

# Introduction to Philosophy

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## Reason and Religious Faith: The Problem of Evil

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

### Reading

- Richard Swinburne, "Why God Allows Evil".

### Background

A common argument against the existence of God questions why there should be evil in a world created by an all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing being. This argument is known as the problem of evil and runs so: First, a being who is all-good would do everything possible to abolish evil. Second, a being who is all-powerful would be able to abolish evil. Third, a being who is all-knowing would know about the evils needing to be abolished. Putting these three together, if there were an all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing being, there would be no evil. Yet evil clearly exists. Thus, it would seem there is no being who is all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing. Numerous attempts have been made to find a solution to this problem. A familiar strategy is to try to demonstrate how the goods of the world are made possible by the presence of evils. For instance, it has been argued that evil is necessary so that human beings can bear moral responsibility for their actions. This strategy for resolving the problem of evil is developed by Richard Swinburne.

### Questions

1. Richard Swinburne distinguishes between "natural evil" and "moral evil". What is the difference?
2. Swinburne's argument claims that "the occurrence of certain evils. . . is not evidence against [God's] existence". In particular, "God cannot give us [the highest] goods in full measure without allowing much evil on the way". What are these highest goods exactly?
3. According to Swinburne, why do these higher goods necessarily allow for the possibility of *moral* evil? In particular, why does responsibility require that I could possibly harm other people? Why cannot a person be responsible without being able to do so? Why is my suffering at your hands actually a good thing for me? Is this argument convincing?
4. According to Swinburne, why do these higher goods necessarily allow for the possibility of *natural* evil? In particular, what are the two ways in which natural evil operates to "make available to humans specially worthwhile kinds of choices"? Is this argument convincing?