**Module Three, Lesson #1:** Free Human Action CCC nn. 1749-1775

**This week:**

Article IV. The nature of free **human acts** that move us toward (or away from) the goal 1749-1761

Specifically: the symphony of intellect & will in choosing freely in truth for love

Article V. A closer look at our embodiment: the **passions** & their relation to choosing 1762-1775

# Prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas

**Grant me grace, O Merciful God,**

**to desire ardently all that is pleasing to Thee,**

**to examine it prudently,**

**to acknowledge it truthfully,**

**and to accomplish it perfectly**

**for the praise and glory of Thy Name. Amen.**

**EXCURSUS: A Map of Human Psychology**

[See Handout “Virtue, Vice, Passions, Desires”]

**EXCURSUS: The Twelve Steps in a Free Human Action**

[See Handout: “A complete deliberate human act”]

**Article IV. The nature of free human acts that move us to (or away from) the goal 1749-1761**

**Specifically: the symphony of intellect & will in choosing freely in truth for love**

• Right reason informed by revelation => illuminates the truth/ falsehood of action (goodness vs. evil)

• The moral quality of an act resides not in fact of choosing but in the quality of that which is chosen.

• See Diagram of Human Acts:

1. “Acts happening in man” vs. “Human acts” (engaging intellect & will)
2. => objectively morally good (in accord with right reason discerning the true good) vs. objectively morally evil (contrary to right reason) [*malum*: assessment depends on three fonts / sources of morality (below); this is generally observable]
3. => subjective responsibility [*culpa*] for evil acts [*malum*] (assessment depends on discerning the individual’s knowledge and free ability; this is generally the stuff of the confessional & courts).

i.e. If someone commits an objectively evil act but lacks either the sufficient knowledge (and could not reasonably have known) or lacks sufficient freedom of will, he is more or less—perhaps entirely less—blameworthy/ responsible/ culpable. The act itself, however, does not thereby become excellent. Lack of blame does not turn an evil act into a morally upright one; the objective nature of the act does not change, only the subjective responsibility of the agent.

• The objective assessment of the moral goodness or evil of an act: Three fonts

1. **Object** = the “what” of the act (considered apart from the agent) 1751
2. **End / intention** = the “why” of the act; the agent’s motive/ reason/ end 1752
3. **Circumstances** = the “to whom” “where” “when” “in what manner” of the act—that either increase or diminish the evil or the good 1754

**Important:** For an act to be morally upright / good, **all three fonts must be in accord with right reason/ good**; if any one is contrary to right reason, the act as a whole is evil (1755).

No combination of circumstances or good intention of the agent can make an otherwise evil object now good; that is, there are some things I may NEVER do, regardless of circumstance or regardless of my intention. There ARE absolute moral norms. On the other hand, an objectively good object may become evil by virtue of my intention or of the circumstances.

• **One can never do an evil as a means to a good end**—otherwise, I am willing to do evil. 1754

Examples:

*For more thorough discussion, see Mark Lowery,* Living the Good Life *(Ann Arbor: Servant, 2003), chapter seven).*

• An act is morally good or morally evil not because the Church simply says so, but Church says so because it objectively is so. If some act is objectively evil, it is so for all human beings, not just for Christians or Catholics (though the practices of the Family of the Church themselves take on a moral quality). ALL HUMAN beings have the witness of conscience, witness of philosophy, witness of natural law (regardless of how capable we are of listening to those witnesses). What the Church illuminates is ultimate the Goal and the signposts that orient us (Law of the Gospel), and the Church is the vehicle of grace (power, life, divine aid).

• **NOTE WELL:** Right reason…demands clarity of intellect and proper ordering of the will, that is, the interior principle of action to perfect intellect & will: virtue.

• “The virtuous man is he who *freely* practices the good.” CCC 1804 OUR TOPIC NEXT WEEK

“The Christian moral life is emphatically not, as too many people mistakenly and unfortunately believe, basically a question of meeting obligations and obeying laws that inhibit human freedom. It is, rather, a matter of striving to become fully the beings God wants us to be, that is, persons who share forever his own divine life and happiness, an end attainable, with the help of God’s never-failing grace, by living a life of excellence, shaped by virtues, rooted in faith and hope, and animated by love.”

William E. May. “Recent Moral Theology: Servais Pinckaers and Benedict Ashley.” The Thomist, vol. 62, no.1 (Jan. 1998) 117.

**Article V. A closer look at our embodiment:**

**the passions & their relation to choosing 1762-1775**

• **the Range of Human Passion** [Hamburger! Example]

**Features of the Passions (Sense Appetites/ Emotions):**

• Are constitutive of embodied human nature, therefore are constitutive in human action.

[Walking on scaffolding example]

• Are **morally neutral per se**, **but take on a moral quality as soon as reason & will are engaged** (or ought to be engaged!) = the “raw material” of desire in the concrete particular.

• N.B. illuminate how temptation often works: the random desire…but not yet sin…

• Are appetitive powers **meant to help induce us rightly toward true goods** in the proper way in the hierarchy of the good…

• …But because we are fallen, **tend toward** disorder, unruliness, disproportion, dis-integration & enslavement => impel toward the **“abuse of freedom”** (sin).

• Therefore **need to be re-integrated** not by denial / repression, but **by governance of reason & will** (truth & the rational desire for the true good and all goods in proportionate way) => to order and channel.

• **To the degree they are disordered, to that degree are we not free**…to love and to attain Beatitude.

• To the degree they are disordered, to that degree are we unable to see truly (think clearly) or act freely.

• **Virtue** (intrinsic principle of action) and the influence of **law** and **grace** (exterior principles of action) all necessary for governance, for tutoring & educating our appetites.

N.B. **To be free, we can & must learn to want the right things in the right way at the right time.** We *can* *& must* educate our desires (rather than be beholden to them!).

• **Goal is** not to be dispassionate/ “stiff upper lip”/ Vulcan, but **passionate for true goods in proper way**!

• **The saints** / holy / “perfect” are those in whom the passions *work strongly* toward the proper good in concert with and as aid to reason and will => a symphony of sweet action rather than a cacophony of impulsive & destructive response.

*Do not confuse the passions with the will or with conscience!*

**Next Week: Putting it all together:** the roles of conscience and of virtues in living the *Imitatio Christi*, the humanly free and happy life, the life of loving as Christ has loved us.