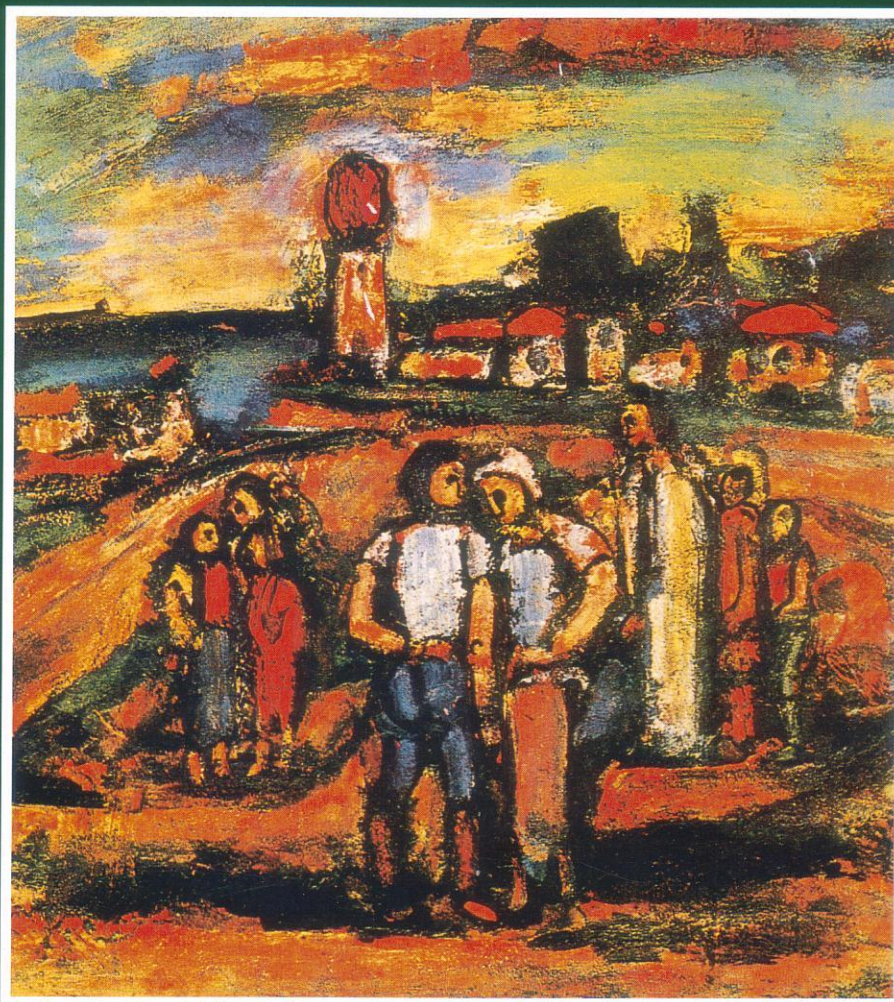


# PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

FUNDAMENTAL PART



Juan Manuel García de Alba, S.J.

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*PROFESSIONAL*  
ETHICS  
FUNDAMENTAL PART

***PROFESSIONAL***  
**ETHICS**  
**FUNDAMENTAL PART**

**Juan Manuel García de Alba, S. J.**

**Fourth Edition**

**Translated from the Spanish by William Quinn**



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Special collaboration

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To all young people  
who hunger and thirst  
to be better  
and who want to forge  
a more human world.

1<sup>st</sup> EDITION, 2009

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Periférico Sur Manuel Gómez Morfín 8585  
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- » Juan Card. Sandoval Iñiguez  
Archbishop of Guadalajara  
May 23, 1998
- » Msgr. Rosendo Huesca Pacheco  
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May 7, 1998.

**BISHOPS' COMMISSION  
NATIONAL SECRETARIAT  
FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURE**

Mexico City, May 7, 1998.

Rev. Juan Manuel Garca de Alba, S.J.

Dear Fr. Juan Manuel:

We find your book to be an excellent treatise on philosophical morals that makes an in-depth analysis of all the elements, both metaphysical (intellectual and value-centered) and existential (conditioned by bio-psychological, social, cultural, situational factors, etc.)

We also find interesting and praiseworthy the approach you give to the science of human action, by making it the essential instrument for educating the human person. The questionnaires at the end of each chapter are useful for stimulating students' thinking and helping them to discover the values that are latent in the topics they study, and to apply this knowledge to different life situations. To this end, I would suggest including questions or comments that contribute to



the formation of ethical attitudes in the practice of specific professional fields.

I would also suggest the inclusion of a discussion of the abortion issue in the section on human rights, as well as women's issues.

To conclude, I would like to make just one more suggestion, which may seem superfluous: it might be useful to include an analytical index of conceptual (philosophical) terms.

I hope this text is adopted as a textbook for courses taught on this subject at universities and institutions of higher education.

**Msgr. Rosendo Huesca Pacheco**

Archbishop of Puebla  
President of the Bishops' Commission  
for Education and Culture.

**Msgr. Francisco Robles Ortega**

Bishop of Toluca  
President of the Bishops' Commission  
for Education and Culture.

## PRESENTATION

It is a pleasure for me to present the book "Professional Ethics. Fundamental Part," published by the Mexican Association of Catholic Institutes of Higher Education, under the responsibility of Rev. Juan Manuel Garca de Alba M., S.J.

This work stands out on account of its personalist perspective on ethics, which tends toward perfection with the development of the person, society and history. It presents objective norms that apply to everyone and expressly disapproves of situational morality and subjective and individualistic ethics.

To deal with the challenges facing the world at the end of the second millennium, it is important to focus on the PERSON, in order to look deeply into his heart and discover there all the values that the Creator gave him, so that people can realize their full potential and reject all projects that demean their greatness and their ideals.

Troughout the book the reader finds God's injunction: "*Turn away from evil and do good, look for peace and pursue it,*" which will lead people to their fulfillment in harmony with their personal individuality in the context of their relationships with all of God's

Psalms 33,15.

creatures, giving rise to a new humanity that will always prefer the "*Civilization of Love*."

This work is presented as an urgent priority for the human and Christian education of all young people, especially those who will become leaders of society. Today's world calls for a profound renovation of the person and institutions, in order to achieve real change and usher in the new millennium of Christianity for the coming generations.

It should be pointed out that the book is written in a clear, pleasing style. The presentation with quotes from famous authors or brief summaries in the margins, the activities and different exercises, the generous bibliography with a short critical assessment of each work, give the book added educational value.

The content of the whole book can be summarized with the phrase that closes the book of Ecclesiastes: "*Fear God, and keep his commandments, since this is the whole duty of man. For God will call all hidden deeds, good or bad, to judgment.*"

Ecclesiastes 12:13

I congratulate all those who collaborated on this work, for they have set themselves a noble ideal and provided a quality service that will make an important contribution to the education of men and women of virtue and learning, so that they may be the leaven of the new humanity.

Guadalajara, Jal., May 23, 1998.

+JUAN CARD. SANDOVAL IÑIGUEZ  
*Archbishop of Guadalajara*

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## INTRODUCTION

*"One does not study ethics to know what is good, but to be good."*

Aristotle, ,  
Nicomachean  
Ethics, 1130 b.

This beautiful text by Aristotle clearly points out the meaning of ethics, but it also highlights Aristotle's fundamental error: knowledge as the sufficient and only requirement for achieving good and right action. The fundamental task in ethics is not to reason critically in order to know how to act, but to put what is



known into practice. It is not the same to know what is right as to put it in practice.

*"Ethics is good for nothing if it does not make you better."*  
Seneca,  
Letters to Lucilius n. V.

Ethics calls for more than knowledge, reflection and judgment, which belong to the intellectual sphere. It requires a love for what is good, for truth and virtue, a love for justice and right action. In short, it is a task that goes beyond information and leads to the formation of the ethical personality. The key to right action is not so much knowing what is good, as loving what is good.

But Aristotle's text is right on one thing: the study of ethics is ultimately about practice.

### **0.0 Responsibility for living**

Life is not just something that we have been given; it is also what we make of it. By living we direct and modify our life. We must make our life with others.

*"Beautiful and divine is the burning desire that drives you to look for the reasons of things; but practice and become skilled in these efforts (to see and understand things) while you are young, otherwise the truth will slip through your fingers."*  
Plato.

And in order to "make my life," I must critically accept the elements that are given to me, which include not only those that keep me alive biologically, but also those that keep me alive as a human being, i.e., norms and judgments governing behavior, as well as customs, ideas and values. That is my world, where I am situated and where I must fulfill myself as a person.

Accepting life implies accepting the world. We have to fulfill ourselves in this world that was given to us along with our life, and even though it is a world that is thrust upon us, we must accept it critically. The

obligation of making our own life is what compels us to engage in ethical reflection.

We cannot live in peace with ourselves, our families and our society unless we make a conscious decision and effort to do so. People grow in humanity when they strive to grow.

### **0.1 What is ethics?**

We understand ethics to be the fundamental structure that sustains the study of moral ideas and actions, as well as the order of human life that makes us see, understand and experience reality as a humanizing element. Its field of interest includes those faculties that are involved in the ethical dimension of the human person, as well as the set of criteria, principles, norms and values that are characteristic of human beings.

Etymologically the word ethics comes from the Greek word "ethos", which means "custom, way of acting."

Ethics concerns itself with how to live humanly; it is the science that studies people's action as it relates to their self-fulfillment, in all fields and as an integrated whole. It also considers the effects or consequences of human action.

An ethical way of conducting business implies fair, proper, honest behavior.

Ethics provides an answer to the problems of justifying and making sense of human action; ethical problems are thus human problems. But it is not the job of ethics to set down the actual rules of behavior. That is the domain of morality: the "mores" or prevailing customs. Each human group has different mores, which are determined by a great number of factors. This is why morality is relative to each society, group or institution.

It is up to morality to prescribe how a person is to act under certain circumstances, which in Thomistic philosophy calls for the virtue of prudence.

Ethics is reflection about the reasons that make a given morality valid; in this sense it is what justifies morality, or lays the groundwork for it. Ethics also provides criteria for judging morality. Ethics is the rational attempt to know how to live humanly and to actually set out to do so.

God's demands are always grounded in reality. Thus the inner need of our being is what God demands.

We study human reality in order to find criteria, principles and values that allow us to be better and to make the world we live in better. We study an ethics grounded in the reality of the human person. In this way we propose an objective, rational and reasonable ethics that is valid for all people in any place, culture or time.

Human activity encompasses a wide range of fields and facets, which is why there are so many specialized fields within ethics: business ethics, economic ethics, engineering ethics, medical ethics, sexual ethics, family ethics, communication ethics, etc. All of these branches, and many others, fall under the generic heading of specialized ethics. This book offers the elements to construct a fundamental ethics, i.e., the basic points that are common to all areas of human activity. We will find criteria and principles that shed light on areas of personal, social, economic and professional life.

Fundamental ethics thus looks at all fields of human activity. What does it mean to be a moral subject and what steps must be taken to become one? How does

ethical living relate to social living? What elements are involved in a decision and how do they relate to each other? What grounds do we have to state that certain actions are right and others are wrong? What happens when values conflict and how can these conflicts be resolved? What "good" does it do to be good? What practical purpose does it serve to act ethically?

We will devote a part of this book to resolving current problems of specialized ethics that may be of interest. For this we will apply criteria, values and principles that should be present in our decision-making and that will help us to judge objectively.

## **0.2 Objective of ethics**

People engage in ethical reflection as a way to develop themselves personally and to help others be fully human. This can be achieved by becoming aware of the principles governing human beings' actions, including their means, their purposes, and their possibilities. The purpose of ethics is to help people discover their own fulfillment and their own good, within the context of, and commitment to, the common good.

The human person's most wonderful encounter is with herself; her work of art is the making of herself.

By studying ethics we seek to orient ourselves as people with respect to values and what is right. This kind of study helps us to be freer, more supportive of others, more truthful, more authentic; to live our lives in accordance with our own decisions, to identify with values that make people more human. The task of ethics is not just to organize a body of knowledge, but to humanize people.

The vocation of the human person entails a two-fold purpose: personal and social. Social, because it unfolds within a society where everyone has the same vocation in correlation with everyone else. Personal, because the human individual must strive to achieve her own purpose, and the fullness of her own self-realization, because there is no other value that overrides the imperative to be fully human.

*"It takes so much work to be a full human being that few have the love or the courage to pay the price."*  
A. Matthews

Plants and animals live, but they cannot become "de-plantified" or "de-animalized". The human person, however, aside from living and dying, can live humanly or inhumanly. Inhumanity is a real possibility for the human person, which is why living humanly is not a foregone conclusion. It cannot be taken for granted; rather, it is a task that is taken up every day. Only human beings are capable of deciding, and of deciding their own fulfillment. This means that ethics has an enormous responsibility to help people become human, and to enter into dialogue with culture, society, economics, politics and all the sciences.

There are many circumstances and conditions that have an impact on us as people; the ultimate responsibility for our being and our way of living, however, lies with us. This is where ethics can be of help, by providing elements, knowledge, motivations for deciding the way we want to be. We study ethics both to form a better idea of ourselves and of our relationship with others, and to fulfill this idea of ourselves that we are forming. Therefore, we need to:

- › acquire a body of knowledge,
- › order and systemize this knowledge,
- › justify and value our person,



- › assimilate values,
- › practice right action and have a genuine desire for it,
- › confront our values with the way other people act and with their values.

The main function of ethics does not focus on specific actions; it has a more basic objective: to offer steady guidance, to find the road that leads to a goal, to create a style and a way of life that is consistent with a project. The ethical dimension encompasses people's disposition toward life, their character and their way of acting. The ethical life is an organized whole, and its starting-point and center is the human person.

For a person who has an orientation in life, not every direction is the right one.

### **0.3 What contribution should ethics make?**

Ethics is not a purely speculative science; its purpose is to inspire and clarify a human being's life, and to provide a firm foundation for it. Ethics should provide:

- a) criteria that inspire a particular outlook on people's life and behavior;
- b) criteria for assessing, criticizing and transforming human behavior and conditions;
- c) an analysis of the elements that qualify human action; and
- d) links to human values, grounded in the person and the values themselves.

#### **0.4 What does ethics look at?**

Its object of study is life as an occasion for human fulfillment through proper conduct. To be more precise, we can say it is the person himself, along with his values and his actions that proceed from him as a human being and that at the same time fulfill him. The object of ethics is to attain an overall orientation for life, and not just to analyze and evaluate isolated acts.

Ethics provides the elements needed to judge among the different possibilities that a person faces, and to choose that which makes her fully human. It is one possibility in the context of the other possibilities.

Ethics is closely related to, and dependent on, anthropology. It studies the origins, foundation and sense of human beings' ethical condition and their possibility of humanization. It studies what the human person must do to humanize society, the workplace, the world and history.

#### **0.5 From what perspective does ethics look at these things?**

Life, to the extent that it is human, is both the mold and the forge of the person.

Many sciences study human life. Ethics does it from the perspective that it is up to human beings to give shape to human life. We are interested in life as it is lived freely, consciously and responsibly; inasmuch as the way life is lived can either humanize or dehumanize a person.

All of us live necessarily in a certain way, according to certain norms and customs; all of us make our own life in a particular and unique way. And there are

clearly norms that belong to particular groups of people, and others that correspond to certain times of history. But can we say that there are norms that apply to everyone, not because someone imposes them, but simply because we are all human beings?

### **0.6 How does ethics reach its objective?**

The (classical) philosophical method takes as its starting-point the concept of human nature (an abstract concept that abstains from concrete particulars, although it is derived from them) in order to deduce notions, values and norms.

Any discipline's method must be determined by its object of study. Ours is human life. Therefore, our method must take life experience as its starting point and essential reference. In this sense, we are not starting at zero. We all already have years of experience, of decisions, of successes and of knowledge. We should start with the basics. Since when is it possible to speak of ethics? How did human beings come to be human and what does ethics have to do with becoming human? Where do moral criteria come from? What are people called to? How do we decide? Are we really free? How could we be? Are there valid criteria to guide my behavior? What are the tasks that a person should undertake? What sense does it make to be ethical?

Since the values that faith brings to the discussion do not contradict, but rather are grounded in human reality, these values will not be set aside, but included in our study.

The ethical imperative does not arise from being a believer or an atheist, but from being human.

### **0.7 Methodology**

We have to start by framing the problems in the right way. In many cases we will have to begin by merely making a description of the phenomenon in

order to look for its rational justification and its sense. As philosophical reflection, ethics must consider the results of other sciences that also look at human beings, society and behavior. Otherwise, the reflection can become sterile. These data will lead to a reflection from which well-grounded and adequate ethical proposals can be derived.

*"It' is legitimate and necessary for moralist to find ever more consistent rational arguments, as this is well-suited to meeting the demands of dialogue and cooperation with non-Catholics and non-believers."* John Paul II, Apostolic Letter to the Youth of the World 10; Vigilia, Denver.

Here we add some reflections from the Christian viewpoint. We do not intend to present a religious ethics, however we believe that reason can be enriched by faith, and vice versa. At any rate, we will attempt to make ethical proposals that can be justified rationally, even supposing that God does not exist. In this sense, our proposal of a fundamental ethics can be valid for believers, atheists or agnostics.

As Christians, we think that ethical reflection can be enriched when we look at people's life and behavior in the light of faith in the true God who is pleased with the life and development of human beings, and who has revealed himself to us fully, absolutely and totally in Jesus Christ.

For the student, the main task that ethics presents is that of being UNDERSTOOD. It is not a question of accepting it blindly, but of understanding it, and from there of assimilating the values that are presented. The challenge is to understand why certain behaviors are in our interest and others are not, what it is that builds us up and what it is that tears us down; to understand that life is worth living deeply, and that this issue that concerns us - "living our own life to the full" - is the concern of all people.

### + Christian reflection

In Christian life it is taken for granted that before the obligation to seek God, to worship him and even to believe in him, there is the obligation to be fully human. This call, therefore, linked as it is to our nature and our life, can be the basis for constructing an ethics that is also valid for non-believers.

The full acceptance of the Word of God and the teaching authority of the Church does not imply succumbing to an authoritarian and childish ethics that has no room for reason, dialogue or inner conviction.

A proper understanding of God means knowing that his will and his greater glory consist of the overall progress of the human individual. And that God is not far away... He is close by, and sensitive to our life and behavior.

God is not, in the first place, an explanation of the world's problems. He is above all a Personal Being who offers and gives us salvation.

*"The ethics of the Gospel is the ethics of reason."*  
H. Bergson.

Irenaeus,  
Ad. Haer. IV, 19.

### Activities

1. Write on a slip of paper your greatest expectation for this course, and on the back, what you think should be avoided.
2. Discuss the following questions in groups:
  - a) Why come up with an ethics for the purpose of making people more human?
  - b) What would happen if no ethics were made?
  - c) What do you think are the most important issues that ethics should address?

d) How do you think the content of this course could be made more meaningful for you?

e) Do you think Christian reflection can help ethics, and you, to shed light on our work? How?

3. Check to see if the following summary contains the main points of the Introduction:

Ethics is the science that studies people's actions as it relates to their own fulfillment. The purpose of ethics is to help people be fully human by becoming aware of the principles governing the actions of human beings, as well as their means, purposes and possibilities. The purpose of ethics is overall life guidance. Ethics looks at human life from the perspective that it is up to people to shape their lives. Its starting-point is life experience.

### **Concepts**

1. Reality: general concept for distinguishing the human person from everything that is outside of his subjectivity, but that determines and influences him. Everything that is independent of the person and that somehow has an impact on him, such as the world of space-time, circumstances, society, economics, politics, etc. Reality can be equated with the objective world, as opposed to the subjective world.

"Being out of touch with reality" means being outside of the context and closed inside one's own way of thinking, without considering objective phenomena.

2. "To make life": the expression underscores the dynamic sense of human life; it means to direct it; to live it consciously, responsibly and freely; in solidarity with one's fellows. It also means to give it shape, to define it, to enjoy it, to make sense of it and to give it meaning.

### **True or False**

Indicate whether the following statements are true or false. A second exercise could consist in explaining why.

The purpose of ethics is not just to offer or systemize knowledge, but to form ethical human beings.

True [ ] False [ ]

Any way of doing things is valid, as long as it is pleasant.

True [ ] False [ ]

With regard to conducting one's life, there are no written rules; everyone can do as they please.

True [ ] False [ ]

There are right ways and wrong ways to proceed; it is not the same to act one way as another.

True [ ] False [ ]

Success and failure in life have a cost and, at least in part, depend on the individual.

True [ ] False [ ]

In other cultures, when a man decides to die, he chooses his oldest son to pull the rope that will hang him, and his friends and relatives celebrate with a feast.

Reasonable [ ] Unreasonable [ ]

Ethics is a way to manipulate people.

True [ ] False [ ]

Ethics helps to find solutions to life's problems.

True [ ] False [ ]

Ethics is a way to impose arbitrary laws.

True [ ] False [ ]

Ethics is a way some people dominate others.

True [ ] False [ ]

Ethics is no more than ideology.

True [ ] False [ ]

If ethics is human, even if it is enlightened by faith, it must be rational and understandable.

True [ ] False [ ]

Human beings are the only ones who bear the responsibility for their own fulfillment.

True [ ] False [ ]

Ethics is oppression.

True [ ] False [ ]

People are humanized by acting fairly and unfairly, reasonably and unreasonably.

True [ ] False [ ]

There is one morality for Jews, another for Christians, another for Muslims, but they all fall under the same ethics.

True [ ] False [ ]



Ethics deals with what objectively make people more human.

True [ ] False [ ]

The weight of ethics is derived from the weight of the human condition.

True [ ] False [ ]

Ethics has the right to examine, from the perspective of reason, whether claims made by religion are really conducive to human growth.

True [ ] False [ ]

Ethical problems touch on the future of the human person, and of human beings in general.

True [ ] False [ ]

Humanity's task is to defend and promote its essential values on which its being and existence depend.

True [ ] False [ ]

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\*\*\* This book contains a systematic presentation of the main topics of ethics. In a somewhat complicated style, it offers deep reflections.

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\*\* In this small book the author makes a brief presentation of some of the important currents of contemporary ethical reflection.

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\*\* The author sets out to investigate the foundation of a unitary ethics within a pluralistic society and culture. He offers a broad vision of the values of life, pleasure, joy, happiness, power, respect for the person, love, etc. The author discusses the reality of values and demonstrates the validity of a universal ethos capable of leading the human person to fulfillment.

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\*\*\* The author attempts to ground morality in overall human experience within the context of political and social life. It proposes a solid grounding for human dignity.

López Azpitarte, Eduardo, *Fundamentación de la ética cristiana*, Madrid, 1991.

\*\*\* In this book, the author offers a brief but in-depth summary of a justification for Christian morality in a pluralistic and skeptical society. The main topics of ethics are rigorously addressed. Extensive bibliography.

Maritain, Jacques, *Lecciones fundamentales de la filosofía moral*, Ed. Club de Lectores, Buenos Aires, 1965.

\*\* Useful as a systematic introduction to moral philosophy from a Thomistic perspective.

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\*\*\* Planned as a textbook, pleasant to read. Clear, well-grounded, stimulates reflection.

Ricoeur, Paul, *Finitud y culpabilidad*, Ed. Taurus, Madrid, 1975.

Millán-Puelles, Antonio, *La libre afirmación de nuestro ser*, Ed. Rialp, Madrid, 1994.

\* In this book the author proposes a foundation for realistic ethics: the person's own being becomes the basis for the imperative in free human behavior. The author posits the existence of objective moral norms of absolute value, and all forms of ethical skepticism are contradictory in both theory and practice. The book is written in a very abstruse style and is too long (560 pages).

Ordúñez Rincón R., López Azpitarte, *Praxis cristiana*, I, Fundamentación, Madrid, 1980.

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\*\* This book frames ethics in terms of self-love: the link between virtue and pleasure, the relationship between individual and society. The ethical is that which responds to the subject's self-affirmation. A lucid, provocative and well-written book.

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Zubiri, Xavier, *Sobre el hombre*, Alianza Ed., Madrid, 1986.

\*\*\* The book brings together a body of work in anthropology-metaphysics. It offers important analyses of different dimensions of human reality and action, and their repercussions in the constitution of personality.

## CHAPTER I

### HOW DID THE HUMAN PERSON ARISE AS AN ETHICAL BEING?

**Objective:**

To reflect on the origins of the human species and the emergence of the ethical phenomenon, in order to appreciate its progressive and historical nature.

#### 1.1 The emergence of the human person

One of the most important aspects of the process of humanization, from the viewpoint of the history of life, is the emergence of the ethical dimension in human life. This occurred when human beings became capable of recognizing, appreciating and assessing things.

Unlike other animals, human beings are not definitively determined by their specific biological structures or by the environment.

The fundamental differences between humans and animals are not only biological in nature, but also behavioral, because humans have a distinctively intellectual way of seeing reality, of assessing it and of deciding to act. It is human beings' behavior that constitutes their distinctive identity and forms the basis of their dignity. The ability to reflectively carry out activities that are not strictly biological and to

transmit them gives rise to the kind of activity that is identifiably human. This is what makes humans capable of creating culture, understood as a body of ethical and religious traditions, language and codes of interpersonal communication, literature and art, knowledge and technology. It is in the heart of cultural life where human beings' ethical dimension develops. In all of this it is quite certain that humans attained their cultural capacity in an evolutionary process. A plethora of paleontological, anthropological and archeological data increasingly confirm this fact.

The use of intelligence makes it possible to abstain from violence and to find solutions that are better for all group members.

"Homo sapiens" has survival skills that are distinct from those of any previous hominid. The development of the brain led to the emergence of intelligence, which we could tentatively describe as the ability to find solutions based on adaptation and minimum effort.

When intelligence emerged among human beings, it led to a reduction of instincts, a dismantling of almost all the stimulus-based coordination that made human beings react in a fixed and predictable way.

*"And with regard to animals, it is a characteristic of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like, and the association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and a state."* Aristotle, Politics, I, 2, 14.

Intelligent human beings were freed from the exclusivity of impulses and instinctive drives as a way of responding to their reality. They found themselves increasingly pressed to respond less instinctively and more consciously. From pure reaction they began to move toward freedom; from response to responsibility.

One of the characteristics of early humans was that they lived in groups, that they had a community life. They gradually ceased to be members of a horde and

became collaborators and companions. Although aggression persisted, the life of others came to be imbued with value and a progressive broadening of horizons took place in their vision and their behavior. Their ethical structure, incipient though it was, kept them from killing their own kind and feeding on one another, even when food was scarce.

*"Moral qualities are based on social instincts, family ties being included in this concept. In lower animals these instincts display a special tendency toward certain defined actions; the most important elements are love and the precious emotion of sympathy."*

And ever since an organization was found that guaranteed each member her due, a way was sought to preserve this system against changes that would do away with the admitted solutions and break down the established social order. This gave rise to the need to set up norms that would keep the community together, defend its values, and be sufficiently stable.

As tribes began to adopt a settled life, humans discovered new values and developed new possibilities for maintaining a more human and rational way of life. The need arose to take responsibility not just for the other clan members, but also for the place where they lived and where their children would grow up. The moment came when they discovered the value of the family and the responsibility for one's own work.

*"The moral sense emerges, firstly, from the enduring and ever-present nature of social instincts; secondly, from the regard man has for the approbation and dis-*

*"Animals endowed with social instincts take pleasure in their mutual company, warn each other of danger, defend each other and give mutual aid in many ways." C. Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, II, Ed. Ibéricas, Madrid, 1933, pp. 398ff.*



Darwin, Op. cit. pp. 292ff.

*approbation of his fellows; and lastly, from the high development of his mental faculties on past impressions that are kept extraordinarily vivid; and it is precisely in these aspects that he differs from the lower animals."*

It gradually became clearer to human beings that being reasonable is the first ethical imperative.

Over the millennia, human beings came up against new demands that aroused their sense of ethics in accordance with their culture and the evolving conditions in which they lived. In their shared experience they gradually discovered new dimensions of respect and value: first as sympathy for other people's needs, then as an extension and refinement of this feeling in consideration of others' interests. Irrational aggression and the desire to dominate were eventually replaced in their consciousness by demands that went beyond immediate concerns.

Human beings cannot live by simply repeating their species' patterns of behavior. Each person has the obligation to be creative with her own life. Human beings are the only animal that can get tired of things, that can be fed up, and that can aspire to a different world.

With regard to others, the human being constitutes himself as "homo sapiens," and becomes capable of understanding, reasoning, and also of discovering values.

*"The intellect must have been all-important to him, even at a very remote period, as enabling him to invent and use language, to make weapons, tools, traps,*

*By living together with other human beings, people come to see reality as reality, and not just stimulus. In this context the language of gestures arose, then oral language, in response to the need to communicate. The ability to make sounds was harnessed for meaningful communication. The creation of oral language*

had an extraordinary significance for primitive people's ethical conscience. With language they could manipulate verbal symbols as things and remember concepts. The word fixed the idea and enabled people to manipulate ideas conceptually and communicate them. In this way, early human beings were able to "reach agreements." Through language, human beings were "hominized" and gradually came to be "ethical beings."

Thus new forms of stable living not only played a decisive role in hominization, but also in humanization. Social life served to stimulate and perfect intelligence, and to reveal what it means to be human. Human beings discovered the potential of what was to become their conscience and their freedom. In dialogue with their fellows, they learned to think, to choose, to be themselves and of themselves, and to share. The written word was a subsequent step in the development of the human person's ethical conscience and humanization.

It is important to point out that only slowly and gradually did humans discover different values. Their growing understanding of the world and of themselves aroused their sensitivity to human values.

When human beings appeared on the earth, they already possessed the incipient capability to become free: they had to choose from among various alternatives in order to take charge of their reality.

It is impossible to determine just when people began to reflect on their own behavior. Morality arose as a defense of the individual and society, at the level

*etc., whereby with the aid of his social (moral) habits, he long ago became the most dominant of all living creatures..."*  
C. Darwin, *Ibid.*, II, pp. 389ff.

The most ancient written texts, from roughly 5,000 years ago, contain codes, contracts and precepts, which points to the development of a certain ethical awareness.

of both individual and community subsistence. Without behavioral norms, human societies would fall apart and individuals ran the risk of not surviving.

Human beings are "*ethical beings*" because they are capable of thinking about what they feel and perceive.

Human beings managed to survive thanks to their intelligence, which is the basis of their ethical dimension. Ethics developed, above all, as a defense of life. Ethical conduct is both the fruit of human survival and the bastion where the survival of our humanity is safeguarded. The ethical dimension is one of the ways that people defend and construct their lives; it arises from the social life of human beings and the difficulties and conflicts that this entails.

At this early stage, ethics can be understood as a set of "*rules of the game*" for being and becoming human, and for being and becoming full members of society. These rules are not arbitrary, but they are not prefabricated either: they must be discovered and elaborated. These rules of the game are the result of choosing one possibility among many others; they are not the expression of all possibilities. They are the specific manifestation of a historical way people have found to be human.

In the constitution of the human person as an ethical being, ways of living in society played an important role, as well as what was declared to be forbidden or allowed. Ethics as an experiential and existential phenomenon is a way of dealing with the problems of living in society.

As civilizations have grown, people have gradually discovered their own conscience and their own value. At the same time, family, community, the world and

transcendent values have taken on greater relevance and put people on track to being the authors of their own development.

Discovering oneself as an ethical being means having an inkling of what is forbidden and what is allowed, what may be done and what may not, what leads to personal fulfillment and what does not, what promotes life and what defeats it... The need arises to live by choosing among different options, which implies in turn a need for criteria, judgments and assessments; the ability is developed to sympathize with others and their interests, as well as to react when one's own interests or those of others are being trampled.

Moral norms are established, evolve and develop depending on the type of human settlement, economy, social organization, religious life and even artistic sensitivity.

In response to the most urgent needs, norms were devised that would safeguard what human groups found to be relevant and valuable. Depending on the way society was set up, its relationships with other groups, and its religious beliefs, morality took on different shapes and imposed different demands.

Only relatively recently did ethics break fully into our awareness. In Greece, ethics began to be distinguished from its religious dimension, and the first attempts were made at giving it consistency, coherence and a grounding in reason. Thus ethics emerged as a discipline. This happened three thousand years ago.

Culture was the expression of their being and also the medium in which their ethical dimension developed. Within the framework of culture, and conditioned by it, criteria, judgments and moral values developed.

Humanity's instinctive and emotional impulses reach their apex in the tendency to be ethical; this human dimension allows people to shed light on their own actions and steer them toward specific goals that often go beyond immediate satisfaction and aim at more complex objectives.

## **1.2. Consequences of considering ethics in an evolutionary framework**

1. Humanity has undergone an evolutionary process that affects not only its physical-organic development, but more importantly its mental development, its ability to understand reality and itself, and the idea of what human beings can expect and what they should do. Ethical evaluation is internally linked to the awareness and evaluation of one's own personal being and that of others. As the people widen their horizons and venture out of their personal circle of concerns, they will broaden their perception of their rights and obligations and feel responsibility for realities that are less and less immediate. People's ethical conscience can thus extend as far as their understanding and their intellectual capacity can reach.

2. Unlike other higher mammals, human beings' morphological shortcomings make them, from a biological point of view, a creature that is poorly adapted and not specialized to survive and flourish without effort; this forces them to develop their specific qualities.

3. Human beings are the "*unfinished animal*"; they stand before themselves as before a task; they find themselves in a special position, because they strain in

the opposite direction from the rest of living things, and a different organizing principle is involved: their freedom. Ethical reflection cannot overlook the fact that human beings have been possible, have developed and made their life under constantly changing conditions and circumstances. Human beings have become ethical within a process of evolution, within history.

4. Under this sign of freedom, human beings' existence becomes a task and an activity. Their own life is their personal responsibility. In order to improve it, they must make use of all their abilities.

Undetermined by nature, they must determine themselves.

5. This incompleteness imposes an obligation on human beings to develop, by bringing out of themselves the possibilities of their own fulfillment though effort, painful learning and failures, while resisting natural impulses and actively seeking their self-improvement.

6. Within an evolutionary framework and in accordance with human beings' nature, the ethical dimension is a both a breakthrough and a condition of their development.

7. Human beings evolve not only like other higher animals, in the ability to adapt; they evolve primarily in their psycho-physical ability to grow more and more intelligent, conscious and free, more sensitive to reality, more in charge of themselves, more capable of giving of themselves, more co-responsible and aware of the totality, and therefore more and more human.

*"The task proposed for man in his determined constitution is always objective. It is the task of mastering reality, and in the face of himself. Man lives by directing his life."*Arnold Gehlen, *El hombre*, p. 193.

C. Darwin, *"The Descent of Man"*, pp. 403-405.

*"Man may be excused for feeling some pride at having risen, though not through his own exertions, to the very summit of the organic scale; and the fact of his having thus risen, instead of having been aboriginally placed there, may give him hope for a still higher destiny in the distant future."*

The transformation of ethical consciousness and human evaluative criteria in the past is evident, and even now it is possible to appreciate differences from one generation to the next. A gradual, progressive discovery of each one of the human values can be discerned, such as freedom, peace, justice, unity, the declaration and defense of human rights.

8. As ethical beings, humans have had to give a historical and creative response to fundamental questions about their own action. We thus find in different primitive societies different ethical responses to the same problems.

*"Ethical life, without the person's inner commitment, is formalism and hypocrisy."*  
A.J. Heschel.

There is no ethical order than can be isolated from human beings' concrete historical manifestations. Ethics is not a catalogue of abstract, universal values and virtues, nor has it set down the definitive version of truth: the search for truth is ongoing. Ethics must give answers to the questions of the day and in dialogue with its culture. In practical life there is only one ethical constant: human beings become what they make of themselves.

9. The fundamental, constant and universal affirmation of ethics could be stated as follows: human beings are called to be more and more human. This statement has the advantage of underscoring the ascendant,

dynamic character and the historical dimension of this vocation.

Doing good and avoiding evil is the way human beings can become more human. But, what is good and what is evil? Or what is favorable or unfavorable for a given individual? This is something that people need to discover continually within their own circumstances.

Over the centuries, social and religious convention has made people more sensitive to their own ethical dimension. For this reason, transformations in social and religious life lead to changes in the perception of ethical values, new ethical demands or new ways of meeting the old ones.

*"Our future depends on an (ethical) evolution in the fullest sense of the word." Teilhard de Chardin.*

10. The ethical conscience is a step forward in the process of humanization. Codes of conduct may be rudimentary and subject to criticism from many perspectives, but the awakening of an ethical conscience is in and of itself one of the greatest leaps forward on the road to humanization.

The first reality that people encounter, before objective good and evil, is their own rational reality.

Ethical behavior (the ability to organize values and choose codes of conduct) is a universal human attribute. In all cultures, people make judgments based on moral values. But now we pose the question: Where does the ethical capacity come from? Is it universal in nature? Why is it present in all human cultures and races? Why is it lacking in all animals except humans?



## **Summary**

\* Human beings are not only ethical beings; they make themselves ethical beings.

\* They gradually discover their personal fulfillment in concrete ways.

\* The ethical conscience awakens and develops in experience shared with others.

\* It is shaped by its surroundings; in turn, it influences its surroundings by the actions it takes.

\* The fundamental principle of ethics could be expressed as follows: human beings are called to become more and more human.

\* Ethical reflection must be done within an evolutionary and historical framework, even as it affirms constant criteria, values and principles.

### **+ Christian reflection**

In Christian life, this condition of humans as unfinished beings was of vital importance from the beginning. Saint Irenaeus, for example, said that just as it is inherent to God to be perfect and to have everything from the beginning, it is inherent to human beings to be imperfect and to gradually acquire their own perfection. He also affirmed that God had made human beings so that they would grow, and that human growth did not just imply becoming older or more numerous, but also growing internally, tending toward perfection.

"God formed man for development and growth."

St. Irenaeus, *Ad. Haer.*  
IV, 1, 1-2. Cf. IV,39,2.

Human beings' action is not an accessory to their life; it is the element with which they make their life, and a condition for their temporal and eternal fulfillment.

Saint Irenaeus also said that the image and likeness of God, in which human beings had been made, was not just a fact about their origin and dignity, but also a task and a vocation, fulfilled perfectly when their model, the decisive factor in their life, was Christ. As Saint Paul said, people in their life have the call to reproduce Christ's image and to participate in his glory.

Rm 8:29; II Th 2:14

The History of Salvation is not tangential to or separate from the history of humanity. God's revelation and saving action follow the slow steps that humanity takes. The human species is the mold, the shape and the language where God's word is expressed more and more, and better and better.

Hb 1,1,s.

### **A More In-depth Look**

People's psycho-biological, religious and social structure demands of them conscious, free and responsible responses, i.e., ethical responses. Human beings, in living their life, are called on to be more and more authentically free and responsible.

It was wondrous that matter could give rise to the spirit, but even more wondrous was it that the spirit could give rise to kindness, truth, love and justice, as well as the possibility to choose these values.

People may be surprised to learn that as late as in the 20th century, slavery was considered "*less propitious to human dignity..., however, not contrary to natural law.*" Saint Alphonsus defended the castration

Theol. Moralis, Lib. III,  
tr. IV, c1, n.370. ib. Lib.  
IV, c I, n.202.

A change in the perception of reality implies a change in behavior as well. V. Cathrein

of children "in order to sing more sweetly divine praise in the Church." He admitted torture "*in order to assure evidence*". The declaration of Human Rights would have been unthinkable in the 19th century. For a long time it was forbidden to charge interest on capital, cremate the dead, and recognize freedom of conscience. It was believed that no one could be saved outside of the Catholic Church. For millennia women were considered inferior to men, with innumerable consequences.

### Activities

1. a) If human beings have evolved, do you think that fact changes the understanding of ethics?

b) What role do you think ethics plays in the possibility of being more human?

2. List three consequences of considering ethics in an evolutionary framework.

3. Divide students into two groups. Each group represents a stance on ethics. One group conceives of ethics within a stable framework, while the other approaches it within an evolutionary framework. Both groups come up with strong arguments to defend their position.

4. Think of cases in which history has witnessed an evolution in ethics.

### **True or False**

People have always had sufficient understanding, and basically the same understanding, of their duty in the world.

True [ ] False [ ]

Human beings are always the same, and what they should do never changes.

True [ ] False [ ]

The only basis of ethics is human nature, which never changes, so ethics should not change either.

True [ ] False [ ]

Human rights have been the same now since the time of creation to the present.

True [ ] False [ ]

It is enough to follow God's commandments.

True [ ] False [ ]

Ethical knowledge has progressed over time, and with great difficulty.

True [ ] False [ ]

People's only obligation is to be authentic: think as they wish, say what they think and act as they please.

True [ ] False [ ]

Customs are different among different peoples and cultures, and it cannot be said that some are better than others.

True [ ] False [ ]

There are objective, valid criteria for judging the customs of peoples and their cultures.

True [ ] False [ ]

It is reasonable to be unreasonable.

True [ ] False [ ]

There is no reason to abandon reason.

True [ ] False [ ]

Everything that appears to a person to be evidently reasonable is good for that person.

True [ ] False [ ]

A human being's primary obligation, in order to be truly human, is to be reasonable.

True [ ] False [ ]

It is not allowed to say that something is not allowed.

True [ ] False [ ]

The ideal is not to have to justify anything, or answer for anything, but to live as one pleases.

True [ ] False [ ]

### **Concepts**

**Hominization:** transition from unreflective animal life to reflective human life (which does not exclude divine intervention to move past previous stages).

**Humanization:** process in which human beings find themselves immersed, by which they become more and more human in all respects (conscious, free and

responsible, autonomous, supportive, transcendent, etc.)

Human nature is defined by human beings themselves; it is what human beings are, what makes them human. Human nature includes the notion of development, growth, historicity. "*Nature is the source and cause of things' being in movement or at rest; it is that which makes things be what they are in themselves, and not accidentally.*" (Aristotle, Phys II, 1, 192b, 20). The knowledge of nature, like the knowledge of reality, is progressive.

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\*\*\*\* This book contains the most important ideas of the founder of the theory of evolution. Dense and at times difficult, it offers an abundance of observations intended to show how species descend from other species. Important as a source for understanding the idea of natural selection.

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\*\*\*\* The essay "El origen del hombre" is complete and authoritative with respect to current scientific findings that support the theory of evolution. On this basis, the author attempts to explain the meaning of evolution from a philosophical point of view.

## **Questions**

### **What is the difference between the process of hominization and the process of humanization?**

"Hominization" is a biological process characterized by the acquisition and development of properties that distinguish the species, such as cranial capacity (3500 c.c.), the ability to walk upright, the use of hands, the way of eating, etc. "Humanization," on the other hand, consists of the process by which a person gradually becomes more intelligent, conscious, free, responsible, supportive, generous, fair, autonomous, etc.

### **What role does language play in human beings' ethical development?**

A decisive role. It made it possible to communicate meanings and values, and to agree on norms for living in community. It accompanied and facilitated the development of intelligence and the moral conscience. It was able to fix verbal symbols as things and retain them in memory.

### **What does "awareness of humanity" mean?**

The perception that people have of the value of others and themselves as subjects, of their interests and needs and, in general, of everything that connects them to other people (consciousness, freedom, responsibility, solidarity, etc.).

## CHAPTER II

### WHY ARE HUMAN BEINGS ETHICAL?

**Objective:**

To establish the ethical dimension in human beings.

#### 2.1 Anthropological grounding

Human beings are ethical beings because they are intelligent and free. Their ability to comprehend their situation, to comprehend things and to comprehend themselves is the foundation of their ethical conscience, whereby their ethical being is directly proportional to their ability to comprehend and assess value.

*"The teacher of all people is an honest heart."*  
Umberto Eco.

By being free, people have the possibility to decide their life, their action, and the way of carrying it out. Their responsibility comes from the possibility to act in different ways, in pursuit of different objectives, and

with different motivations. All of this can only happen in a being that is free.

We know that ethical capacity is strongly influenced by biological nature, although people are not hard-wired to follow their instinct, but rather under obligation to act freely. Ethical norms (values perception, moral codes, attitudes, principles, conditions) thus have their grounding in human nature, which is not completely determined by instincts and circumstances.

Ethical capacity is expressed in three kinds of activities that are determined by biological nature:

a) The capacity to foresee the consequences of one's own actions and to establish differences between means and ends.

b) The capacity to formulate value judgments on the basis of abstract concepts and not just concrete and immediate impressions.

c) The capacity to choose among different ways of proceeding, to process outside information, and to choose what is thought to be best in terms of personal codes.

People are and become ethical in concert with others.

Humans are ethical beings on account of being called to live in community with others, because they are social beings and develop in reference to others.

The source and root of ethics is found in human reality. Ethical behavior and values have a "natural" basis and constitute a universal substrate in space and

time, but they are not independent of cultures, although they are also not products of them. All cultures are rooted in human nature, and while they are not identical to human nature, they are sustained by it to a greater or lesser degree. This makes it possible to think about a universal culture.

The ultimate root of people's ethical being is found in their unfinished condition, in their call to fulfill themselves, in reference to and in recognition of others.

To the question 'Why are people ethical?', we can offer the following answer: because they are intelligent, free, called to fulfill themselves in their own actions, and to help others in their self-construction.

The attribute or quality of "ethical" refers fundamentally to human persons, and only then, and in reference to them, does it also characterize things, actions, laws. The ethical problem is always a problem of the person.

## **2.2 The human person's ethical structure**

We have said that people are ethical beings on account of being intelligent. But what does the word intelligence mean here?

Intelligence above all refers to reality. Animals are defined in advance by their structures, and thus remain within the threshold of their stimuli. This happens with people as well, but external reality does not necessarily determine them, which opens the door to the ethical option.

Thus people's first and most fundamental responsibility is to construct themselves. The greatest thing people can make is what they make of and with themselves.

*"Morality, properly speaking, does not reside in things, but in humans: in the human person, in his judgments, in his personality, in his conception and fulfillment of values." Pius XII, AAS 46, 1954, 576.*

People have to consider reality before carrying out an action. In their freedom, they may prefer one response on account of something, thereby turning stimuli into possibilities, not requirements. In this way, people adapt to their world and insert themselves into it through the intelligent options they choose.

*"A moral being is one who is capable of reflecting on his past actions and their motives--of approving of some and disapproving of others; and the fact that man is the one being who certainly deserves this designation, is the greatest of all distinctions between him and the lower animals." C. Darwin, The Descent of Man.*

*"The possibility of choosing evil is not inherent to the notion of freedom, but emerges from it by being situated in a defective nature." Thomas Aquinas, De Veritate 24, 3 ad 2.*

Animals always respond according to the stimulus, but people are different: they have to find a way to make their response adequate, they have to justify their acts. Adequate action has to be done for a reason (motivation or cause), in pursuit of something (purpose). But what exactly makes action adequate? Among the possibilities that people are confronted with, there are some that fulfill them more and others that fulfill them less: some are more adequate and others are less adequate, or inadequate. Their freedom is not only about choosing one out of all the choices available, but about choosing the one that seems most suitable and in accord with their preference.

Not all actions make people free, even though they are freely chosen. When they perform an inadequate action, for from gaining freedom, their freedom decreases. People affirm their freedom only with that which fulfills them. The wrong use of freedom actually enslaves them.

But why do we prefer certain things? At the root of our preferences is the basic goodness of reality. When people prefer what is best for them, they are acting adequately. The perception of the goodness of reality is something that they achieve through their intel-

ligence, and thus they are capable of choosing what is best for them.

Human beings' ethical structure includes an inborn inclination to good that precedes even their intelligent choice. People by nature are oriented toward what is right, and accidentally, by deficiency, toward what is wrong. From their orientation toward what is right comes the hope of increasing progress in the moral domain, and their critical capacity in the face of deficiencies. From their accidental orientation toward what is wrong, and fundamentally from their nature as imperfect, unfinished creatures, comes their inclination toward evil. The lack of identification with what is right comes from a predisposition by which they are oriented in an inadequate direction.

Humans are the only beings capable of changing the world.

### **2.3 Binding ethical reality and natural law**

With respect to people, reality has different meaningful aspects. Reality is true inasmuch as it relates to the human mind, which is capable of making a mental representation of reality. And thus truth is directly related to the understanding that knows it. There is no truth without a mind to discover it. But it is also grounded in reality inasmuch as reality is the object and criterion of cognitive activity. Reality is the normative criterion for knowledge.

What is binding in reality, or natural law, belongs to human beings' own nature.

In the same way, values have a basis in reality, which is why we can speak of objective values, of valuable things; their value, however, is related to the human mind that is capable of assessing that value, and to the will that is capable of desiring them. Values are objective realities with reference to the person who ap-

precipitates them. There is no value without a mind-will to discover it. We thus realize that values and norms of behavior are to be found in people's inner being; they are human beings' projection and way of being human in the face of reality.

Only humans discover values and feel obliged in the face of reality.

In reality we also find an aspect that is binding for people. People find not only justice, but also their personal obligation to act fairly. But there is no objective obligation without a mind-conscience to discover that obligation. Obligation is rooted in reality, but it is always perceived by the human mind, which is capable of discovering it and being bound by it. In this way, ethical obligation can be discovered progressively and dynamically, and its grounding in human reality explains its dynamic character and the different interpretations it has had over the centuries. But its grounding in reality makes it an objective norm and criterion that binds people according to their cultural levels, historical situations and personal circumstances.

### **Duty**

The elements of duty or of obligation are:

- › a person who perceives (mind-conscience),
- › a binding reality (reality that obliges) and
- › a link between reality and person; this is the element that is explicitly expressed in positive law.

Good, truth, persons and reality allude to perception, to will and to freedom. There is no obligation, nor binding reality, if there is no free person to perceive them. Binding reality is the real fact ap-



prehended by a free being; or better yet, the free apprehension of a real fact.

Ethical adults are more bound to the perception of their obligations than to the perception of their rights. Humans are free beings, and as such, can spontaneously love good, truth, and other people. Then, moved by their freedom and love, they can bind themselves to them; they come to discover not only their free dynamism, but also their responsibility, which emerges from their encounter with binding reality.

The concept of natural law has been understood in legalistic and judicial terms, when it originally meant nature's way of being, a concept that was more descriptive than legal. In its original conception it was directly linked to reason.

The term binding reality seems more appropriate because it belongs more to the ethical domain and does not necessarily include legalistic connotations.

Another consideration is that natural law has become overly ontologized or reified, so that it no longer expresses its relation to human consciousness. It has come to be understood as relating to an abstract, once-and-for-all nature, and this conception leads to affirmations that take the form of abstract, isolated, objectified and unchangeable principles, detached from the circumstances of the person knowing it and from her historical dynamics.

Natural law can be wrongly conceived as a pre-existing entity subsistent in itself, which becomes the

A mother, before perceiving that her child has a right to eat, feels obliged to feed him.

*"It also becomes clear why this law is called the natural law: it receives this name not because it refers to the nature of irrational beings but because the reason which promulgates it is proper to human nature." John Paul II, V.S. n. 42.*

This is the basis for the strong criticisms of an ethics grounded in a natural law that is extrinsic to human beings.

*"Natural law is nothing other than the light of understanding..." John Paul II, V.S. n. 40.*

foundation of an ethics that gives no thought to human beings in their specific historical circumstances.

*"Natural law refers to man's proper and primordial nature."*  
John Paul II,  
V.S. n. 50.

Overriding all interpretations and misunderstandings that the notion of natural law has engendered, is the fundamental and essential message that norms for human action are rooted in the human person's inner being.

*"All true moral norms are ultimately based on being, on reason, and on God."*  
Pius XII, AAS. 46,  
1954, 596.

Natural law is the rule of behavior that the world in its order demands: among inanimate objects it consists of the laws of physics; among plants, the laws of biology; among animals, their instincts; and among human beings, reason.

### Summary

\* The structure of human behavior consists of conforming action to reality. And it is people themselves who must do the conforming. All actions, in order to be truly human, must be adequate in the sense of in accord with reality, consistent with it, compatible with it. We will call this first dimension the ethical structure.

\* Human beings conduct their lives; the way they conduct it is called "conduct" or "behavior". They cannot do otherwise because their lives are not predetermined like animals'. On the contrary, their structures demand that they act freely: they have to choose to survive.

\* The idea of adequate action can be understood in a second sense: actions conform not only to nature, but to the ethical criterion, binding reality, or natural

law. In this sense, adequacy is not just correspondence to reality, but correspondence to the ethical demands of reality. We will call this second dimension binding ethics. Natural law or binding reality is based on the reality of things and of human beings themselves, in their nature.

\* Binding ethical reality is grounded in the ethical structure and cannot exist without it. It thus makes sense not to act arbitrarily or subjectively, but in accordance with certain objective demands.

### **+ Christian reflection**

Within the framework of a Christian anthropology, human beings are the "creatures" of a creator God, and redeemed by Jesus Christ.

As creatures, people are called by God to continue his work by living as his image: as lords of the world, called to fulfill themselves in freedom, responsibility, love and communion with him, while respecting, mastering and transforming the world. This call comes out of their own dynamic nature: it is there that they hear God's call.

Christian anthropology is substantially optimistic: "*God made man and indeed, it was all very good.*" The evil in human beings is explained as an accidental attribute, brought about by sin. "*God's crowning work is the fashioning of man.*"

Gn 1:31. Cfr. Gn 3ff.

Irenaeus, Ad Haer V, 15,2; IV, 11, 1.

In the light of faith in Jesus, God's "plan" takes on a new dimension. People respond to the call by making Jesus' message theirs, identifying with it and

Rm 8:29

with his project - "*becoming his true images*", as Saint Paul would say. Jesus called this project the "kingdom of God," which consists of God's presence and communion with him as God of all people, and of a relationship of brotherhood with others. This has a double dimension, historical and eschatological. Historically it translates into the construction of a world of justice, of peace, of progress, of solidarity and of unity; eschatologically, in the sense that full and definitive communion with God takes place in eternal life.

John Paul II, V.S. n. 44 and 43; Catholic Catechism 1954-1960.

Thus, from the Christian perspective, what forms the basis of human beings' ethical being is God's call to them to fulfill themselves as beings-in-the-world and as children of God, in accordance with the plan manifested in creation and definitively in the life and message of Jesus.

John Paul II, V.S. no. 43-44.

Church teaching upholds the notion of natural law. John Paul II, quoting Leo XIII, points out that natural law "is none other than human reason itself" and that "*God calls man to participate in his own providence, since he desires to guide the world - not only the world of nature but also the world of human persons - through man himself, through man's reasonable and responsible care. The natural law enters here as the human expression of God's eternal law.*"

St. Thomas, S. contra G. III, 122.

*"God is not offended by us except by what we do against our own good."*

### **A more in-depth look**

"Just as it is important to assume that a life not *valued is not worth living, it is crucial to realize that a life without commitment to something larger than life is not worth living.*"

A.J. Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, N.Y., 1975, pp. 47-48.

"*The natural law is written and engraved in the heart of each and every man, since it is none other than human reason itself.*"

John Paul II,  
V.S. n. 44.

We could ask ourselves if there are universal values and obligations that are always and everywhere valid for the human species. If we look at people's way of being and acting in their different cultures, we can answer our question with a yes. We can see that for everyone everywhere it is better to grow than not to grow, to eat than to starve; everyone feels the need to express their feelings; everyone suffers when they are tied up or mutilated, or when they are subjected to physical or psychological torture. There is the sexual urge, love for one's children, the need for dialogue and companionship. The encounter with others obliges us to discover the ethical structure of all people and at the same time the existence of the sense of obligation and common human values, elementary as it may be in some cultures. From common and universal needs come common and universal values and demands.

### **Activities**

1. Analyze a situation such as choosing a job or a study program.

a) What motivates you to choose one alternative over another? What purpose are you aiming at?

b) What are your predispositions? (previous inclinations)

c) What is at the root of your preferences? (preferred behaviors)

d) What good things do you see in the situation?

2. Analyze the following case: in the company where you work, you find out that someone has committed fraud, but it does not show up right away in the book-keeping. What is your duty in the light of these events? Where does it come from? How do you justify your behavior?

3. Analyze the ethical content of a decision. (Giving money to a boy who cleans your windshield on a street corner, or to a blind person)

a) What ethical demands do you see in this reality? (What do you feel an urgent need to do?)

b) What options correspond the most to your intelligence and freedom?

c) How do you justify your decision? (What reasons do you give?)

d) What is the best decision in the context of reality?

e) What decision can enhance your freedom the most?

**True or False**

The human person necessarily feels the urge to be ethical.  
True [ ] False [ ]

Ethics consists of channeling our "received nature," what we are, with our "acquired nature," what we do.  
True [ ] False [ ]

The structure of the human person is not necessarily ethical.  
True [ ] False [ ]

Ethics arises because human beings are not just what they are, but what they ought to be.  
True [ ] False [ ]

From common and universal needs come common and universal demands.  
True [ ] False [ ]

Natural law is nothing other than human reason.  
True [ ] False [ ]

People have the right to lead their life as they see fit, without obeying anything or anyone.  
True [ ] False [ ]

Reality is independent of human beings and demands nothing of them.  
True [ ] False [ ]

We feel obliged to do something on account of our perceiving it as good, not the other way around: perceiving it as good on account of our feeling obliged.

True [ ]    False [ ]

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## **Questions**

### **Why are humans ethical?**

Because they are intelligent, free, called to fulfill themselves through their own actions and to contribute to the development of others.

### **What are the necessary requirements for an ethical attitude?**

a) Ability to foresee the consequences of one's own actions, b) to formulate value judgments, c) to choose from among different options of action.

### **What constitutes a person's ethical structure?**

a) Taking the initiative to conform one's own actions to reality, b) Being oriented, by nature, toward what is right, and by accidental attribute, by deficiency, toward what is wrong.

**Under what aspects does reality present itself to people?**

a) As truth, b) as object and criterion of cognitive activity, c) as normative criterion for knowledge, d) as value, e) and as a binding ethical aspect by which people feel compelled to act in a certain way.

**What do we understand by binding reality?**

The property of being that, upon being perceived by a person, creates an obligation or a duty. It is the free apprehension of a fact that a person perceives and appropriates, based on the person's ethical structure and on the reality itself.

**What do we understand by Natural Law?**

The internal call by which, in the face of reality, a person feels compelled to act, affirming some values and rejecting others.

It is the participation of eternal law in the rational creature.

(St. Thomas Aquinas, STh. I-II, 91-2.)

**When we say "*natural law is written in our hearts*," we are using a number of metaphors. What is it essentially that we are saying?**

That people must follow their reason, which orients them from their deepest being.

**When does the feeling of obligation arise?**

When we apprehend binding reality.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **THE PERSON AS ETHICAL SUBJECT, AND HIS DYNAMICS**

**Objective:**

To describe the process by which the ethical personality is formed. To point out the need to choose a "way of being." To create an attitude of responsibility.

#### **3.1 The human person**

Humans are not only beings endowed with certain abilities such as intelligence, free will, affectivity, reference to others, etc. They are beings that are called to fulfill themselves by using their abilities. In other words, the human person is not only born; he also makes himself, in response to a call to fulfill his full potential in the midst of his particular circumstances and through his own history.

The process of personalization consists of reaching a higher degree of consciousness, responsibility, freedom, solidarity, autonomy, capacity to love, to serve, and to build oneself. And since these qualities do not exist at birth, we can describe the human person as a subject who is called to become more and more of a person. The only authentic way to be human is by being a person.

A human being's ethical condition comes from her personal being. In this way, the personal being and the ethical being are joined into what we can call the ethical personality. The human person is an ethical subject because she is conscious, free and responsible for her actions. She is not a subject that is finished once and for all; she is undergoing a dynamic process, and thus is always unfinished and perfectible.

*"The way of being and the way of acting form a person's irreplaceable character."*

Johannes Gruendel.

The concept of person designates each human being in the totality and indivisibility of their bodily spiritual existence, in their relation to others, conditioned by time and space.

By appropriating human values, people enhance their personal value. This means that those who do not cultivate in their own person such human values as justice, love, compassion, hard work, etc., depersonalize and dehumanize themselves, which makes them less valuable to society.

*"The origin, the subject and the purpose of all social institutions is and should be the human person."* John Paul II, V.S. n. 97; Vat. II, G.S. 25.

### **3.1.1 Person and society**

The vital medium for being ethical is society, and while the ethical subject is the person, no one can be ethical in isolation. The human person does not exist

separate from the community of people. In fact, the person is an ethical subject on behalf of the community.

Principles, criteria and norms of behavior are not purely individual; they are anchored in relation to others. There are of course aspects of personal life that do not relate directly to the social dimension, and yet everything that contributes to a person's ethical development makes her a more accomplished social being. The opposite is also true: an individual's self-destruction, in any of the dimensions of life, impacts society and disrupts the development of the community. In this way a sort of feedback loop is in effect: what favors the person helps to build community, and the strengthening of community in turn enables the human person to attain fulfillment.

The most exquisite form of being and existing, and the most wonderful reality, is being a person.

### **3.1.2 The person and his action**

Just as each person is unique and irreplaceable, so is each and every one of his actions. A person's situations, circumstances and conditioning factors change constantly, and the same is true of his actions.

Ethical actions are always human actions, personified actions, i.e., they are performed by an author who is situated in a specific place and time, and who is conditioned by her circumstances, which are her inner and outer world. People are always accompanied by their circumstances, their conditioning factors and their relations.

Action in itself does not exist; it is always the action of someone, who is its main referent. It is an abstrac-

tion to speak of ethical actions without referring, at least implicitly, to the person who performs them.

People gradually constitute and shape their personality over time and the course of their life. They are always the same person, on account of their personal reality, but they are not always the same, because their acts reshape them over time.

### **3.2 How does a human being become a person?**

People's being and "way of being" give rise to their way of acting, but this does not keep their way of acting from substantially modifying their way of being.

You have the right to decide what you will be, and to be what you decide.

A person's actions are not only good and bad; they also make him good or bad; they fulfill him or frustrate him. A person's main responsibility therefore falls on him: it consists of forging his personality according to his most profound vocation.

*"All things subject to change and to becoming never remain constant, but continually pass from one state to another, for better or worse."*  
John Paul II,  
V.S. n. 71.

The shape that our personality takes at any given moment implies the choice of one possibility among many. We choose some options and leave others behind. We decide our way of being on the basis of what we are and the way we act. In this way, our personality is gradually shaped and constructed, destroyed, or reconstructed.

It is not only about choosing to be an engineer or a doctor, but also about what kind of doctor I want to be.

People's way of being consists not only of having a way of doing things, but of having ways that are "their ways." Personality is shaped not only by what each person does, but by the degree to which the action modifies the person.



In each personal action I not only possess myself; I also make of myself what I want to be. With my action, I take on a personal way of being. I take possession of myself and make myself "me" through my actions. One of the inherent characteristics of a personal action is that it contributes to the constitution of the person. An action has a personal dimension not only in the sense that it comes from a person, but also because it is constitutively personal: it contributes to the way of being that I want as mine.

My personality is the concrete "me" that emerges from all the traits that have been determined by my decisions; however, the actions taken in freedom and intelligence are not the only ones to determine my personality. Each person has acquired traits and natural traits. The natural ones are determined by the more modest vegetative and somatic processes. My genetic inheritance, physical constitution and health condition me to act in a certain way. From these conditioning factors and from these circumstances, people construct themselves in their unity and projected into the future.

One of the most sublime ways in which people transcend and become more themselves is by loving, because in love they move out of themselves and give themselves to another. A person's true value is determined by her capacity to move beyond her self and to care about others. One of the most beautiful ways to "be ethical" is to love.

### **3.3 Unity and continuity of the human person**

There is a risk of judging substantially unconnected actions as if the relationship of some with others, and with the subject who performs them, were accidental in terms of ethical assessment.

It is important to stress that life must be taken as a whole, from infancy to old age; otherwise, a person could live a series of fragments and undergo situations that leave her untouched as an ethical subject; she

could act illogically, with no relationship or unity among her actions.

A key feature of the ethical life consists of giving meaning and taking responsibility for life in its entirety.

Ethical action is like a work of art. The product of a vision and of a struggle to make the best decisions.

Each action is a link in an individual's ethical life, which channels the forces that drive her being, in search of unity, consistency, freedom and correspondence with reality. Aside from the ethical assessment of each action, there is the way the person assesses herself according to the perspective she takes on her reality in its entirety.

It is not possible to analyze a person's life as simply being here and now. Not simply here, because the person is history, confronted by a decision rooted in his situation and his circumstances. Situations are accidental in the sense of particular, contingent and unique; but they are essential because, on the one hand, circumstances belong to temporal existence as the matrix in which the person makes his life, finds his possibilities and determines his way of being; and on the other hand, because in each situation the subject is present in the unity of his life; and finally, because the human person must necessarily find himself in a situation, and even though it is accidental that it is this or that situation, it is essential that it be some situation.

### **3.4 Development of personal ethical awareness**

We all come into the world with no previous knowledge, with no decisions made, with no model or

type of behavior. We are all project and very little reality. The world and society are things that are thrust upon us; in them and before them we have to find our place.

The culture we live in constitutes one of the determining factors in our programming: it orients us or predisposes us to react in certain ways in the face of certain situations.

As we become adults, our freedom kicks in. Our ethical personality gradually frees itself from programmed responses; it stops reacting and begins to act at its own discretion. In this way we leave off being subordinates and little by little become masters of ourselves and of our actions.

The perfectly complete, fixed, true and real ethical person does not exist in any individual, precisely because being a person implies becoming a person, i.e., it involves a process. If I am a person, and an ethical person at that, this being a person entails thinking, judging, feeling, valuing, respecting, esteeming, loving, hating, fearing, desiring, hoping, believing and committing myself. All of these actions, and many more, are what define my ethical personality, and undergo a continuous process of change.

The ethical personality is not a set of core principles engraved in our heart, or a kind of perfectly formed statue, authentic and real, fixed and permanent. There is something permanent, the ultimate subject, but there is also something constantly developing, which is why I can say "I am different" or "I can change."

When we react the way others expect us to, or when we follow certain norms, our self takes its place in the world we were born in.

The human person is never entirely everything that he is, because he is free and can change.

At the beginning of our life, just as we were given the food we needed to survive, we were also given a set of norms and principles to help us live. They were given to us out of love, but we were also asked to comply with them as a demonstration of love. We were not asked to understand them, or to accept them freely; we were asked to comply with them: *Don't pick your nose, don't chew with your mouth open, say please when you ask for things, etc.* These were all precepts that were imposed on us with no distinction as to their importance, value or durability; they were simply the ways we were supposed to behave.

There were also implicit or explicit penalties or punishments, but the possibility also existed of our discovering and understanding for ourselves the importance and the value of these norms, in accordance with our age and our intellectual capacity. In this way we gradually moved from the self conditioned by a series of precepts and impositions, to a more authentic self that understood, evaluated, questioned and implemented these norms. We were learning to be ourselves by "choice" rather than by "imposition."

As this assimilation or internalization took place, as we learned to conduct ourselves and not be conducted by others, we became adults and the quality of our ethical personality emerged.

Social and individual "programming" tend to crystallize in patterns of action and reaction, in such a way that our actions and reactions can be predicted quite accurately. In the same way, moral action tends to become an attitude and a personal way of behaving. This is how we go from actions to attitudes: by acting

fairly we create attitudes characterized by fairness; by acting in a disorderly way, we create disorderly attitudes.

One reaction that some people have is to reject all authorities and norms of behavior, either because they believe they can be any way they want, or because they believe that any way of acting can lead to success and happiness, which is clearly wrong.

We tend to conduct ourselves the same way according to our physical or emotional needs, and we assume the same roles to perform the same activities. It is a case of reactions to certain situations that have been more or less programmed at some time in our psychological history. In order to achieve sincere communication with others, and to succeed in giving of ourselves and maturing, it is extremely useful to be aware of the roles we play. If we do this, we might end up discarding them, but we might also end up making them more consciously ours.

Faithfulness to options and values, and the ability to change the direction of one's life, form the foundation on which the human person grows ethically.

### **3.5 The concept of situation**

In general terms, a situation can be understood as a concrete human way of existing: it is an anthropological notion that co-determines the person's essence. It is the concrete result of all the factors of time and place in which human freedom is inserted. It is closely related to our physical being, to our body and everything it entails: it is being-in-the-

world. Freedom, consciousness and responsibility are necessarily conditioned, located. Human nature is a non-existent abstraction; what exists is human beings with their capacities in a certain situation.

We can distinguish between elements of situation and situational elements. The former can be generalized: for example, all human beings are in the world, or are necessarily masculine or feminine; the latter are unique, absolutely individual and personal.

The "circumstances" used to be considered aggravating or mitigating factors, not as integral parts of the ethical act; ethics was disembodied from circumstances. It was not believed that there could be specifically masculine or feminine obligations, for one age or another, in one country or another, and in different countries.

There are situations that highlight geophysical elements: climate, seasons, day, night, country, etc.; and bio-psychological elements: sex, age, health, temperament, etc.; personal elements: intelligence, capacity for concentration and reflection, degree of consciousness, freedom, age, development, abnormalities, etc.; cultural elements: education, environment, religion, etc.; social elements: family, race, people, nation, etc.; historical elements: positive and negative experiences and personal history; moral elements: sensitivity to values, way of being, conscience, etc.; religious elements: sensitivity to the sublime, ability to value and admire, and everything related to the order of grace.

### **3.5.1 The situated person**

Ethics can point out values, analyze their correlations, justify them, propose motivations so that people identify with them, but it cannot indicate how each person in particular is supposed to live them.

You are responsible for what you have

In addition to ethical systems and moral proposals, each individual and each community must use their

particular creativity to come up with specific applications.

made of yourself and what you are making of yourself by acting this way.

It is a fact, from a sociological and anthropological viewpoint, that knowledge, truth, and human nature are marked by historicity. People find themselves in unique situations that will never come up again, and that therefore demand unique responses that will never be called for again; the way of appreciating, of thinking, of being plays a role, as does the way people have acted in the past; with all of this input, people's consciences, upon careful consideration, point out to them what is good and what is not.

The measure of the justice that I must carry out is not the abstract idea of justice, but rather what I discover to be just in the here and now, as a function of my possibilities to act. The particular dimension of the ethical demand is grounded in the fact that the call to do the right thing and to be more and more human is discovered in history, and is expressed in each situation.

*"A doctrine which dissociates the moral act from the bodily dimensions of its exercise is contrary to the teaching of Scripture and Tradition."*  
John Paul II,  
V.S. n. 49.

The newness of history (possibilities of change, and of free options), demands of people the capacity to renew their options, to widen the horizons of their values, and to find ever more creative and effective ways to do what is right.

Ethics teaches that there are values that should be present in any action within any specific situation. The fact that the situation is particular and specific does not make the value any less compelling, or dilute the imperative of the conscience. What it does is demand

creative action that discovers how and to what extent that value will determine the action.

The experience and the call of duty that each person discovers may demand more than what is strictly necessary under ordinary circumstances.

*"What is right to do in a certain situation depends on the circumstances..."*  
John Paul II,  
V.S. n. 58.

Primordial values, such as life and the dignity of the person, take a back seat in certain situations, such as self-defense; this means that the primordial character of these values must be seen in the context in which the problems arise, and consideration must be given to the plurality of ends and interests, and above all, to the person, her life and her possibilities.

People's ethical formation does not consist of implanting atemporal ideas, but of forming concrete people that recognize their entire being and their history.

More important than adopting universal standards is finding a way to give form and produce order in the complexity of inner and outer life, coordinating impulses, ambitions, tendencies and desires with the orientation to do the right thing.

### **3.5.2 Characteristics of the situated person**

1) All people are necessarily situated, and their situation is not determined by them. Even before they freely take a stance, their situation pushes them in a certain direction. No one can do a thing independently of their objective situation. This situation is not simply something that influences their life; it is something by which their life, in its entirety, is configured: to react to the circumstances.

2) Situations are unique and never repeat themselves. In all situations there are elements of change. The nature of a human person does persist over time, but



it is a nature "in history." Development is an essential part of the human person, derived from his condition as creature.

3) The situation is an invitation, a call to the person, a demand made by binding reality, a requirement of objective reality. From the specific situation, as binding reality, the sense of obligation arises.

Thus, the situation becomes an objective ethical norm that at times can take preference over general norms (even divine law itself, for example, the law governing worship, fasting and the Sabbath), both positive and negative (thou shalt not kill, swear, make graven images, etc.). If a person is ill, her situation not only exempts her from discharging certain responsibilities, it also imposes others.

4) The situated person must always be discerning, at least for the most important cases.

5) Since the concrete person in specific circumstances can be identified with human nature, the human person's essential structure does not disappear when consideration is given to these particular circumstances.

Discernment: a person's ability to distinguish one obligation from another, with regard to action.

### **3.6 Law and situation**

The situated person cannot simply dismiss the law or objective norms; he must integrate them. He must take them into account as compulsory norms, in the specific situation, subject to the virtue of discretion or prudence.

The situated person must not make an arbitrary choice; her obligation is to determine the objective norm in a particular case. An act is right or wrong depending on whether it agrees or not with the objective norms and also considers the concrete situation.

Abstract and general norms are clear criteria for action that must be taken into account. The situation is not the only objective moral norm. General norms are an imperative and a duty that enter into a dialogue with the personal situation. In this dialogue, the person consults her conscience, knowledge and freedom to determine or discover what she must do in that specific case.

Objective norms, and the moral good that is sought through them, are what should go into a judgment of conscience. Conscientious and responsible people discover or recognize norms in concrete reality.

The judgment of conscience does not decide by itself whether an act is wrong, but in the light of objective reality, inasmuch as it succeeds in knowing its value and accepting it freely.

Ortega y Gasset

The human person is not just "*he and his circumstances*", but also "*he and his decisions*." In the face of his circumstances he is obliged to make decisions that shape who he is.

We need to look for the way to reconcile the objective demands of morality (positive laws) with subjective morality and binding reality.

The Pharisaic spirit consists of giving priority to the law over people.

We assert that there are general abstract norms that have universal value, because they are grounded in objective reality. We believe that the situation must not don the mantle of "law." But we also believe that when the law is applied, the person's situation must be considered. These reflections are made with the intention of emphasizing that the objective norm of the

conscience is not an abstract, universal norm, but a specific norm.

### **3.7 Situational ethics**

Situational ethics states that it is not possible to determine what is morally good or bad on the basis of general, abstract norms that are valid for all cases without exception, but rather only on the basis of the situation the person is going through. And since this situation is unique for each individual, not to be repeated and impossible to generalize, general rules have no normative value.

Situational ethics responds to a lived need or tendency, rather than to a perfectly elaborated system. It is almost evident that it includes compelling points of view and that it is a reaction to an abstract, ahistorical and depersonalized ethics.

Situational ethics emerged from certain philosophical, psychological and ethical schools of thought, and although it is not represented by any specific philosophers, its inspiration comes from existentialism.

Such as Carl Rogers  
or Jean Paul Sartre.

### **3.8 Situational ethics is unacceptable**

1) Because it does not recognize general or universal norms, and assumes that people decide for themselves whether a given act is good or bad.

2) Because it posits that the situated person is the only criterion for ethical norms, and gives no weight to binding reality or natural law.

3) Because it makes the judgment of conscience, with no points of reference, the source of ethics, and because it leaves out the human person's social dimension, making each person an isolated and ethically autonomous being.

4) Because it does not agree with the knowledge of truth and values, and with their historical and dynamic meaning.

5) Because it locks people into their subjectivity. Situational ethics does not contribute to the construction of the person, nor does it fulfill the purpose of ethics, which is to make people more human in their relations with others. Situational ethics instead makes people an independent center of social reality.

6) Because it does not help people to construct their personality, as it disconnects them from objective and binding reality.

7) Because it does not consider the margin of freedom that a person has even in a specific situation: while we are not free to choose what happens to us, we are free to act in one way or another in response to what happens to us.

Situational ethics is unacceptable, not because it considers people in their specific situations, but because it rules out other criteria; not because it points out a principle, but because it makes it absolute.

### **3.9 Summary and conclusion**

Being a person and being ethical are correlative terms. The more people develop ethically, the more they develop as persons, and vice versa. People act personally and ethically when they do so consciously, freely and responsibly, as individual subjects who make decisions in a situated, historical context and with a sense of their social dimension.

There are no ethical actions without a subject who acts, which means that every action necessarily refers back to some person, and his circumstances and conditioning factors, if only implicitly. People are always in a particular situation, and from there they must decide what to do and what to avoid, while giving consideration to binding reality. The situation (the human and specific way of existing) co-determines people's actions. The call to do what is right and to become more and more human is discovered in history and is expressed in each situation. People have the obligation to discover the objective norm of morality in the particular case. The concrete situation, as binding reality, gives rise to the sense of obligation. General norms are an imperative and a duty that are bound up with the personal situation.

#### **+ Christian reflection**

It is true that in the Christian faith we recognize that people are fundamentally damaged by the forces of disintegration that work in them (original sin). We also believe, however, that they are called to become more and more human, which in Biblical language means closer and closer to God's image and likeness,

Rm. 5:15. and that people are always under the influence of grace, i.e., cloaked by God's presence and action that work in them to help them overcome their shortcomings. People are under the sign of love and grace more than they are under the sign of sin and destruction.

Gn. 2:7; I Cor. 15:45. In the Christian faith, human beings' existence has always been seen as linked to God's creative action. God made people conscious, free, responsible, social, and put them in a world that they must share with others. God communicated with people to teach them and help them grow. He conveyed to them his most ardent wish: for people to live, grow, develop, and be happy. For this reason alone he gave them the commandments. But he made them and wants them so free that they can, if they want, ignore him and reject him.

Ex. 3:7ff; Ex. 20: 1ff.

### **Activities**

Answer the following questions individually.

1. Looking at the past: in view of my history, and at the present moment, what kind of person have I become? What are the factors that have influenced my development? How far have I come in assimilating my own values? To what extent have I been a person shaped by others with authentic appropriation?

2. Looking at the present: What things make me less consistent? How can I overcome them? What positive and negative impulses and tendencies are there in me? How can I develop my positive impulses?

Discuss the following questions:

- a) What makes you a person?
- b) How can you develop as a person?
- c) Describe your way of being.
- d) How would you like to be?
- e) What kind of actions do you think shape you in the way of being that characterizes you?
  
- f) Analyze the role that different external factors have played in shaping your way of being. Which do you think have helped you the most and which have held you back?
  
- g) How do you think the Christian faith can help you in your actions and your decisions?

Discuss the following examples:

a) A reporter has knowledge of a crime that has been committed, and he feels the urge, out of a love for the truth, to inform the authorities. His life, however, is in danger; he has received anonymous death threats over the phone. Analyze the elements and the values at stake. Compare the results from an ethics of the situated person, and from situational ethics.

b) In the same way, analyze the following example:

A strike is about to be called in a factory. The workers demand higher salaries. The owner offers a raise that is significantly lower than what the trade union has asked for. The only way to offer a higher raise would be to cut into profits.

### **True or False**

Human actions have their own weight and must be judged separately, because they are not connected.

True [ ]    False [ ]

Actions are good or bad in themselves, like killing and lying, regardless of the person, the circumstances and the consequences.

True [ ]    False [ ]

Good and bad human actions do not change the person; they only demonstrate what she already is.

True [ ]    False [ ]

Ethics is a demand that human growth makes on the person.

True [ ]    False [ ]

In order to acquire a virtue, it is necessary to have freedom to act otherwise.

True [ ]    False [ ]

An ethics that does not make us act on our own account and with sincerity, should not be called human, much less Christian.

True [ ]    False [ ]

There are values that should be present in any human situation.

True [ ]    False [ ]

The call to do what is right and to become more and more human is discovered in a person's life and circumstances,



and is fulfilled in concrete ways.

True [ ] False [ ]

The human person in his particular situation is the only ethical criterion for setting norms.

True [ ] False [ ]

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### **Questions**

#### **What does it mean to be a person?**

To be endowed with certain abilities (intelligence, free will, affections, a feeling of connection to others, etc.), to be called to fulfill oneself in all the dimensions of one's being, in one's circumstances and through one's own history, consciously, freely and responsibly, and always in a dynamic, unfinished and perfectible process.

#### **Why is a person an ethical subject?**

Because there are no conscious, free and responsible actions without a subject who acts, which means that every action necessarily refers back to a person and the circumstances and conditioning factors that are inherent to her being. Being a person and being ethical are correlative terms.

**What does the process of personalization consist of?**

Of people's progress - which grows steadily more and more conscious, responsible, free, supportive, autonomous - in their overall fulfillment, in the context of their circumstances and through their own history.

**How can a human being become more of a person?**

By appropriating, cultivating and applying human values (justice, love, compassion, work, truth, etc.).

**What role does society play in a person's ethical being?**

An extremely important role, because it is the vital medium in which a person fulfills herself.

**How does a person grow ethically?**

In his ability to reorient his life in the here and now in order to be better and to do the right thing; in his faithfulness to his options and values.

**What do we mean by "situation"?**

In general terms it is a specific and human way of existing; it is being-in-the-world.

**Mention some characteristic of the situated person.**

- 1) The person does not determine her situation.
- 2) The situation is unique and is never repeated.
- 3) The situation is an invitation and demands an attitude of discernment.

**What does situational ethics claim?**

That it is impossible to determine what is morally good or bad on the basis of general, abstract norms, because each situation is unique for each individual.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE VALUE OF THE HUMAN PERSON

#### 4.0 Preface

We understand right to mean the title by which people can demand the conditions necessary for the full development of their being and their action. Human rights are historical expressions of humanity's ethical conscience. And they are natural demands that arise from the human structure.

Kant said that it was not right to talk about the value of human beings, but about their dignity, because value is measurable and can be used for comparative calculations. This reflection is important because it makes us realize the transcendence of the human person beyond merely practical values.

#### Objective:

To show how the human person is the foundation of an ethics with universal validity, and how people have become aware of this value on the basis of their historical experience.

Ground work of the Metaphysics of Morals, BA 77.

We use the term pre-eminence to designate the property that places human beings above all other living beings. This pre-eminence stems from the fact that human beings are not subordinated to any other value; on the contrary, all values are subordinated to them.

But what does a person's value consist of? Why are all people accorded the same fundamental value? The answer to these questions lies in the "eminence" of human beings with respect to all things. Human beings, because of their intelligence, and thus their conscience, freedom, responsibility, social dimension, love and capacity for giving of themselves, are placed above all things. They are worth more than other things but the same as other human beings.

#### **4.1 Historical discovery of the human person's value**

The discovery of personal dignity is a fruit that took a long time to grow over the course of human history; it ultimately grew out of human beings' encounter with themselves. Many circumstances and factors have enabled humanity to become aware of its pre-eminence. Since the emergence of the great cultures it has been recognized, often only partially, that the individual has the right to be respected and protected. Almost all cultures set forth in their legal, cultural or religious codes the prohibition against violating certain rights and the imperative to protect life.

In a certain period of Greek history, for example, the weak and the deformed were exterminated.

This pre-eminence has clearly not been recognized by all people, or for all people. In fact, it has yet to be accorded universal status. Highly developed cultures

have accepted as natural such institutions as slavery, torture and discrimination. It was not until two centuries ago that slavery ceased to be seen as normal, and even a natural right.

Hitler did not recognize the most elementary rights of millions of Jews.

Western culture particularly has recognized a special right of the individual, by which the individual can demand respect. Throughout history, personal dignity has gradually acquired a more universal validity.

The recognition of the value of the human person entails respect for each individual person. In many cultures and traditions, this has not been possible, in part because their religious beliefs do not recognize the importance of individual identity (e.g., Buddhism), or due to prejudices about special prerogatives based on caste or gender differences (e.g., Islam or Hinduism) or social class, as in many industrialized or developing countries. In part as well, because the recognition of this pre-eminence jeopardizes the interests of privileged groups. Nonetheless, an international consensus is emerging that recognizes the inalienable dignity of each person.

*"Civil authorities and particular individuals never have authority to violate the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person."*  
John Paul II,  
V.S., n. 97.

*"We recognize the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family."*

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Preamble.

Personal pre-eminence endows all human beings with fundamental rights. These rights are based on people's very being and enable them to demand adequate conditions and means to fulfill themselves in the fundamental aspects of their personal being. The obligation that I discover in my neighbor corresponds to the right that my neighbor has to demand that I respect him.



*Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel, 1830, 486.

Having a subjective right means having an obligation to oneself and to others. Whoever has the right to life has the obligation to respect the life of others. And whoever does not respect the life of others loses the right, at least, to live like them, in freedom.

The right to truth is based on the natural tendency of intelligence to know reality. The right to life is grounded in the inner drive that compels people to preserve life, propagate the species and improve themselves. The right to a dignified life comes from the desire to fulfill oneself and the need to do it under suitable conditions, etc.

Human rights are specific, historical conclusions drawn from the pre-eminence and value of the human person; they bear witness to a deep aspiration that people have, to their potential for growth and humanization, to their commitment to duties and rights that enable their self-fulfillment.

Seeing that everyone is covered by these rights, we become aware of our fundamental equality and our condition as free beings, because without these conditions it would be impossible to enforce the rights in which we are all included.

#### **4.2 The experience of the human person's value**

It is interesting to point out that the discovery of the other as a valuable being is the seed from which love grows.

Each person has an intuition of the value of her own life, of her being and her existence as a supreme value, at least for herself. When she manages to project this value onto others, she discovers the pre-eminence of the other person. She thus comes to realize that the other is worth as much as she is. This realization gives

rise to the precept of treating others as she would be treated: "*your neighbor as yourself*" or "*do not wish for others what you would not wish for yourself*". Intuition and experience help us to recognize human dignity, more than an abstract consideration of human beings' faculties or qualities.

Lv. 19:18; Mt. 19:19;  
Mk. 12:33.

Experience shows us that people who do not value their own life are practically unable to value the life of others; likewise, people who cannot get past focusing on their own value to see the value of others, often end up using others for their own purposes.

#### **4.3 Anthropological grounding of personal pre-eminence**

In ourselves and in others we discover certain qualities that sustain our immediate certainty as subjects with a relatively absolute value, i.e., open and free beings with self-determination in the face of all reality, even in the face of the reality of God, but in a relative way inasmuch as we need the world's reality, and the reality of others and of God in order to be human beings. Ours is an absolute value, beyond all measure; but it is relatively absolute, because our value as persons is in relation to others and depends on mutual recognition and respect.

From this we can posit a common basis for the different conceptions of the human person throughout history: intelligence, consciousness, free will, the possibility of moving beyond self-interest and being jointly responsible, of doing things for love, of being a person, and at the same time part of a whole.

a) With respect to intelligence: in our way of encountering things, we find that we apprehend them as something real, different from us. Intelligence opens up the realm of reality. We can know it, we are in it, we transform it, and we define ourselves in terms of reality. We can be who we are on the basis of reality, without being completely determined by it.

b) Consciousness is the capacity people have to possess themselves, to be present to themselves, to conduct themselves. This ability makes people superior to all other living beings. From this experience we can come to discover ourselves as thinking selves who can comprehend the world, who can be what we are and still relate to what is not us, transform it and make use of it.

*"Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed. The entire universe need not arm itself to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water suffices to kill him. But, if the universe were to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which killed him, because he knows that he dies and the advantage which the universe has over him; the universe knows nothing of this."*

Blaise Pascal,  
*Pensées*, 347.

c) Free will. We experience ourselves as free beings because we can define our way of being and determine ourselves in our actions, and because people are capable of deciding for themselves and of determining what relation they will have with the world and with others, as well as of responding to the demands made on them as autonomous beings.

*"Freedom is an essential of that creaturely image which is the basis of the dignity of the person".* John Paul II V.S. n 86

d) People's pre-eminence is grounded in their capacity to move beyond their self-interest and be jointly responsible for others.

Most people are worth more than they believe themselves to be worth.

e) They are also capable of loving and of giving of themselves for love. Love is the most ennobling force in humanity.

Only love reveals a person's value.

f) They are the only beings capable of apprehending all people and the universe. This is why they ask questions about totality.

The human person is the supreme value of the universe.

It is worth pointing out that an individual person's rights cannot be detached from her social reference. Respect for one person's rights entails obligations for others. Furthermore, the sense of human rights has to do with enabling people to fulfill themselves within a community, in which these same people must respect the rights of others, as an obligation that corresponds to their rights.

Respecting human beings also entails respecting the surroundings in which they live, and recognizing the value of the world and other living beings. There is no use in respecting people without respecting what they need to live. In many cultural and religious traditions we find respect for all creatures with which people feel affinity. At times this respect may be rooted in superstitious and fetishist elements, but it can also reflect a well-founded sense of the value of things.

Whoever does not respect others' rights, loses his own.

Respect for people also implies respect for that which belongs to them. First of all, their personal qualities, and then their worldly belongings. This

*"Respect for others' rights is peace."* Benito Juárez.

respect is grounded in people's social dimension and the need that all people have of worldly goods.

The human person is an objective value, and a value in relation to other people and the world.

These arguments provide an anthropological grounding of the value of the human person. The claim that people have pre-eminence means that due to their intelligence, consciousness and freedom, they constitute in themselves an inestimable value, relatively absolute and unalienable. People's value and pre-eminence is the immediate foundation of ethical values.

Thinkers such as Sartre, Camus, Feuerbach and Marx are among those that posit the only absolute value in the human person, considered individually and generically.

An anthropological philosophy that does not subordinate people to any transcendent reality or to any other value will be forced to find in people themselves the foundation of their pre-eminence. But if it is grounded in the reality of the human person, not only will it have universal and permanent validity, and be open to transcendence, it will also be able to draw on the wealth of life, history and culture.

#### **+ Christian reflection**

*"God's supreme work is man."* St. Irenaeus, Ad. Haer. V, 15, 2.

The message of Christian revelation, more than a revelation about God, is a revelation about human beings, about the value of the human person. People have worth because they are God's creatures, his masterwork. They have been made in God's image and likeness; they are capable of knowing and loving their Creator. People are valuable for being the object of God's love, for their personal relationship with him. Christ has come not just to reveal the value of the human person, but to give his life for it. And in this sense it can be said that people are worth the life of God made man.

By being children of the Father himself, people are brothers and sisters among themselves, called to share Christ's destiny and to reproduce his image during their lifetime and after it, definitively in eternal life. *"Christ forms us according to his image,"* says St. Cyril of Alexandria, *"in such a way that the traits of his divine nature shine forth in us..."*

Rm. 8:19; Ph. 3:21;  
2Co. 3:18.

John Paul II, V.S., n.  
73.

*"Man's sublimity, his glory and dignity, lie in knowing where true greatness is and cleaving to it, in looking for the glory that comes from the Lord of glory. As the Apostle says, "If anyone wants to boast, let him boast of the Lord," an assertion made in another text: "By God's doing Christ has become our wisdom, and our virtue, and our holiness, and our freedom."*

St. Basil the Great,  
Homily 20, *On Humility*,  
3.

Human beings' dignity is grounded in the option that God has taken for them by creating them and redeeming them. The purpose of the Commandments is not just to honor God, but as a necessary demand of faith, to care about other people's rights and needs.

### **Summary**

Human beings' consciousness, freedom, responsibility, social dimension, love and capacity for giving of themselves place them above other things. This pre-eminence makes all values subordinate to human beings.

The discovery of human dignity is a fruit that took a long time to grow over the course of human history. The dignity of the human person gives rise to human rights, which are an expression of people's potential for development and humanization. Human dignity is

recognized through intuition and experience. The purpose of human rights is people's development within their community.

### **A more in-depth look**

*"In our neighbor we intuitively recognize a being identical to ourselves, with a conscious, thinking and free nature. This intuition means that in the experience that we have of the other, we are inevitably aware of not only the presence of a body with a series of physical features that are inherent to its corporality. What we experience, paradoxically, is the intimacy of the other as an inviolable intimacy, something that is not experienced, so to speak, but that is similar to my own. As an experience that at the same time contains the secret of the universe."*

Humberto Gianini, *La experiencia moral*, Ed. Universitaria, Chile, 1992, pp. 139-140. Idem., p. 132.

*"There are those who walk down their own short personal segment of this long human history without ever considering the problem of their dignity. Satisfied perhaps with the unfathomable gift that they are for themselves, they never stop to wonder where it came to them from."*

Gandhi, in a letter to Dr. Julian Huxley, Director General of UNESCO, May 25, 1947.

*"I learned from my illiterate but wise mother that all rights to be deserved and preserved come from duty well done. Thus the very right to live accrues to us when we do the duty of citizenship of the world."*

*"The sum total of everything that can be the object of human rights is far from being exhausted. Just as we do not know where the limits of man's physical capacities lie, as we see him break 'records' that we considered unbreakable, neither can we determine how far the development of our moral conscience and the feeling of*

*brotherhood and equality may someday lead..., when defining what human rights are."*

It is not enough to defend the dignity of the human person and her human rights. It is also important to find out which specific behaviors promote this dignity and which degrade it, and what sort of actions are consistent with these human rights.

Pedro Arrupe

### **Activities**

1. What alternatives can you come up with to the pre-eminence of the human person as a basis for a common ethics? How might the construction of a universal ethics not grounded in the human person be justified?
2. What happens when we do not recognize that the human person has a pre-eminent value? (Discuss some historical cases.)
3. In what areas of our personal and social life do you think the pre-eminence of the person has not yet emerged as a guiding principle?
4. Analyze an issue of the company or professional activity where you work in which it is particularly important to consider the pre-eminence of the human person.



5. What implications could there be in the structure of the company if the human person is seen as an end and not a means?

6. How do you think the value of one's own person and that of others might be experienced?

7. Analyze the Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations Charter. Point out the rights that are respected in the company where you work (or in some other company) and those that are not respected. Why do you think they are not respected? How could they begin to be respected?

8. If your rights were not derived from your dignity, how else do you think they could be justified?

9. What do you base your own personal pre-eminence on?

10. Analyze an extreme case in which personal pre-eminence might need to be relativized (situation in which the common good takes preference over the individual good: death penalty, tyrannicide, etc.)

11. Could an ethics with universal validity be possible?

12. What would it have to be based on?

### **True or False**

The human person is not an objective value; it is just a way of thinking about others.

True [ ] False [ ]

"Human relations (father, mother, spouse, child, friend) are merely concepts of the mind" (A. de Mello, *Rompe el ídolo*, p. 22).

True [ ] False [ ]

If someone believes they are inferior, they will constantly find things that confirm their belief.

True [ ] False [ ]

Laws that are contrary to human rights cannot be taken as mandatory.

True [ ] False [ ]

The overriding issue of authority is not to order the right things, but to let human beings be persons.

True [ ] False [ ]

Human rights emerge from the very nature of human beings.

True [ ] False [ ]

Human rights are based on the consensus of the people who defend them.

True [ ] False [ ]

Human rights need to consider not just the individual person, but also the aggregate of people organized in society.

True [ ] False [ ]

Human rights endanger the correct functioning of society.

True [ ] False [ ]

There is no such thing as better or worse people.

True [ ] False [ ]

Assessing value always entails mental work.

True [ ] False [ ]

The struggle for self-improvement is futile.

True [ ] False [ ]

Human dignity consists of conducting one's own life in service to others.

True [ ] False [ ]

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the person, and the meaning of human rights from a variety of viewpoints.

### **Questions**

**What is meant by pre-eminence?**

The property that places human beings above any other value.

**How did the value of the human person gradually emerge?**

As a fruit that grew slowly over the course of history, out of the encounter of human beings with themselves.

**What are human rights?**

They are natural imperatives derived from the human structure; they are concrete, historical conclusions drawn from the pre-eminence and value of the human person; they are a reflection of the human person's most profound aspiration, of her potential for growth and humanization.

**How can we recognize the value of our personal being?**

Through intuition and experience.

**Where does the value of the human person come from?**

From his consciousness, responsibility, freedom, solidarity and capacity to give of himself, and to apprehend all of reality.

**What is the anthropological basis for personal pre-eminence?**

The human person's intelligence, consciousness and freedom.



**What does it mean that people are intelligent beings?**

That they have the capacity to open themselves to reality and to recognize through it their independence and autonomy.

**What does it mean that people are conscious beings?**

That they have the capacity to possess themselves, to be present to themselves, to conduct themselves and to recognize their pre-eminence over other living creatures.

**What does it mean that people are free?**

That they have the capacity to define their way of being, and to determine who they are through the relationships they establish with the world and with others, as well as to respond to the demands that these others make.

## CHAPTER V

### THE ETHICAL DYNAMICS OF THE HUMAN PERSON

#### 5.1 Ethical perception

Given that people's ethical foundation lies in their capacity to understand, in their comprehension of reality and adaption to it, it is important to study the nature of their ethical knowledge.

In the first place, we can speak of ethical perception, i.e., of moral good as it should be carried out, which is often more of an intuition than rational knowledge. People are beings that, before knowing and reacting ethically, have ethical intuitions, which drive and guide their reflections. To distinguish this from other faculties, we could call it an "ethical (or pre-ethical) instinct," which is exclusive to human beings. It is an

**Objective:**

To describe the characteristics that enable people to acquire their personality. To show the dynamism of consciousness and freedom, as well as the sense of human responsibility. To motivate the student to grow in consciousness, freedom and responsibility, and to discover the means to do so.

expression of people's innate inclination to what is right.

We usually first perceive the values that are at stake in ethical issues, then we think of different alternatives for solving the problem.

We should point out that this faculty may be more or less developed at different stages of history, or in different people and cultures.

People are capable of understanding what actions and behavior, what life projects might be more reasonable, more in line with concrete human beings.

People need to be educated and to develop by learning about the values that lead to their fulfillment as human persons, and by putting them into practice. These values include loyalty, responsibility, sincerity, justice, etc.

## 5.2 Consciousness

*"Conscience is ... in its primordial reality... an act of a person's intelligence."* John Paul II, V.S., 32.

Consciousness is the faculty by which people are the masters of themselves and possess themselves. Consciousness is not an entity that is separate from the subject; it is the subject inasmuch as he knows himself, values himself and judges himself. Consciousness consists of being able to know oneself, and to turn back on oneself.

The ethical conscience consists of the ability to evaluate and judge the projects, attitudes and actions that people carry out. It is characterized by its reference to ethical values, such as right and wrong, justice and injustice, truth and falsehood, reasonableness and unreasonableness, the individual and others.

Consciousness encompasses all of the dimensions of the human person, and constitutes her unity; it is the ultimate foundation of the person.

### **5.2.1 The ethical judgment of conscience**

People are inclined to make ideas out of reality, and reality out of ideas; this is the natural dynamic of rational beings, to want to understand, interpret and affirm reality. All people display the tendency to apprehend reality and to act as closely as possible in accordance with it. Reality apprehended, understood and assessed, becomes the measure and norm of action.

People apply ethical principles on the basis of their ideas, their realities or needs, and their culture. This horizon is historical, thus not all people consider the same things as mandated or forbidden.

The relationship between idea and reality is similar to the one that exists between theory and practice, between being and doing. These elements are complementary and mutually dependent.

### **5.2.2 The dialectic of conscience**

In her acts of conscience, the human person experiences herself as identical to herself. And yet she feels the demands of her conscience as intensely as if they were separate from her. This gives rise to tension. The conscience reveals to people who they are, what they have achieved and what they have left to achieve; it expresses the tension between what people are and what they ought to be, between being and the way of being. The conscience is the wellspring of responsibility. And as it is often experienced as a call from outside of ourselves or as a reproach, it easily becomes personified or identified with a higher power. The perception of conscience enables people to realize

that they can transcend themselves, that their self is reality and project; that reality and practice can correct their judgments and that the contradiction that occurs inside of them can be overcome in the process of their decisions.

Part of people's being is their "ought to be", their goal, their aim, because people are not a closed and finished reality, and the success or failure of their actions, inasmuch as they leave an imprint on the actors, are part of their very being.

People experience their conscience dynamically because it reveals to them their identity: they are what they are, they are "such" and unique. But then they transcend themselves by realizing that the more they identify with good, with truth and with others, the more "themselves" they are.

### **5.2.3 Function of conscience**

People as conscious beings have a perception of reality and its value. They affirm the value and link it with their action, while at the same time rejecting the anti-value. Thus, for example, by collaborating in a common task, they affirm and take possession of the values of collaboration and solidarity, preferring them to indolence and selfishness.

Ethics addresses the person's inner life. Nothing is ethical unless it is thought and valued as such.

From the conscience and from the perception of reality, obligation arises, which is an ethical imperative. People do not create values, they discover them; nor do they discover their obligations, they encounter them and become aware of them. Duty arises from the perception of reality, and from what people wish would come to pass. It arises from being and from the "ought to be". Duty is the expression of the inner tension between being and its aspirations and possibilities.

As conscious beings, people judge their acts. This function of the conscience has been visualized with different elements of a trial: the witness, the accuser, the judge, guilt, the law, the executioner, the sentence, etc. The judgment handed down by the conscience can be an affirmation, or it can be a disapproval and condemnation.

#### **5.2.4 The formation of the conscience**

The ethical dynamism of the conscience calls for a sort of trial to be held, but it also calls for its own continual formation. Because people never have absolute awareness of all the facts, nor can they foresee all the circumstances and consequences, they must always be open to more and better knowledge of the path that leads them to be more fully human. This view of the conscience that is always open and critical gives compelling expression to the tension between the objective and subjective dimensions of ethics.

*"It is always from the truth that the dignity of conscience derives."* John Paul II, V.S., n. 63.

Negligence or indifference to the continual formation of the conscience creates an unsound and guilty conscience, by staking out a position without considering a commitment to the truth. The guilt does not lie in following the conscience sincerely, but in the previous negligence, when the person could have developed a more solid and better-grounded knowledge.

Decisions of conscience do not exclude the possibility of error. This is a risk inherent to all human options that arises the moment people are presented with different alternatives without knowing which one is the most appropriate. Nor does the simple fulfill-

ment of the law preclude all danger; it would be naïve to think that submitting to orders eliminates all risk of mistake. It is sometimes said that he who obeys makes no mistake. But that is not the case; he who obeys an unjust order commits an injustice along with the person who gave the order, although perhaps with a lesser degree of responsibility, because he is not a mechanical instrument. Obeying does not do away with his identity as an ethical subject, a person.

*"The task of moral teaching today consists of awakening free consciences that are open to the calls of the Spirit."*  
P. Valadier, *Elogio de la conciencia*, p. 382.

If obedience confers peace of mind, the question should be posed whether this peace of mind is authentic, or the fruit of an escapist acquiescence that seeks to shirk responsibility. People often try to flee from the risk of decision and responsibility. When the person in charge takes on these risks and responsibilities, and takes them away from those who obey, she stunts their growth and human development more than she does them any favor.

Hitler's decisions required vast numbers of people without conscience to implement them.

Without the clear and responsible participation of the conscience, there is no truly ethical attitude. Thus, obedience to law and authority, without looking at the law or authority that is behind it, it is not a positive ethical attitude.

Obligation derives from the conscience when the conscience has discerned what is best, or what should not be done, in the context of the circumstances.

### **5.2.5 Ethical conscience as the ultimate criterion for action**

Through their perception of reality, subjects are linked to the values that are implicit in reality. Their

conscience becomes the norm to which they should submit. It is the ultimate ethical occasion by which people are linked to their actions.

The conscience is nourished by education and the influence of the environment. People usually become aware of what is and what should be done on the basis of what they have been told, but their observation of what others do, or should do, also shapes their conscience.

We are dealing with a norm that is internalized on the basis of the reality of things, of the environment and of society. Out of the myriad possibilities that people are presented with at any given moment, the conscience calls on them to choose the right one, the most appropriate one.

*"Each man is a law unto himself."* St. Thomas Aquinas, ST, 1-11 q 90 a 3 d 1.

*"The immediate judgment of conscience"* is the admonition for right behavior that should be followed here and now. *"Obligation in conscience"* points out the inner nature of ethical demands, which derives from binding reality and which is imposed as an obligation. Moral life is based on the principle of the proper autonomy of the human person, the personal subject of his acts. *"The autonomy of practical reason"* means that people have in themselves the law that should govern their actions.

Cfr. J.P.II, V.S. nn. 36 and 40.

The conscience is the ultimate criterion of obligation. And this conscience arises in consideration of the reality of things, in consideration of their values and anti-values. The ultimate criterion of a particular ethical action is reality plus the collection of values and



meanings as I apprehend them and as they impose themselves on my conscious perception.

"*Obligation in conscience*" is the binding perception that people have of themselves in view of reality.

People sometimes interpret "*obligation in conscience*" as implying that one can disregard positive laws and not be compelled by binding reality, but this is a mistaken interpretation. Positive laws are usually made to highlight an obligation in conscience. Obligations that do not move the conscience are not humanizing norms.

Freedom of conscience is people's right to conduct themselves according to their own way of thinking. "*Freedom of conscience*" is not a free pass to act arbitrarily.

### 5.3 Freedom

"*Only the freedom which submits to the Truth leads the human person to his true good. The good of the person is to be in the Truth and to 'do' the Truth.*" John Paul II, V.S. n. 84.

Freedom arises from people's rational nature, and consists of not being necessarily conditioned by external stimuli and being able to make their own determinations on the basis of individual preferences. The exercise of freedom consists of doing what is right out of love for it, giving oneself fully to it under no pressure from anyone else. This implies that the possibility of doing wrong is the risk of being free.

People develop on the basis of free options; their decisions gradually shape the source of their desires.

The most profound and important effect of freedom is the configuration of the human person. Freedom is the capacity that people have to give of themselves and to commit to themselves, to ideals, and to other people. This implies that the meaning of

freedom is the possibility of undertaking a commitment, and the right of free people is to give themselves to whomever they have chosen.

When people give themselves not to a person but to "a cause," this cause is worthy only inasmuch as it is linked to people. "Causes" or institutions are not in and of themselves subjects of personal commitments, because they cannot respond personally. Ideals are sublime to the extent that a commitment to them affords benefits to specific people.

### 5.3.1 Freedom in process

Even when a decision is free, it is conditioned in terms of both each concrete situation and its own history. Not all of our options are free in the same measure. In human action, all kinds of determinations come into play - social, climatic, biological and psychological - that to a great extent can limit our freedom. There may be cases of internal or external coercion that cancel it. In fact, people are more inclined not to be free than to be free, given the many dependencies they are born with, and given the fact that they often find it easier to surrender their freedom than to make use of it. Freedom, then, is something that has to be taught and learned. People are not born free. They become free.

Even when people manage to be free, their freedom is conditioned, in the first place, by themselves, because decisions made in the present are not independent of those made in the past. This is why life consists at the same time of conditioned freedom and

*"Freedom is at once inalienable self-possession and openness to all that exists, in passing beyond self to knowledge and love of the other. Freedom then is rooted in the truth about man, and it is ultimately directed towards communion."*

John Paul II, V.S. n. 86.

*"Only the freedom which submits to the Truth leads the human person to his true good."* John Paul II, V.S. n. 84.

received nature; people are the authors who decide as well as the executors of their acts.

Human life means discovering a series of inevitable questions, and the need to choose a path on an uncertain horizon.

The life of a person is a whole: each of his acts carries the weight of the entire life. In his early years, all perspectives were open and the number of possibilities was practically limitless. As we opt for certain preferences, we gradually shape our lives in a certain direction.

Moreover, our virtues or vices incline us toward certain actions or to certain others. Virtues and vices constitute ways of proceeding that are imprinted on us. There are also habits that may have been voluntary at first, but that are not any more. Thus the field of free action narrows as life goes on. Our present freedom is conditioned by the history of its development. It is no longer possible to point life in a direction that was possible ten years ago. The concrete situation rules out a good portion of possibilities and imposes a series of inescapable duties.

Turning the right thing into something that is second nature, that is mine, is the most sublime form of happiness.

The task of the ethical life is to make good decisions come naturally to us, so that doing the right thing becomes more and more agreeable and spontaneous.

Our way of being, our habits and our situations give a direction to our freedom without canceling it. Our freedom makes us capable of overcoming our given and acquired nature, our innate and acquired way of being, and thus transcends it. This is what enables us to go beyond our own conditioning factors.

### **5.3.2 Freedom for commitment**

People's lives develop through commitments. Together with the right to be free, people have the obligation to exercise their freedom responsibly. The call to freedom is also a call to responsibility.

Freedom in and of itself, independently of the use that is made of it, of the nobility of heart or the cruelty involved, is not the supreme value. Freedom seen as the possibility of doing "whatever I feel like," is an empty concept. The meaning of freedom depends on its objective, i.e., what the person opts for.

### **5.3.3 Meaning or purpose of freedom**

The objective of freedom is not just the choice of concrete options, or the configuration of the person, which can be good or bad, but rather good itself, value and virtue, which is whatever makes people more human.

The perfection of freedom consists of wanting what is right and identifying with it to such an extent that it becomes impossible to do what is wrong. Being able to do evil is not a value, but an imperfection of the will; not a strength, but a weakness.

The possibility of doing the wrong thing is not freedom or perfection of freedom, but rather the risk of being free. With what is right we have an essential and natural relationship. Toward what is wrong we have a fundamental inclination as a defect, a shortcoming, an absence. When we tend toward evil, we do so as dupes; error and evil do not build people

We have been given freedom not just to do what we want, but primarily to make of ourselves what we want.

The first demand of freedom is to love what is good for that reason alone.

up. They are always a stumbling, a kind of failure, and choosing them makes people less human.

Another thing that freedom is not is indifference; in that case, the more neutral we became, the freer we would be. The essence of freedom is not the possibility of choosing what is wrong, but the fact of choosing objectively what is right, of choosing it willingly and consciously.

A good education is not one that resorts to fear and guilt to ensure obedience.

The transition from childhood to adulthood entails replacing externally imposed obligation with inner obligation freely recognized and assumed. We are called to be even freer than we have managed to make ourselves so far.

The deepest link that people can forge through their free decision is the link they forge to other people. Only in interpersonal relationships do they find a response that corresponds to their dynamic freedom. This orientation points to the sense of the human vocation. People are free to communicate with others, but their freedom extends farther than the people they deal with directly.

I am freer than what others are willing to accept or want me to be. In society, no one insists on my freedom or needs me to be free; on the contrary, other may be out to keep me down. And even though the good that I do may culminate in a link with others, my freedom only finds its fullest sense as a response to a transcendent call.

Those who think that being free is doing "whatever I feel like," are getting it wrong, as are those who think

that being free does not entail commitment, or obligations, or deciding autonomously what is right and what is wrong.

## 5.4 Responsibility

The word "responsibility" comes from the word "response." It is a specifically personal attitude, because only the person can respond. Being responsible means responding in the face of reality, and also, responding for the way of responding. It means assuming responsibility for the response.

Conscience and freedom culminate in responsibility. This is the fruit of conscientious intellection and free action. We call it the ethical constituent, because it is the way people express themselves explicitly, and without it there is no ethical action.

There can be no ethical action without the possibility of a response, of responsibility.

Toward things, the response is only indirect. In its strictest sense, responsibility only exists toward people. Responsibility is possible inasmuch as people can account for themselves and their action, both to themselves and to others. The response does not necessarily have to be verbalized; it can be communicated by any appropriate and fitting reaction.

Responsibility is a response for oneself and to oneself. Each person is, in the first place, responsible for what she makes of herself, and then, for whatever depends on her. In practice, the responsibility that

No one commits evil without a justification, and it is the justification that deludes him.

first becomes apparent is responsibility for an immediate action.

Since people are social beings called to enrich and justify their actions before others, their actions can be subjected to both their own judgment and that of others. By taking responsibility for their way of being and acting, people enhance and strengthen the social fabric. Responsibility is the basis of people's capacity for dialogue. There is no dialogue when there is no possibility to respond. And for this same reason, only responsible people can engage in real dialogue.

Only the person as responsible subject can be evaluated ethically. More than being responsible for a particular action, the important thing is to be a responsible person. Responsibility is the way of being of the finished person.

#### **5.4.1 How to be responsible?**

Things done out of custom or habit, or simple obedience, do not create a sense of responsibility.

Responsibility is assumed and developed by the conscious and free ordering of one's own actions; like the exercise of freedom and the conscience, the exercise of responsibility benefits the person himself first of all. And for this reason, it enters into a dynamic process. People are not born responsible; they become responsible. In this sense, the environment plays an extraordinarily important role in developing the sense of responsibility. This serves to underscore the importance of the social task of forming responsible people.

Education for responsibility is achieved by gradually entrusting people with actions that evoke the

response of a true subject; this in turn makes people more and more disposed to behave responsibly. And they get practice in measuring and discerning the scope and the consequences of their actions.

Rewards and punishments can be helpful in the early stages of nurturing responsibility, but later they can interfere with the process.

Genuinely responsible people take their greatest satisfaction and reward from doing the right thing. And at the same time, this way of acting confers the greatest dignity because it is motivated by the gratification and satisfaction of doing what is right, and not the expectation of a reward, or the fear of punishment.

Whoever does what is right in order to be rewarded, cares less about what is right, and more about the reward.

#### **5.4.2 The scope of responsibility**

The call to respond for one's own life brings with it the need to take care of the different areas that make up a human life. All the dimensions of the human person are included in the call to be responsible. Therefore, people need to address their family life, their political life, their economic activity, the way they care for the environment, etc.

People live immersed in myriad responsibilities. They must respond to numerous demands placed on them by the world they live in. Sometimes, responsibility for immediate or urgent matters keeps people from being responsible for their own life. But when people choose certain options and decide on a certain orientation in accordance with what is fairest, they are properly assuming responsibility for their life.



Man, *"through his reasonable and responsible care, guides the world--not only the world of nature but also the world of human persons."*  
John Paul II, V.S., n. 43.

The scope of personal responsibility is limited. We can only respond for what we know, and we are aware of the fact that we must assume it freely. As people become more responsible, the scope of their responsibility expands: they can be co-responsible, they can share obligations with others. They are able to broaden the horizons of their ethical ideals, to extend their judgment beyond experience and human behavior. Parallel with this, they begin perceiving new responsibilities; the ethical sense grows more sensitive to new demands through the transformation of reality. The ideal of the common good is built on a society where everyone assumes responsibility for everyone else, in solidarity.

#### **+ Christian reflection**

*"Just as the citizen cannot know the emperor's will except through the governor, thus man cannot know God's will except through his own conscience."*  
St. Thomas Aquinas, I q 79a12.

God speaks through our conscience, in the same way he speaks through our reason and our feelings. Thus, the conscience can be seen as a window to the transcendent in order to appraise one's own actions, either confirming them or rechanneling them. People's inner call is God's voice beckoning them to make better of themselves in the freedom and truth of their own being; it is a call to authenticity.

People, as God has made them and loves them, are conscious, responsible and free beings, and called to be more and more so. God wants to be recognized in freedom. Faith in God is a call to freedom, to responsibility and to co-responsibility.

*"The conscience is God's presence in man."* Victor Hugo.

The possibility of giving an answer to God, in words and with one's own life, is the foundation that makes faith possible. There would be neither faith nor com-

munication with God if people were not able to give an answer.

### **Summary**

Studying this chapter leaves me with the following convictions:

I am an ethical person on account of being conscious, free and responsible. As a conscious being, I listen to the voice of my conscience by reflecting on what I do, what I ought to do, what I have done, or what I have failed to do.

I should see to the edification of my own conscience by procuring the necessary information. As a person called to true freedom, I need to conquer it in order to commit myself to others, to what is right and what is true. I need to take responsibility for myself, for my decisions, for my actions and their consequences; this is what makes me an adult. Because I am free, I can communicate with others and with God, and respond to them.

Religion does not impose the ethical burden, but rather helps us to shoulder it by motivating, encouraging, infusing hope and discovering its transcendent meaning.

### **Activities**

1. Describe the way your conscience works in response to a certain problem (personal or professional, e.g., abuse of authority).
2. With this same problem, describe the way you perceive values and alternatives you have. Also indicate what these values are.

3. How do you make a judgment? How does the sense of obligation to do something arise in you? What do you feel responsible for and why?

4. Detect the criteria or norms, feelings and drives that your conscience clashes with. What is the root of this clash? What happens when you do not follow the call of your conscience? What makes you think you have made the right decision?

5. In this same situation, what are you free to do and what aren't you free to do? In each case, identify what it is that limits your freedom.

6. In what way is the weight of your life at stake in the decision you make? Which of your habits give you freedom and which take it away? How is your freedom compromised by this or that decision?

7. Which of the responsibilities that you have taken on do you think make you freer? How do you think you could be more co-responsible (in your family, in your social relationships, in your work)?

8. Make a description of the dynamic nature of freedom.

a) Freedom is always oriented toward what is right,  
b) freedom always entails responsibility on the part of the subject, c) freedom is communication with others,  
d) freedom is openness toward "the other," e) freedom ends in love.

### **True or false**

All education is a kind of taming.

True [ ] False [ ]

The human formation of personality is an assimilation of ideology without an objective grounding.

True [ ] False [ ]

Conscience is nothing more than the need for personal and collective justification.

True [ ] False [ ]

The approval of others is what makes value judgments right or wrong.

True [ ] False [ ]

The fundamental role of freedom consists of opting in life for a basic orientation, giving it a target (or discovering it) and opting for a project.

True [ ] False [ ]

Freedom serves to free yourself from the values that others have tried to impose on you.

True [ ] False [ ]

If people were the way they were as children, before receiving any education, they would be better.

True [ ] False [ ]

For the good of the person, it is better to live without obligations, or to disavow them.

True [ ] False [ ]

Freedom is a way to commit ourselves more to truth, love, good and people.

True [ ] False [ ]

Authority cannot be called on as the ultimate argument for assessing a certain behavior.

True [ ] False [ ]

A doctrine cannot be proposed as ethical, or demand submission, without rational arguments.

True [ ] False [ ]

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### **Questions**

#### **What do we mean by ethical perception?**

The innate orientation that people have to do the right thing.

#### **What is conscience?**

The capacity that people have to know themselves, own themselves, and turn their gaze upon themselves.

#### **What does the ethical conscience consist of?**

The capacity to evaluate and judge one's own projects, attitudes and actions.

What relationship is there between the conscience and human beings themselves?

The conscience is not a separate entity; it is the subject himself inasmuch as he knows, values and judges himself. The conscience encompasses all the dimensions of the human person, and refers back to a living unity, to the ego of the human being as a person.

**Why do we say that the conscience is dialectical?**

Because it makes people aware of the tension that exists between their being and their "ought to be", between their being and their way of being; it reveals their identity as reality and project. It highlights their identity as a dynamic process that allows them to transcend themselves and in this way, to be more and more themselves.

**How can we have a well-educated conscience?**

By making an effort to proceed as authentically as possible in each situation; by gathering enough information about the dynamic nature of human and social structure; by engaging in dialogue with people who have experience and maturity; by continually discerning our own decisions, and the values and anti-values that I can choose within a conflict situation.

**What are the dynamic processes that make up the person as an ethical being?**

Conscience, freedom and responsibility.

**What is freedom?**

The capacity that people have to direct their own actions and their life in accordance with their decisions, to give of themselves and to commit to themselves, to their ideals and to other people.

Is freedom the basis of there being good and bad things?  
Freedom does not make things good or bad, but it does determine the person's way of being when choosing what is right or wrong.

**What is the meaning and the orientation of the human person's freedom?**

The choice of what is right.

**What is responsibility?**

It is the foundation of people's dialogic nature. It is a response from oneself to oneself, to others, to God.

**How do we come to be responsible people?**

By responding to what we know consciously and freely, without expecting a reward for it.

## CHAPTER VI

### FACTORS OF THE ETHICAL PERSONALITY

**Objective:**

To identify the factors that influence people's ethical development and their actions.

#### Introduction

Conscience and freedom are two ethical dynamics that are essential to the human person. In addition, there are other factors that have an impact. People are immersed in the world; their ethical development therefore depends on the way they relate to this world. The human person is a being-in-the-world, in all of her capacities. Indeed, historicity, sexuality, human desires and feelings, innate reactions, and the social and economic dimensions are all inherent factors that determine her personal being. These factors are present in all human actions, to a greater or lesser extent.

From the moral perspective, it is important to integrate these factors and take them into account in the process of ethical discernment, in actions, and in the proper configuration of the ethical personality.

### **6.1 The human person as being-in-the-world**

It is impossible to understand human life and action as separate from the world. "The human person" is simply an abstraction that does not exist until we refer to a specific, concrete person situated in their world.

The world people live in first of all comprises the specific sphere they belong to, where they grew up, including all the things involved, the people they develop with, the institutions, the knowledge and skills they acquire over time, the values they were raised with and that constitute the horizon of their actions and self-understanding. The world is, in this sense, the whole range of aspects of life that are not the person in question, but without which this person cannot exist or develop.

People are beings-in-the-world because they need to relate their being and activity to a world that will give it meaning and that they have not created.

The world people live in is in continuous flux. Not just because things happen or because events take place, but because people are constantly integrating new meanings into their life and discarding others. Horizons of understanding expand and enable them to establish new relations. They discover new values that point their life in new directions. Ethical action takes place within this framework. The understanding

of the world and the stance that is taken toward it make up the horizon of human decisions and the standard by which they are measured.

## **6.2 People's social reference**

The human person is a singular and unique being, but he is inserted in a social reality. His world is also the world of others. And it would not be his world if it were not for the others. This is also true of his inner world. Everything that we have made personally ours, we have assimilated from the social context in which we live.

We live in society; as a result, we share values with others.

Many of our ideas grow and are shaped in the web of relationships in which we move from the day we are born. We are mutually linked to others and our being and developing depends on that. Even that which makes us unique was forged in the social fabric and in reference to it. We are a reflection of our forebears not only in biological terms, but in cultural and ethical terms as well.

The social reference is a decisive ethical factor, because the values and codes by which we proceed are systems of preferences that first are instilled in us, and that then we establish as our own options, thus creating our own authentic and independent ethical personality.

## **6.3 Historicity**

People must project their future and act accordingly. They must likewise situate themselves in the present and procure the means to obtain what they

want. Consciousness and memory play a key role as a bridge connecting the past, present and future.

Historical consciousness turns the present into a point of continuity and rupture, of ongoing conversion and reorientation. People are not always original subjects; their accumulated baggage of experiences has a bearing on their actions and development.

The present moment condenses for each person the whole of his life.

*"When man accepts that he is a being for death (finite), then he takes a stance regarding life."*  
Heidegger.

Moral conscience and ethical criteria are transformed and consolidated over time, because people are beings in history.

The life of a person is a limited, definite and concrete time; death is its natural end. This end gives character to ethical life and enlightens it. It is a reality that people must accept as their proper condition. They must think of the orientation of their acts in the light of the end.

#### **6.4 Sexuality**

Sexuality is the concrete mode that the human being has of being a person; this makes it decisive for ethical being. There is a different way of perceiving and living the ethical dimension from the masculine or feminine perspective.

We can see that men and women do not perceive values the same way, or evaluate judgments of conscience, or understand and live freedom and responsibility. The way of understanding virtue and putting it into practice is also different, although it cannot be said that one way is better than the other.

Men and women live reality from the platform of their respective sexes. This installation is prior to all behavior. It is a type of sensitivity, a manner of apprehending reality that affects knowledge, the way of being free and responsible. Our sexed condition infuses, impregnates and encompasses our entire life. All reality - eating, understanding a problem, perceiving the world, love and generosity, the experience of danger - is lived from a sexed perspective. Sexuality drives vitality in a significant way, as well as the ability to undertake projects and actions, although they are not determined exclusively by sexuality.

The perception of moral values, by both men and women, is conditioned by the part they play in culture.

*"The conscience, in women, is a personal affirmation of ethical values, and they live it in each concrete case with their entire being, even to the point of physical resonance. The content of this experience is not abstract law, but a kind of vital morality. More than ethics, it is an ethical sense. This should not lead to a hasty conclusion that women are exclusively emotional. Men and women both are, but they do not experience the same feelings when dealing with the same problem. In women, emotions are more related to the vital and individual dimension, than to universal concepts."*

From this, several consequences can be drawn that are important to ethics: Ethics must bear in mind both the masculine and the feminine way of approaching objectives and judgments. These lead to different ethical behaviors and as a result, the way of evaluating actions must be different.

Women's motivations and purposes are different from men's, even when their activities coincide materially. By not bearing this fundamental difference in mind, men are sometimes left with the impression of women's "irrationality." Men do not understand what women are doing, because they do not usually see the reason and the purpose of women's actions. If men were to do the same thing, they would do it differently.

*Una moral responsable*, p. 211.  
Hortelano



Ethics, more than in other sciences, calls for complementarity and dialogue. There is a need to reflect on the ethical dimension from a feminine perspective to complement traditionally masculine reflection. This has important implications for ethical teaching and self-study, for communicating values, life projects and fundamental options.

### 6.5 Innate reactions

What is specific to ethical behavior is the intervention of intelligence and freedom; it must be pointed out, however, that human beings are endowed with innate patterns of reaction and inherited inclinations that have an impact on their ethical actions.

In behavior, all human structures come into play, and even though people are rational, their behavior is not governed exclusively by reason. Karl Jaspers speaks of a "basic stock" of psychobiological characters that people have passed down over the thousands of years of their evolution, and that could be said to "shape" them.

Some people think that authenticity is the fundamental ethical criterion: *what matters is to be consistent with what you think and feel*. But before authenticity is the value of truth, otherwise you could be authentically wrong.

Thus, whether we approach the development of the species or that of the individual, we see that people act on the basis of certain patterns that are outside the scope of free decision-making. They have a need to follow innate ways of acting and reacting, as well as conditioned responses that they have acquired consciously or unconsciously, both those that favor and those that hinder their ethical action. People should be aware of their innate patterns of behavior, of their inherited and acquired inclinations, in order to channel them and make use of them.

Innate reaction patterns include aggression, anger, altruism, the sense of group and family, the parenting and the filial instincts, the sense of property, the desire for power, the desire to excel, etc.

## 6.6 Feelings

People react affectively to anything that they find relevant, or that affects them as a stimulant or as a reality that can meet their needs, or that they feel could meet their needs. Moved by their feelings, or sometimes driven by them, people change their perspective on their relationships and their world.

"Feeling" is what we call the agitation of the senses that people experience when confronted with their inner or outer reality. Feelings have a great deal to do with ethical decisions, because they very often determine behavior more than reason does.

The aim of ethics is to educate one's own inclinations in such a way that there is no contradiction between them and duty.

Good people are those who synchronize duty and inclination, i.e., those that happily do the right thing. This is the foundation of the classical notion of virtue as the capacity acquired through constant effort to do the right thing happily, duty and inclination being in harmony.

Part of the effort entailed in ethics is educating one's own feelings. To a certain extent we are responsible for the way we react affectively to reality. We must effectively cultivate our feelings: the bad ones,

Feelings are the uprisings in the heart of a natural and pre-rational ethics.

The education of the feelings is a task that is very often neglected in Western culture.

in order to root them out and channel their force; and the good ones, in order to make them effective and productive.

*"The man who does not rejoice in noble actions is not even good; since no one would call a man just who did not enjoy acting justly, nor any man liberal who did not enjoy liberal actions; and similarly in all other cases."*  
Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics I, VIII, 12.

*Well-trained affectivity is at the service of people's projects and fulfillment. Distorted affectivity is an obstacle to freedom. Feelings are important in ethical life, because through them we apprehend values that contribute to our fulfillment. We identify with what is right when we do it happily, even more so when we discover it intellectually.*

Correct ethical action takes place not only when people decide guided by an intention and good criteria, but when their reasons arise from good feelings and they identify affectively with the right thing.

## 6.7 Imagination

*"Only he is happy who is not afraid to live."* Seneca.

Our feelings arouse fantasies and illusions in our imagination, also fears and anxiety. It is important to detect them at their source, to use them for our own good and that of others.

We must not allow ourselves to become victims of our history.

Fears and anxiety are obstacles for fulfilling personal and community ethical projects. They generally come from negative experiences that undermine our confidence and make us hesitant about our options. They can become a drag on our decisions and paralyze our efforts. Once the source of a fear is recognized, we are in a position to face it, and either dispel it or assume it.

We owe to our imagination our inventions, discoveries and theories.

Imagination is one of the most boundless sources of ethics. It is the resource people use to make life crea-

tive. The best projects and the best accomplishments are the result of an imagination tempered by reality. In the face of difficulties and threats, people can always be creative, imagining new and unexpected solutions.

The lives of great figures are determined more by their ideals than their history.

Illusion linked to "ideals" is an essential element for mobilizing our efforts in the pursuit of an ethical project. Without illusion, ethical life is left without light and meaning. Ideals make people ethical; they are what spur them on.

## 6.8 Economic dimension

People's relationship with things; the use they make of them; the appropriation and supply of goods and services; the appraisal, exchange and management of resources, all represent a dimension of human life that cannot be ignored. Economics is a part of human life. Decisions are imbued with this dimension. The things we decide to do, the projects we undertake, the freedom to carry them out, the availability of the things with which we make our life, are conditioned to some extent by the economy.

"Your human quality demands that you appraise money at its true value: very little." Cicero.

Economics shapes the social and political life in which we develop. It is the resource by which people and societies meet their needs of consumption, savings, investment and development. The economic factor, while not the only one, does play an important role in the history of each person and each community.

Marx held that the economics was the main factor in the constitution of society.

Living humanly requires a series of indispensable material goods.

*"In life, it is right for each person to procure what he needs, but taking it away from someone else is not right."*  
Cicero, On Duties.

The ability to procure resources can be a factor that promotes freedom, inasmuch as these resources can help people to develop; but economic ability can also compromise freedom and even make it impossible, either because the resources necessary to undertake certain projects are lacking, or because this economic ability becomes the sole motivation of all decisions.

## **6.9 Unity and totality**

One of the person's most important responsibilities, almost on a par with the preservation of life, is that of protecting the integrity and oneness of her being; this is also one of the human rights.

The human person is essentially a whole, a unit. All the elements that go into him as a personal being are structured unitarily. The psycho-organic components of his reality have a central nucleus, the self. All of physical, bodily being refers back to the self, to the consciousness of identity, from which conscious acts arise. The human person has the capacity to take possession of himself not as fragments, but in oneness.

The human person forms a material unit of structure and functions. Oneness is a decisive ethical factor because I must be the one to conduct and integrate all the aspects of my reality and my experience in order to fulfill myself as a person.

### **+ Christian reflection**

Christian life recognizes the importance of all the factors set forth here for ethical decision-making. It cannot be denied that at different times some of them have been ignored, and practically denied. Some Christians came to believe that it was better to live apart from the world, like a hermit, than in the world; that it was better to renounce material things than to produce and consume them. Sexuality and marriage

were also regarded with suspicion. The Second Vatican Council served to refocus attention on the Christians' duty to re-conquer their own culture, to engage in dialogue, to enrich and be enriched by science, technology, life and human problems.

*"What needs to be recommended for the upbuilding of contemporary society? What is the ultimate significance of human activity throughout the world? ... The people of God and the human race in whose midst it lives render service to each other..."*

GS n. 11

The message of salvation refers to the person in her wholeness, and her fulfillment takes in all aspects of human life.

The prophets, the Gospel and St. Paul insist on the importance of feelings, especially love, in all good action.

I Co. 13:1;  
Mk. 12:31f.

### **For reflection**

A teenager: "I think that the part of me that thinks is always slower. The sentimental part always shows up first. Feeling takes over my whole being. Thinking gets stuck in my mind.

It seems like my thoughts are less important than my feelings. Thoughts almost always come later and bring remorse. I get the impression that I only think when I'm facing a problem. Thinking right is hard, getting swept up in my feelings is easy."

People always act with a mixture of lights and shadows, cowardice and sincere effort, constraints and

freedom, reasons and feelings that do not always submit to reason; they are righteous and guilty at the same time. Their heart is not coherent. They must be patient with themselves, and decide to take the first steps. It is not reasonable to expect to be perfect from the start, when people are subject to the law of growth.

Material goods are meant for people: they have their anthropocentric meaning; they are there to help people become more and more human in the way they acquire them, possess them, manage them, relinquish them, are served by them and serve with them.

### **Activities**

1. Analyze the way each one of the factors discussed in this chapter has an impact on your present life.

a) How have they had an impact, and how are they having an impact now on your life, your decisions, your being-in-the-world, your social references, your relationship with others, your sexuality, your feelings, your personal history, the environment in which you are developing, and your economic dimension?

b) How do you think you could integrate them to give your life greater unity and coherence? What could you do to better integrate each one of these factors? How could you take them more into account in order to make freer decisions?

2. Think of an important situation in which a decision has been conditioned by the factors mentioned here and describe it.

3. In groups, discuss the following summary:

People are unique and integrated beings, but situated in a social reality. By living with others, they are beings-in-the-world, because they need to relate their being and their activity to a world of meaning and value that they have not created. People share their values, which are decisive for the formation of each person's ethical personality.

Given that they are historical beings, their conscience and their ethical criteria change over time.

There are different ways to perceive the ethical dimension from a masculine and feminine viewpoint. This is why sexuality is a key ethical factor.

People act according to certain psycho-biological features that are partially beyond the scope of their free decision-making. Ethical subjects must be aware of their innate patterns in order to make use of them and channel them. Behavior is often determined more by feelings than by reason. People need to educate their affectivity so that it contributes to their project and their fulfillment.

For its part, the imagination is one of the richest sources of ethics. The imagination projects the ideals that drive ethical life.

Finally, the economic dimension constitutes an important ethical factor, because it conditions life and for many, becomes an overriding objective.



### **True or false**

Sincerity demands that we exclusively follow our feelings; all else is hypocrisy.

True [ ] False [ ]

People who live honestly and fairly are better prepared to think honestly and fairly.

True [ ] False [ ]

The exercise of virtue demands that we learn to overcome our feelings.

True [ ] False [ ]

People are the way they are, and should not aspire to be otherwise.

True [ ] False [ ]

It is a misfortune to depend so much on others; happiness is being able to do without them.

True [ ] False [ ]

The first and foremost purpose of our sexuality is to shape our identity and our personal being.

True [ ] False [ ]

Men and women are different and complementary; neither one is better than the other in terms of human values.

True [ ] False [ ]

Imagination and ideals are necessary for transforming the world, society and people.

True [ ] False [ ]

The environment absolutely determines human behavior.  
True [ ] False [ ]

Socio-economic level absolutely determines human behavior.  
True [ ] False [ ]

Genes determine people's behavior to a relative degree, but not exclusively.  
True [ ] False [ ]

Freedom absolutely determines people's lives.  
True [ ] False [ ]

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### **Questions**

**Why is it said that the human person is a being-in-the-world?**

Because human life and actions cannot be understood in isolation from the world. People need to relate their being and their activity to a world of meaning and value that they have not created.

**Why is the historicity of the human person so important for ethics?**

Because the conscience and ethical criteria are transformed and consolidated over time.

**Why is sexuality a decisive ethical determinant?**

Because it is a type of sensitivity, a way of apprehending reality that affects consciousness as a whole, a way of being free and responsible.

**What important consequences are derived from the way of perceiving and living the ethical dimension from the masculine or feminine standpoint?**

a) Different ethical behavior, b) a different way of assessing actions in practice, c) the need for complementarity and dialogue between men and women.

**Why are feelings important for ethics?**

Because it is through them that people apprehend and appropriate values that contribute to their fulfillment, and because their feelings give rise to many decisions and attitudes.

**Why does the economic dimension determine the person as an ethical being?**

Because it is the means by which people and societies meet their needs and provide services; and because human action can be frustrated by the abundance or lack of resources.

**Why do we say that the human person is a being-in-the-world?**

Because she needs to relate her being and her activity to a world of meaning and value that she has not created.

**Why is the social reference a decisive ethical factor?**

Because the values and codes on which we act are systems of preferences that are first instilled in us and that later we establish through our own options, thereby creating a unique, authentic and independent ethical personality.

**What role does historical consciousness play with respect to the present?**

Historical consciousness makes the present a point of continuity and rupture, of continual conversion and reorientation. People are not always original subjects; they act and develop in accordance with accumulated baggage of experience.

**Why do innate reactions have an ethical character?**

Because people can be aware of them, of their inherited and acquired inclinations, in order to channel them and make use of them.

**What is the role of ideals in ethical life?**

Ideals mobilize all our efforts in the pursuit of an ethical project. Without an illusion, ethical life lacks light and meaning.

**Why are ideals part of the ethical being?**

Because people are beings in progress, and the destination determines the road they walk down every day.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **GOOD AND EVIL AS REALITIES OF THE HUMAN PERSON**

#### **7.1 Good and human fulfillment**

**Objective:**

To show how good and evil are objective realities with respect to the person.

People are capable of appropriating some possibilities and rejecting others in the course of their development and their ever-changing relationship with the world. These possibilities are presented to them with respect to things, circumstances, or people they share their life with. Possibilities as such are not yet physical realities. What is real is that people can count on them. And precisely because having the possibility is real, people are faced with the problem of opting for some and leaving the others behind.

Reality, inasmuch as people can appropriate it, constitutes good and evil. Reality is good inasmuch as it offers possibilities that people can make theirs, and people are inclined toward this good reality because they see it as favorable to them.

Doing what is right is a demand of human nature.

Good only exists in reference to people. Without this reference, nothing is good or evil. Reality is what is there, and what is there is neither good nor evil; these qualifiers imply a value judgment, and they obviously assume a subject who perceives and judges what is there. The formal character of good is found in its ethical dimension. If people were not ethical beings capable of appropriating reality, things would be neither good nor evil.

What is specific about good is that it favors human fulfillment. Good and evil are objective realities always in reference to human people.

#### **7.1.1 The roots of good**

The first reward of doing good is having done it.

The root of the ethical good is both in people and in reality; in people, it consists of their dynamic nature that impels them to seek their fulfillment in all their dimensions: in the call to be human.

In the part that corresponds to reality, the root of good is to be found in the possibilities of life and development that reality itself offers people.

By doing what is right, people heed their inner call and outer reality. We can speak of objective good as that which in itself contributes to people's fulfillment, such as the knowledge of truth, respect for life and development, and everything that meets authentically human needs.

### 7.1.2 The good of people: value

The term value refers to human beings. We see as valuable everything that is useful to us, important for our life or other people's lives.

There are different kinds of valuable things or values. The difference resides in the sphere of life in which things are meaningful or valuable; thus we can speak of aesthetic values, religious values, material values and ethical values. Values are qualities of things, aspects of reality that for us represent something good. They are qualities that we discover in reality and in this sense, they are objective in character. People do not invent them; they attract people's attention, will and affectivity. With regard to values, people have an intuition, which is joined to a movement of the will, and they come to prefer one order of things over another. Values demand from the subject the ability to apprehend, appreciate and appraise what is best for the human person, for society and for their development.

Value is an aspect of reality that meets a specifically human need. People's humanization is linked to their values.

Ethical value appears as an invitation to be preferred. What is characteristic of ethical value, unlike others, is that it decisively modifies the person.

Cfr. Chap. 2.

The good that is preferred and appropriated becomes an element of our being through action. The value becomes a part of us. The value of justice is manifest in the just person; the value of truth is inherent to the truthful person, etc. Values are realities that are beneficial to people, and they contribute to the shaping of the personality.



### 7.1.3 Possibility of fulfillment

People create links to what they do because their options generate within them a possibility of living either in accordance with their vocation or in resistance to it. People's inner commitment to ethical value gives rise to the right action; from their inner strength, the possibility of acting ethically emerges.

The best way to have good friends is by being a good friend; the best way to be happy is by making others happy.

Acting the right way leads people to their own fulfillment. Good, sought out and accomplished in reality and in oneself, constitutes happiness which is its greatest prize. Happiness arises in the context of experiences shared with others. If people fulfill themselves as human persons, they do so in the company of others; people's best possibility of fulfillment is relating their being to others.

People fulfill themselves when individual good is achieved by contributing to the common good; when what is sought and attained is the result of a combination of what is good for us and for others; when we become human by helping others be human too.

In the final analysis, what makes people happy is love. Love confers satisfaction and fullness.

### 7.2 Evil and human frustration

Evil can only exist at the expense of good. Evil only occurs where there is good. Just as darkness is the absence of light, evil is the absence of good.

Not all possibilities that people can opt for are beneficial to them. In the specific situations of a particular person, not everything she prefers contributes to her fulfillment. And even though we always choose from among good things, we do not always choose well. Ethical evil consists of appropriating a possibility

that does not contribute to the development of the specific person.

Evil is linked to that which objectively frustrates people; that which suffocates them, cuts off their development or makes it impossible. Evil is the negation of that which is specifically human. It means giving up on growth, on consistency, on conscience, on freedom, on unity. Ethically, evil is whatever keeps people from being human and acting humanly. Any attitude, action, commitment or reality that makes people enemies of themselves and others, must be considered evil, as well as any destruction of the world and of the things that make it possible to have life, development and the values that lead to human fulfillment: peace, truth, solidarity, equality, love and giving of oneself.

Bad actions bring on maladjustments. Evil makes people "mis-fits," it pits them against themselves and consequently, against others. Bad action is a burden that holds back the development of the person and society. "Evil in itself," unrelated to people, does not exist; what does exist are evil actions, attitudes, effects.

By choosing bad options and doing bad actions, people set up obstacles to their own development. Evil is destructive; it is the way we cut human ties with other people and with reality.

### **7.2.1 The roots of evil**

What we call "evil" has many manifestations and many roots. There is an evil that stems from error or ignorance. When ignorance is not attributable to a

For all these reasons, evil is an objective reality, and not simply a human appreciation. There are things and realities that do harm to people always and everywhere, in any culture.

Evil is the denial of what is human through people's guilty action.

No one is guilty of things that do not depend on them; no one is guilty if they are unaware of, or cannot foresee, the effects of their action.

subject, even though the consequences of the action are extremely serious, it is not an evil with ethical implications.

*"The root of evil is to be found in freedom." Kant.*

The objective of ethics is not to deny drives and instincts, just to channel them.

People are moved by drives for power, pleasure and property. These drives can be channeled to people's own good and the good of others, but they can also develop pathologically and dehumanize people. When people are dominated by their instincts and their drives, even their feelings, and not by reason, they end up dehumanizing themselves because what is natural for human beings is to conduct themselves according to reason, and not passions, drives or instincts. Even the noblest feelings, such as love, must be guided by reason.

Many ethically bad actions have a psychological root. People experience multiple needs: physiological needs, security, love, community, self-esteem and self-fulfillment. If these needs are not met, they can lead to an imbalance in people, or interfere with their behavior. Sometimes unmet needs cause feelings of frustration, aggression and bad behavior. Meeting these needs the wrong way, without considering the whole person, his social nature, respect for others and the consequences, turns out bad.

The origin of many social evils is "history," i.e., decisions made by the people who preceded us.

Social conditions can also be a root of evil. Sub-human living conditions can bring out many frustrations in people, increasing their aggression and their destructive instincts. The context of social, political, economic and cultural life tends to foster competition and aggression. There are invisible social mechanisms that do latent violence to people and arouse aggressive or counteroffensive attitudes.

However many the conditioning factors, ethical evil is always a personal responsibility, although sometimes it is extremely conditioned by the social situation. People are also responsible, to a certain degree, for their conditioning factors. If these factors are not conducive to a person's development, then that person should make an effort to change them.

The ultimate root of ethical evil can be found in people's inner divisions and their condition as unfinished beings. Evil is something that emerges from people's most intimate recesses; it is something that occurs by defect or absence, and not by nature.

### 7.2.2 Objective evil

There are some human actions involving consciousness, forewarning and freedom that are evil on account of their object; they are often called "intrinsically evil." Some examples: homicide, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, blameworthy suicide; anything that violates a human person's integrity such as mutilation, physical and mental torture; anything that offends human dignity such as actions that automatically produce sub-human living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, human trafficking, treating people as objects to be exploited and not as free and responsible beings.

That which is objectively evil (intrinsically evil) must not be the object of a positive act of will, nor may it be taken as a means to attain something good, even when the intention is to safeguard or promote the well-being of an individual, family or society.

Evil is not a separate thing, it is nothing other than the problem of the human person.

*"A world without evil would be an infinite world."* Leibniz.

What makes evil so evil?

Is evil an objective reality?

Evil is an objective reality, inherent to reality, and arises from human beings' limitation.

Moral law that is just is grounded in the reality of being and of the human person, and this reality is what makes the law just or unjust.

"Therefore, whoever acts of himself acts freely, but one who is moved by another does not act freely. Therefore, one who avoids evils, not because they are evil, but because of God's commandment, is not free. But one who avoids evils because they are evils is free " St. Thomas, In Ep II Cor, Lec. III

*In order to be able to grasp the object of an act which specifies that act morally, it is therefore necessary to place oneself in the perspective of the acting person."* J.P.II V.S. 78.

A healthy and mature conscience that is at peace, knows how to recognize its own guilt.

Objective evil is not grounded in a positive law. There are things that are bad not because the law forbids them but because they go against ethical reason, against the human person. Things of this sort are forbidden because they are bad; they are not bad because they are forbidden.

Evil is not grounded in a moral conventionalism, as if things were evil because we agree to see them as such. There are things that are wrong because they violate a contract, but this does not mean that the moral order is grounded in a contract. In the same way, it is not the authorities or the State that provide the grounding for the moral order and establish what is wrong. They too must submit to the objective order; thus there can be unjust authorities and States.

Objective evil is grounded in reality just as truth, good, value and obligation are. As a human act, evil has an implicit but indispensable relationship with the person who commits it, or with the reality that is its object and with the consequences it brings about.

### 7.2.3 Guilt and frustration

Guilt is the personal experience of the evil committed. Frustration consists of not attaining our fulfillment. It is a case of deliberate denial; ethically frustrated people are never that way coincidentally; they are because of their bad choices. Bad acts are acts through which people jeopardize the accomplishment

of their personal being; if they become a way of existing, they can turn a person into a frustrated being.

Frustration occurs when we fail to adjust our being to reality. This maladjustment makes people less adept at living humanly. So by opting for what is wrong, we end up frustrating ourselves.

People's primary obligation is to proceed humanly.

The problem with human beings consists of both what they are and what they do. If we ask ourselves: What makes human beings human? Or, What dehumanizes them? the answer would necessarily point to their condition as "ethical beings." What dehumanizes them is their action when it is wrong, inappropriate, unjust. The human dimension expresses human beings' limitation, but more than that, what leads them to their fulfillment.

### **7.3 Awareness of guilt and feeling guilty**

Human beings, capable as they are of judging their own actions, can discover the mistakes in their actions and how they contribute to their frustration. In this way, they can experience guilt for their actions or omissions.

The sense of guilt is an invitation to free oneself from the wrong action. It has a positive side to it because it compels people to go back over their mistakes; instead of ignoring them, they acknowledge them in order to overcome them. People who can recognize their own mistakes are much freer, much more their own masters than those who are incapable of recognizing themselves in their mistakes.

The sense of guilt is a manifestation of people's moral responsibility. Not having a sense of guilt for a bad action implies a lack of ethical responsibility.

Being myself means taking a road that goes from my real self to my ideal self.

Repentance implies a loyal and sincere judgment of one's behavior. The voice of conscience calls on people's loyalty. It can be a judgment of one's own act, by which a person judges himself and takes the side of what is right. When people disapprove of their own acts, it is not a case of being inconsistent with their personal history; they recognize themselves in it, but they also recognize that they are guilty. And at the same time they recognize their call to be consistent with their vocation to do what is right.

People accept themselves when they recognize themselves as guilty. They neither deny nor ignore what has happened; they do not act as if nothing had happened, which would be an evasion of reality. Accepting a negative judgment of conscience is not a denial of what one is or has done; on the contrary, one is accepting it as something that must be overcome. The acceptance of guilt is one of the most precious forms of freedom, accessible only to those who are free with regard to what they have done and who they are.

Good and evil are not found in a chemically pure state. Good comes with traces of evil, and evil with traces of good. This is why evil is sometimes attractive or yearned for.

There are cases in which a wrong action evokes a disproportionate feeling of guilt, a guilt complex, which is a depressive feeling out of all proportion with the guilt itself, and sometimes even independent of it. This feeling is unhealthy, and ceases to be an ethical matter, but rather a psychological problem.

It should be emphasized that the purpose of the call of conscience is to make people responsible and not to blame them. Guilt knocks people down; recognition of guilt lifts them up.

## 7.4 Possibility of recovery

Our acts define us, but as long as we are still alive, they are never definitive. Just as those who have decided to walk the path of righteousness can take a detour by committing an unrighteous act, in the same way those who have been losing themselves through ill-advised acts can make it back to the road leading to fulfillment. A reorientation of one's life is always an option at hand. A new-found determination to do what is right already contains the spark that could trigger an inner liberation.

*"I was shipwrecked before I could navigate." Seneca.*

Conditioning factors do not exhaust people's possibilities. The call to freedom is stronger than any kind of slavery. People's natural aspirations are more deeply rooted than dehumanizing options.

Recovery consists of putting oneself on the path that leads to real fulfillment. It means taking a responsible stance with regard to what we are and what we have done, to reality and to others.

The first step toward recovery is the desire to be authentic; people need to go back to the essential elements of their life. Recovery thus involves realizing what they are and the damage they have done to themselves.

People are bigger when they recognize their mistakes than when they commit them.

People put their past life in a balance, and realize how their bad options and actions have dehumanized them, sometimes without their even knowing it.

Recovery demands a resetting of the true perspectives on life.

Our recovery does not start at zero. Our life experience, whatever it may be, is already a point in our



*"The only mistake is the one we don't learn from."* John Powell

favor, if we know how to assume it. From experience we learn which roads lead to frustration, and how to keep from travelling down those roads again.

Conversion does not happen once and for all. People have to convert day after day, and assume the values that they gradually discover as theirs, and that their conscience establishes as the ones to live by. Human beings, as conscious and free beings, are capable of identifying or not with their own actions, and with their acquired way of being, which is why they are capable of conversion, i.e., of rejecting one acquired way of being and inclining toward another way of being, not yet acquired.

#### **+ Christian reflection**

Evil is a necessary manifestation of human beings' limitation and the need for God.

Christianity recognizes that ethical goodness or evil comes from human decisions and, at an even deeper level, from a person's heart. The lack of recognition of reality, and of respect for the human person and the values that derive from her, are reason enough to explain evil and frustration. The basis of both moral goodness and evil is human freedom.

*"You made me, Lord, for yourself; and my heart is restless until it rests in you."* St. Augustine.

God has given people the capacity to recognize and choose that which favors their development, as well as that which trips up and frustrates their development. He has oriented people to seek out what is good, and inclines them to do what is right; evil, which stems from people's decisions, is not desired by God. Finally, the fulfillment that people seek is communion with God; that is why people are anxious until they attain it. Frustration is the breaking off of this communion that God always strives to re-establish.

The more people identify with what is right, the more they identify with Jesus Christ, even without realizing it, and they become collaborators with his work, which is the Kingdom of God.

*"In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me." Mt 25:40.*

Life tends to provide certain experiences that represent a compelling invitation to recovery; in Christian language they are called "conversion grace". Conversion, like all of people's ethical life, is essentially linked to the nature of God and human beings. Because God is holy, he wants the holiness of human beings.

### **For reflection**

"The measure of the evil a man is capable of is proportional to the good he is called to do." (Cardinal Jean Marie Lustiger).

Human values are like our parents: when they're gone is when we identify with them most.

"God wants the greatest good (for human beings), and thus he prefers the presence of a greater good than the absence of a lesser evil." (St. Thomas, De Verit. 5, a5, ad 3).

Growing in humanity does not mean leaving oneself behind. It means accepting oneself and building by putting down roots in one's heart, because only what is rooted in the heart has enduring value and bears authentic fruit.

"Those who do not believe claim that there is no one watching them from on high, and therefore, they also

know there is no one to forgive them; their loneliness will have no limits, and their death will be hopeless. They will resort to asking forgiveness from others and for this they will understand that first they must forgive those who have offended them." (Umberto Eco).

### **Activities**

1. Analyze three actions in which you believe you have done the right thing and that have given you satisfaction (e.g., helping a sick person).

a) Why do you think it was the right thing? Why did you do it?

b) Do you think that for something to be ethically right, it is enough that you intended it to be so? What do you think would be needed?

2. Analyze some actions in which you believe you did not do the right thing, such as deceiving someone. Do you think that these actions were somehow frustrating? What do you think was behind them?

3. Comment on the following summary:

What distinguishes "the right thing" is that it fosters human fulfillment. What is ethically good has its roots both in the subjective call to be more human, and in the possibilities of life and development that reality itself offers. The objective good is that which in itself contributes to people's fulfillment. Values are qualities of things that with respect to people represent something good. Seeking out what is good and attaining it, equals happiness. Evil is the appropriation

of a possibility that is inappropriate for the specific person in question. The sense of guilt is an invitation to free oneself from wrong action. Recovery consists of setting off down the road that leads to human fulfillment.

### **True or False**

There are objective and universal evils that can be qualified as inhuman.

True [ ☐ ]    False [ ☐ ]

On account of their intelligence, people are capable of passing universally valid judgments on standards of behavior.

True [ ☐ ]    False [ ☐ ]

What is right is the expression of a human demand; and what is wrong is the expression of a frustrated human demand. What is right is something that should be done, and what is wrong is something that should be avoided, as a demand of human nature.

True [ ☐ ]    False [ ☐ ]

God can work miracles, but he cannot make objectively evil things good.

True [ ☐ ]    False [ ☐ ]

Good and evil are what God says they are.

True [ ☐ ]    False [ ☐ ]

The goodness or evil of human actions is previous to what is set forth by law, authority, the majority, or consensus; they depend on their consistency or inconsistency with the

reality (truth) of the human person.

True [ ] False [ ]

Everything that is not forbidden is allowed.

True [ ] False [ ]

Evil depends on what each person sees as evil. In terms of their life and behavior, people are subject only to their own way of seeing things.

True [ ] False [ ]

If everything were acceptable, there would be no difference between what is right and what is wrong, what is just and what is unjust, what is advisable and what is ill-advised.

True [ ] False [ ]

The guilty party is simply the product of social errors; society should not punish him, but forgive him.

True [ ] False [ ]

Each culture determines what is right and what is wrong.

True [ ] False [ ]

There are criteria by which each culture should be evaluated.

True [ ] False [ ]

Since nothing is true or false, nothing is good or bad, everything takes on the color of whatever glasses the observer is wearing.

True [ ] False [ ]

Evil is simply a lack of information, of education, or of positive experiences.

True [ ] False [ ]

People are free to think about right and wrong as they see fit.

True [ ] False [ ]

The sensation of guilt is a mental drug.

True [ ] False [ ]

A guilt complex is a disproportionate reaction to real guilt.

True [ ] False [ ]

Guilt is responsibility for something wrong that a person could have avoided.

True [ ] False [ ]

Nothing needs to be evaluated or questioned; the mind creates good and evil; everything is where it ought to be.

True [ ] False [ ]

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### Questions

#### **What is "good"?**

It is a reality that is available for appropriation by people and that fosters their fulfillment.

Where can the root of ethical good be found and why?  
In human beings and reality. In human beings on account of their dynamism that leads them to seek their fulfillment in all of their dimensions: in the call to be human. In reality, in the possibilities for life and development that it offers people.

#### **What allows people to choose, from among different good options, those that are most favorable to their person, their development and society?**

The ability to apprehend, appreciate and evaluate.

**What distinguishes ethical values?**

The fact that ethical values, unlike any others, decisively modify one's personal being.

**How to people attain their fulfillment?**

a) When individual good stems from having contributed to the common good, b) when what was sought and attained stems from a combination of what is good for oneself and also good for others, c) when we make ourselves human by helping others to be human.

**What relationship is there between what is right and human fulfillment?**

A directly proportional relationship: the greater the good, the greater the human fulfillment.

**What does ethical evil consist of?**

Of the appropriation of an inadequate possibility that keeps people from becoming more human.

**What consequences does a wrong choice imply for people?**

Frustration, maladjustment, poor adaptation, being at odds with oneself and therefore, with others, the impossibility of personal and group development, the breaking off of human links with others and with reality.

**List some of the roots of evil.**

a) External. Psychological: unmet needs: physiological, for security, love and community, self-esteem and self-fulfillment. Social: the context of social, political, economic and cultural life tends toward competition and aggression. B) Internal. Inside people themselves, on account of their inner divisions and their condition as unfinished beings.

**Why do people feel guilty?**

Because in their capacity to judge their own actions, they discover that they come up short, and this frustrates them.

**What steps can people take to get past their guilt?**

1. Be aware of it and recognize their limitation.
2. Accept their reality as it is.
3. Repair the damage done, if possible.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Objective:

To present some basic principles for orienting human action that can serve as criteria for ethical judgments.

## BASIC PRINCIPLES

### 8.0 Ethical criteria and their justification

It is important to find general criteria that we can appeal to not only to resolve conflict situations, but also to orient the overall project of our lives.

Are there criteria by which people can direct their actions?

The principles may seem almost self-evident, and yet they are extraordinarily important because of their practical consequences and the conclusions that can be drawn from them.

We understand "principle" to mean a fundamental statement from which consequences or conclusions are derived. They are not something added on to people, like a simple qualifier. Rather, they flow as attributes from their reality itself, and are grounded in their nature. Principles are characterized by the

absolute nature of their demands, the universality of their validity and the immutability of their content.

### **8.1 The humanization principle**

People are genuinely human when they confront the question of acting humanly.

What we call humanization is the dynamism that moves people to grow in consciousness, freedom, responsibility and social awareness, and to fulfill and promote human values. The humanization principle can be articulated as follows: all people are called to become more and more human.

The crisis of values is a crisis of humanity.

This principle leads more to a project of growth than to a set of norms. In legal terms we can say that it is the right and the obligation that people have to develop in all their aspects, in pursuit of a goal: to be fully what they are. This principle thus gives rise to duties, not as impositions from outside of people, but as demands of their reality, of the values that lead them to fulfillment, and of their dignity as human persons. This principle speaks of people who are open to all values and places them on a limitless horizon; it justifies and draws in all of the human rights, inasmuch as people have the right and the obligation to develop in all areas.

All people have the right to be fully adult, and no one has the right to block another person's development.

The humanization principle has to do with the content of what has also been referred to as natural law. We speak of principle, and not of law, because it is not about an explicit command handed down by a legislator, even though its origin is God.

We qualify the principle with the word humanization in order to highlight the total and dynamic nature of people in contrast to physical laws. Binding reality,

the source of obligation (of duty), or the strongest and clearest natural law for people is the human person herself, meaning the humanization principle is an expression of the reality of the human person.

Opponents of this principle are those who refuse to grow or who keep others from growing, especially when the issue is what makes people more human. In order to understand people in human terms, we should not regard them as a physics, chemistry or biology problem, not even in social, economic or political terms. Rather, we should focus on the root of these manifestations, on their call (dynamism) to be more, qualitatively speaking, of what they are.

Opponents of this principle are those who do not do the right thing, or who assume that they are not changed by their actions.

People's first obligation is to act according to their nature.

## **8.2 Autonomy principle**

Each (adult) person has the non-renounceable right to determine and conduct his life by himself, and may not be deprived of the chance to live a full and self-determined life. By acting, they find themselves in a particular unique situation that will never be repeated, which necessarily has an impact on their action, although it does not necessarily determine it.

This principle is the basis of human rights.

It is true that in family life and at the workplace we can find people being used as instruments, which is tolerable only if their responsibility is not impaired and the fulfillment of their human vocation is respected.

A misunderstanding of this principle is the idea that the situation does not influence the subject's actions, or that it is the only determining element.

### 8.3 Equality principle

Tb 4:15; Mt 7:12; 19:19

All human beings are equal, they have the same rights and obligations, and they form a whole which we could call the human family. The axiom *Do to no one what you would not want done to you* expresses strict reciprocity in human relations. It demands a way of thinking and of living.

"*Nothing is more yours than what you have in common with others.*"  
Seneca.

It is clear that the equality we are referring to is the equality of nature and of everything that comes from that.

The equality principle is opposed to any kind of discrimination based on race, religion, ethnic origin or sexual difference.

### 8.4 Difference principle

The difference principle does not contradict, but rather aligns with and complements the equality principle. Equality corresponds to the nature, the pre-eminence, the vocation and destiny, the rights and obligations of all people; the difference principle corresponds to the particular. We can state it as follows: all people are different on account of their individuality, i.e., their origin; their history, education and culture; and the concrete manifestation of their nature.

Differences are grounded in the nature of human beings and thus fall under the heading of human rights. They demand that others have a tolerant attitude. For this reason, it is not ethical to impose the same thing on everyone, just as it is not ethical to shirk fundamental obligations with an appeal to differences.

Each person is unique and will never be repeated, and therefore has the right and the obligation to be different.

This principle demands attention and respect for differences, in interpersonal, social, political, religious, cultural relations, etc.

This is the basis of a healthy pluralism.

A misunderstanding of the difference principle is that it implies that there are no common obligations or relations among people, or that one can act as if all people were independent and sovereign. And it is wrong to show intolerance to different customs, cultures, and political, social, economic and religious practices.

Being tolerant does not mean questioning one's own convictions, but respecting the right of others to think and act for themselves.

### 8.5 Complexity principle

While it is true that we can know reality objectively, our perception is incomplete because it does not encompass all of the many aspects of reality, and even with those aspects that we do manage to perceive, our perception is approximate at best. Then, added to the objective difficulties of knowing reality, we have difficulties that stem from the knowing subject. Our apprehension of things is possible not only because reality is intelligible in itself, but also because of the great store of knowledge that we already have, plus the frameworks for understanding that we have internalized, the methods for approaching reality that have been developed in different disciplines, and the

*"In the human and social sciences it is well to be aware above all of the plurality of methods and view points, each of which reveals only one aspect of reality which is so complex that it defies simple and univocal explanation."*  
Cong. Doc. of the Faith.  
*On Certain Aspects of Theol. of Lib.* VII, 5.



models of interpretation that we have at our disposal. We must also consider the prejudices and ideologies that we have subscribed to over the years.

The complexity principle can be stated as follows: reality is complex, and people must act according to what they manage to learn about it.

Reality imposes itself as it is, not as we imagine it.

The need to bear in mind that reality in its entirety is imposed by reality itself. We call this demand the complexity principle. This is an analytical principle with an ethical dimension: it turns its critical gaze on practice, and insists on discernment. We speak of complexity in recognition of the nature of people, of situations and of reality.

This principle underscores the possibility that all human beings have of making a mistake, as well as the need to undertake an ongoing quest for truth, goodness, justice, love, peace and unity.

Known values are, first and foremost, indicative, and only then imperative.

The principle is important for ethics because the normative character of ethics is derived from a knowledge of reality. Ethical demands are the demands of reality, and they must be evaluated and assessed from an objective standpoint, even as they are at the same time an inner call to each person. Thus, for example, if someone happens upon a person who is gravely injured, the reality of the situation is an ethical demand to lend help.

And since concrete reality has its own complexity, and there is also the complexity of the person people involved, ethical principles are not the last word: they do not automatically override all the other factors that

are in play. These other factors are practically unpredictable, and yet we cannot simply write them off. In fact, it would be unethical to disregard them. Thus, for example, if the gravely injured person might suffer even greater harm or run a greater risk by receiving inexpert care, then the obligation to lend help no longer applies to those lacking appropriate training.

We believe that the truth can be known, albeit with limitations and approximately, and it is precisely in recognition of reality and our way of knowing it that the complexity principle becomes a compelling precept: reality is more complex than we tend to think at first, and discovering the good to be done is much harder than just applying certain principles mechanically.

What makes people human is not isolated values, but values embodied in concrete reality.

Reality is like a *system of forces* made up of vectors having different values and directions. Being a dynamic system, it cannot be resolved by simply imposing the direction of one of the vectors; the direction and force of all the vectors in play must go into the solution.

In spite of the complexity of the system, vectors always form a unit that, in the case of ethics, is determined by reality and the situation of the subject in question. If the demand is separated from the person, it loses its obligatory character.

The complexity principle does not deny or undermine the fundamental criteria that are needed to resolve the most complex cases. It is not a pretext for justifying any and all behavior, or for thinking that no definitive solutions can be given; rather, it serves as a

Although the law is made on behalf of people, there has been more effort made to adapt people to law, than to adapt the law to people in concrete circumstances.

way to focus attention on the concrete situation at hand.

It would be a mistake to construe this principle as meaning that in view of the complexity of things, there are no values, standards or laws that must be known and applied.

### 8.6 Totality principle

The unity and totality of the human person gives rise to a principle that is of capital importance for ethics: each person is responsible not just for each part of her person, but primarily for her entire personal being. Thus she can make use of the parts to benefit the whole.

What we call the totality principle is the overriding nature of the whole over the part, which we could express as follows: *When a whole-to-part relationship can be verified, and in the exact degree to which such a relationship is verified, the part is subordinated to the whole, and the whole determines the part and may make use of it in the interest of the whole.*

Pius XII A. A. S. 44  
1952 - 788.

In the case of the good of the human person, for which this principle can most appropriately be applied, the whole transcends any of its parts and is worth more than the sum of all of them. This principle is grounded in the unity of the acting subject, for whom his identity and existence are overriding values.

This principle justifies surgical mutilations done in the person's benefit.

The elements are not simply mixed, but organized in connections that have a structure and a function. People are beings that must pay heed to their entire

reality, because they are a total reality. Their natural obligation is to safeguard their personal being, their life, their freedom, their consciousness, even if they have to lose members, organs, functions or abilities.

It is helpful to distinguish among three important concepts in this principle:

a) **The Whole:** is constituted in relation to the parts, which are elements of a unit that is organic, psychic, moral, individual, social, etc.

b) **The Parts:** can be integral when they are not themselves the Whole but rather make it up in such a way that if one of these Parts is removed, the integrity of the Whole is damaged but not destroyed. Outside of the Whole, the Part has no meaning or purpose.

c) The part can also be constituent (essential or vital), meaning that when one of them is removed, the Whole is not only damaged but also destroyed. These parts are engaged in the Whole, and their existence and function are justified by the purpose of the Whole.

Such as consciousness, memory, freedom.

d) In the case of a moral Whole, the Parts will also be moral and as such will never form a physical (organic) Whole; likewise, the integral parts of an organic being will not constitute a moral but a physical Whole, such as the parts of a human being.

The members or organs of a person are not part of a society, therefore the civil authorities cannot make use of them.

e) **Predomination** is the subordination of the Parts to the Whole, and the ability of the Whole to make use of the Parts.

The State has the right to limit a people's freedom for a just cause, but not to make use of their life.

People are the main referent (*princeps analogatum*) of the totality principle. Bearing in mind the analogical nature of the totality principle, we must determine in each particular case the relationship between the Whole and the Parts, and the type of Predomination or authority.

The totality principle can be especially useful for shedding light on the problem of responsible parenthood.

The totality principle is applied to a moral whole, such as a family, a society, the State, a team or a company, only in an analogous (similar) way; in these cases it is important not to overextend the type of unit and the relationship with the whole, and thereby sacrifice the parts. A part can form a whole, but not in all aspects. The person (her existence) may not be sacrificed for the good of the State or the family.

The application of the principle assumes a hierarchy of values grounded in nature, in reality, which means it is not arbitrary.

Just as it is important to consider all of reality, due to the complexity principle, it is also important to consider the entire person, due to the totality principle. This principle takes in the whole being, including history and personal experiences.

Those who let themselves be dominated by a part of their lives, without overcoming or integrating it, are opposed to the totality of their being and of their life, which surpasses any of its stages.

Moral rights and conditions are limited by the rights of the people that make up the moral entity. With respect to the conditions that institutions can set for affiliation, membership or employment, they should

not go beyond those needed for the institution's purposes.

If a person has authority or predominance within an institution, thus lending a service, he does not on that account have the right to set any kind of conditions, only those called for by the institution's nature and purpose.

It is a misunderstanding of this principle to disregard the nature of the whole, for example, to ignore the fact that people are not a part of society, or the State, or the Church, and that these institutions do not have the authority to go against people's fundamental rights.

### **8.7 Solidarity principle**

The solidarity principle arises from the social nature of human beings. This condition of people who are born, live, grow up and develop in society, also gives them a sense of purpose: people are immediately inclined toward service for others. In the practical realm, this service takes the shape of a profession, the search for the common good and care for the needy.

The solidarity principle can be stated as follows: people are expected to contribute to the common good in accordance with their possibilities, depending on the different levels of common good. And they have the right to receive from others everything they need to live and develop, if they for good reason cannot cover their needs.

For example, by giving jobs only to children or young people. Being in charge does not justify setting any and all conditions.

*"We are all responsible for each other, and I more than others."*  
Dostoyevsky.

This right goes with an obligation that, as the case may be, corresponds to parents, the family, intermediate associations and finally, the state.

The purpose of wisdom is to make us useful to the republic; that is the clearest measure of virtue and the first duty in life.  
Cicero, *Republic* 1,2.

The solidarity principle aims mainly at the common good, and the obligation to contribute to it. It is a duty of justice that each person must comply with according to her own capacity and in recognition of the needs of others, by promoting and helping institutions both public and private.

Contributions to the common good have different characteristics that should be borne in mind.

Specific abuses do not cancel the obligation to contribute to the common good, such as that of paying taxes.

a) People's real capacity to contribute with their work, research, care for nature and the environment, observance of civil norms, economic contribution in the form of taxes, etc.

Human beings are those that serve others not instinctively, but out of solidarity.

b) The more fundamental other people's needs are, the greater the obligation is to see to those needs and to improve those people's living conditions.

The sense of "others" is what compels the philosopher to philosophize, the writer to write, the teacher to teach, the inventor to invent.

Solidarity is linked to the values of justice, freedom, equality, participation, etc.; it expresses the ethical condition of human life in common, and its supreme action is sharing and taking part. All people have the right to human values like truth, freedom, development, justice, peace, etc.

It is an abuse of the solidarity principle to hide behind it as a way to shirk one's personal responsibilities, or to misuse common goods and services with the argument that it does no harm to anyone. This

principle goes against the individualistic vision of human beings, the economy and society.

### **8.8 Enablement principle**

The enablement principle arises from people's right to grow and develop their abilities, and it calls on those with greater ability, authority, experience and knowledge to avoid taking care of the work, decisions, functions and obligations that subordinates can handle, because that would hinder their growth.

This principle implies the obligation to see to others' development and to leave in their hands everything that they can do for themselves. It is of the utmost importance that people be active agents in their own development, because otherwise they can be treated as objects within a development plan, which would take away from their dignity, their freedom and their responsibility.

In the social and political realm, the enablement principle means that neither the State nor Society should supplant the initiative and responsibility of individuals or of intermediate social groups at those levels at which these people can act. Nor should the State or Society eliminate or cancel the opportunities needed for the full development of all people who make up the society.

This principle implies that people should be supported and respected in all of their rights by the State or any other social grouping. It indicates that the State should not take on any more responsibilities than

It is the right and obligation of each human person to become an adult: to think, judge, decide and act for herself.

The enablement principle raises the issue of determining how far it is appropriate to help others without doing them harm.



those that are required for the common good and that are beyond the possibilities of individuals or groups.

You can be taught how to walk and to dance, but no one has the right, or the obligation, to carry you on their shoulders.

*The main obligation of political authority is to form responsible citizens.*

Aristotle,  
*Nicomachean Ethics*.

Any sort of condescending or suffocating paternalism is to be avoided; the guideline is that any type of society should be at the service of people, and not people enslaved by society. It is easy to see that this principle will never be embraced by any totalitarian society or State. Some cultures still believe that it is the role of the aristocracy or the authority to know, think, decide and command, and that everyone else must simply obey.

This principle lays the foundation for democracy and opposes the autocratic exercise of authority.

This principle is violated when the authority thinks, decides and acts on behalf of subordinates in such a way that the subordinates end up accepting and even preferring that others make the decisions and assume the responsibilities that are really up to them.

#### **+ Christian reflection**

*"The glory of God consists in the complete well-being of living, concrete man."* St. Irenaeus, Ad. Haer. IV, 19.

The humanization principle (or natural law) is the expression of God's will: by accepting it consciously and freely, we accept human reality and God.

In the Gospel we can find passages that have to do with these principles:

Mt. 16:26; Mk. 8:36. *"What will a man gain if he wins the whole world and ruins his life?"*

*"The sabbath (and the law) were made for man, not man for the sabbath."* Mk. 2:27; Mt. 12:1-8.

*"And if your right hand should cause you to sin, cut it off and throw it away, for it will do you less harm to lose one part..."* etc. This text should not be taken literally, but in the sense of subordinating secondary values to the main value. Mt. 5:30.

Loving and serving others is the most sublime and authentic way to love and serve God. Mt. 22:35-40ff.

### **For reflection**

#### On the humanization principle

*"By virtue of natural reason... moral (natural) law is a properly human law."* (John Paul II, V.S. 40).

Natural law *"is nothing but the light of intelligence instilled in us by God. Through it we know what should be done and what should be avoided. God has bestowed this light and this law on creation."* (St. Thomas Aquinas, S.Th. I-II, q.93, a.3, ad 2dum.)

#### On the complexity principle

*"What must be done in any given situation depends on the circumstances, not all of which can be foreseen; on the other hand there are kinds of behavior which can never, in any situation, be a proper response, a response which is in conformity with the dignity of the person."* (John Paul II, V.S. 52).

*"Life is governed by a multitude of forces. It would be smooth sailing, if one could determine the course of one's actions only by one general principle whose application at any given moment was too obvious to need even a moment's reflection. But I cannot recall a single act which could be so easily determined." (Mahatma Gandhi, *El derecho de ser hombre*, Unesco, Sígueme, Salamanca, 1973).*

*"Complexity can be apprehended by anyone who reads history without a preconceived ideological framework, who allows his prejudices to be challenged and confronted, who takes up the burden of not having ready-made diagnoses and predetermined therapies. Complexity keeps us from giving our conscience false assurances, it keeps us from pursuing simplistic utopias and rosy memories." (Bruno Forte, quoted by J. Salman, *Ética y Progreso*, Ed. Azteca, Mexico City, 1968).*

#### On the solidarity principle

*"Justice is not the only virtue that imposes order on social life; when justice alone reigns, inhuman deformations result, selfishness thrives, and justice itself becomes a precarious thing. This virtue must be complemented by the practice of other virtues, especially solidarity, understanding, affability, selfless love, etc. Solidarity goes beyond justice because it leads to a discovery of the demands of justice, but it does not limit itself to respecting the rights of others and giving each his due. Rather it moves people to lend a generous hand, to give of what is theirs. Moreover, love of neighbor can reconfigure the contentiousness that often characterizes justice, and temper its claims. Love tends to unite, to appreciate the interests of others; it is more flexible than justice. It*

*reaches agreement more easily because it leads to forgiveness, and mercy, and understanding (which the State is incapable of fostering). Solidarity is posited on justice. He who loves his neighbor begins by respecting his rights."* (ngel Rodríguez Luño, *Ética*, Euns, Pamplona, 1984, p. 230).

## Activities

1. List five different criteria regarding the content of ethics. You may mention criteria proposed by certain philosophers or criteria that people tend to consider compulsory in our culture.

Compare them with the principles that we have proposed and analyze them from a rational standpoint in terms of their usefulness for your everyday decisions. Which criteria do you think shed more light on your actions? Explain.

2. Analyze an important decision you have made. Reconstruct the situation and write down the criteria you used to decide. Then check and see if by applying the principles set forth in this chapter you could have made a better, more satisfactory decision.

3. Write a paragraph about what you think makes people more human in the professional sphere, in social relations, within a romantic relationship, in the family, etc.

4. Express in your own words what each of these principles means in the context of concrete situations.

5. Think of a conflictive ethical situation. What do you think would be the solution, in light of the principle that you think would be applicable? Then apply the complexity

principle and the rest of the principles set forth in this chapter, and compare the results of your analysis with the solution that you came up with first.

6. Analyze these cases applying the totality principle:

Is it right to remove healthy Fallopian tubes, knowing that another pregnancy could be highly dangerous to the mother, who has a heart condition?

Is it permissible to operate on healthy Fallopian tubes?

Is it justified to prevent carriers of hereditary diseases or incurable illnesses like AIDS from getting married? Is it correct to surgically sterilize them?

7. What is missing in this summary to make it complete?

There are general criteria or principles that orient human life:

The humanization principle, which consists of the dynamism that moves people to grow in consciousness, freedom, responsibility, social awareness, and to put human values into practice and to promote them.

The autonomy principle, which states that all people (adults) have the irrevocable right to determine and conduct their own life.

The equality principle, which states that all human beings are equal, that they have the same rights and obligations, and form an entity that we could call the human family.

The complexity principle, which obliges us to bear in mind all the aspects (conflicts, values and anti-values) of a situation when we assess it and judge it ethically.

The totality principle, by which in a verified whole-to-part relationship, the part is subordinated to the whole and the whole determines the part, meaning it can make use of the part in pursuit of its own interest.

The solidarity principle: each person is expected to contribute to the good of society in line with her possibilities and in accordance with the different levels of the common good.

The enablement principle, which calls for the development of the person, and leaving in his hands whatever he can do for himself.

### **True or False**

People have no more responsibility in life than to live the life they have been given.

True ☐ False ☐

Becoming more and more human is a task that our culture imposes on us.

True ☐ False ☐

In fact, not all people are equal; there are differences.

True ☐ False ☐

Non-intervention is grounded in difference and sovereignty, which corresponds to neither physical nor

human reality.

True ☐ False ☐

All nature, including human nature, has universal repercussions; therefore there must also be universal obligations and laws.

True ☐ False ☐

Among all human beings there are common elements and yet, all are different.

True ☐ False ☐

In the final analysis, nature is the basis of human equality and differences.

True ☐ False ☐

Reality is so complex that we should give up on knowing it, and settle for managing it.

True ☐ False ☐

Of all realities, the most complex is the human person.

True ☐ False ☐

"Human" does not refer to a single, concrete value, but to a whole range of values, to the set of all authentic values, and being human consists of coordinating the expressions that bring about fulfillment.

True ☐ False ☐

People's complexity makes ethics impossible and impractical.

True ☐ False ☐

Since people do not have control over their life, they do not have control over themselves and their abilities either.

True ☐ False ☐

Each person is responsible for himself and no one else.

True ☐ False ☐

Authorities have the right to think and decide for their subordinates.

True ☐ False ☐

Authorities do not have the right to impose a way of thinking.

True ☐ False ☐

Authorities have the right to forbid dissent among their subordinates.

True ☐ False ☐

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### **Questions**

#### **What is an ethical principle?**

It is a fundamental statement from which a series of conclusions can be drawn for application to real-life situations. They are consequences of the reality of human beings.

#### **What do we call the humanization principle?**

It is the dynamism that moves people to grow in consciousness, freedom, solidarity, social awareness and to fulfill and promote human values.

#### **What does adulthood consist of?**

The right and the obligation to think for oneself, decide for oneself and act for oneself. Without this possibility, there would be no responsibility.

#### **What does the autonomy principle consist of?**

The irrevocable right to determine and conduct one's own life.

#### **Where does the complexity principle come from?**

It comes from the need to bear on mind reality in its entirety.

**State the totality principle.**

When a whole-to-part relationship is verified, and to the exact degree to which it is verified, the part is subordinated to the whole, and the whole determines the part, and may make use of the part in pursuit of its own interests.

**What sense of purpose does the solidarity principle give human life?**

It shows that people are immediately oriented toward service to others, which in practical terms is manifested in the professional field, in the quest for the common good and in caring for the needy.

**What obligation does the enablement principle entail?**

The obligation to pay attention to people and to leave in their hands everything they can do for themselves.

In the social and political realm, it implies that society should not supplant the initiative and responsibility of individuals and intermediate social groups at the levels at which they can function.

**What principle is violated when people treat others as objects, or allow themselves to be used as instruments?**

The humanization principle.

**Does the equality principle deny the real differences that in fact exist among people, and the right to be different?**

No, because it neither denies nor ignores personal differences, but rather affirms that in spite of them, we are all equal by nature, with the same pre-eminence, rights and obligations.

## CHAPTER IX

### COMMON GOOD AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

**Objective:**

To become aware of the social meaning of our actions as other-oriented people, and of the obligation to play an active role in the common good.

#### 9.1 The common good

One of human beings' essential characteristics is our ability to go beyond our exclusive interests and to love and care about others. Given our social dimension, we simply cannot fulfill ourselves as people unless we look after other people as well. The community of individuals is constituted through the personal communication of goods and values.

The common good is the full range of social conditions that allow for the overall development of the

human person. People's fulfillment must be achieved in an equitable and co-responsible way; it implies objective prosperity in different areas, within a well organized society. It is clear that the common good is a goal to pursue and not a state that can be reached once and for all.

*"The common good is not simply the sum total of particular interests; rather it involves an assessment and integration of those interests on the basis of a balanced hierarchy of values; ultimately, it demands a correct understanding of the dignity and the rights of the person."*

John Paul II, Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, No. 47, 1990.

The common good does not exist without tension between two extremes: the individual, who consists of the sum of particular goods, and the collective, which pertains to the community as such and to co-responsibility. It must be pointed out that the common good is not a good that is separate from individuals, and yet without disregarding them or limiting itself to their service, it goes beyond them and concerns itself with service to the community. The common good can be seen in different perspectives, from both the standpoint of individualistic liberalism and from that of totalitarianism that subordinates the person to the interests of the State.

The common good must be understood from a standpoint that looks at the human person as a being for others, and at society as a community for people.

The content of the common good is not restricted to economic and material values. It takes in all spheres of social life: the sum total of goods, purposes and conditions that concern everyone.

The common good emerges from human beings' social condition, and it should not be understood as a burden laid on top of personal interests, but as a condition that nature itself calls for. It is people-centered, and yet at the same time it requires the

collaboration of everyone for the sake of its members, which does not mean that goals cannot be reached progressively.

The common good is not something that each person can own exclusively. It can be imagined as a series of concentric circles, where there are things of greater or lesser importance, things that contribute more or less to the proper functioning of society and people's development. Services such as running water, electricity, sewers, highways, schools, parks, social security, etc., fall under the heading of the common good.

The common good is the unifying principle of all political activity as well as its main responsibility; it follows that it is the State's duty to see to the common good of civil society. The common good is pluralistic and democratic in character because it has to encompass all human beings as such. It is also dynamic, because it is not a good that is constituted once and for all. It emerges and responds to a culture that is generated in the dynamic condition of human beings themselves. Finally, the common good has an intentional character, because it is a product of wills and the aim of social, legal, economic, cultural and political structures.

As an ethical imperative of politics, the common good calls for distinguishing between public and private interests and keeping them separate, even as it also requires mediation between them. The public interest is not the sum total of private interests but a legal and political balance between individuals' and

Each person should strive, within her possibilities, to contribute to the common good, and to support institutions and participate in political activities that help bring about better living conditions for the human community.

It also has a totalizing character because it refers to the entire person, leaving out none of his parts, and also because it refers to all people, making no distinctions for social class, race, religion or ideology.

groups' interests that guarantees fair and stable conditions for everyone.

The common good of all of humanity requires the organization of the international community and an attitude of co-responsibility on a universal level.

### **9.1.1 Common good and human costs**

In the pursuit of the common good, human costs are inevitable, especially as far as macrosocial decisions are concerned. Building streets, improving electrical infrastructure, installing sewers, cleaning up the environment, etc., all of these actions entail human costs.

Due to the wide range of what can be conceived as the common good in each culture, it is impossible to come up with an exhaustive and conclusive list of all the possibilities that the human community might admit (Josef Pieper).

It is not always easy to reconcile the human and the material aspects in real-world situations, which gives rise to no small amount of tension. It is often the case that the material improvements that the common good demands tread on the rights of some individuals. In these cases, the authorities are obliged to make a sincere discernment between the magnitude of the human costs and the advantages or benefits for the common good, for example, of building a dam or widening a street.

### **9.1.2 Common good and personal good**

It is through communication at all levels that the common good is constructed. A willingness to communicate one's own values and interests is the most constructive attitude to have when it comes to changing and reinforcing the conditions that offer well-being and development to everyone in society.

The ideal society is a society of communication, equality and union, justice, freedom, peace and solidarity; of sharing and consumption, of respect for human rights; of growth and development; of time for work and time for study, culture, sports and recreation; of equal opportunities; of willingness to help and enjoyment of life.

Social order is possible due to the balance of its inner forces, conditioned by the participation of social groups. This calls for bringing particular interests into harmony with the overall interest.

The common good takes preference over people's particular interests; this however does not justify trampling on people's fundamental rights.

The fulfillment of a person's possibilities assumes and demands the fulfillment of the best possibilities of the community in which she lives. The search and struggle for the personal good should be, at the same time, the search and struggle for the common good.

It sometimes happens that the common good demands a sacrifice on the part of an individual, as long as his human dignity is not compromised. People's rights, even their inalienable rights, must always produce their fruits within and in favor of society. Being a person implies not fitting perfectly within any social structure. There can be no total subordination of the person to society, because the good of society in the final analysis is the good of the people that make it up. Society is subordinated to the person, and the person only partially to society, without renouncing human rights.



It is up to citizens and intermediate institutions to determine the best approach and means for achieving the objectives of the common good.

Aristotle,  
*Nicomachean Ethics*  
II, 8-10.

*"As much as the human good is the same for the individual as for the city, it is by far a greater and more perfect thing to safeguard the good of the city. It is very kind to do good to a single person, but more beautiful and more divine to do it to the people and to cities."*

### **9.1.3 Enabling conditions for the common good**

It is impossible to strive for the highest values in a community that lacks the most elementary requirements for human life. It is impossible to live in freedom if there are no institutions or laws that support personal development. The purpose of civil law is to procure the common good by guaranteeing social order.

A society's infrastructure, which is a necessary condition for the common good, is not sufficient; co-responsibility is required, i.e., everyone must collaborate and pursue common purposes.

It is the responsibility of community leaders to guide their community along the lines of ethical values, so that the community itself educates its members and conducts itself according to these values.

Society should instill in its members a desire for improvement and transcendence, and it should provide them with the means to fulfill their desire. Private interests are aligned with the common good and the unity of the nation; at the same time, society makes

use of education and culture to foster the creation of criteria that respect and appreciate other cultures, thereby broadening its members' horizons.

## 9.2 Ongoing transformation of society

There is no formula for attaining the common good, or for maintaining it. The common good is not something that arises spontaneously when people live together. It is something that must be built, maintained and strengthened over and over. It is above all an ideal to strive for, in view of the ever-changing demands of justice and the unpredictable aspirations of human beings.

The reason for this is that people are characterized by their knowledge of values and their inclination toward them, and they have the capacity to move toward ever greater personal and social, material and spiritual fulfillment.

The common good is an aspiration that should compel all members of a society on a permanent basis; its true dimensions surpass the achievements of societies and peoples. As a historical reality, the common good takes on different features over time, in each culture and place.

The more productive and participatory a social system is, the greater the guarantee of stability, justice and peace within it. In general, a society that does away with privileges and creates conditions for an ever-growing participation of all groups in political and economic decisions, as well as in the benefits of

*"Man lacks a perfect formula for social order. He does not have an instinct, like the bee's for building a hive. He is always searching for the complete fulfillment of his being, which surpasses all concrete formulas." Dostoyevsky.*

Just like the human person, society is in constant transformation and development.

The search for justice does not interfere with the effective functioning of institutions; on the contrary, it is what gives them their true meaning and constitutes a key fac-

tor for their optimal performance.

wealth and culture, can achieve a more functional and stable organization.

Given the nature of social interaction, it is always undergoing transformation. The French Revolution was the culmination of a dizzying number of previous movements, ideas and achievements; it was at the same time a condition for what nowadays constitutes democratic societies. Society is not transformed once and for all, but gradually and to a certain extent, unpredictably.

The common good needs to embrace different ways of interacting, different kinds of institutions, needs, cultures and peoples. The conditions of today's world call for solutions that look beyond nationalisms; all the peoples in the world live in a relationship of reciprocal interdependence that demands with greater and greater urgency solutions at the international level.

*"There can be no progress towards the complete development of man without the simultaneous development of all humanity in the spirit of solidarity."*  
Paul VI, *Populorum progressio*, n. 43.

The common good in our society today will form the basis of the common good tomorrow, and the common good of the whole world.

#### **+ Christian reflection**

In Christian practice, works done for the good of others have always been held in the highest esteem. Although the New Testament does not put forth a political program or a philosophy of society, there is in Jesus' message a clear proposal of a new world where justice, peace and love reign, and each believer's response is essential to bringing it about.

For Jesus, love and service to God must take the form of love and service to others. Jesus identifies with the neediest:

*"I was hungry and you gave me food;  
I was thirsty and you gave me drink;  
I was a stranger and you made me welcome, etc.  
-When did we see you hungry and feed you?...  
-In so far as you did this to one of the least of these  
brothers of mine, you did it to me."*

Mt. 25:31-46.

In Jesus' way of thinking and that of the early Church, the "common good" was not an explicit concept that people readily understood, but it was implicit in concrete cases. From its very beginning, the Church found criteria and values in Jesus' teaching that placed certain demands in terms of social interaction, political organization, economy and culture.

Mk. 10:42-43;  
Lk. 22:25-26.

Starting in the 19th century, the Church has worked out its own body of thought on social issues known as "*Catholic social doctrine*." This doctrine is made up of a dynamic set of orientations about people and their life in society.

At present, the common good as a Gospel imperative takes on more urgency inasmuch as the good of the majorities is more important; because the more universal a good, the more it meets the demands of God as Father and the needs of people as brothers and sisters.

The call to care for the marginalized touches a special Christian nerve. It expresses the need to care

for the entire human family, and insists that it is not Christian to neglect any of its parts.

It is worth noting that in many of the documents authorized by the Church there is a distinct emphasis placed on the rights of the individual person as opposed to the common good, which can be explained by the tension or threat that socialism represented at certain times. Nowadays, when the greatest threat might well be the lack of social awareness, it would be better to insist on the co-responsibility of all people and the social function of human rights.

### **A more in-depth look:**

#### **On the common good**

John Paul II, Speech  
in Brazil, July 2,  
1980.

*"Only fair social structures can be justified, those which strive indefatigably to achieve greater justice. They are the only ones that are open to the future. A social system that does not concern itself with justice destroys the foundations of its own future."*

I.T. Frolov,  
*Nuestro destino  
común*, Alianza Ed.,  
Madrid, 1988, p. 63.

*"In order to successfully solve global problems, we need to create new ways of thinking, come up with a new morality and a new scale of values and, what is beyond all doubt, new ways of behaving. Humanity is at a new stage of its development. Not only must its material, scientific and technical basis be expanded, but also, more importantly, new humanistic values and aspirations must be formed. We need new social, moral, scientific and ecological concepts to determine the new conditions of life for now and the future."*

*"The common good is not simply the sum total of particular interests; rather it involves an assessment and integration of those interests on the basis of a balanced hierarchy of values; ultimately, it demands a correct understanding of the dignity and the rights of the person."*

John Paul II,  
Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, No. 47, 1990.

### On Justice

*"Did Aristotle not make friendship the point of departure for his whole ethical conception of life? It is thanks to friendship that the ideas of justice are fulfilled in such a way that they tend toward a single thing. The notion of Law, therefore, is grounded in the idea of friendship."*

Sören Kierkegaard,  
*Lo Uno o lo Otro*, Ed. Sudamericana,  
Buenos Aires, 1957.  
Cfr. Nicomachean Ethics, VII, 9 and 11.

### Activities

1. Discuss in groups. What is the social significance of a particular degree program? For example, discover how a business manager might make a contribution to the good of society.
2. In teams, think of three basic problems that interfere with the common good in our society, their roots and possible solutions. Write them on a piece of paper, and exchange them with other teams for discussion and comparison with their own proposals. Then have a full-group discussion with all the teams.
3. Analyze the structure of businesses today. In teams, discuss the pros and cons of shared business management, alternatives and ways to put it in practice.
4. On a piece of paper write a concrete proposal, in the form of a suggestion, for "sustainable development." Then get together in teams and discuss the proposals of all the

team members. Have a full-group session and try to come up with a concept that pulls together all the different contributions.

5. Make a summary like this one:

The common good is the full range of conditions that make the human person's overall development possible. It must be understood from a viewpoint that looks at the person as a being-for-others, and at society as a community-for-people. The common good is the unifying principle of all political activity as well as its main responsibility. Communication at all levels is what builds the common good, which takes preference over particular interests. This, however, does not contradict the purpose of society, which is the good of the people who make it up.

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### **Questions**

#### **What is the common good?**

It is the full range of the conditions of social life that are necessary for the complete development of the community of persons.

**What are the main tensions that arise when one addresses the common good, and why?**

The interests of individuals and the interests of the community.

**Under what perspective must the common good be understood?**

From a viewpoint that looks at the human person as a being-for-others, and at society as a community-for-people.

**What is the most constructive attitude for the common good?**

A willingness to communicate one's own values and interests.

**Why do we say that the common good is dynamic in character?**

Because it is not a good that is constituted once and for all, but rather in response to, and as a product of, a specific culture. It is the fruit of the dynamic condition of the human person.

**Why does the common good have an intentional character?**

Because it is a product of wills and the aim of social, legal, economic, cultural and political structures.

**Whose responsibility is it to determine the approaches and means for achieving the objectives of the common good?**

It is the responsibility of public authorities, intermediate institutions and sometimes citizens.

**What values should the ethical society promote in its members?**

A desire for improvement and transcendence and the means to achieve them, confidence, solidarity, responsibility, etc.

## CHAPTER X

### HOW IS THE ETHICAL PERSON FORMED?

#### Objective:

To propose some means that will help us take possession of our own lives, by making good decisions and developing human attitudes.

*Will not the knowledge of good, then, have a great influence on life?  
Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right?*

Aristotle,  
*Nicomachean Ethics*, I,  
1094 to 23.

#### 10.1 The fundamental option

A characteristic of adulthood is having a personal identity. Adults have normally given their lives a certain direction, they have taken responsibility for themselves, they have taken a certain stance before the

world and others. Their actions manifest a "fundamental position," a particular way of facing reality. This position gives their life direction, meaning and definition. Through the options that form the foundation of their life, people affirm, express, create and act out the kind of person they have decided to be.

We ask what is the best way to fulfill ourselves through our options and actions.

Just as making decisions is characteristic of mature people, not making them is characteristic of childhood. Children are prone to manipulation and whims; they do not have a specific direction or a clearly defined stance before the world. Adults can approach reality differently. In fact, life presents us with problems that demand definite stances and that put us in a position of choosing anew or confirming the kind of person we want to be.

No path is good for those who do not know where it leads.

The fundamental option is the orientation that people freely choose, by which they orient their actions in the direction that they wish; it is an internal act of self-definition; it is the conscious and responsible orientation of the whole person toward certain values.

The fundamental option gradually takes shape, first of all in convictions, which are resolutions to act in such and such a way; then in concrete choices which fulfill the option and incline people to keep acting the same way. With this option we give our life a certain direction which then frames all of our subsequent acts.

*What is it that you are doing every day if you don't know what you're doing?*  
Shakespeare.

Fundamental options determine human personality more than isolated actions do; the fundamental option reveals more than specific decisions because people can find themselves forced by cir-

cumstances into such decisions, or else fall into them by accident. In other words, individual decisions do not necessarily express the orientation that people want to give their life.

The focus of the fundamental option is usually values and what is right. When it focuses on evil, it reveals not so much a negative fundamental orientation as psychological and educational problems, and human need.

Behind a person's acts, and also as a result of these acts, there are a number of fundamental attitudes. The acts can change the attitudes, purify them, reinforce them and make them more consistent. Fundamental attitudes constitute a sort of existential structure, an abiding way of acting and reacting.

The unity of our personal being demands continuity in our life. The pillar that holds it up is the fundamental option, which represents our personal style of living. It becomes the wellspring of our actions, and gives us unity. One of people's basic duties is to be true to themselves in circumstances and situations that are diverse and ever-changing. For this it is crucial to take options and create attitudes.

It is a misunderstanding of the fundamental option to think that it is the only thing that matters in moral action, that the concrete and particular act lacks ethical value and does not modify people or their fundamental option.

Can we make a project of ourselves that seduces us, that responds to our deepest desires?

*"The essential thing is to choose to have a certain attitude toward what is right or wrong; it is less important to know precisely whether what one thinks is right or wrong."*  
Søren Kierkegaard.

### 10.1.1 Options and renunciations

Great individuals are formed through great options and great renunciations.

Options bring with them certain renunciations. By opting, we choose one way of proceeding over another, and in this way we renounce certain tastes, inclinations, objects, ways of proceeding, etc. More than frustration, renunciation is a way of taking control of our life. It is impossible to live without renouncing.

### 10.1.2 Implicit options

We go through life "*blazing our own trail*" in response to the problems and demands that life throws at us.

Experience shows us that few people feel the need to take the reins of their life into their hands by means of fundamental options. Nonetheless, even though we do not consciously and explicitly set forth the option, we make decisions, and we set off down a specific path.

Alcoholics and drug addicts do not decide to be substance abusers in a single, explicit decision; their lives are defined incrementally by repeated acts.

When there is no explicit fundamental option to channel one's life, it finds its own direction. Particular acts become the explicit expression of the fundamental option, but at the same time, they have the power to determine the person who performs them.

The characteristic feature of an option is the consciousness and freedom with which it is taken, and yet we can also speak of implicit fundamental options. People cannot live without giving some direction to their life; life necessarily heads toward a goal, and when we do not consciously and freely set this goal, life takes its course by way of the everyday decisions we make.

### **10.1.3 Explicit options**

Unlike implicit options, in our explicit options we look first at our goals, so that life becomes a search for the means to reach what we have set out to attain.

It is a good idea to make our life options explicit:

- › in terms of values such as justice, truth, integrity, freedom, love, etc.
- › in terms of professional and family life: marriage, career choice, professional practice, etc.
- › in terms of society: politics, faith, Church, etc.

### **10.1.4 Fundamental options and styles of life**

A given option brings with it a style of life. For example, the option of marriage brings with it a style of life in which personal fulfillment is shared. The style of life that is chosen is not separate from the person's being. Choosing a style of life means choosing a way of being.

The choice of a style of life implies the need to take a stance on certain values. When people live without explicitly choosing a style of life, they are in fact taking an implicit option that gradually takes shape as a result of their specific way of living.

It is preferable to choose how one is going to live than to be carried along by external forces.

The multiplicity of options is the reason there is a multiplicity of styles of life. Values, customs and cultural paradigms may diverge greatly, but within them,



the decisive factor from an ethical point of view is each person's implicit and explicit options.

## 10.2 Education

The more freedom a person enjoys, the more necessary self-discipline becomes.

Right behavior is not a set of rules or a specific road to follow. It is something that must be learned. People have to learn to conduct themselves; that is how they learn to live. The learning is not spontaneous and automatic. They need to draw out of their being their best possibilities: they need to be educated. Education consists of learning to live by conducting one's own life.

Education is not, nor should it be, a structure added on, but rather the drawing out of the best in each subject. An ideal education would discover each person's values and foster their development.

From the biological viewpoint, we can look at education as a means by which people can overcome their organic and instinctual limitations. This occurs when they transform the world by their activity into something that serves the cause of life. Thus they learn to protect themselves from the weather, to take care of the feeding of their children, to work for something beyond their immediate interests, to perceive and create useful and beautiful things. In a word, they learn to transform the world, to make culture. Culture is the work of education, and education takes place within a culture.

Education and culture are very important, but not absolutely deter-

It is in the context of their culture that people discover the meaning of their personal being and that of others. The family, business relationships,

friendship and love are all ways in which we make ourselves in relation to other people and among them.

On the basis of this encounter, education can and should develop other qualities and skills in us that contribute to our fulfillment, integrate us into social life and arouse in us the desire and the wherewithal to serve the common good.

Education is also training or life, for social interaction, and for finding a way to be useful to others. It should help people find their place and their task in the world.

### **10.3 Self-image**

As unfinished beings, people are a task for themselves. For this they need an interpretation of their being and their actions.

The idea that people have of themselves is a part of their reality. On the basis of this idea, people act. In order for people to change, they also need to change their image, and the idea they have of themselves.

In the work of being fully oneself and producing the best fruits, a crucial role is played by the image of ourselves that we create in our mind, and together with that, the esteem and the value with which we love and measure ourselves.

When we observe a certain lack of quality in a person, we rarely stop to think that behind it is often a lack of a satisfactory personal image, and also, a lack of esteem that the person feels for himself. When a

mining factors.

People can be healthier, even much healthier, than the culture in which they grow and live.

Almost no one can behave in the right way when they have a bad opinion of themselves.

person succeeds in changing his image, his performance changes along with it.

Life offers us all the elements we need to overestimate and to underestimate ourselves. The important thing is to hold on to those elements that help us to improve ourselves, planting our feet firmly on the ground of reality while trying to be positive. Exaggerated self-esteem leads to pride, disdain for others, an unfounded overrating of oneself, self-deceit. Low self-esteem can lead to inhuman actions. There can be various degrees of low self-esteem and of depression due to this cause.

#### **10.4 Ethical social structure**

Because of their social and community dimension and their call to develop and grow, people necessarily tend to make their values explicit, and to demand that others do the same. People naturally identify with certain values and strive to live in a setting where these values are respected and approved. People also need the approval of others.

One of the most important responsibilities of the human person is to help others to be human as well, by transmitting her values to them and motivating them to live by those values.

The community needs to function in accord with the conscience of the people that make it up, without going to the extreme of being a totalitarian or oppressive community. The community should be pluralistic, and include the elements needed for individuals to be

educated in it, while at the same time respecting the conscience of its members.

### **Summary**

People gradually develop into ethical beings situated in "reality" by means of their own fundamental option, by complying with their obligations, and by pursuing their own fulfillment. Education and social life are resources by which they can bring out the best in themselves, in accordance with a positive self-image.

The fundamental option consists of the orientation that people freely adopt, by which they orient their actions in the direction that they choose. It focuses on values and what is right, and it manifests itself in specific actions. It can be implicit or explicit; in the case of an implicit fundamental option, life takes on a certain direction without meaning to, on the basis of day-to-day decisions.

A given option brings with it a style of life, which shapes people's being and way of being. The social structure also determines their way of being.

Education should be a means for bringing out the best in each person.

### **+ Christian reflection**

Christian life is in fact a fundamental option in favor of Christ and the Gospel expressed and celebrated in the sacrament of Baptism; it is also a renunciation of all the anti-values of human life. In addition, it is the

option of living in a faith community, which is the Church, where people should find the "approval" of the Gospel. Christian life demands fundamental options taken freely and consciously.

Vatican II, P.O. 6,2;  
G.E. 17.

The fact of having been born Christian does not exempt us from the need to be Christian in adult terms. Christian life is not opposed to human values; on the contrary, it offers a foundation for them and integrates them.

People become ethical in the face of their circumstances, on the basis of their nature, with the help of others, and with God's grace.

### **For reflection**

Let us look to the past to learn, not to justify what happened or what now exists. The important thing is to build the future. And that depends on ideals, aspirations and skills.

The knowledge of an ethical value is much more complex and difficult than that of an empirical reality. The physical fact is not the only objective thing; there is also the reading that we make of it in order to realize that we would all live better if we learned to act in a certain way. Recognizing the importance of truth, of respect for others, of keeping one's promises, of solidarity, of the demands of the common good, and of many other values is not possible without a certain preparation. It is very hard for those who have never experienced love or loyalty to feel moved to be loyal or to love. It is like hygiene, which also has to be learned. Human values require more than informa-

tion; they need to be put into practice, and then they are capable of winning people over for good.

### **Activities**

Analyze the following cases:

#### **1.A. Consider**

A young man X a) starts smoking marijuana with his friends for fun. b) After a year he starts to crave it. c) After two years he cannot function without it. d) He never intended to be a drug addict.

#### **B: Judge**

- Analyze the kind of option he took (implicit or explicit).
- What means should he avail himself of to correct his behavior?
- Have his implicit options humanized him as a person?
- Would an explicit option of marshalling resources to kick his habit make him more human?
- If quitting drugs provokes severe personal crises in him, do you think he should face them?

#### **2.A. Consider**

A young man X from an underprivileged background has been raised to fear love. a) He never felt it from his parents. b) He never received it either from any adult or friend. c) He experienced love in the context of sexual expression. d) He is interested in love as a synonym for sex. e) In movies he experiences it as a pre-requisite.

#### **B. Judge**

- Has the education that this young man received helped him to be more human or less human?
- What has been missing in his life?

-How could an irreversible experience be amended?

-What different experiences might help him?

-What recommendations would you make to him in terms of educating his own children?

3. Analyze the type of education you have received (in school, from the media, from your friends, in your family). List the values that you think you have learned. Do you think the education you have received has helped you to be more human? What has been missing? How would you like to educate your own children? (Make a list of characteristics and materials.) How could you educate yourself better right now in order to be more authentically yourself?

4. Describe the elements that, in your judgment, constitute an ethical social structure. Which of these elements are present in our society and which are not? Why do you think they are absent? How do you think they could be introduced? If it were up to you, and if it depended on this group to build an ethical social structure, what would you suggest? Where would we have to start?

### **True or false**

There is no virtue in being persuaded on the basis of insufficient reasons.

True [ ]    False [ ]

People's fundamental options define their human quality.

True [ ]    False [ ]

What makes people human is not human values.

True [ ]    False [ ]

Style of life is a function of the fundamental option.

True [ ] False [ ]

Specific acts determine one's way of being.

True [ ] False [ ]

The only really important thing is the fundamental option.

True [ ] False [ ]

Education is the specific means for solving the problems that come up in life.

True [ ] False [ ]

Education is the only factor that determines a person's development.

True [ ] False [ ]

Exaggerated self-esteem breeds smugness and disdain for others.

True [ ] False [ ]

Low self-esteem can lead to inhuman behavior, because people who do not love themselves are not capable of loving others.

True [ ] False [ ]

Respect for others does not rule out, but rather calls for the communication of personal values.

True [ ] False [ ]



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*Moral de opción fundamental y de actitudes.*

\*\*\*\* The author proposes a morality supported by ethical discernment and the formation of the conscience, with due respect given to the necessary reference to the objectivity of ethical values. Worthy of note is the decidedly personalist character of the morality, as opposed to rigid moralism.

### **Questions**

#### **What is the fundamental option?**

It is the orientation that a person consciously, freely and responsibly adopts toward certain values.

**How does the fundamental option manifest itself concretely?**

The fundamental option manifests itself first in terms of convictions, which are resolutions to act in such and such a way; then in concrete choices which verify the option and incline the person to keep acting the same way; then in concrete acts that either reinforce it or weaken it; finally, with the person's judgment of his own acts, either approving them or disapproving them, and in this way making them more or less his. With approval comes the social support to continue with the same orientation.

**What does the fundamental option contribute to the human person?**

- a) A personal style of life.
- b) Consistency in her personal being and her actions.
- c) Clarity for making choices under certain circumstances.

**In what way do people develop into ethical beings?**

By means of their own fundamental option, by complying with their obligations, and by pursuing their own fulfillment by doing what is right, in touch with the social context through their education and social interaction, willing to develop their best possibilities within an ethical social structure and in accordance with a positive self-image.

**What happens when there is no fundamental option to give direction to a person's life?**

Life spontaneously and naturally finds its own course.

**Why is it necessary to take options and create attitudes?**

Because one of people's responsibilities is to be true to themselves in circumstances and situations that are diverse and ever-changing.

**In what sense is it possible to speak of an implicit fundamental option?**

In the sense that people cannot live without giving some direction to their life. Life necessarily aims at a goal, and when we do not set this goal consciously and freely, life takes its course on the basis of our day-to-day decisions.

**What does education consist of?**

It consists of learning to live by conducting one's own life. It is a drawing out of the best that is in each person. It is also training for life, for social interaction, and for finding a way to be useful to others.

**What is the importance for ethics of the image that people have of themselves?**

It has great importance, because behavior depends to a great extent on this idea. As unfinished beings, people are a task for themselves, which means they need an interpretation of their being and their actions.

**What does ethical social structure mean?**

It is the social order in which individuals constitute a community, and explicitly set forth and approve their values.

**What are attitudes?**

Attitudes or habits are the sets of acquired inclinations that predispose us to act in a certain way in the face of what is right or wrong, or in the presence of human values.

## CHAPTER XI

### RESPONSIBLE ACTION

#### Objective:

To analyze the link between people and their acts, between ends and means, between causes and effects, as well as the degree of responsibility involved.

#### 11.1 Decisions

We have a number of physiological and psychological mechanisms that come into play when we make a decision, although we are not usually aware of them. Inclinations or passions give our actions a certain orientation even before we make an actual decision, but we cannot speak of ethical action unless conscience and freedom are involved.

Human action can have ethically contradictory motivations, because human beings are internally divided. In their heart are good and bad motivations at the same time, with respect to the same action; their duty obviously is to identify with the good motivations and not accept the bad ones.

A single action can arise out of countless pre-conscious, sub-conscious, unconscious and even some conscious motivations. The ethical task that people face is to act on those motives that fall under the control of their consciousness.

### **11.2 Intention**

People become ethical by choosing their own goals.

It is specifically human to work toward a chosen goal: people's intelligence raises them above the genetic and instinctual level, and opens them to the realm of freely chosen goals.

Acting in pursuit of a goal characterizes and confers meaning on human action. People need to know what their final intention is, and then seek to attain that intention through their action.

There is a two-fold problem: that of knowing what you intend to accomplish with this action, and that of realizing where that action will take you, whether you intend it or not.

The intention is the end that people consciously pursue when they take a given action. The intention orients actions toward a goal, according to a concrete internal plan. Without an intention, there can be no ethical action. This is why the choice of goals is so important, because they are what orient people's actions and lives.

The intention comes from the realm of people's values, from their convictions, but above all, from their "heart," i.e., from their orientation toward good or evil. Through the intention that they impress on their behavior, people express themselves, make adjustments to themselves, and commit themselves to what they do.

The chosen goal is an appropriated goal. And thus, the purpose of the action qualifies the act itself, and more importantly, the person. Intention is a constituent element of the human act, as well as the objective effect of the action and its foreseeable consequences.

And yet, intention is not enough to qualify an act. The reason it is not enough lies in the fact that the human act also depends on its object.

An overly subjective, individualistic or spiritualist ethics looks too closely at the intention, and disregards the effects, the consequences and the repercussions.

The intention and the purpose in the subject who acts is the most important of the causes, and the ultimate reason for the ethical action. But it is not the only important thing, because what is sought "intentionally" is "something" that has its place in reality.

The intention must be linked to the natural result of the action. Planting elms to harvest pears is an intention that goes against nature, as is sowing evil and expecting to harvest good.

### **11.3 The objective effect of action**

Good intentions are not enough to qualify a person, because the intention is just one moment, a pre-requisite for human action. Good intentions make people better, but in and of themselves they do not make a better reality. Whatever our intention, our actions have their own effect, what we call objective effect.

Responsible people consider what the action itself produces and the consequences of that action.

It is not enough that my action arises out of a good intention; the result of the action needs to be good as well. Therefore, the realm of reality imposes a limit on the determination of goals and indicates a responsibility: I must consider the consequences of my actions.

The ideal situation is when the intention matches the dynamism and the result of the action. The result of the action should orient the intentions, because a good intention does not change the objective result of the action, even though from an ethical standpoint people are not held responsible for unintentional consequences.

#### **11.4 Distinction between ends and means**

We ask whether the ordering of the means to the ends and of the ends among themselves can serve to distinguish objectively between a means and an end.

Let us consider an act in which a person chooses certain means to reach an end, or chooses certain ends and not others.

If the means are compared with the ends, it can be seen that their quality of means and ends comes from the will, not from reality. Both means and ends are simply possibilities. A door or a stairway is not just a means to go out onto the street; they are that only when I set out to use them as such. In and of themselves, they are neither means nor ends, but for people, they can be both means and ends.

Actions by themselves do not have an end. Actions take place, and consequences ensue. The sense of



purpose is a projection of people's ordering mind; in the animal world, for example, there are causes and effects or consequences, but not ends. Ends require intentions, which are not present in things or in beings without intelligence.

Action, even when construed as a means to reach an end, already insinuates ethical action inasmuch as it is assumed by a subject. The action must be objectively and subjectively oriented toward a good end, subjectively by the intention with which it is carried out, and objectively because its natural result should match the subject's intention.

Action has in itself an orientation; it produces one or several inevitable effects. The cause is a cause with regard to the effect, and the effect is an effect with regard to the cause. Action is disoriented not only when it does not correspond to a good end, but also when it produces an undesired effect. The morality of action does not depend only on the subject's intention; it is also linked to the objective meaning of reality.

An action might have countless effects or consequences. The intention is what gives it an ethical character, not the unexpected consequences; but people, as intelligent beings, must consider the possible unintended consequences.

### **11.5 Plurality of ends and the order of nature**

In things, we discover a certain natural order. Plants do not realize it, but they blossom, produce fruits and seeds, and thereby reproduce. The order of nature is independent of human will, but this order can be

Reality has the capacity to "lead to"..., with or without the subject's intentionality. This implies that it already has in itself a possibility that makes a claim on the person's conscience.

Would it be ethically good to drive too fast?

oriented in many different ways and is never completely predetermined. Aside from the natural order, things can be ordered according to different purposes.

If we understand action exclusively in terms of ends, we limit its possibilities. Reality has many, many possibilities, but only a few of them are ever reached. Reality can exist in many ways, and action can also occur in different ways; reality, in this sense, is versatile.

The order that we discover in nature is not opposed to the ends that we might give to animals and things; we can even say that nature expects and presupposes our own purposes. Thus we observe that what is ordered are things, but our mind is what orders them; the end always presupposes an intention and thus we cannot speak of an objective end, only of an objective order; and that objective order falls within the purposes that people might have.

Ethically, people must consider "their reality" if they want to discover the order of the means by which they reach the greatest fulfillment. But in the final analysis, reality is not what endows people with purpose; it is the other way around: people endow reality with the purpose that they have chosen. Therefore, people can use things considering not only the obvious ordering, but many other purposes. It follows that the criterion of the objective order is not the only ethical criterion, because things in themselves can serve for what they were originally made for or many other purposes.

People are not made to adapt themselves to the material world, although they often do so. It is more likely that they adapt the world to them and impose their own ends on it.

From the ethical point of view, it is important to consider the objective order of things so that reality, in itself, reveals its functioning and its requirements. And yet purpose does not express the entire ethical reality. With the criterion of purpose we run the risk of limiting reality, of making it coincide with obvious consequences that have already been discovered, which we tend to recognize as ends, and we overlook

all of those possibilities of reality that can be ordered to other ends.

Their task is to humanize the world.

For example, a bird's egg is naturally ordered for procreation, but it can also serve to feed other living beings.

### 11.6 Ethical character of means and ends

Something is constituted as a means with regard to an end, and its ethical condition is a function of that end. If there is no intentionality or purpose, we cannot speak of good or bad means. The mutilation of an arm, for example, can be good if it prevents cancer from spreading. Thus, in order to say that the means are good, they have to be oriented toward a good end. It cannot be said that the ends or the means are good or bad in themselves, because they are mutually relative and the means cannot be abstracted from the end, nor can the end be abstracted from the means. Ethically speaking, the end and the means form a unit, and they are distinguishable only as an exercise in logic.

The principle that states that a good end justifies the choice of immoral means -*the end justifies the means*- is unacceptable because the means cannot be considered by themselves, independently of the end.

### 11.7 Double effect

In human life there are actions that produce a double effect, one good and the other bad. Intentionally, the good effect should always be sought, and the bad one tolerated. It is not reasonable to run big risks when the possibilities of the good effect are slim.

An action is not good or bad independently of its effects and of the intention with which it is carried out.

Ethically, action should be considered in the light of the good and the bad effect; in reality, in the light of all the possible effects.

The double-effect principle can be useful in some cases, but it is not a universal principle and it leaves many unresolved many cases that can only we solved with the totality principle (such as, for example, the unjust aggressor, mutilation, birth control, organ transplants, etc.).

How to assess a double-effect action? There are four conditions:

- a) the action should be good or indifferent,
- b) the intended end should be good,
- c) the good effect should not be achieved through the bad one,
- d) there should be a reason to justify the tolerance of the bad effect.

In conflict situations it is possible, and sometimes necessary, to choose a lesser "evil" in order to avoid greater evils.

N.B. While it is important to distinguish causes from effects and ends from means, it is also important to avoid atomizing the situation and to remember that causes and effects, ends and means, together with the subject's intentionality, all form an ethical whole.

### **11.8 The consequences of action**

Human actions can have numerous consequences, some of them predictable and others unpredictable. From the ethical standpoint, the only consequences that are important are those directly linked to the subject's intention that fall within her conscious capacity.

Given their intellectual capacity, people can increase their knowledge of the consequences of their actions and take responsibility for those that can be foreseen, and determine their corresponding obligations. It can be a gravely wrong action to leave a campfire unattended in a forest, to burn products that pollute, to do harm to oneself or another person, to impose an unjust and disproportionate punishment, etc.

Actions can have consequences or effects that are natural, normal and ordinary; as well as consequences that are unnatural, extraordinary, and that happen only by accident. These effects cannot be foreseen, or surmised, and from an ethical perspective, the subject cannot be held responsible. This is not the case, however, with normal effects and consequences that are foreseeable.

Allowing or causing harm is ethically wrong when there is no sufficient reason to justify the risk. All actions are carried out to accomplish something.

The objective order of nature is that of being directed by people. Nature, in and of itself, is not absolutely ordered. People need nature, and nature

The order of physical, chemical, biological or animal nature demands the human order of nature.

needs people to survive. People discover the order of nature but they also impose their own purposes on it, and these are not separate from nature; they bring it to fulfillment.

Things are for satisfying the natural order, and for many other things as well; think of flowers, for example.

### 11.9 Complicity

Just as there are causes with multiple effects, there are also works that require the convergence of many causes. In the judicial realm it is customary to distinguish between the intellectual cause or perpetrator of a crime- the one who plans and directs- and the material perpetrators who carry out the other's plans.

When the object of an action is good, and the people involved appropriate that objective, their cooperation is good: it has an impact on them and makes them more human. But if they contribute to the good without meaning to, without identifying with it, by accident, the action is objectively valuable, but it has no impact on the people or their humanity. The enhancement of a person's human quality requires the participation of the human person as such: with consciousness, freedom, responsibility, solidarity, as long as the objective of the action is good.

*"It is just as despicable to accede to a dishonorable entreaty as to make one."*  
Cicero, De amicitia.

In the complex and pluralistic world in which we live, important actions are less and less individualistic and more and more collective. The good, in order to become a social objective, needs to be planned, organized, evaluated, and people need to show

solidarity, co-responsibility and perseverance in order to bring it about.

There are also evil actions (kidnappings; robberies; social, political and economic injustices; wars; crooked deals; fraud; etc.) that require the concerted participation of many people.

We are guilty of complicity when we consciously and freely contribute to an action whose objective is wrong. There are degrees of responsibility, and of guilt, depending on the participation, the consciousness and the freedom of those who participate in it.

Neither a job, nor a salary nor obedience wipes away the co-responsibility for an action when that action is not right, either in itself or in view of its consequences and purposes. The person is still a person when she is expected to obey, or when she receives a salary, or when she has signed a job contract. This is what gives rise to conscientious objection, which means that the person sees a real moral difficulty in participating in a joint action.

It is very common in professional practice, and in life generally, that the problem of complicity receives little attention.

In both political and economic life, situations come up that demand a clear ethical stance on our part; social pressure can be stronger than personal fortitude.

The pursuit of negative ends is all the more dangerous when personal responsibility is easily diluted.

An accomplice is someone who shares responsibility for something wrong that other people also commit.

A drug dealer's accountant, the anesthesiologist for a criminal abortion, the driver of a robber's getaway car are not only material collaborators if they know what they are contributing to.

*"It is no excuse to sin that we have sinned for a friend."* Cicero, *De amicitia*.

Individualism keeps us from seeing that we often contribute to the evil that "others" commit, which means that we commit it as well.

### **+ Christian reflection**

For the sake of the human person, Jesus made institutions and traditions relative. Man is the measure of the Sabbath and of the law (Jn. 7:51; Mk. 7:3; 2:18; Mt. 9:14)

The Christian faith provides a horizon of meaning that gives a deeper significance to theory and practice. Christians are called to come up with the best possible means to attain good ends and to think creatively about how to accomplish what they have not yet achieved. They have a clear point of reference in Jesus, and also in the conviction that the human person, whatever his situation, must never be a means to achieve an end. The human person must never be the price to attain an objective.

People of faith, even when they recognize all of the influences on their action coming from their education, the environment, their own nature and above all their own history, do not believe in moral determinism. They know that they always have the means to straighten out their life and that they can always count on God's grace for that. They know that in their life and history there is a transcendent element, stronger than they are, that invites them to higher things.

A part of Christian faith is the conviction that Jesus Christ is with each and every one of those who believe in him, at all times, everywhere and under any circumstance.

Mt. 28:20.

### **For further reflection**

Causing a moral wrong is not justifiable for any reason; tolerating a physical (ontic) wrong, however, is justifiable when its objective is to attain a superior good.



The affirmation that the end does not justify using any kind of means serves to defend the singular and historical human person. Too much emphasis on the end leads to totalitarianism:

a) Totalitarianism of pure intentionality, with no grounding in reality ("as long as your intention is good, you can do as you please").

b) Totalitarianism of technocracy ("production, efficiency, effectiveness"); but to what purpose?

c) Totalitarianism of utopian revolutionary movements (a new society, at whose expense?) When the end is overvalued, history turns into the hegemony of power, authoritarianism, obsession, absolutism. The morality of the end without a morality of the means constitutes a justification of the power of the strong over the weak.

On the other hand, an immoderate consideration of the morality of means tends to be excessively rigid; it leaves out the most personal elements of ethics, and becomes a dehumanizing mechanism. It turns into a series of principles that are actually immoral by overlooking the moral subject that is the person. It ceases to be operative because it is essential to accept the historical cost of pursuing good ends.

Morality must value the dynamics of the end and its relationship with the means, the nature of actions, consequences, and the imperfection of strategies.

### **Activities**

Comment on this summary and see if it contains the main points:

Every decision brings into play physiological and psychological mechanisms that condition it. People must be determined by those motives that fall under the control of their consciousness. Acting toward a goal characterizes human action and gives it meaning. The intention is the end that people consciously pursue when they carry out an action. People need to consider what the action in itself produces. Actions have natural effects, but not ends, as these correspond to the person. The rightness of an action depends on the intention and the objective result of the action.

Means are constituted with regard to an end and from it they receive their ethical character. Intention and action must be situated in one and the same relationship with the end. Ethically relevant consequences are those linked directly to the subject's intentionality and that fall within her conscious capacity.

### **True or false**

Human action is right when the intention is good, because the intention is enough.

True [ ]    False [ ]

Human action is wrong only when it aims at an evil end.

True [ ]    False [ ]

Human action is right if in itself it is correct, even though it is carried out with an evil intention, or with an evil end (e.g., giving a person presents in order to seduce her).

True [ ] False [ ]

Neither effectiveness, nor popular approval, nor economic success is a criterion for ethically assessing a specific action.

True [ ] False [ ]

People can rectify nature in order to assure a good result.

True [ ] False [ ]

Human action is wrong when it aims at an evil end.

True [ ] False [ ]

Human action is right if in itself it is correct, even though it is carried out with an evil intention.

True [ ] False [ ]

The object of an action is completed in its consequences.

True [ ] False [ ]

Consequences are assessed in the same way as the object of an action, because they and the action make up a whole.

True [ ] False [ ]

The morality of an action arises from its object, with no need to consider its consequences.

True [ ] False [ ]

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## **Questions**

### **What is meant by the motors of decision?**

All of those physiological and psychological mechanisms that come into play when a decision is made, even though the person does not necessarily identify with them.

### **Can we speak of ethical action without considering intention?**

No, because it is specifically human to work toward a chosen goal and not just conditioned by one's psychogenetic structure.

### **What is the relationship between intention and the objective effect of an action?**

The result of an action should orient the intentions, because a good intention does not change the objective result of an action. The ideal situation is when the intention matches the dynamics and the result of the action.

### **Does it make sense to talk about ethical action independently of the human person?**

No, even though the action in itself has an orientation and produces effects which cannot be overlooked, it is always the action of a particular person.

### **Why can't the criterion of the objective order be the only ethical criterion?**

Reality is versatile, which means it can exist in multiple ways and action can also take place in different ways. Ethically speaking, people need to consider "their reality" if they want to discover the order of the means by which they achieve the greatest fulfillment.

**Can it be said that means or ends are wrong in themselves?**

No, because they are mutually relative: the means cannot be abstracted from the end, nor can the ends be abstracted from the means. The ends and the means are an ethical whole, and are distinguishable only as an exercise in logic.

**What are the important consequences from an ethical standpoint?**

Those that are linked to the subject's intentionality and those that fall under his conscious capacity.

## CHAPTER XII

### BEYOND ETHICS

#### Objective:

To show that people are transcendent not only for what they are but also for what they do.

With this concluding chapter we wish to present an important point of Christian faith that refers to human actions: people's fulfillment in this life and in eternal life is directly related to their decisions, choices, options and actions.

#### 12.1 Transcendence

By transcendence we mean people's ability to go beyond their own limits. With respect to their life, we say that they transcend it by participating in immortality. With respect to their actions, people transcend them by achieving something more than the immediate and natural object of their action.

Transcendence is part of human beings' nature, but at the same time it goes beyond that. It has to do with

The affirmation that ethics is grounded in reason, which makes it valid for all people, does not exclude its also being an object of revelation and a place of encounter with God.



Whenever people love, serve, or give of themselves, they transcend.

a dynamic order the fullness of which is not foreseen. In this way, people are transcendent by believing, and often in their faith itself, by loving and hoping. They are transcendent by choosing moral good, truth and virtue; by using their life to serve others, and by going beyond their exclusive interests.

Transcendence is not an increase of what is finite; that would simply lead to inflated, giant-sized people.

Transcendence is not the desire to last forever or attain immortality through monuments, memories and works. These may extend a person's shadow over history, but they do not really transcend because they do not go beyond the limits of time. In this context the word immortality is often used, but it is actually a memory that also belongs to history, the way we now remember Homer, Plato or Bach.

We assert that people have a destiny that goes beyond their earthly life, and that nevertheless is rooted in their reality in this world. There is not just spatial and historical *being-in-the-world*, but also human reality referred beyond this world.

People transcend by being human persons (conscious, responsible, free, other-oriented and ultimately God-oriented), *being-in-progress* whose destiny is communion with God.

The transcendent justification of ethics does not rule out, but rather presupposes its rational justification.

We might ask whether transcendence as a message is exclusive of revelation, and whether non-religious people can give a transcendent meaning to their life and their death, at least as if they were to "*leave a message in a bottle so that, somehow, what they believe*

*in and found beautiful can be believed and found beautiful by those to come."*

Umberto Eco, *Belief or Non-belief?*

## 12.2 Communion with God

People's fundamental relationship with God, in Christian faith, does not focus on action as people's behavior, but on being as something received originally; it does not focus on merit but on grace. God is the Father of all people, loving Creator, independently of whether people respond as children of God and as brothers and sisters among themselves. This, however, does not mean that God does not expect a certain kind of behavior from people. If we are children of God, then we should live and act as such.

Mt. 5:45.  
I Jn 3:1ff.

Human nature is an ongoing reference to "God's humanity." God's language is the most authentically human thing there is.

Faithfulness to truth is ultimately faithfulness to God, who is the foundation of reality and truth. The true God is not only the only God who really exists, but also the God who is the foundation of truth and comes close to us in it.

There are many roads, but only one leads to the goal.

Those who seek the truth seek God, and those who are faithful to the truth are faithful to God. God's word, for those who do not know *God's Word*, is the Truth, and loving God, for those who do not know him, is loving others.

Those who run away from reality, from truth, or from love are hiding from themselves and running away from God.

It is a double track by which human values put us in communion with God. First because he is the foundation and the source of all values, such as goodness,

justice and love, and second because these values are in people's interest and make them more human. The human condition is the wide-open door that allows for communication from people to God and from God to people. It is the point of contact of the God who makes himself human, the most human of all people.

God's communication is not only through his words, but also through his works. And correspondingly, people communicate with God not just through their words, but mainly through their works.

Mt. 7:21; I Jn 3:1ff

Godness is engraved in the person's heart as a project of salvation

Communication with God is a communication that is so inserted in reality that people communicate with him in everything they do, as long as what they do is something positive, and when it is not, they are communicating with God in a negative sense, in that they look for him where he is not, or in that God is always willing to forgive.

### **12.3 The importance of action**

In all cultures, people have discovered that their actions are relevant for attaining certain results. In this sense we can say that human beings are essentially intelligent and active, and that one of their actions is to understand their action and give it meaning. They carry out their actions in order to obtain some concrete or immediate result, but there are other actions that they carry out with an eye to objectives that neither concrete nor immediate. These actions do not imply a relationship of objective cause leading to specific result. People thus find themselves naturally drawn to magic, sorcery and superstition. Only by making a concerted effort of the intelligence do

people succeed in discovering the importance of their action as liturgy and worship, and the difference between these on the one hand, and magic and sorcery on the other.

Liturgy and worship are directed at a Higher Being whom people try to know, accept and worship. In magic and witchcraft there is no reference to a Higher Being; the magical action is directly related to the desired effect and powers are attributed to the action above and beyond its nature.

It is clear that religions have always expressed themselves in people's actions. All religion is about "doing something"; none is merely philosophy, which also explains why all human action requires or presupposes a philosophy of which it is an expression.

There is a profound relationship between being and doing, between being and what ought to be, between being a certain way and the dynamism that can lead to another way of being, which is achieved actually through action.

A tenet of Christian faith is the acceptance, more than the demonstration, that all human actions, including the most insignificant like giving a glass of water to one of the least of these, has eternal transcendence, i.e., that it is linked to people's immortality and that we can say they are immortal, imperishable, transcendent actions. Christian faith does not give worldly actions a transcendent and eternal effect, but rather a meaning and value that transcend the time-bound and worldly. The effect is historical, but its meaning and value transcend history.

Behavior is people's natural way of achieving their temporal and eternal fulfillment. In evolutionary terms as well, human beings survived thanks to their behavior.

Jesus taught that God cares about people's life and behavior, that we can find him more readily in human relationships than in the temple and sacrifices, that God desires people's well-being and service to others. Jesus teaches that salvation does not come from knowledge, but from God's action and people's response.

For those who do not believe in God because of problems that they have had in life, because of the lack of dialogue between faith and culture, or because of a false image of God, the path of good works and good feelings is the surest path for finding him, even when the word they receive from God or the testimony that others give them about God strikes them as rationally unacceptable. Just as there are people who believe by hearing words and not by seeing works, there are people who believe by seeing works and not by hearing words.

When people open up to others and accept them for what they are, they open up to God and accept him for what he is, in the same way that by loving and giving of themselves to others they love and give of themselves to God. People, in and of themselves, regardless of their condition, are a reference to God.

Human freedom has its purpose and meaning in giving to the person, and ultimately to the Personal

Being who surpasses all people and who makes himself accessible in the person of other people.

People are free to freely love moral good, truth, and all human values, but primarily to love others and God. In the exercise of their freedom, they transcend themselves.

Throughout life, and particularly at the end, people sense that they must respond for it, that they are responsible to Someone. By responding for themselves before others and before God, they transcend.

#### **12.4 Biblical morality**

The behavior of the people of Israel does not derive from a reflection on human nature or natural law; it emerges from a faith and a cultural milieu. Its point of departure is not the rationality of precepts, but a covenant established in love.

The Ten Commandments presuppose but also surpass natural law and a "*closed humanism*"; they set forth the style of life that God wants in his people. It is a sign of the covenant, of mutual friendship and of having accepted God in life.

When God is linked to people's being and life and wants the best for them, he wants an orderly and ethical life. The Bible asks people to resemble God not only in their being but also in their doing. They are to follow God's paths and to act like him. People in the Bible understand human values in a derivative way: they are human because they come from God. By acting righteously, they act like God.

Biblically, morality is grounded in religion, and faith is expressed in a morally lived life. The commandment thus becomes not so much a precept as a revelation of what is best for people. Obedience is an act of personal adoration.

A few basic postulates of morality in the Old Testament can be pointed out:

1. God's dominion over the world, people, and particularly the chosen people.
2. The norm of behavior is God's will as expressed in Mosaic law.
3. The central content of moral life is based on the sense of people. Its history, its faith and its customs combine and form a whole.
4. In the Old Testament people are the center of the universe: image and likeness of God, but at the same time members of the chosen people.

In the New Testament, loving God and others is the core content of Christian morality.

For Jesus and for Christians, those who care for others, particularly the neediest, care for Jesus himself. And they give their actions an imperishable transcendence and make themselves worthy of eternal happiness.

Doing God's will is summarized in accepting Jesus and the Gospel, and all of Jesus' teaching is reduced to love. By lovingly doing God's will, people become the dwelling-place of the Father and the Son. And the Holy Spirit makes itself present as the one who makes love possible and effective.

A Gospel-centered way of living does not raise people to a superior level of authentic humanity; it makes them human with the humanity of God.

*"Jesus' ethical preaching is not a summons to be heeded by those bold enough to accept the challenge. It is more of a description of the person who lives a truly human life."*

### **Activities**

In groups, answer the following questions:

- In what sense does faith make people more human?
- Does all faith make people more human?
- Why does loving others, especially the needy, make people more human?
- Why does hope humanize people? Or would it be more human not to have hope?

### **True or false**

If God does not exist, everything is permitted (Dostoyevsky).

True [ ] False [ ]

Faith does not make human behavior good or bad.

True [ ] False [ ]

Faith is a motivation to act better.

True [ ] False [ ]



No one, without the help of Revelation, can accede to the knowledge of what is right.

True [ ] False [ ]

Good actions, without an explicit reference to God, have no meaning.

True [ ] False [ ]

Concrete acts are insignificant, without order or relationship; they are "life".

True [ ] False [ ]

Only faith justifies Christian ethical demands.

True [ ] False [ ]

Christian morality should not be judged by reason.

True [ ] False [ ]

All religions humanize people.

True [ ] False [ ]

Good actions have value, even supposing that God does not exist.

True [ ] False [ ]

God is the natural goal of good actions.

True [ ] False [ ]

All good actions lead to God, and not even God can hide himself from those who do good.

True [ ] False [ ]

Ethics reaches its fullness of value and meaning when life is lived out of love for God, oneself and others.

True [ ] False [ ]

All acts of love and self-giving have their fullness in God's love and self-giving.

True [ ] False [ ]

The authentic response to God does not consist of irrational obedience to his will.

True [ ] False [ ]

The path by which the non-believer can find God is the practice of what is right, the search for Truth and the exercise of virtue.

True [ ] False [ ]

In Christian life it is not possible to accept God without accepting Jesus, or to accept Jesus without accepting others (without love for others).

True [ ] False [ ]

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\*\*\* Short and very interesting book. It compares the secular and Christian visions on a number of ethical issues.

## **LATIN AXIOMS**

### **Ab asuetis non fit passio.**

In what is customarily done there is no passion.

### **Abusus non tollit usum.**

Abuse does not cancel use.

A maxim of ancient law meaning that the occasional abuse of something does not rule out its being used properly.

### **Ad impossibilia nemo tenetur.**

No one is obliged to do the impossible.

### **Alta petit recta qui tendit.**

He reaches high things who looks for them righteously.

### **Ama et fac quod vis.**

Love and do as you wish (St. Augustine).

### **Amicus Plato, sed magis amica est veritas.**

I am a friend to Plato, but an even greater friend to the truth (Aristotle).

This expression highlights the transcendence of values that make people more human. In them we go beyond our interpersonal relations in order to be faithful to values, and to God who is their foundation.

### **Bonum es aliquando excesum facere.**

Excess is good from time to time.

### **Bonum est faciendum, malum vitandum.**

Good should be done, and evil avoided. (St. Thomas

Aquinas, S.Th. I-II q.94,a.2). Basic principle of morality.

**Bonum ex integra causa, malum ex quocumque defectu.**

For something to be good, it must be so under all aspects; for it to be bad, it is enough for it to be so under any aspect.

**De internis neque Eclessia.**

A person's inner judgments and motivations cannot be judged even by the Church.

**Distingue tempora et concordabis iura.**

Distinguish among times and you will coordinate rights. This refers to differences between moments and circumstances, which will help you to know your obligations and rights.

**Donec eris felix, multos numerabis amicos.**

As long as you are happy, you will have many friends.

Verse from Ovid (Sorrows, I, 1, 39) after having been exiled by Augustus and abandoned by his friends. The second verse is usually added: Tempora si fuerint nubile, solus eris. If the sky clouds over, you will be alone.

**Errare humanum est.**

To err is human.

Used to excuse a mistake, a moral fall.

**Excusatio non petita, accusatio manifesta.**

Excuse not asked for, clear accusation.

Those who excuse themselves before they are accused declare their guilt.

**Fiat iustitia, et pereat mundus.**

Let justice be done, and the world perish.

An ironic saying that points out that justice is for people's sake, so it is not reasonable to do a justice that finishes off human beings. People cannot banish themselves from the list of ethical values; they are the main value. Fiat productio, et pereat homo. (W. Sombart, *Le bourgeois*.)

**Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas.**

Happy is he who was able to see the causes of things. Verse from Virgil (*Georgics*, II 489). Often cited to celebrate the happiness of those whose inquisitive spirit penetrates the secrets of nature and thus rises above the opinion of others.

**Hoc volo, sic jubeo, sit pro ratione voluntas.**

I want it, I order it, and let my will serve as reason.

Verse by Juvenal (*Satires*, VI, 223), who puts these words in the mouth of a bossy woman. Used to speak of an arbitrary authority.

**Homo res sacra homini.**

Man is sacred to man. (Seneca)

**Homo sum: humanum nihil a me alienum puto.**

I am a man; nothing human is foreign to me.

Verse by Terence (*The Self-tormentor*, I, 1, 25) expressing human solidarity.

**Honesta mors turpi vita potior.**

An honest death is worth more than a shameful life.

**In dubio libertas.**

In case of doubt, there is no obligation.

**In dubio pro reo.**

The benefit of the doubt to the accused.

**In dubio standum est pro validitate actus.**

In case of doubt, what counts is the validity of the act.

**In medio est virtus**

Virtue is in the happy medium.

**Labor omnia vincit.**

Hard work conquers all. (Virgil, Georgics, I, 145).  
All difficulties in life can be overcome by steady, patient work.

**Longum est iter per praecepta, breve et efficax per exempla.**

The road is long by precepts, short and effective by examples. (Seneca, Letters to Lucilius, 6,5)

**Sabbatum propter hominem, non homo propter sabbatum. (Mk. 2:27)**

The ultimate reason of the law and obedience to the law and authority is people's well-being; people should submit to the law only inasmuch as it helps them be more human. The same applies to worship and the sacraments. Sacramenta propter homines.

**Magna pars est profectus velle proficere.**

A big part of progress is wanting to progress. (Seneca, Letters to Lucilius, 72)

**Melior est conditio posidentis.**

The law favors him who has possession.

**Multis melior pax triumphis.**

Peace is better than many triumphs. (Carlo Emm. II, 1637-1675).

**Naturalia no sunt turpia.**

What is natural is not immoral.

**Nemo malus nisi probetur.**

Innocent until proven guilty.

**Ne quid nimis.**

Nothing in excess. Excess is never good, either in tolerance or in punishment, or in the satisfaction of any need.

**Nihil est in intellectu quod prius non fuerit in sensu.**

Whatever is in the mind first passed through the senses.

**Nihil volitum, nisi praecognitum.**

Nothing is willed that has not first been known.

**Nulla est igitur excusatio peccati, si amici causa peccaveris.**

It is no excuse to sin that we have sinned for a friend. (Cicero, De amicitia, n. 37).

**Nulla poena sin lege.**

No punishment without law.



This saying is important for positive law, which must be made known, together with its punishments. But it does not apply to natural law, or binding reality, which is grounded in being itself and whose punishment is the lack of being, or its wasting away.

**Omne agens agendo perficitur.**  
Practice makes perfect.

**Omnia mea mecum porto.**  
What is truly mine I carry around with me (Cicero).

**Omnem crede diem tibi deluxisse supremum.**  
Think that every day is the most splendid day of your life.

**Operari sequitur esse.**  
Doing leads to being.

**Pacta sunt servanda.**  
Promises should be kept.

**Prius est esse quam operari.**  
Being comes before doing.  
Metaphysical principle that indicates the priority of being over doing; it insists on the temporal priority and the priority of the subject as the efficient cause of his action, but it does not consider the impact that the action has on the subject and how it modifies him: the subject, while still the same subject, is changed by the action itself.

**Prius est esse quam taliter esse.**  
Being comes before being a certain way.

This principle is applied to logic only, because in the existential order it is impossible to be without being "thus," i.e., a certain way.

**Possunt quia posse videntur.**

They can because they think they can. (Virgil, Aeneid)

**Quantum mutatus ab illo!**

How different from what he was!

Words put by Virgil in the mouth of Aeneas, horrified at seeing Hector, who appears to him in dreams, covered with wounds. (Aeneid, II, 247)

**Quia nominor leo.**

Because I am the lion. An expression that indicates an authoritarian attitude: might makes right. (Taken from a fable by Aesop: The Lion and the Sheep)

**Quidquid recipitur, ad modum recipientis recipitur.**

A person's way of being determines the way he receives things.

**Qui nescit dissimulare nescit regnare.**

He who knows not how to dissemble, knows not how to rule. (Macchiavelli)

**Qui probabiliter agit, prudenter agit.**

He who acts on probabilities, acts prudently. (Bartolom de Medina, 1577)

Basic principle of probability. For underscoring the turn toward the subject and his freedom, it was denounced for its laxity. Tutorism, for its part, took a rigorous, Jansenist stance.

**Qui tacet consentire videtur.**

Silence is taken as consent.

**Quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxiliis, cur, quomodo, quando?**

Who, what, where, by what means, why, how, when? Technical hexameter summarizing what in rhetoric is known as the circumstances: the person, the deed, the place, the means, the motives, the way, and the time. It also summarizes criminal investigation: Who is to blame? What is the crime? Where was it committed? By what means or with what accomplice? Why? How? At what time? This hexameter was passed down by Quintillian.

**Quod natura non dat, Salamantica non prestat.**

If it does not come by nature, we will not get it even in the best university, by studying hard.

**Si aliquando, cur non modo?**

If at some time is it advisable or legitimate, why not now?

**Sic itur ad astra.**

This way to the stars. (Virgil, Aeneid, 9, 641).

**Sint ut sunt, aut non sint.**

Let them be as they are, or not be at all. Famous response mistakenly attributed to Fr. Ricci, General of the Jesuits, regarding a proposal to modify the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus. It was actually spoken by Clement XIII. Used to refer to a substantial change that cannot be accepted at any price.

**Tua res agitur, paries si proximus ardet.**

It is your business when your neighbor's walls are burning.

**Summus ius, summa iniuria.**

The extreme application of the law can cause extreme injustice. (Cicero, De Off., 1,10,33).

**Ubi non est culpa, ibi non est delictum.**

Where there is no guilt, there is no crime.

**Verba rebus proba.**

Prove words with deeds. (Seneca, Letters to Lucilius, 21)

**Volenti non fit iniuria.**

No injury is done to one who consents.

A

ll people are called to grow in human quality and at the same time, to be themselves, by consciously assimilating values that make men and women more human. Being an ethical person means having a set of coherent, clear, reasonable and firm convictions that lead to a certain kind of behavior...

This book is written for young people who are looking for authentically human values to guide their life, who are capable of making an effort to build a world that meets the needs of all human beings in the third millennium.

*"The book is an excellent treatise on philosophical ethics that offers an in-depth analysis of all the elements, both metaphysical and existential, involved in specifically human action.*

*We hope it is adopted as a textbook for courses on this subject taught at universities and institutions of higher education."*

(Bishops' Commission)