

# Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

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Volume 11 | Issue 2

Article 16

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4-1-1994

## Richard Swinburne, RESPONSIBILITY AND ATONEMENT

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### Recommended Citation

Stump, Eleonore (1994) "Richard Swinburne, RESPONSIBILITY AND ATONEMENT," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 11 : Iss. 2 , Article 16.

DOI: 10.5840/faithphil19941126

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol11/iss2/16>

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much. I'm just supposing." Some of mentality amount to doings, such as imaginings and cases of considering or deliberating, but not all. In particular, supposing, believing, assuming, and presupposing seem not to be doings at all. They are, instead, states we find ourselves in rather than things we do.

5. On p. 171, Alston claims that the concept of being a more firmly established practice "involves components such as (a) being more widely accepted, (b) having a more definite structure, (c) being more important in our lives, (d) having more of an innate basis, (e) being more difficult to abstain from, and (f) its principles seeming more obviously true." In light of (f), one may wonder whether there is a connection between Alston's emphasis on firmly established practices and egocentric rationality. The answer is, it depends on whose seeming is involved in (f), and what weight is assigned to each factor. In the case of Cedric, if it is Cedric's seeming that matters, and if the presence of (f) dominates all other conditions, then Alston's emphasis on firmly established practices implies egocentric rationality. I doubt this is Alston's view, however; and in any case, this list is of little help without clarification of its members and some idea of how to weight each factor since it is clearly possible for conflict to obtain between them.

6. Though Alston does not clarify the notion of coherence, it is common practice to assume that coherent beliefs are at least consistent. The difficulties come in trying to say what else besides consistency coherence involves.

7. And theorists who prefer a view of propositional content on which these different sentences express the same proposition need to explain how it could have been an important epistemic achievement to find out that the sentences express the same proposition. Presumably, any such explanation will allow some epistemic status for beliefs involving the first sentence that might not be possessed by beliefs involving the second sentence.

8. I am assuming that the full reasons for each claim will not be exhausted by a deductively valid argument with either claim as the conclusion. It is hard to imagine an adequate theory of rationality that would deny this claim, but I won't defend it here.

9. For arguments that (8) is false, see, e.g., Henry Kyburg, "Conjunctivitis," in *Epistemology and Inference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); and Richard Foley, *The Theory of Epistemic Rationality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

*Responsibility and Atonement*, by Richard Swinburne. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. Pp. v + 213.

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Over the course of several books, Richard Swinburne has undertaken to produce a systematic philosophical defense of Christianity. While there are other philosophers who are engaged in defending one or another piece of traditional Christian philosophical theology, Swinburne is the only one to have embarked on a systematic treatment of all the major doctrines of the religion, and it is a mammoth undertaking. He began with a trilogy: *The Coherence of Theism*, *The Existence of God*, and *Faith and Reason*. This

volume, *Responsibility and Atonement*, is the first of a subsequent tetralogy, which will cover atonement, trinity and incarnation, revelation, providence and the problem of evil. (By now, the volume on revelation has also appeared.) The labor of a large, ongoing project of this sort is clearly revealed in an endearing but utterly implausible claim Swinburne makes several times in *Responsibility and Atonement*: “The strongest desire of all, which influences us to fail to fulfill our obligations...is the desire to rest” (p. 12). Both those who are inclined to attack Christianity and those who mean to defend it can be grateful for Swinburne’s unrelenting efforts, which are yielding a lucid exposition of Christian doctrine and a philosophically coherent defense of it.

*Responsibility and Atonement*, as its title implies, focuses on the distinctively Christian doctrine of Christ’s atonement for human sin. The first part of the book, which comprises well over half the volume, is focused on responsibility. It begins with a detailed consideration of the nature of moral goodness and the connection between responsibility and free will. It also examines merit and reward, guilt and forgiveness; and it completes the discussion of responsibility with a chapter entitled “Man’s Moral Condition,”<sup>1</sup> which examines human proneness to wrongdoing. Swinburne intends this part of the book to be independent of any theological assumptions and to be of general interest to philosophers concerned with ethics or issues involving free will. In the second part of the book, Swinburne introduces the theological views characteristic of Christianity—that there is an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God, creator of the world, who became incarnate in Christ, and so on. Swinburne argues that these theological views make a difference to our understanding of human obligation and human proneness to wrongdoing, and he lays out his understanding of the resulting account of obligations to God and of sin. Then he is finally ready to address the doctrine of the atonement, and the last three chapters of the book are devoted to atonement, sanctification, and heaven and hell.

Clearly, Swinburne is covering an enormous range of material in this short book; in consequence many of his discussions are necessarily sketchy. So, for example, in the chapter on free will, Swinburne argues against compatibilism and for incompatibilism, but Daniel Dennett’s defense of compatibilism is dismissed in a short footnote, and the defense of incompatibilism provided by Peter van Inwagen, who might have been a valuable ally for Swinburne here, is discussed and rejected in just a couple of paragraphs in a note. Swinburne espouses the principle of alternative possibilities, which he takes to be essential to incompatibilist free will, without any serious discussion of the substantial literature challenging that principle. There is very little examination of Harry Frankfurt’s work, for instance, and none of John Martin Fischer’s. Finally, although the connection between reason and free will is important to Swinburne’s position, Susan Wolf’s views on this subject, well argued and opposed to Swinburne’s, aren’t mentioned at all.

Furthermore, no doubt also in order to expedite discussions that otherwise would have been considerably more lengthy, Swinburne relies heavily on unargued intuitions which not all his readers will share. To take just one example out of very many, Swinburne says, "Do we not think that the coward who does an heroic act out of character is greatly to be praised for it, praised for rising above his habitual reactions and natural inclinations? He is worthy of praise more than the man to whom the heroic act is almost second nature" (p. 40). But consider former Governor Jerry Brown. On who knows what impulse, at one point in his life he left his usual round of politics and joined Mother Teresa, tending the dying in India; after that brief episode, he went back to his usual concerns. Certainly, Brown is an example of someone who does a heroic act out of character, and so on Swinburne's views Brown is more worthy of praise than Mother Teresa, to whom by now heroic acts of this sort are no doubt second nature. But not everyone will see things Swinburne's way here.

Finally, the brevity of the book makes for some problems also when it comes to the history of philosophy and Christian tradition. Swinburne makes many references to the work of philosophers and Christian thinkers from earlier periods; his erudition is impressive and his willingness to engage with historical thinkers is exemplary. But because he is covering so much in such a short space, he cannot give historical figures the attention they deserve; and so this side of his book is sometimes frustrating. For example, he castigates Aquinas for holding a view more commonly associated with Calvin, that the people who wind up in hell have been predestined, or reprobated, by God to be there. Swinburne says that for Aquinas the doctrine of predestination "means that God foreordains the salvation of certain men chosen for no prior merit of theirs—i.e., he programmes them in advance to do such good works as will merit salvation.... [But] if all and only those who are saved are programmed in advance to be saved, then those who are lost will be so as a result of not being programmed, i.e., they will have been reprobated; and I have argued that a good God will not reprobate" (p. 193). Whatever exactly the correct description of Aquinas's account of predestination is, this cannot be it, although Aquinas sometimes writes loosely, in ways which can give rise to this impression. Aquinas defends at length the claim that God is timeless; therefore, on Aquinas's account, God cannot *foreordain* anything or program anyone *in advance*. In fact, strictly speaking, temporal *predestination* of any sort is not possible for a timeless God.

The ethics Swinburne expounds in the first part of the book is largely Kantian, as Swinburne himself explains (see, e.g., p. 35). He elaborates the Kantian foundation of his ethics by reference to "normal human beliefs" (p. 14) or "commonsense morality" (p. 22), though the sociological base for the intuitions invoked by such phrases seems a good deal narrower than the

phrases themselves would suggest. Commonsense morality, for example, is supposed to be the warrant for the claim that "Perhaps I have an obligation to save one life by paying \$5, a second life by paying \$5; but after a time, when I have given a certain proportion of my income over that time, I have done my bit. More than that is supererogatory" (p. 22). The moral principle implicit here is indeed common in the circles in which many of us move but seems to have been rarer, for example, among the poor villagers of le Chambon, who on their own account felt it morally obligatory to help Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany even to the point of risking their own lives.<sup>2</sup>

A great deal more could profitably be said about Swinburne's methodology and conclusions in the first part of the book, but in this short review I will concentrate just on the second part, on Swinburne's account of the atonement. On Swinburne's view, atonement is necessary for the removal of guilt consequent on wrongdoing in general and sin in particular; and he takes atonement to consist at least in repentance and apology, and usually also in reparation and penance (p. 81). Forgiveness of the sort which removes guilt is not possible without atonement, although it is possible for the victim of wrongdoing to forgive without requiring reparation and penance in addition to repentance and apology (p. 85). God undoubtedly could forgive human sin without requiring reparation and penance, but "it is good that if we do wrong, we should take *proper* steps to cancel our actions...as far as logically can be done" (p. 149). And so God chooses not to forgive sin without reparation and penance, too. The problem then becomes this: what possible penance could human beings give to God? God himself makes this penance available to human beings in the life and death of Christ, Swinburne says.

He thinks that the best way to understand Christ's atonement is as a sacrifice. The idea of a sacrifice to God is that "God takes something valuable as a gift of reconciliation whose benefits he will often share with worshippers—like, to use a humble modern analogy, the box of chocolates which one gives to one's host, who then offers one in return a choice from the box. The sacrifice of Christ is then Christ giving the most valuable thing he has—his life; both a lived life of obedience to God, and a laid-down life on the Cross—as a present to God, whose benefits will flow to others" (p. 152). This picture is somewhat complicated by the doctrine that Christ is also fully God, as Swinburne recognizes: "insofar as Christ is God himself, he cannot offer a sacrifice to himself. The sacrifice model has then to be somewhat transformed. God makes available the sacrifice (of himself), but it is we who have to offer it. ...Any man who is humble and serious enough about his sin to recognize what is the proper reparation and penance for it may use the costly gift which another has made available for him to offer as his sacrifice. On this model Christ's death has no efficacy until men choose to plead it in atonement for their sins" (p. 153). And, he adds, "if, as some Reformers have

claimed, God forgives men before men seek him, God would not be taking men seriously.... Rather, the sinner has to use Christ's death to get forgiveness" (p. 153). We use Christ's death to get forgiveness when we plead it before God in this way: "'Our life is a failure,' we may now say. 'We have made a mess of the life which you gave us, we have made no reparation of our own for our sins,...But we have been given a perfect life, not owed to you, O God. We offer you this life instead of the life we should have led...Take its perfection instead of our imperfection. We are serious enough about our sins to repent and apologize and to offer you back an offering of this value as our reparation and penance'" (pp. 154-55).

Swinburne himself raises and answers several questions at this point. One important question is this: couldn't a human being make reparation and penance for herself, or for herself and others? Why does God have to provide reparation and penance for us? The answer, Swinburne says, is that "[W]e ordinary men, even if we had not sinned ourselves, would owe so much to God anyway...that the little extra we could do for our brethren in this way would not amount to very much. Only when I owe you nothing can I give you something" (p. 157). But why, we might wonder, would the penance and reparation have to be made by God's becoming incarnate? "[T]he point of reparation is to restore the status quo as nearly as possible. Likewise, the best penance is that which more than makes it up to you in the respect in which I harmed you. ...Since what needs atonement to God is human sin,...appropriate reparation and penance would be made by a perfect human life, given away through being lived perfectly" (pp. 156-57).

What are we to say about this account of the atonement?

Someone might object at the outset that Swinburne has simply misunderstood the nature of forgiveness. On Swinburne's account, the wronged person's ability to forgive is dependent on the decisions of the wrongdoer; if the wrongdoer decides not to make atonement, his victim can't forgive him. But contrary to Swinburne, it seems evident that forgiveness is entirely within the power of the wronged person. We can forgive people who still aren't speaking to us; we can forgive our parents long after they are dead; and we can be commanded to forgive our enemies (as distinct from being commanded to forgive those people who were our enemies but have now repented, apologized, made reparation, and brought a present).

Nonetheless, an objection of this sort is mistaken, I think. We speak of forgiveness ambiguously. Sometimes—especially when we think about forgiveness from the point of view of the person wronged—we mean by 'forgiveness' the wronged person's putting away all resentment or wrath with respect to the wrongdoer. In that sense, it *is* perfectly possible for a victim to forgive the person who has wronged her no matter what he decides to do. But, on the other hand, sometimes—especially when we think about forgive-

ness from the point of view of the person committing the wrong—we mean by ‘forgiveness’ the restoration and healing of a broken relationship. When a husband asks his wife for forgiveness, he wants the marital relationship whole again. If his wife were to put away all her angry feelings towards him but divorce him anyway, with serenity, he would feel with bitterness that she hadn’t forgiven him at all. In this sense of ‘forgiveness,’ the restoration of a broken relationship, forgiveness isn’t entirely within the power of the wronged person; it does depend on decisions and actions of the wrongdoer as well, at least on his repentance and confession. If we understand Swinburne to be discussing forgiveness only in the second sense, this objection evaporates.

A more serious worry concerning Swinburne’s account, in my view, has to do with the way he identifies the problem atonement is meant to solve. Human sin produces a breach in the relationship between human beings and God, a breach which the atonement somehow heals. One way to see the problem here is to suppose that it lies with human beings and consists in finding a way of restoring to righteousness wills which are both free and (as Jeremiah says) “desperately wicked.” On Swinburne’s view, however, the problem lies with God, who requires reparation and costly penance, which is out of the reach of human beings and which the atonement then provides. This view raises a number of questions.

In the first place, Swinburne quite rightly says that when human wrongdoing produces a breach in a relationship with another human being, the relationship sometimes requires reparation and penance, as well as repentance and apology, in order for the person who has been wronged to return to the relationship as it was before. This claim seems as right as it does because human wrongdoing does often result in harm to other human beings, harm which we feel the wrongdoer ought somehow to undo. But it isn’t clear that human wrongdoing harms God, or that an omnipotent, omniscient deity could be harmed at all. And if God isn’t harmed by human wrongdoing, then why would there be any need or desire on *his* part to have a costly present as penance for human wrongdoing (as distinct from a need or desire to provide penance, on the part of human wrongdoers)?

Furthermore, while it is clear in cases of human wrongdoing that wrongdoers sometimes have an obligation to provide penance as well as reparation, it isn’t clear that sinners could have any obligation to provide penance to God. On Swinburne’s view, only when one person owes another nothing can she bring him a present. But in that case human beings *can’t* bring God any presents, since (as Swinburne says) they owe him so much anyway, even without taking sin into account. But if human beings *can’t* bring God a present, if they can’t provide penance, it seems that a good God wouldn’t require it of them.<sup>3</sup>

And there is a further worry in the case of the penance provided by the atonement. In this case, the penance includes the torture and destruction of

an innocent human being. If, as Swinburne claims, God is not morally obligated to demand penance but decides to require it anyway, how are we to understand a good God's deciding to require torture and destruction when (on Swinburne's own account) God could get what he wants without it?

Moreover, even in the case in which wrongdoing causes harm to its human victim and the wrongdoer can make reparation and innocuous penance, although we find the victim who insists on penance morally acceptable, we admire her if she is willing to forego it. In the parable of the prodigal son, the son, who has seriously wronged his father, returns home intending to say to his father "I have sinned against heaven and before you." But *before* he can express his repentance to his father, his father runs to him and embraces him with kisses; and although he finally does make his speech of repentance, his father rushes to restore the broken relationship without requiring any reparation whatsoever, to say nothing of asking for a present. The father in the parable seems to many a model of parental love. Would we feel the same way about him if the story were rewritten on Swinburnian lines, so that forgiveness were granted only in response to repentance, apology, reparation, and penance?

Finally, there is some difficulty in seeing exactly what Swinburne takes the penance constituted by the atonement to be. Is the death of Christ an essential part of the costly present offered to God in the atonement or not? Sometimes, as in the passages quoted above, it seems as if the costly present consists essentially just in the blameless life of Christ, to which his death on the cross is a perhaps foreseen but nonetheless accidental accompaniment. On this view, nothing essential to the atonement would have been lost if God had responded positively to Christ's prayer in Gethsemane and had prevented the crucifixion (as he could easily have done by a host of means ranging from the prosaic to the miraculous). A view of the atonement of this sort would raise some difficult questions and would put Swinburne at odds with the New Testament and Christian tradition. Sometimes, however, Swinburne seems in harmony with that tradition: in summing up his account of the atonement, he speaks of the "redeeming *death*" of Christ and of the way in which we use "Christ's life *and death*" (my emphases) as a means of removing sin (p. 161). But if Christ's passion and death are an essential part of the atonement, then it is hard to see how they constitute a costly present to God, the cosmic equivalent of the box of chocolates offered along with reparation. How could any decent person, let alone a perfectly good God, take the humiliation, mangling, and destruction of an innocent person as a valuable present which helps to make up for previous wrongdoing on the part of others? And, of course, the problem only becomes worse when we bring in the doctrine of the trinity: now the costly present we offer to God is the torture and death of his own incarnate self. Why would God find this a valuable gift which constitutes our penance for wrongs done to him?



That serious worries of this sort can be raised about Swinburne's theory of the atonement is in a certain sense the best indicator of the excellence of this book. When Anselm wrote his treatise on the atonement, he thought that nothing which Christian tradition had bequeathed him about the atonement was worth discussing at any length, and perhaps he was right. His own theory of the atonement, which has a family resemblance to Swinburne's, is not nearly so well worked out, or so worthy of critical examination, as Swinburne's is. By trying to produce a detailed and philosophically coherent account of the atonement which is true to biblical texts and Christian tradition, on the one hand, and our moral intuitions, on the other, Swinburne has done us all a great service. Philosophers and theologians interested in the atonement must grapple with the issues raised by Swinburne's account.<sup>4</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Braving the trends of the age in this as in other respects, Swinburne has decided to retain the use of 'man' for the species and 'he' as the non-gender-specific pronoun. Bravery is in general admirable and appealing, but misplaced, I think, in this case.

2. See, for example, Philip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1985). In summing up, Hallie says, "Trocme and This [the two pastors who led the work of rescuing Jews in Le Chambon] believed that if they failed to protect those [Jewish refugees] in Le Chambon, they, the ministers, would share the guilt of the evil ones who actually perpetrated the harmdoing" (p. 283).

3. In correspondence, Swinburne has agreed with this point but said that "God provides [penance] for us in order that we may be able to bring it." It is true that if God provides human beings with a costly present they otherwise would not have been able to provide themselves, then they may have some obligation to use it and God may have some right to require that they do so. On this position, then, Christ's atonement is not a response to some preexisting moral need on the part of human beings but rather creates a moral obligation which was not there before. This conclusion, which strikes me as infelicitous, only sharpens the worry raised in the next paragraph.

4. I am grateful to Norman Kretzmann and Richard Swinburne for helpful questions and comments on an earlier draft of this review.

*Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy*, by Richard Swinburne. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. Pp. 236. \$65.00 (cloth), \$19.95 (paper).

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In this historically rich but theologically controversial book, Richard Swinburne discusses the grounds for believing that some book or creed or act conveys revealed truth in propositional form, devoting well over half the book to a discussion of the Christian revelation.

Part I is a primer in philosophy of language designed as a prolegomenon