

INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

LECTURE TWO

THE PROPERTIES OF GOD (CONTINUED)

PROPERTY FOUR: OMNIPOTENCE

First stab at a definition: omnipotence = power to do anything

- Questions*
- 1) Can an omnipotent being make an object that is both perfectly spherical and perfectly cubical at one and the same time?
 - 2) Can an omnipotent being make mistakes?
 - 3) Can an omnipotent being commit suicide?

- Answers*
- 1) No. At most omnipotence entails ability to do anything logically possible.
 - 2) No. Omnipotence doesn't entail being able to do anything that would involve exercising a liability rather than a power, indeed involves one's not being able to do such things.

Second stab at a definition: omnipotence = having all powers it is logically possible to have (and no liabilities)

- 3) No. Having one's existence depend on one's will can be a power for a being who is constrained by forces beyond his/her control, but would always be a liability for God, who is not so constrained.

Final stab at a definition: omnipotence = having the most power that it's logically possible to have

Makes full understanding of what abilities are required by omnipotence beyond anyone who is not omniscient

PROPERTY FIVE: OMNISCIENCE

First stab at a definition: A being is omniscient just if for all statements, if a statement is true, then that being knows that it is true and if it is false then that being knows that it is false.

Potential problem: statements about future actions, e.g. At the end of the lecture, I'll ask if there are any questions. Assuming this has a truth-value, let's assume it's true, we may ask

Does God know it to be true infallibly? Theists divide over the answer. Why? Different views on eternity

PROPERTY SIX: ETERNALITY

God did not come into being at some moment in the past and He will not cease to exist at some moment in the future. Theists divide over whether this is because He is outside time (atemporalists) or inside time but everlasting (temporalists).

Knock-on effects for theists' understanding of omniscience

An atemporalist will see God as infallibly knowing all true statements, including any concerning times that are to us future. A temporalist will see God as infallibly knowing all true statements which it is logically possible for a temporal being to know at the time it now is; this then - the temporalist will

usually say - excludes true statements about the future actions of free creatures. (View not mentioned in the lecture: one might think there are no true statements about the future anyway, and use this to motivate temporalism.)

PROPERTY SEVEN: PERFECT FREEDOM

Freedom requires or perhaps simply is the ability to bring about what one reasonably desires. God's ability to bring about what He reasonably desires is unconstrained (due to omnipotence and omniscience) and thus we may say He is perfectly free.

Theists are objectivists about moral value.

PROPERTY EIGHT: PERFECT GOODNESS

God's perfect goodness is His doing the best action whenever there is a best action. The ability to do a less good action would always be a liability for God, even if not for us.

So God is perfectly good of necessity

PROPERTY NINE: NECESSITY

God could not not exist. The sort of necessity employed here is usually taken to be a metaphysical necessity.

The Doctrine of Divine Simplicity.

CAUTIONARY NOTE

As with last week's lecture, you might disagree with me at any point (except the point that you're free to disagree with me; *that* you have to agree with), but I mention a few points of potential disagreement here:-

I claim in the lecture that no theist thinks God can do the logically impossible. Descartes is a counterexample; other counterexamples would be provided by lots of theists who haven't thought about it much.

Kryptonite doesn't in itself kill Superman; it just removes his superpowers and renders him mortal.

The way I define goodness might seem to have a 'consequentialist' flavour; if so, it wouldn't appeal to all tastes, including those held amongst theists. If you don't know the meanings of the terms already, find out what the differences are between consequentialist, deontological and virtue theories. In fact, I rather simplify my understanding of perfect goodness in the lecture. I believe that perfect goodness requires doing the best action (or, if several are 'joint best', then one of those) whenever there is one and an acceptable action whenever there's no best. What makes for an action being best is that it meet a minimal not-more-bad-than-good-overall standard (and thus be what I call acceptable) and it be the best for the set of actual creatures. Needless to say, almost all of this is controversial, but also almost all of it lies outside the Philosophy of Religion and inside the field of Moral Philosophy, so I'll leave it there for now.

It would be worth looking up 'Molinism' too.

SUGGESTED READING

- A. Kenny 'Omnipotence', in his *The God of the Philosophers*, or in T. Morris (ed.) *The Concept of God*
- B. Williams, *Morality, An Introduction to Ethics*

T. J. Mawson

684,171,000,000,000,000,000,000,000