

Ph.D. GENERAL EXAMINATION

Philosophy of Religion

April 2007

Instructions

1. The exam will last four hours and you should answer a total of four questions, at least one from each of the three parts.
2. The questions are equal in weight so you should expect to spend about one hour on each question.
3. You are expected to mention arguments and views of philosophers whose work is pertinent to the question you are answering. You should not give a survey of all the published work you have read on the topic, but you should discuss the arguments or views you find most important.

I. Religious Epistemology

1. What does Plantinga mean by a properly basic belief? Present and evaluate Plantinga's critique of what he calls "classical foundationalism." Present and evaluate his argument that nobody has shown that belief in God is not properly basic. Present Plantinga's positive thesis that belief in God can constitute knowledge when properly basic. Evaluate it briefly.
2. What is meant by religious exclusivism? What is meant by religious inclusivism? Distinguish inclusivism/exclusivism about truth and inclusivism/exclusivism about salvation. Explain the theory of religious diversity John Hick calls pluralism. How is it meant to circumvent the unappealing aspects of both exclusivism and inclusivism about the truth of different religions? How well does Hick succeed? Discuss some of the objections raised to Hick's theory.
3. Under what conditions is it appropriate to appeal to religious experience as a ground for religious belief? What does Alston mean by a doxastic practice? Explain and evaluate his view that belief in God based on religious experience is analogous to belief in the existence of physical objects based on sense experience.
4. What reasons do we have or could we have for believing that a miracle has occurred? Critically discuss Hume's argument in his essay "On Miracles." Include his definition of a miracle and his claim that belief in Christianity rests on belief in miracles.

II. Religious Metaphysics

1. Present the argument that infallible foreknowledge seems to entail the non-existence of human free will. Give at least three traditional compatibilist solutions to the problem and briefly evaluate them. Present your own evaluation of the argument.
2. Discuss one of the three traditional classes of argument for theism: The Ontological Argument, the Cosmological Argument, and the Teleological Argument. In your discussion present at least two forms of the argument-- a classical form and a contemporary form. The latter may be a version of your own invention, but it should be the best version you know of. Evaluate the argument. Discuss the issue of whether the traditional arguments have any use for religion as a practice.
3. It has often been claimed that the idea of a perfect being leads to contradictions. Problems include alleged incompatibilities between omniscience and immutability, between perfect

goodness and omnipotence, between perfect goodness and divine freedom, between eternity and agency, and many others. Explain the attributes that are included in the classical idea of a perfect being given by Aquinas and discuss at least three of the alleged incompatibilities in the attributes.

4. Beginning around the middle of the twentieth century, religious anti-realism and non-cognitivism became popular, and both continue to have adherents. Discuss and evaluate the prospects for either theory.

III. Morality, the Problem of Evil, Life After Death, and the Meaning of Life

1a. Distinguish the logical and evidential problems of evil. Carefully explain the most compelling version of the Free Will Defense. Discuss the prospects for a version of this response as a plausible way out of both problems.

or

1b. Some philosophers have argued that the problem of evil creates more problems for Christian doctrines than are generally discussed in the standard problem. One problem is that the existence of an omnipotent and perfectly good God seems to be incompatible with the Christian doctrine of an eternal hell. Another is that the Free Will Defense seems to be incompatible with the doctrine that God's inability to do evil is a perfection. Discuss ONE of these two problems. What do you think is the best response to it?

[Do not answer both questions 1a and 1b]

2. Discuss some of the ways in which the traditional God of Western religion can be related to morality. Include a good version of Divine Command theory and evaluate it.

3a. Recently some Christian philosophers have argued that a Christian can be a materialist about the nature of the human being and still justifiably believe in the resurrection of the body. Discuss and critically evaluate at least one of these views.

or

3b. What does it mean to say that a human person survives her death? On what theories of the nature of a human person is survival possible? According to what theories, if any, is it impossible? Discuss the theory you find most plausible and assess the prospects for survival according to that theory.

[Do not answer both questions 3a and 3b].

4. Which has the best chance of answering the question, 'What is the meaning of life?' – Naturalism or SuperNaturalism? Discuss the one you find most plausible, if any. Defend your answer.