University of St Andrews



God and the World: The Cosmos in Religious and Ethical Perspective

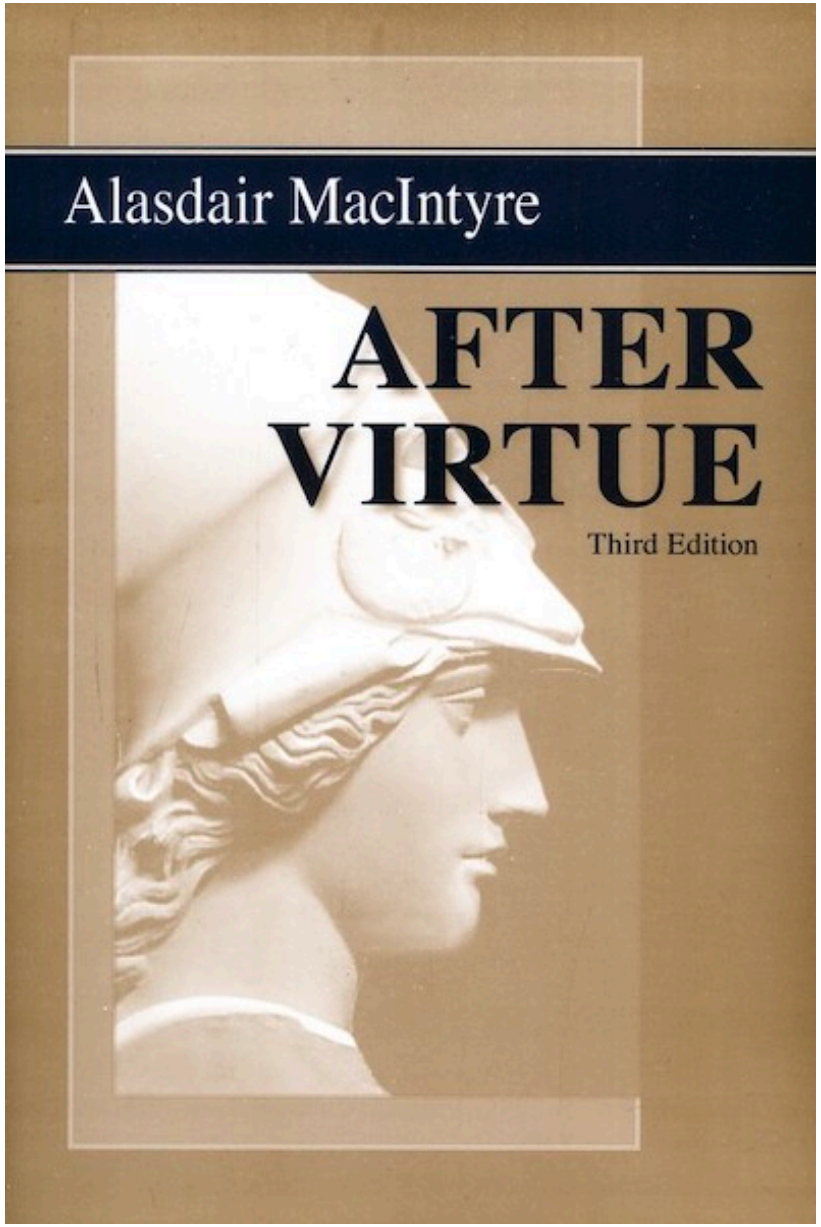
Rev Dr Jared Michelson

How do we respond when moral disagreement seem intractable?

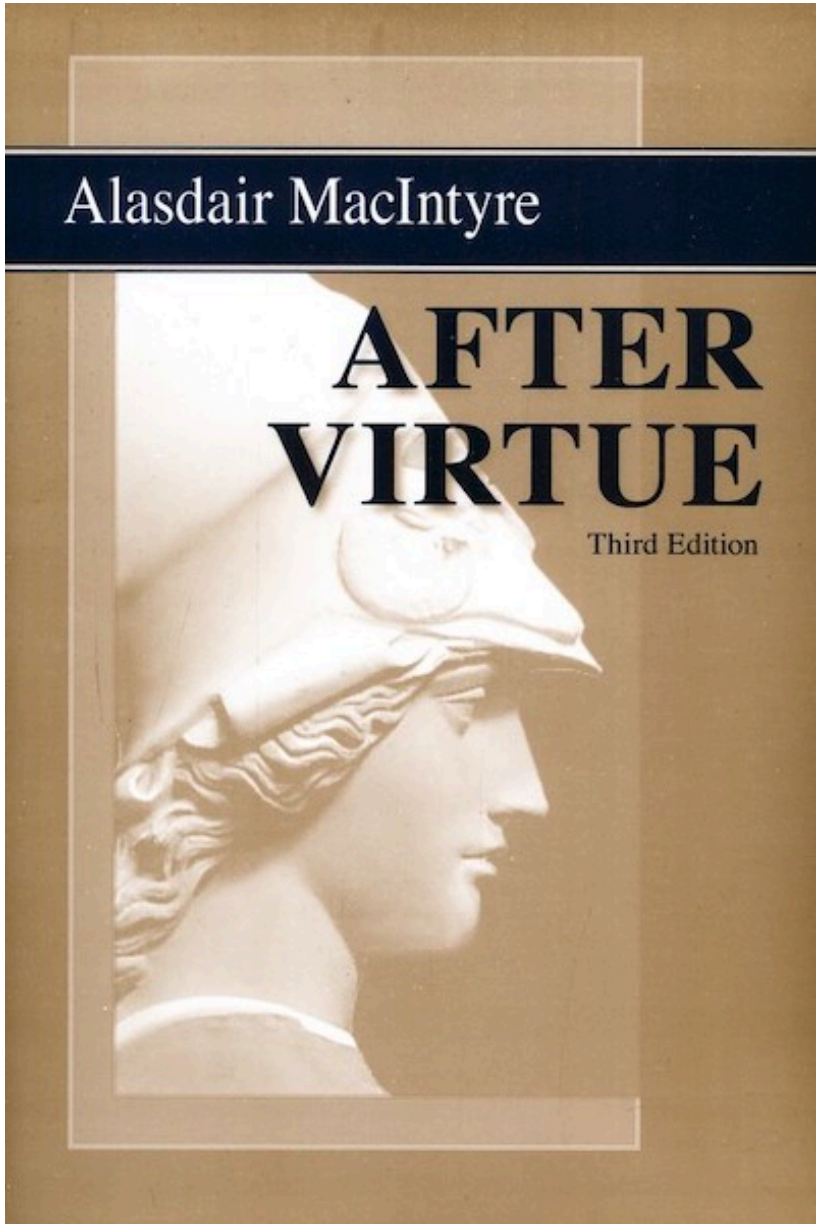


Photograph: Sean Smith/The Guardian

What grounds our values?

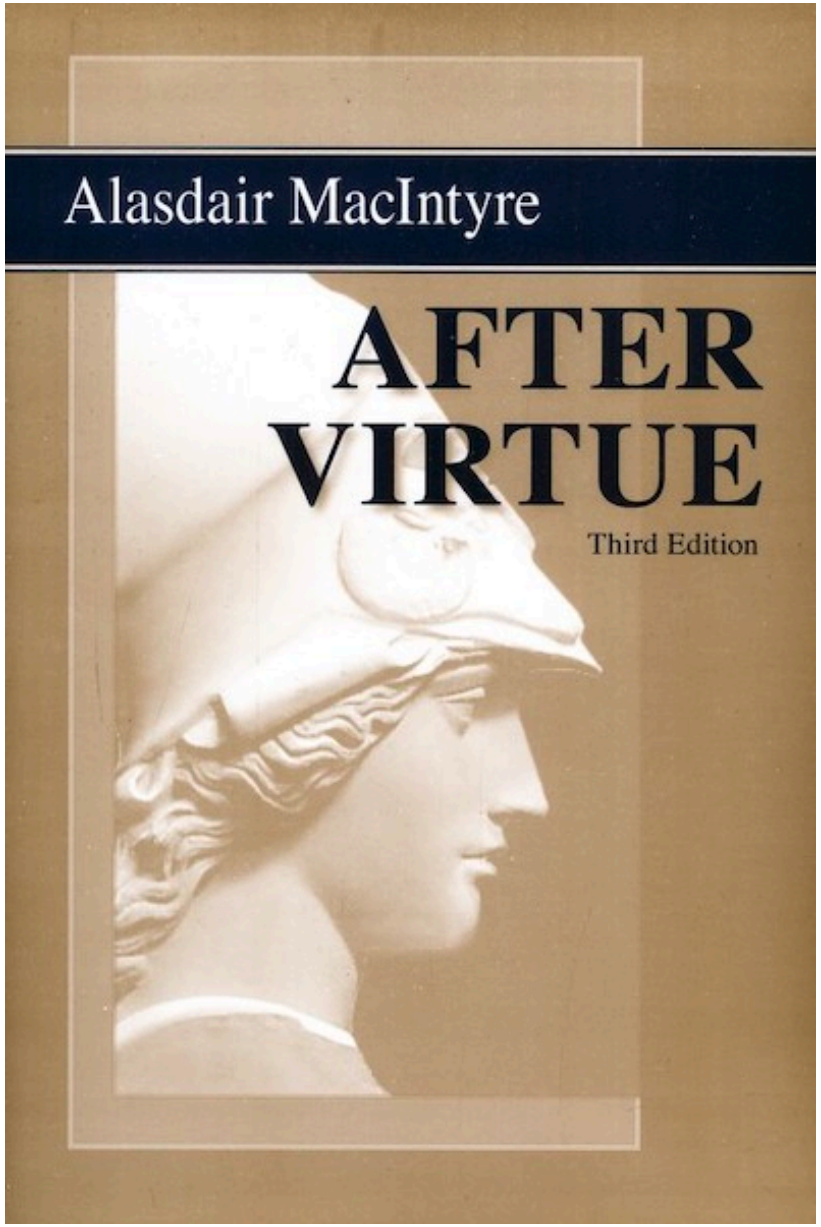


What gives our moral claims normative force?



What gives our moral claims normative force?

What is the source of their action-binding authority?

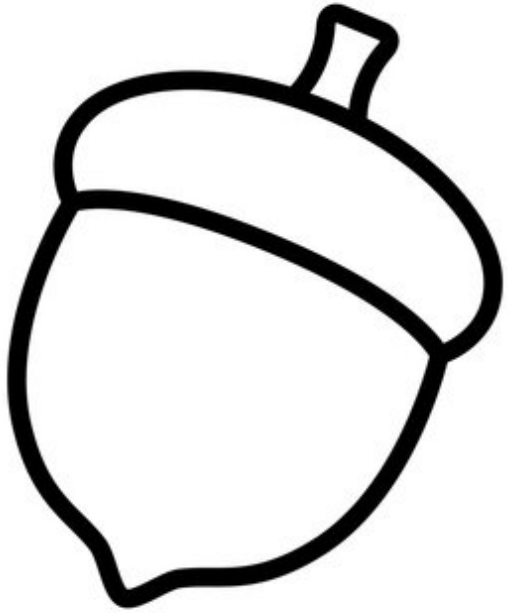


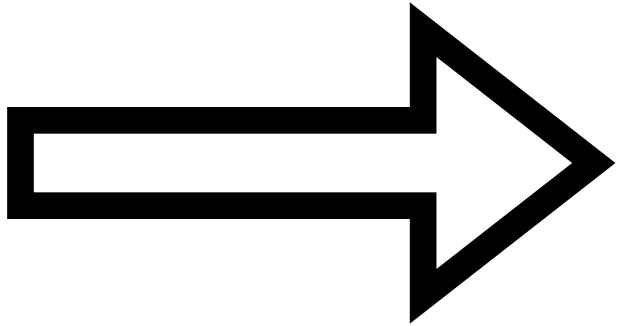
The moral law is holy (inviolable)…humanity must be holy to him.

Immanuel Kant



Public Domain







1. Restriction of teleology to the mind

"It is not bad to distinguish four causes: material, formal, efficient and final. But of these the Final is a long way from being useful; in fact it actually distorts the sciences except in the case of human actions."

Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*



Public Domain

2. Division of facts from values

Reasoning involves the “inferring of matter of facts….[whereas] moral good and evil belong only to the actions of the mind.”

David Hume, *Treatise*



Public Domain

3. Division of what ‘is’ from what one ought do

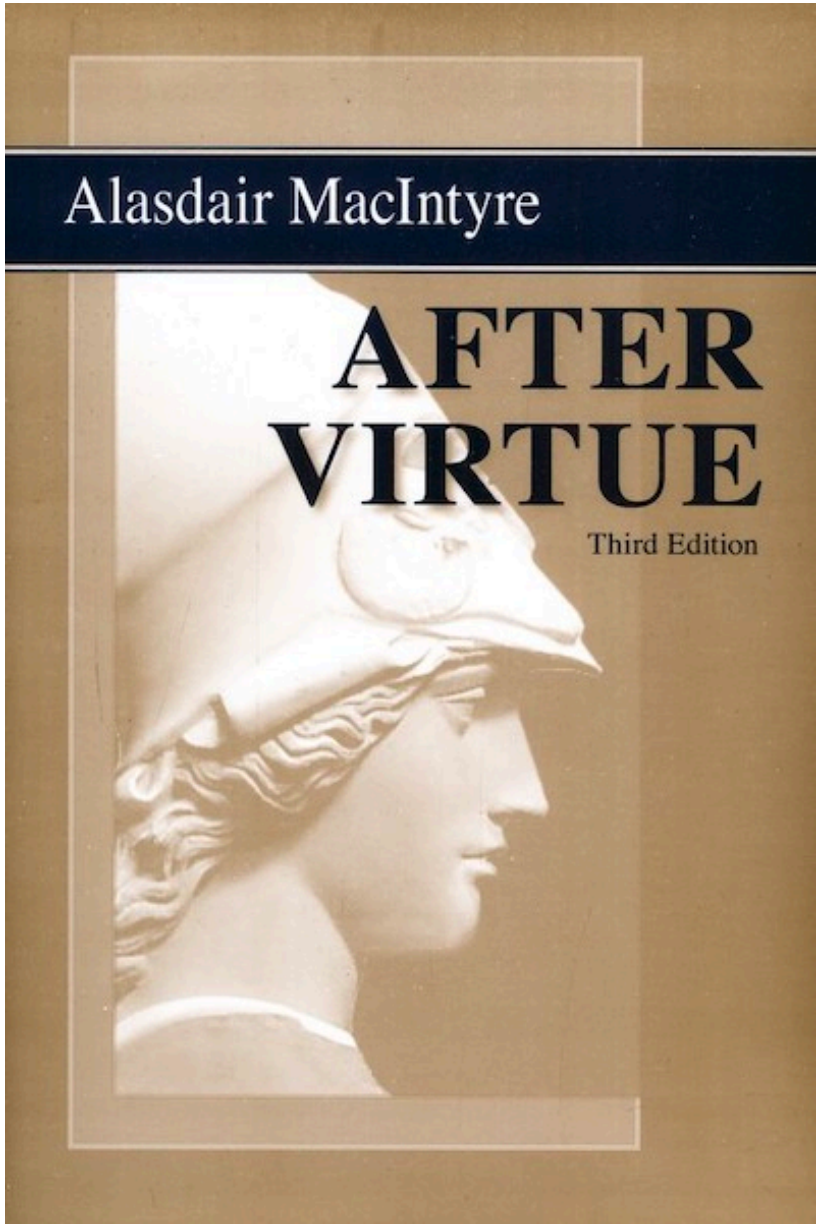
Reasoning involves the “inferring of matter of facts….[whereas] moral good and evil belong only to the actions of the mind.”

David Hume, *Treatise*



Public Domain

The evacuation of teleology from the cosmos is the reason our moral debates are intractable.



Early modern ethics consists in various, contradictory attempts to respond to this crisis and re-found morality.



Francis Bacon, Figure in a Landscape
© Estate of Francis Bacon. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2023

University of St Andrews



After Metaphysics

Karl Barth's Theological Ethics

Ethics is “supremely critical because it questions not only individual human actions from the standpoint of general modes of action, but also general human modes of action from the standpoint of the good.”

Karl Barth,
Church Dogmatics, II/2, 413.



Colijn de Coter - Fragment du retable du jugement dernier - l'archange Saint Michel
Commons:Quality images candidates/Archives March 2012

Ethics “do not emerge from reality; they descend into it.”

Karl Barth,
Church Dogmatics, III/4, 22.



Colijn de Coter - Fragment du retable du jugement dernier - l'archange Saint Michel
Commons:Quality images candidates/Archives March 2012

“It must come to me as something alien, as the command of another… If there is an ought, it must not be the product of my own will, but touch from outside the whole area of what I can will of myself. It must lay upon me the obligation of unconditioned truth—truth which is not conditioned by myself.”

Karl Barth,
Church Dogmatics, II.2 651.



Colijn de Coter - Fragment du retable du jugement dernier - l'archange Saint Michel
Commons:Quality images candidates/Archives March 2012

This amounts to a comprehensive critique of ‘immanent’ ethical systems, which, for Barth, includes most all early modern accounts of ethics.

“What begins with the human self cannot end with the knowledge of God and of His command.”

Karl Barth,
Church Dogmatics, II/2, 541.



Colijn de Coter - Fragment du retable du jugement dernier - l'archange Saint Michel
Commons:Quality images candidates/Archives March 2012

Kaiser’s case for war, delivered to the Reichstag, written by Adolf von Harnack.

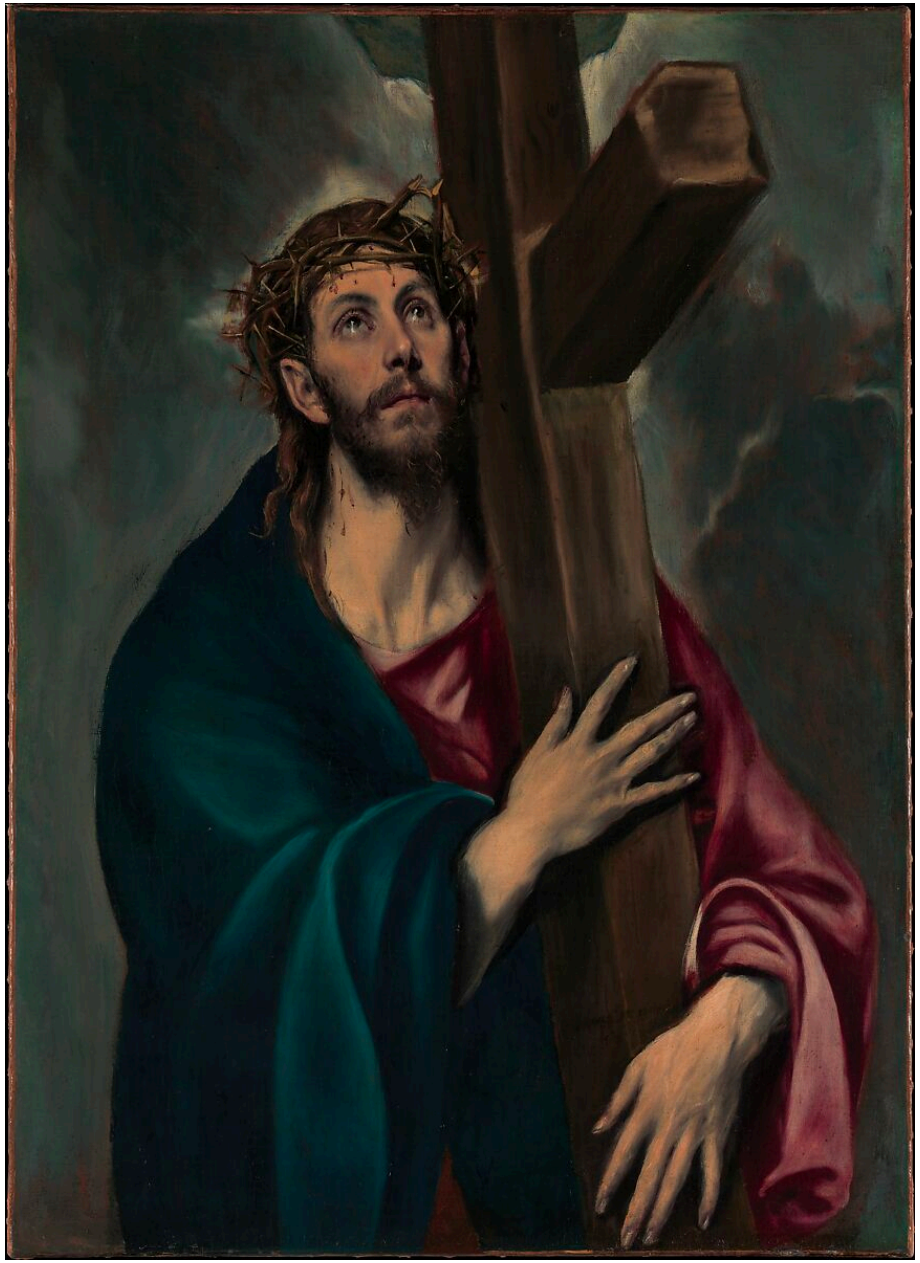
‘Manifesto of the Ninety-Three’ endorsement by 93 German intellectuals, 11 of whom went on win Nobel Prises.



Adolf von Harnack
Public Domain

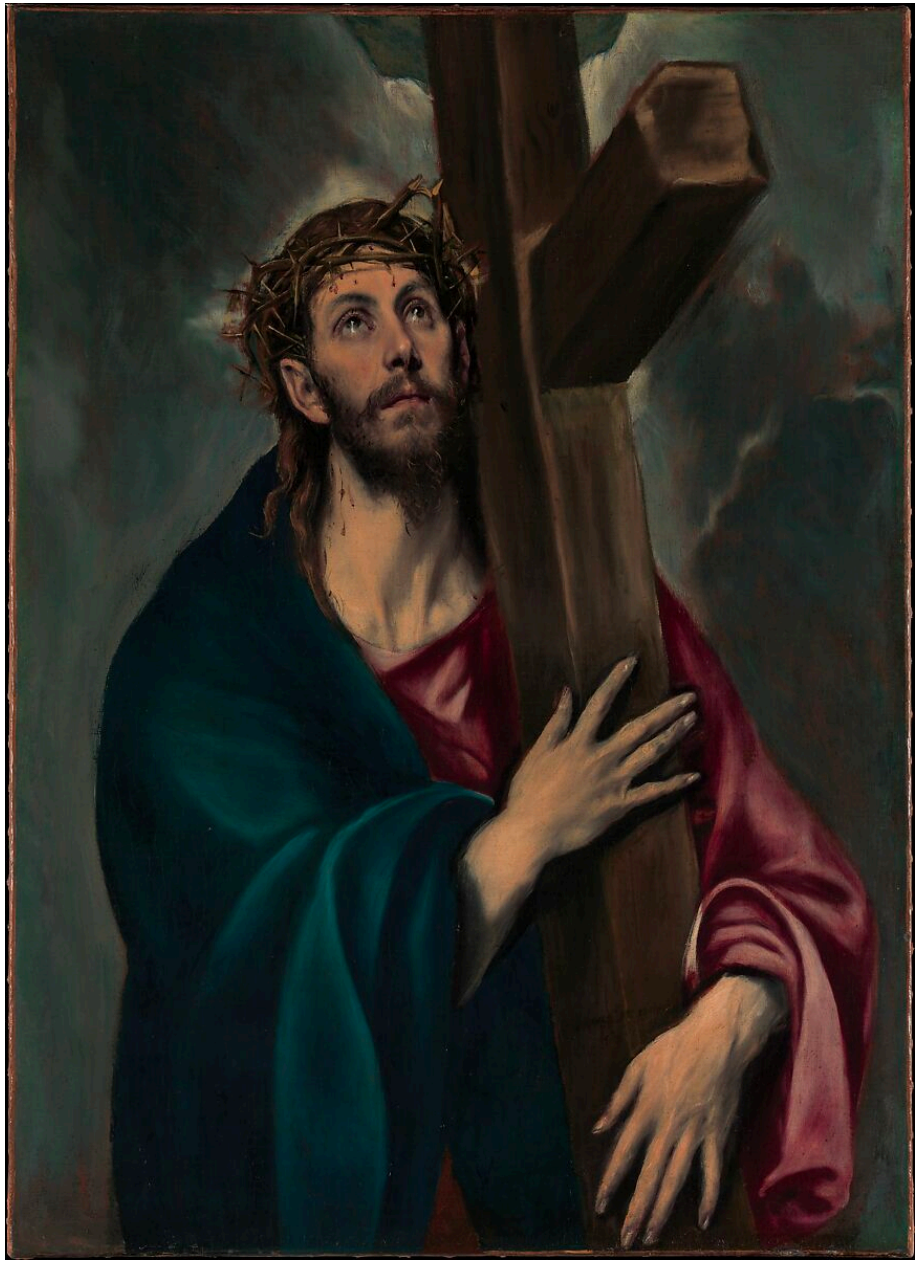
“The good required by the command of God is not a general and intrinsic good, as is presupposed in every moral scheme, but the good of the divinely controlled history of the covenant of peace and its subsequent developments, the good of God’s eternal election of grace, the good which bears the name of Jesus Christ.”

Karl Barth,
Church Dogmatics, II/2, 704.



Christ Carrying the Cross, El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos)
Public Domain

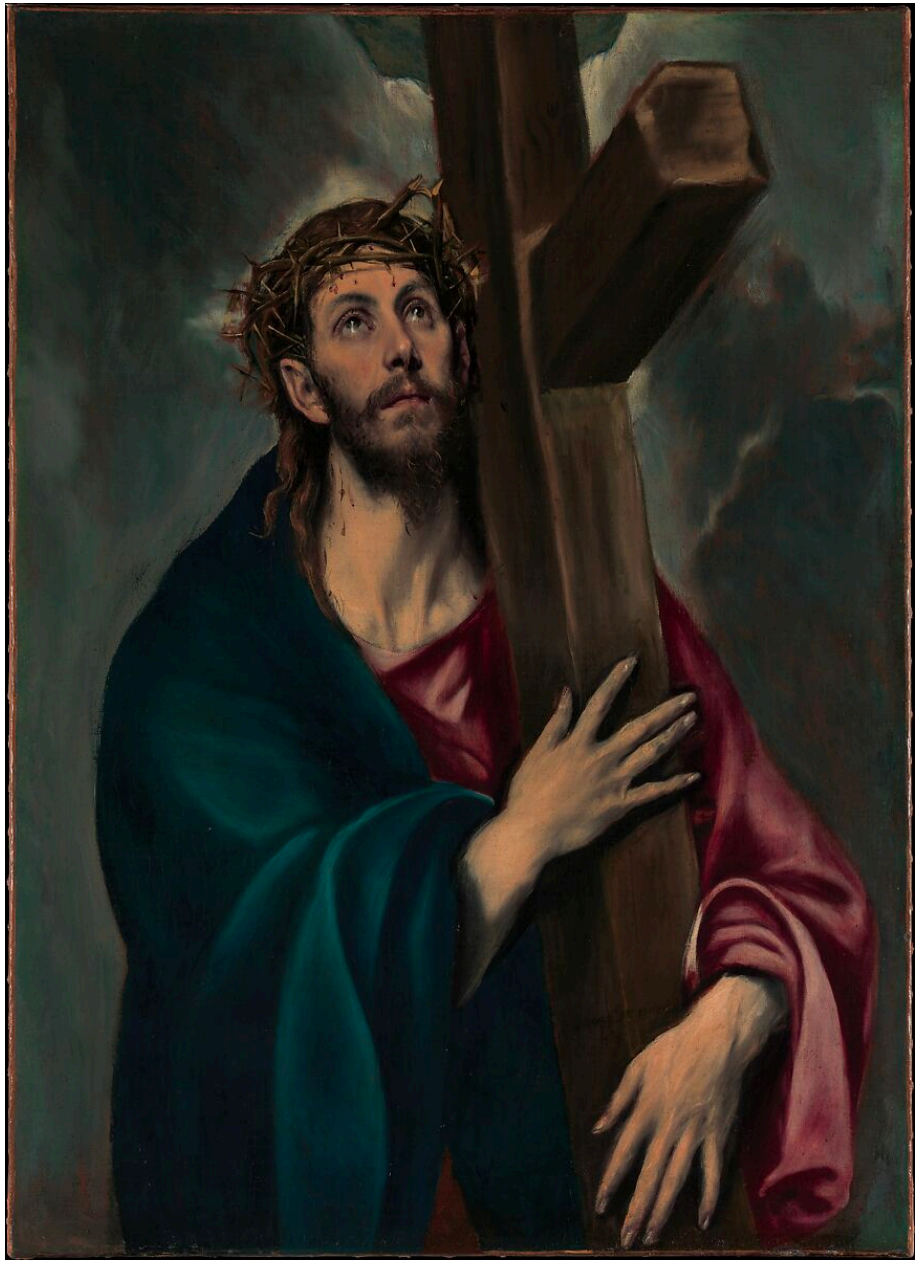
1. Unity of theology with ethics



Christ Carrying the Cross, El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos)
Public Domain

1. Unity of theology with ethics

2. The existential command of God rather than teleology or law

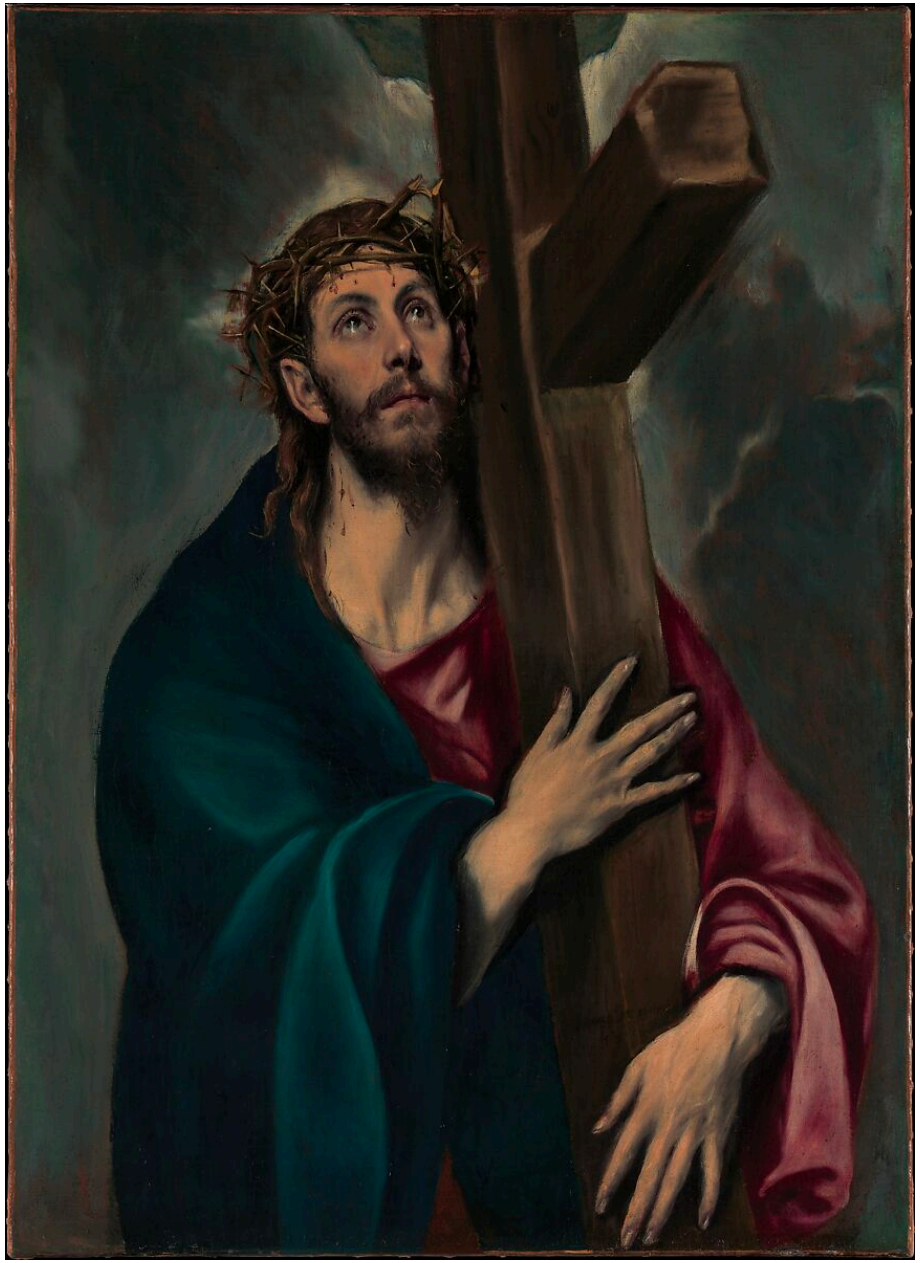


Christ Carrying the Cross, El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos)
Public Domain

1. Unity of theology with ethics

2. The existential command of God rather than teleology or law

3. A theological ontology



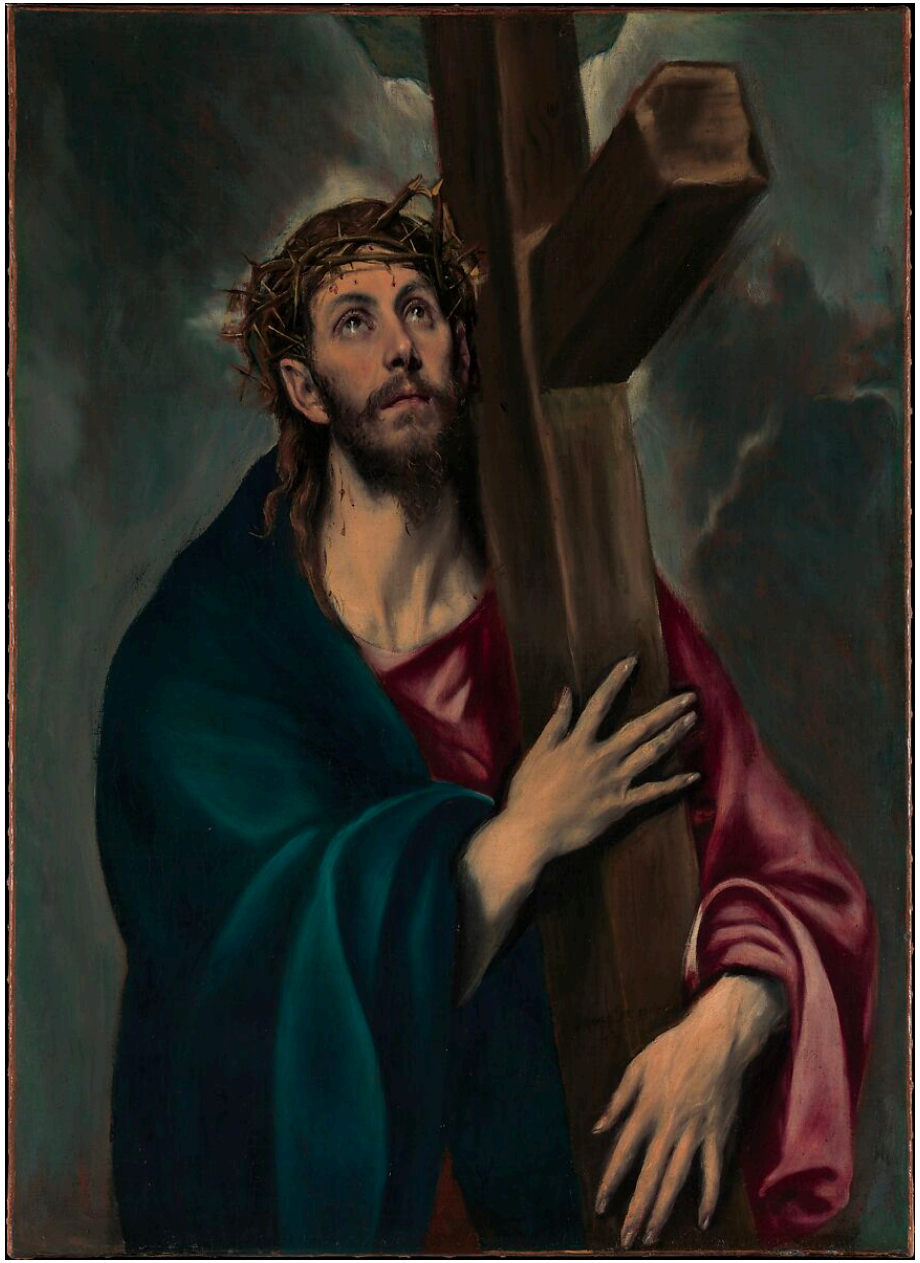
Christ Carrying the Cross, El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos)
Public Domain

1. Unity of theology with ethics

2. The existential command of God rather than teleology or law

3. A theological ontology

4. Ethics as grateful attestation



Christ Carrying the Cross, El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos)
Public Domain

Assessment and Final Reflections



Botticelli and Pollaiolo - Theological and Cardinal Virtues
Public Domain