

Does God Have a Role in Morality? A Critique of Richard Swinburne

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Abstract

In his discussion of the relation between morality and religion (God), Richard Swinburne attempts to adopt a middle position. After outlining his account of the nature of moral judgments, he argues that moral facts are divided into two kinds: necessary and contingent. God plays no role in necessary moral facts, but does play a role in contingent moral facts. Moreover, Swinburne appears to attribute two further roles to God in morality: altering the status of certain moral judgments, and contributing to our understanding of necessary moral facts. In this paper, I argue that Swinburne fails to successfully introduce God into morality, and that all three roles he assigns to God are mistaken. If Swinburne's premises are correct, the conclusion would be that God plays a role in the lives of theists; however, this does not show that God plays a serious and distinctive role in morality. Finally, I argue that Swinburne's account of God's role in morality, even if correct, has no practical impact either on the lives of theists or on those of non-theists.

Keywords: Richard Swinburne; Religion and Morality; Necessary Moral Facts; Contingent Moral Facts; Atheism.

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