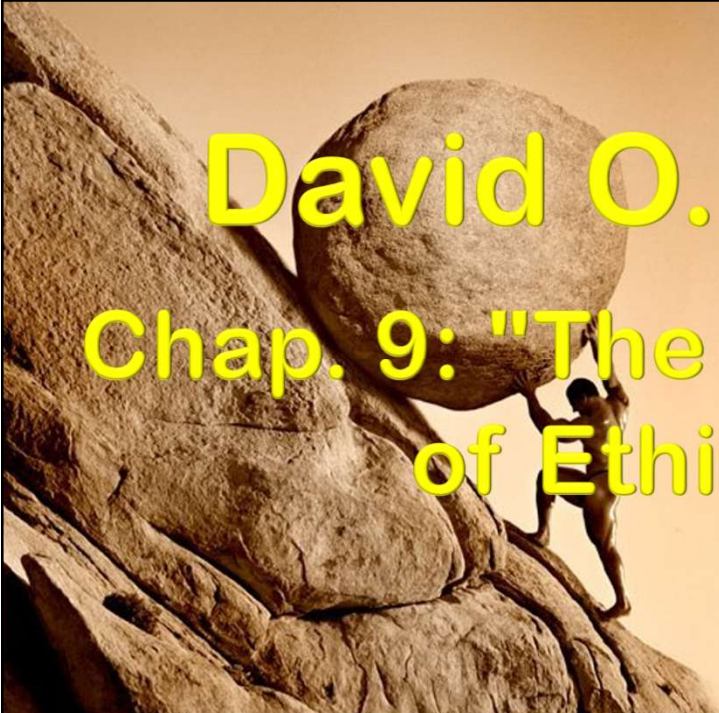


Responding to the
Arguments of
*The Cambridge
Companion to
Atheism, Pt. 3**

Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.
Provost
Norman L. Geisler Chair of Christian Apologetics
Professor of Philosophy and Apologetics
Southern Evangelical Seminary

**and select other academic atheist sources*



David O. Brink
**Chap. 9: "The Autonomy
of Ethics"**

On the Term 'Natural'



David O. Brink

"Naturalism accepts the autonomy of ethics. Ethical naturalists, such as Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), claim that the moral properties of persons and situations depend on their nature. If so, moral qualities do not presuppose a God, though a perfectly wise and good God would approve all and only good and right things. ... Naturalism does not itself preclude God from playing an epistemic role in morality But naturalism does deny theism a metaphysical role.

[Brink, "Autonomy," in *Cambridge Companion*, 152]



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[Brink, "Autonomy," in *Cambridge Companion*, 152]

The reader should be careful of this term 'naturalism' as it can easily be misunderstood outside of the context of a discussion about ethics.

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[Brink, "Autonomy," in *Cambridge Companion*, 152]

'Natural' can be used as a reference to the metaphysical nature of a thing.

This usage follows the contours of classical metaphysics, especially Aristotle, who employed such metaphysical categories as form/matter.

Aquinas later augments elements of Aristotle's metaphysics to include (among other things) existence in contrast to essence.

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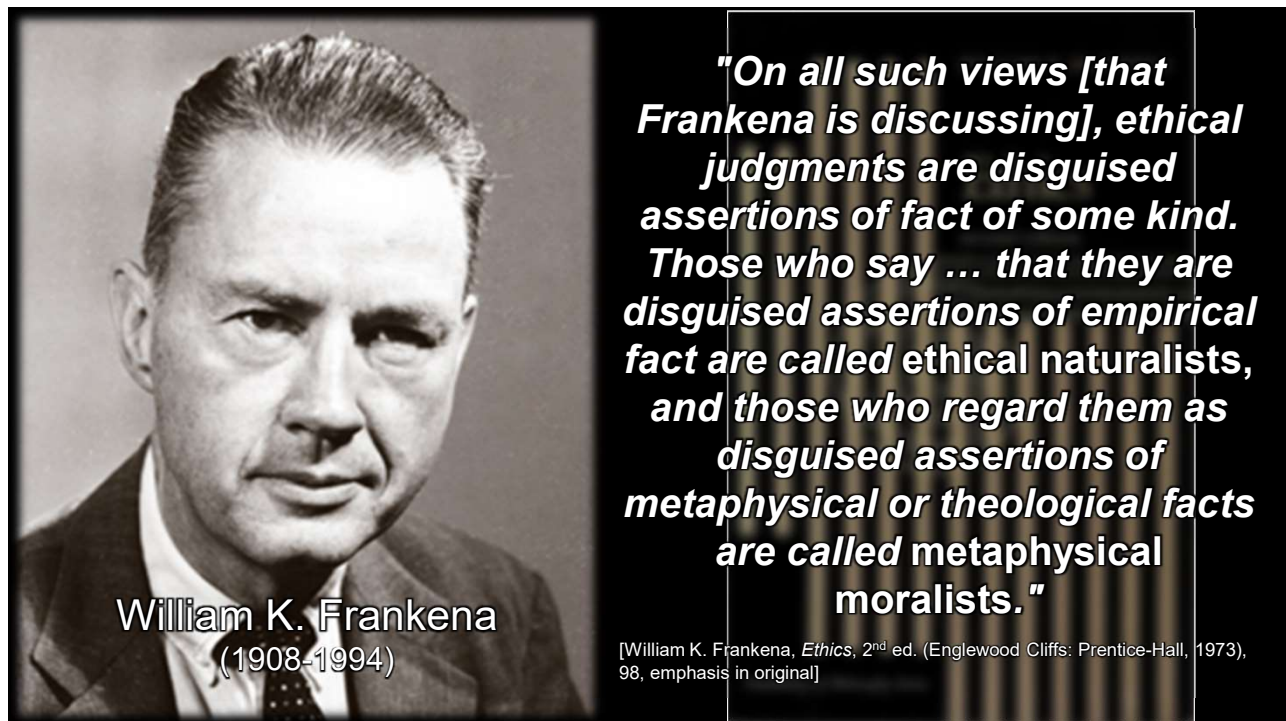
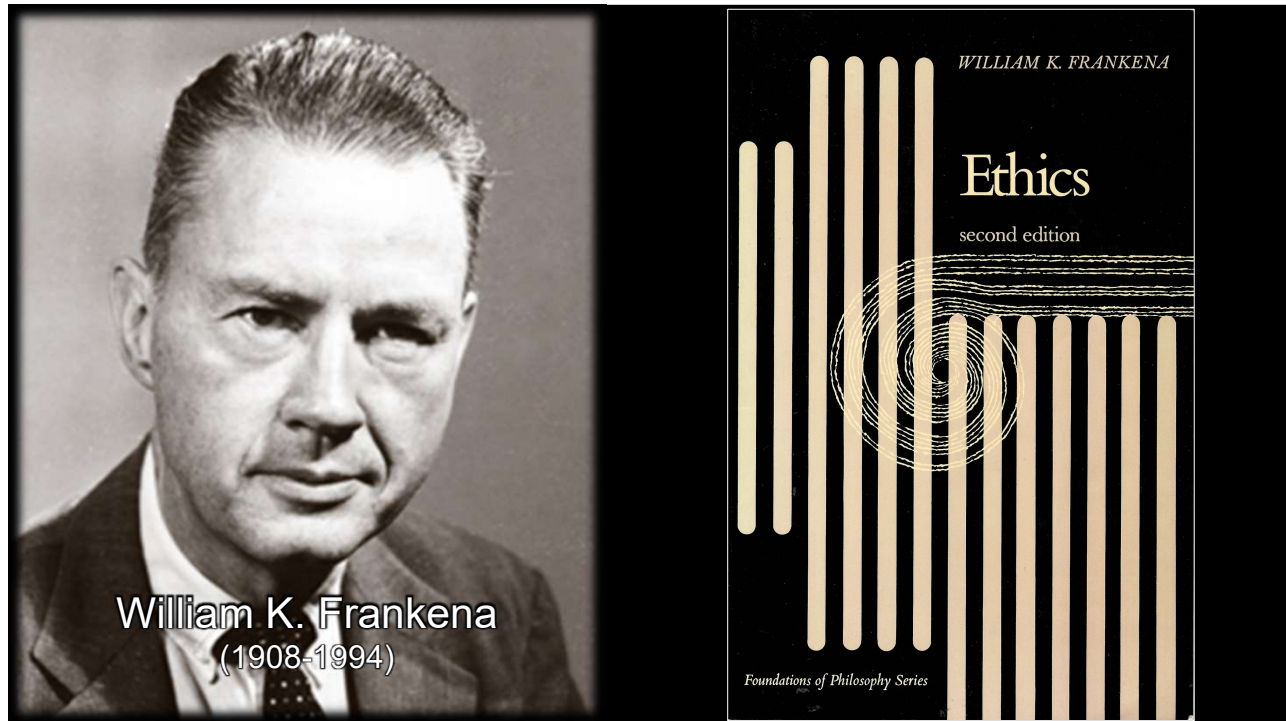
In this context of Brink's discussion, ethical naturalism is the idea that moral values "arise from" and can be "reduced to" non-moral facts.

This usage follows the contours of the is/ought discussion, including whether there is a such thing as the is/ought fallacy.

On Ethical Naturalism



David O. Brink



My worry here is that Frankena has in mind empiricism as it is understood today and is not at all considering the important elements within classical empiricism.

"On all such views [that Frankena is discussing], ethical judgments are disguised assertions of fact of some kind. Those who say ... that they are disguised assertions of **empirical fact are called ethical naturalists, and those who regard them as disguised assertions of metaphysical or theological facts are called metaphysical moralists."**

[William K. Frankena, *Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 98, emphasis in original]

My worry here is that Frankena has in mind empiricism as it is understood today and is not at all considering the important elements within classical empiricism.

What is more, when it comes to any metaphysical considerations, there is a difference between the mere "fact" that something exists, and recognizing that the thing's existence is an "act."

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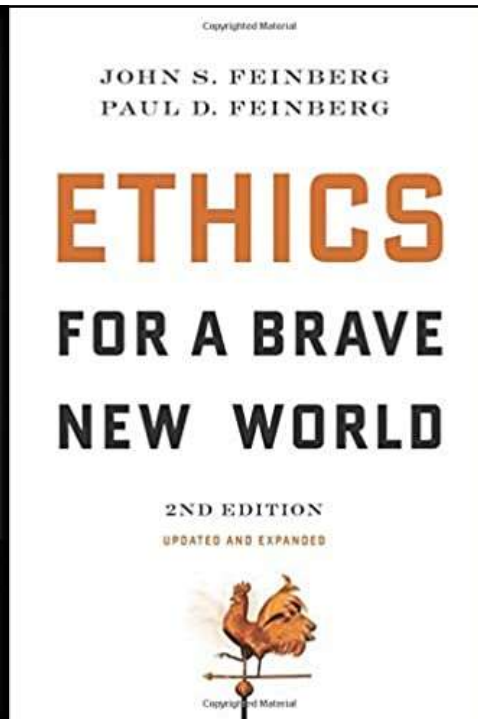
Last, in my experience, this last expression never seemed to have caught on in the philosophical discussion about ethics.

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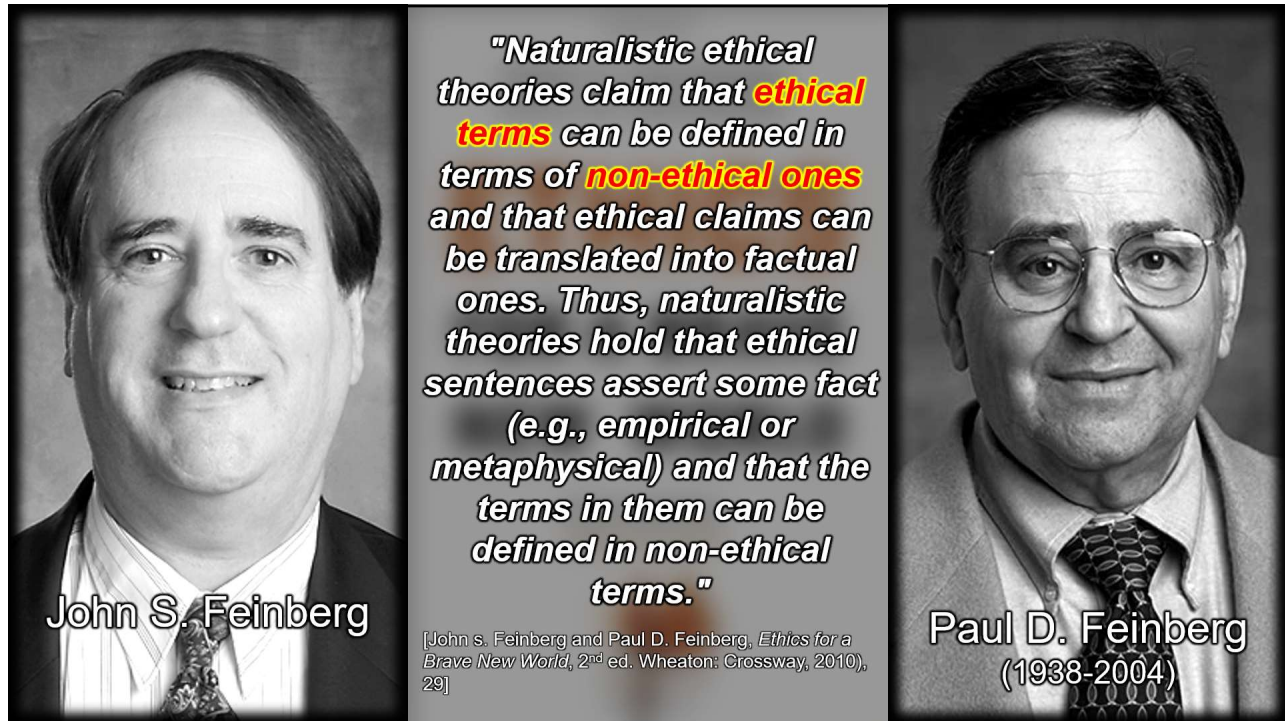
[William K. Frankena, *Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 98, emphasis in original]



John S. Feinberg



Paul D. Feinberg
(1938-2004)

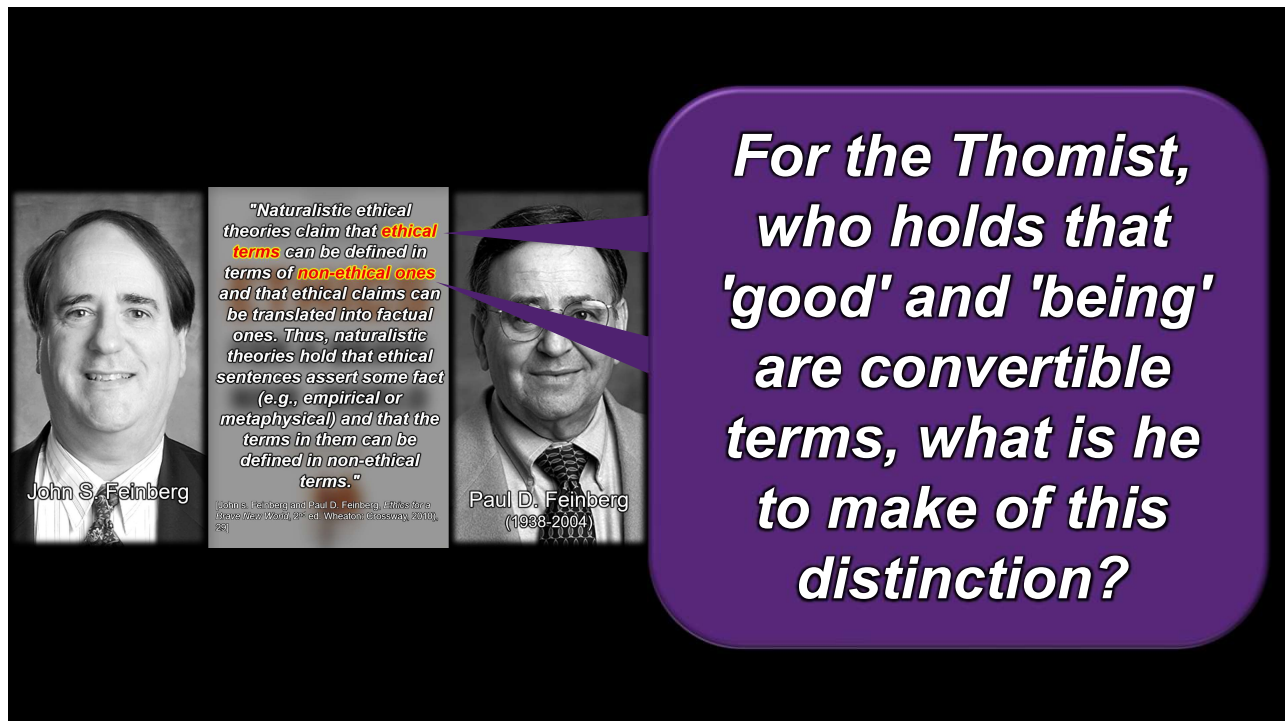


John S. Feinberg

*"Naturalistic ethical theories claim that **ethical terms** can be defined in terms of **non-ethical ones** and that ethical claims can be translated into factual ones. Thus, naturalistic theories hold that ethical sentences assert some fact (e.g., empirical or metaphysical) and that the terms in them can be defined in non-ethical terms."*

[John s. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 2nd ed. Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 29]

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Paul D. Feinberg
(1938-2004)

For the Thomist, who holds that 'good' and 'being' are convertible terms, what is he to make of this distinction?

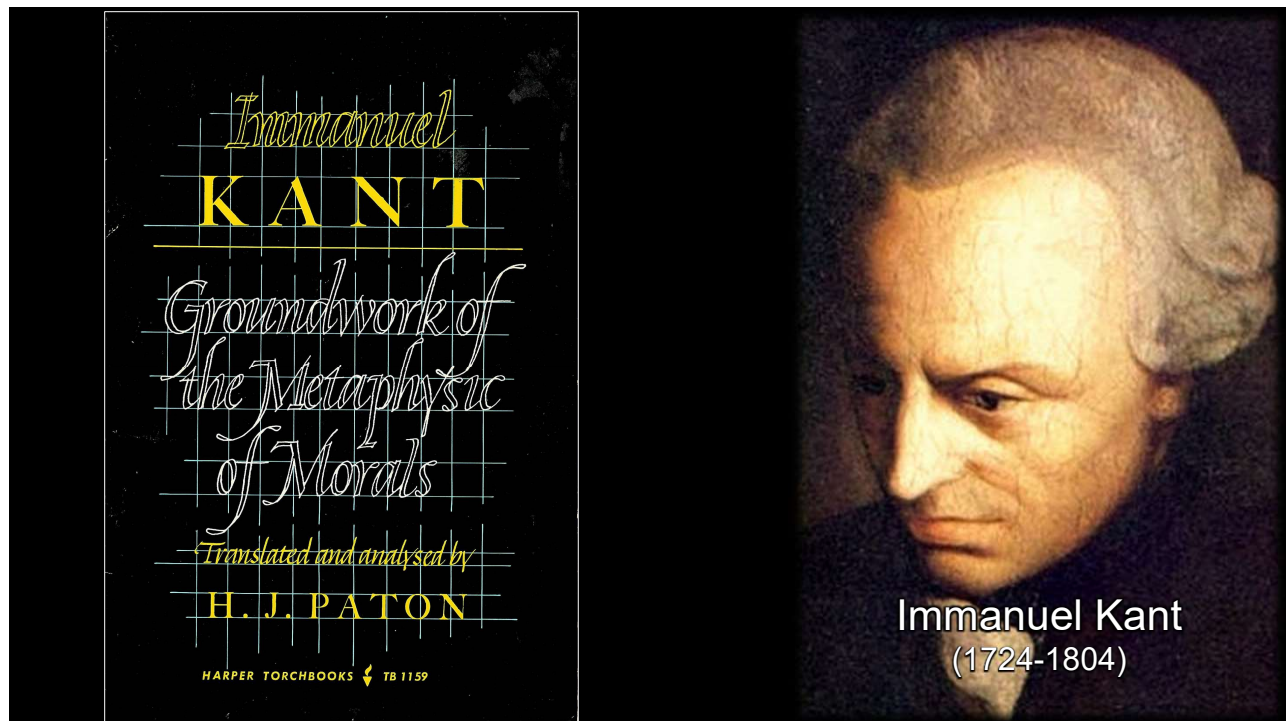
"Naturalism accepts the **autonomy of ethics**. Ethical naturalists, such as Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), claim that the moral properties of persons and situations depend on their nature. If so, moral qualities do not presuppose a God, though a perfectly wise and good God would approve all and only good and right things. ... Naturalism does not itself preclude God from playing an epistemic role in morality But naturalism does deny theism a metaphysical role.

[Brink, "Autonomy," in *Cambridge Companion*, 152]

The phrase 'the autonomy of ethics' is no doubt a reference to Kant.

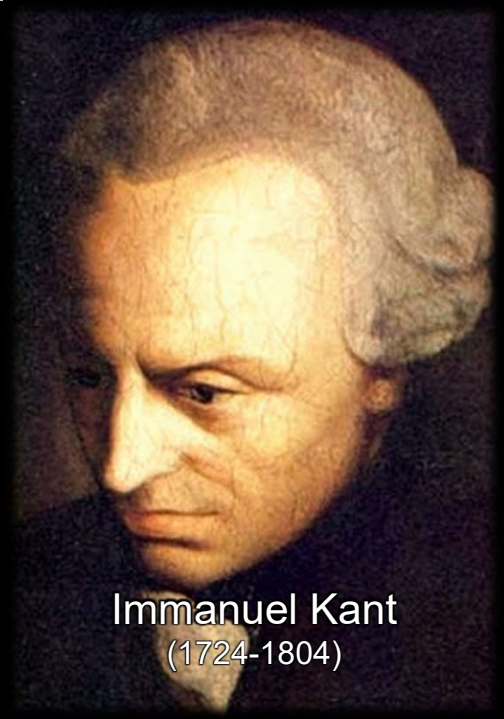
In this tradition, by and large morality is autonomous in as much as it is free from the constraints of Divine law, considered in the "Divine Command Theory" model of ethics.

Kant regarded moral autonomy in terms of one having freedom over one's moral actions.



"Reason must look upon itself as the author of its own principles independently of alien influences. Therefore as practical reason, or as the will of a rational being, can be a will of his own only under the Idea of freedom, and such a will must therefore—from a practical view—be attributed to all rational beings.

[Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (New York: Harper & Row, 1948),]



Immanuel Kant
(1724-1804)

"Ethical naturalists, such as Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), claim that the moral properties of persons and situations depend on their nature. If so, moral qualities do not presuppose a God,



David O. Brink

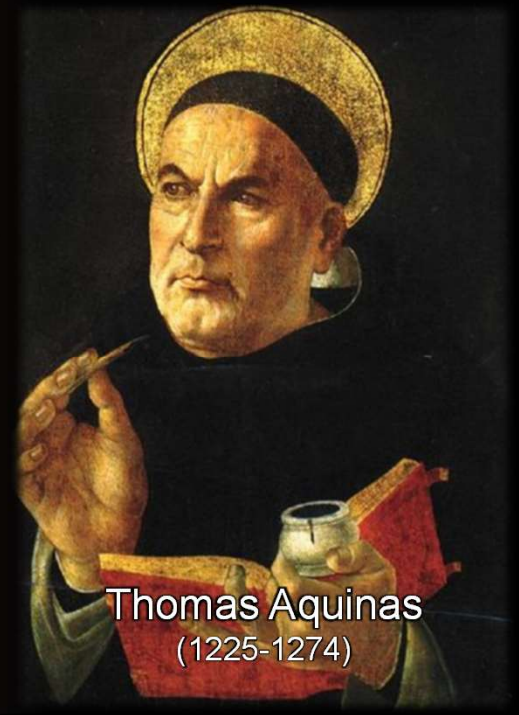
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Brink gives no argument as to why it follows that if moral properties of persons depend upon their natures then moral qualities do not presuppose God.

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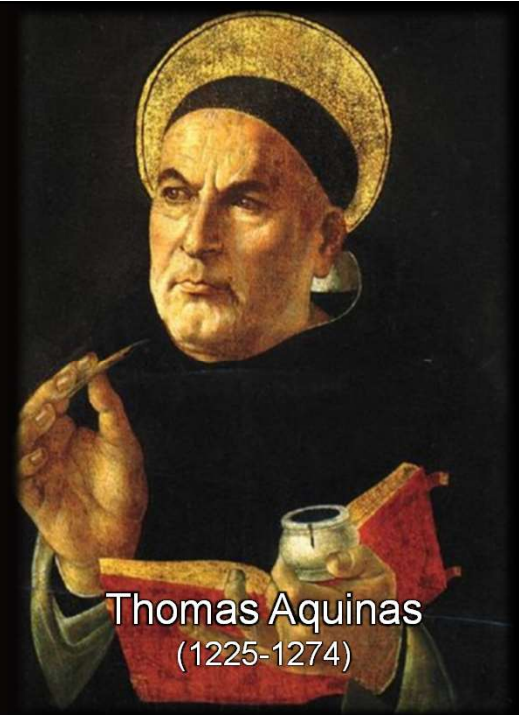
The very same Thomas Aquinas, in his argument for the divine governance of the world, makes an explicit connection between human nature and God.

"The natural necessity inherent in those beings which are determined to a particular thing, is a kind of impression from God, directing them to their end;



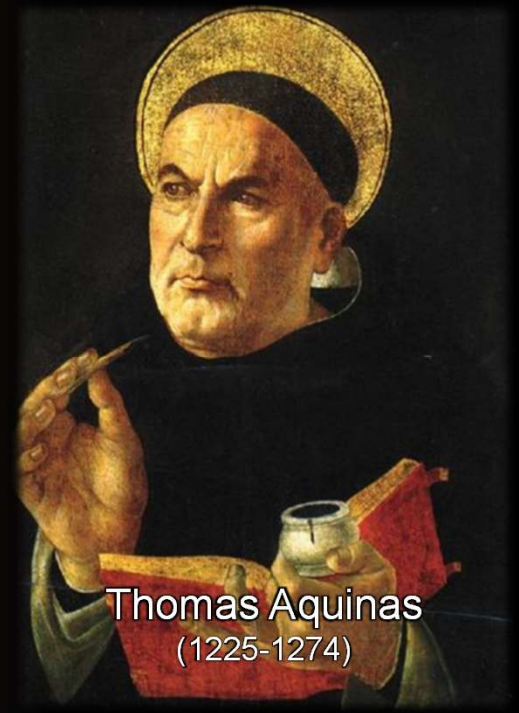
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"as the necessity whereby an arrow is moved so as to fly towards a certain point is an impression from the archer, and not from the arrow.

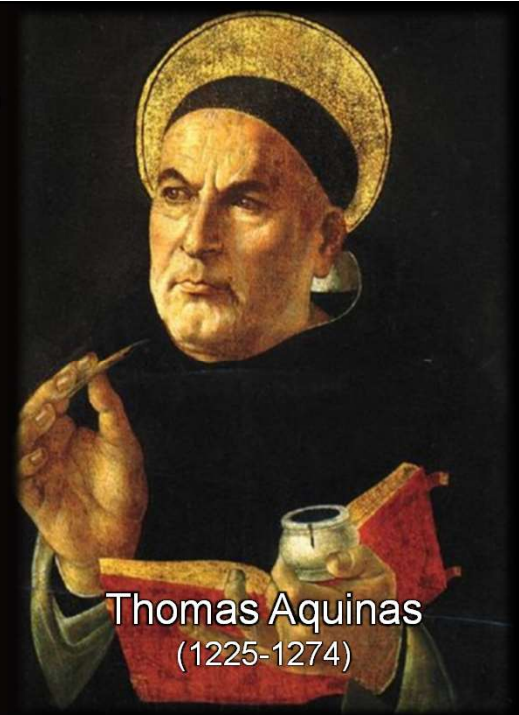


Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"But there is a difference, inasmuch as that which creatures receive from God is their nature, while that which natural things receive from man in addition to their nature is somewhat violent."



"Wherefore, as the violent necessity in the movement of the arrow shows the actions of the archer, so the natural necessity of things show the government of Divine Providence."



[STI, Q. 103, art. 1, ad. 3, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1981)]

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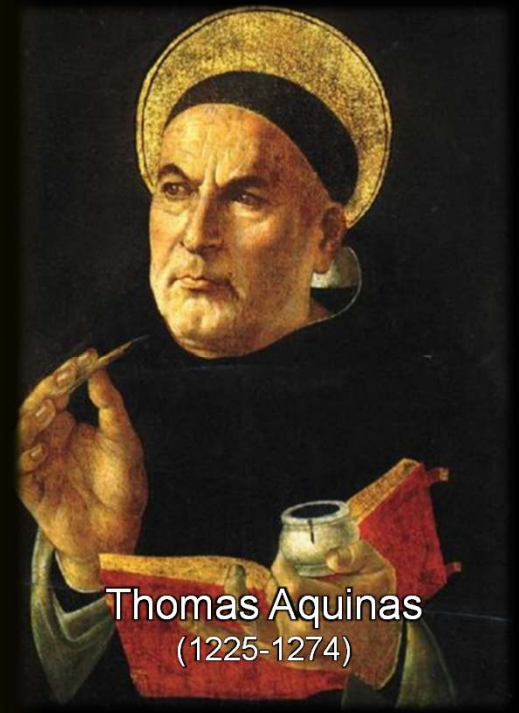
Interestingly, Aquinas utilizes the same reasoning in his arguments for God's existence and God's knowledge of things other than Himself.

***As an Argument
for God's
Existence***



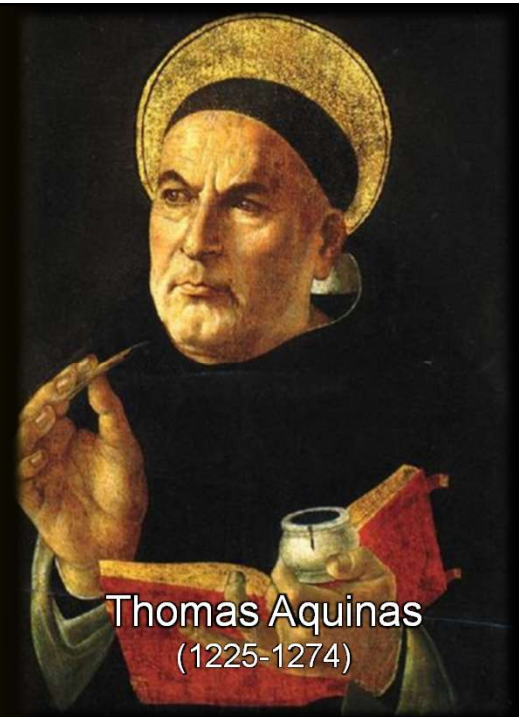
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end."

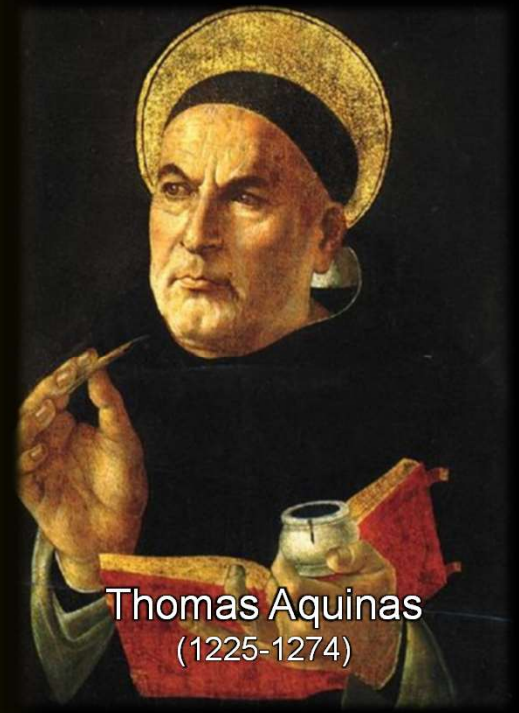


"Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move toward an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God."

[ST, Q2, art. 3, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1981)]

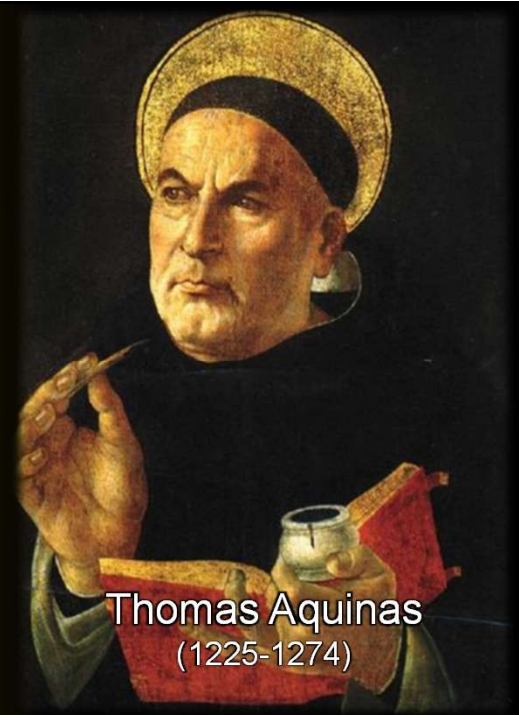


***As an Argument
for God's
Knowledge of
Things Other
than Himself***



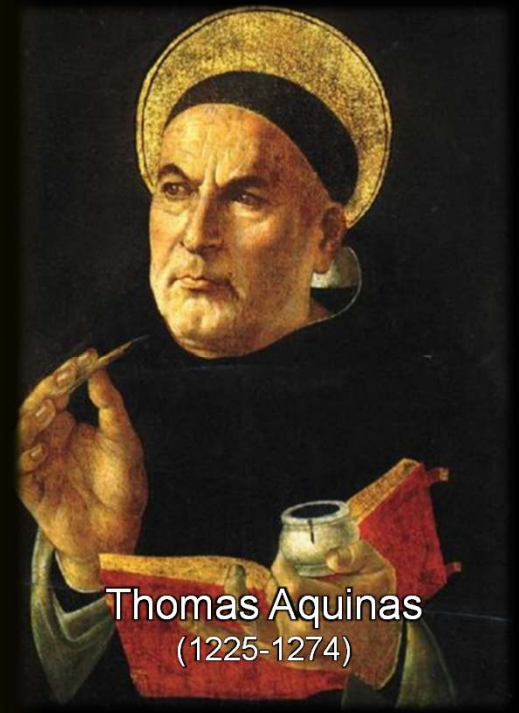
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

***"Whatever naturally
tends toward another
must have this tendency
from someone directing
it toward its end;
otherwise, it would tend
toward it merely by
chance.***



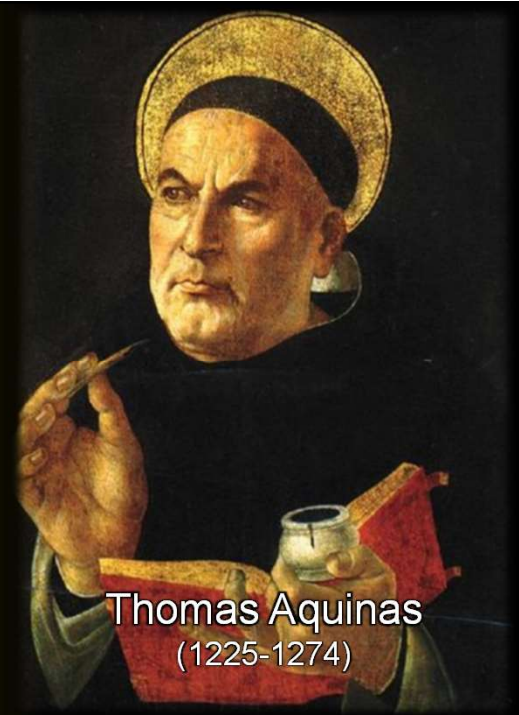
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"Now, in the things of nature we find a natural appetite by which each and every things tends toward its end.



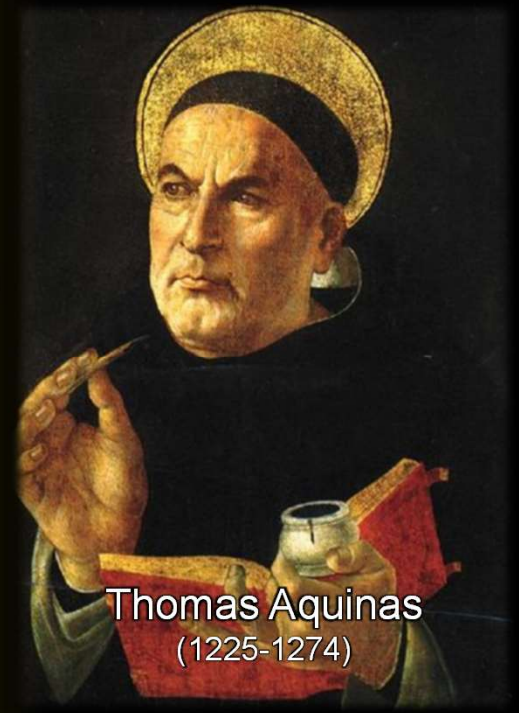
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"Hence, we must affirm the existence of some intellect above natural things, which has ordained natural things to their end and implanted in them a natural appetite or inclination.



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

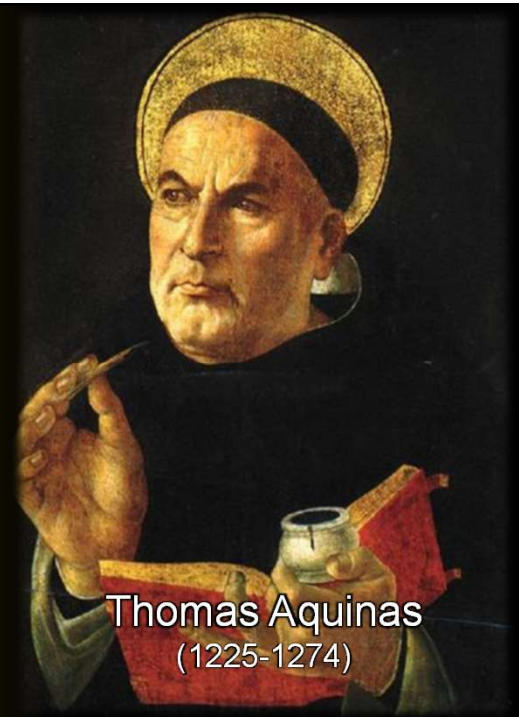
"But a thing cannot be ordained to any end unless the thing itself is known, together with the end to which it is ordained."



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"Hence, there must be a knowledge of natural things in the divine intellect from which the origin and the order of nature come."

[*On Truth (de veritate)*, Q 2, art. 3, trans. Robert W. Mulligan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), Vol. 1, p. 70]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"Ethical naturalists, such as Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), claim that the moral properties of persons and situations depend on their nature. If so, moral qualities do not presuppose a God, though a perfectly wise and good God **would approve all and only good and right things**. Naturalism does not itself preclude God from playing an **epistemic role in morality (telling us reliably what is morally good and bad) or a motivational role (providing divine incentives for moral behavior)**. But naturalism does deny theism a **metaphysical role**.

[Brink, "Autonomy," in *Cambridge Companion*, 152]

Brink goes on to assert (again, without any argument) that a good God "would approve all and only good and right things," that God might play an epistemological role in morality, and perhaps God could play a motivational role.

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[Brink, "Autonomy," in *Cambridge Companion*, 152]

But it is manifestly false that for Aquinas "naturalism does deny theism a metaphysical role."

Note there that my point is not that Aquinas's view is true (though I think that it is).

Rather, my point is that Brink is wrong in concluding that the ethical naturalism of Aquinas (bearing in mind the meaning of 'naturalism' here) denies theism "a metaphysical role."

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[Brink, "Autonomy," in *Cambridge Companion*, 152]

Last, Brink's discussion suffers from the anachronistic usage of the notion of "moral properties" coupled with the notion of "good" in as much as he fails (as many other contemporary analytic philosophers do) to distinguish 'moral good' and 'good' in the context of Aquinas's understanding of the convertibility of being and good.

On the Euthyphro Dilemma: Being and Goodness



David O. Brink

"To determine whether morality requires a religious foundation, we need to distinguish three different roles God might play in morality. God plays a metaphysical role in morality if the existence and nature of moral requirements depend on his existence and will. On such a view, it is God's attitudes toward various courses of action that makes them good or bad and right or wrong."

[David O. Brink, "The Autonomy of Ethics," in *Cambridge Companion*, 150]



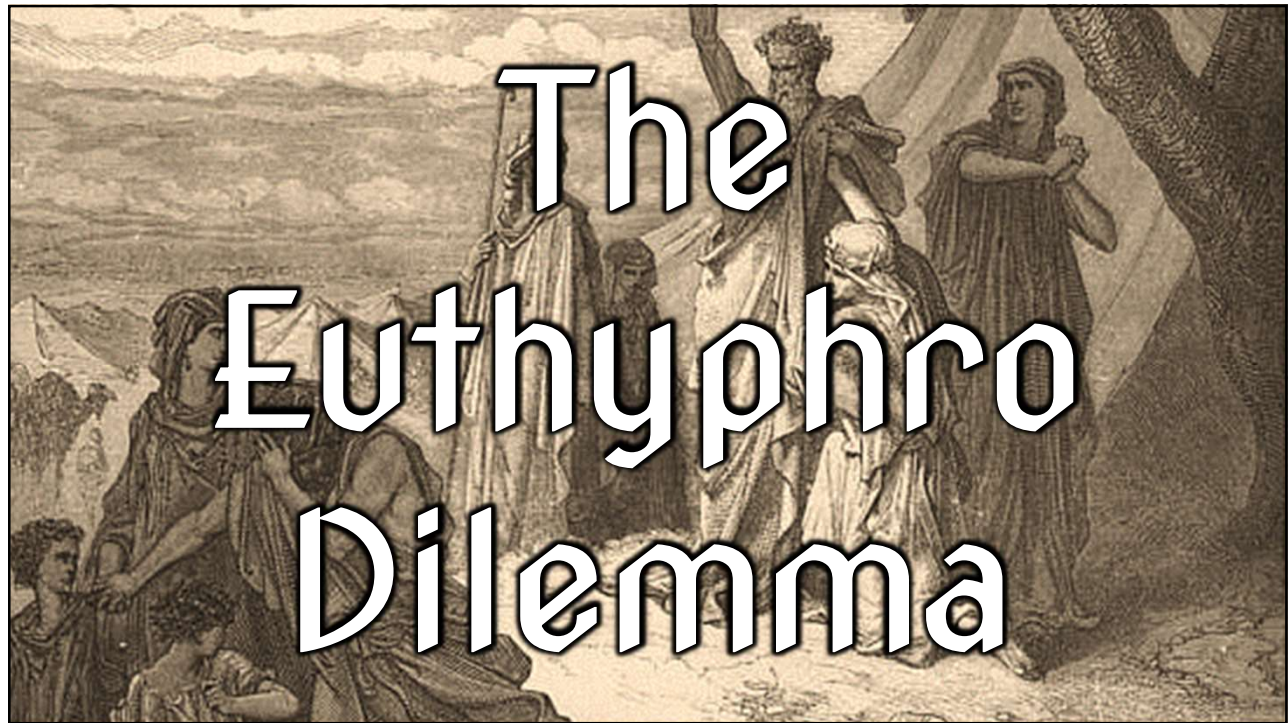
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[David O. Brink, "The Autonomy of Ethics," in *Cambridge Companion*, 150]

Note that Brink moves from the role being metaphysical to the role being attitudinal. With this, Brink is attempting to convert the question of any metaphysical role God might play into a "Euthyphro" role.

This allows him to then critique the question along the contours of the Euthyphro Dilemma.



*Is X good because God wills it?
This option has come to be known as
the
Divine Command Theory.*

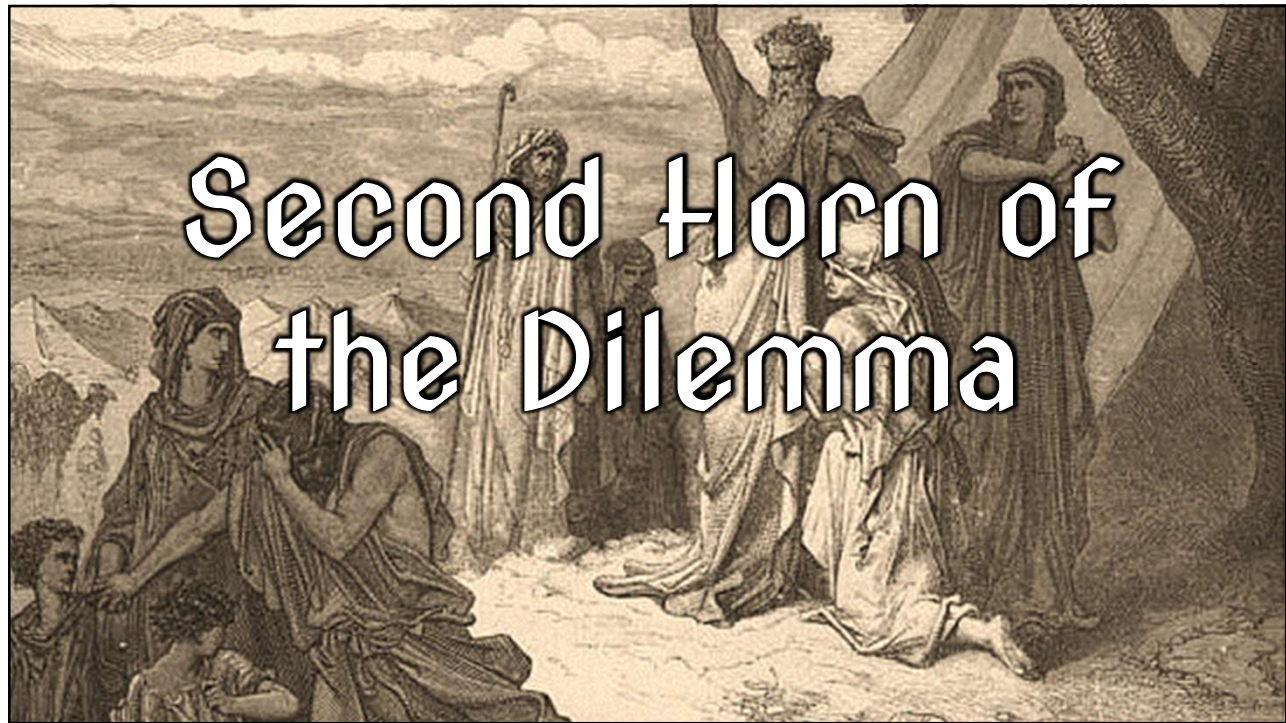
Note that some use the expression 'Divine Command Theory' as referring, not to what makes some action good, but what makes the action obligatory.

Suggested Problems with the First Horn

First, if X is good because God wills it, then this would seem to mean that God could make something good by willing or commanding it.

Thus, if God willed rape (or racism, or murder, or any other sin) then it would be good.

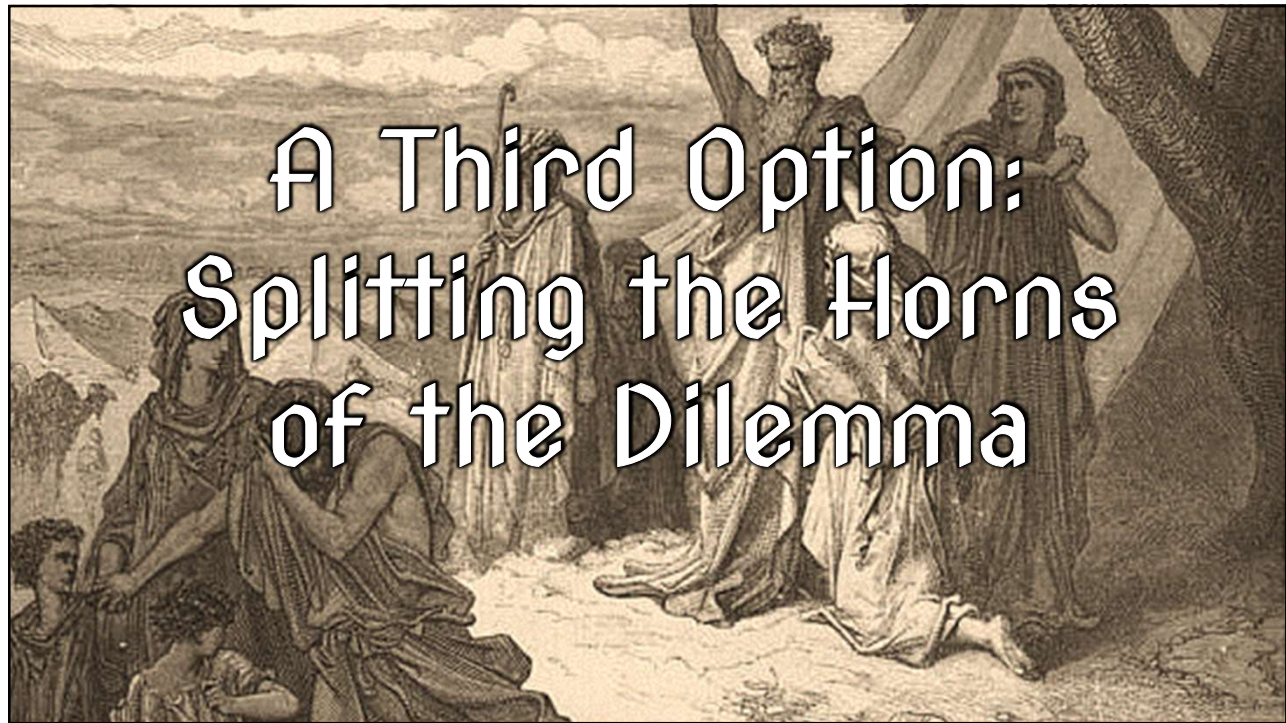
Second, if X is good because God wills it, then this would make the statement "God's will is good" to be "God's will is what God wills" which is an empty claim; what philosophers call "trivially true."



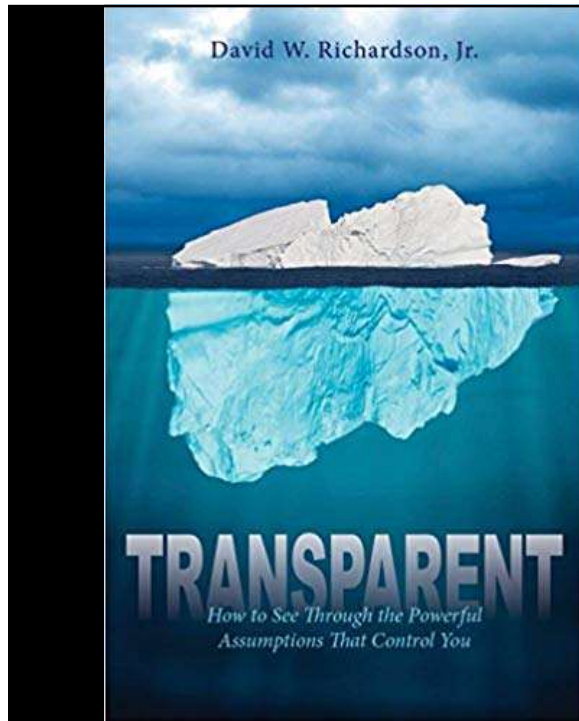
*The second option says God wills X
because X is good.*

Suggested Problems with the Second Horn

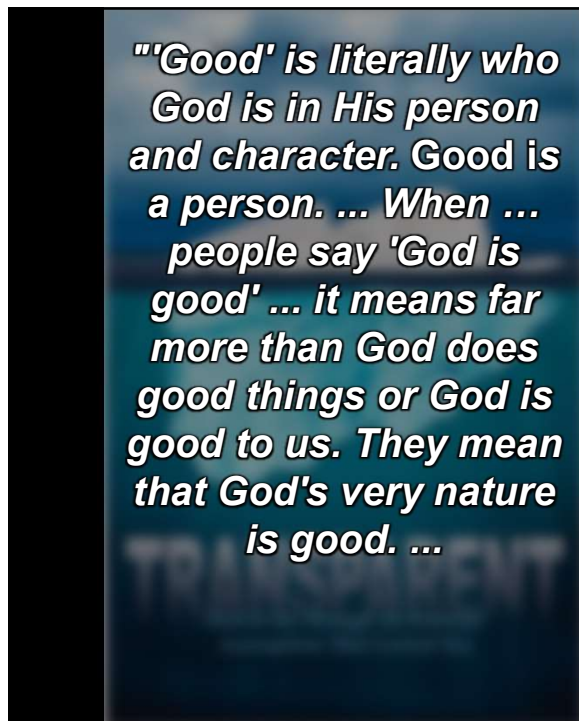
*This seems to imply a standard of
good that is outside of and
above God.*



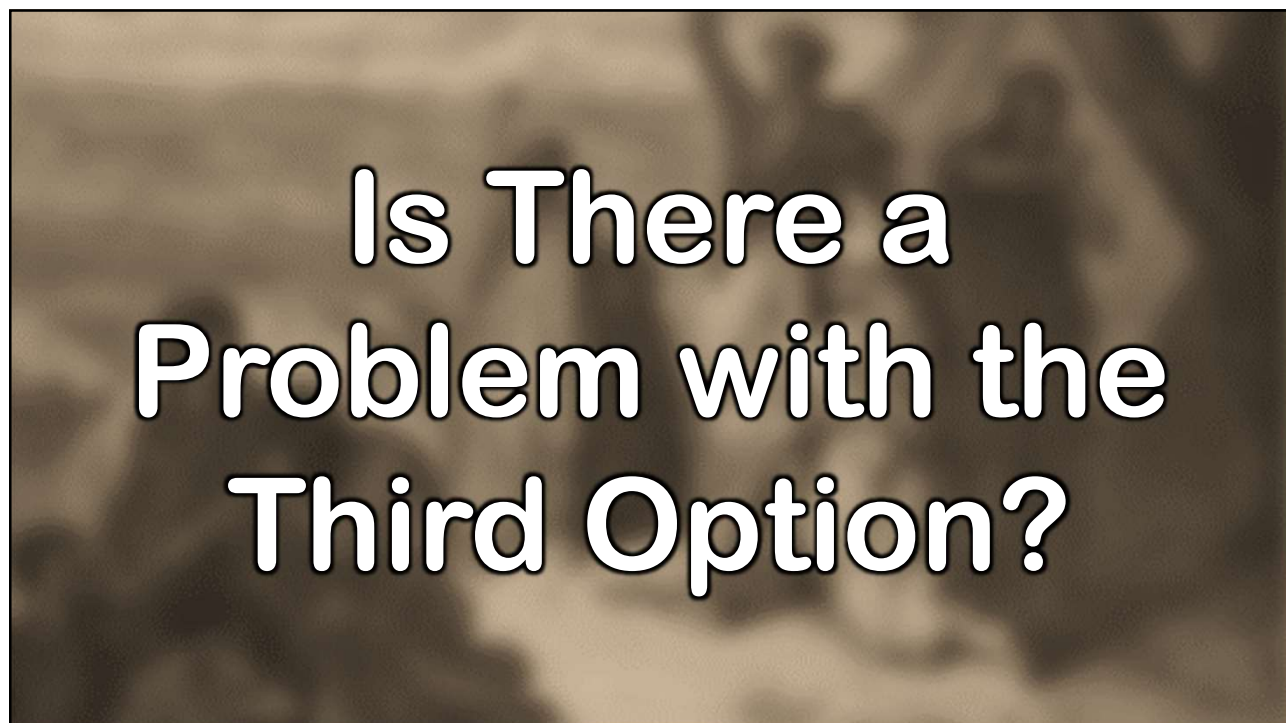
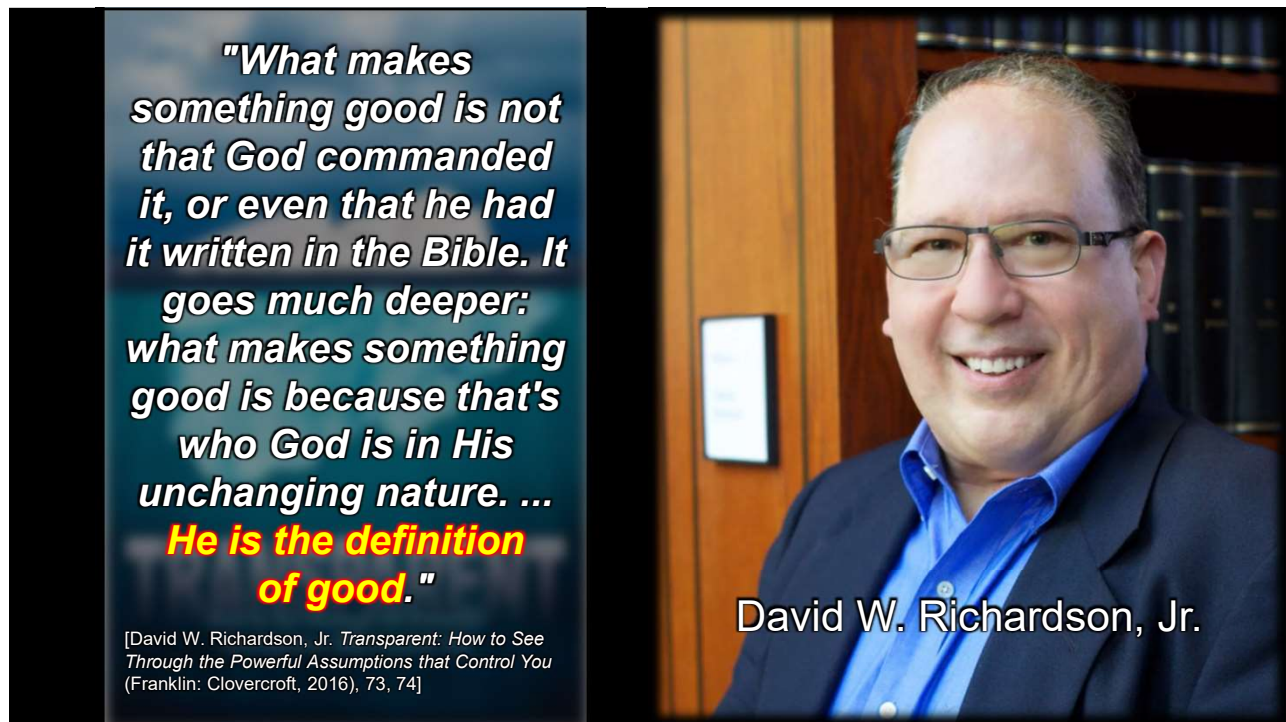
*Good is ultimately grounded
in the nature of God.*



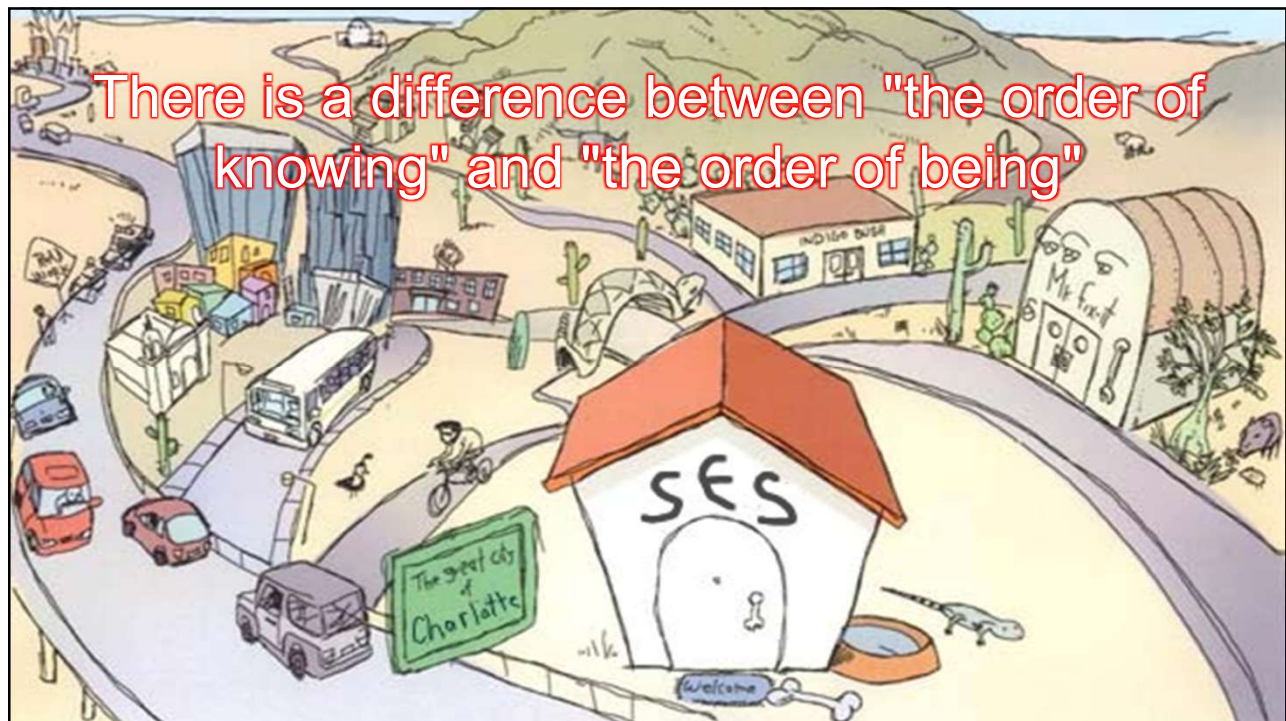
David W. Richardson, Jr.



David W. Richardson, Jr.



However, the problem of being trivially true and empty of moral content which we saw regarding the First Horn seems to remain.



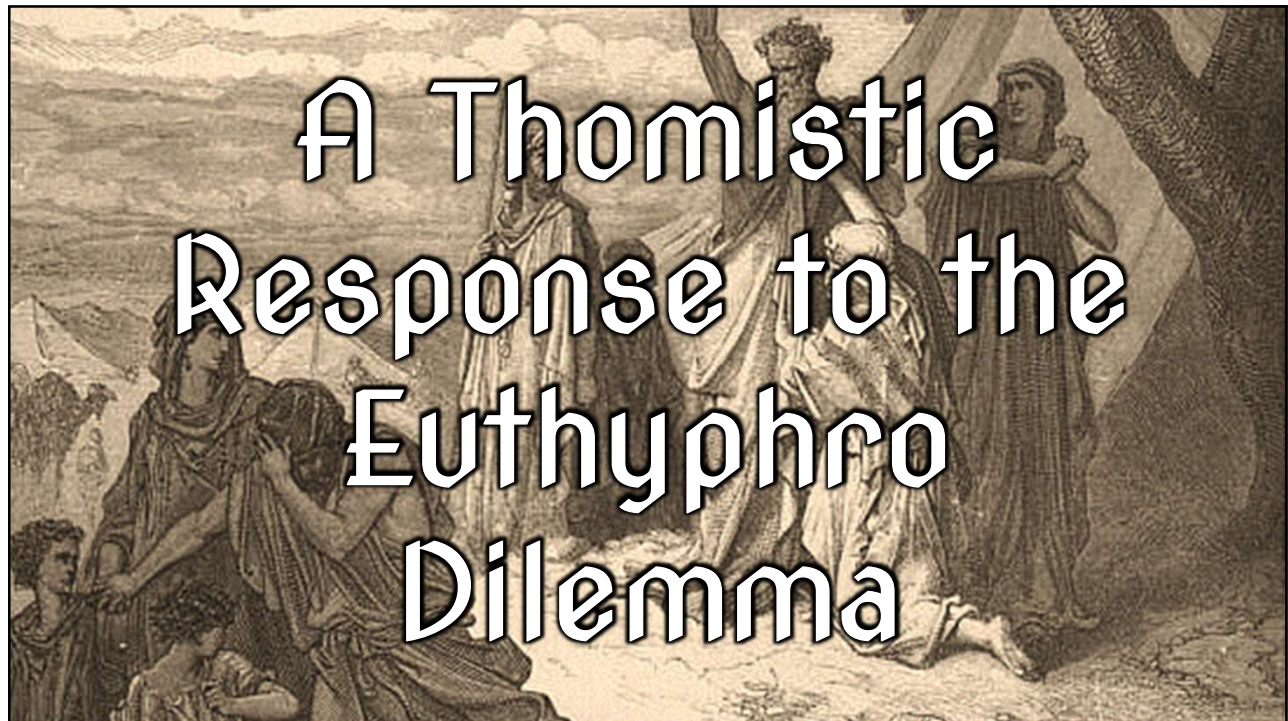
There is a difference between "the order of knowing" and "the order of being"

The map is first in the order of knowing.

SES is first in the order of being.

In other words, one would need to know what the word 'good' means before one can apply the word to God, but God has to exist before there can be "good."

*In other words, one would need to know what the word 'good' means before one can apply the word to God, **but God has to exist before there can be "good."***

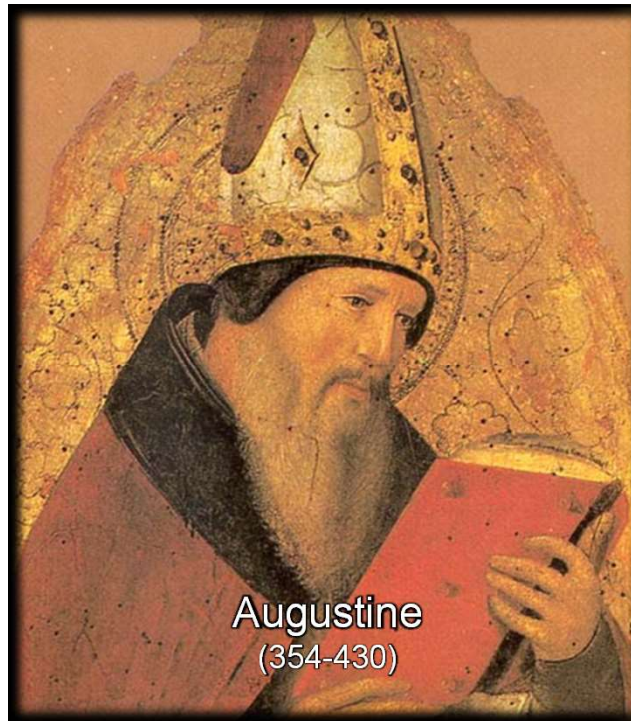


What Is Evil?

This distinction in contemporary philosophy differs from the understanding of evil in the Classical / Medieval / Scholastic / Thomistic tradition.

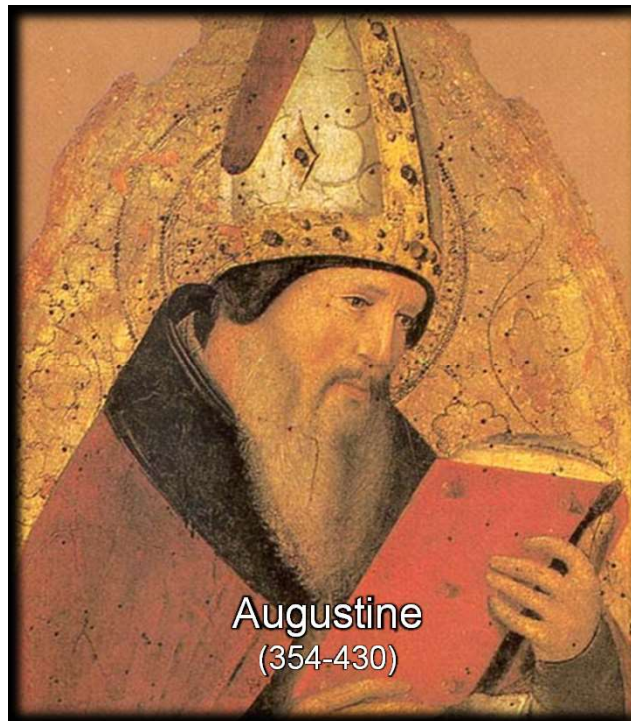
***If God created everything
except Himself, and, if evil
is something, then it
would seem the God
created evil.***

***If God did not create evil,
then it would seem either:
evil is unreal
or
evil is not a thing.***



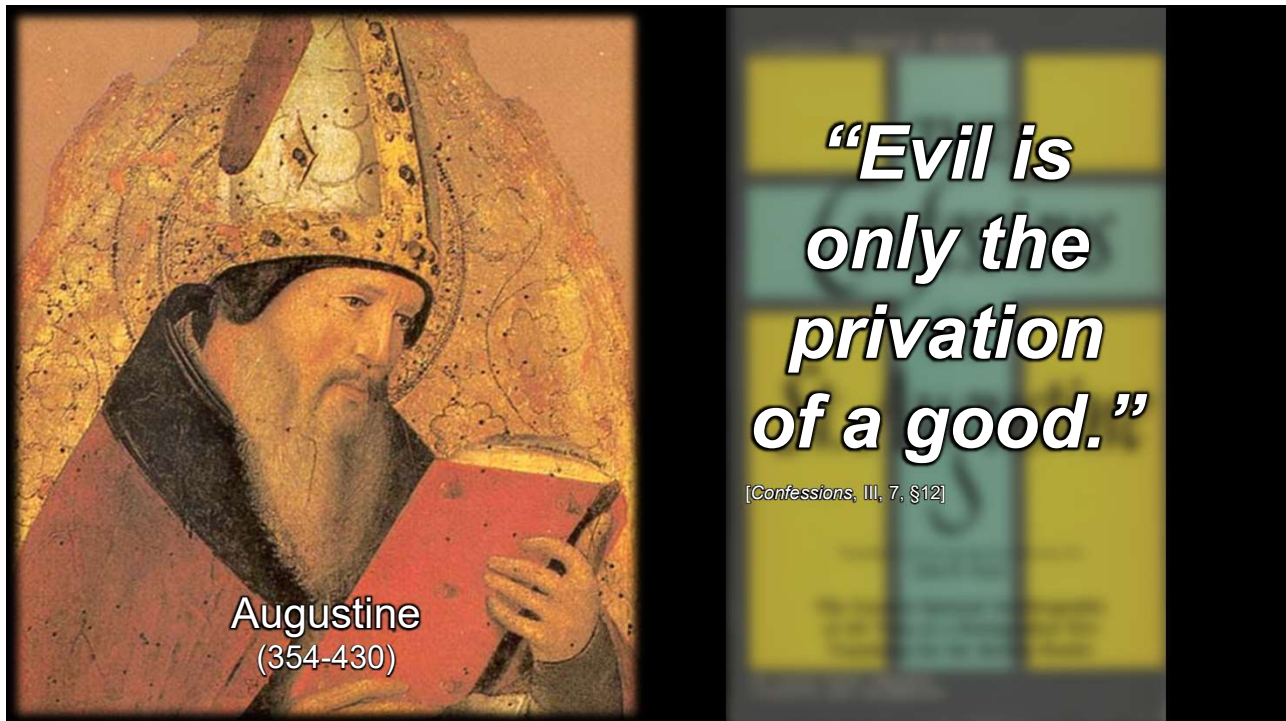
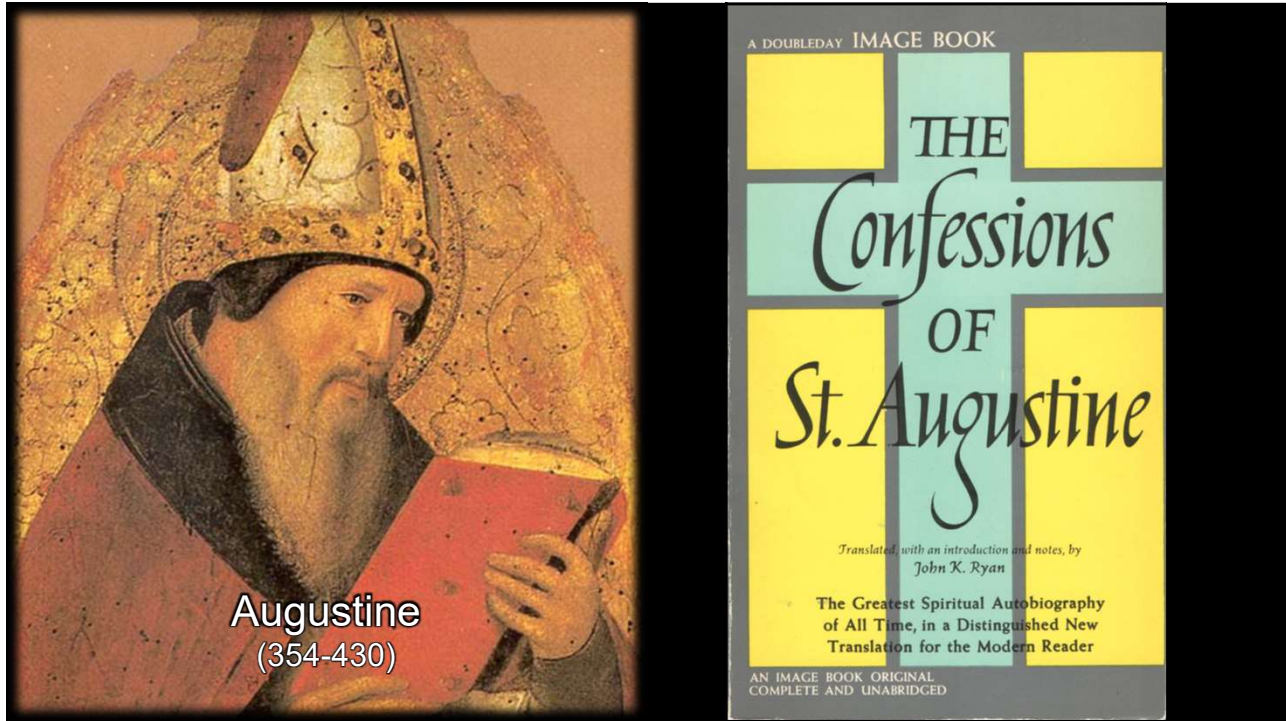
Augustine
(354-430)

There is a
difference
between:
being nothing
(unreal)
and
not being a thing.



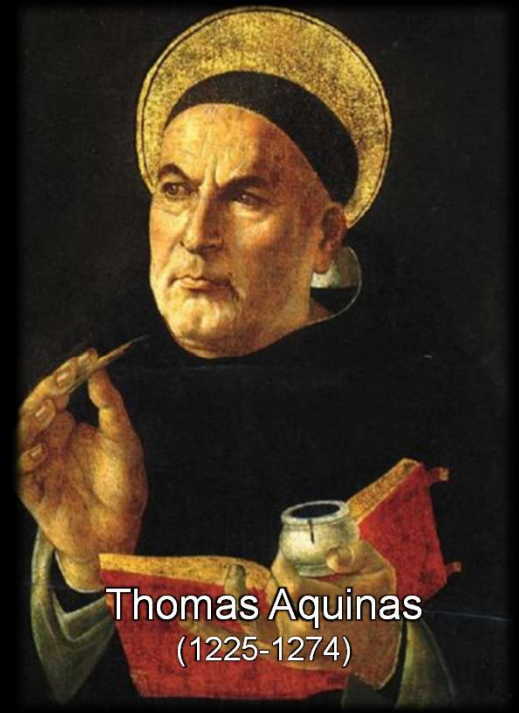
Augustine
(354-430)

Augustine argued
that evil is real but
is not a thing.
Rather, it is a
privation or a **lack**
in things.



“Now evil is in a substance because something which it was originally to have, and which it ought to have, is lacking in it.”

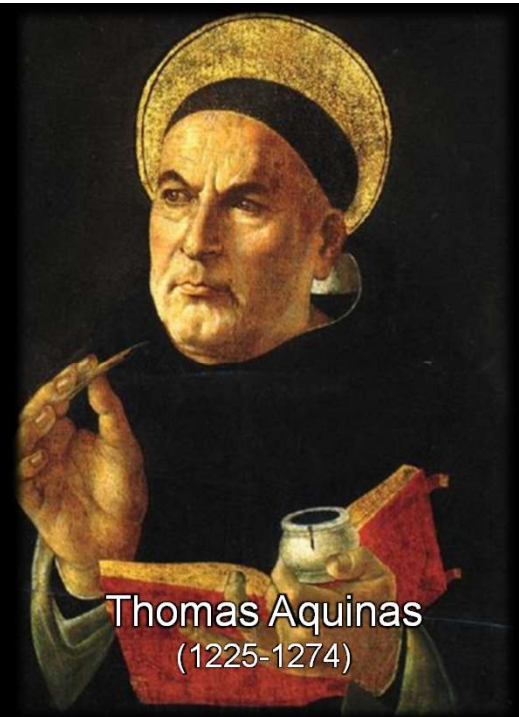
[*Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 6, §1]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

“Evil is simply a privation of something which a subject is entitled by its origin to possess and which it ought to have.”

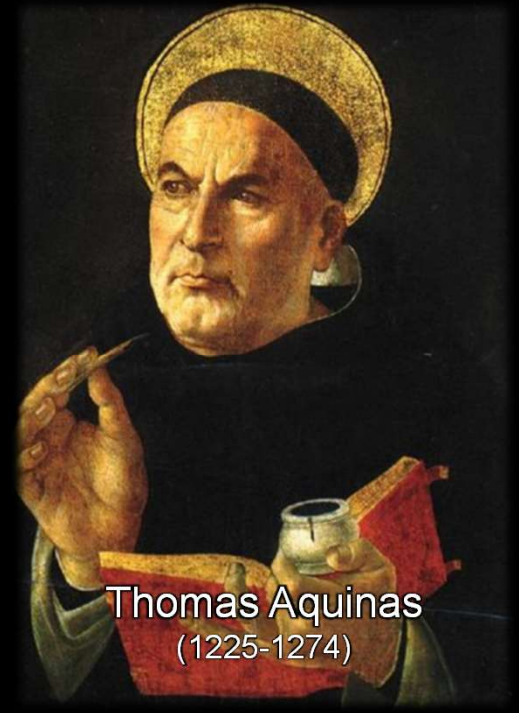
[*Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 7, §2]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

“Evil is the absence of the good, which is natural and due to a thing.”

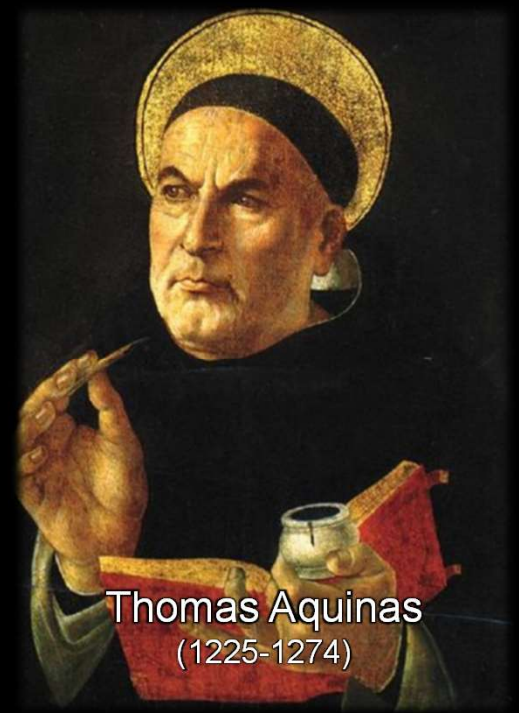
[*Summa Theologiae*, I, Q49, art. 1]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

“Evil cannot exist by itself, since it has no essence... Therefore, evil must be in a subject.”

[*Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 11, §2]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

*Note that there is a difference between a **privation** and a **negation**.*

*A **negation** is the mere absence or removal of something.*

*A **privation** is the absence or removal of something that “ought” to be there.*



**Blindness is the
privation of sight.
But blindness is not a
thing in itself.**

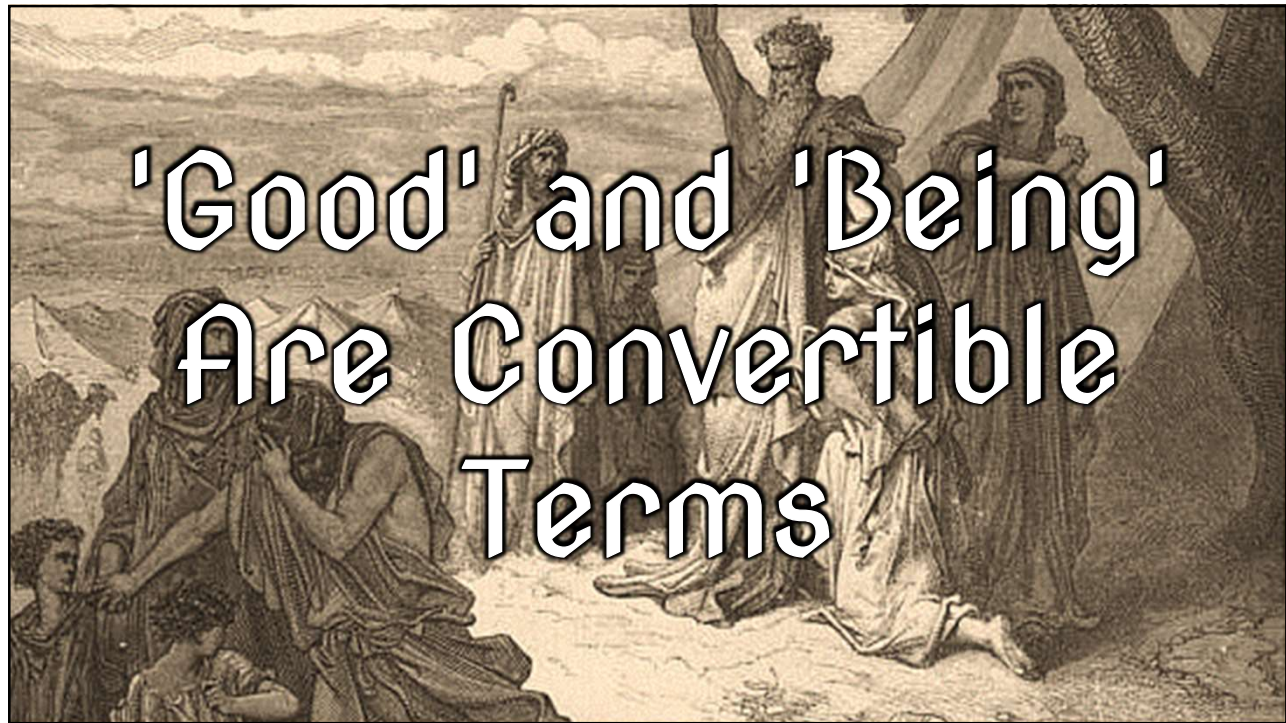
**A rock cannot see, but
it is not blind because
it "ought" not be able
to see.**



**Blindness is the
displacement of sight.
But blindness is not a
thing in itself.**

**A rock cannot see, but
it is not blind because
it "ought" not be able
to see.**

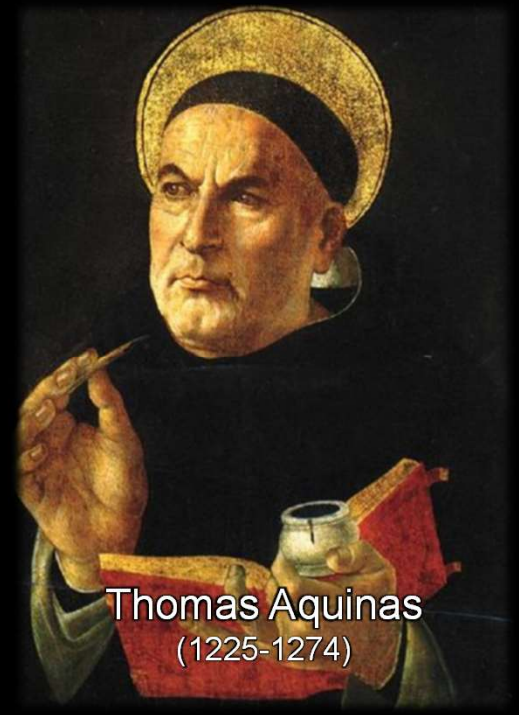




1. 'Good' is first identified with 'desirable' (appetible).
2. 'Desirable' is identified with 'perfect'.

***"Now it is clear
that a thing is
desirable only in
so far as it is
perfect; for all
desire their own
perfection."***

(ST I, Q5, art. 1)

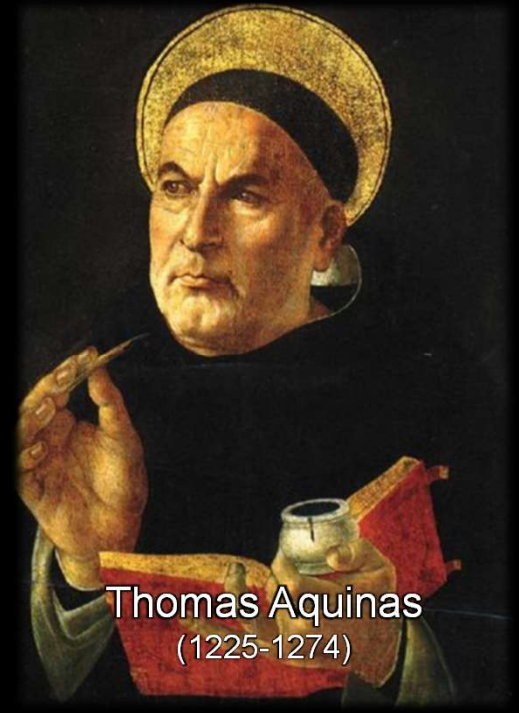


Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

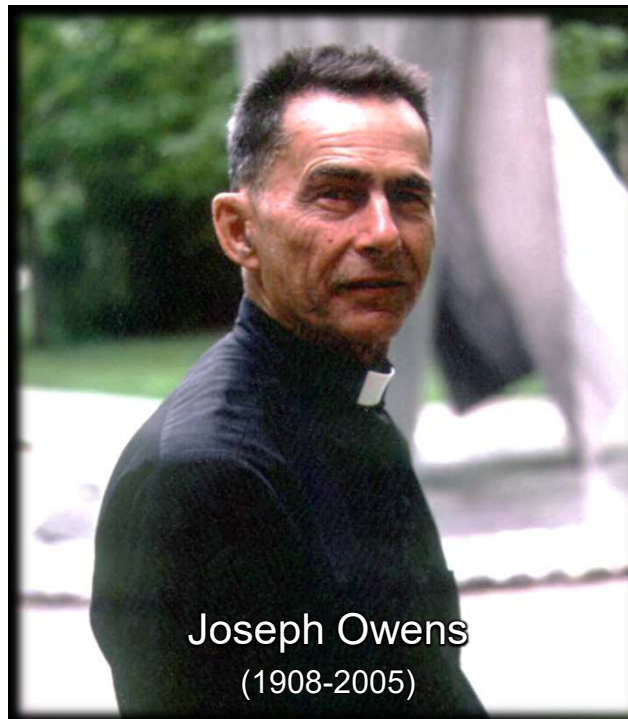
1. 'Good' is first identified with 'desirable' (appetible).
2. 'Desirable' is identified with 'perfect'.
3. 'Perfect' is identified with 'act' or 'actuality'.

"Everything is perfect so far as it is actual."

(ST I, Q5, art. 1)



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)



Joseph Owens
(1908-2005)

"An alternate word for actuality in this respect is "perfection" (entelecheia). It was used by Aristotle along with actuality to designate the formal elements in the things."

perfection

(entelecheia, ἐντελέχεια)

en, ἐν = in

+

telos, τέλος = end, goal

+

echein, ἔχειν = to have

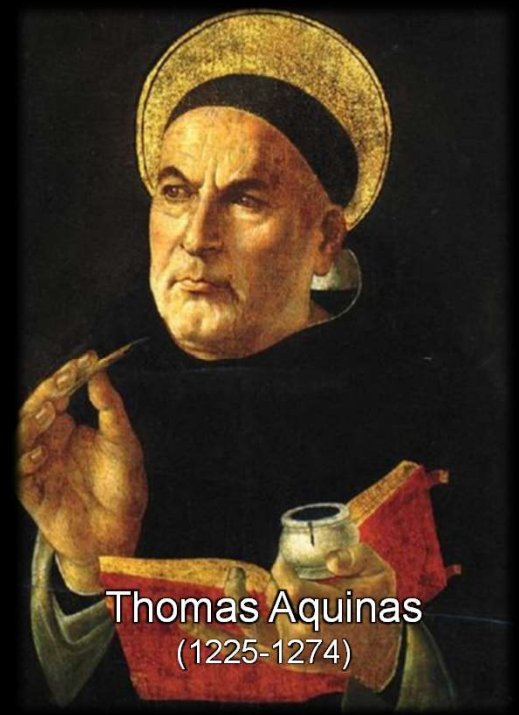
perfection

(entelecheia, ἐντελέχεια)

to have the end or goal in

1. 'Good' is first identified with 'desirable' (appetible).
2. 'Desirable' is identified with 'perfect'.
3. 'Perfect' is identified with 'act' or 'actuality'.
4. 'Actuality' is identified with 'being'.

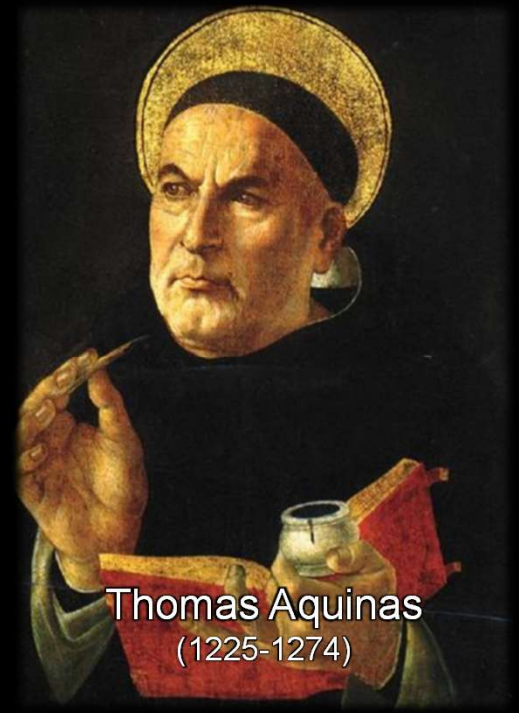
"Goodness and being are really the same, and differ only in idea; which is clear from the following argument. The essence of goodness consists in this, that it is in some way desirable. Hence the Philosopher says [Ethic. i]: 'Goodness is what all desire.'



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"Now is it clear that a thing is desirable only in so far as it is perfect; for all desire their own perfection. But everything is perfect so far as it is actual. Therefore it is clear that a thing is perfect so far as it exists; for it is existence that makes all things actual, as is clear from the foregoing [Q. 3, A. 4; Q. 4, A. 1]. Hence it is clear that goodness and being are the same reality."

[ST1, Q5, art. 1]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

A full exploration of how it is that 'being' and 'good' are convertible (which is to say that 'being' and 'good' are really the same) requires a examination of the Medieval doctrine of the Transcendentals.

The Convertibility of Being and Good in St. Thomas Aquinas

by Jan A. Aertsen

IN MANY medieval thinkers, e.g. Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, the statement can be found: "being and good are convertible" (*ens et bonum convertuntur*).¹ That is to say, "being" and "good" are interchangeable terms in predication (*converti enim est concessim praedicari*).² Wherever "being" is predicated of something, the predicate "good" is involved as well.

That must imply that "good" is here not a concept that adds a real content or a new quality to "being", as a result of which "being" is restricted. For in that case there would be no question of convertibility.³ "Good" is an attribute which pertains to every being, it is a property of being as such, a "mode that is common, and consequent upon every being."⁴ In other words, "good" is coextensive with "being", it is one of the so-called *transcendentia*⁵ which, since Suarez, are usually referred to as "transcendentals".

¹ Alexander of Hales, *Summa I*, Inq. 1, Tract. 3, q. 3, membrum 1, e. 1, a. 1, "An idem sit bonum et ens"; Bonaventure, *In II Sent.*, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, fundam. 5, "Res et bonum convertuntur, sicut vult Dionysius", d. 34, a. 2, q. 3, fundam. 4; Albert the Great, *De Bono* q. 1, a. 6; *Summa Theol.* tract. 6, q. 28; Thomas Aquinas, *In I Sent.* 8, 1, 3; *De Ver.* XXI, 2; *In De Hebdomadibus*, lect. 3; *Summa Theol.* I, 16, 2.

² Thomas Aquinas, *De Ver.* I, 2 obj. 2.

³ *De Pot.* IX, 7 ad 5; Bonum quod est in genere qualitatis, non est bonum quod convertitur cum ente, quod nullam rem supra ens addit.

⁴ *De Ver.* I, 1; modus generaliter consequens omne ens.

⁵ Comp. Albert the Great, *Summa Theologiae* tract. 6, q. 27, c. 2; Bonum dicitur intentionem communem et est de transcendentibus omne genus sicut et ens.

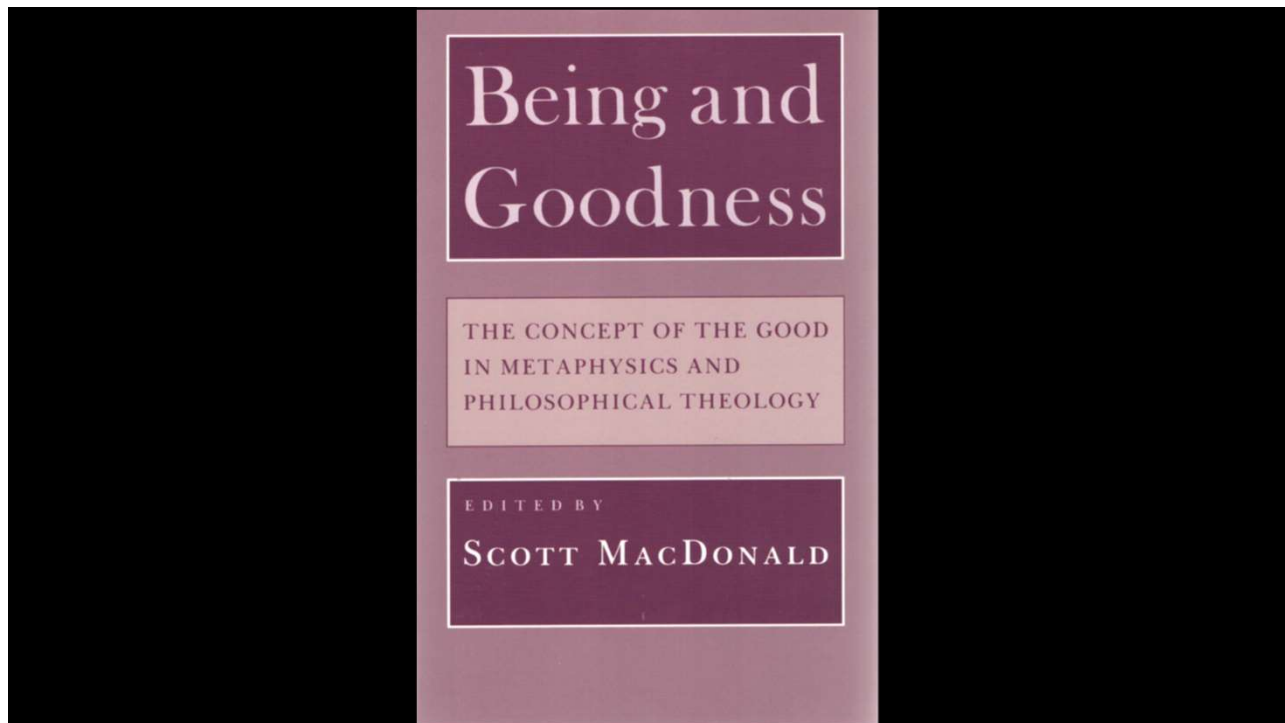


Jan Aertsen
1938-2016

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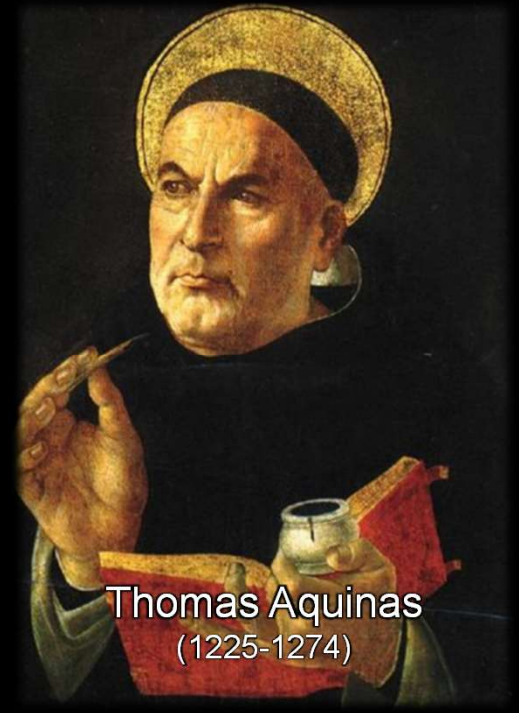




1. 'Good' is first identified with 'desirable' (appetible).
2. 'Desirable' is identified with 'perfect'.
3. 'Perfect' is identified with 'act' or 'actuality'.
4. 'Actuality' is identified with 'being'.
5. God is goodness itself in as much as God is being itself.

"To God alone does it belong to be His own subsistent being."

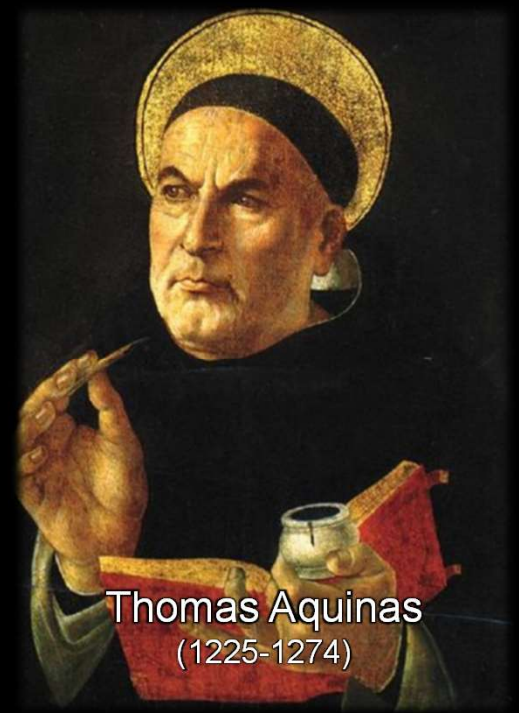
[ST 1, Q 12, art. iv]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"God is absolute form, or rather absolute being"

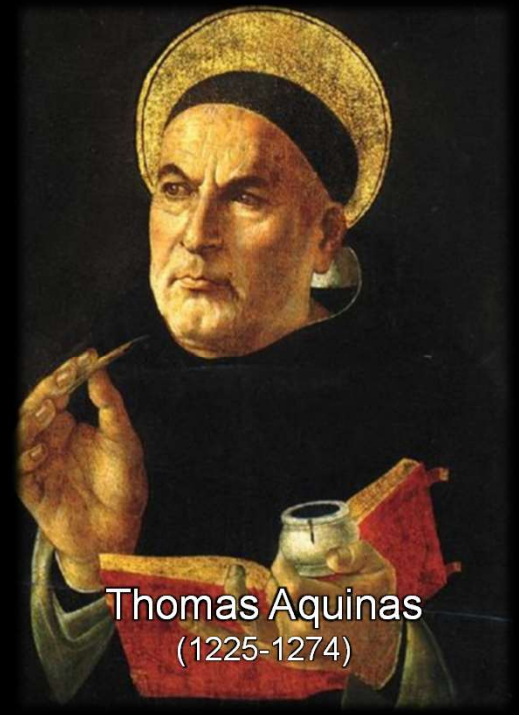
[ST, I, Q3, art. 7.]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"God is supremely being ... He is being itself, subsistent, absolutely undetermined."

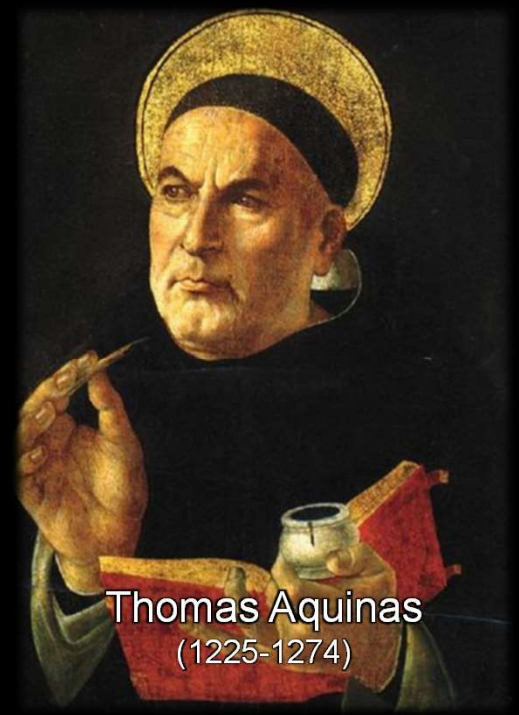
[ST 1, Q 11, art. iv.]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"Good belongs pre-eminently to God."

(ST 1, Q5, art. 1)



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)