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IN SEARCH OF "GOOD POSITIVE REASONS"
FOR AN ETHICS OF DIVINE COMMANDS:
A CATALOGUE OF ARGUMENTS

Janine Marie Idziak

Recent proponents of a divine command ethics have chiefly defended the theory by refuting objections rather than by offering "positive reasons" to support it. We here offer a catalogue of such positive arguments drawn from *historical* discussions of the theory. We present arguments which focus on various properties of the divine nature and on the unique status of God, as well as arguments which are analogical in character. Finally, we describe a particular *form* of the theory to which these arguments point, and indicate how they counteract a standard criticism of it. Throughout we pick up on previous work of Philip Quinn.

During the last several decades there has been renewed interest on the part of philosophers and theologians in an ethics of divine commands. Most basically, a divine command moralist holds that the standard of right and wrong is the commands and prohibitions of God. According to the divine command theory, "an action of kind of action is right or wrong if and only if and *because* it is commanded or forbidden by God."[1] In other words, the theory stipulates that "what ultimately *makes* an action right or wrong is its being commanded or forbidden by God and nothing else."[2] According to a divine command moralist, it is *not* the case that God commands a particular action because it is right, or prohibits it because it is wrong; rather, an action is right (or wrong) because God commands (or prohibits) it.

The defense of any ethical theory operates on two levels: the refutation of objections which may be brought against the theory, and the presentation of reasons in support of the position and for preferring it to other ethical systems. Recent proponents of divine command ethics have, for the most part, chosen the former strategy of defense. In fact, in the first contemporary monographic study of divine command ethics, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements*, Philip Quinn explicitly states that he does not try to answer the question whether there are "good positive reasons for believing that a version of divine command theory is true."[3] The historical literature in general is richer in this regard, offering a variety of putatively "good positive reasons" for adopting an ethics of divine commands.

Our aim in this paper is to present and call attention to these historical arguments, drawn from discussions of the divine command theory in late medieval

philosophy and theology, in Reformation and in Puritan theology, and in British modern philosophy. Some of the sources on which we will draw have hitherto gone unnoticed in the recent published literature on the divine command theory. Although we will not here undertake a critical evaluation of the arguments in question but simply set them out, our catalogue is meant to be suggestive to philosophers and theologians interested in the divine command theory and hence a prolegomenon to further attempts to defend it.

As well as considering particular arguments, we will attempt to discern some basic strategies for the positive defense of the theory. In sections I and II we consider arguments which connect an ethics of divine commands with various properties of the divine nature. In section III we look at a line of argument centering on the unique status occupied by God. Arguments which are analogical in nature are examined in section IV. Finally, in section V we consider some wider implications of these arguments. Specifically, we describe a particular form of divine command theory to which some of these arguments point, and suggest that the body of historical arguments we have delineated serves to counteract one of the standard criticisms leveled against an ethics of divine commands.

<center>I</center>

The citation of authorities is a familiar element of the medieval style of argumentation, and discussions of the divine command theory from this period are no exception. Authoritative statements apparently favoring an ethics of divine commands were brought forward from the writings of Augustine,[4] Ambrose,[5] Gregory the Great,[6] the Pseudo-Cyprian,[7] Isidore of Seville,[8] Hugh of St. Victor,[9] and Anselm.[10]

Such authoritative statements not infrequently represent mere *assertions* of a viewpoint or stance, rather than the presentation of reasons or evidence, properly speaking, for a position. From the point of view of the task at hand, that is, of searching for "positive reasons" for an ethics of divine commands, the most interesting of the authoritative statements comes from Hugh of St. Victor's *On the Sacraments*. We quote in its entirety the section of the text from which various quotations were taken:

> The first cause of all things is the will of the Creator which no antecedent cause moved because it is eternal, nor any subsequent cause confirms because it is of itself just. For He did not will justly, because what He willed was to be just, but what He willed was just, because He Himself willed it. For it is peculiar to Himself and to His will that that which is His is just; from Him comes the justice that is in His will by the very fact that justice comes from His will. That which is just is

> just according to His will and certainly would not be just, if it were not according to His will. When, therefore, it is asked how that is just which is just, the most fitting answer will be: because it is according to the will of God, which is just. When, however, it is asked how the will of God itself is also just, this quite reasonable answer will be given: because there is no cause of the first cause, whose prerogative it is to be what it is of itself. But this alone is the cause whence whatever is has originated, and it itself did not originate, but is eternal.[11]

This text suggests a connection between the dependency of what is just on the divine will and God's recognized status as *first and uncaused cause*. Although the text is somewhat obscure, it bears the following interpretation. When trying to determine what is just, we look to what accords with the will of God, for the divine will is considered to be paradigmatically just. Now in seeking the foundation of justice, it does not make sense to seek something else beyond the divine will. For the divine will is the first cause of all things, and as such, it is uncaused and has no cause prior to it. Thus, there is no cause of the justness of the divine will; rather, the divine will itself generates justness.

The text from *On the Sacraments* takes on additional significance from the point of view of subsequent discussions of divine command ethics. The connection suggested by Hugh of St. Victor between an ethics of divine commands and God's status as first cause and uncaused cause is a connection which recurs in the historical literature, in somewhat varying forms.

In *On Truth*, Thomas Aquinas raises the issue of an ethics of divine commands in asking the question whether justice as found among created things depends simply upon the divine will.[12] One of the arguments mentioned by Aquinas in favor of an affirmative answer to this question, and hence in favor of an ethics of divine commands, invokes the conception of God as *first cause*: Justice, as a certain correctness, depends on the imitation of some rule; the rule of the effect is its due cause; therefore, since the first cause of all things is the divine will, it is also the first rule from which everything just is judged.[13] Another of the arguments reported by Aquinas as supporting the divine command position involves the *uncaused* nature of the divine will. Thus he makes mention of the contention that every will which is just by a principle other than itself is such that its principle should be sought; however, since Augustine has pointed out that the cause of God's will is not to be sought, it seems we must conclude that the principle of justice depends on no other than the divine will.[14]

The connection in question is also found in Reformation and early Protestant theology. Whatever may be the best interpretation of the ethics of Luther and Calvin overall, there are passages to be found in their writings which are indicative of an ethics of divine commands. Such statements of a divine command theory

are at times contextually intertwined with statements about the *uncaused* nature of God's will. This juxtaposition is unmistakable in a passage from Martin Luther's *The Bondage of the Will*, in which assertions of the uncaused status of the divine will immediately precede and immediately follow a statement of the divine command ethical principle:

> The same reply should be given to those who ask: Why did God let Adam fall, and why did He create us all tainted with the same sin, when He might have kept Adam safe, and might have created us of other material, or of seed that had first been cleansed? God is He for Whose will no cause or ground may be laid down as its rule and standard; for nothing is on a level with it or above it, but it is itself the rule for all things. If any rule or standard, or cause or ground, existed for it, it could no longer be the will of God. What God wills is not right because He ought, or was bound, so to will; on the contrary, what takes place must be right, because He so wills it. Causes and grounds are laid down for the will of the creature, but not for the will of the Creator . . .[15]

This text of Luther was subsequently quoted by Jerome Zanchius in *The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination* in his assertion of the position that "the will of God is so the cause of all things, as to be itself without cause."[16] The juxtaposition of an assertion of the divine command thesis with a description of the divine will as uncaused is again in evidence in John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. At one point in the text, it is after warning "how sinful it is to insist on knowing the causes of the divine will, since it is itself . . . the cause of all that exists" that Calvin goes on to affirm that "the will of God is the supreme rule of righteousness, so that everything which he wills must be held to be righteous by the mere fact of his willing it."[17]

The Puritan theologian and divine command moralist, John Preston, explicitly appeals to God's status as both first cause and uncaused cause in the treatise *Life Eternall*. Preston is noteworthy for his attempt to introduce argumentative rigor into the line of thought we have been considering, as well as for his way of construing the relationship between God's causal status and the realm of ethics:

> The next *Attribute* . . . is this: That *God is the first without all causes, having his being and beginning from himselfe.*
>
> Now we come to application.
>
> Use I. If the *Lord* be without all cause, this we may gather then, that he doth not will any thing, because it is just, or desire it, because it is good, or love any thing, because it is pleasant; for there is no cause without him, all perfection is in him originally. The creatures indeed desire things, because they are good, and love them, because they are

pleasant; because they seek for perfection out of themselves, because they are caused by that which is out of themselves: but this is not so in *God*, who is the first cause, because, of the first cause there is no cause; and of the first reason there is no reason to be given. . . . I speak this for this end, that in our judging of the waies of *God*, wee should take heed of framing a model of our owne, as to thinke, because such a thing is just, therefore the *Lord* wils it: . . . we forget this, that every thing is just because he wils it; it is not that *God* wils it, because it is good or just.[18]

Preston seems to reason in the following way. God is the first cause. God's status as *first* cause implies that God is *uncaused*, that is, that God cannot be causally affected by anything. If God were to choose something because he perceived it to possess goodness or justice, then God would be causally affected by something external to himself, which is impossible. Therefore, it is not the case that God wills something because it is good or just; rather, something is good or just because God wills it. In *An Exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles*, the Puritan theologian William Perkins is also found to articulate an ethics of divine commands within the framework of comments on the uncaused nature of the divine will similar to those of Preston.[19]

II

While the appeal to God's causal powers represents one strain in the defense of the divine command theory, it is by no means the only aspect of the divine nature to which this ethical position has been related. One can find yet other historical arguments which have the form of showing that an ethics of divine commands is compatible or consistent with some established attribute of God whereas rejection of this theory is not.

This strategy is employed by John Preston in *Life Eternall*, in contending that an ethics of divine commands is required to preserve God's *impeccability*. His argument is straightforward and succinct:

. . . we should finde out what the will of *God* is; for that is the rule of justice and equity; for otherwise it was possible that the *Lord* could erre,[20] though he did never erre: that which goes by a rule, though it doth not swarve, yet it may; but if it be the rule itselfe, it is impossible to erre.[21]

Of the same ilk is a line of argument recorded by Ralph Cudworth which involves the divine *omnipotence*. In describing the divine command position in a *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, Cudworth claims that

"this doctrine hath been since chiefly promoted and advanced by such as think nothing so essential to the Deity, as uncontrollable power and arbitrary will, and therefore that God could not be God if there should be any thing evil in its own nature which he could not do . . . ."[22]

The argument which Cudworth reports might be unpacked in the following way. Omnipotence is one of the essential or defining properties of God; or, in other words, "Necessarily, God is omnipotent." Now let us suppose that an ethics of divine commands is a false theory and that there is something, x, which is evil in its own nature entirely apart from a divine prohibition. If this is so, then God, being good, cannot do x. But then, if God cannot do x, God is not omnipotent—which is impossible. In other words, the rejection of the divine command position seems to lead us into the unacceptable position of denying the divine omnipotence. An ethics of divine commands, on the other hand, respects God's omnipotence, for if God can make anything right which he wants to, then there is nothing which he is morally prevented from doing.[23]

Cudworth himself is not a proponent, but a vociferous critic of the divine command position. Thus one can ask the question of how accurately he reports the actual thinking of divine command moralists.

A number of medievalists have suggested a connection between adherence to an ethics of divine commands and exaltation of the divine omnipotence in the case of William Ockham. This explanation for Ockham's favorable disposition towards the divine command theory has been offered in papers by David Clark,[24] Francis Oakley,[25] and Oakley and Elliot Urdang.[26] It has also been suggested by Frederick Copleston in his history of philosophy.[27] This explanation for the espousal of an ethics of divine commands may seem intuitively plausible, for God's postulated institution of morality surely represents an aspect of what God has the power to do. In the case of Ockham, however, this explanation turns out to be purely speculative from a strict textual point of view. In reviewing the texts which serve as evidence for Ockham's adherence to a divine command theory,[28] one can see that they do not contain any deduction of divine command ethics from the concept of divine omnipotence, nor any explicit argument for an ethics of divine commands which involves the notion of divine omnipotence. Further, the connection in question is not suggested by the larger context of discussion. Ockham's statements of the divine command position do not occur within questions dealing with the divine power.

Among historical divine command moralists, the best textual evidence we have found for the postulated connection between an ethics of divine commands and God's omnipotence occurs in the work of Ockham's disciple Gabriel Biel, specifically, in his commentary on the *Sentences*, Book I, distinction forty-three:

He shows of omnipotence, by what it is directed. He determines how far it is extended.

And the text can be summarized as follows:

First conclusion: God can do many things which he does not will, and he can forego many things which he does, and yet his will can be neither different nor new nor changeable.

Second conclusion: Although what God does or foregoes he justly does and foregoes, yet if he were to do or forego in a different manner, he would do or forego these things justly.

Third conclusion: Not things themselves, but the divine will is the first rule of all justice and rectitude.

First Question
Could God do things which he neither has done nor will do?

For the fourth article we have the conclusion responding to the question: God can do, to some extent or in some way, what he does not do, and can produce things in a different way than he does. This is clear because he contingently causes things; therefore he can both cause something and not bring it about, in one particular way or in another manner.

Corollary: God can do something which is not just for God to do; yet if he were to do it, it would be just that this be done. Wherefore the divine will alone is the first rule of all justice, and because he wills something to be done, it is just that it be done, and because he wills something not to be done, it is not just that it be done.[29]

In this case, the statement of divine command theory occurs within the framework of consideration of God's attribute of omnipotence specifically. Biel interprets the text of Lombard as presenting this theory, and himself endorses it as a consequence drawn from a particular claim about what God has the power to do. In section V we will consider further the implications of this connection for the acceptability of a divine command ethical system.

III

In his treatise *On Laws and God the Lawgiver* the Renaissance scholastic Francisco Suarez provides an account of the debate then taking place over an ethics of divine commands. In a discussion of the position that "certain actions are so intrinsically bad of their very nature, that their wickedness in no way depends upon eternal prohibition . . . nor upon the divine will" and, concomit-

antly, of the position that "other actions are so essentially good and upright that their possession of these qualities is in no sense dependent upon any external cause,"[30] Suarez gives the following report of the foundation of such a view:

> Briefly, the underlying reason for such a view is that moral actions have their own intrinsic character and immutable essence, which in no way depend upon any external cause or will, any more than does the essence of other things which in themselves involve no contradiction, as I at present assume from the science of metaphysics.[31]

What is significant about Suarez's report is that the rejection of the divine command position is connected with the metaphysical issue of the status of the essences, morality being treated as one instance of this more general problem. This is a strain which recurs in discussions of the divine command theory in modern philosophy. Ralph Cudworth, George Rust, and Richard Price all explicitly connect morality, and the rejection of a divine command theory, with the status of essences and truths as independent of divine decree.[32]

On the other hand, it is well known that Descartes maintained the divine creation of the essences and eternal truths,[33] and a connection between such a position and the espousal of an ethics of divine commands is drawn by Cudworth in a *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*:

> But some there are that will still contend, that though it should be granted that moral good and evil, just and unjust do not depend upon any created will, yet notwithstanding they must needs depend upon the arbitrary will of God, because the natures and essences of all things, and consequently all verities and falsities, depend upon the same. For if the natures and essences of things should not depend upon the will of God, it would follow from hence, that something that was not God was independent upon God.
>
> And this is plainly asserted by that ingenious philosopher Renatus Descartes . . .[34]

Important to note is the contention that there cannot be anything which is *independent to God*. For in *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, Richard Price also makes mention of the issue whether "we must give up the unalterable natures of right and wrong, and make them dependent on the Divine will" in order to avoid "setting up something distinct from God, which is independent of him, and equally eternal and necessary."[35]

The suggested contention that a divine command theory must be adopted in the realm of ethics because there cannot be anything independent of God may be seen, we believe, as an attempt to capture the religious insight of the *absolute centrality* which God is to enjoy. As such, it bears some analogy to a point made

in favor of the divine command position by Robert Merrihew Adams, namely, that such a system satisfies the religious requirement that God be the supreme focus of one's loyalties.[36]

IV

An ethics of divine commands was a major topic of discussion in late medieval philosophy and theology,[37] and E. Pluzanski has hypothesized two reasons for the attractiveness of this theory to the medieval mentality. On the one hand, he connects the espousal of an ethics of divine commands with the unwillingness of medieval theologians to take liberties in interpreting Scripture, which contains accounts of actions which clearly seem to contradict moral laws and which yet are presented as accomplished under the direct order of God.[38] This postulated connection is verified by the use made, within the medieval divine command tradition, of such Scriptural cases as Abraham sacrificing Isaac, the prophet Hosea committing adultery, the Israelites despoiling (and hence stealing from) the Egyptians on their way out of Egypt, Samson killing himself, Jacob lying to his father, and the patriarchs practicing polygamy.[39] Secondly, Pluzanski suggests that the structure of civil society in the Middle Ages, in particular, the large number of special regulations admitted by customary and canon law, prepared the way for acceptance of the idea of an arbitrary moral law.[40]

At first blush, Pluzanski's second suggestion appears to be a sociological and psychological thesis of a highly speculative character. On closer examination, one can see in Pluzanski's comment the suggestion that an analogical mode of reasoning with respect to legislative activity may underlie the position of the divine command moralist.

From this point of view, it is worth taking note of an argument reported by Thomas Bradwardine in *The Cause of God* on the side of the divine command theory:

> This could be confirmed by human ecclesiastical laws, and even by secular ones. For frequently in ecclesiastical laws the Pope says, "It pleased us thus, or so," which, from that very fact, is established for a law and is obligatory. Imperial laws too very often have a similar foundation, wherefore they also say, "What has pleased the sovereign has the force of law." But so is God free in establishing laws for governing his whole state, just as these are for his state. Therefore the will of God is sufficient for law, and the highest law.[41]

This argument works with a comparison between civil and ecclesiastical law and divine legislative activity. From the realm of civil law, it makes use of a statement in the code of Justinian, "What has pleased the sovereign has the force of law."[42]

When reporting arguments in favor of the view that justice as found among created things depends simply upon the divine will, Thomas Aquinas mentions precisely the same text from the Justinian code as supposed evidence that law is "nothing but the expression of the will of a sovereign."[43] Thus the argument reported by Bradwardine can be interpreted as claiming that civil law can be, and indeed frequently is constituted by the mere will of the ruler. Further, according to this argument, the same thing holds true in the realm of ecclesiastical law, since papal legislation is often formulated in the terminology of "It pleased us thusly." Having established a connection between law and will, the argument proceeds by way of analogy. Just as the pope is governor of the spiritual realm and just as a civil ruler governs a political state, so God governs all of creation as his "state." And hence, just as an ecclesiastical or civil ruler has the power to make law by sheer choice of will, so it must be the case that the will of God is enough to create law in those matters appropriate to divine legislative activity.

One can also find medieval arguments for an ethics of divine commands which draw an analogy between metaphysics and ethics. An analogy between the metaphysical notion of God as "first being" and the ethical notion of God as "first good" forms the basis of the argument initially presented in favor of a divine command theory by Andrew of Neufchateau[44] in his commentary on the first book of the *Sentences*, distinction forty-eight, question one:

(1)   As the "first being" is related to other beings, so is the "first good" to other goods.
(2)   The "first being" is the contingent and free cause of all other beings, and that on account of which each being is such a being.
(3)   Therefore, the "first good," that is, God, is the contingent and free cause of all other goods, and that on account of which each good is such a good.[45]

The use of the concept of causality in this argument is noteworthy. In the course of his discussion of the divine command theory, Andrew employs causal terminology too often for its occurrence to be purely accidental. Andrew speaks of "the first cause and rule of goodness,"[46] of the "first cause and reason of good,"[47] and of the "first cause and rule and measure of rectitude."[48] On several occasions the causal force in morals is explicitly identified with God. Andrew states that "the rectitude of human action and reason and of the dictate and law of nature are reduced to the rectitude of the divine will and proceed from it causally . . . ."[49] Or again, he describes God as "the effective and the final and as if the formal and the exemplary and the regulative and the measuring cause of this [moral] good."[50] The significance of such causal terminology is an issue which will be taken up in section V.

The same strategy of establishing an analogy between what obtains in

metaphysics and what obtains in ethics is employed and indeed ingeniously exploited by Peter of Ailly in taking the familiar medieval cosmological argument fort he existence of God and constructing an analogue of it supporting an ethics of divine commands. Ailly's version of the cosmological proof is divided into three stages: firstly, an argument that it is necessary to reach one first efficient cause; secondly, establishment of the contention that no created thing can serve this function; and thirdly, an argument that the first efficient cause is to be identified with the divine will. The analogous proof of divine command ethics likewise involves three steps. Through rejection of the possibility of an infinite regress in obligatory laws, Ailly argues for the necessity of one first obligatory law; he then contends that no created law enjoys this status for the reason that no created law has from itself the power of binding; finally, using the divine attribute of perfection and Augustine's definition of eternal law, he establishes that the first obligatory law is the divine will. Given the enduring popularity of the cosmological argument, Ailly's extrapolation of it into the realm of ethics is sufficiently intriguing to merit quoting the text of the argument in its entirety:

> Thus the first conclusion is this: Just as the divine will is the first efficient cause in the class of efficient cause, so, in the class of obligatory law, it is the first law or rule. Now the first part of this conclusion is commonly granted by all philosophers; therefore it is assumed as something evident. But in order to prove the second part, I must first advance some preliminary propositions.
>
> The first proposition is that, among obligatory laws, one is a law absolutely first.
>
> Proof: Just as there is not an infinite regress in efficient causes, as the Philosopher proves in *Metaphysics* II, 3; so there is not an infinite regress in obligatory laws. Therefore, just as it is necessary to reach one first efficient cause, so it is necessary to arrive at one first obligatory law, because the principle is entirely the same in both cases. Therefore, etc.
>
> The second proposition is that no created law is absolutely first.
>
> Proof: Just as no created thing has of itself the power of creating, so no created law has of itself the power of binding; for as the Apostle states in Romans 13, "There is no power except from God," etc.. Therefore, just as no created thing is the first efficient cause, so no created law is the first obligatory law; for just as "first cause" is a sign that it is God who is involved in the causal activity, so "first law" is an indication that it is God who is imposing the obligation. Therefore, etc..

The third proposition is that the divine will is the law which is absolutely first.

Proof:
Evidently by the two preceding propositions.

Just as it is ascribed to the divine will to be the first efficient cause, so it must be ascribed to the same thing to be the first obligatory law; for just as the former belongs to perfection, so does the latter. Therefore, etc.

Furthermore, this proposition is demonstrated by Augustine in *Against Faustus* 22, where he states that the eternal law is the divine intellect or will commanding that the natural order be maintained and forbidding that it be disturbed. Now the eternal law is a law absolutely first; similarly, nothing is prior to the divine will. Therefore, etc..

And thus the second part of the conclusion is evident.

This line of argument is presented by Peter of Ailly in his introductory commentary on the first book of the *Sentences*.[51]
Ailly's contemporaries did not let this argument pass without criticism, and Ailly defended it against a variety of objections: (1) that there is a *first* obligatory law only in the sense of priority of time of institution,[52] and concomitantly, that a created law could be first in this sense;[53] (2) that it is in effect a category mistake to connect the fact of being an obligatory law with the concept of perfection;[54] (3) that the divine will is not, strictly speaking, the eternal law, but rather, is the eternal *maker* of law;[55] (4) that the divine will is not absolutely *the first* law or rule because negative laws (such as "Do not steal") are not derived from it;[56] and (5) that the status of a law or rule is inappropriately assigned to the divine *faculty of will*.[57] It is Ailly's response to this last objection which is the most interesting philosophically, in articulating a version of the divine command theory based on the concept of the divine simplicity, and hence on the identity of will and intellect in God.[58]
Peter of Ailly also makes mention of the analogy between the divine will as first efficient cause and as first obligatory law in his treatise *Is the Church of Peter Regulated by Law?*.[59] A possible precursor of Ailly's argument is to be found in a line of argument recorded in Thomas Bradwardine's *The Cause of God*. Although lacking an explicit analogy with a cosmological form of argument for God's existence, the argument reported by Bradwardine is like Ailly's argument in contending that there cannot be an infinite regress in the rules of justice, that the rule which is the highest of all and the origin of the other rules cannot be in some creature, and that this highest law is the divine will.[60]

V

Surely, one of the purposes of studying the history of philosophy is to gain insight into problems we are still grappling with today. In addition to providing examples of a positive strategy of defense for an ethics of divine commands, there are yet other respects in which the arguments we have just presented make a contribution to the current discussion of the divine command theory.

In the contemporary literature the most familiar division among divine command ethical systems is that between *metaethical* and *normative* theories. Philip Quinn has attempted to distinguish yet other forms which an ethics of divine commands might assume. In *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements* he investigates divine command theories based on *logical* relations such as strict equivalence:

It is necessary that, for all p, it is required that p if and only if God commands that p.

$N(\forall p(Rp \equiv Cp))$.

It is necessary that, for all p, it is permitted that p if and only if it is not the case that God commands that not-p.

$N(\forall p(Pp \equiv \sim C \sim p))$.

It is necessary that, for all p, it is forbidden that p if and only if God commands that not-p.

$N(\forall p(Fp \equiv C \sim p))$.[61]

In a subsequent paper Quinn sets out "to explore a somewhat different terrain,"[62] formulating a *causal* normative theory:

For every proposition which is such that it is logically possible that God commands that p and it is logically contingent that p, a sufficient causal condition that it is obligatory that p is that God commands that p, and a necessary causal condition that it is obligatory that p is that God commands that p.

For every proposition which is such that it is logically possible that God commands that p and it is logically contingent that p, a sufficient causal condition that it is forbidden that p is that God commands that not-p, and a necessary causal condition that it is forbidden that p is that God commands that not-p.

For every proposition which is such that it is logically possible that God commands that p and it is logically contingent that p, a sufficient causal condition that it is permitted that p is that it is not the case that God commands that not-p, and a necessary causal condition that it is permitted that p is that it is not the case that God commands that not-p.[63]

According to Quinn, the attempt to construe the relation between divine com-

mands and moral duty in causal terms is meant to incorporate a view held by at least some divine command moralist which the logical formulations of the theory fail to embody. Specifically, it is meant to capture an intuitive picture of God as an agent *bringing about* or *creating* moral obligations and prohibitions by means of his legislative activity.[64]

Our historical study shows that there is more to Quinn's proposed causal version of divine command theory than he recognized. In making this proposal he is in fact resurrecting an historically established conceptual framework for articulating an ethics of divine commands. Andrew of Neufchateau, the paradigmatic divine command moralists of the Middle Ages,[65] uses causal terminology in his statement and discussion of the theory. Further, an appeal to God's status as first and uncaused cause is a strain running through the discussion and defense of the theory in medieval philosophical theology, Reformation theology, and Puritan theology. And the medieval divine command moralist Peter of Ailly saw in the divine will's status as first efficient cause an analogy for God's status in the realm of morality.

An ethics of divine commands has not infrequently been perceived as a theory which reduces ethics to a matter of *power*. As we have already noted, the seventeenth century British philosopher Ralph Cudworth asserts that "this doctrine hath been since chiefly promoted and advanced by such as think nothing so essential to the Deity, as uncontrollable power and arbitrary will, and therefore that God could not be God if there should be any thing evil in its own nature which he could not do . . . ."[66] Another historical critic of divine command ethics, Thomas Chubb, saw proponents of the theory as reduced to adopting the unpalatable position of Hobbes, that is, of grounding God's authority in his absolute power.[67] In the contemporary literature, D. Goldstick has claimed that a theist is in the position of affirming, with respect to any divinely willed code of behavior, that "its moral rightness follows necessarily from its being willed by somebody omnipotent."[68] Or again, Philip Quinn has described varieties of divine command theory which "have it that God's commands are to be obeyed just because he is supremely powerful."[69]

Tying the divine command theory to the divine omnipotence has occasioned severe criticism of it. As representative of this critique, we quote Anthony Flew:

> But a price has to be paid for thus making God's will your standard.
> . . . you simultaneously lay yourself wide open to the charge that your
> religion is a gigantic exercise in eternity-serving, a worship of Infinite
> power as such, a glorification of Omnipotent Will quite regardless of
> the content of that will. It takes a very clear head—and a very strong
> stomach—to maintain such a position openly, consistently, and without
> any attempt to burk its harsh consequences.[70]

While it cannot be denied that the divine omnipotence has entered into the articu-

lation and defense of an ethics of divine commands, study of the historical litera-
ture does serve to indicate that the notions of God's omnipotence and of his power
over us have not constituted the only considerations offered in support of the divine
command theory, nor have they dominated the discussion. The theory has also
been related to other divine attributes, such as God's impeccability. It has been
related to the religious insight of the absolute centrality of God, expressed as the
view that there cannot be anything which is independent of God. There have been
attempts to use human legislative activity as a model for the divine. And attempts
have been made to defend divine command ethics through notions taken from the
realm of metaphysics, specifically, by invoking God's status as first and uncaused
cause, by drawing an analogy between "being" and "goodness," and by con-
structing an ethical analogue of the cosmological argument for God's existence.
Thus someone inclined to adopt an ethics of divine commands need not fear being
automatically committed to a doctrine of "Might makes right."[71]

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NOTES

1. William K. Frankena, *Ethics* 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 28.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Philip L. Quinn, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978),
pp. vi-vii.

4. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Ps. 61(62), 17-21, especially 21; citations in Thomas
Buckingham, *Quaestiones*, De Causalitate Divina, a. 2, Ms. New College (Oxford) 134, fol. 354
ra 14-20 and in Thomas Bradwardine, *De Causa Dei* I, 21. Also Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*,
Ps 35(36), 16; citation in Andrew of Neufchateau, *Primum Scriptum Sententiarum* d. 48, q. 2, a.
2, concl. 1, Praeterea voluntas . . . . Also Augustine, *De Peccatorum Meritis et Remissione et De
Baptismo Parvulorum* II, XVI, 23; citation in Andrew of Neufchateau, *Primum Scriptum Sententiarum*
d. 48, q. 2, a. 2, concl. 1, Item Augustinus . . . , and in Gregory of Rimini, *Super Primum et
Secundum Sententiarum* II, d. 34-37, q. 1, a. 2, corr. 2, contra. Also Augustine, *Contra Faustum*
XXII, 27; citations in Andrew of Neufchateau, *Primum Scriptum Sententiarum* d. 48, q. 2, a. 2,
concl. 1, Praeterea patet . . . , and in Gregory of Rimini, *Super Primum et Secundum Sententiarum*
II, d. 34-37, q. 1, a. 2, corr. 2, contra.

5. Ambrose, *De Paradiso* VIII, 39; citations in Andrew of Neufchateau, *Primum Scriptum Senten-
tiarum* d. 48, q. 2, a. 2, concl. 1, Praeterea patet . . . , and in Gregory of Rimini, *Super Primum
et Secundum Sententiarum* II, d. 34-37, q. 1, a. 2, corr. 2, contra.

6. Gregory the Great, *Moralium Libri, sive Espositio in Librum B. Job* II, 17[13]; citation in
Thomas Buckingham, *Quaestiones*, De Causalitate Divina, a. 2, Ms. New College (Oxford) 134,
fol. 354 ra 11-13.

7. Pseudo-Cyprian, *De Singularitate Clericorum* 16; citations in Andrew of Neufchateau, *Primum
Scriptum Sententiarum* d. 48, q. 1, a. 2, concl. 2, Item Augustinus . . . , and in Francisco Suarez,

De Legibus ac Deo Legislatore II, VI, 4.

  8. Isidore of Seville, *Sententiarum Libri Tres* (also known as *De Summo Bono*) II, 1; citation in Thomas Buckingham, *Quaestiones*, De Causalitate Divina, a. 2, Ms. New College (Oxford) 134, fol. 354 ra 4-5.

  9. See note 11.

10. Anselm, *Proslogium* 11; citations in Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate* q. 23, a. 6, 1m, and in Thomas Buckingham, *Quaestiones*, De Causalitate Divina, a. 2, Ms. New College (Oxford) 134, fol. 353 vb 49 - 354 ra 4, and in Thomas Bradwardine, *De Causa Dei* I, 21, and in Andrew of Neufchateau, *Primum Scriptum Sententiarum* d. 48, q. 1, a. 2, concl. 2, Praeterea . . . , and in Francisco Suarez, *De Legibus ac Deo Legislatore* II, VI, 4. Also Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* I, 8; citation in Andrew of Neufchateau, *Primum Scriptum Sententiarum* d. 48, q. 1, a. 2, concl. 2, Praeterea . . . .

11. Hugh of St. Victor, *De Sacramentis* I, IV, I, translated by Roy J. Deferrari (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1951). Citations in Andrew of Neufchateau, *Primum Scriptum Sententiarum* d. 48, q. 1, a. 2, concl. 2, Item Hugo . . . , and in Thomas Buckingham, *Quaestiones*, De Causalitate Divina, a. 2, Ms. New College (Oxford) 134, fol. 354 ra 6-10, and in Francisco Suarez, *De Legibus ac Deo Legislatore* II, VI, 4.

12. Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate* q. 23, a. 6.

13. Aquinas, *De Veritate* q. 23, a. 6, 4m, translated by Robert W. Schmidt, S.J. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1954).

14. *Ibid.*, q. 23, a. 6, 6m.

15. Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* V, 6, translated by J. I. Packer & O. R. Johnston (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1957).

16. Jerome Zanchius, *The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination*, "Observations on the Divine Attributes" II, Position 7 (London: The Sovereign Grace Union, 1930).

17. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* III, 23, translated by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962).

18. John Preston, *Life Eternall or, A Treatise of the Knowledge of the Divine Essence and Attributes* 4th ed., Part I, Sermon VIII, Second Attribute of God (London: E. Purslowe, 1634).

19. William Perkins, *An Exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles* in *Workes* (London: John Legatt, 1616) I:278.

20. In this context, "err" is best understood, we believe, as "to go astray morally, to sin."

21. Preston, *Life Eternall*, Part I, Sermon VIII, Second Attribute of God.

22. Ralph Cudworth, *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* I, I, 5. In *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (New York: Gould & Newman, 1838).

23. Cf. R. G. Swinburne, "Duty and the Will of God," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 4 (1974): 213-26, pp. 213-14.

24. David W. Clark, "Voluntarism and Rationalism in the Ethics of Ockham," *Franciscan Studies* 31 (1971): 72-87, pp. 82-83.

25. Francis Oakley, "Medieval Theories of Natural Law: William of Ockham and the Significance of the Voluntarist Tradition," *Natural Law Forum* 6 (1961): 65-83, p. 82.

26. Francis Oakley & Elliot W. Urdang, "Locke, Natural Law, and God," *Natural Law Forum* 11 (1966): 92-109, p. 101.

27. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, pt. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Image,

1963), pp. 115-17, 119, 120-21.

28. William Ockham, *Quaestiones in Librum Secundum Sententiarum*, q. 15, Solutio Dubiorum, ad 3m, ed. Gedeon Gal & Rega Wood (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1981) = *Super 4 Libros Sententiarum* II, q. 19, O (Lyons, 1495). See also *Super 4 Libros Sententiarum* II, q. 19, P (=*Quaestiones in Librum Secundum Sententiarum*, q. 15, Solutio Dubiorum, ad 4m) and III, q. 12, E, NN, CCC; *Quodlibeta Septem* III, q. 13 and IV, q. 6 (Strassburg, 1491).

29. Gabriel Biel, *Collectorium circa quattuor libros Sententiarum* I, d. 43, ed. Wilfridus Werbeck & Udo Hoffmann (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1973). Translation that of the author.

30. Francisco Suarez, *De Legibus ac Deo Legislatore* II, V, 2. In *Selections from Three Works of Francisco Suarez, S.J.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1944).

31. *Ibid.*

32. Cudworth, *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* I, III, 4; George Rust, *A Discourse of Truth*, Sect. I, in *Two Choice and Useful Treatises* by Joseph Glanvill (London: James Collins & Sam. Lowndes, 1682); Richard Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals* (3rd ed.) I, 3 and V (Reprint, New York: Burt Franklin, 1974).

33. See Emile Brehier, "The Creation of the Eternal Truths in Descartes' System" in Willis Doney (ed.), *Descartes: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1967); Anthony Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), chap. II.

34. Cudworth, *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* I, III, 1-2.

35. Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, chap. V.

36. Robert Merrihew Adams, "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness" in Gene Outka & John P. Reeder, Jr. (eds.), *Religion and Morality* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1973), pp. 334-35.

37. For a comprehensive history of the debate over an ethics of divine commands during this period, see our manuscript *The Medieval Dispute on an Ethics of Divine Commands*.

38. E. Pluzanski, *La Philosophie de Duns Scot* (Paris: Ernest Thorin, 1888), p. 274.

39. Andrew of Neufchateau, *Primum Scriptum Sententiarum* d. 48, q. 2, a. 2, concl. 2, Praeterea hoc maxime videretur . . . ; Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense* III, d. 37, q. 1.

40. Pluzanski, *La Philosophie de Duns Scot*, pp. 274-75.

41. Thomas Bradwardine, *De Causa Dei* I, 21 (London: Billium, 1618). Translation that of the author.

42. *Corpus Iuris Civilis, Iustiniani Digesta*, I, IV, 1.

43. Aquinas, *De Veritate* q. 23, a. 6, 2m.

44. Among medieval philosophers and theologians, an ethics of divine commands has been *primarily* associated with William Ockham. Such an attribution reflects the current state of ignorance about the medieval dispute on the divine command theory. In fact, the lengthiest and most sophisticated defense of this position was presented by the fourteenth century French Franciscan Andrew of Neufchateau (Andreas de Novo Castro) in *Primum Scriptum Sententiarum*, distinction forty-eight, questions one and two. A Latin edition and English translation of this tract form part II of our manuscript *The Medieval Dispute on an Ethics of Divine Commands*.

45. Andrew of Neufchateau, *Primum Scriptum Sententiarum*, d. 48, q. 1 (Paris: John Granjon, 1514).

46. *Ibid.*, d. 48, q. 1, a. 2, concl. 2, Confirmatur . . . .

47. *Ibid.*, d. 48, q. 1, a. 2, concl. 3, 12m, Consequentia patet . . . .

48. *Ibid.*, d. 48, q. 1, a. 2, concl. 3, ad 4m.

49. *Ibid.*, d. 48, q. 2, a. 2, concl. 1, ad 2m.

50. *Ibid.*, d. 48, q. 1, a. 1, De Secundo, concl. 1, De bono etiam morali . . . .

51. Peter of Ailly, *Quaestiones super libros sententiarum cum quibusdam in fine adjunctis*, Principium in Primum Sententiarum, D (Strassburg, 1490).

52. *Ibid.*, Principium in Secundum Sententiarum, I.

53. *Ibid.*, Principium in Secundum Sententiarum, I.

54. *Ibid.*, Principium in Secundum Sententiarum, I.

55. *Ibid.*, Principium in Secundum Sententiarum, I.

56. *Ibid.*, Principium in Secundum Sententiarum, E, H.

57. *Ibid.*, Principium in Secundum Sententiarum, E.

58. *Ibid.*, Principium in Secundum Sententiarum, F-G as elucidated by I, q. 6, a. 2, P, R, S.

59. Peter of Ailly, *Utrum Petri Ecclesia Lege Reguletur* in Jean Gerson, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Ellies Dupin (Antwerp, 1706), I:663.

60. Thomas Bradwardine, *De Causa Dei* I, 21.

61. Quinn, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements*, p. 30. We quote the "simple theory." The remainder of the monograph develops theories which are more sophisticated logically.

62. Philip L. Quinn, "Divine Command Ethics: A Causal Theory," in Janine Marie Idziak (ed.), *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings* (New York & Toronto: Edwin Mellen, 1980), p. 311.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 312.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 311.

65. See note 44.

66. Cudworth, *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, I, I, 5.

67. Thomas Chubb, *The Comparative Excellence and Obligation of Moral and Positive Duties* (London: J. Roberts, 1730), pp. 18-19.

68. D. Goldstick, "Monotheism's *Euthyphro* Problem," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 3 (1974): 585-89, p. 587.

69. Quinn, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements*, p. 19, n. 16; see also pp. 32-36.

70. Anthony Flew, "The 'Religious Morality' of Mr. Patterson Brown," *Mind* 74 (1965); 578-81, p. 579. See also D. Goldstick, "Monotheism's *Euthyphro* Problem," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 3 (1974): 585-89; A. C. Ewing, "The Autonomy of Ethics" in Ian T. Ramsey (ed.), *Prospect for Metaphysics* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961), pp. 40-41.

71. This paper is part of a larger project on the history of divine command ethics in the medieval period, undertaken at the Medieval Institute of the University of Notre Dame with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Council of Learned Societies. The author is likewise indebted to the British Library, the libraries of the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies and Princeton Theological Seminary, and the rare book libraries of Harvard University and the University of Toronto for providing access to historical texts cited in this paper. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at St. Louis University and for the joint Faculty Forum of Wartburg Seminary and the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary.