

# APOLOGETICS PODCAST SERIES

## EP. 32 : THE MORAL LIFE I: APOLOGETIC AND INTRODUCTION

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### INTRODUCTION

- Strictly, Apologetics or Fundamental Theology is about establishing:

#### 1. Naturally Knowable Truths

(*Using reason alone*) Natural truths about man and God: e.g. the existence and immortality of the soul, God's existence and His attributes, the possibility of revelation as a reliable source of knowledge, man's free will, the possibility of miracles, the possibility of certitude about supernatural things, and the need for external/social worship by sacrifice.

#### 2. The Possibility and Reasonableness of Christian/Catholic Doctrine

(*Using reason alone*) That what Catholics claim to be revealed by God, integrate into what we can know about man and God by nature perfectly, that what Christ claims to be (God and Man) is reasonable and likely true, that the basic Catholic doctrines are not unreasonable and likely to be true, that it is reasonable and likely that Christ founded a Church with a structure like that of the Catholic Church.

*This leads one to make an act of Faith with the help of God's grace, and accept the truth of revelation.*

#### 3. Truths of Faith

(*Using Revelation and Reason*) Establishing that the Catholic Church's claims are the only tenable claims, and thus it is the Church founded by Christ to which all should belong.

- Another way of putting it the three steps in apologetics help us to:

1. Reject atheism, polytheism, and pantheism, by establishing monotheism and the necessary attributes of God from reason;
2. Reject non-Christian monotheism (Judaism, Islam, etc.) and semi-polytheism (Mormonism, some forms of Hinduism, etc.)
3. Reject non-Catholic Christianity (Protestantism, Orthodox schism, etc.)

- **N.B. None of this touches directly on morality**, even if we already said back in the episode on Miracles in the New Testament of a kind of miracle supporting the Church's Divine founding being the rapid spread of Christianity in the face of an unfavorable environment, part of which was that Christianity had a demanding moral code, dramatically opposed to the social norms of those early centuries.

- Christian morality did not immediately appeal to the pagan as such, because it restricted him, but,
  - With some reflection and especially with the helps of the martyrs, miracles, and charismatic gifts seen in the early centuries, he could see that Christian morality made a great deal of sense, and even, if he could step away from his disordered passions, that it did fulfill his desire for the good and happiness.

- Thus Christian morality or ethics does play an important role in the apologetical realm, even if it is not really part of apologetics, strictly speaking. It falls mostly in that second stage of establish the reasonableness of Catholic claims, and once the truth of revelation is accepted the third stage.
- Further, we can need to look at the basis for Catholic morality in this neo-pagan post-Christian world we live in specifically in an apologetical manner because
  - People who reject the Church's doctrines or even the existence of God rarely (if ever) do so because they have logically reasoned themselves to this conclusion in a dispassionate manner, rather

- They typically wish to follow their disordered passions, and seeing that the Church's doctrinal or moral code stands in the way, they reject the doctrine or morals so they can justify a lifestyle lived contrary to the teachings of the Church.
- Therefore, a great deal of the work of the apologist is actually to help the sinner see the error of his ways, appeal to his reason, and provide him a way out of his sin, which is to reconcile with Christ by becoming Catholic, or returning to the State of Grace.

## STATUS QUÆSTIONIS

- These days, we find that Catholic morality is in a situation very much like the pagan world of the early Church: a source of controversy because it opposes the social norms in vogue in the present. This is one reason we can say that the present era is a post-Christian era.
- During the Ages of the Faith (Christendom), and even well into the early-to-mid-20<sup>th</sup> century most of the Catholic-Christian moral doctrines were accepted (at least superficially), as universal moral norms.
- Important questions arise in seeing this opposition to worldly moral norms in the early days of the Church, a long-standing acceptance of Catholic-Christian moral norms, but now a return to worldly norms similar to those of the pre-Christian world :
  - Is Catholic-Christian morality a set of arbitrary/subjective standards, or objective?
    - These replaced the pagan moral norms, so perhaps all morality is just subjective, and Christian norms were just "in vogue" for a time.
    - Because in this series we're looking to establish objective standards by which to accept the Catholic Faith, it would be a serious blow if the morality it preaches is arbitrary and subjective.
  - If objective, what is the basis for Catholic-Christian morality?
    - Is Scripture or some revelation needed, or is there some other standard?
    - This is important because it will set what part of Apologetics morality needs to be seen to be a part of
      - If founded on natural reason, like God's existence, it should be knowable by all, and provable by reason alone.
      - If founded on some revealed truths, then we cannot argue from nature or reason, but have to show it is not unreasonable, and most likely to be the Truth revealed by God.
  - Does Catholic-Christian morality solve all moral questions?
    - Does the Church decide every moral question?
    - Or are there some moral questions that escape the Church's teaching?

## WHAT IS MORALITY

- Essentially morality or ethics is the study that asks the question of what is the standard by which men should rule their actions.
  - It asks those same questions of whether there is a standard, and if so, what that standard is.
  - Then it tries to apply this to actions in general to guide, and specific actions which are freely willed.
- There are very few people who would claim to hold an amoralist position.
  - It is contrary to the fundamental moral first principle: "Do Good, Avoid Evil" so is irrational,
  - If there is no "good" to be sought or "evil" to be avoided, and thus no rules for behavior, then one cannot have preferences, or really know anything.

- Amoralism is contrary to human experience, in which we do sense (even those without religion), that there are certain duties to be performed and guilt for failure to live up to some standard that goes beyond myself.
- Either the moral law or standards will be
  - Objective (based on some transcendental moral law, some societal demand, or something innate in man), or;
  - Subjective (based on my own individual value-judgements)
- The common argument against moral subjectivity is Theistic, but others who want to avoid God will try to base an objective morality on other standards outside of
- What is the source of standards outside of our own value-judgements
  1. Supernatural (above us),
  2. Societal (at our level),
  3. Innate/Evolutionary (below us),
  - If we reject some transcendental supernatural source for these standards (e.g. atheists) in an effort to avoid God, then we only have societal norms or something innate to us.
  - Leaving the truth or falsity of evolution aside, let us just assume it is true for a moment to argue against the idea that morality was generated from it.
    - How does guilt help reproduction or survival?
      - With regards to being excluded from society when we do things that make us hateful to others, perhaps there is some basis, but then this is really no different than saying there are objective “societal norms of morality” or standards at our level. It’s just couched in evolutionary terms, but in this argument morality does not come from beneath us.
      - Guilt for actions that do not cause shame from others is almost never experienced as some kind of utilitarian way of survival or growing the species. So, there seems no evidence to suggest that they are source from some biological instinct to survive.
      - Further, if we are rational and understand that biology has wired us in certain ways, we can go against this and so it is no longer really any standard at all.
    - Is there anything innate then?
      - We will say there is later, but not due to natural development, rather due to our Creation.
      - Natural Law “engraved in the heart of man” which is just a reflection of the Divine Law.
  - Does morality come from society?
    - Certainly there is an aspect of society imposing pressure towards what it considers to be moral actions, but that does not establish the source of these,
      - In a universe without God, society is only a collection of individuals who happened to come together, so the moral standards it sets are not fixed and depend on the individuals.
      - In other words, if morality is horizontal there are really no fixed standards.
  - So it seems that morality must come from some supernatural source.

## CLAIM ONE : MORAL PRINCIPLES ARE OBJECTIVE AND BASED ON FINALITY

- At the beginning of the Apologetics series, Fr Robinson used some arguments to demonstrate the necessity of God's existence, without referring to any Revelation.
  - He mainly used the argument from contingency, because it also establishes many of the attributes of God without further argument, but it is also quite a complex argument.
  - There are many others from the First Mover, most perfect good, or the order of the universe.
  - In other words, it was established (and can be established), that a God who is Supreme and Creator of all, must exist.
    - In the Fifth Way, St Thomas argues that we can see that non-intellegent things (e.g. a planet, rock, etc.) always act according to the same rules. We'd now call this the Physical Laws of the Universe, and the subject that studies it "Physics".
      - By the laws of physics, including gravity and other forces, a planet will orbit around its star, and a rock will fall towards the center of mass of a larger body like the Earth.
      - These things always act this way, unless some external force interrupts this.
        - In the miracles episode we even discussed how God does not violate these laws of physics, but acts within these laws in miracles.
        - We can only do science because these laws are consistent and knowable.
      - These consistent results show that these non-intelligent things act towards an end or goal, a "final cause". This goal-seeking show Order.
        - Some misunderstand this argument thinking it is arguing for "Design". While "Intelligent Design" is not a bad argument, the argument from "design" is weak, because it tries to detect design.
        - The Fifth Way does not try to detect design, it sees an Order and things following this Order towards a goal, and design necessarily follows from order and goal.
      - These non-intelligent things cannot know the goal they seek, and do not establish the order or means to that goal.
        - Intelligent being sees a goal and orients himself towards that goal. He ordains himself towards an end.
        - The non-intelligent thing must be given this ordination from an intelligent agent/Creator/maker.
      - This cause must be outside of the universe, because the universe itself is not an intelligent being.
      - Thus we reason to an intelligent being outside of the universe, which is God, who gives Order to the universe, who can be known by the nature of things and how they operate.
        - In other words, we do not need God to reveal Himself, nor is knowledge of God's existence a matter of Faith. It is a question of science (proof from causes).
    - If God exists, and He is the Creator of all things, He gave the things created things with a particular nature (way that they are).
      - It is because things share a nature that we can give them a common name.
        - Human beings are individuals sharing a human nature (even though there are still varieties of men with different features and characteristics)

- Trees (varied as they are) all share an arboreal nature.
  - If they did not we could not look at branched coral and say it was “tree-like” but not actually a tree.
- If things have a nature, and God has a nature, by Creation, there is a relationship that is created between Creature and Creator.
  - It is a relationship of dependence
  - For rational creatures that have a free will to choose how they will act, this relationship also establishes when actions conform to this nature or are not conformed to this nature.
  - This is what we call the Natural Law.
    - We sometimes speak of the Natural Law as “the eternal law of God, engraved on the hearts of men”. This is not wrong, but *not the most simple way to look at this for questions of morality*.
    - Better to say, the Natural Law is the relationship between God and man, based on what God is and what man is, which sets for man, the duty to act as God made him to act.
- This way of looking at things means that the Natural Law is really about finality, purpose, or the goal and ensuring the man, by his actions, reaches this goal to which his nature directs him.
- This means that our feelings, our ambitions, our opinions, our passions have almost nothing to do with morality or whether an action is moral or not.
- It is only a question of what man’s purpose (end/goal) is, and whether a particular action helps man to achieve this purpose, or impedes it.
- Thus the fundamental axiom : “Do good, avoid evil”.
- **The conclusion therefore is that moral principles are going to be objective and fixed for all men, because all men share the same human nature.**

## WHY IT IS IMPORTANT THAT MORALITY IS CONSIDERED FROM THIS PERSPECTIVE

- Firstly, because it flows from the
- Secondly, without it it is far too easy to confuse the natural and supernatural aspects of morality.
  - Many people (both defenders and opponents) presume that Catholic morality is based only in Scripture, Tradition or magisterial decrees.
    - Thus, some will argue a tattoo is morally wrong because Leviticus (19.28) forbids “branding the body with marks and designs”).
    - At the other extreme are those who think moral teaching of the Church needs some whole theology around it to develop it, thus the error of a “Theology of the Body” to try to regulate sexual mores (and make a mess of it at that!)
  - The most important (and seemingly controversial) points of Catholic sexual morals are grounded in the very purpose of the sexual functions of the body.
  - Because founded on natural law, all human beings can (and if using right reason) would see the correctness of these moral principles, unless blinded by their passions or malicious wills.
  - This would be true, even if God never revealed anything to man.
  - **The supernatural sources of knowledge (Revelation via Scripture or Tradition, with the help of the Magisterium) do have something very important to add to enhance our understanding of the natural law and morality, but without natural law/finality are going to be incomplete.**
  - **GRACE BUILDS ON NATURE!** Not nature on grace.
  - Without looking at finality/purpose, Catholic moral rules quickly become mere “official policy” or “opinion”

- Opponents will say, “I don’t agree” or even condemn the Church’s teaching as outmoded, because it’s “just an opinion”
- We need to return to this idea a bit later and flesh it out if we will really appreciate Catholic morality, but for now let’s continue.
- Thirdly, it shows that understanding most Catholic morality is not about theology, but requires fairly simple natural reflection.
  - The ten commandments do not create morality or moral principles, they are just guideposts for what is moral.
  - The Church’s laws do not create morality, they reflect it and teach it.
  - To know what is good for a tree, grass, a dog, or man is not a theological or even a deep philosophical question.
    - Grass needs a certain amount of water, sunlight, air, fertilizer, and heat to grow.
      - It is not good for grass to have an extended drought.
      - It is good for grass to get some rain, but not good for a field of grass to be flooded and lack access to air.
      - It is good for grass to get some sunlight and warmth, but the Saharan sun won’t be good for it.
    - So too, for man by looking at what is good for him to reach his goal, and what impedes his goal, even simple people can answer most moral questions
    - Only for the more complex and difficult questions is help needed beyond normal use of our reason, and control of our passions.
- Fourthly, because this approach naturally leads to virtue and a manner of keeping the moral law.
  - St Thomas Aquinas discusses Law in the *Prima Secundæ* of his Summa, but only beginning with question 90.
    - He first steps through discussing Man’s purpose or Last End, which is Happiness. (5 questions)
    - Then he talks about human acts and how the intellect and will of man work (16 questions)
    - Then he discusses man’s passions and how they affect his actions (26 questions)
    - Then he discusses habitual actions including virtue and vice (40 questions)
    - Only then does he get to Law, because law is “a rule and measure of acts, whereby man is induced to act or is restrained from acting.”
      - In other words, the law only helps push a man to do good, or restrain him from doing evil.
      - It does not make something good or evil.
  - Analogy : Driving a Car
    - The law is the guardrail, the road is the path, the endpoint is our happiness.
      - The final cause or purpose of the drive is happiness (eternal & temporal)
      - The path is the life of Charity/Friendship meant to be lived now
        - Driving off the road is not good (mortal sin)
        - No one would say that driving against the guardrails (just keeping the law) is actually good driving
          - In fact it risks damaging the car (means to get to our goal) to such a point that we may be forced to walk (have a more difficulty to reach our goal)

- Rather the best way to drive is to stay on the road, and pay attention to the goal, and keep ourselves well away from the law
- A good driver is one who does this with ease, joyfully, and promptly corrects errors.
  - This is precisely what virtue does!
- If law is the encouragement to good and the avoidance of evil, then habitual actions flow from keeping the law, first imperfect, then perfect.
- Those habits help order passions and actions towards the goal.
- They help us to reach happiness, and constantly evaluate things in the light of the moral law.
- Lastly, because this approach matches what God has revealed to be His desire for our life and purpose
  - “I now no longer call you servants, I call you friends” (Jn. 15.15)
  - True friendship is not just about willing to good of another, but a mutual sharing of goods and of love
    - The goal is an intimate union with God, who by Charity, gives us the means to love him in return
    - This is why St. Thomas Aquinas' first analogy for Charity and our eternal goal is Friendship

## CATHOLIC MORAL PRINCIPLES ARE BASED ON THE DIVINE LAW

- What is the objective basis for Catholic morality?
  - We are saying it is the Natural Law, but that is a bit too specific. Let's back out a bit
  - Ultimately because God created the nature of things, as we said, the Natural Law is really the Divine Law, but as it is found in the nature of things.
  - So, when God chose to create men as we are, he set the Natural Law.
    - Recall this is why murder is always wrong. It violates our nature.
  - But beyond what strictly corresponds to our nature, he also made certain arbitrary decisions that our nature does not determine for us
    - This is what is called Divine Positive Law
    - Such arbitrary decisions was to first set the Lord's Day as the Sabbath (Saturday), then to transfer it to Sunday (Dominica, from *Dies Domini*—The Lord's Day).
    - Another arbitrary decision was the manner in which men would worship God.

## INCORRECT NOTIONS OF MORALITY

1. *Subjectivism* — There is no fixed standard of morality. What is moral is left to the judgement of each individual man (“my truth”)

*Critique : If there is no fixed standard for morality (which is about human action), then there can be no standard for any natural actions, and scientific research is impossible, because there is no standard for scientific truth. This theory also results in practical chaos, since if every man set his own standard, there would be no evil in murdering your neighbour to take his goods, or acting “because you fell like it.”*

2. *Relativism* — There is a standard for morality, but it exists only in relation to some larger group, like society which decides what is good and evil.

*Critique : While this avoids the lack of any standard and therefore permits some order, the order is changeable according to the whims of the mob. Murder could be made legal, and all manner of other evils, again resulting in chaos.*

3. *Utilitarianism* — The standard of morality is whatever is most useful for man or for society and has no relation to what is true.

*Critique : This is no different than Subjectivism, but attempts to set the standard on what is “good” or “useful” for man, but then this also is subject to interpretation, and ends in the same way as Subjectivism*

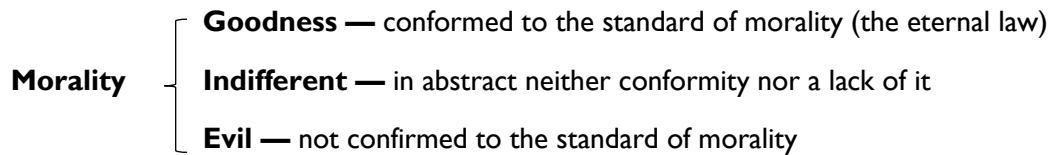
4. *Nominalism* — God has set a standard of morality based on his arbitrary (free) choice.

*Critique : Despite that this view was held by some Catholics, it destroys the idea that God is a loving Father, since it is just his arbitrary will that determines things. While this is a conclusion flowing from Nominalism, the larger school of thought itself has landed most of its proponents in heresy or apostasy.*

## CORRECT NOTIONS OF MORALITY

Opposed to these false ideas the Catholic notion of morality is a relationship between the act and a standard of morality, the *ultimate objective standard* being *the eternal law of God* (which consists both of the Natural Law and free choices of God called Divine Positive Law), and the *proximate objective standard* being right human reason.

The subjective standard which applies these objective standards to the individual is the conscience.



*n.b. Indifferent acts only exist in theory in the abstract. Once an act is done it is either good or bad, and will never be indifferent, because there will always be a purpose or intention added which make it good or evil.*

For example, while walking is, in abstract, a morally indifferent action, once one begins walking it is for a purpose. Is it to go to a bad place? Is it to go to a good place?