

BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY • FALL 2014
PHIL 1A: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY
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God's Nature

Divine Attributes

Throughout much of the Judeo-Christian tradition G-d has been described as possessing three characteristics: G-d is said to be all-knowing, all powerful, and all good, or, as it is more fancily put: omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent. This has, in some instances, been "lovingly" encapsulated by some philosophers in the short-hand expression "G-d is all PKG."

OMNIPOTENCE

- If G-d is omnipotent, i.e. all-powerful, if G-d can do anything whatsoever or all things are possible for G-d can G-d make $2 + 2 = 5$ or $A = \text{not-}A$?
- If G-d is omnipotent and G-d creates a free creature, a creature with free will, has G-d ceased to be omnipotent because now there is a being G-d cannot control? If G-d is omnipotent, can G-d create a human being with free will?
- Is there an ultimate limit to what, in principle, we can credit to an omnipotent being, to a Supreme Being? Could there be a being, for example, that could take credit for its own existence and constitution? Could G-d have created G-d?
- If G-d is thought of as immaterial, i.e. as a non-physical being, can G-d sit in on our philosophy class? If not, is G-d less than omnipotent?
- If G-d is believed to exist, can G-d cease to be? If G-d cannot cease to be is G-d not so powerful after all?
- If G-d is thought of as supremely good, can G-d bring about an evil state of affairs without some overriding good reason to do so? If God cannot commit evil acts without there being some good in it, does this mean that there is a being more powerful than G-d who can be truly evil, evil through and through?
- And if G-d is all-good, why is there evil in the world? If G-d is all-good and omnipotent, why doesn't G-d prevent evil things from happening? Since there is evil in the world, doesn't that mean that G-d is either not all-good or not all-powerful?

OMNISCIENCE

- If G-d is omniscient, G-d knows everything. That means that he must know what you or I are going to do. That means that G-d knows what grade you will receive in PHIL 1A and G-d knows where you will sit on the last day of class or whether you will be in class on that day at all. Does G-d's knowing exactly what you and I are going to do preclude (rule out) whether you or I have free will?

TEMPORALITY

- In the great monotheistic traditions G-d is thought of as without beginning or end. Some argue that this means that G-d is outside time altogether, not in time at all; others believe that this means G-d is simultaneously at or in all times. What do you think?
- If G-d is at or in each time, is G-d simultaneously at or in each time? If G-d is simultaneous with the bombing of Pearl Harbor and with your reading this question, then it would seem that the bombing of Pearl Harbor must be taking place at the same time that you are reading this question. Is this possible?
- Perhaps G-d is "outside" time, but if G-d is outside time, can G-d know what time it is now?