

How, according to the natural law ethics of Thomas Aquinas, can humans discover what God commands?

Barbara A. Gibbs, RN

Department of Nursing Labour College of Healthcare

Ethical Domains & Dilemmas SP2 23

Professor: Mark Robinson

March 15, 2023

In the book of Leviticus, chapter 19 is the Various Laws of God's commands. Verse one: The Lord said to Moses, "2 Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them; Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy. "3 Each of you must respect your mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths. I am the Lord your God. Chapter 20 Punishments for sin verse 10 "If a man commits adultery with another man's wife, with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death." (New International Version 1973 /1978).

This is a very difficult topic to discuss because there are so many forms of religion and the ethical laws of religion and belief. The Divine Command Theory of Morality is a metaethical theory, a theory about the nature of ethical reasoning, that sees moral obligation as equivalent to and dependent on God's commands.

We have the Natural Law Theories applied to theories of ethics, theories of politics, theories of civil law, and theories of religious morality. Is credited to Thomas Aquinas. According to the article. "Thomas Aquinas plays in the natural law tradition. If any moral theory is a theory of natural law, it is Aquinas's. (Every introductory ethics anthology that includes material on natural law theory includes material by or about Aquinas; every encyclopedia article on natural law thought refers to Aquinas.) It would seem sensible, then, to take Aquinas's natural law theory as the central case of a natural law position: of theories that exhibit all of the key features of Aquinas's natural law view we can say that they are clearly natural law theories; of theories that exhibit few of them we can say that they are clearly not natural law theories; and of theories that exhibit many but not all of them we can say that they are in the neighborhood of the natural law view but nonetheless must be viewed as at most deviant cases of that position. There remain, no doubt, questions about how we determine what are to count as the *key* features of Aquinas's position. But we may take as the key features those theses about natural law that structure his overall moral view and which provide the basis for other theses about the natural law that he affirms.

For Aquinas, there are two key features of the natural law, features the acknowledgment of which structures his discussion of the natural law at Question 94 of the Prima Secundae of the *Summa Theologiae*. The first is that, when we focus on God's role as the giver of the natural law, the natural law is just one aspect of divine providence; and so the theory of natural law is from

that perspective just one part among others of the theory of divine providence. The second is that, when we focus on the human's role as a recipient of the natural law, the natural law constitutes the principles of practical rationality, those principles by which human action is to be judged as reasonable or unreasonable; and so the theory of natural law is from that perspective the preeminent part of the theory of practical rationality." (The Natural Law Tradition in Ethics first published Mon Sept 23, 2002; substantive revision Sun May 26, 2019)".

The discussion question, **How, according to the natural law ethics of Thomas Aquinas, can humans discover what God Commands?** I know that all of the great religious scholars and writers credit Thomas Aquinas with the Natural Law Ethics in helping humans discover what God commands, however, I am going to say that I disagree that Thomas Aquinas should be credited with helping man discover what God commands are because it is clearly stated in the Bible book of Exodus Chapter 20 The Ten Commandments is Gods commands to man and these are the rules and commands that man has been living by and abiding by the ten commands God gave to Moses.

REFERENCE

The New International Version Bible 1973 /1978

Hendricks, C. (2020) Introduction to Philosophy: Ethics

The Natural Law Tradition in Ethics was first published Mon Sept 23, 2002; with substantive revision Sun May 26, 2019.