

Introduction to Moral Theology

Romanus Cessario O.P.

Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001

Vatican II and *Veritatis Splendor* and *Catechism of the Catholic Church* have seen the eclipse of old casuistry and a return to Thomistic moral realism

So knowing whole Christian doctrine - what is God like, what is man, what is the purpose and happiness of man etc - is vital dimension of moral theology.

Moral realism - there is a natural and proper order of things and a right (true) way of seeing / understanding them. "proceeds on the assumption that the plan of divine Providence is both wise and loving, and that submission of all things to God results not in their destruction but in their flourishing." xviii

Need revelation from God - and have got it.

Importance of philosophical anthropology.

"the foundations of all moral truth abide in God himself and reflect his wisdom" xxi

"the wellspring of human activity is found in the voluntary" xxi

Chapter One - The Starting Point for Christian Moral Theology

"moral theology as integrally united with dogmatic and spiritual theology" 1

exitus-reditus scheme

- illumines doctrine of creation
- makes sense of religious language
- gives human existence meaning: "journeying back to God ... the human person is set between God as both Origin and Goal" 5

"Christian moral th-y proposes specific views about the place that the created order holds in moral reasoning, about the nature of theol-l doctrine, and about the ultimate destiny that belongs to each human person. For these reasons, sound moral theology always points to Christ." 6

"The analysis of the general principles of moral theology belongs to the "first part of the second part" of th *Summa theologiae*; in Latin, the *prima secundae*." 8 n.18

"As a practical science ordained to guide human actions, moral theology supplies authoritative direction for the *reditus*, the return journey of the human creature to God." 15

Four features of Realist Moral Theology:

1. "because it derives from a single source, *sacra doctrina* composes a unity

2. moral theology is a science of faith

"because it claims a privileged source of authenticity, Christian morality is not therefore restricted to those already persuaded for whatever reason to accept its truthfulness. Christian moral theology is not a sectarian enterprise." 19

"Only the act in conformity with the good can be a path that leads to life" VS 44

3. concerned first of all "to explain the good ends of human flourishing" 20

"... because human reason is able to discover what suits the in-built entelechies of human nature, the Christian moral theologian can confidently expound on the teleological dimension of the moral life without undue appeal to legal sanctions and punishments. Behind this optimism that eschews moral badgering stands an unshakeable confidence in the Christian teaching, suggested in Greek philosophy, that the end draws." 20

"God and the things that direct us to God specify the kind of life that the Christian should embrace."
21

4. proper attn to the revelation that the HS furnishes. Chrysostom - Moses came down from mountain with tablets of stone. Apostles came down carrying the Holy Spirit.

The Human Person as *Imago Dei*

"Mistakes about the human being prompt mistakes in ethics" 22

Aquinas - "the principles of the being and of the truth of anything are the same" 23 - absolutely central to moral realism.

- "an agent produces something like itself" (*omne agens agit simile sibi*)
- we are in God's image
- God is pure act
- so we tend to actuality and actualization of capacities is part of our imaging

Human Flourishing and *Beatitudo*

"Deliberate moral action falls between desire and fulfillment" 32

Thus dealing with real things (as perceived). "The human person acts for a *ratio bonitatis*, for what is understood to be good and because it is good" 32 n.81

"Acting is morally good when the choices of freedom are *in conformity with man's true good* and thus express the voluntary ordering of the person towards his ultimate end: God himself, the supreme good in whom man finds his full and perfect happiness." VS 72 32-33

Ends

- ultimate end - *finis cuius gratia* - end-for-sake-of-which (what aiming at ultimately)
- proximate end - *finis cui* - end-to-which (what actually draws you at this moment)
- means - *finis quo* - end-by-which - (means)

"Reality and the good dominate Christian ethics" 38

"Both deontology and teleology find their legitimate expression in Christian moral theology" 44

"Moral realism operates within the framework of a highly refined teleology. I would describe a Christian moral theology as one which explains and evaluates human behaviour on the basis of whether or not a given human action properly and opportunely attains a good which conduces to the complete perfection of the agent." 44

"God alone satisfies" 50

Chapter Two - Moral Realism and the Natural Law

"The Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar referred to Christ as the "Concrete Norm" of the moral life."
p.57

Eternal law - how God knows the world to be (partly cos he made it). The proper way of looking at what is true and therefore what is good.

"No created act is other than a natural but ontologically deficient imitation of God who is self-subsisting pure act." 78

Aquinas: "natural law embodies nothing other than a participation of the eternal law in the rational creature"
Ia-IIae, q.91, a.4, ad.1

"The first directive or inclination of natural law, viz., that the good must be sought and done, forms the ground for all other natural law inclinations." 87

"*bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum*" axiom - "Good is to be done and pursued and evil avoided".

But is that a truism - does that inevitably happen ?

Even if so, it remains "normative for every human act" 88 - cos it points out that it is the good and not just the perceived good that is meant.

"Three structural tendencies of human nature lie at the foundation for the moral life" 89

- a) generally - has being - so self-preservation
- b) generically - is animal - procreation and rearing of children
- c) specific - rational - knowledge of truth about God and society.

form the "three primary precepts of the natural law" 90

"basic inclinations in the human person to embrace the perfective ends of human flourishing" 91

[Aquinas: Capital punishment: "Abraham in consenting to kill his son, he did not consent to homicide, since it was right that his son should be put to death by the command of God, who is the Lord of life and death. For it is God who inflicts the punishment of death on all men, just as well as unjust, on account of the sin of our first parent, and if man carries out that sentence on the authority of God, he is no murderer any more than God is." Ia-IIae, q.100 a.8, ad 3]

Chapter Three - The Origin and Structure of Virtuous Behaviour

"Natural law quickens both the human cognitive and conative powers. As we have seen, it establishes in the human person the foundation for an *entente-cordiale* between the intelligent pursuit of moral truth and the human appetite for the good. In human acts, reason and will are rooted together." 100

"Voluntariness refers to the plain fact that human actions proceed from both human reason and will ... will as the rational appetite". 101

Aquinas: "willing embodies an inclination following upon a form as understood" - "*inclinatio sequens formam intellectam*" 101

"voluntariness signifies the self-mastery which the human person can possess over his or her activity"

Aquinas: "man as the source of actions which are his own and fall under his responsibility and control" intro to Ia-IIae

"Moral realism introduces a useful distinction between the voluntary and the free. Every free act is voluntary, but not every voluntary act attains the perfection of human freedom." 104

"moral theologians ascribe the full weight of praise or blame only when it is a case of a person's fully voluntary activity." 106

****"to sum up: a voluntary action is one which finds its principle from within the agent and which proceeds with knowledge of the end." Ia-IIae, q.6, a.1 108

"interiority and due knowledge serve as the criteria for evaluating a human action's voluntary character." 108

the *hostes voluntarii* - enemies of the voluntary - violence, fear, ignorance and lust.

"The four enemies of voluntary action either restrict the requisite knowledge for deliberate human activity or intrude upon the interiority which distinguishes authentic human conduct from what happens spontaneously"

1) violence - coercion - "When some form of physical violence overcomes a person, he or she becomes completely instrumentalized to the will of the aggressor." 110

2) fear - "alarm of mind which shapes the way we react to some evil which is absent but likely to befall us" 111. "While he jettisons his cargo freely, still, throwing the goods overboard expresses voluntary action only after a fashion, for he certainly would act otherwise if not for the sure perception that his fragile bark might sink and his life would be lost. Actions induced by fear exemplify the voluntary only in a qualified sense of the term for apart from the concrete circumstances which precipitate the fear, the individual would not have acted in such a way." 111

3) lust / passion - "precisely because of its drawing-from-within dynamism, lust always increases the voluntary character of an action, and this is for the better if the action be virtuous." 30 (the interiority characteristic of the voluntary increases.

*** "It is possible that the evil done as the result of invincible ignorance or a non-culpable error of judgment may not be imputable to the agent; but even in this case it does not cease to be an evil, a disorder in relation to the truth about the good." VS 63 q 113. "This salutary warning should inform both good moral theology and sound pastoral practice." 113

Sorts of ignorance.

Involuntary ignorance: "since ignorance leaves one liable to embracing evil, this state, though excusable, does not therefore portend happiness for the ... person. The moral realist finds no comfort in the adage, "ignorance is bliss". " 114

"Aquinas's action theory":

"to illustrate how human reason and appetite combine to direct what moral agents accomplish" 117

"Twelve acts of the mind": but remember that "actions rightfully belong to the whole person" 118

About the end	Volitio
	1. Perception
	2. Wish
	Intentio
	3. Judgment
	4. Intention
About the means	Prudence: Counsel
	5. Deliberation
	6. Consent
	Prudence: Judgment
	7. Decision
	8. Choice
	Prudence: Command
	9. Command
	10. Application
About the end	Fruitio
	11. Performance
	12. Completion

"the schema serves to illustrate the dynamic inter-penetration of mind and will and the mutual action and reaction of their partial acts on one another" 121

"the two basic capacities of the rational soul - intellect and will" 122

"Central to a realist conception of freedom remains the conviction that human choosing in itself does not constitute an ultimate value for human existence ... The Christian religion holds that for a person to find

union with God constitutes an infinitely greater blessedness than for a person to secure the right to choose among a range of options." 123-4

"Virtue, in other words, supplies more than a description of moral goodness. As developed with the Thomist tradition, the virtues constitute real sources of human action, working in both efficient and final causality. They are true dispositions for action, operative habits (*habitus*) that energize both the quest and the attainment of a happy life." 128

"Conscience-centered accounts of the moral life favor recourse to theoretical reason in order to ground moral behaviour, or they combine elements of deontology with a sense of obligation in order to spell out the requirements of the moral order. While encouraging the free exercise of choice, theories of this kind also promote an individualism that is irreconcilable with authentic Christian personalism and the community structure in which alone it can flourish." 132

"With few exceptions, modern moral philosophy follows one of two directions: first, schools of emotivism propose sincere feelings as the ultimate moral criterion, and second, schools of moral cognitivism propose a variety of ways for the intellect to dictate a course of action. Various factors in the history of moral philosophy account for the fact that few theories recognize two crucial truths: first, that rational principles no matter how well defined cannot adequately ensure that a particular human action really instantiates moral goodness; secondly, that the appetites in themselves lack the ability to develop a full moral measure, even though one may allow that they contain the germ of virtue. Authentic prudence cultivates an intelligence measured by moral knowledge and capable of shaping human behavior toward virtuous ends as these are grasped by a rectified appetite." 143

pp.144-148 - Excursus on Freedom and Divine Providence.

pp.146-7 – quotes Aquinas, *ST Ia*, q.83, a.1, ad 3:

“God, therefore, is the first cause, Who moves causes both natural and voluntary. And just as by moving natural causes He does not prevent their acts being natural, so by moving voluntary causes He does not deprive their actions of being voluntary: but rather is He the cause of this very thing in them; for He operates in each thing according to its own nature.”

and

“To be moved voluntarily, is to be moved from within, that is, by an interior principle: yet this interior principle may be caused by an exterior principle; and so to be moved from within is not repugnant to being moved by another.” (*ST Ia*, q.105, a.4, ad 2)

then says that

"this theme of the dependence of creaturely activity upon God ... is quite arguably the essential and most delicate issue of Christian anthropology, and the central point of its variance with all rationalisms or what Maritain called "anthropocentric humanisms". It may even be argued that the historical challenge to this Thomist-Augustinian tradition (footnote 87 reads ... Posed originally in good faith by the Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina (1535-1600), but later developed so as to bracket the providentialist sense of human freedom, which arguably constitutes the most important anthropological point of departure between Christian and rationalist teaching. ...) constitutes an historically intra-Catholic source for radical ideological secularism, as contrasted with extra-Catholic sources (continental idealism, phenomenism, materialism)."

Chapter Four - The Form of a Good Moral Action

“The Christian realist recognizes authentic moral value in an action only when the action fully participates in the eternal law.” 155

“For within the schema of Aquinas’s moral realism all created moral goodness exists by reason of an intrinsic participation in the highest good which is God.” 156

“Every agent acts for the sake of an end” (*omne agens agit propter finem*)

“Every agent acts so as produce what is like itself” (*omne agens agit sibi simile*)

“The Christian tradition, however, maintains the view that not only should every human action aim to embrace the good, but in order to do so, every human action must acquire the pattern of the good. The end both draws and specifies.” 138

Object, end, and circumstances of an action. Three constitutive elements.

Bonum ex integra causa, malum ex quocumque defectu

The good is from the ordered and complete set of perfected causes, whereas from any defect whatsoever evil ensues. In other words ... in order to possess the full form of moral goodness, each of the three elements must be complete and good, but in order for the action’s form to be deficient, it suffices that only one element fall short of the mark.” 159

160

The Form of a Good Moral Action

Metaphysical Levels of Being

Specific Definition, i.e. genus with specifying difference, e.g., rational animal, elephant, baseball game.

Individuation, i.e., specific nature with individuating matter, e.g., this man, this grey elephant, last night’s ball game.

Personhood, i.e., the ultimately substituting personal reality, undivided within itself, incommunicable, and divided from all others, e.g., my uncle Russell.

Levels of Goodness in Moral Act

Specific Determination, i.e., object (*finis operis*), [moral objectives], e.g., judicial execution of the innocent, adultery, perjury.²⁹

Individual determination, i.e., circumstances, e.g., the judicial execution of a Christian missionary, adultery with your brother’s wife, perjury against the poor.³⁰

Personal determination, end [intention], e.g., to execute judicially an innocent man in order to save his family from destruction, to commit adultery in order to escape a death penalty, to give alms in order to be well thought of by others.³¹

The Chart: “The relationship between metaphysical distinctions of being and the levels of goodness that can exist in human actions” 159

I. Object: there are lots of real things out there and then lots of activities with and in relation to those things. That is the object of a moral action – a noun and a verb - a thing and the action done to that thing. Think etymologically: “ob-ject” – ob – against – jacens – throwing. Throwing something up against another thing.

“In order to specify an action as a particular type of action, we first consider the interplay of a given motion with some thing.” Objects specify actions. 168

“In short, “object” designates a specific reality which shapes the moral life and provides an identifiable description of a moral situation.” 168-9. An innocent life, another person’s spouse etc – then add an activity to the thing.

“The world as it exists offers real objects which take on a moral significance by the way in which we reasonably act towards them.” 169

“A sinful action is one that neither conforms to truth nor embodies goodness; sin is a privation of the due order that should inform a human action.” 170

II. End / intention. Personal purpose. (So talking here not re the “end of the purpose” – i.e. human telos - but re the “end of the deed” – i.e. the aim in doing this act).

End as both

- purpose
- result

*** *ST Ia-IIae q.18, a.6:* “Therefore the species of the human act is formally considered taken from the end and materially considered taken from the object of the exterior action.” 177

Need both for the act to be good.

But can be sinful either by

a) the matter of the act / object – e.g. killing an innocent person - is wrong even though the intention is good. . “The matter of an act may be such that it is not congenial to the form of an agent’s purpose” 177

Remember – “human intention cannot make inherently distelic acts to be naturally perfective.” 177

b) the form of the act / intention – i.e. false motive for good act – e.g. gluttony.

III. Circumstances “Moral circumstances are those moral conditions which are added to and modify the already existing moral substance of the act From the earliest times, it has been customary to list seven circumstances contained in the following verse:

“Quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxiliis, cur, quomodo, quando”

Who, what, where, by which means, why, how, when ? p.179 – quoting Prummer.

“Reason attests that there are objects of the human act which are by their nature "incapable of being ordered" to God, because they radically contradict the good of the person made in his image. These are the acts which, in the Church's moral tradition, have been termed "intrinsically evil" (*intrinsece malum*): they are such *always and per se*, in other words, on account of their very object, and quite apart from the ulterior intentions of the one acting and the circumstances.” 182

Chapter Five - The Life of Christian Virtue and Freedom

"Virtue is a good quality of mind, by which one lives righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us without us." Ia-IIae, q.55, a.4

215-6: Heading "Theonomy"

VS 41 "VS speaks about true freedom in terms of theonomy. This term means that our "free obedience to God's law effectively implies that human reason and will participate in God's wisdom and providence"

"True Christian freedom flourishes within the limites set by divine love and manifested in the order of nature and grace" 216

Appendix - Flight from Virtue - The Outlook of the Casuist Systems

Define casuist system - "a morality based on the formulation of precepts, the formation of conscience, and the obligation to obey duly established norms"

- tends to go with liberty of indifference freedom - have able choice between two courses of action - "power to choose between contraries"

- "nominalism's false sense of moral neutrality" - 231

"The classical casuist model was built upon three foundational pillars: law, liberty, and conscience" 231

"Any overly juridical construal of the moral life possesses its own set of built-in tensions" 231

can look v much like a legalistic system - a "certain mathematical approach to morality" 234

1. Laxism - find one authority to support action X and can do it
2. Probabilism - a solidly probably opinion even if not majority is OK
3. Probabiliorism - need to go with maj-y / consensus of proper authorities
4. Aequiprobabilism - can't go for marginal opinions in imp't matters
5. Rigorism or Tutorism - always go with the strictest course of action

Eight Features of Casuist Moral Theology:

1. The atomization of the moral action - "views each discreet (sic) action as an independent and isolated moment within the moral life" 237

2. Final cause - "like nominalism, casuistry practically eschews the notion of final causality ... To fill the place of final causality, the casuists streed obedience, which becomes the fundamental virtue of the casuist systems" 237

3. Disappearance of virtuous disposition: "confined their analysis of human freedom to the actual moment of free choice, these authors were unable to find a place for the virtuous dispositions that shape the character of the free person" 237

4. The punctual character of human autonomy

5. Extrinsicist view of law and liberty. "all law represents something extrinsic to the human person and constitutes a limitation on the person's God-given autonomy" 238

6. The juridicism of casuistry - best suited to those trained in the legal profession - "resolved moral difficulties in much the same way as the competing claims of two clients are arbitrated by a judge" 239

7. Individualism. "Casuistry fostered individualism and, therefore, failed to stress the social character of the Christian life" 240 Also exaggerated role of conscience

8. Minimalism - "emphasis on observance of norms and precepts."

post - Vatican II: "eclipse of the casuist model" 241

"The four-hundred-year history of casuistry supplies sufficient reason to recall the warning that Jesus addressed to the Pharisees: "They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger." (Mat 23.4)" 242