

Is God Perfect?: Brian Leftow

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Transcript - Short

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

How do we understand the idea that God is perfect?

Brian Leftow:

Well, there are certain traits we think of as making something good or valuable. It's a good thing to have knowledge, it's a good thing to have power, it's a good thing to be morally good. Those things come in different degrees. If you extend the degree higher and higher and higher some of those things have kind of an intrinsic maximum. So to say that God is perfect is to say that he has qualities like this in their absolute maximum degree. Some good qualities may not have intrinsic maxima. In other words, maybe for every beautiful thing there could be something even more beautiful than that, who knows? But with some others you can see where a maximum is just a natural consequence of what's involved.

For instance, knowledge; knowledge has to be of the truth, of the way things really are. There is just one way things really are, just one body of truth. And it's got limits. This is true and what's the contradictory of it isn't true, so there's a maximum amount of truth, namely all of them. And so there's a maximum amount of knowledge, namely knowledgeable of that.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

So the concept of perfection deals with a host of different qualities that if they have a maximum, God has them, and if they don't have a maximum, God has as much as is possible?

Brian Leftow:

Well, if they don't have a maximum there isn't such a thing as having as much as possible. If they don't have a maximum then the concept of a perfect being isn't committed to God's having the maximum of it, it's just committed to his being very good in those respects.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

Why is it important for God to be perfect on this human description?

Brian Leftow:

We worship God. When you worship, you praise God, you say that he's great, and you don't sort of have a mental reservation, to the effect, well, you're great, but I can think of better. The attitude of worship is really praise without reservations. What would an object have to be to really deserve that? It would have to be good without qualification.