I thought it would be opportune to quote it in abstract, retaining the dialogue form, and then to continue from where it ends, keeping up the fiction it initiated; and that less with the purpose of enlivening the subject, than in order to explain myself towards the end of my dissertation as clearly as I can, and in a way most likely to be generally understood. This Dialogue of Valla and his books on Pleasure and the True Good make it plain that he was no less a philosopher than a humanist. These four books were opposed to the four books on the Consolation of Philosophy by Boethius, and the Dialogue to the fifth book. A certain Spaniard named Antonio Glarea requests of him elucidation on the difficulty of free will, whereof little is known as it is worthy to be known, for upon it depend justice and injustice, punishment and reward in this life and in the life to come. Laurentius Valla answers him that we must console ourselves for an ignorance which we share with the whole world, just as one consoles oneself for not having the wings of birds.

ANTONIO—I know that you can give me those wings, like another Daedalus, so that I may emerge from the prison of ignorance, and rise to the very region of truth, which is the homeland of souls. The books that I have seen have not satisfied me, not even the famous Boethius, who meets with general approval. I know not whether he fully understood himself what he says of God's understanding, and of eternity superior to time; and I ask for your opinion on his way of reconciling foreknowledge with freedom.

LAURENTIUS—I am fearful of giving offence to many people, if I confute this great man; yet I will give preference over this fear to the consideration I have for the entreaties of a friend, provided that you make me a promise.

ANT.—What?

LAUR.—It is, that when you have dined with me you do not ask me to give you supper, that is to say, I desire that you be content with the answer to the question you have put to me, and do not put a further question.

ANT.—I promise you. Here is the heart of the difficulty. If God foresaw the treason of Judas, it was necessary that he should betray, it was impossible for him not to betray. There is no obligation to do the impossible. He therefore did not sin, he did not deserve to be punished. That destroys justice and religion, and the fear of God.

LAUR.—God foresaw sin; but he did not compel man to commit it; sin is voluntary.

ANT.—That will was necessary, since it was foreseen.

LAUR.—If my knowledge does not cause things past or present to exist, neither will my foreknowledge cause future things to exist.

ANT.—That comparison is deceptive: neither the present nor the past can be changed, they are already necessary; but the future, movable in itself, becomes fixed and necessary through foreknowledge. Let us pretend that a god of the heathen boasts of knowing the future: I will ask him if he knows which foot I shall put foremost, then I will do the opposite of that which he shall have foretold.

LAUR.—This God knows what you are about to do.

ANT.—How does he know it, since I will do the opposite of what he shall have said, and I suppose that he will say what he thinks?

LAUR.—Your supposition is false: God will not answer you; or again, if he were to answer you, the veneration you would have for him would make you hasten to do what he had said; his prediction would be to you an order. But we have changed the question. We are not concerned with what God will foretell but with what he foresees. Let us therefore return to foreknowledge, and distinguish between the necessary and the certain. It is not impossible for what is foreseen not to happen; but it is infallibly sure that it will happen. I can become a Soldier or Priest, but I shall not become one.

ANT.—Here I have you firmly held. The philosophers' rule maintains that all that which is possible can be considered as existing. But if that which you affirm to be possible, namely an event different from what has been foreseen, actually happened, God would have been mistaken.

LAUR.—The rules of the philosophers are not oracles for me. This one in particular is not correct. Two contradictories are often both possible. Can they also both exist? But, for your further enlightenment, let us pretend that Sextus Tarquinius [the man who raped Lucretia and doomed his house, the last kings of Rome - HH], coming to Delphi to consult the Oracle of Apollo, receives the answer:

Exul inopsque cades irata pulsus ab urbe.

A beggared outcast of the city's rage / Beside a foreign shore cut short thy age.

The young man will complain: I have brought you a royal gift, O Apollo, and you proclaim for me a lot so unhappy? Apollo will say to him: Your gift is pleasing to me, and I will do that which you ask of me, I will tell you what will happen. I know the future, but I do not bring it about. Go make your complaint to Jupiter and the Parcae [the Fates - HH]. Sextus would be ridiculous if he continued thereafter to complain about Apollo. Is not that true?

ANT.—He will say: I thank you, O holy Apollo, for not having repaid me with silence, for having revealed to me the Truth. But whence comes it that Jupiter is so cruel towards me, that he prepares so hard a fate for an innocent man, for a devout worshipper of the Gods?

LAUR.—You innocent? Apollo will say. Know that you will be proud, that you will commit adulteries, that you will be a traitor to your country. Could Sextus reply: It is you who are the cause, O Apollo; you compel me to do it, by foreseeing it?

ANT.—I admit that he would have taken leave of his senses if he were to make this reply.

LAUR.—Therefore neither can the traitor Judas complain of God's foreknowledge. And there is the answer to your question.

ANT.—You have satisfied me beyond my hopes, you have done what Boethius was not able to do: I shall be beholden to you all my life long.

LAUR.—Yet let us carry our tale a little further. Sextus will say: No, Apollo, I will not do what you say.

ANT.—What! the God will say, do you mean then that I am a liar? I repeat to you once more, you will do all that I have just said.

LAUR.—Sextus, mayhap, would pray the Gods to alter fate, to give him a better heart.

ANT.—He would receive the answer:

Desine fata Deum flecti sperare precando.

Don’t imagine that the decrees of the gods can be changed by prayers.

He cannot cause divine foreknowledge to lie. But what then will Sextus say? Will he not break forth into complaints against the Gods? Will he not say? What? I am then not free? It is not in my power to follow virtue?

LAUR.—Apollo will say to him perhaps: Know, my poor Sextus, that the Gods make each one as he is. Jupiter made the wolf ravening, the hare timid, the ass stupid, and the lion courageous. He gave you a soul that is wicked and irreclaimable; you will act in conformity with your natural disposition, and Jupiter will treat you as your actions shall deserve; he has sworn it by the Styx.

ANT.—I confess to you, it seems to me that Apollo in excusing himself accuses Jupiter more than he accuses Sextus, and Sextus would answer him: Jupiter therefore condemns in me his own crime; it is he who is the only guilty one. He could have made me altogether different: but, made as I am, I must act as he has willed. Why then does he punish me? Could I have resisted his will?

LAUR.—I confess that I am brought to a pause here as you are. I have made the Gods appear on the scene, Apollo and Jupiter, to make you distinguish between divine foreknowledge and providence. I have shown that Apollo and foreknowledge do not impair freedom; but I cannot satisfy you on the decrees of Jupiter's will, that is to say, on the orders of providence.

ANT.—You have dragged me out of one abyss, and you plunge me back into another and greater abyss.

LAUR.—Remember our contract: I have given you dinner, and you ask me to give you supper also.

ANT.—Now I discover your cunning: You have caught me, this is not an honest contract.

LAUR.—What would you have me do? I have given you wine and meats from my home produce, such as my small estate can provide; as for nectar and ambrosia, you will ask the Gods for them: that divine nurture is not found among men. Let us hearken to St. Paul, that chosen vessel who was carried even to the third heaven, who heard there unutterable words: he will answer you with the comparison of the potter, with the incomprehensibility of the ways of God, and wonder at the depth of his wisdom. Nevertheless it is well to observe that one does not ask why God foresees the thing, for that is understood, it is because it will be: but one asks why he ordains thus, why he hardens such an one, why he has compassion on another. We do not know the reasons which he may have for this; but since he is very good and very wise that is enough to make us deem that his reasons are good. As he is just also, it follows that his decrees and his operation do not destroy our freedom. Some men have sought some reason therein. They have said that we are made from a corrupt and impure mass, indeed of mud. But Adam and the Angels were made of silver and gold, and they sinned notwithstanding. One sometimes becomes hardened again after regeneration. We must therefore seek another cause for evil, and I doubt whether even the Angels are aware of it; yet they cease not to be happy and to praise God. Boethius hearkened more to the answer of philosophy than to that of St. Paul; that was the cause of his failure. Let us believe in Jesus Christ, he is the virtue and the wisdom of God: he teaches us that God willeth the salvation of all, that he willeth not the death of the sinner. Let us therefore put our trust in the divine mercy, and let us not by our vanity and our malice disqualify ourselves to receive it.

**Leibniz Finishes the Story**

This dialogue of Valla's is excellent, even though one must take exception to some points in it: but its chief defect is that it cuts the knot and that it seems to condemn providence under the name of Jupiter, making him almost the author of sin. Let us therefore carry the little fable still further. Sextus, quitting Apollo and Delphi, seeks out Jupiter at Dodona. He makes sacrifices and then he exhibits his complaints. Why have you condemned me, O great God, to be wicked and unhappy? Change my lot and my heart, or acknowledge your error. Jupiter answers him: If you will renounce Rome, the Parcae shall spin for you different fates, you shall become wise, you shall be happy.

SEXTUS—Why must I renounce the hope of a crown? Can I not come to be a good king?

JUPITER—No, Sextus; I know better what is needful for you. If you go to Rome, you are lost.

Sextus, not being able to resolve upon so great a sacrifice, went forth from the temple, and abandoned himself to his fate. Theodorus, the High Priest, who had been present at the dialogue between God and Sextus, addressed these words to Jupiter: Your wisdom is to be revered, O great Ruler of the Gods. You have convinced this man of his error; he must henceforth impute his unhappiness to his evil will; he has not a word to say. But your faithful worshippers are astonished; they would fain wonder at your goodness as well as at your greatness: it rested with you to give him a different will.

JUPITER—Go to my daughter Pallas, she will inform you what I was bound to do.

Theodorus journeyed to Athens: he was bidden to lie down to sleep in the temple of the Goddess. Dreaming, he found himself transported into an unknown country. There stood a palace of unimaginable splendour and prodigious size. The Goddess Pallas appeared at the gate, surrounded by rays of dazzling majesty.

Qualisque videri / Coelicolis et quanta solet.

In beauty and stature such as she is wont to appear to the lords of heaven

She touched the face of Theodorus with an olive-branch, which she was holding in her hand. And lo! he had become able to confront the divine radiancy of the daughter of Jupiter, and of all that she should show him. Jupiter who loves you (she said to him) has commended you to me to be instructed. You see here the palace of the fates, where I keep watch and ward. Here are representations not only of that which happens but also of all that which is possible. Jupiter, having surveyed them before the beginning of the existing world, classified the possibilities into worlds, and chose the best of all. He comes sometimes to visit these places, to enjoy the pleasure of recapitulating things and of renewing his own choice, which cannot fail to please him. I have only to speak, and we shall see a whole world that my father might have produced, wherein will be represented anything that can be asked of him; and in this way one may know also what would happen if any particular possibility should attain unto existence. And whenever the conditions are not determinate enough, there will be as many such worlds differing from one another as one shall wish, which will answer differently the same question, in as many ways as possible. You learnt geometry in your youth, like all well-instructed Greeks. You know therefore that when the conditions of a required point do not sufficiently determine it, and there is an infinite number of them, they all fall into what the geometricians call a locus, and this locus at least (which is often a line) will be determinate. Thus you can picture to yourself an ordered succession of worlds, which shall contain each and every one the case that is in question, and shall vary its circumstances and its consequences. But if you put a case that differs from the actual world only in one single definite thing and in its results, a certain one of those determinate worlds will answer you. These worlds are all here, that is, in ideas. I will show you some, wherein shall be found, not absolutely the same Sextus as you have seen (that is not possible, he carries with him always that which he shall be) but several Sextuses resembling him, possessing all that you know already of the true Sextus, but not all that is already in him imperceptibly, nor in consequence all that shall yet happen to him. You will find in one world a very happy and noble Sextus, in another a Sextus content with a mediocre state, a Sextus, indeed, of every kind and endless diversity of forms.

Thereupon the Goddess led Theodorus into one of the halls of the palace: when he was within, it was no longer a hall, it was a world,

Solemque suum, sua sidera norat.

And he recognized his own sun and stars.

At the command of Pallas there came within view Dodona with the temple of Jupiter, and Sextus issuing thence; he could be heard saying that he would obey the God. And lo! he goes to a city lying between two seas, resembling Corinth. He buys there a small garden; cultivating it, he finds a treasure; he becomes a rich man, enjoying affection and esteem; he dies at a great age, beloved of the whole city. Theodorus saw the whole life of Sextus as at one glance, and as in a stage presentation. There was a great volume of writings in this hall: Theodorus could not refrain from asking what that meant. It is the history of this world which we are now visiting, the Goddess told him; it is the book of its fates. You have seen a number on the forehead of Sextus. Look in this book for the place which it indicates. Theodorus looked for it, and found there the history of Sextus in a form more ample than the outline he had seen. Put your finger on any line you please, Pallas said to him, and you will see represented actually in all its detail that which the line broadly indicates. He obeyed, and he saw coming into view all the characteristics of a portion of the life of that Sextus. They passed into another hall, and lo! another world, another Sextus. who, issuing from the temple, and having resolved to obey Jupiter, goes to Thrace. There he marries the daughter of the king, who had no other children; he succeeds him, and he is adored by his subjects. They went into other rooms, and always they saw new scenes.

The halls rose in a pyramid, becoming even more beautiful as one mounted towards the apex, and representing more beautiful worlds. Finally they reached the highest one which completed the pyramid, and which was the most beautiful of all: for the pyramid had a beginning, but one could not see its end; it had an apex, but no base; it went on increasing to infinity. That is (as the Goddess explained) because amongst an endless number of possible worlds there is the best of all, else would God not have determined to create any; but there is not any one which has not also less perfect worlds below it: that is why the pyramid goes on descending to infinity. Theodorus, entering this highest hall, became entranced in ecstasy; he had to receive succour from the Goddess, a drop of a divine liquid placed on his tongue restored him; he was beside himself for joy. We are in the real true world (said the Goddess) and you are at the source of happiness. Behold what Jupiter makes ready for you, if you continue to serve him faithfully. Here is Sextus as he is, and as he will be in reality. He issues from the temple in a rage, he scorns the counsel of the Gods. You see him going to Rome, bringing confusion everywhere, violating the wife of his friend. There he is driven out with his father, beaten, unhappy. If Jupiter had placed here a Sextus happy at Corinth or King in Thrace, it would be no longer this world. And nevertheless he could not have failed to choose this world, which surpasses in perfection all the others, and which forms the apex of the pyramid. Else would Jupiter have renounced his wisdom, he would have banished me, me his daughter. You see that my father did not make Sextus wicked; he was so from all eternity, he was so always and freely. My father only granted him the existence which his wisdom could not refuse to the world where he is included: he made him pass from the region of the possible to that of the actual beings. The crime of Sextus serves for great things: it renders Rome free; thence will arise a great empire, which will show noble examples to mankind. But that is nothing in comparison with the worth of this whole world, at whose beauty you will marvel, when, after a happy passage from this mortal state to another and better one, the Gods shall have fitted you to know it.

At this moment Theodorus wakes up, he gives thanks to the Goddess, he owns the justice of Jupiter. His spirit pervaded by what he has seen and heard, he carries on the office of High Priest, with all the zeal of a true servant of his God, and with all the joy whereof a mortal is capable. It seems to me that this continuation of the tale may elucidate the difficulty which Valla did not wish to treat. If Apollo has represented aright God's knowledge of vision (that which concerns beings in existence), I hope that Pallas will have not discreditably filled the role of what is called knowledge of simple intelligence (that which embraces all that is possible), wherein at last the source of things must be sought.