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978-1-107-08704-0 - Describing Gods: An Investigation of Divine Attributes

Graham Oppy

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## DESCRIBING GODS

How do religious believers describe God, and what sort of attributes to they attribute to him? These are central topics in the philosophy of religion. In this book Graham Oppy undertakes a careful study of attributes which are commonly ascribed to God, including infinity, perfection, simplicity, eternity, necessity, fundamentality, omnipotence, omniscience, freedom, incorporeality, perfect goodness, perfect beauty and perfect truth. In a series of substantial chapters, he examines divine attributes one by one, and relates them to a larger taxonomy of those attributes. He also examines the difficulties involved in establishing the claim that understandings of divine attributes are inconsistent or incoherent. Intended as a companion to his 2006 book *Arguing about Gods*, his study engages with a range of the best contemporary work on divine attributes. It will appeal to readers in philosophy of religion.

GRAHAM OPPY is Professor of Philosophy at Monash University. His books on philosophy of religion include: *Ontological Arguments and Belief in God* (1996), *Philosophical Perspectives on Infinity* (2006), *Arguing about Gods* (2006), *Reading Philosophy of Religion* with Michael Scott (2010), *The History of Western Philosophy of Religion* co-edited with Nick Trakakis (2013), *The Best Argument against God* (2013) and *Reinventing Philosophy of Religion: An Opinionated Introduction* (2014).

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*An investigation of divine attributes*

GRAHAM OPPY

*Monash University*



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## *Preface*

This book has been an inordinately long time in the making. I began working on it in the first half of 2004, and had some material completed by the end of June that year. Thereafter, I made very little progress with it until I began working on the 'Models of God' project with Nick Trakakis and Mark Manolopoulos, supported by ARC Discovery Project Grant DP1093541, in 2010. A year of study leave from Monash in 2013 allowed me to apply the finishing touches.

The overall aim of the present work is to investigate attributes that are often ascribed to God by those who believe in God. This investigation might, eventually, feed into verdicts about the coherence of various conceptions of God. But, as it stands, the work would only license the most preliminary and tentative verdicts.

There are many people and organisations to thank. I am grateful for the support that I have received from my colleagues at Monash, from within the School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies, from within the Faculty of Arts more widely and from within the university community as a whole. I am also grateful to the many philosophers with whom I have discussed material that appears in this work. No doubt I won't remember everyone; the list certainly includes: Mike Almeida, Dirk Baltzly, John Bigelow, John Bishop, Monima Chadha, Mark Edwards, Peter Forrest, Richard Gale, Bruce Langtry, Brian Leftow, Morgan Luck, John Maher, Neil Manson, Yujin Nagasawa, Alex Pruss, Mark Saward, Robert Simpson, Nick Trakakis, Ed Wierenga and two anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press. I noted above that part of the writing of this book was supported by an ARC Discovery project grant; I am indebted to the Australian Research Council, and to the Australian taxpayers who provide its funding. The editorial team at Cambridge University Press provided sterling support: in particular, I am grateful for the assistance and hard work of Hilary Gaskin, Gillian Dadd and Kim Richardson; and I am also indebted to Karen Gillen for her work on the index, and

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for her careful proof-reading. Finally, as always, I must acknowledge the support of friends and family; in particular, I owe more than I can say to Camille, Gilbert, Calvin and Alfie.

Some of the material presented here is not new. In particular, sections 1.1, 2.2, 3.1, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 5.3, 6.2, 6.3 and 8.1 have been published previously. On the other hand, sections 1.2–1.4, 4.2, 5.1–5.2, 5.4–5.6, 6.1, 7.1–7.5, 8.2–8.4, 9.1–9.4, 10.1–10.6, 11.1–11.5 and 12.1–12.2 are all new.

Section 1.1 is based on an article – ‘Gods’ – that first appeared in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, 2, 2009, 231–50, as a publication of Oxford University Press. This material is republished here with the permission of Oxford University Press, which I gratefully acknowledge.

Section 2.2 is based on a chapter – ‘God and Infinity: Directions for Future Research’ – that first appeared in M. Heller and H. Woodin (eds.) *Infinity: New Research Frontiers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 233–54, © Cambridge University Press. I hesitated to seek permission from Cambridge University Press to republish this material, for fear of the regress that might ensue. However, my fears proved groundless, and this chapter is reproduced with the permission of Cambridge University Press, which I gratefully acknowledge.

Section 3.1 is based on an article – ‘Perfection, Near-Perfection, Maximality and Anselmian Theism’ that first appeared in the *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 69, 2, 2011, 119–38. This material is republished here with the permission of Springer, which I gratefully acknowledge.

Sections 4.1, 4.3 and 4.4 are based on an article – ‘The Devilish Complexities of Divine Simplicity’ – that first appeared in *Philo* 6, 1, 2003, 10–22, as a publication of the Center for Inquiry. This material is republished here with the permission of the Center for Inquiry, which I gratefully acknowledge.

Section 5.3 is based on an article that first appeared on the Secular Web, under the title ‘Some Emendations to Leftow on Time and Eternity’. This material is republished here with the permission of Internet Infidels Inc., which I gratefully acknowledge.

Section 6.2 is based on an article – ‘Leftow on God and Necessity’ – that is to appear in the *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, a publication of Akademos Press. This material is republished here with the permission of the Editor, which I gratefully acknowledge.

Section 6.3 is based on a chapter – ‘Abstract Objects? Who Cares?’ – that is part of P. Gould (ed.) *Beyond the Control of God? Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, New York, Bloomsbury Publishing,



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Section 8.1 is based on an article – ‘Omnipotence’ – that first appeared in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 71, 1, 2005, 56–84, as a publication of the International Phenomenological Society. This material is republished here with permission of the International Phenomenological Society, which I gratefully acknowledge.