

Philosophy of Religion

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1 Overview

Week	Topic
1	Evidentialism and Reformed Epistemology
2	Ontological Arguments
3	Arguments from Design
4	Miracles
5	Omniscience
6	Freedom and Foreknowledge
7	Omnipotence and Benevolence
8	The Problem of Evil

In the *Philosophy of Religion* course, we will be thinking about some of the fundamental questions concerning the nature of God, the existence of God and the respectability or otherwise of belief in God. The course is divided into two parts. In the first half of the course, we will begin by thinking about whether or not belief in the existence of God requires independent evidential support, or whether it can be *foundational*, as epistemologists like to say. From this starting point, we will move on to consider what kinds of reasons, if reasons are required might be brought to meet this demand.

During the second part of the course, we will turn our attention to the kinds of properties that God is supposed to have and consider the implications of a being having these kinds of properties. We will consider the notion of divine omniscience and, having thought about what omniscience is supposed to amount to, we will consider the question of whether or not God being essentially omniscient is incompatible with human action being free in any interesting sense. Lastly, we will consider the idea of God being omnipotent and reflect on the problem of evil and consider the extent to which the existence of evil creates problems for belief in an omnipotent and perfectly benevolent God.

Throughout this course, we will look at the theories of various prominent authors that have been concerned with justification for belief in God and the nature of God. Most prominently, we will look at Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* and more recent work by Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne and J.L. Mackie.

2 Website

I'll post the materials for these tutorials on my website as we go along. They can be downloaded at:

www.stephenwrightphilosophy.com on the right-hand side of the page under the 'Philosophy of Religion' link.

3 A Note on the Reading List

For each class I've identified two different types of reading. Readings marked as required are exactly that – they're readings you just have to do. Some of these are hard, but don't worry, we can discuss anything that you don't understand in tutorials. After this, there are some further readings. These you will want to look at in your own time, possibly after the tutorial (or maybe before) and they will help develop your thinking on these subjects further. For the purposes of the tutorial essay, however, I'd like you to focus particularly carefully on the readings that I've identified as required for the class. This is *not* to say that all of the readings for each week will be relevant to every essay for that week. You'll have to use (and develop) your judgement for working out what is and isn't useful in each case. But it is to say that you should read those required readings particularly carefully because I'll be expecting you to know about them in advance of the tutorial.

† denotes required reading.

* denotes background reading.

Lastly, don't be shy about asking me if you find any of the readings hard to get hold of. If you can't find any of the readings, I'll either email you a PDF of it or else replace it on the reading list with something that can be found or sent.

4 Doing Philosophy

During your time doing philosophical work, you'll want to read things that aren't on the reading lists. And it's really important that what you read is good quality. It's very easy to waste a lot of time and energy in philosophy reading stuff that just isn't helpful. If you read stuff from poor sources, you're liable to wind up confused or misinformed. You want to be reading things that are written by people who have, at the very least, more philosophical experience than you. In the case of several sources, though, there's no filtering or checking to make sure that this is the case. Obviously, the reading

lists provided by the faculty are a great place to look. But even they don't contain *everything*. With that in mind, here are some guidelines for you to get you started. As always, do get in touch and ask me if you find yourself in any doubt at all.

Some good places to start your reading are:

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <http://plato.stanford.edu> is an excellent resource. It gives you an overview of some of the topics that we'll be working on and also comes with a useful bibliography, all of which is of an appropriate quality for you to be using.

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <http://www.iep.utm.edu/> is another excellent online philosophy encyclopedia. Like the Stanford Encyclopedia, its entries are reviewed before they are published and also have useful suggestions for further reading.

Philpapers at <http://www.philpapers.org> is an online collection of philosophy articles that can be searched by category. There are some excellent articles on here and the site is a useful way of finding things to read. This site requires some caution, though. Unlike the above two, anyone can add their papers, regardless of whether or not they have actually been published in journals, or are ever going to be! As a rule of thumb, if you can't see publication details for a paper on this site, then proceed with caution. This notwithstanding, it is an excellent and important source.

Google Scholar at <http://scholar.google.co.uk/> is a relatively recent research tool and one that's extremely useful. The best thing that you can use Google Scholar for is finding papers that are relevant to what you've been reading. If you run a search for a paper that you've just read, Google Scholar will help throw up any papers that have cited the paper you searched for. This is extremely useful for helping you figure out where to go next. As with PhilPapers, however, there's no quality filter, so if you are in any doubt about what you've found (as with any of the above resources) feel free to ask me first. Lastly, note that this *is* an acceptable use of Google's resources, where searching for philosophers or themes and then reading what you find absolutely is *not*. Likewise, stay off looking for things on Wikipedia.

5 Preliminary Reading

For those wanting a particularly good introductory reading to the course as a whole, however, the following would be particularly suitable:

Brian Davies (2004) *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* Oxford: Ox-

ford University Press.

Any part(s) of this book would be suitable introductory reading for those preparing to take the course.

6 Tutorial 1 – Evidentialism and Reformed Epistemology

We will begin our investigation into the philosophy of religion by considering the question of whether or not belief in God needs to be supported by the kind of evidence provided by independent argumentation. According to reformed epistemologists, belief in God can be properly basic, the idea being that it does not stand in need of independent justification (though belief in God might be justified only if there is no counterevidence). This view has an affinity with *foundationalism* in contemporary epistemology. By contrast, those taken with evidentialism hold that belief in God being justified depends on the provision of some suitable argument to the conclusion that God exists.

6.1 Readings

- † Plantinga, Alvin (2000). Religious Belief as Properly Basic, in Davies, Brian (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology* Oxford: Oxford University Press 42-94.
- † Audi, Robert (2008). Belief, Faith, and Acceptance. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 63 (1/3):87-102.
- * Alston, William P. (2001). Religious Belief and Values. *Faith and Philosophy* 18 (1):36-49.
- * Swinburne, Richard (1981). *Faith and Reason* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 3.
- * Kretzmann, Norman (2000). Evidence and Religious Belief, in Davies, Brian (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology* Oxford: Oxford University Press 95-107.
- * van Inwagen, Peter (1996). It Is Wrong, Everywhere, Always, for Anyone, to Believe Anything Upon Insufficient Evidence, in Jeff Jordan & Daniel Howard-Snyder (eds.), *Faith, Freedom and Rationality* Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield 137-154.
- * Pritchard, Duncan (2000). Is ‘God Exists’ a ‘Hinge Proposition’ of Religious Belief? *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 47 (3):129-140.

Questions: Can one be rational, justified or warranted in holding a religious belief without independent evidence?

6.2 Study Questions

- (1) What sorts of beliefs might be basic and why are they basic?
- (2) How does reformed epistemology differ from classical foundationalism?
- (3) Why might the idea that we have an obligation to believe only that which is supported by independent arguments be problematic?
- (4) What is involved in a belief being internally rational?
- (5) Might it be the case that a body of evidence maximally supports more than one hypothesis?
- (6) What does Plantinga mean by warrant?
- (7) Is there any problem with the idea that whether or not belief in God is warranted depends on whether or not it is true?
- (8) What might someone's evidence for belief in God consist in?
- (9) Do false beliefs justify equally as well as true ones?
- (10) What is the Principle of Credulity and why does it matter for the prospect of belief in God being appropriately basic?
- (11) What features make a hypothesis evidentially probable (or otherwise)?
- (12) Could beliefs based on the testimony of others be properly basic?
- (13) What is *natural theology* and how does it connect to the idea of belief in God being properly basic?
- (14) Might a belief in God provide its own evidence without independent supporting argumentation?
- (15) Can Plantinga's reformed epistemology make sense of the drive to find a better justified belief on the issue concerned?
- (16) Does it matter if we can't check up on the reliability of the processes that are involved in the production of our beliefs?

7 Tutorial 2 – Ontological Arguments

God is supposed to have certain properties. Furthermore, he is supposed to have these properties *essentially*. According to most, he is supposed to be a perfect being or a being greater than anything else that can be conceived. Ontological arguments seek to show that having these properties implies existence. So we get a reason for thinking that God exists from considering God's essential nature. We'll have a look at three different types of ontological argument. The first comes from St. Anselm, the second is Descartes' ontological argument from the *Meditations* and the third, which will be our primary focus, is the *modal ontological argument* from Alvin Plantinga.

7.1 Readings

- † Plantinga, Alvin (1974). *God, Freedom, and Evil* Michigan: Harper & Row, Part IIc.
- † Tooley, Michael (1981). Plantinga's Defence of the Ontological Argument. *Mind* 90 (359):422-427.
- * van Inwagen, Peter (1977). Ontological Arguments. *Nous* 11 (4):375-395.
- * Descartes, Rene (1641). *Meditations on First Philosophy* Cambridge: Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, Meditation 5.
- * Gassendi, Pierre, Caterus, Johannes and Descartes, Rene (2000). Descartes Replies to Critics, in Davies, Brian (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology* Oxford: Oxford University Press 330-337.
- * Kant, Immanuel (1781). *Critique of Pure Reason* Cambridge: The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, A592-602/B620-630.
- * Mackie, J.L. (1982). *The Miracle of Theism* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 3.

Question: 'If non-existence disqualifies something from being the greatest conceivable thing, then the material universe is the greatest conceivable thing, because it is the greatest thing that exists. So in proving the existence of the greatest conceivable thing the ontological argument does not prove the existence of God.' Is this a respectable response to the ontological proof?

7.2 Study Questions

- (1) What is Anselm's ontological argument?
- (2) How does Anselm get from the claim that God exists to the claim that he *necessarily* exists?
- (3) In what way does Descartes' ontological argument differ from Anselm's?
- (4) How does Plantinga's version of the ontological argument seek to establish the necessary existence of God?
- (5) What role does the notion of maximal excellence play in Plantinga's ontological argument?
- (6) What does Gaunilo's response to Anselm purport to show?
- (7) Is there any relevant difference between something like God and a perfect island?
- (8) What are Kant's two responses to Descartes' ontological argument?
- (9) Does saying that something exists tell us anything about it?
- (10) Can something that does not exist have (or lack) any particular property?
- (11) Is ascribing a property to a non-existent object the same as not ascribing it to anything?
- (12) Does Plantinga's argument seek to define God into existence?
- (13) How does van Inwagen move from the idea that God *possibly* exists to the conclusion that God *actually* exists?
- (14) Is the existence of a perfect being intrinsically impossible?
- (15) Can we settle the question of whether or not God could possibly exist?
- (16) Do ontological arguments have anything to do with the kind of God that is usually the focal point of contemporary monotheistic religions?

8 Tutorial 3 – Arguments from Design

Arguments from design claim that an argument for the existence of God comes from the observation that the world exhibits certain features. Specifically, the world appears to have been designed. In this tutorial we will examine various different types of design argument. We will focus our attention on two separate points. Firstly, we will consider whether or not the world really exhibits the kinds of features that advocates of design arguments seek to appeal to. Secondly, we will consider whether or not these features of the world (if they exist) support the kind of argument for God's existence that defenders of design arguments claim that they do.

8.1 Readings

- † Hume, David (1779). *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* Indiana: Hackett, Parts II and V.
- † Swinburne, Richard (2004). *The Existence of God* (2nd Edition) Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 8.
- † van Inwagen, Peter (2009). *Metaphysics* (3rd Edition) Philadelphia: Westview Press, Chapter 9.
- * Mackie, J.L. (1982). *The Miracle of Theism* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 8.
- * Paley, William (2000). An Especially Famous Design Argument, in Davies, Brian (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology* Oxford: Oxford University Press 253-259.
- * Plantinga, Alvin (1974). *God, Freedom, and Evil* Michigan: Harper & Row, Part IIb.
- * Leslie, John (1982). Anthropic Principle, World Ensemble, Design. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 19 (2):141-151.
- * Swinburne, Richard (1972). The Argument From Design - a Defence. *Religious Studies* 8 (3):193-205.
- * Geach, P. T. (1973). An Irrelevance of Omnipotence. *Philosophy* 48 (186):327-333.

Question: Is any form of design argument still viable?

8.2 Study Questions

- (1) How does the notion of design in Paley's design argument differ from the notion of design in Swinburne's design argument?
- (2) What role does aesthetic beauty play in Swinburne's design argument?
- (3) Does the legitimacy of our inferring a designer depend on our having previously observed similar types of things in the past?
- (4) Does the uniqueness of the universe indicate that it cannot be explained scientifically?
- (5) If we allow that there is a designer, how easily can we move from this observation to the conclusion that the designer is powerful, purposive and incorporeal?
- (6) Does the idea that invoking something to explain the universe leads to a regress trouble every explanation of the universe?
- (7) Why can it not be the case that a creator God could be corporeal?
- (8) Where does the burden of proof lie between the idea that the universe was created by one God against a plurality of Gods?
- (9) Is the universe more like a machine or an organism?
- (10) Does the fact that some parts of the universe exhibit disorder damage the force of arguments from design?
- (11) Are Hume's objections taken together worth more than they are taken individually?
- (12) Does the universe have any discernible purpose?
- (13) Is Paley correct in claiming that we would infer that a discovered watch had been designed even if we had never seen a watch before?
- (14) What is wrong with the idea that we do not need an explanation of the specific features of the universe because they *have* to be that way for us to even exist?
- (15) Is claiming that we don't need to explain the order in the universe arbitrary?

9 Tutorial 4 – Miracles

The idea that miracles do, or at least can, happen is important to religious believers. In this tutorial, we will think about the epistemic respectability of beliefs in miracles. In particular, we will think about whether or not we could ever justifiably believe a witness report in a miracle. In the light of this, we will consider how forming beliefs on the basis of what other people say can bring us to form knowledge and justified beliefs.

9.1 Readings

- † Hume, David (1748) *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* Indiana: Hackett, §X.
- † Mackie, J.L. (1982). *The Miracle of Theism* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 1.
- † Swinburne, Richard (1968). Miracles. *Philosophical Quarterly* 18 (73):320-328.
- * Sorensen, Roy A. (1983). Hume's Scepticism Concerning Reports of Miracles. *Analysis* 43 (1):60.
- * Hambourger, Robert (1980). Belief in Miracles and Hume's Essay. *Noûs* 14 (4):587-604.
- * Mavrodes, George (1998). David Hume and the Probability of Miracles. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 43 (3):167–82.
- * Sobel, J.H. (1987). On the Evidence of Testimony for Miracles: A Bayesian Interpretation of David Hume's Analysis. *Philosophical Quarterly* 37 (147):166-86.
- * Dawid, Philip & Gillies, Donald (1989). A Bayesian Analysis of Hume's Argument Concerning Miracles. *Philosophical Quarterly* 39 (154):57-65.

Question: You observe a bearded man raise a staff and invoke God. An ocean in front of you then parts; you cross it by walking. Years later, you tell your children about this. Years after that, they tell theirs. Have they given their children good reason to believe in God?

9.2 Study Questions

- (1) What difficulties are there with understanding the notion of a miracle in terms of God's intervention in the world?
- (2) In what ways might understanding miracles in terms of violations of the laws of nature be problematic?
- (3) Does Hume allow that miracles might take place?
- (4) Under what circumstances does Hume allow that belief in miraculous events might be reasonable?
- (5) In what sense, if any, are miracles impossible?
- (6) How does Hume propose to establish the claim that nobody has ever observed a miraculous event?
- (7) Does the claim that miracles are impossible have atheism as a presupposition?
- (8) What is a law of nature?
- (9) Aside from the idea that miraculous reports are outweighed by countervailing evidence, how does Hume argue against the establishment of miraculous events?
- (10) How persuasive are these arguments?
- (11) Does Hume need to rely on an epistemological theory of testimony for our access to past regularities?
- (12) If someone who was otherwise observed to be reliable reported a miraculous event, would this give us sufficient reason to believe in a miraculous event?
- (13) Under what circumstances could something contrary to a law of nature be more probable than not, given our evidence?
- (14) How plausible is the idea that if we really believed that a violation of a law of nature had occurred, we should just revise our understanding of laws of nature to include the event in question?

10 Tutorial 5 – Omniscience

Omniscience is supposed to be one of God's properties. In this tutorial, we'll think about what this amounts to. We'll start by thinking about what it means for God to be omniscient, whether or not there are things that an omniscient God might not be able to know, before moving on to think about the extent to which the kind of knowledge that an omniscient God might have is similar in kind of the kind of everyday knowledge about the world that human beings with finite minds might have.

10.1 Readings

- † Aquinas, Thomas (2000). Why Ascribe Knowledge to God? in Davies, Brian (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology* Oxford: Oxford University Press 446-455.
- † Grim, Patrick (1985). Against Omniscience: The Case From Essential Indexicals. *Noûs* 19 (2):151-180.
- † Castañeda, Hector-Neri (1967). Omniscience and Indexical Reference. *Journal of Philosophy* 64 (7):203-210.
- * Plantinga, Alvin and Grim, Patrick (1993). Truth, Omniscience, and Cantorian Arguments: An Exchange. *Philosophical Studies* 71 (3):267-306.
- * Hoffman, Joshua and Rosenkrantz, Gary S. (2002). *The Divine Attributes* Malden: Blackwell, Chapter 6.
- * Kretzmann, N. (1966). Omniscience and Immutability. *Journal of Philosophy* 63 (14):409-420
- * Swinburne, Richard (1977). *The Coherence of Theism* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 10.
- * Chisholm, Roderick (1976). Knowledge and Belief: 'De Dicto' and 'De Re'. *Philosophical Studies* 29 (1):1-20.

Question: What could an omniscient God fail to know?

10.2 Study Questions

- (1) Why can we not define omniscience in terms of $(\forall p)p \leftrightarrow KGp$?
- (2) Is knowing everything that is true the same as knowing everything that is true and disbelieving everything that is false?
- (3) What is the difference between being omniscient and essentially omniscient?
- (4) Might God know anything dispositionally, rather than occurrently?
- (5) Would an omniscient God form any beliefs by inferring things?
- (6) Could God know everything through His essence?
- (7) In what ways might God's knowledge be different in type from knowledge understood in terms of justified true belief?
- (8) Could the model of God's knowledge be extended to account for human knowledge?
- (9) How could an omniscient God know about future facts?
- (10) Does omniscience require *de re* knowledge?
- (11) Are there some propositions that can only be known to particular people in virtue of first-person indexicals?
- (12) Might an omniscient God know these if we regard them as some kind of access to a fact rather than facts in themselves?
- (13) Could God, in virtue of being God, come to grasp the propositions distinctively associated with individuals?
- (14) Does the problem of first-person indexicals re-emerge with regard to knowledge that depends on a certain perspective?

11 Tutorial 6 – Freedom and Foreknowledge

Following on from our discussion of omniscience, we will consider the implications of God's omniscience for the possibility of human freedom. According to one plausible-looking line of thought, since God already knows what we're going to do (and not just knows but *infallibly knows*) what we do isn't up to us in any interesting sense. The idea is that it's already decided at the point that we seem to make up our minds. In this tutorial, we will think about whether or not human freedom can be made compatible with God's infallible foreknowledge.

11.1 Readings

- † Alvin Plantinga (1999). On Ockham's Way Out, in Stump, Eleanor and Murray, Michael J (eds.), *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 13-27.
- † Zagzebski, Linda (2002). Recent Work on Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will, in Kane, Robert (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* Oxford: Oxford University Press 45-64.
- † Stump, Eleanore & Kretzmann, Norman (1981). Eternity. *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (8):429-458.
- * Hasker, William (1985). Foreknowledge and Necessity. *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (2):121-156.
- * Craig, William Lane (1998). On Hasker's Defense of Anti-Molinism. *Faith and Philosophy* 15 (2):236-240.
- * Brant , Dale Eric (1997). On Plantinga's Way Out. *Faith and Philosophy* 14 (3):334-352.
- * Stump, Eleanore & Kretzmann, Norman (1991). Prophecy, Past Truth, and Eternity. *Philosophical Perspectives* 5:395-424.
- * Pike, Nelson (1965). Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action. *Philosophical Review* 74 (1):27-46.

Question: Could an omnipotent and omniscient being create free creatures?

11.2 Study Questions

- (1) What is the difference between omniscience and essential omniscience?
- (2) Does someone unlike God knowing what you will choose make your choice unfree?
- (3) How does the argument that God's essential omniscience is incompatible with free action go?
- (4) What is the Ockhamist solution to the problem?
- (5) What is the difference between the *necessity of the consequent* and the *necessity of the consequence* in terms of the argument that God's foreknowledge prevents free action?
- (6) How does Plantinga seek to define the *accidental necessity* of the past?
- (7) 'Only the hard facts about the past are plausibly thought to be accidentally necessary' [PLANTINGA]. Discuss.
- (8) Why does the Ockhamist solution not involve claiming that the past can be changed?
- (9) What is the Boethian solution to the problem?
- (10) How should we understand the idea of God being outside of time?
- (11) Does God being outside of time make any difference to the problem of his knowledge?
- (12) What is the Molinist solution to the problem?
- (13) Does the Molinist solution still allow an incompatibilist conception of freedom?
- (14) Is Molinism as bad as the Calvinist doctrine of predestination?
- (15) Might a compatibilist notion of free will allow for the possibility of God knowing in advance the result of genuinely free decisions?
- (16) Could God be omniscient without knowing the truth of future contingents?

12 Tutorial 7 – Omnipotence and Moral Perfection

The God of classical theism is supposed to be omnipotent. In this tutorial, we'll think about what being omnipotent amounts to. Even an omnipotent being, most theists say, can't perform logical impossible actions or create contradictory things. This just isn't part of what being omnipotent means. In the light of this observation, we'll think about the relationship between omnipotence and being perfectly moral. One might think that being perfectly moral involves creating the best of all possible worlds. But what if this is a logical impossibility?

12.1 Readings

- † Rowe, William (2004). *Can God Be Free?* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 6.
- † Wielenberg, Erik J. (2000). Omnipotence Again. *Faith and Philosophy* 17 (1):26-47.
- † Pike, Nelson (1969). Omnipotence and God's Ability to Sin. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 6:208-16.
- * LaCroix, Richard (1977). The Impossibility of Defining "Omnipotence". *Philosophical Studies* 32:181-90.
- * Adams, Robert (1972). Must God Create the Best? *Philosophical Review* 81:317-32.
- * Conee, Earl (1994). The Nature and Impossibility of Moral Perfection. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54:815-25.
- * Garcia, Laura (2009). Moral Perfection, in Flint, Thomas and Rea, Michael (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 10.
- * Leftow, Brian (2009). Omnipotence, in Flint, Thomas and Rea, Michael (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 8.

Question: 'If God exists, He must be omnipotent and impeccable. If He is omnipotent, He is able to sin. If He is impeccable, He is not. Therefore there is no God'. Discuss

12.2 Study Questions

- (1) Could God be both free and morally perfect?
- (2) Is creating the best of all possible worlds a logical impossibility?
- (3) If moral perfection and omnipotence come into conflict, which should theists opt for?
- (4) What are the two questions concerning omnipotence?
- (5) Does God make necessary states of affairs happen?
- (6) How does Leftow suggest accommodating the idea that possibility and necessity doesn't impose a limit on God's power?
- (7) What is omnipotence according to Wierenga?
- (8) How Flint and Freddoso define omnipotence?
- (9) What is the difference between range and power?
- (10) Can we give a complete account of omnipotence in terms of range alone?
- (11) How does Wielenberg define omnipotence in terms of strength alone?
- (12) Why do considerations about McEar create trouble for Wielenberg's account?
- (13) What sort of range of things might God be able to do?
- (14) Might a morally perfect being be able to sin but still not sin?
- (15) If so, how should we understand the semantics of this claim?

13 Tutorial 8 – The Problem of Evil

The existence of evil in the world seems difficult to explain if an omniscient, benevolent and omnipotent God exists. It seems as though an omniscient, benevolent and omnipotent God wouldn't allow the kind of evil that we see in the world to exist. In this tutorial we will think about how far the existence of evil yields an argument to the conclusion that God doesn't exist. We'll also think about various ways in which theists have sought to respond, including the scope and limits of the *free will defence*, which claims that the fact that humans have free will is a good thing and explains the existence of evil in some sense.

13.1 Readings

- † Mackie, J.L. (1955). Evil and Omnipotence. *Mind* 64 (254):200-212.
- † Schellenberg, J.L. (2000). Stalemate and Strategy: Rethinking the Evidential Argument from Evil. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 37:405-19.
- † Draper, Paul (1989). Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists. *Noûs* 23 (3):331-350.
- † Rowe, William L. (1979). The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (4):335-341.
- * Lewis, David (1993). Evil for Freedom's Sake? *Philosophical Papers* 22 (3):149-172.
- * Swinburne, Richard (2004). *The Existence of God* (2nd Edition) Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 11.
- * Hume, David (1779). *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* Indiana: Hackett, Parts X and XI.
- * Pike, N. (1963). Hume on Evil. *Philosophical Review* 72:180-97.
- * Plantinga, Alvin (1974). *God, Freedom, and Evil* Michigan: Harper & Row, Part Ia.

Question: Does the postulation of an afterlife help to solve the problem of evil?

13.2 Study Questions

- (1) What is the difference between the logical problem of evil and the evidential problem of evil?
- (2) Which principles does Mackie appeal to in order to derive a contradiction between evil and the existence of God?
- (3) How does Rowe's version of the problem of evil go?
- (4) Do evils perpetuated by people provide evidence against the existence of God?
- (5) Is Swinburne correct in thinking that naturally occurring suffering needs to occur for the free will defence to work?
- (6) Are there too many natural evils to support Swinburne's view?
- (7) Does it make sense to assess God's moral character in human terms?
- (8) Can God be moral without belonging to a moral community?
- (9) Would an omnipotent, benevolent God always prevent suffering?
- (10) Could theists claim that evils in the world are what Mackie would call *absorbed* evils?
- (11) Is it possible for God to create free agents who always act in the morally best way?
- (12) Does the fact that God is omnipotent and omniscient mean that God is automatically responsible for everything that happens?
- (13) Couldn't an omnipotent God have created us with knowledge of good and evil that didn't involve experiencing natural evil?
- (14) Is there a problem with Hick's view that evil allows us to acquire virtues that cannot be maintained in heaven?
- (15) What is the difference between a free will *defence* and a free will *theodicy*?

14 Revision Reading

Below is some reading designed to help ease you into your revision. It should start you off in the process of remembering what you've been thinking about during the course. It doesn't (usually) go into the kind of levels of detail that you'll want to go into in your essays, nor the kind of levels of detail that we've been thinking about things in during tutorials. But it's useful stuff to give you an overview and try to jog your memory a bit. There's one particular book that I'd recommend to you for shaping your reading, because it's based on a set of lectures for this course:

Mawson, T.J. (2005). *Belief in God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

After that, the following will re-introduce you to a lot of the material that we've been looking at during the course:

Zagzebski, Linda (2007). *The Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction* London: Blackwell Publishing.