

Hum 9

First Paper Assignment

Instructions: Write a reaction paper of approximately 300-500 words. Not much more than one page. This paper must be typed and printed out and given to me at the beginning of class. You must write about an article assigned for class that we have not yet discussed in class. For example, for week 3, we are reading pieces by Clifford and James for Tuesday and by Gettier for Thursday. If you write about Clifford or James, you must give it to me on Tuesday. If you wish to write about Gettier, you may wait until Thursday.

In this paper you should:

- 1) Identify some argument from the text, being clear about its premises and conclusion (though not necessarily writing out its logical form).
- 2) Defend or criticize the argument with an argument of your own.

Here is a sample reaction paper:

In “Why God Allows Evil”, Richard Swinburne attempts a theodicy founded on the “free-will defence”. That is, the central reason that God allows evil in the world is that we humans have a certain kind of free will, “free and responsible choice”, which carries with it the natural possibility of moral evil. The argument appears to be something like this:

- 1) When God faces a choice between actualizing different possible worlds, God will create the best of all possible worlds.
- 2) A world where humans have free will will necessarily allow for some evil in the world as the result of humans choosing to do evil.
- 3) A world where humans have free will but do evil is a better world than any world which has no evil and no free will.

Therefore, 4) God will create a world with the possibility of evil.

An obvious response to this argument is to claim that premise 2 is false since God, who is omnipotent, could simply make humans such that they would always choose to do good and never evil. Swinburne says (on page 73) that in order for humans to have free will, it must be actually outside of God’s own control what they will do. He claims that it is logically impossible that humans have free will and yet we always do good. But this is a mistake.

God is omniscient. God knows everything that is true including all of the facts about the causes of our actions and decisions. What we decide to do in any particular circumstance is dictated by physical circumstances and the laws of nature. We do make choices, but we are determined to make those choices given the exact circumstances that we are in. God knows exactly the circumstances that we are in and therefore what we will choose to do. In fact, God knew from the beginning of time exactly what circumstances would evolve and exactly what choices each human would make. He also knows exactly what choices we would make if the world were slightly different. Since God is directly responsible for creating the world and the laws of nature exactly as they are, God could have set up the world in such a way so that humans were always in exactly the circumstances such that they will choose to do good and never evil. Swinburne assumes that this would not be free will since free will requires that we have some kind of genuine power over nature such that even God cannot know what we will do in any particular circumstance. But we do not have that kind of free will and therefore this kind of free will cannot be the reason that God allows evil in our world.