

Socrates and Thomas Aquinas on Morality

Socrates

Socrates said that if you measure the divine against some standard that says it is good then you can praise the the divine as good. But this view asserts that the divine is not as important as the standard. It would not really be divine.

He argued that an act is not inherently good. It is some standard that shows it is good. Goodness is not innate to the act. This made Socrates support the independent standard view. An act can never be good because any god however great and good says it is.

Aquinas

St Thomas Aquinas led Catholicism into the doctrine that since we are created by God and his property, that he can do what he wants with us. Fairness does not come into it for we are clay in the hands of the potter. It is fair however for him to treat us as he pleases but he is under no obligation to treat us fairly or make us happy. He can make murder or adultery right if he wants to. God owns all things in the universe so nobody really owns what they say they own. Thus there is no problem with God commanding you to burgle your neighbour.

Aquinas like Abelard and Bonaventure put forward the doctrine that life is all and only about obedience to God. If you obey God's command to love others it is not the love that matters but the obedience.

Aquinas softened the dangers of his doctrine by saying that God rarely commands things that would ruin our society. He tells us to be community people and very rarely allows murder.

He said that God's commands are mostly non-arbitrary for they endorse what is best for us as human beings. To be moral we have to understand what our potential is and our human nature is. Human nature wants to survive and thus God commands that we must not murder.