

CHAPTER NINE: HUMAN ACTS: THE PART OF CHRISTIAN LIFE WHICH IS IN OUR POWER

A. Introductory considerations

5 Human acts are studied by metaphysics, philosophy of man, psychology, the social sciences, law, and many other disciplines. Only theology studies human acts in the light of faith. Contemplative systematic theology studies acts as part of creation; it considers how God manifests His goodness in creating things not only like Himself in being, but also like Himself in making something be. Moreover, human acts can be studied
10 insofar as they reveal God in His image--the human person.

Moral theology is concerned with human acts from its own point of view. Moral theology systematically reflects upon the truth of faith in order better to help us shape our Christian lives in the light of this truth. The moral truth of faith directs human acts. The sin of our first parents was a human act; the redemptive work of Christ
15 is made up of human acts; our lives in Christ, insofar as we humanly live them, are a structure of human acts.

Good pagans who have never heard the Gospel preached nevertheless in some way share in the redemption brought about by Christ. They are Christians and they live Christian lives without knowing it (cf. LG 16). Persons who have heard and consciously
20 accepted the Gospel are not necessarily better persons or holier persons than such unconscious Christians. Why, then, is moral theology important for us?

Its primary importance is this: Having received the gift of an explicit knowledge of the truth revealed by God in Christ, we have the privilege and responsibility of sharing in the redemptive work of Christ. He has made us friends and coworkers in carrying
25 out His redemptive work in ourselves and in communicating Him to others. Moral theology helps us better to understand and so better to do the work of redeeming which our Lord Jesus has assigned to us.

The study of human acts in the present chapter will be dry and technical. I am going to make many distinctions and define many expressions. Hardly any reference will
30 be made to any truth of faith. In other words, this whole chapter will consist of nothing but analytic clarifications. No one will enjoy reading this chapter or find much that is edifying in it. Students will prefer to ignore it. But they must not ignore it or pass over it lightly. It is one of the most important chapters in the book.

It not only must be read, but carefully studied until it is fully understood. At
35 every step of the way, the student must try to locate what is being talked about in his or her own experience, and should commit the definitions and distinctions to memory only when they are understood. Moreover, although I use some traditional terminology and keep as close as possible to its traditional uses, students who have studied human acts in a previous course in ethics or moral theology will find that the analysis presented
40 here does not agree precisely with what they think they know. The reason for this is that previous analyses of human acts include many obscurities and confusions which are being avoided or removed here. (No doubt there remains much defective in the present effort, and someone else will have to correct and refine it.)

Why must human acts be studied so carefully, dissected so precisely? Why can't
45 this book do without the present chapter?

In the first place, Christian life must be both like and unlike the life of Jesus. Our lives must be both united to His and distinct from His. Often traditional spiritual guidance talks about imitating or conforming to Christ. As I shall explain, this approach is absolutely sound. But one wants to know what it means to imitate or conform
50 to Christ. He lived a long time ago, in a culture very different from our own, was unmarried, mainly engaged in activities directed to only one human good--that of religion. Most people have abilities, opportunities, and responsibilities very different from His. How can they live like He did? The only way to answer this question is to make some very precise distinctions concerning human acts. The necessary distinctions will be
55 made in this chapter. Also, some distinctions will be made here which are needed to make sense of the revealed truth about original sin.

In the second place, because human acts are much more complicated than they at first seem to be, whole areas of Christian life which could be cultivated very fruitfully are ignored. For example, an inadequate understanding of spontaneous human acts,
60 which are done intelligently and willingly by small children, has led to an almost complete absence of ministry to children under six or seven years old. Only at this age do children begin to make choices. But their earlier Christian life is important too, and the Church could do a great deal to foster its growth. Again, too exclusive a focus upon the outward acts of individuals has made it difficult to understand even them very
65 well, and has led to insufficient attention to omissions, to cooperative acts, to the voluntary readiness of a person to act, and to many other important aspects of Christian life.

In the third place, the correct application of the moral teaching of the Church demands that one understand human acts with some precision. For example, God commands
70 us not to kill. One cannot apply this norm unless one knows exactly what a human act of killing is. Are parents who refuse to allow very painful treatment for their child, being aware that the child will die without it, killing the child? Is a nurse who prepares a patient who is scheduled for an abortion killing the unborn baby? Did Jesus kill Himself when He laid down His life for us? Questions similar to these must be answered
75 by priests in the confessional and by them and other counselors outside the confessional. The answers will be poor and often wrong if priests do not understand human acts with some precision.

Traditional treatises on human acts usually analyze human acts, treat free choice, discuss various factors which alter (especially ones which lessen) moral responsibility, and then go on at once to examine the principle by which moral good and evil are distinguished.
80 Only the analysis of human acts is included in the present chapter. Because it is so important, free choice has been treated in chapter eight. It will play a central role here. Factors which alter moral responsibility will be considered mainly in part six when I deal with sin of weakness. The principles of moral good and evil will

be examined in part five.

B. Some current errors denying the primary importance of human acts

5 In Catholic theology at present, there are many mistaken theories. In moral theology, apart from erroneous theological opinions about particular issues--for example, contraception or reverse discrimination--most of the more important errors explicitly or implicitly belittle the primary importance of human acts as our contribution to fulfillment in Christ. Instead of particular acts, various theologians would prefer to emphasize such things as one's fundamental option for God, one's character and the general trend of one's life, one's intentions, the consequences of one's acts, or some combination of these. A brief comment on these current errors is appropriate here, although some of these points have been discussed previously, and all of them will be considered again, mainly in part six, when I treat sin and its consequences.

15 In one sense, fundamental-option theory involves a basic mistake. It proceeds on the assumption that one can and must choose between directing one's life primarily toward God or primarily toward human goods. I explained in chapter seven, sections A-C, why this option is unreal. Real options always are between human goods, and one can choose against God only indirectly, by choosing wrongly with respect to some human goods, as I explained in chapter seven, section E. In another sense, fundamental-option theory is partly correct. For there is a fundamental option by which one consciously enters upon Christian life: the act of living faith.

25 But this act is a particular human act. It does not differ from other acts of Christian life by being a mysterious exercise of some obscure freedom other than free choice. The act of living faith, as a human act and moral principle of Christian life, differs from other acts of Christian life by being a big choice, the biggest choice of one's life which shapes all the rest, as I explained in chapter seven, section B. Proponents of fundamental-option theory rightly notice some of the characteristics of this basic choice; they fail to notice that other choices, at their own level, share the same characteristics--for example, that they are determinations of oneself and that they endure.

30 Most important, proponents of fundamental-option theory are suggesting that one can without changing one's fundamental option choose with full deliberation and unimpeded freedom to do particular acts which the Church teaches are mortal sins. This suggestion is a half-truth, since not every mortal sin undoes the act of faith, but every mortal sin does deaden faith by excluding the love of God from one's heart. This point will be considered more fully in part six.

35 Those who wish to emphasize one's character and the general trend of one's life, rather than particular human acts, are more nearly correct. Not all particular acts are of equal significance. Some sins are only venial, and there are various reasons why this is so. Moreover, even mortal sins are not all equally grave, and a mortal sin from which one is quickly converted by God's grace is far less important than the act of faith which maintains the continuity of one's sinful, Christian life. These matters also will be studied in part six.

45 The most serious error of those who wish to emphasize character and the general trend of one's life is that they fail to realize that character itself--which is one's virtues or vices as a whole--is chiefly (although not solely) the enduring structure of one's choices. I explained this point to some extent in chapter eight, section M. Choices are choices to do something or other; they are the most central principle in oneself of one's acts. The enduring, spiritual reality of one's choices, especially the bigger ones which mainly shape one's identity, is the principle of an integrated moral self. Character simply is this self, regarded as the source of further acts.

50 As I explained in chapter eight, sections L-M, one who has a developed character often acts out of it with no need for further choices, since the self is well enough defined by past choices to make most possibilities which suggest themselves or are suggested by other people seem uninteresting or definitely less appealing than the lines of action which will express one's character. Thus, those who wish to emphasize character rather than particular acts are setting up a false dichotomy. Character itself is essentially some particular, although major, choices, and character manifests itself in further particular acts.

55 "Intentions" is a very ambiguous word. In one respect, one's intentions in acting either are one's choices or are an aspect of them. One's choices are central to one's moral responsibility, so in this sense of "intentions" one's intentions are more important than other aspects of one's acts. But notice that I say: "than other aspects of one's acts" and not "than one's acts." For one's choices are not apart from one's acts; a person chooses to act and acts by choice. Acts other than those done by choice occur, but, as I will explain, they are morally important only to the extent that they are related somehow to choice.

60 It follows that to the extent that "intentions" refers to choices or an aspect of them, intentions are more important than acts only if "acts" is taken to mean one's outward behavior as distinct from one's choices. If this is what is meant by those who wish to emphasize intentions, they are right in what they wish to say but they are using language in a very confusing way, much as do those who say that one's soul is more important than one's body, as if the body were an object distinct from the soul.

65 "Intentions" has many other meanings. Sometimes it means one's wishes, one's conditional preferences, or one's regrets. All of these are quite distinct from and can be opposed to one's choices. In this sense, the road to hell often is paved with good intentions; one says "Lord" but does not do the will of the Father. To urge that intentions in some such sense are more important than particular acts is to assist the work of Satan. (As I shall explain in section O, one sometimes assists another without being morally responsible for what the other is doing.)

C. On consequentialism

Certain consequences of one's acts are important and one bears some moral responsibility for them, as I shall explain in section J. The important consequences are those which affect, for good or ill, one's own or another person's fulfillment in respect to any of the intrinsic goods of the person. For instance, an act which has consequences for someone's life or health cannot be adequately evaluated if these consequences are ignored, even if the act is primarily concerned with something else, such as the pursuit of knowledge.

But many theologians today wish to give consequences a more basic role than I will allow. On their view, one ought to make that choice which on the whole and in the long run will have the over-all best (or least bad) consequences. They define "best" and "least bad" here not by moral norms, such as the moral teaching of the Church, but in terms of something like the intrinsic personal goods I described in chapter five, sections G and H. They generally do not understand very well that the goods of the existential domain are themselves moral goods, and cannot really be promoted in the least by acts which are not in all respects morally good.

An example of the way theologians who have adopted consequentialism argue is the following. Imagine that a woman is pregnant and that this pregnancy is endangering her life. Very likely, if she dies, so will the unborn baby. In such a case, many physicians who otherwise abhor abortion would recommend abortion to save the mother's life. The consequentialist usually will argue that this is the right thing to do (whether the conclusion is correct is beside the point, and a morally correct judgment requires more information than I have supplied). The consequentialist probably will say: One may in a case like this choose to kill the unborn baby, even though its death in consequence of one's act is evil, in the sense that it is incompatible with the basic good of human life. The reason the consequentialist would give for this judgment very likely would be: It is better--that is, a lesser evil--to have a dead baby and a live mother than to have the otherwise likely outcome, namely, both of them dead. And many consequentialists, according to their personal views about the comparative worth of babies and mothers, will argue that even if one could save the baby by allowing the mother to die, it would be wrong to do so, and it is morally right even in this case to kill the baby to save the mother's life.

In the preceding paragraph, I have written "the consequentialist usually will argue" and "probably will say." This caution is needed because one never knows what consequentialists will hold to be right and wrong. One never knows, because although consequentialism is presented as a rational method of making moral judgments on the basis of good and bad consequences, it really is no such thing. Rather, consequentialism is nothing but a pseudo-theoretical framework in which each consequentialist expresses his or her own personal moral judgments, and these judgments reflect the preferences among human goods settled by the consequentialist's own prior choices.

Suppose a priest, in hearing confessions, is moved by the very natural, human pity he feels for his penitents to try to make life easier for them by giving them permission (a very strange idea, but one intelligible in a legalistic context) to do something which is forbidden by the Church's teaching (and therefore by moral truth, since the Church's moral teaching simply unfolds the moral implications of divinely revealed truth). In doing this, the priest is making a choice--usually initially and with much struggle and soul-searching--which determines his own self with respect to the human goods involved in the matter at issue. When confirmed, unrepented, and integrated into his character, this choice will lead the priest to regard goods differently than does one who is faithful to the moral truth. This different regard will affect his personal judgments on matters where these goods are at issue, not only on the particular question he directly chose about.

Thus, for instance, if a priest has given people permission to practice contraception, it is going to be difficult for him to continue to regard the beginnings of life in the way he formerly did. That it would be wrong to kill a baby which might well die anyway, if this is necessary to save its mother's life, will seem irrational. And so, if the priest also is a theologian, he will begin to revise what he teaches on many issues. To make this revision seem reasonable, not simply arbitrary, he will need the framework of a "new moral theory." Consequentialism serves.

Before I go on, I call the attention of students who will hear confessions to a very important moral to this story: One who hears confessions is in an occasion of grave sin. He is Christlike to enter and work in this occasion of sin, but he is a fool if he does not act like our Lord Jesus in this situation. Jesus always was merciful toward individuals but intransigent with moral evil. The confessor must transform his pity into charity; he must never forget that not to compromise in any way the saving teaching of Christ is an eminent form of charity for souls (cf. *Humanae vitae*, 29). To compromise the Church's moral teaching is eminently uncharitable to souls, beginning with one's own.

There are many philosophical arguments against consequentialism. In appraising good and bad consequences of proposed choices, whose interests are to be considered? To what extent must one try to think up other possible courses of action? How far must consequences be investigated? How is the weighing of the various values and disvalues to be done? All these questions have been around for a long time, and cogent answers to none of them have been forthcoming. Still, consequentialists cling to their "method" as if it were a saving truth.

To see what is wrong with consequentialism, one need not worry about whether its proponents want to limit it to certain choices or use it only under certain conditions. In any case, there is no consequentialism unless some judgments as to what choice one ought to make are held to be properly grounded upon the comparison of the good and bad effects of choosing one or another alternative. Just insofar as consequentialism is claimed to apply in reaching the judgment, the alternative promising greater good (or lesser evil) should be judged morally right.

The most central trouble with this story is that it requires two logically

incompatible conditions to be satisfied simultaneously. First, the choice to be made must be between alternatives which really are morally significant--there is a difference of right and wrong, and one must choose. Second, the person about to make the choice must have reached a definite conclusion, by weighing goods and bads, as to which alternative promises the greater good (or lesser evil).

The first condition--that the alternatives really be morally significant--entails that the one choosing be able to choose the morally evil possibility. There is no moral significance in a choice between right and wrong proposals unless one is in danger of making the wrong choice. By itself, this first condition poses no problem. However, the second condition--that the one about to choose has reached a definite conclusion as to which alternative is preferable in consequentialist terms--requires a knowledge which would preclude the choice the consequentialist claims is wrong.

Why is this so? Because nothing is chosen except insofar as it seems good. If one alternative is seen to promise definitely greater good or lesser evil, then some other cannot be chosen. I described this sort of case in chapter eight, section H; alternatives under consideration which one sees promise less good (or more bad) simply drop out of consideration. What reason could there be to choose the lesser good or the greater evil? None.

Thus consequentialism is proposed for cases in which one must choose between morally significant alternatives, but its account of moral judgment excludes from the status of a possible alternative for choice precisely that which the consequentialist account says would be wrong. The theory directs one not to do what one could not do in any case. In this respect, consequentialism requires that two incompatible conditions be met. This is absurd, literally meaningless. It is like telling someone to prove a point, but to be careful not to try to prove any but the most obvious point. (Logically, one can only prove a conclusion from premisses more obvious than it is itself.)

People who really think, because of previous choices they have made, that it is better to kill a baby than to risk both its own and its mother's life do not hesitate over this possibility. If it arises, no choice need be made. They say: "It is sad to have to kill babies, but at times it is necessary."

Someone who wonders whether it is right to do abortion to save the mother's life and who must choose whether to do (or have or "give permission for") an abortion does not see clearly what is the greater good or the lesser evil. On the one hand, such a person sees the-death-of-the-baby-and-my-killing-it. On the other hand: the-likely-death-of-both-mother-and-baby-and-my-allowing-it. Which of these is the lesser evil is the question moral reflection must help to settle.

To place all the emphasis on the outcomes and to ignore the acts themselves (my killing or my allowing) as the consequentialist urges one to do is not to answer the moral question but to beg it. To answer the question, one must (among other things) understand human acts clearly enough to grasp that there can be an important difference between killing and allowing to die, between doing something and permitting something to happen.

To some extent this distinction will be clarified in what follows. The moral importance of the distinction will not appear fully until moral principles are treated in part five. But to some extent, explanations already given make clear what is at stake and is ignored by consequentialists. To make a free choice is to determine oneself, as I explained in chapter eight, section L. For this reason, consequences, although important and relevant to one's moral responsibility, are not as important morally as human acts in themselves. One's moral acts are part of one's moral self; the consequences of one's acts are not part of one's moral self.

If it is morally wrong to do an abortion even to save the mother's life, then one's choice not to do the abortion when one is tempted to do it will last, since human acts have lasting significance, as I explained in part two, especially chapter seven, sections J-L. If the mother and the baby die, God will raise them up along with the person who refused to kill the baby to save the mother's life. But if one does the abortion (and assuming that one sins in doing it and does not repent), then, although God will raise up all concerned, even He cannot overcome the evil which one dying in mortal sin takes with oneself from this world into eternity.

The souls one must save are the moral selves of persons; the other dimensions of persons will be recreated. Ultimately, it would profit nothing if one saved the mortal lives of everyone in the world by committing one mortal sin. Therefore, the consequences of moral acts are ultimately important only insofar as they make a difference to the self one is constituting by doing the act. Human acts are not just ways of getting results, as consequentialists tend to think. It follows that their suggestion that consequences are more important than acts themselves is erroneous.

D. What are morally significant human acts?

Initially people think they understand well enough what moral acts are--meaning by "moral" those which are morally significant for good or ill. To kill, to commit adultery, to help the needy, and so forth are moral acts. But as I said above, what counts as killing (or as doing any other morally good or bad act) is not so clear.

In ordinary language, acts are distinguished as items and kinds of items found in experience, including one's own experience of oneself acting. Some units of human performance (some chunks of behavior) are picked out as acts and understood to be acts of a particular kind. (Nothing is picked out as a particular in experience unless one has some idea of what it is.) The diversity of items which are treated as acts can be noticed by attending to ordinary language.

One can begin by examining active-voice verbs used of personal subjects. Some of these refer to states ("he lived"); some to relationships ("he had"), some to undergoings ("he caught cold"), some to ways of acting ("he hurried"), and some refer to intransitive and transitive actions. One simply does something or one affects someone or something.

Observable actions are processes which somehow originate in and emanate from

persons. But not every process which originates in a person is an action. For example, warmth emanates from a person, and can make another warm--as when one sleeping spouse snuggling up to the other in their double bed makes the other, who is awake, uncomfortably warm. "You were making me too warm, so I went to the guest room," explains the wakeful spouse the next morning, but "making warm" does not refer to an action. At a minimum, an action must be a process which in some way has a meaning. The meaning arises from a good, from some sort of fulfillment, to which the process is leading.

The situation is complicated, however, because there are many sorts of goods, as I explained in chapter five, sections C-H. There are goods which do not pertain to human persons at all; there are goods which pertain to the person at the sentient level, others which are mere means to ulterior goods, and others which are parts or aspects of one or more intrinsic goods of persons. Ordinary language does not discriminate among these goods in deriving expressions to refer to actions, for one can be interested for one or another reason in the processes emanating from persons insofar as these are relevant to all sorts of extrapersonal and personal goods.

"Sneezed," "scratched," "saw," "enjoyed," "dreamed," "jumped," "understood," and many other words refer to actions which sometimes occur without any moral significance whatsoever, since sometimes these actions are altogether beyond the control of the person who does them.

"Kill" refers to an act seldom done nonvoluntarily. But the act is defined in terms of an event which is a good just in the sense that it is the effect the process causes, and so is the fulfillment of the process. In other words, "kill" is defined by the job it gets done. "Kill" also makes reference to that fulfillment which is life. But this fact only begins the moral analysis of the act. Killing flies is one thing and killing people is another; murder is one thing and killing a person in self-defense is another.

Traditional treatises on action usually begin by making a distinction between "acts of man" and "human acts." "Human acts" is said to refer to those acts which are done voluntarily, or to those which are done through deliberation and choice. All others are called "acts of man" and dismissed as morally insignificant. This distinction points one's thinking generally in the right direction, for it suggests that one should examine for moral purposes the acts which are involved in and express choices and other operations of the will. However, the distinction is not altogether clear, for it does not take account of spontaneous acts, such as the human acts of small children, which are done with understanding of the good and out of a will for it but entirely without the self-control which is present in free choice.

What is more important, the traditional treatises proceed to try to analyze for moral purposes many diverse sorts of acts, just as one finds them jumbled together in ordinary language. This approach is very confusing, for it tends to conceal relevant moral differences. For instance, how can one deal with the morality of human acts with respect to human life if one tries to morally appraise the gross causal process of bringing about a person's death? What will be the difference between killing oneself in doing a very difficult job to the point at which one drops dead of a heart attack (John killed himself passing that course) and killing oneself as a means of avoiding the pain and other burdens of a lengthy, fatal illness?

Because of these difficulties, I think that one ought to begin the analysis of human acts for the purposes of moral theology by considering various modes of willing. Instances of willing are called "acts" in ordinary language; we speak of "acts of choice." In traditional scholastic terminology, instances of willing, or at least certain of them, were called "elicited acts" to distinguish them from acts done in accord with one's willing. The latter were called "commanded acts," because they are performed at the direction of the will. Because instances of willing are not "acts" in any ordinary sense, it would be better if we referred to them by another name, such as "actuations." But "acts" is not objectionable, and I sometimes use it, with the proviso that the distinction must be kept in mind.

I not only begin my analysis of human acts from actuations of the will, I also carry out the whole analysis both at the general level and in application to various moral problems from this same standpoint. This procedure makes the analysis hard to understand, because actuations of the will are not items familiar to common sense. For this reason the analysis of human acts will seem very technical and abstract. However, by working consistently to analyze human acts from the point of view of actuations of the will, one can work out definitions and distinctions which greatly clarify thinking about moral questions.

I explained in chapter eight that choice, because it is self-determining, is central for morality. From this principle, one might draw the conclusion that morally significant human acts are the acts which carry out one's choices. In fact, while the execution of a choice always is morally significant, there are other morally significant aspects of human action. Moral selfhood and the responsibility which goes with it belongs to persons just insofar as they have the power to make choices. Corresponding to personal responsibility, aspects of actions are said to be "imputable" to the person or persons responsible for them. "Responsibility" is not all of one sort, as I shall explain. Therefore, neither is imputability. However, I call persons "responsible" for acts (including aspects of acts, omissions, and dispositions to act) and these "imputable" to persons precisely insofar as these acts somehow depend for their existence upon any actuation of the will or any failure to make a choice which could and should have been made.

From what I have just said it follows by definition that morally significant human acts are any acts of human persons which are imputable. As will become clear in the ensuing analysis, "morally significant human acts" is not a general class-name (a genus) univocally predicated of the specifically different sorts of things which are kinds of human acts. Rather, "morally significant human acts" refers to an ordered set (a grouping by analogy) of diverse classes of things, which are human acts and morally significant in diverse but related ways.

The primary class of things (the prime analogate) which are called "moral acts"

consists of executions of free choices. In other words, the basic and most obvious case in which one engages in morally significant action is when one chooses to do something, and does what one has chosen to do. The whole--choice and performance together--is the human act. Since doing by choice is central, the following analysis will focus upon
 5 this class of human acts. But before undertaking this analysis, I review and develop some important points previously made concerning simple willing and spontaneous willing.

E. Simple willing -- the volitional actuation presupposed by all action

10 In chapter five, sections C-H, especially sections G-H, I clarified the concept of basic human goods. The basic human goods are various areas of possible human fulfillment. Some of them pertain to the existential domain; they have to do with levels of harmonious unity in diversity within the person who is a moral self, between the moral agent and his or her own moral life, among persons, and between humankind and God.
 15 Other of the basic human goods pertain to other dimensions of human persons.

In chapter six, section B, I explained that human love is a disposition toward fulfillment. Love exists both at the emotional level and at the volitional level. Emotional love bears upon sensible goods; volitional love bears upon intelligible aspects of human fulfillment. Every actuation of the will includes volitional love; since every
 20 actuation of the will is a disposition toward the fulfillment of one or more persons in one or more intelligible goods.

The most basic actuation of the will, the volitional love which underlies and is present in every other actuation of the will, is the fundamental disposition to care about or be interested in the basic human goods. One understands that life, health,
 25 safety, avoidance of pain, and so forth--to take as an example one area of basic human goodness--are possible fulfillments; in a practical frame of mind one grasps this good as something to be promoted and protected. Given this understanding, simple volition is the constant, underlying disposition toward this good. One naturally and necessarily cares about and is interested in what makes a difference to human survival, health,
 30 safety, pain-avoidance, and so forth. The same statements can be made about the other areas of basic human goodness, such as knowledge of the truth, living in harmony with others, and so on.

Someone might object that simple volition is not a natural and necessary disposition toward all of the basic human goods. For one can choose to act in ways destructive
 35 of these goods, knowing full well that one is doing so. For example, one can choose to kill another person or oneself, can set oneself by one's own free choice against the supposedly basic good of life.

The answer to this objection is that one can indeed do this, for there are various other human goods, and in a choice situation one cannot act for and hope to participate
 40 in all of them at once. By choice one determines oneself toward fulfillment in one aspect, setting aside possible fulfillment in another. By a choice to kill, one sets oneself toward whatever good one has in view which makes the killing seem desirable. One not only sets aside but sets oneself against the basic good of human life. Yet the underlying simple volition of this good remains. There is an inconsistency in one's
 45 willing, an inconsistency introduced by one's own choosing. Notice that this inconsistency is not a logical one: the incompatibility of two propositions. It is existential: incompatibility of a fundamental pro-life disposition and a particular, anti-life self-determination. Such incompatibility is one type of immorality. (This and other types of immorality will be clarified in part five.)

50 In chapter six, section I, I treated the love of God poured forth in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. This love is a disposition toward fulfillment in super-human, divine goodness. The most basic choice in Christian life, the choice to accept Christ with living faith, is made out of this love. It follows that the love of God which inheres in the Christian is analogous to simple volition. It is a principle of action
 55 toward heavenly fulfillment similar to one's natural and necessary disposition toward human fulfillment.

However, the love of God poured forth in our hearts must not be regarded as if it were merely another simple volition of an additional human good, inserted in us alongside the love of human life, knowledge of truth, and so on. As I explained in chapter
 60 seven, sections A-C, divine goodness and human fulfillment are not direct alternatives. The love of God includes and transforms all of the natural forms of simple volition.

Hence, out of love of God, Christians act both for the human fulfillment to which they are naturally disposed by simple volition, and also act for fulfillment in heaven in divine goodness. The morally significant acts of Christian life always are inspired
 65 both by love of God and by love of some human good. According to the latter principle, they always are acts suited to human nature, although many of them, beginning with the act of living faith, are such that human persons can do them only by grace.

F. Spontaneous willing and action -- premoral human action

70 In chapter eight, section H, I mentioned spontaneous willing and action. The basic disposition of simple willing always being given, one who thinks of some definite way of proceeding to realize some concrete possibility, and thus reach some fulfillment, spontaneously wills to proceed. If not in some way blocked, such spontaneous willing
 75 unfolds into action.

One observes this process in children of three, four, and five years. A child has some understanding of human goods; its behavior is not merely that of a human animal. A child who does not feel well, for example, can grasp the idea of sickness and the idea of health, and naturally loves the latter and hates the former. Informed that bad-tasting medicine will help to restore health, the child sometimes will take the medicine
 80 voluntarily, the emotions aroused by spontaneous willing of "getting well" overcoming the emotions aroused by distaste for the medicine. More directly--though less obviously a case of willing action--children like to play. Play is an aspect of the human good of performing skillfully for its own sake. A child who grasps a particular opportunity to

play spontaneously wills to engage in the activity, and does so if not somehow blocked.

Children are blocked from spontaneously doing what they spontaneously will by emotions incompatible with the emotions aroused by the spontaneous willing which interfere with behavior. For example, on a family hike, a small child begins to tire. The parents say: "Come on, it's only a little farther, and then we will stop and eat lunch." The child's understanding of lunch leads to spontaneous willing, this focuses imagination, which in turn arouses desire and leads to continued behavior: trudging along. But as the child tires still more, the emotions aroused by pain and fatigue distract the child's attention from lunch, and the child stops walking. At some point, additional talk about lunch no longer is effective. Sometimes, even at this point a new and effective motive can be supplied: "And where we are going to eat lunch there are swings and slides and a merry-go-round. We'll play while lunch is cooking." The child, spontaneously wishing to play, begins to trudge on.

What one does not observe in small children is evidence of an act of choice. To make choices, spontaneous action must be blocked not merely by emotion, but by the simultaneous understanding of two or more incompatible alternatives as real possibilities. Small children seem not to be able to understand two things at once and to compare them. This process requires not only understanding and judgment but reasoning.

It is worth noticing certain aspects of spontaneous willing and acting which also are present in actions done by choice.

First, spontaneous willing includes a double relationship to the good. Underlying all spontaneous willing and still present in it as its basic spiritual energy is simple volition. Spontaneous willing thus is related to the understood good as to that in which one might share by action. But spontaneous willing also is directed to the specific, concrete realization understood as possible by one's action. This understood good is a definite state of affairs which actually is (expected to be) fulfilling. This state of affairs either is realized in one's very action, or it is subsequent to one's action which is a partial cause of it.

Thus, a child's spontaneous willing to play is a willing to share in the good of play ("What can we play?") and it also is a willing to do the very things which count as play ("Let me play too!"). This latter willing can unfold into spontaneous acts of play; it also can unfold into a spontaneous act of trudging along, in order to arrive at the playground.

Second, what is done spontaneously is defined by what one understood and spontaneously willed to do. A child at play brings about many states of affairs other than its play activity. For example, the child dirties his or her clothing, falls down occasionally, and so forth. A child of four or five can be well aware of some of these effects. But what it is doing is what it does "on purpose"--that is, what expresses its understanding and willing. That which is done on purpose includes not only activity which is directly fulfilling, but also activity done to bring about a fulfilling state of affairs. For example, the sick child purposely takes the bad-tasting medicine to get well.

Thus, what a child does spontaneously is done either for its own sake or for the sake of something ulterior. What is done for its own sake--for example, playing--is in itself a good; it is called an "end" in the sense that it is in itself a purpose of human action. What is done for the sake of something ulterior--for example, taking bitter medicine--is not in itself an intelligible good; it is called a "means" in the sense that it is done as a way of bringing about an end--in this case, feeling better.

What the child does by spontaneous willing, whether as a means or as an end, is done voluntarily or "on purpose." In this sense, it is done intentionally. However, "intend" has at least two distinct meanings here, as is clear if one considers the case of taking medicine to get well. In this case, one intends to get well as an end, while one intends to take the medicine only as a means. Taking the medicine is intentional in the sense that it is done on purpose, but is not intentional in the sense that it is not wanted for itself and would not be done except for the sake of something else.

If the child at play gets muddy, it does not intend to get muddy in either of the preceding senses. Mother might say: "You're all muddy, again. Now, take your shoes off." The child replies: "I didn't get muddy on purpose." And mother says: "But you knew you were getting muddy, didn't you?" The child is reduced to silence. He or she did know, but simply was not concerned about it. In a third, weaker sense, one might say that the child got muddy intentionally, not meaning "on purpose," but rather that it did get muddy knowingly and carelessly.

Is the child's spontaneous willing and acting morally significant? It certainly is not morally significant in the way that actions done by free choice are. Children acting spontaneously do not determine themselves in respect to goods. To poke the baby in the eye is naughty, not immoral. But there are two ways in which the child's spontaneous willing and acting is morally significant, and there is a third way in which an adult's spontaneous willing and acting is morally significant.

In the first place, the child's spontaneous willing and acting is specifically human. The action is voluntary. The child has a certain responsibility for it, diverse both from the "responsibility" of a pet and from the full moral responsibility of a person who makes and acts on free choices. Small children are praised and blamed for what they do on purpose; these responses would make no sense were there no responsibility. Yet this responsibility is not moral responsibility in a full and proper sense. The child's human acts are premoral, not so much in the sense that they are prior in time to moral acts, but rather in the sense that they are incipient realizations of the human person's capacities.

In the second place, the child's life of human action cannot be understood in its full significance if it is viewed within an individualistic framework. The child acts within an acting community: its family. Its own spontaneous willing and acting is shaped to a great extent by the moral life of its family. The child, as it were, lives the life of a human moral person embryonically, exercising some functions for itself, depending for some essential functions--the free choices--upon those who are bringing it up. The life of a child is a participation in the life of its family. By way of this participation, the child's life really has moral significance in the full sense of

"moral" but does not fully have this significance.

The Christian child, who has received the gift of God's love, surely makes an act of living faith by spontaneous willing prior to its choice to affirm this faith--a choice which might not be necessary until adolescence. The child's act of faith partici-
 5 pates in the freedom of its parents' and ultimately of the Church's act of faith. With faith and love, the child can act for many human goods for Jesus. Children of three, four, and five live a Christian life which needs to be fostered. The development of this point does not pertain to the present volume, but it is an important matter which ought to be studied.

10 Whatever spontaneous willing and acting makes up the life of a child, whatever adult choices it participates in, and whatever Christian development it enjoys--these all provide the context for its subsequent full and independent life of Christian moral action. The self of the child is not determined by spontaneous willing as it will be by free choices, but such willing provides some experience of human fulfillment, and thus
 15 shapes the child's later appreciation of goods and grasp of possibilities. I discussed this point to some extent in chapter five, section K. The adult choices in which the child participates constitute its existence in a moral community; the child later must either affirm or rebel against this existence. Such affirmation or rebellion will not be a choice without antecedents; in a way it will be like an adult's choice confirming or repenting of a previous choice of his or her own. The Christian development the
 20 child enjoys can unfold into a mature life of holiness; indeed, in some sense the holiness of the child is our model, for we must become again like little children, who act out of love without even thinking of doing anything else.

An adult's spontaneous willing and acting has a moral significance absent from
 25 that of the small child. For an adult is able to reflect upon every aspect of his or her own life. One can notice what one does spontaneously, and can take control over such acting. If one can and fails to choose to do something which will prevent one from doing what comes naturally, then one has some responsibility (to be considered later) for the omission to do what one could and should have done.

30 G. Acting by free choice -- the object of the act

The whole of chapter eight has prepared for what must be said here by way of clarifi-
 35 cation of human acts done by free choice. At present, I am concerned only with cases in which one chooses to do something, not cases in which one chooses to omit something.

There is no occasion for choice unless one understands as good two or more possible and incompatible courses of acting (at least, acting and not acting). If there were only one possibility, one would will it spontaneously. The presence of incompati-
 40 ble alternatives causes hesitation and demands self-determination.

Just as in cases of spontaneous willing, choices once made involve a double relationship to the good. What one does by choice is defined by what one understood and chose to do. Actions can be chosen either as ends or as means to an ulterior end. The various senses of "intend" relevant to spontaneous willing also must be distinguished in
 45 the case of action done by choice. But insofar as "intend" connotes responsibility, all the senses of "intend" in a context of choice are distinct from the corresponding senses in the context of spontaneous willing. I now proceed to illustrate these points with examples of choice.

First, what one does by choice is defined by what one understands and chooses to do. By choice one adopts a proposal to do something. Actions considered possible and
 50 interesting by individuals are deliberated about very much as motions which are put forward are debated by members of a deliberative body. The adoption of a proposal for action is a choice, just as a motion which carries is a decision of a group. Action carries out choice, very much as an executive carries out what a legislature has decided upon.

55 Thus, a person who chooses to play golf is playing golf, and a person who chooses to take painful treatment for a disease is taking painful treatment. A person who considers the proposal to kill himself or herself, adopts the proposal, and carries it out is killing himself or herself. If John chooses to work long hours on a course and acts accordingly, then he is doing just that, not killing himself as does Pete who adopts a pro-
 60 posal to kill himself.

In traditional terminology, what one does by choice--one's action as defined by the proposal it executes--was called the "object of one's act." Sometimes the same thing was called "finis operis" or "the end of the work." This latter terminology is
 65 confusing and ought to be avoided. From the point of view of moral analysis, the human act is not a chunk of outward behavior which has an inherent sense prior to deliberation and choice, merely projected into existence by one who chooses it. The human act rather is behavior which has a definite sense precisely because it executes a proposal excogitated by deliberation and adopted by choice. Thus, sexual intercourse does not have a naturally given procreative meaning, and one makes a mistake if one claims that it has
 70 such a meaning.

From this it does not follow, however, that one can adopt a proposal precisely to prevent the begetting of a new life without doing something which is antilife, in the sense that it is opposed to life in transmission and set against the coming to be of a new person. The outward behavior which is contraceptive directly has the moral signifi-
 75 cance it has from the proposal one adopts by choice, not from the natural power of sexual intercourse to generate new life. Obviously, the proposal one adopts would be impossible if certain factual relationships were not taken into account. But the moral significance of what one does depends upon what one proposes and chooses to do, and the relationship of this choice to the basic human goods. It would make no difference if, for instance, the couple were sterile anyway but did not know it. (Thus it makes perfectly
 80 good sense to say that the choice to contracept violates the requirement that every act of intercourse remain open to new life, even though in fact most acts of intercourse would in any case be sterile.) Nor does it make any difference if a couple chooses to prevent pregnancy by a means which in fact has no such effect.

In sum, one does what one thinks one is doing and chooses to do. Talk in some traditional treatises about the "finis operis" is correct in calling attention to the importance of one's actual behavior, insofar as an informed and honest person knows how this behavior bears upon various human goods, frames proposals with the real situation in mind, and so takes responsibility for what he or she does in executing adopted proposals. But such talk is misleading if it is taken to mean that human acts are morally what they are by meanings built into them antecedent to deliberation and choice.

Since one's action done by choice is defined morally by the proposal one adopts, one does not only what one chooses to do as good in itself (playing golf) but also what one chooses to do as a means (taking painful treatment). A person who chooses to kill a defective child so that the child will not have to endure a miserable life is rightly said to be a child-killer, not simply a preventer of misery. The fact that the choice to kill might be made reluctantly, with regret, and so on does not alter the real character of what one is doing. When the United States chooses under some conditions outside our own control to kill millions of people, we are killing these people, although we hope never to have to execute the choice, and only make it as a means of preventing the Soviet Union from doing whatever it would do if we disarmed unilaterally.

H. Acting by free choice -- the end and the good

Choices, like actuations of spontaneous willing, involve a twofold relationship to the good. A man who chooses to play golf determines himself to this good; by the action he shares in a good which, because it is freely chosen, is self-fulfilling in a special sense. One who chooses to play golf also aims at and in executing the choice brings about the particular state of affairs which is playing golf on a certain occasion. This state of affairs is good as a realization of the human capacity to perform skillfully. Adoption of the nuclear deterrent is killing and is antilife by the first relationship to the good, even if the threat never is carried out, if no performance destructive of life ever is done. Indeed, the adoption of the deterrent is antilife even if it is true --something no one really knows--that refusal to deter would in fact lead to widespread loss of life, while readiness to kill preserves a balance of terror protective of the lives of all concerned.

If one chooses to do something as a means, and if this means is relevant to a basic human good, then one's choice is related doubly both to the good to which the means is relevant and to the good which is one's end. A woman who chooses to kill herself in order to avoid burdening her family with her terminal illness makes herself antilife, brings about the concrete evil of her own death (if the attempt succeeds), confirms herself as a considerate person, and relieves her family of a burden (if her act has the result she expects it to have).

In addition to the object of the human act done by choice, traditional analyses mention the "end of the agent." The analysis just now given clarifies this conception, both by distinguishing between the two ways in which one's choice is related to a good, and by making explicit the relevance both of the good which pertains to the end and of the good affected by an act chosen only as a means to an ulterior end.

"End" also can refer to a state of affairs which one seeks by some means, even though that outcome is not sought for itself. For example, one might choose to play golf with the end of making a sale, but this end itself might be interesting only as a means to obtaining money, and this in turn interesting only as a means to using it. A chain of subordinate ends of this sort, insofar as they do not impact upon intrinsic goods of the human person, constitute the structure of technical or artistic work, rather than the structure of moral action.

A person can be said to intend his or her action insofar as one does it by choice and thus establishes the relationship involved in the act to any of the directly relevant goods. One who plays golf for its own sake intends the good of being a golfer and intends the particular instance of skilled activity. One who chooses to kill as a means intends the evil of being a killer and intends the particular death, not of course for their own sake, but for the sake of the ulterior good for which killing is chosen. The ulterior good is intended both as that to which one commits oneself and as that which one hopes to realize by killing.

Obviously, the end of the agent is very important, especially insofar as it is that to which one commits oneself, for in this aspect the end constitutes the person acting. But one also constitutes oneself in choosing and acting by one's relationship to a good which is relevant only to a means adopted in pursuit of an ulterior end. One who chooses to kill one person to save the life of another constitutes himself or herself both by the intentional killing and by the intended saving of life. The inconsistency involved can exist in one's moral self only if one makes some sort of distinction between life worth saving and life which is expendable. In making such a distinction, one is qualifying one's basic love of life, limiting it to love of life of a certain quality, or something of the sort.

It is worth noticing that the good to which one determines oneself and in which one thereby shares is wholly distinct from the concrete good brought about by one's action only in the case of goods pertaining to domains other than the existential. In the existential domain, to determine oneself to a true good is to begin to effect what one wills; to seek some satisfaction in a mere appearance of the good is to constitute oneself accordingly. For example, one who gives a gift out of friendship thereby begins to realize the good; one who does favors only for selfish purposes brings into existence a manipulative relationship.

This point is extremely important in religious matters. Acts which are pseudo-religious are of no religious worth whatsoever; indeed, they constitute one who deliberately does them idolatrous, pharisaic, or something of the sort; and to be pseudo-religious in any respect puts an obstacle in the way of genuine religious acts. Thus the Gospel is for sinners, not for the self-righteous.

I. Acting by free choice -- commitments and creativity

Sometimes people adopt by choice a proposal which requires at once only that they do something rather simple to realize a particular good, but which requires in the long run indefinitely many more acts directed toward its realization. Such a choice is most appropriately called "a commitment." Examples are the choice to accept Christian faith, the choice to get married, the choice to be a priest, the choice to enter a certain profession, the choice of one's friends, and so on.

Commitments bear directly upon goods of the existential domain; one commits oneself in view of religion, friendship, one's own moral uprightness, and one's own integrity. Commitments can be to all of these at once, since they are interrelated. Moreover, since the existential goods are possible harmonies in already-real personal and interpersonal relationships, one never commits oneself without both committing oneself to a specific person or persons and to the goods to be shared.

Many of the interesting characteristics of commitments depend upon the goods of domains other than the existential which provide a common substance for the personal and interpersonal relational harmonies of the existential domain. For instance, the commitment of Christian faith has certain characteristics which arise from its specific relationship to life and truth. Marriage has characteristics (among them its moral nondissolubility) which follow from the fact that this type of companionship involves a kind of service to new life impossible by any other cooperation.

One who makes a commitment very obviously determines himself or herself in respect to certain goods. The initial execution of the commitment often is little more than a symbolic realization of the goods to which the commitment is made. Precisely what the commitment eventually will require by way of execution never is known at the time the commitment is made. People who choose to be Christians or who make any other commitment never know what they are getting into. The commitment itself is developed and defined only gradually as it is lived out.

Yet even at the outset, some kinds of choices are definitely excluded by any commitment--for example, choices among the Church's teachings by an act of faith, intercourse with other people by a marital commitment, and so on. This negativity is required not for itself, but because commitments are to specific persons and because one can define only negatively the unknown good which one seeks to find by one's loving service. To reject the negative requirements of commitments is to reject commitment altogether, and to bar oneself from every sort of fulfillment which is possible only by openness to God and to other persons.

One who has made a commitment is able to face the world of possibilities in a new way. Prior to making commitments, one can make choices among particular proposals, and so implicitly set oneself in respect to all the basic human goods. But one is limited to the possible lines of action which suggest themselves, and so usually to lines of action others have followed out. If one who has no commitments is creative, the creativity is not with respect to proposals for realizing existential goods, but only with respect to values in other domains. Once one has made a commitment, one is in a position to reflect upon the good to which one has committed oneself, upon all of one's powers, upon all of the opportunities and needs for serving the good, and thus to excogitate new ways of acting for it.

The possibility of thinking creatively about how to realize goods to which one is committed is extremely important in living a Christian life. Very often, the only apparent possibilities are the alternatives of committing a sin or accepting some very bad consequences. One who loves without real commitments and creative reflection based on them is likely to use this common occurrence as an argument for consequentialism. A person who has commitments very often (not always) is able to find possibilities no one else would have dreamed of. Love finds a way. This fact is one reason why the lives of saints are more varied and original than the lives of sinners, as I noted in chapter eight, section D.

J. Acting by free choice -- foreseen results of what one does

Thus far I have explained that human acts morally defined by their being executions of proposals adopted by choice are moral acts in a primary sense. I also have clarified the relationships of such acts to the basic human goods, especially in the case of those choices which are commitments. But one's moral responsibility does not end with what one does by choice. One's choices occur in the context of deliberation in which one generally foresees many results of the execution of the proposal one eventually adopts. Some of these results, although they are not included in the proposal itself, can have important implications for various human goods. A moral agent has some responsibility for such side-effects, but the responsibility is not the same as for what one does by choice.

The goods in which one is interested and on which one's choice directly bears are much more limited than the whole state of affairs one actually brings about by executing the proposal one adopts. For instance, if two boys play catch, they are interested in the good of playing the game. Perhaps the boys have been told to do chores instead of playing catch, and they know they might be caught and punished for their delinquency. This foreseen consequence, though understood as part of the state of affairs their action will bring about, is not precisely what they choose. Their self-determination is to play, not to being punished. Punishment, if it comes, will be an unwanted side-effect of having done as they pleased.

It might be assumed that the foreseen consequence in this example lies outside the precise boundaries of the boys' choice only because the consequence occurs by parental fiat. But this assumption is false. The boys might also realize that they are wearing out their gloves. Even if they consider this natural and inevitable consequence of using their gloves, it is no part of the proposal they adopt in choosing to play. They are interested in play; they accept wear on their gloves as an unwanted consequence of using them.

Thus it is clear that if "what one does" is defined strictly by what one chooses, what one in fact brings about always is much more extensive than what one does. One brings about an indeterminable set of results, many of which cannot be foreseen, some of which can be guessed at, only a few of which can be predicted with some confidence.

5 Much of what is predictable is extrinsic to the proposal one adopts. One determines oneself only with respect to a small part of what one brings about--namely, with respect to the goods which are one's end and--if the end is distinct from the act--the goods directly at stake in the means one chooses. Since reference to the power of free choice is the ultimate ground of moral responsibility, one can see at once that one's responsibility for foreseen consequences is not the same as is responsibility for what one does in executing one's proposals.

In making this point, I by no means deny that one voluntarily brings about the foreseen consequences of one's freely chosen acts. By not choosing these acts, one could avoid these consequences. One might not want these consequences, but one does accept them. Thus, in carrying out one's proposals, one brings about all sorts of consequences one has accepted but not chosen. Such consequences are not part of one's act.

15 That one can bear responsibility for foreseen consequences which are no part of one's proposal is clearly indicated by examples. A person who enjoys very loud music might decide in the late night hours to play his or her favorite records, realizing that the sound will disturb others. The proposal simply is to listen to music; the disturbance to others might even be regretted. Still, one who causes noise-pollution is responsible, and others are justified in complaining that such a person is selfish.

In many cases, injustices are like this one. Individuals usually are not interested in harming others, but they foresee benefit to themselves, harm to others, and proceed to act selfishly. In a case of this sort, the moral responsibility is not in self-determination against some good--for example, the health of others damaged by their lack of sleep. Rather, the responsibility is in lack of commitment to community with others, since such commitment would incline one to treat their interests on a par with one's own.

30 That one sometimes may accept side-effects of one's acts which it would be wrong to bring about as a means to one's end also is clearly indicated by examples. A person who takes the place of another who is about to be executed, to save the other with foreseen loss of his or her own life, is in a very different moral condition from one who chooses to kill himself or herself, even to save someone else's life. To accept foreseen death at the hands of others--to lay down one's life for one's neighbor--does not require one to determine oneself against the good of life, but such self-determination is unavoidable if the proposal one adopts precisely includes killing oneself. Thus Jesus was not a suicide.

In sum, one is primarily responsible for one's choices. What one does, most properly, is what precisely executes the proposals one adopts by choice. What one does constitutes oneself and shapes one's character directly. One is secondarily responsible for the effects one causes in carrying out one's actions. These effects are results of one's acts, not part of what one does. If these effects are foreseen, they are voluntary in the sense that they are accepted.

45 But voluntarily accepted effects of one's behavior must be distinguished from chosen means to one's ends. Means are adopted as useful goods; they are included in one's proposals; one determines oneself in respect to the human goods on which they bear. To adopt a means which is contrary to any realization of any of the intrinsic goods of human persons is to set oneself against that good. To accept effects which are contrary to some realization of intrinsic human goods is not to set oneself against them.

50 Still in many cases the effects one foresees and accepts have a great significance for human goods. Although in some cases one might accept effects which significantly inhibit or damage some human good, this possibility is not unlimited. If one really is as committed to community as one ought to be, one will not accept effects selfishly. Nor will one bring about effects which it is one's duty to avoid. A firefighter, for example, will try to fight fires, not always in the easiest way, but in ways which minimize loss of life, since it is his or her duty to save lives. Hence, although one is not responsible for the results of one's acts which one accepts in the same way one is responsible for what one does by choice, responsibility for the former can be just as grave as responsibility for the latter.

In scholastic terminology, the results of what one does are counted as circumstances, and various other items are listed as circumstances. Conditions one knows about which have no bearing at all upon any human good are of no moral significance. Conditions which enter into one's proposal or specify the end to which one's proposed action is a means are essential to the act. All other interesting circumstances belong among the results of what one does, provided that "results" is taken in a liberal sense.

65 For instance, if one's obnoxious playing of records in the middle of the night disturbs people whose peace ought more especially to be respected--say, not only one's brothers but one's parents--the circumstance is a difference in foreseen results. If a young man chooses to have intercourse with a prostitute, knowing that she is married, but not for the sake of injury to her husband, the circumstance which makes the act adultery is part of the results of the act in the sense that it comes about in his execution of his choice.

75 When moral norms have been treated in part five, I will explain why only some of them can apply to the accepting of consequences. This explanation will make clearer precisely how responsibility for what one does differs from responsibility for the foreseen consequences of what one does.

80 Finally, it is worth noticing that in Anglo-American law, "intent" is defined in such a way that it includes indiscriminately what one does and all the consequences a reasonable person acting in one's place would foresee. If one adopts this language and says that consequences are "intended," one must be clear that they are so in a different sense from any of the uses of "intend" previously distinguished.

K. Other cases of voluntariness -- the voluntary in cause

In sections G-J, the central instance of morally significant human action has been analyzed. The instance is action which executes a proposal adopted by free choice. I have dealt with the voluntariness and responsibility present in such action, making clear the distinction between one's responsibility in and for the action itself, and for its foreseen but merely accepted consequences. Now I turn to a number of additional cases of voluntariness and responsibility. Some of these are discussed in traditional treatises, but often without adequate precision; others are seldom or never mentioned.

A special case of foreseen results is that in which one looks ahead and expects with greater or lesser probability that if one chooses to do x now, then later one is likely to do y, when y is something one ought not to do. If one nevertheless does x, one assumes some responsibility for doing y, even if in the event one does not do y. This mode of voluntariness was named "the voluntary in cause" by St. Thomas.

There are at least two modes of voluntariness in cause. In one case, one foresees the likelihood that one's choosing to do x now will lead to one's choosing to do y later. For example, a man might consider whether to stop at a stand where there are for sale magazines containing immodest photographs, foreseeing that if he chooses to do so, he is likely to choose to buy one, to look at in, and then to masturbate. In another case, one foresees the likelihood that one's choosing to do x now will lead to one's proceeding without choice to do y later. For example, an alcoholic woman might consider whether to have a drink with an alcoholic friend, foreseeing that if she chooses to do so, they are likely without further deliberation to get drunk.

Voluntariness in cause also can apply to the foreseen consequences of one's choices for the actions of another person or persons. For example, those who oppress others might foresee that their choice to do so is likely to lead to a choice by the oppressed to do violence. Again, one who chooses to tease an irascible person might foresee that the person is likely to react violently in a nondeliberate outburst.

It seems to me that in principle one's responsibility for that which is voluntary in cause, whether in oneself or in others, is the same as one's responsibility for other foreseen consequences of one's acts. The difference is that in cases of the foreseen consequences previously considered, the consequence is in respect to goods of other domains, whereas the voluntary in cause bears upon goods of the existential domain. In other words, in the present case, one is dealing with foreseen consequences which have in themselves some moral significance, since they are cases of human action or of behavior which ordinarily can and ought to be avoided.

Because of what is at stake in such foreseen consequences of one's acts, it is worth considering them separately in a moral treatise. The treatment of occasions of sin is concerned with voluntariness in cause in respect to one's own foreseen actions and behavior; the treatment of scandal is concerned with voluntariness in cause in respect to the foreseen consequences of one's acts for the actions and behavior of other persons. The responsibility to avoid the occasions of sin and to avoid scandal is not the same as one's responsibility not to choose to do the wrong act which one foresees as likely. Nevertheless, one ought to be careful to avoid occasions of sin and scandal unless there is some obligation or genuinely good reason to enter into them.

In considering what is a good reason, one must take into account three things: the seriousness of the foreseen act or behavior, the likelihood that it will come about, and the importance of that for the sake of which one might choose to take the risk. The same general principles, to be considered in part five, which sometimes exclude accepting other foreseen consequences will exclude accepting the voluntary in cause. No general principle can specify the cases in which one not forbidden by any general norm should enter the occasions of sin or accept the danger of giving scandal.

L. Other cases of voluntariness -- executive willing

There is another mode of voluntariness which, so far as I know, has not been noted in previous analyses. I call it "executive willing." A person chooses to do x, foresees consequence y, proceeds to carry out the decision to do x, finds that in doing x he or she also is doing z or bringing about z, which had not been considered previously, makes no new choice, and continues to do x. For example, a man decides to go golfing on Saturday, foreseeing that his wife will be displeased, proceeds to get ready to go, finds that in going golfing he is making his wife far more unhappy than he expected, does not reconsider his plans but goes ahead anyway.

Salesmen are well aware of executive willing. One of the principles of selling is to obtain the decision to buy as soon as possible, and put off informing the purchaser of costs and unpleasant information as long as possible. In the New Testament, most of the epistles talk first about the good news of redemption, and only then about the bad news of the responsibilities of Christian life.

As the general definition I have given indicates, executive willing can occur not only in cases in which one executing a choice accepts a previously unforeseen consequence, but also in cases in which one executing a choice willingly does an act other in kind from that which one had chosen to do. For example, a gangster, Ma Fia, decides to get revenge on a rival by burning down her rival's warehouse. As she executes this plan, she perhaps notices that a strong wind is blowing in the direction of other nearby buildings, and foresees that the fire will spread, but proceeds nevertheless without any further choice. Here the executive willing is of something which would have been a foreseen consequence had it been taken into account during deliberation. But in executing the plan, Ma might also discover, to her delight, that her rival unexpectedly is in the building to be burned, and is likely to die in the fire. Had this been foreseen, it would have been part of the proposal adopted, since it serves the purpose even better than the original proposal. Thus, Ma Fia kills her rival, does it voluntarily and is responsible for doing it, but never chose to do it.

Executive willing is not the same as the voluntary in cause, since the voluntary in cause involves willing acceptance of foreseen results of one's chosen actions.

Executive willing concerns unforeseen aspects or results of one's actions, which come to light as one executes one's proposals; without further deliberation and choice one willingly continues to carry out the action despite its unforeseen aspects or willingly accepts the unforeseen results.

5 One certainly has responsibility for what one does by executive willing. If one thus wills a different kind of act--the murder of the rival, not merely the destruction of property--one would seem to have the same responsibility one would have had if one had chosen this different act, despite the fact that one has not chosen to do precisely what one does. Perhaps this paradoxical conclusion is true because the act which is
10 chosen and the subsequent executive willing both emerge from previous choices and express self-determination with respect to goods such as life and property. One who is prepared by a life of wrong choices to murder certain people at any opportunity is no less responsible if he or she sometimes does a particular murder without even stopping to think about it. A similar analysis must be carried through if one by executive will-
15 ing accepts unforeseen consequences; one's responsibility will be what it would have been had one foreseen and accepted the same consequences.

M. Other cases of voluntariness -- omissions

20 One not only is responsible for what one does, but also for what one fails to do. What one fails to do is called "an omission." If omissions are analyzed from the point of view of the voluntariness involved, there are several different sorts. These have not been distinguished clearly in previous analyses. St. Thomas says of all omissions that they are "indirectly voluntary."

25 One case of omissions is that in which one chooses not to engage in certain performances precisely in order to bring about a desired state of affairs. For example, those concerned sometimes decide that they desire the death of a defective infant, and they choose to kill it by withholding food and water until it dies of hunger and thirst. The voluntariness in this kind of omission is exactly the same as would be the voluntariness
30 in killing the child by giving it an overdose of narcotics. Only the technique and outward state of affairs are different. (Of course, one might argue that neglect is crueler, and so morally more reprehensible, than killing by narcotics would be.)

Another case of omissions is that in which one chooses not to do something which one ought to do, not because one sets oneself against the goods at stake, but because
35 one prefers to do something else. For example, a student chooses not to study when he or she ought to study, not out of any rejection of learning, but out of love of amusement and dislike of hard work. The voluntariness and responsibility in this sort of omission is very like that in the accepting of foreseen consequences. What one chooses to omit to do usually goes undone as an accepted foreseen consequence of one's choice to
40 do something else.

Before I proceed further, notice that the notion of omission is not univocal; omissions like actions are an analogous set. Often it is said that an omission is the failure to do something which one can and ought to do. The two modes of omission already distinguished make clear that "failure" can have different meanings. "Can" and "ought"
45 also have many meanings.

"Ought" not only refers to moral normativity, but also to natural regularity, to logical requirements, and to what is fitting. Actions expected because people usually do them, because consistency requires them, or because they seem somehow appropriate can be said to be "omitted" if they are not done, but there are only omissions from a
50 moral point of view if there is some moral norm indicating that they should be done, despite which they in fact are not done. Thus, a person who skips lunch on a certain day has omitted it, but he or she has done a moral omission only if there was some moral requirement to have lunch. A priest who leaves out appropriate but optional items in a liturgy omits in a certain sense, but not in a moral sense, since he uses the option;
55 however, a priest who omits what is prescribed by the Church is not doing what he ought to do, since the faithful have a right to the Church's liturgy, not some homemade variant upon it.

"Can" also has many meanings. In the two cases of omission already analyzed, one could have done what ought to have been done in the sense that one had a choice and chose
60 not to do the right thing--not to feed the baby, or not to study. The next type of omission differs, for in it one does not make a choice.

In this type of omission, one is aware that one ought to do something, deliberates about what ought to be done and about doing it, but fails to do anything. In some cases, a choice is made to put off (but not to omit) doing something definite; in other cases, a
65 choice is made to put off (but not to omit) figuring out precisely what one ought to do; in still other cases, no choice actually is made, and the deliberation is interrupted by something which calls attention away from the problem.

An example is parents who notice that one of their children seems to have a health problem. They begin to discuss the situation, knowing that they ought to do something
70 about it. Ideally, they investigate and seek advice until they formulate a reasonable plan of action, and then proceed to adopt the plan and carry it out. But often the parents fail to take the action they should take for their child's well-being. Perhaps they think they should make an appointment with their physician, but put off making it; perhaps they are not sure what to do, and put off investigation into the matter; perhaps
75 at times they worry the problem rather aimlessly, but always are interrupted by work, sleep, or something else from coming to a conclusion.

The moral responsibility in cases of such omissions clearly is real, but also clearly is very different from the voluntariness and responsibility involved either in choosing to do something or in accepting foreseen consequences of one's acts. The re-
80 sponsibility in omissions without choices is for failure to use one's freedom when one could and should use it. By such omissions, one certainly can be morally responsible, yet one cannot have the responsibility involved in choosing to do something other than what one knows one ought to do. If the child dies of the condition, the parents will realize the death is their fault: "We knew Mary was not well; we ought to have taken

her to the doctor; we did talk about it, but we just never got around to doing anything until it was too late." This sad story is very different from that of parents who decide to kill their defective infant by starving it, and also different from that of parents who (in a starvation situation) choose to eat the available food themselves and regretfully accept the death by starvation of their children.

Finally, there are omissions in which one fails to do what one could and ought to have done, but never even considers doing. A priest fails to do adequate preparation of his homilies, although he could and ought to prepare them carefully. Let us imagine a case, unlike that of the parents just described, in which the priest never even thinks about how he is preparing his homilies and is not the least worried about obligations in this area. Where is the responsibility here? It lies in other actions and omissions which have not been what they should have been. In the seminary, perhaps he did not study Scripture very hard, because he did not enjoy it. Entering upon the pastoral ministry, he realized he should allocate his time with some care in order to be able to do the job well, but he never got around to making a schedule and getting himself on it. The result is that he spends his time doing the things he finds enjoyable and the things which simply have to be done, and never has time to prepare the Sunday homily carefully. If he had fulfilled his other responsibilities, he would be able to do this, would see that he ought to do it, and probably would do it. Thus there is some responsibility for the ill-prepared homilies this priest gives, and for the fact that the faithful--most of whom never receive instruction otherwise--receive little solid teaching from him. Still, this responsibility is not the same as one's responsibility in any of the previous cases.

25 N. Other cases of voluntariness -- unforeseen results and readiness

There are other cases of voluntariness which are similar to the omissions last discussed in their dependence upon prior acts and omissions, but differ from these in having something of a positive character.

Most important are things one does by spontaneous willing, which are morally inappropriate, which one does not endorse by choice or willingly accept or purposely omit doing anything about, but which one could and should control, and would control but for one's prior wrong choices. For example, a man who is becoming senile might by spontaneous willing indecently touch a young woman. At the moment, he cannot help himself, but this action can be somewhat voluntary and responsible if and to the extent that it follows from his failure during a long life ever to cultivate sufficiently the virtue of chastity.

Again, many priests make arbitrary alterations in the liturgy, sometimes very minor ones. They could and should realize that in doing this they give the faithful the impression that the law of the Church need not be respected and also convey to many of the faithful the impression that moral norms need not be respected (since many people cannot distinguish between legal requirements such as rubrics and moral requirements). Such priests probably realize that they upset conservative parishoners and are willing to accept this consequence. But they have no idea that their arbitrariness contributes to a general atmosphere of anomie and is one reason why many people feel free to disregard the Church's moral teaching on matters such as abortion and remarriage after divorce. Priests who act thus bear some responsibility for the harm their action causes, but the responsibility is not the same as it would be if they foresaw and willingly accepted all the consequences of their actions. Their responsibility, as in the last case of omissions, arises from previous moral failings which have rendered them insensitive and inclined to carelessness about the Church's laws and rules.

In some cases, one's prior moral commitments and failings lead neither to action nor to omission, but to a readiness to choose and act. One might be more or less conscious of this readiness, yet not move from it to deliberation because the occasion to do so never arises. In many cases, the awareness of readiness is not specific; one is ready for something, but does not know what. For example, a person who has never heard the Gospel but who by God's grace does the best he or she can has a disposition of readiness to believe. Consciously, such a person might only yearn into the darkness for "something more." This disposition is voluntary and responsible; it is credited as faith.

Unfortunately, the disposition of readiness is not always toward what is good. A man who does not cultivate his love for his wife might be ready to commit adultery, yet not have occasion to deliberate about it and so never do it. He bears some responsibility for this attitude, and it has some moral significance, but not the significance of any of the previously distinguished forms of voluntariness.

The analyses just given in sections K-N bring to light areas of moral responsibility which often are ignored. In a way, it is far pleasanter not to think about these matters, because to think about them is to see that one's moral responsibility is far more extensive than one generally realizes. Even a person who has a clear conscience--for example, after having made a good and full general confession, and set about to live a truly Christian life--will go on in virtue of previous sins wrongly doing and omitting many things.

However, students will notice that these analyses are going to help to render intelligible many Scriptural notions, such as that of unconscious faults, of the inevitable sinfulness of the upright, and so on. Moreover, those moral defects in oneself for which one is somehow responsible, yet (at present) wholly powerless to change, are not beyond God's merciful love. In respect to such forms of moral evil, the dictum of Luther is correct: I am simultaneously just and a sinner.

80 O. Cooperative action and helping others

Up to this point, the analyses in this chapter have proceeded without taking into account the social dimension of human action, which I discussed in chapter eight, sections N-O. Yet a great deal of our moral action is some form of cooperating with others, and much of the rest helps others or hinders them in doing what they are doing.

The most important point which one must grasp is that although individual cases

involving cooperation and helping can be very complicated and difficult to analyze, no really new modes of voluntariness are involved. The modes of voluntariness distinguished and exemplified up to this point are at the bottom of human moral life and responsibility, and nothing human is exclusively individual or exclusively social. Therefore, the social dimension has not been absent, although most (but not all) the examples have concerned the actions of individuals.

The cases of cooperation and communal action which pose the fewest complexities are those in which two or more persons freely associate and cooperate in a common life and common actions. Partners in marriage or in business are examples. To the extent that they are partners, nothing different will be revealed by analytic reflection. Their deliberations and decisions will go on in discourse expressed in language; even their acceptance of consequences, their putting off of problems, and so on will belong to their common life.

Things begin to become complicated when one considers cases in which persons are involved in something other than an ideally communal and cooperative relationship. Traditional moral treatises often dealt, under the present heading, with the problems of Christian slaves whose less than upright masters involved them in a variety of unseemly activities. The problem was: To what extent could the slave contribute to the activities which executed immoral proposals without himself or herself committing sin? In other words: At what point must a person who is subservient take a stand and accept (some level of) martyrdom? Since no human relationship is perfect and no authority altogether upright, we still have essentially the same problem. May the nurse who considers abortion evil prepare a patient scheduled for abortion? Must an employee of a business resign or make it public if the company is hiding dangerous defects in its products?

The general answer to questions of this kind is that the same norms apply as apply in any other case. If a student has understood clearly the preceding analyses, he or she knows that actions are not defined morally by outward behavior and physical effects, but by reference to various modes of voluntariness. The seeming difficulty of questions of cooperation mainly arises because one tends to suppose that being involved in unseemly behavior or bringing about unacceptable consequences has a moral significance of its own, quite apart from one's choices and other principles of responsibility. But this is not so.

Therefore, persons whose action helps others do something wrong are responsible for what they themselves do, accept, omit, and so forth. If a nurse adopts a proposal to kill unborn babies (perhaps she is in favor of abortion) and participates in abortion procedures in execution of the proposal, she is killing unborn babies, and it matters not whether outwardly she does no more than fill out forms. On the other hand, if a nurse in a concentration camp is threatened with death unless she assists a surgeon who is doing abortions, she could be assisting in surgery to save her life without ever adopting a proposal to kill any unborn baby. The acts of the surgeon and the death of the babies not only are no ends of hers, they are not even means she chooses. They only are foreseen consequences.

The fact that one does not adopt a proposal which is morally excluded, however, does not free one from moral responsibility--perhaps grave responsibility--for what one helps to bring about. For example, a nurse who prepares patients for abortion not because this behavior carries out any proposal of hers but merely as part of her job perhaps ought to look for a different job or refuse to do these preparations by way of testimony to the truth. The abortions she assists really are a foreseen and accepted consequence of her own chosen actions; perhaps she is obliged not to accept this consequence.

It is impossible for one person to direct another to do x without adopting the proposal that x be done, and therefore without taking full moral responsibility for doing x. For example, a physician who writes a prescription to use an abortifacient drug or a teacher who gives an assignment to read an indecent novel is adopting the proposal that these acts be done. If the acts are wrong, the person who directs that they be done has full responsibility for them; this responsibility cannot be evaded by the excuse that the patient or a school superior is putting on pressure.

Individuals who act as agents for others ("principals") have responsibility in the same general ways. One who merely contributes behavior to wrongful schemes--for example, by delivering messages--without adopting any wrong proposal is not doing the evil act, but might well be accepting consequences which he or she ought not to accept. Agents are not passive instruments; they have their own responsibilities. An agent given wide discretion is unlikely to be able to serve without adopting as his or her own the proposals which the principal wishes to execute, for the agent with discretion will be unable to do anything except by proceeding with the principal's own end in view.

There is a good side to this situation if the principal's purposes are noble ones. Agents told precisely what to do might carry out instructions for their own, less noble purposes. Agents given a broad mandate and a wide field of discretion, but provided with a good idea of the intentions of the one for whom they act, become in a full sense cooperators. The apostles and all Christians who share in the redemptive work of Christ are not mere instruments; they are friends and fellow workers with God.

Many other social aspects of moral responsibility were ignored in traditional analyses of human acts. Among these overlooked aspects were the moral implications for children of the manner in which they are brought up. Everyone knows there are such implications; the fact is assumed whenever the Church insists upon the responsibility of parents to see to the moral formation of their children. How can parents have any real effect upon their children's future free choices? In other words, how can one posit any real influence of parents on children without implicitly denying the children's own true freedom and moral responsibility?

One way parents make a difference is by their conditioning of children's spontaneous willing, which I discussed in section F. Such conditioning shapes the way in which the child will come to see human goods and his or her own possible fulfillment in them. Moreover, the choices of parents to a great extent limit the options of children. Thus

parents very largely predetermine the conditions under which their children's moral battle will have to be fought.

When some children begin making free choices, they have little reason to choose what is morally right even to the extent that they correctly judge what is right.

- 5 Without any fault of their own, such children can be strongly tempted to do things they know to be immoral. If under such conditions children make some morally evil choices, then even if at some point they are converted and begin to live an upright life, their early immoral acts can continue to reverberate throughout the rest of their lives. Years later, such persons still will be insensitive to some of their obligations and to many of the consequences of their acts, and so will be responsible--in one of the weak modes of responsibility--for things they cannot any longer do anything about. In such a way the failures of parents can affect--and even affect beyond all possibility of repair--the lives of their children.

- 10 We turn now to the paradigm case of such intergenerational responsibility: original sin.

15 Questions for study and review

1. Why is a very careful study of human acts necessary for moral theology?
- 20 2. Summarize the criticisms I offer of fundamental-option theory, the theory of the primacy of character, and the theory which subordinates acts to intentions.
3. What is consequentialism? Why is it untenable?
4. Why is the work of a confessor the occasion of serious sin?
5. What is the principle by which human acts have moral significance for good or
25 for ill?
6. What is simple willing? How is it similar to, different from, and related to the love of God which is poured forth in our hearts through the Holy Spirit?
7. What is spontaneous willing and acting? How is such willing and acting morally significant in children prior to their coming to the point at which they can
30 make free choices?
8. What is the "object of the act" which is done by free choice? Why is it confusing to talk about this as the "finis operis"--the end of the performance itself?
9. How are human goods related to acts done by choice?
10. Why does one determine oneself with respect to those goods contained in the
35 object of one's act of choice, when one is choosing a means to some ulterior end?
11. What are commitments? How do they open the way to creative action in the moral domain itself?
12. Explain the difference between one's responsibility for what one chooses and for the various foreseen results of the execution of one's choice.
- 40 13. What is the "voluntary in cause?" Why should this be given separate treatment in a moral treatise?
14. What is executive willing? What is responsibility for that which one wills in this way?
15. Distinguish between the various types of omissions and explain the precise
45 responsibility one has for omissions of each type.
16. Explain how persons can have some responsibility for spontaneous willing, for totally unforeseen results of one's acts, and for one's readiness to act in certain ways.
17. In what sense is it perfectly correct to say that one is both justified and
50 a sinner at the same time?
18. What are the general principles for determining responsibility in cases of cooperative action? In cases in which one person helps another? Why at the concrete level are instances of these kinds of action difficult to analyze?
19. Describe the special situations of responsibility of persons in authority and
55 of persons who act as agents for others.
20. Be prepared to provide your own, original examples to illustrate every point which is illustrated by an example in this chapter.