

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

This week: “HUMAN ACTION ANIMATED FROM WITHIN BY GRACE”

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,	= GRACE
to desire ardently all that is pleasing to Thee,	= to desire
to examine it prudently,	= to discern
to acknowledge it truthfully,	= to decide
and to accomplish it perfectly	= to do
for the praise and glory of Thy Name. Amen.	= as self-gift to Him

Review: Our Desire & Our End (Goal): **Happiness**, union with The Good.
 A Hierarchy of The Good, of Happiness, of ALL the good(s) that make us happy.
 The *Summum Bonum*: **What we really want**: Friendship with God, Love, Beatitude.
 The Means to that End: Freedom: **“Human action, animated from within, by GRACE”**

EXCURSUS: A Look at Human Psychology: Intellect + Will + Embodied Passions

EXCURSUS: The Twelve Steps in a Free Human Action

**FREEDOM DEPENDS ON
 THE TRUTH OF WHAT
 HUMAN NATURE IS &
 “HOW WE WORK” (1731)**

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 power point Diagram of Human Acts:

- 1) **“Acts happening in man” vs. “Human acts”** (engaging intellect & will, deliberate & ‘free’)
- 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” (see below): WHAT I am doing, WHY I am doing, IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES. We can and must make judgments about the objective moral quality.
- 3) => **subjective responsibility** [= *culpa*] for evil acts [*malum*]: assessment depends on discerning the individual’s knowledge & free ability; this is generally the stuff of the confessional & courts & those with competent authority. Jesus warns against judging the subjective guilt or culpability of the heart. Only those with competent authority & Holy Spirit convict.

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**, she 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 doing the act.**

• The objective assessment of the moral goodness or evil of an act: three fonts (aspects):

- 1) **Object** = the “what” of the act (observable from viewpoint other than the agent’s) 1751
- 2) **End / intention** = the “why” of the act; the agent’s internal 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 (aspects) 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 disordered intention or of the wrong circumstances. And a good act may become exemplary (heroic, loving) by purity of intention and extreme circumstances.

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

Examples:

Notes: - Principle of “double-effect.”
- The reality of *formal* and *material* cooperation in evil.

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

• An act is morally good or morally evil **not because the Church simply says so, but the 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 for members of the Body of Christ). ALL HUMAN beings have the witness of conscience, witness of philosophy, witness of natural law (regardless of how practiced we are at listening to those witnesses). The Church illuminates the ultimate Goal and the signposts that orient us (Law of the Gospel) to that goal, and the Church is the vehicle of GRACE (power, divine aid) to attain that goal.

• **NOTE WELL: “Right reason” demands “clarity of intellect” and “proper ordering of the will,” that is, effective ordering of me interiorly, i.e., the excellent operation of my 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.**”

Article V. A closer look at our embodiment: the passions and how they affect choosing (1762-1775)

The Range of Human Passion [Example: Hamburger!]

Features of the Passions (Sense Appetites/ Emotions):

To be human is to *want* “in the body,” not only in will. To be free is to *want rightly* in the face of pleasure, difficulty, danger, fear.

- Are constitutive of embodied human nature, therefore are constitutive in human action.
READ 1763 [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 *felt (sensed) or imagined (in memory or imagination)* and **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** (knowing the truth & rationally desiring the true good and all goods in proportionate way) => to order and channel our embodied energies.
 - **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 **desire and act freely**.
 - **Virtue** (“me-well-ordered-within”), **self-denial**, and the influence of **law** and **grace** (extrinsic influences ordering me) are 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 & enslaved to them!).
- Our **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 **virtue** in living the *Imitatio Christi*, the humanly free and happy life, the life of “human action animated from within by GRACE,” the life of loving as Christ has loved us.