

Philosophy Paper Two

According to traditional theology God must be omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent, meaning that he must be all-knowing, all-powerful, and perfectly good. While all three properties are important when attempting to understand the nature of God, in this paper we will examine the property of omnipotence. Two theories of omnipotence will be examined, one in which God can do anything and everything, and one in which God can do anything and everything that is logically possible. It is important to examine and analyze each definition of omnipotence to assist in determining what it means for God to be omnipotent, which, can further help understand the nature of God.

The first definition of omnipotence that will be examined in this paper is the idea that God can do anything and everything. Rosenkrantz and Hoffman define this version of omnipotence as, “The notion of having it with in one’s power to bring about any state affairs” (71 Coursepack). As was discussed in lecture, this definition of omnipotence seems intrinsic. If, according to traditional theology, God must be all powerful, then he should be able to do anything and everything. According to this definition, God could have the power to create the sun, create life, and even make this paper write itself. In addition, if we followed this definition, God could also make $3+7=$ grapefruit, make a stone that is too heavy for himself to lift, or he could be able to stand and sit at the same time. While all the following seem to be impossible and nonsensical, this definition suggests that God can still create these events because he can do anything and everything. And although we may not understand it, it may not be our place to say whether or not God can do the above.

However, Thomas Aquinas and several other philosophers believed that this definition of omnipotence seemed inaccurate. It is difficult to imagine how God could

create a stone that he himself could not lift, as was noted in the paradox of the stone in Rosencrantz and Hoffman's article (Coursepack 27). In addition to this contradiction Aquinas noted several other contradictions that appeared to limit God's omnipotence, including the fact that God can not sin, nor deny himself (Coursepack 68). Due to these contradictions that were noted in the coursepack articles it appears that God can't be omnipotent according to the original definition that Descartes supported. If God is not omnipotent according to the original definition, then two possibilities could arise. Firstly, God may not exist since it appears he can't be omnipotent (and therefore wouldn't have one of the three necessary qualities), or omnipotence should be defined differently to better explain what is possible. Aquinas seemed to choose the second option and, so, we have a new definition of omnipotence to examine.

According to Aquinas, the fact that God is omnipotent should be understood that, "God can do all things that are possible" and these things are limited to what can be consistently described (Coursepack 69). While this definition does not appear to differ that much from the first definition of omnipotence, that is not the case. According to this definition, God can still do everything, but everything is only what is logically possible. In other words, it isn't comprehensible to be able to sit and stand at the same time since those actions appear to be contradictory. Therefore that action appears to be logically impossible. As Aquinas notes, if a contradiction exists, "It is more appropriate to say that those things can not be done, than [to say] that God can not do them" (Coursepack 68). This definition may appear to limit what God can do, however, that is not the case. According to this definition, God can still do everything possible, however, the realm of what is possible is limited to what is logically possible, or according to Aquinas, what can be "consistently

described.” Therefore, God can’t create a stone that is too heavy for himself to lift, because that is logically impossible, but, if he desired, he could allow a rainstorm to occur next Thursday because that is logically possible, he could even make it rain giant strawberries instead of water if he wanted to, but he could not let me sit and stand at the same time no matter how much I wanted to, because it is logically impossible to do so.

After looking at both theories it may seem challenging to determine, which theory may be stronger, and, thusly, which definition of omnipotence is accurate when describing the nature of God. However, when investigating the first definition of omnipotence one can see that according to that definition God would be able to do things that appear to be contradictions. Since it seems improbable that God could create a stone so heavy, that he, himself, can’t lift, or that he could cause an individual to sit and stand at the same time, it may be appropriate to assume that the first definition of omnipotence, where God can do absolutely everything, isn’t as strong as the second definition.

Therefore, it may be best to believe that God’s omnipotence follows the second definition of omnipotence. As Aquinas noted, God can do all things that are possible absolutely, and things are possible absolutely if the predicate isn’t incompatible with the subject (coursepack 68). Therefore, if the predicate and subject are incompatible, they are not possible absolutely. So, according to this definition an object can’t be neon green and colorless, those traits are incompatible, and thusly incomprehensible. Since our logic is our method of reasoning, it is understandable why we may assume that contradictions that don’t follow our logic may not fit in the realm of possibility, since they are incomprehensible. And, if these contradictions and nonsensical things aren’t in the realm of logical possibility, then not even an omnipotent being could do them. Therefore, in the

second definition, God is still all powerful, since he can do everything that is in the realm of logical possibility. Therefore, this definition doesn't appear to limit the power of God, as some may suggest, but rather it accounts for the illogical contradictions that were stated in page one of this paper.

However, while it may appear that God's omnipotence fits the second definition, it is still important to examine the first definition when deciding if God is omnipotent. As was stated earlier in the paper, the first definition of omnipotence is the capability of a being to do absolutely everything and anything. This definition includes items both in the realm of logical possibility and those outside of the realm, including contradictions. As was discussed earlier, it was difficult to imagine the possibility that God could create a stone so heavy that he himself could not lift, or the fact that he could allow a statement such as $3+7=\text{grapefruit}$, when such events seem irrational and improbable to us. Therefore, the second definition eliminated these events and deemed them as outside of the realm of possibility, because, we could not understand them.

However, eliminating these from the realm of possibilities could have consequences. Just because these events seem improbable and irrational to us, does not mean that they are improbable or irrational to God. By deeming these events as illogical we limit the realm of possibility, and thus, it appears that somehow, we limit the power of God. Yes, according to the second definition, God can still do everything, but we have set a limit on what everything is. This appears to be problematic to me, since I have a hard time believing that we, as humans, understand everything that is possible. For example, I don't understand how an MRI, works, as far as I'm concerned little men could be inside the machine making an imprint of a person's brain, yet I know it does work as many

medical professionals rely on this machine on a daily basis. Similarly, I may not understand how God could create a stone so heavy that he himself can't lift it, but maybe God understands how. Just because one person may not understand something, or may think that an event is impossible, it doesn't mean that someone else doesn't understand this event or think that it is impossible. In that sense, although humans may not understand some of these contradictory statements that were mentioned in the paper that does not suggest that God may not understand these events, or that he is unable to accomplish these tasks. So, while the second definition may seem to eliminate the problem of irrational and contradictory events that are incomprehensible to us, the first definition of omnipotence seems to look at those events, and suggest that, while we may not understand them, who are we to say that they are outside of the realm of possibility. If this is the case, the second definition, could in fact limit the power of God, and so one may suggest that even though they don't understand it, God's omnipotence follows the first definition.

While the first definition of omnipotence may suggest that it is not the place of humans to define what is possible, the second definition does seem more rationale, and thus may be stronger when determining God's omnipotence. However, because of the discrepancies between both definitions, it is not my place to conclude what God's omnipotence resembles. Rather, I attempted to present both cases, and make arguments for why either definition may be an accurate description of God's omnipotence.