

The Divine Command and Moral Requirements: A Review of the Relationship between Religion and Morality from Richard Swinburne's Perspective

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Abstract

In answer to the question “can we consistently see God as the origin of moral duties” Richard Swinburne believes that the divine commands have something to do with moral problems. Since God is gives us the greatest blessing, if God asks us to do something, it will be our duty to comply with it. However, it is obvious that God cannot make something our duty when it is not our duty in fact. As to the problem of God's power and morality, Swinburne draws a distinction between necessary and contingent moral judgements, maintaining that God cannot change necessary judgements even if he wants to. As to contingent moral judgments, however, in virtue of his absolute power for creating any contingent world, God can select one world in which the contingent moral judgments are different from those in other worlds. Our objection is that, on the one hand, Swinburne's claim cannot provide a good answer to the question of what the relation is between God's absolute power and contingent moral judgments because his position can resolve the contradiction resulting from the requirements of the necessary moral judgments, while in solving the contradictions arising from the contingent moral judgments, he faces questions which render his argument incomplete. On the other hand, his argument for the requirement of complying with God's commands because he bestows his favors and blessings upon us is implausible. At best, he can just claim that praising someone who bestows blessings upon us can provide a motivation for complying with God's commands and, in the most developed version, we can say that it provides a motivation for complying with moral obligations.

Keywords

Richard Swinburne, religion and ethics, moral obligation, praising someone who bestows blessings, necessary moral judgments, contingent moral judgments.

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