

Morality of Human Acts

Introduction

- I. **Soul, *Catholic Dictionary* (Rev. Fr. John Hardon, S.J.)** The spiritual immortal part in human beings that animates their body. Though a substance in itself, the soul is naturally ordained toward a body; separated, it is an 'incomplete' substance...As a simple and spiritual substance, the [rational] soul cannot die....Animals and plants are also said to have souls, which operate as sensitive and vegetative principles of life. Unlike the human spirit these souls are perishable. The rational soul contains all the powers of the two other souls and is the origin of the sensitive and vegetative functions in the human being.
- II. Hierarchy of creatures
 - a. Vegetative soul – Nutrition, growth, and reproduction – Physical body
 - i. Plants
 - b. Sensitive soul – Use of senses – Powers of the vegetative soul – Physical body
 - i. Animals
 - c. Rational soul – Rational intellect – Free will
 - i. Man – Powers of the sensitive and vegetative soul – Physical body
 - ii. Angels – No physical body

Passions

- I. Passions connect the sensitive powers to the intellectual powers
 - a. **CCC 1764** [The passions] form the passageway and ensure the connection between the life of the senses and the life of the mind.
- II. Passions are not good or evil in themselves (cf. CCC 1767)
- III. Our intellect and will should govern our passions, not the other way around
- IV. We are not robots and our passions should assist us in our attempt to live holy lives
- V. Saint Thomas Aquinas lists 11 passions
 - a. Irascible
 - i. Hope and despair
 - ii. Fear and daring (courage)
 - iii. Anger
 - b. Concupiscible
 - i. Love and hatred
 - ii. Desire and aversion
 - iii. Joy and sadness

The Law

- I. Types of Law
 - a. Eternal Law - "The plan of divine wisdom, insofar as it directs all the actions and events of the universe. It is, therefore, the unchangeable effective decree

of God binding the whole of creation to the fulfillment of its purpose, and to the use of such means for attaining this purpose as are adapted to each nature.”

- b. Natural Law - “As distinct from revealed law, it is ‘nothing else than the rational creature’s participation in the eternal law’ (Summa Theologiae, 1a, 2ae, quest. 91, art. 2). As coming from God, the natural law is what God has produced in the world of creation; as coming to human beings, it is what they know (or can know) of what God has created.”
- c. Human Law - “Legislation imposed by human authority, implementing the natural law...No human law that contradicts the natural law is a true law, but it need not merely re-echo the natural law.”
- d. Revealed Law - “The sum total of all the prescriptions that God has communicated to the human race by way of supernatural revelation. It is, therefore, revealed law as distinct from the knowledge of God’s will attainable by human reason alone.”

- II. **Romans 1:18-23** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.

How to Determine if an Act Is Morally Good

- I. See handout ‘How to Determine if an Act Is Morally Good’ for more information
- II. Determinants
 - a. ‘Object’ – What you are doing
 - i. Morality of the ‘Object’ is objective to the act
 - ii. **CCC 1751** The *object* chosen morally specifies the act of the will, insofar as reason recognizes and judges it to be or not to be in conformity with the true good.
 - iii. Means to an end – The ‘Object’ is the means
 - 1. **CCC 1755** *object of the choice* can by itself vitiate an act in its entirety.
 - iv. If the ‘Object’ is intrinsically evil, the entire act is evil apart from the other two determinants
 - b. ‘End’ – Why you are doing what you are doing
 - i. **CCC 1752** The end is the first goal of the intention and indicates the purpose pursued in the action...[it] is not limited to directing individual actions, but can guide several actions toward one and the same purpose...One and the same action can also be inspired by several intentions, such as performing a service in order to obtain a favor or to boast about it.

- c. 'Circumstances' – Everything around the act, including the consequences
 - i. **CCC 1754** The *circumstances*, including the consequences, are secondary elements of a moral act."
- III. For an act to be good, all three determinants must be good
 - a. **CCC 1753** A good intention...does not make behavior that is intrinsically disordered...good or just.
 - b. No matter if 'Circumstances'...
 - i. **CCC 1754** increase or diminish the moral goodness or evil of human acts...[or if they] diminish or increase the agent's responsibility.... Circumstances of themselves cannot change the moral quality of acts themselves; they can make neither good nor right an action that is in itself evil."

Moral Principles to Follow

- I. See handout 'Moral Principle to Follow'
- II. Principle of double effect
 - a. Before you attempt to apply this principle, both the 'Object' and 'End' must be good
 - b. **Summa Theologiae, II-II q. 64 a.7 (Saint Thomas Aquinas)** Though proceeding from a good intention, an act may be rendered unlawful, if it be out of proportion to the end.
 - c. **Summa Theologiae, II-II q. 64 a.7 (Saint Thomas Aquinas)** Wherefore if a man, in self-defense, uses more than necessary violence, it will be unlawful: whereas if he repel force with moderation his defense will be lawful. ... it is lawful to repel force by force, provided one does not exceed the limits of a blameless defense.