

Midterm exam study questions

PHIL 20810

Exam is on Wednesday, March 7, in class

On the midterm, you will be given four questions from the following list, and will be asked to answer three:

1. Explain the paradox of the stone. Which premise should be rejected by someone who thinks that God can bring about only possible situations? Which premise should be rejected by someone who thinks that God can bring about any situation, whether possible or impossible?
2. Mackie argues that God can bring about a world where people have free will, and yet never do anything wrong. Explain his argument. How should the defender of the free will defense reply? Is that reply satisfactory?
3. Does the free will defense require that free will, and the ability to do evil, are very good things for human beings to have? Why or why not? Consider and evaluate one argument against the claim that these two things are very good things for human beings to have.
4. Explain what van Inwagen calls 'the problem of horrors', and explain van Inwagen's response to that problem. Evaluate his response.
5. Show how one might argue that if God is essentially perfectly good, then God is not able to do some things that I can do — e.g., cause evil. Is this argument convincing? Does it conflict with God's omnipotence?
6. Explain the different answers given by Descartes and Leibniz to the question of how necessary truths — like mathematical truths — depend on God. Consider an objection to each. Which is more plausible?
7. Explain the social trinitarian response to the problem of the Trinity, and explain how it avoids contradiction. Explain and evaluate what you take to be the most serious problem for the view.
8. Explain the story of the statue and the clay, and say why one might want to describe that story by saying both that (1) the statue is the same material object as the lump of clay and (2) the statue \neq the lump of clay. Explain a view according to which both (1) and (2) are true, and how such a view might, when applied to the Trinity, avoid contradiction. Does the view provide a plausible model for the Trinity? Why or why not?
9. Explain the Molinist view of providence, and the way that it differs from that of the proponent of Determination. Say which view of providence you think is more plausible, and why. Briefly state and evaluate what you take to be the most serious objection to the view you favor.
10. State Edwards' argument for the incompatibility of free will and divine foreknowledge. State what you take to be the best response to that argument from the defender of the compatibility of free will and foreknowledge. Consider, and respond to, the best objection to that response.
11. The open theist departs from orthodoxy by denying that God knows what free actions we will perform in the future. State and evaluate what you take to be the two most important objections to open theism, and briefly say whether, and why, you take it to be preferable to Determination and Molinism.