

Does God have to be perfect?

By Tim O'Toole

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Last week on the PBS series "Closer To Truth" three philosophers conjectured on the nature of God. Could an all-knowing, all-seeing God have free will?

Human beings are influenced when making choices by such factors as parental upbringing, social pressure, physical laws and raging hormones. None of these would limit the supreme being.

But advanced knowledge of the outcome of any choice would take the doubt — and the fun — out of life. Omniscience would preclude God having a chance to grow and learn by his mistakes (something we humans do daily).

I was amused when the three wise men imposed the semantic distinction of "perfect" on the prime mover. While not on a par with the sophistic "Could God make a boulder heavier than he could lift?," their arrogance in applying an absolute to the unknowable one (three if you are a Trinitarian) got me to thinking about my own notion of the deity.

The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures revealed that God is capable of changing his mind. To smote or not to smote, that was the question in the Old Testament. The world was spared from destruction in biblical times through the intervention of a few honest souls.

Then came the New Testament. Was salvation restricted to one group, or would other cultures share in redemption?

Does God really have to be perfect? I prefer a God who makes mistakes — humanity itself might be one of them. That would answer the question "How can God allow such-and-such to happen?"

Could we settle for best rather than perfect? You don't need to be perfect to take the gold at the Olympics.

Why did God create the universe? Genesis suggests He was lonely. Science suggests God is patient. Consider the 200 million years from the Big Bang to the formation of stars. Add to that the millions of years of post-dinosaur evolution required to bring us to the point of asking that question. God is certainly mature — a clear sign of that is his ability to delay gratification. God had this great idea — the universe — and wanted to share it with those who could think for themselves.

A God smarter, older and wiser than the rest of us, but not necessarily perfect. I want a creator to be better than Satan. The competition between good and evil needs to be just that — a competition.

To err is human, to forgive, divine. We share some in that divinity by forgiving God when things don't work out perfectly in our imperfect world. We've been doing a good job trashing our Garden of Eden. If our attempt to despoil the planet is interrupted by an asteroid, adding the human race to the list of extinct creatures, will we be big enough to thank God for the lives we lived, warts and all?

Or are we counting on a God who will intervene when things really get nasty? I think we need to count on each other in such circumstances. Like right now.

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