

# APOLOGETICS PODCAST SERIES

## EP. 33 : THE MORAL LIFE 2 : PRINCIPLES

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### INTRODUCTION

- In the last episode we looked at an apologetic for Catholic-Christian Morality being based on the Natural Law
  - This is an important ancillary part of apologetics because not only must one find Catholic doctrines reasonable and then accept them to become a Catholic, but also one must accept the reasonableness of the Catholic moral system
  - Further, many 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.
  - This also useful for Catholics who have started doubting the Faith, or have fallen away, because, again, it is typically because of wanting to live a moral life outside of the Church's teachings that they leave.

### CORRECT NOTIONS OF MORALITY

The Catholic notion of morality is a **relationship** between the act and a standard of morality based on a **relationship** between God and man established by the very nature of God and man.

The *ultimate* objective standard is *the eternal law of God* (which consists both of the Natural Law and free choices of God called Divine Positive Law),

The *proximate* objective standard is **right** human reason.

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

**Morality** { **Goodness** — conformed to the standard of morality (the eternal law)  
**Indifferent** — in abstract neither conformity nor a lack of it  
**Evil** — not confirmed to the standard of morality

*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.

Actions which can be morally good or bad are all human acts. But not all of man's actions are perfectly willed, such as dreams or reflexes. Those we distinguish by calling "acts of man" and by this mean that they happen without knowledge or thought, and so are absent any morality, like the actions of an animal.

### HUMAN ACTS

***Intellect : Knowledge required for human acts***

Knowledge is the first efficient cause of a human act and will touch on the act itself and its morality. For a human act *actual* knowledge (or attention) is required. Attention may be

1. *Complete or incomplete*
  - a. Complete attention = a man perfectly understands what he is doing.
  - b. Incomplete attention = a man only imperfectly understand what he is doing (e.g. when he is sleepy, usually his attention is not complete)
2. *Distinct or confused*
  - a. Distinct attention = a man clearly recognizes the act itself and its morality,
  - b. Confused attention = he sees his action a superficial manner as generally doing good or evil without clearly taking note of that distinct action.
3. *Actual or virtual*
  - a. Actual attention = a man averts to the act and its morality clearly at that moment
  - b. Virtual attention = physical inattention, but when a man's previous actual attention continues to control the action he does inattentively now.
  - c. Note : virtual attention is sufficient for valid Sacraments (e.g. the Consecration), prayer and the recitation of the Breviary, as well as venial sin.

### **Ignorance : The lack of knowledge**

*Ignorance [=] The lack of due knowledge. (i.e. lack of knowledge one ought to have)*

*Nescience [=] The lack of knowledge which is not necessary (i.e. a mere lack of knowledge).*

*Error [=] A false judgement proceeding from (a habit of) ignorance.*

As regards the object (thing that ought to be known) :

- Ignorance of a fact** — a man is ignorant of a factual truth (i.e. John is a heretic)
- Ignorance of the law** — a man is ignorant of the law or its punishment (i.e. it is unlawful and sinful to take part in heretical religious functions)

As regards the subject (the person who is ignorant) :

- Invincible** — unable to be removed through reasonable prudent means at present
- Vincible** — able to be reasonably easily removed with prudent effort
  - Simply Vincible** — slight lack of prudent effort to remove
  - Crass/Supine** — grave carelessness to remove or no effort to remove ignorance
  - Studied/Affected** — ignorance intentionally fostered to excuse a sin

### **How ignorance, inadvertance, and forgetfulness influence an action**

Inadvertance and forgetfulness are equivalent to invincible ignorance, unless there is some negligence.

**PRINCIPLE 1 : Actions which proceed from invincible ignorance are neither voluntary (wilful), nor imputable (one cannot be guilty for them)**

*Proof: Nothing can be willed unless previously known.*

**PRINCIPLE 2 : Vincible ignorance (a) does not destroy the voluntariness of an act, but (b) it does diminish the voluntariness, (c) unless this ignorance is studied or affected.**

*Proof: (a) Vincible ignorance is voluntary, so acts flowing from it are voluntary.*

*(b) Because there is at the moment of the act, a lack of perfect knowledge, there is less voluntary*

*(c) affected ignorance arises from an evil will seeing freedom to sin.*

*Scholion 1 : Sinful habits. Some sinful habits (e.g. blasphemy, lying) can become so second nature to man that he does these without much or perhaps any advertance. The rule is this : If the person has resolved through contrition to abandon the evil, the inadvertant failures are not sins, because involuntary and blameless; if he has not revoked his evil habit, there is voluntariness and so guilt and sin in each sinful action.*

*Scholion 2 : Ignorance of Church laws and penaties. No form of ignorance makes an invalid action valid (e.g. unknown marriage impediment not fixed through ignorance). If one violates a law because ignorant through no fault of his own, it is not imputable. If the ignorance is vincible, then the imputability depends on the culpability for the ignorance. Except in Crass/Supine or Studied ignorance, the penalty must be lessened.*

**The Will : Voluntary acts**

**Voluntary act [=] A voluntary act or its effect is that which proceeds from an internal source of action accompanied by knowledge of the end sought (StThAq)**

*Internal source. This means from one of man's appetites not an external source, nor the object desired itself. Thus one who is physically forced to do something is not acting voluntarily because the source of action is external. Also, the desire for some end which is not in one's control, so no matter how much a farmer wants rain he cannot produce it, so rain is not a voluntary act.*

*Knowledge of the end sought. This means both intellectual knowledge and sense knowledge. The act is perfectly voluntary with intellectual knowledge; imperfectly with sense knowledge only. Because there is a lack of knowledge natural acts (e.g. sleeping and digesting), and spontaneous actions (e.g. physical reactions to a stimulus without thought) are not voluntary.*

**Division of Voluntary acts**

Voluntary acts may be

1. Necessary or free
  - a. Necessary = acts of the will which it necessarily produces (e.g. the desire for happiness, the Beatific Vision).
  - b. Free = acts of the will which are not necessary, but the result of a free choice
2. Perfectly or imperfectly voluntary
  - a. Perfectly voluntary = from full intellectual knowledge
  - b. Imperfectly voluntary = from sense knowledge (which is why the "decisions" of animals look "voluntary" or we can imagine them "thinking")
3. Absolutely or relatively voluntary

- a. Absolutely voluntary = no reluctance to perform action, completely free
  - b. Relatively voluntary = some reluctance to perform action (e.g. *taking unpleasant medicine to treat a disease*)
4. *Positively or negatively voluntary*
- a. Positively voluntary = the will chooses to perform an action
  - b. Negatively voluntary = the will chooses to omit an action that ought to be done
5. *Directly or indirectly willed*
- a. Directly willed (willed in themselves) = the object willed is desired in itself. (e.g. the thief desires his stealing)
  - b. Indirectly willed = the action done is a means to the object directly willed, even if the action is not desired (e.g. *to save the ship, cargo is thrown overboard, even though the loss of cargo is not wanted, except as the only means to save the ship*)

### ***Indirectly Voluntary Acts or the Doctrine of Double Effect (DDE)***

The question naturally arises, can one perform an action which has two effects : one a good effect which is desired, and the second, an evil effect which is not desired?

This seems a dilemma since the first moral principle is “do good and avoid evil” and here it seems an action requires evil to do good, or when one does good, he causes an evil.

PRINCIPLE 1 : Evil may never be done, in order that a good flow from it, no matter the degree of good; nevertheless a good thing can be done, even if it will have an evil effect.

This is not simply semantics. To will evil is to sin, even if there is a good effect intended. To will good, is not to sin, even if an evil effect is foreseen.

PRINCIPLE 2 : It is lawful to perform an act in spite of a foreseen evil effect, provided that

1. *The act is good in itself, or indifferent,*

One is never allowed to do an act which are themselves evil (e.g. lying, blasphemy, fornication) even though an excellent result follows. A good way of determining if the act is good or indifferent is to ask if the agent *has a right to act this way*. Thus a barman has a right to sell liquor even though some may become drunk, but since a doctor has no right to cause death, an abortion is never permitted.

2. *The evil effect is not a means to the good effect,*

In this case sin is committed to obtain a good, and this is not permitted. The evil effect must *follow* the good effect, not precede it.

3. *The agent intends the good effect (and does not desire/intend the evil effect)*

The person acting cannot want the evil effect. He must try to prevent it if possible, or at least make it's possibility as remote as possible. A good intention does not justify evil means, but an evil intention spoils any good means.

4. *Is the good effect proportionally greater than the evil which will result?*

Whenever an evil is tolerated (permitted without being desired), there must be a sufficiently serious reason to do so. Not just any good suffices. There must be a greater good achieved. This is at least partially because there is still material sin here which can easily become a formal sin if the intention is off. Material sin or the risk of formal sin cannot be permitted without some relatively grave proportion.

To answer this, one can ask :

## a. How grave is the evil?

*If the evil is relatively minor in comparison with a notable good, it will be easily seen as proportional. If the evil is a grave evil, there must be an eminent good accomplished. (e.g. if the evil effect threatens one's life, it must be a life-threatening situation for the other)*

## b. How closely tied is the evil effect to the good action proposed?

*Is the evil effect immediately tied to the good action, or is it farther away in time or cause? If the evil effect is several degrees removed, the good may be proportionally greater.*

## c. How certain is the evil effect?

*Is the evil certain to happen, or is it a possibility or likely, but not certain. The more certain, the more the good must be greater.*

## d. Does the agent have a special office or duty to prevent the evil effect?

*If there is a duty to prevent the evil, it will be very difficult to tolerate it, even if for another it would be proportional.*

*e.g. A priest has the duty to risk his own life for his faithful to see that their souls are taken care of. Thus he must expose himself to disease or persecution to prevent the evil of the lack of Sacraments. He has a duty and office that requires him to prevent the damnation of souls.*

## Examples of Indirect Voluntary/Double Effect :

*Chemotherapy* : Chemotherapy is a poison that kills human cells. It does this more quickly to those which are reproducing faster. This means it will preferentially attack cancer cells which are growing quickly, but also hair, skin, etc. Causing harm to the body is an evil and immoral except when that harm is only indirectly willed. Since the life of the body is greater than the harm to any part, the cancer drugs may be taken.

*Ectopic Pregnancy* : Sometimes a child in the womb lodges into a part called the fallopian tube, and called a "tubal pregnancy". Unlike the womb, these tubes will not stretch, threatening the life of the child and mother. A doctor is never permitted to abort the child to save the mother, but may removed the diseased portion of the tube to save the mother, even though, the child will be removed as well, and die as a result. The good (treatment of the disease) is willed. The death of the child is not. This is permitted. Baptism can sometimes be given in such a situation, meaning a great good can come from the situation. In an abortion, the death of the child is willed to cure the mother. This is never allowed, even to save the mother's life.

*Innocent Casualties of War* : In fighting a war there will often be civilian casualties, which is an evil effect which cannot be willed. Nevertheless, even though it can be foreseen that innocent people may die by bombing the military headquarters to try to stop the war, it is good to attack the enemy, and so it can be permitted to attack, even though innocent people may die. It would never be allowed to attack innocents to try to persuade surrender (e.g. the atomic bombings of Japan by the United States).

**Obstacles to Voluntary Acts**

- I. **Violence** [=] that coercion or force which come from an external agent upon a sufferer who is fully opposed to it.

PRINCIPLE : Violence can affect external acts only, not the internal acts of the will.

External actions can be forced, because they involve the use of external organs.  
Thus, one can be forced to walk or touch something.

COROLLARY : Violence can never affect internal actions, so internal acts are always morally imputable (i.e. one is always guilty) no matter how much external violence there is.

2. **Fear** [=] the shrinking of the mind from some impending or future evil

PRINCIPLE 1 : Fear which is not sufficiently grave enough to deprive a person of the use of his reason does not remove the voluntariness of his acts. It does diminish the voluntariness and thus the degree of sin.

*Without reason, clearly a man cannot act in a voluntary manner. Fear that is not grave enough to remove reason leaves the two causes of a voluntary act—knowledge and free will—intact.*

*e.g. Even if threatened with torture or tortured, the early Christians who offered incense to pagan deities to escape this torture still acted voluntarily and committed a grave sin (but not as grave as if they, without fear, apostatised).*

PRINCIPLE 2 : Grave fear—also called grave inconvenience, since a perceived great harm would cause fear—can excuse a man from complying with a positive law.

*A benevolent legislator would not impose a law on someone where it would cause grave harm to them, or great difficulty. Nevertheless, when the common good, religion or the like are in danger, one must still comply with a law, e.g. a soldier must stay at his post, even though death is threatening.*

PRINCIPLE 3 : Contracts made under grave fear (even if unjust) are still valid, but can be rescinded, although civil and church law do invalidate some contracts made under grave fear (e.g. marriage contracts)

*Grave fear does not remove reason, so an agreement made under it is still voluntary, however, it is only just that once the fear ceases the person be able to re-evaluate the situation and rescind a bad agreement.*

3. **Passion** [=] a movement of the sense appetites caused by the imaginative awareness of the presence of a good or evil, producing some bodily change; and  
**Concupiscence** [=] an evil inclination, due to Original Sin, in which man seeks out pleasure in an inordinate, unreasonable, and thus sinful manner.

Aristotle and St Thomas Aquinas identify 11 passions, and divide them between two classes : The Concupiscible and Irascible Passions.

*Concupiscible Passions* are those which are related to something easy to obtain (e.g. some easily gotten sensory pleasure) :

*In reference to a good*

love  
desire  
joy

*In reference to an evil*

hatred  
aversion  
sorrow

*Irascible Passions* are those which are related to something which is difficult to obtain (e.g. a good which will arrive only after a very long effort) :

*In reference to a good*

hope  
despair

*In reference to an evil*

courage  
fear  
anger

- Antecedant** — passions which are excited without the will engaging, such as a state of the body, or a sudden or unexpected disturbance.
- Consequent** — passions fostered by the will either because the desire for the thing is so strong, or deliberately excited to make the act more forceful

PRINCIPLE 1 : Antecedant passions diminish the voluntariness of an act; if sufficiently violent to prevent use of reason, the acts are completely involuntary.

PRINCIPLE 2 : Consequent passions, which become excited because of the great desire of the will do not change the voluntariness of an act, but are only a sign of great desire; when intentionally excited by the will, though, they make an act more voluntary.

## PRINCIPLES OF MORALITY

St Thomas Aquinas gives three elements which set which type of morality from above we are dealing with in a particular case. These elements are known as the *principles* or *sources* of morality :

1. **the moral object** (the thing to which the action naturally and firstly tends) — *finis operis*
2. **the circumstances of the action** (the surrounding situation and character of persons)
3. **the purpose or end which is sought.** (the intention of the agent) — *finis operantis*

Example : A thief steals \$20 from a church poor box to indulge his passion of lust by buying a dirty magazine. The moral object is the taking of the property of another unjustly; the circumstances are the committing of theft in and from a sacred place, and its purpose is to satisfy the thief's evil lustful passion.

### **The Moral Object**

**Principle : The primary and essential morality of a human action comes from the moral object**

Example : The moral object of adultery is the transgression of another's marriage rights. This moral object set the moral character (evil) of the act. No matter what other circumstances or motives accompany the act, it is still evil because the moral object is evil.

**Corollary : The first consideration in human acts cannot be given to the motive, but must be given to the moral object.**

This is because either the motive is the same as the object, or the purpose the agent has in mind is different, but presupposes moral goodness or evil.

### **Circumstances**

Moral circumstances are the conditions which change the nature of the morality of the action. These either make an action more or less voluntary.

From the earliest times it has been customary to list seven circumstances : Who, what, where, with whom, why, in what way, when.

**Principle 1 : Human acts derive some morality from circumstances**

Everyone admits this, even if some people think incorrectly that circumstances are the main determining factor. This can be seen by the value of physical objects. These have greater or lesser value depending on the circumstances (e.g. a paua or abalone shell is worth a great deal more to a Maori carver than to the diner who is eating the paua).

However, in order for circumstances to affect the morality of an action, they have to be morally good or bad themselves, and the agent has to be aware of them, at least to some extent.

**Principle 2 : Some circumstances completely alter the morality of an action, others only affect the degree.**

Circumstances can either effect the *moral species* of an action or the *theological species*.

The *moral species* is the virtue or virtues that an action employs or violates. For example, remaining chaste is the practice of the virtue of Temperance, under the special aspect of chastity. Remaining chaste under a vow of chastity adds also the practice of the virtue of Religion, making the act more meritorious. Similarly just as slandering a man is contrary to Justice, so an injustice; but slandering a priest is contrary to Justice and Religion, so is an injustice *and* a sacrilege. Here the circumstances change the moral species, by adding virtues practices or violated.

The *theological species* of an action is whether the action is mortally or venially sinful, so applies only to sins.

**Corollary : Circumstances can change the “theological species” of an act but unless the sin admits of lightness of matter, circumstances can never make what is, of its nature, gravely sinful only a light sin.**

Certain sins admit of *parvity* or lightness of matter. For example, a lie is contrary to nature. Our mind is made for Truth, and ability to communicate made to share the Truth, so when we say what is contrary to our mind, we violate the very nature of these faculties. A lie is therefore always sinful. Because it is contrary to nature, it would normally be a grave sin. However, most lies are about very light matters, and so the grave sin of lying admits of light matter. It is a grave sin, however, if the lie is a serious matter.

On the otherhand, sins against chastity are always, of their nature, gravely sinful. Only a lack of knowledge leading to a lack of consent (*i.e.* inattention) will save one from grave sin. They never admit of parvity of matter, so the circumstances cannot change the theological species. If there is full consent, there is grave sin. It does not matter if the sin is an impure thought, or fornication.

*n.b.* That does not make these equivalent. The latter is far worse, and far more addictive because of the pleasure involved. Externalizing an action is worse than a merely internal sin.

Circumstances which do not change the moral species either **aggravate** (increase) or **mitigate** (decrease) the degree of morality.

**The subjective end or motive**

This is the end chosen by the agent, not what the act naturally tends towards.

**Principle 1 : The moral character of an act depends also on the motive of the agent.**

The motive may have its own moral character, so it could make a good action bad, but also will determine whether an indifferent action is good or evil.

**Principle 2 : The motive can: (a) make an indifferent act into a good or evil act; (b) increase or diminish the goodness of an act, and even make it evil; (c) increase or diminish the evil of an act; but (d) is never able to make an evil act good.**

Explanatory examples :

- (a) Using a computer in the abstract is indifferent. It could be used to pay a bill (thus satisfy justice), or to indulge sinful curiosity (thus be sinful). The motive determines the act's morality.
- (b) Almsgiving is good. Almsgiving done under a vow increases its goodness. If vanity enters in, it loses some of its goodness. If vanity is the chief motive, it becomes evil.
- (c) The man who steals money to buy drugs to get high sins more grievously than he who steals money to feed himself.
- (d) “Let us not do evil that good may come from it” (Rom. 3. 8)

**Principle 3 : In all his actions man must have a good motive which is at least implicitly related to God; under no circumstances may he act for pleasure alone.**



There must be at least a virtual intention to do the will of God when we act, or the action will be sinful. This is because man must act for his proper end, and this end is supernatural. Since his actions will never be indifferent, but good or bad, they either are directed (in some way) to this end, or directed away from this end.

The Church (Innocent XI) has infallibly condemned the following : “There is no sin in eating and drinking to excess merely for the sake of pleasure, provided there is no injury to health, since it is lawful for a natural appetite to take enjoyment in its own actions.” So, the Church implicitly teaches there is sin in this seeking out pleasure *alone*. **She does not object to experiencing pleasure as a result of a good action, and even making this part of the motive.** She only teaches that it cannot be the only motive.

St Thomas Aquinas : “Pleasure exists for the sake of action and not action for pleasure.” (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3. 26)

## OUR CONSCIENCE

There are a variety of meanings for “conscience, but of concern when studying morals is

**Conscience [=] the judgement or dictate of the practical reason (intellect) which, employing general principles, judges the goodness or evil of some act which is presently to be done (hic et nunc), or has been done in the past.**

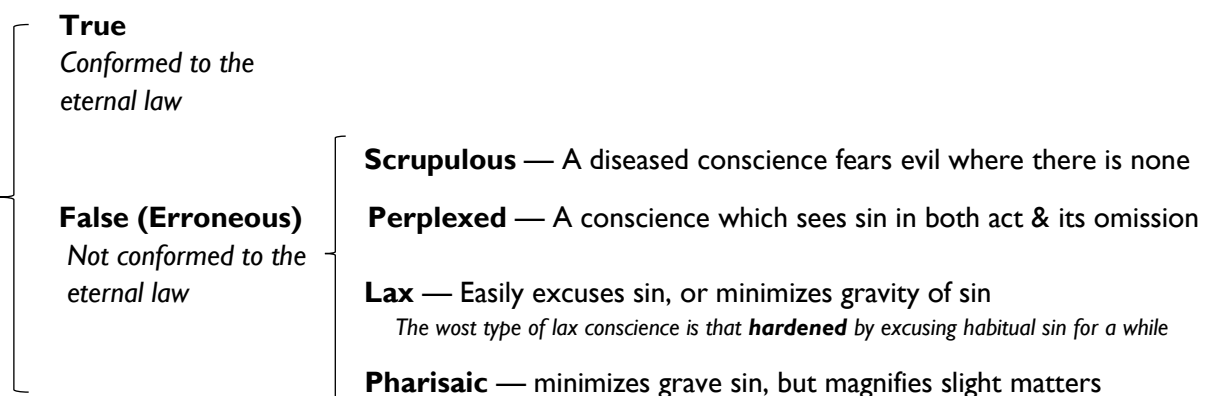
*A judgement or dictate of the practical reason (intellect).* Conscience is not a power or a habit, but an action. The power of the soul sometimes called “the conscience” performs this action of judging. This judgement called Conscience, is the application of knowledge to an individual fact (this act to be done, or having been done), and thus makes a judgement. It does not speculate, nor is it theoretical. It is not about universal judgements, but this individual and particular action.

*Employing general principles.* Conscience begins with general principles, taking the Natural Law and the principles of Faith as true. It then applies these true principles to a particular case. Conscience does not judge the truth of these principles of Faith or Natural Law, but only decides if the act done or to be done conforms with these principles.

*The goodness or evil of some act to be presently done ... or has been done.* The moral law is the objective standard for morality, but the conscience is the subjective standard. An action is objectively good or bad if it accords with the moral law. It is subjectively good or bad if it accords with the conscience applying the law. The primary purpose of conscience is to judge actions to be presently done, though it can also look back at actions already done.

### Kinds of Conscience

*Regarding conformity with the eternal law.*



Following the conscience :

**Principle 1.** *Everyone is obliged to use serious care to possess, on all occasions, a true conscience.*

The reason for this should be clear to common sense. Conscience is the proximate rule/norm for morality and it must act to guide all of man’s moral life. It is of the greatest importance that man’s moral life be guided by a standard which is correct and not false. Means to obtain a true conscience are :

1. Careful knowledge and study of the laws and principles which govern our moral life,
2. Taking wise counsel,
3. Prayer for light
4. Removing obstacles to a true conscience, chiefly by removing the blindness cause by unforgiven sin.

**Principle 2.** *Everyone is obliged to follow his conscience when it commands or forbids some action, not only when it be true, but also when in error, provided this error be invincible.*

If the judgement of conscience merely “permits” or “dissuades” there is no obligation to follow it, hence the terms “commands” or “forbids” are important. Conscience may suggest among two morally good things that one is better, but this does not oblige the better.

Since the conscience is the proximate and subjective rule for morality, one who acts against his conscience, even if it be in invincible error, would commit a sin. Thus, if in invincible error, a man judges that he must tell a lie in order to protect his friend and this is not morally evil, even though objectively it is, he would sin by not telling the lie. He would objectively commit sin, but subjectively he would not be guilty of this sin. Material sin is committed by the doing of something objectively evil, but culpability, or formal sin exists only when the conscience is violated (provided the conscience is properly formed).

Thus a man who thought in error that the Ascension were a Holy Day of Obligation, even though it is not where he lived, by failing to attend Mass and by doing unnecessary servile work and shopping would commit a grave sin, even though objectively he did not sin. Subjectively he would be guilty of grave sin, because he knowingly violated his conscience.

**Nota Bene :** We must carefully avoid the error which makes the conscience not merely the *proximate* rule but the only rule, and thus we fall into subjectivism. Thus, Principle 1. The subjective rule must be conformed as much as possible to the objective rule. If there is fault in this formation, there is sin.

**Principle 3.** *For no reason is it every permissible to follow an erroneous conscience when the error is vincibile, no matter whether it commands or forbids and action. On the other hand, one cannot act contrary to such a conscience, since one must have a judgement of conscience to do so. Thus, one is obliged to correct the error before acting.*

The reasoning for this will be discussed later, but this situation amounts to a doubting or probably conscience, not a certain conscience.

## SIN

Sin is called by scripture “the mystery of iniquity”.

*Our whole life is thus shrouded in mystery. Every one of our salutary acts presupposes the mystery of grace; every one of our sins is a mystery of iniquity, presupposing the divine permission to allow evil to exist in view of some higher good purpose, which will be clearly seen only in heaven. (Fr Reginald Garrigou-Lagrangé, O.P. Providence)*

The reason it is called a “mystery” is because there seems nothing beneficial to man to engage in sin, knowing it will lead to supreme unhappiness, and yet man happily engages in what he knows will lead to supreme unhappiness.

Various saints and theologians have tried to put their finger on exactly what sin is :

St Paul to Phillipians (Phillip. 1.10) : Sin is an act offensive to God.

St Paul to the Hebrews

St Ambrose : A violation of the divine law

St Augustine : Any word, deed, or desire contrary to God’s eternal law

St Ignatius of Loyola : Disorder from the abuse of freedom and rebellion against God.

St Thomas Aquinas : A bad human act, not conformed to the conscience (reason) or divine law.

**Sin [=] a bad human act (namely a desire, word, or deed) not conformed to right reason (i.e. a well-formed conscience) or to the divine law.**

### Conditions for sin

1. Advertance, at least indirectly, to the malice of the action
2. Consent, either indirectly (in its cause), or directly.

Therefore, he who does not understand or take note of any evil in the action he is committing cannot commit a formal sin. On the other hand, anyone whose ignorance is culpable is not excused from fault.

### What is sin, formally?

Matter and form—stuff and what the stuff makes up.

Sin formally is part a privation (a lack of something), and part something positive:

*Adversio a Deo; Conversio ad creaturam.*

The turning from God is the privation. The turning towards a creature is the positive aspect.

StThAq (III, q. 86, a. 4 ad 1) : Confession + Penance returns the proper order by removing the privation and also separating from the creature, and therefore the formal aspect of sin is something dealing with order/disorder.

### KINDS OF SIN

Sin can be divided into many general divisions

- Original** — *Adam's sin and its effect (the lack of Original Justice) inherited by birth.*
- Personal** — *An offense against God deliberately willed.*

Personal sin can then be divided into many other categories among which are :

- Mortal** — *Sin which destroys Sanctifying Grace and Charity in a soul*
- Venial** — *Sin which does not destroy SG, so is pardonable by an act done with actual grace. It wounds the soul, however, decreasing fervour and increasing temporal punishment*

#### Conditions for Mortal Sin :

1. **Grave matter (or the erroneous belief that the matter is grave)** — *This is determined by the object and the circumstances of the act or omission.*

*There are certain kinds (genus) of sins which never admit of slight matter. These are called mortal sins "ex toto genere suo"(e.g. lust, blasphemy, etc.). Only a lack of one of the other two characteristics will makes these venially sinful or not sinful.*

*There are other kinds (genus) of sins which the matter may be grave or slight (e.g. theft, fasting, etc.) and thus the matter may not be grave and the sin venial. When the matter could be grave, but may admit of parvity of matter, these are called mortal sins "ex genere suo."*

*The reason that an erroneous belief that the matter is grave will lead to something not objectively sinful or not objectively a grave sin being a mortal sin is that the will of the sinner consents to what it thinks is grave matter, and therefore malice exists which makes the sin mortal.*
2. **Full advertance** to the moral nature of the act is required. *This includes knowledge both of the gravity of the matter, but also knowledge sufficient that the action (or omission) is a fully human act. If there is a defect in one's advertance, then the sin is venial (or there may be no sin at all), because the act is only imperfectly human or merely an act of man.*
3. **Full consent of the will** is also necessary, and it is presumed to exist when there is full advertance and no external violence. *Fear and passion do diminish the consent but do not destroy it unless they remove reason itself (and therefore advertance). Fear and passion do not prevent a sin from being mortal.*

**Practical rules :**

*It is often not very clear if all three conditions exist in particular situation. If this doubt arises because of fear of punishment or embarrassment in confessing the sin, a penitent should confess the sin simply and matter-of-fact. If there is a real doubt, the penitent should express his doubt and leave the judgement to the confessor and God. In practice, it is safest (except for the scrupulous) to simply accuse ourselves of the sin unless there is a serious doubt.*

*Advertance and consent are imperfect when : (1) the act is committed when half-asleep or half-drunk; (2) when not in complete possession of ourselves because of a sudden and violent surge of passion; (3) if suffering from some serious pathological state or feelings; (4) when one can honestly say that he would never under any circumstances have acted this way if he had given it serious thought; (5) when one is seriously tempted, immediately agitated, and afterward is profoundly sorry for any imperfection in his fighting.*

**Venial Sin**

*Of its nature, venial sin is a disorder which is an offense to God, but does not imply a complete turning of the soul away from God. It is therefore a wound to the soul, or a sickness of the soul, but does not imply its death.*

*Sins may be venial because : (1) of their nature they do not imply a serious disorder (e.g. a jocose lie); (2) because of parvity of matter, so, sins which are, of their nature, mortal, but become slight disorders because the matter is not grave (e.g. theft of \$10); (3) sins which, through imperfect advertance or consent, are not grave sins (e.g. semi-deliberate impure thoughts).*

*Venial sins are of a different nature than mortal sins, and so, frequently committing venial sin does not accumulate to mortal sin, normally. There are three occasions, though, where an additional element is added which can make what is objectively venial a mortal sin : (1) an erroneous conscience judging the matter grave; (2) malicious intent in the sinner; (3) the accumulation of matter (e.g. theft of small sums intended to add up to a grave amount).*