

PHI 100 Midterm Exam
October 2008
By T.H.

Atheist: Hank
Theist: Jacob

Hank: Jacob, I have to know; what is it about church on Sundays, and in your case Wednesday and Thursdays that keeps you going? Do you truly believe that there is some super powerful God watching you?

Jacob: Of course I do. I'm surprised you even had to ask.

Hank: Then tell me, what is it about this idea of God that has you so convinced?

Jacob: Let me see. Well I suppose it would be easiest to start by agreeing on what God is. We've both been to Sunday school, even if you don't go anymore. You remember they always told us God was "great." What it really means is that God is so great, there can be nothing which is greater than He is. Would you agree with that.

Hank: I would have to say no. You know I don't believe God exists, so how could I possibly agree that He's the greatest being ever?

Jacob: Take a step back. Would you agree to defining God as that than which nothing greater could be conceived? That is, regardless of whether he exists or not.

Hank: I'm still a little reluctant, but ok.

Jacob: That's just it though. You understand that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived. You say that there could be another thing that actually exists (if God does not) which would be greater than God. If we say that it is possible for God to exist He would be greater (in existence and in thinking) than if He only existed in thinking.

Hank: Stop. I know what you're trying to do. If he only existed in thought and not reality the possibility of His existence in reality would make Him greater than that than which nothing greater can be conceived an impossibility. But tell me, Jacob, what is it about existence that is so great? Why would existence be favored over non-existence?

Jacob: Hank, existence must be favored. Imagine for a moment that everything is merely possible. That everything would at some point not exist.

Hank: Clearly, that is what I believe. Nothing but time and numbers are infinite.

Jacob: But then how did existence come to be? If everything is only merely possible, there must have been a time that nothing existed, since nothing comes from nothing, we wouldn't be here having this conversation. God, then is the necessary being. He is

necessary in that it was he that brought about existence from non-existence.

Hank: Nothingness? Non-existence? I can understand that matter can cease to exist, but what about mathematical truths? Two plus two is always four, regardless. Why wouldn't the universe with its universal truths have caused existence?

Jacob: Could you say two plus two is four, if the numbers two and four did not exist?

Hank: That's not an acceptable argument. I know you believe that those concepts arise from the things they describe but it is impossible for you to prove that they do, and for I to prove that they do not.

Jacob: Fair point, Hank. If you're still not convinced, then I'll move along to another side of it. We have as humans aspirations to be the best we can be. We try to have meaningful, creative lives. Lives that one could consider perfect.

Hank: You know a perfect life is impossible. Everyone makes mistakes, and the world isn't made to allow for perfections.

Jacob: Where could we have gotten that idea then of perfection? We attribute to God all perfections; goodness, omnipotence, justice, omniscience, and more. If we cannot look within ourselves and our world to find perfections, it must come from somewhere else, namely, God.

Hank: But if your God is so perfect, why must people suffer and die? Why couldn't this perfect God create a perfect world? With that, I feel I must provide my own view of your philosophy and supply my own explanation. When we look around, we see a finite world. We see evil. We know that someday we must die. If like causes generate like effects, why is this world not perfect and free of evil? I can't be justified in believing that there is a benevolent, omniscient God that cares for the well being of our existence when there is so much evil that I see in the world.

Jacob: I'm surprised, Hank. You've touched on one of the fundamental problems in the belief that there is a God who exhibits all those characteristics we humans attribute to Him. But it is that doubt which can be used to foster belief to address your problem, I first have to say I don't claim to have all the right answers; only the ones I believe to be true. Regarding evil, two different problems must be call to question.

Hank: You're referring to moral evil and natural evil?

Jacob: Exactly. Moral evil: rape, war, bigotry, etc. as you know, is generally attributed to sin. Believers and non-believers alike who, because of the free will which we can exert, choose to do these things.

Hank: That's fair, I suppose. Moral evil is the product of evil choices, not an evil creator. And then what about natural evil, which we have (for the most part) no choice in.

Earthquakes, tsunamis, random accidents. Where is the reconciliation.

Jacob: This is probably the hardest argument to support, because there is no way to prove it (much like the existence of God, I suppose). Realize, though, that evil things can have good effects. They can cause people to have a greater appreciation for the good things in the world. Now, reserve your judgment, because here's where it gets rough. People are shaped not only by their choices, but the choices of others, and the events of the world. Had not many evil things in history happened the way they did, the world would not be the same. By the same account, you and I would also no longer be the same. So it must be concluded that this is the best possible world God would have created, for us to exist in were the world created only differently, we would not be the people we are today.

Hank: This is getting a little off-topic, Jake. I wanted an argument for the existence of your God, not what makes me what I am and what constitutes my identity.

Jacob: I know, and I'm sorry I wouldn't do a better job explaining it. But I must have you with two final points. First, we all exist here based on the interactions of the make molecules and atomic particles. Is it so hard to believe that there isn't a design about that. And a design necessarily needs to designer. I'm not saying that you have to believe in God. I'm merely trying to show you that you have no reason not to. When we die, if you're right and you believe I God, it's still the end. If I'm right and you believe in God, you have the eternal reward waiting

Hank: I do truly see your point, but consider this story. When mankind was primitive, two similar men were walking through the forest. In an instant both believed they saw something move in the trees. One man believed it was a wolf, and ran to escape the danger. The other believed he had imagined it, and continued at an easy pace. The men who ran continued to survive and reproduce. The other, faced numerous such instances and reacting the same way, was eventually killed and eaten by the wolf. We today are descendent of the man who ran, the man who believed there was something out there, even if there wasn't we're genetically enslaved to look for that something beyond what we can experience with our senses, whether it truly is there are not. That is why I doubt. That is why I question.