

The Concept of God

In order to have a rational discussion about God, we must first come to some consensus about what we mean by the term "God." For instance, in order for a theist and an atheist disagree about whether or not God exists, they need to be talking about the same sort of entity; otherwise, they might not actually be disagreeing with one another at all.

Morris examines various methods for determining the best definition of God.

1. Divine Revelation: We might think that we can look to all of the worlds religious texts in order to determine what God is/what God is like.

Problem: However, the religious texts of the world radically differ with respect to their descriptions of what God is like. So, some (or all) of them must be mistaken.

2. Biblical Revelation: Perhaps we should ONLY look to the Bible to tell us what God is like?

Problem: But, for one, that seems arbitrary. Why select this particular text (or any particular text) when there are so many other competitors? Second, the Bible seems to leave many questions of what God is like unanswered.

3. Creator: Maybe we should merely say that God is the creator of the universe, whatever that entity would be like.

Problem: But, this seems very incomplete. It doesn't say anything about whether God is morally good for instance. A very powerful, but very evil entity could create a universe, for example.

4. Perfect Being: Perhaps the best definition of God is that he is the greatest possible being; i.e., a being that exhibits the maximum amount of perfection that any being could possibly exhibit. Specifically, Morris writes that:

God = The being with the greatest possible (i.e., compatible) collection of great-making properties.

Great-Making Property: This is some feature of someone or something that it is "just plain good" to have. In other words, having a great-making property makes you BETTER than you would be if you didn't have it. As Morris states it, a great-making property is a property that it is "intrinsically" good to have.

Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Goods: Intrinsic goods are those good things that are just plain good. END OF STORY. Extrinsic goods, on the other hand, are the sorts of good things that are not just plain good; but we CONSIDER them to be good because they LEAD to good things, or help us to ACQUIRE good things.

For instance: Money is a good candidate for an **extrinsic** (or, “instrumental”) good. If I was stranded in a spaceship and could never get back to Earth, but I had a pile of money with me in the spaceship, I wouldn’t say, “Well, at least I have all of this money, and THAT’S really good!” No. Money is only good insofar as it helps us to ACQUIRE good stuff. So, we might say that money is only EXTRINSICALLY good.

Happiness seems to be an intrinsic good. It would be just plain good to be happy. End of story. So, we might say that happiness is INTRINSICALLY good.

What things are intrinsically good?: Happiness is a THING that one can have. It is an intrinsically good THING. But, are there any intrinsically good PROPERTIES? Morris’s proposed “perfect being” method of discovering what God is like tells us that God has the maximum amount of good properties, or features, that it is possible for a being to have. But, what are the good features? (i.e., what are the “great-making properties?”)

Well, the following properties seem to be intrinsically good:

- (1) **Moral perfection**; it is better to be morally upright, rather than evil.
- (2) **Knowledge**; it is better to know some things, rather than not know anything.
- (3) **Power**; it is better to have the power to do some things, rather than have no power at all.

These three “great-making properties” are the 3 big ones. They make up the “**Three O’s**”: God is **omnipotent** (all-powerful), **omniscient** (all-knowing), and **omni-benevolent** (all-loving, or morally perfect). Morris adds some more things to this list as well:

- (4) **Conscious**; it is better to be conscious than unconscious. In fact, to be morally good and have knowledge, it seems like God would HAVE to be conscious; consciousness is a PRE-REQUISITE for those other properties.
- (5) **Free**; it is better to have the freedom to direct or choose one’s own actions, rather than lack this freedom.
- (6) **Unlimited**; it is better to not be bound or limited by any external factors than it is to be restricted in this way.
- (7) **Independent**; it is better to exist independently of everything, rather than, say, rely on something else in order to exist. For instance, I needed my parents in order to be born, so I am “dependent” on them for my existence. But it is better to be “independent”, not needing such a source.