St Patrick's College

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TOWARDS A SYNTHETIC ACCOUNT OF SIN THAT MERGES MAGISTERIAL TEACHING AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON SIN WITH THE PHILOSOPHICAL INSIGHTS OF BERNARD J.F. LONERGAN

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by

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In loving memory of Frances Neville

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary hamartological treatises usually begin by pointing out that the concept of sin has lost its meaning in the modern world.[1] While the causes of this situation are many and varied,[2] part of the problem lies in the fact that the basic notions that underlie the concept of sin are themselves problematic. The concept of sin presupposes the existence of an objective moral order, as well as humanity's ability to apprehend this order. It also presupposes freedom to choose to act or not to act in accordance with what we have judged to be either morally justifiable or morally reprehensible. These presuppositions, however, are not easily demonstrated, as they involve concepts that require in-depth empirical analysis. Furthermore, the notion of an objective moral order that can be known, and the notion of human freedom are challenged by the counter-notions of moral scepticism and certain forms of determinism. Because of these challenges, it is crucial that a study in the theology of sin demonstrates the rational plausibility of the concept of sin. Such a study must attempt to establish the possibility of both ethical knowledge and human freedom.

The importance of understanding ourselves as beings who are capable of knowing good from evil, and who are capable of freely choosing to do either the former or the latter, is reflected in the teachings of Pope Benedict XVI and his predecessor, Pope John Paul II. Pope Benedict, in his World Youth Day address of 2008, speaks of one form of moral scepticism that has for a long time been denounced in Christian circles, namely, moral relativism.[3] In his address, he speaks of the loss of genuine freedom and of self-respect that comes from moral

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[1] See for example the introductions to the following books: Josef Pieper, *The Concept of Sin*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (Indiana: St Augustine, 2001), 1; Seán Fagan, *Has Sin Changed?* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978) 1; Hugh Connolly, *Sin* (London: Continuum, 2002), v.

[2] Pope Benedict XVI, for example, suggests that the 'eclipse of God necessarily brings the eclipse of sin.' See 'Pope Benedict XVI: The Eclipse of God Leads to a Loss of the Sense of Sin,' 15 March 2011 [article on-line]; available from www.catholic.org/clife/lent/story.php?id=40691; Internet; accessed 17 May 2013.

[3] See for example, C.S. Lewis, 'The Poison of Subjectivism,' in *Christian Reflections* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1967), 72-81, and C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (London: Harper Collins, 1999); first published in 1943 by the Oxford University Press.

relativism: 'Relativism, by indiscriminately giving value to practically everything, has made "experience" all important. Yet experiences, detached from any consideration of what is good or true, can lead, not to a genuine freedom, but to moral or intellectual confusion, to a lowering of standards, to a loss of self-respect, and even to despair.'[4] Similarly, in his discussion of personal and social sin in his *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, Pope John Paul II speaks of the denial of a person's dignity and freedom that comes from a belief in determinism: 'This truth [that the human person is free] cannot be disregarded, in order to place the blame for individuals' sins on external factors such as structures, systems or other people. Above all, this would be to deny the person's dignity and freedom, which are manifested – even though in a negative and disastrous way – also in this responsibility for sin committed.'[5]

Magisterial teaching and contemporary theologies of sin reflect on the necessity of human knowledge and freedom if a wrongful act is to be considered a sin. Neither, however, has engaged sufficiently with the rational possibility of either objective moral knowledge or the freedom to choose between alternative courses of action. Magisterial documents and contemporary treatises in fundamental moral theology, while dealing in some detail with the issues of ethical knowledge and human freedom before formulating a conception of sin, contain many presuppositions regarding knowledge and freedom. These presuppositions are based on scripture, and the arguments presented in these works rely heavily on biblical sources and the Church's theological tradition.

In my dissertation I shall develop a synthetic account of sin that examines and takes seriously the theological anthropology provided by the magisterium and contemporary theologians. I shall also attempt to make this account of sin accessible to the more sceptical

[4] 'Benedict XVI on Moral Relativism in His World Youth Day Address,' July 17 2008 [article on-line]; available from berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/recourses/quotes/benedict-xvi-on-moral-relativism-in-his-world-youth-day-address; Internet; accessed 17 May 2013.
[5] Pope John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1984), sec. 16.

reader by drawing on the work of the Canadian philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan (1904-84). In his works, especially *Insight* (1957), Lonergan provides solid foundations for the possibility of sin, ethical knowledge, and human freedom.

While recent works have dealt with Lonergan's notion of sin, they have not engaged with the philosophical question of the possibility of sin, or the related questions of the possibility of ethical knowledge and human freedom. For example, Cynthia S.W. Crysdale develops a theology of sin using Lonerganian categories, in order to demonstrate the necessity of conversion for authentic moral development in both individuals and communities.[6] Eamonn Mulcahy examines aspects of Lonergan's soteriology. He explores Lonergan's notion of sin as alienation and dehumanisation, as failure to achieve authentic humanness. He goes on to explore how this evil is transformed into good through what Lonergan terms 'the law of the cross.'[7] My focus, however, is on Lonergan's demonstration of the *possibility* of sin, his grounding of the notion of sin in his rationally developed notions of ethical knowledge and human freedom.

My dissertation will be divided into three sections. In the first section I shall offer an exposition and critique of contemporary theologies of sin. This section will be divided into two chapters.

In the first chapter I shall examine the work of four theologians who have contributed significantly to the theology of sin: Bernard Häring, Richard Gula, Germain Grisez, and William E. May. My selection of these particular theologians is designed to indicate the broad spectrum of approaches to moral theology in general. Häring and Gula represent a primarily inductive approach to moral theology that draws general conclusions about the moral life by observing human experience in its concrete historical contexts. Grisez and May,

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[6] Cynthia S.W. Crysdale, 'Heritage and Discovery: A Framework for Moral Theology,' *Theological Studies* 63, no. 3 (2002): 559-578.
[7] Eamonn Mulcahy, *The Cause of our Salvation: Soteriological Causation according to some Modern British Theologians 1988-1998* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2007), 416-421.

on the other hand, represent a largely deductive approach that begins with universal moral principles and assesses human behaviour based on compliance or non-compliance with these principles. In my examination of the themes of sin, natural law, conscience, and human freedom in these authors, I shall argue that they are too reliant on scripture and the Church's theological tradition in their reflections on sin. Consequently, they offer little or nothing to the sceptical reader who doubts the possibility of sin.

In the second chapter I shall outline and critique contemporary Church teaching on sin. I shall examine sections of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as well as selected writings of Pope John Paul II. As in the first chapter, I shall examine the themes of sin, natural law, conscience, and freedom. I shall argue that while these works show profound insights into the human condition we call sin, they are greatly lacking when it comes to rationally demonstrating the possibility of sin. Again, this is because they are too reliant on scripture and the Church's theological tradition.

In the second section of my dissertation I shall examine Lonergan's notions of sin, ethical knowledge, and human freedom. This section will be divided into two chapters.

In the first chapter I shall critically examine the notions of sin, ethical knowledge, and human freedom in Lonergan's *Insight*. In this work, Lonergan provides a thorough empirical analysis of the possibility of both ethical knowledge and human freedom, and proceeds to develop a notion of sin that relies on these anterior notions. I shall then compare Lonergan's approach to these themes with contemporary theological reflection on the same themes. The central question guiding this chapter will be whether Lonergan's approach to sin and ethics is more effective than contemporary theological reflection in terms of dialoguing with moral scepticism and determinism.

In the second chapter, I shall examine the same themes in Lonergan's other major work, *Method in Theology*. As Lonergan's thought on these themes underwent a significant

development in the fifteen years between the publication of *Insight* and that of *Method in Theology*, our critique of *Method in Theology*'s approach to sin and ethics will involve a comparison of these two works.

The third section of my dissertation will consist of a single chapter. In this chapter I shall attempt to merge Lonergan's reflections on sin, ethical knowledge, and human freedom with contemporary theologies of sin. I shall attempt this synthesis by using St Thomas's dialectical method. We shall ask the following two questions: 1. Is there an objective moral order which is discernible by human beings? 2. Are human beings free to act morally? In our answers to these questions, we shall examine the notions of moral scepticism and determinism. We shall follow this with a presentation of the antithesis to these notions in magisterial teaching. Finally, we shall draw on Lonergan to provide a more thorough rational response to the moral sceptic and determinist.

PART ONE

CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGIES OF SIN

CHAPTER ONE

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON SIN

The idea that the notion of sin presupposes knowledge and freedom is formulated in the long-standing distinction in Catholic theological reflection between mortal and venial sin. In this tradition, there are three criteria involved in determining which of these categories a particular sin falls in to: serious matter, full knowledge, and deliberate consent. We shall see in this chapter and the next that these criteria have their origins in the work of St Thomas, and are still in use in contemporary moral theological reflection and Church teaching on sin. I shall argue, however, that today's moral theologians fail to provide adequate empirical foundations for their theologies of sin in terms of knowledge and freedom. Consequently, their theologies of sin are incapable of dialoguing with the philosophies of moral scepticism, which denies the possibility of ethical knowledge, and hard determinism, which denies the existence of human free will.

Contemporary moral theology sees two distinct approaches to the notions of sin and moral truth, that of the classicist and that of the historicist.[8] James Keenan provides descriptions of these two approaches to truth and their relevance to moral theology:

> For classicists, the world is a finished product and truth has already been revealed, expressed, taught, and known. In order to be a truth it must be universal and unchanging. Clarity is key. Its logic is deductive: we apply the principle to the situation and we derive an answer from the syllogism.
>
> The moral law is found, then, in that which is always true, never changes, and always applies.[9]

[8] These distinctions were developed by Bernard Lonergan in three articles published in 1967: 'The Transition from a Classicist World-view to Historical-mindedness', 'The Dehellenization of Dogma', and 'Theology in its New Context'. All three articles appear in *A Second Collection: Papers by Bernard J.F. Lonergan*, ed. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974).

This approach to truth in moral theology is utilized by theologians such as Germain Grisez and William E. May.

Keenan goes on to provide a definition of the historicist:

> Historical-minded theologians look at the world and the truth as constantly emerging. They argue that we are learning more, not only about the world, but about ourselves. As subjects we are affected by history: we become hopefully the people whom we are called to become. What the world and humanity will be is not yet known, but rests on the horizons of our expectations and the decisions we make and realize. The moral law then looks to determine what at this period corresponds to the vision we ought to be shaping. It admits that the final word on the truth is outstanding but emerging.[10]

This approach to truth in moral theology is utilized by theologians such as Bernard Häring and Richard Gula.

In this chapter we shall examine the work of these key figures in both of the above-mentioned approaches to moral theology. The central argument of the chapter is that both the classicist and the historicist approach to moral truth are philosophically weak. They fail to provide adequate empirical foundations for their theologies of sin in terms of the possibility of ethical knowledge and human freedom.

In the first section of this chapter, we shall look at some basic definitions of sin. This will be followed by an examination of the notions of mortal and venial sin: definitions, roots in scripture, and the foundations of the three determining criteria in the work of St Thomas Aquinas. The second section will examine historicist discussions of mortal and venial sin, as well as discussions of the above-mentioned themes, ethical knowledge and human freedom. Finally, the third section will examine the classicist approach to these same themes.

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[9] James F. Keenan, *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 111.
[10] Ibid., 113.

1. MORTAL AND VENIAL SIN

1.1. Definitions of Sin

Part three of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides some useful definitions of actual, mortal, and venial sin. In the next chapter I shall offer a more detailed exposition and critique of the *Catechism*'s discussion of sin. For now, however, the *Catechism* is useful for providing a number of definitions that will help us to begin our discussion of the various theological approaches to mortal and venial sin.

The *Catechism* defines sin as 'an offence against reason, truth and right conscience,' and as a 'failure in genuine love of God and neighbour caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods.' Sin 'wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity.' It has been defined as 'an utterance, a deed or a desire contrary to the eternal law.'[11]

Sin is also seen as an offence against God. To support this, the *Catechism* quotes from the Book of Psalms: 'Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight.' Sin opposes itself to God's love for us and diverts our hearts away from it. Like the first sin, it is disobedience; we rebel against God through the will to become 'like gods,' by knowing and determining good and evil. The *Catechism* quotes St Augustine, who defines sin as 'love of oneself even to contempt of God.' In this proud self-exaltation, the *Catechism* continues, sin is 'diametrically opposed to the obedience of Jesus, which achieves our salvation.'[12]

1.2. Definitions of Mortal and Venial Sin

The *Catechism* begins by stating that 'mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law.'[13] By preferring a lesser good to God, mortal sin turns

[11] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1849. For more detailed references that include information on the sources used in writing this section of the *Catechism*, see the next chapter.
[12] Ibid., 1850.
[13] Ibid., 1855.

human beings away from their ultimate end and beatitude. Venial sin allows charity to continue, even though it damages it. By attacking charity, the vital principle within us, mortal sin makes necessary a new action of God's mercy and a conversion of heart. Such conversion is usually achieved within the setting of the sacrament of reconciliation.

Following this definition there is a discussion of the three criteria for discerning whether or not a sin is mortal or merely venial. 'Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent.'[14] Grave matter is identified by the Ten Commandments. This corresponds to Jesus' answer to the rich young man: 'Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honour your father and your mother.' Particular sins have different levels of seriousness; murder, for example, is graver than theft. Who has been wronged by a given offence has also to be taken into account; so, for example, violence against parents is in itself more serious than violence against a stranger.

The *Catechism* goes on to discuss the second and third criteria for discerning whether a sin is mortal or venial: full knowledge and deliberate consent. Mortal sin presupposes knowledge of the sinful nature of the act, and of its disparity from God's law. It also implies a consent that is sufficiently deliberate that it may be said to constitute a personal choice. Pretended ignorance and hardness of heart do not reduce the voluntary character of a sin; rather, they increase it.

Unintentional ignorance can decrease or even remove completely the responsibility for a grave offence. But no one, the *Catechism* says, is considered to be ignorant of the principles of the moral law, as these laws are 'written in the conscience of every man.'[15] Feelings and passions can also reduce the voluntary and free character of the offence. External pressures and pathological disorders are also taken into account when judging the

[14] Ibid., 1857.
[15] Ibid., 1860.

individual's freedom in committing the offence. The most serious sin is the one committed through ill will, by a deliberate choice to do evil.

Mortal sin, like love itself, is 'a radical possibility of human freedom.'[16] It results in the loss of charity and sanctifying grace. If such a sin is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it results in the exclusion of the sinner from Christ's kingdom and the eternal death of hell. This is because our freedom has the power to make choices for ever, without turning back. However, although we may deem that an act is in itself a serious offence, we must leave judgement of persons to God's justice and mercy.

The *Catechism* defines venial sin as follows: 'One commits venial sin when, in a less serious matter, one does not observe the standard prescribed by the moral law, or when one disobeys the moral law in a grave matter, but without full knowledge or without complete consent.'[17] Venial sin weakens charity. It displays an unhealthy fondness for created goods. It blocks the soul's advancement in the exercise of the virtues and the practice of the moral good. Such sin deserves temporal punishment. Deliberate and unrepented venial sin, according to the *Catechism*, 'disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin.'[18] Venial sin, however, does not put us in direct opposition to God's will and friendship. Nor does it break the covenant with God. With the grace of God it is humanly reparable. 'Venial sin does not deprive the sinner of sanctifying grace, friendship with God, charity, and consequently eternal happiness.'[19]

1.3. Scriptural Roots of the Distinction between Mortal and Venial Sin

In the Old Testament, inadvertent sins of human weakness necessitated a sacrificial offering. 'If any one sins unwittingly in any of the things which the Lord has commanded not

[16] Ibid., 1861.
[17] Ibid., 1862.
[18] Ibid., 1863.
[19] Ibid.

to be done . . . let him offer for the sin which he has committed a young bull without blemish to the Lord for a sin offering' (Lv. 4:4-5). Other sins, however, could not be expiated because they were in the nature of offences against the covenant community and its God. Such sins were punished by death or exile: 'For every person who eats of the fat of an animal of which an offering by fire is made to the Lord shall be cut off from his people' (Lv. 7:25).

This distinction of sins that can be expiated and those that cannot is maintained in the New Testament. In teaching his disciples to pray, Jesus instructs them to ask forgiveness for their daily transgressions (see Mt. 6:12; Lk. 11:4). In contrast, he threatens his obstinate opponents with consignment to hell: 'You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?' (Mt. 23:33).

Some sins involve exclusion from the kingdom forever: 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee? Then he will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me." And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life' (Mt. 25:44-46). Some sins are forgivable while others are not: 'Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come' (Mt. 12:31-32).

In a similar manner, the Epistles speak of commonplace sins of which anyone may be guilty: 'For we all make many mistakes, and if any one makes no mistakes in what he says he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also' (Jas. 3:2). In contrast to this, there is the slavery to sin which leads to death: 'Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?' (Rom. 6:16). Some sins necessitate

excommunication: ‘Drive out the wicked person from among you’ (I Cor. 5:13). The most serious sins, however, involve exclusion from the kingdom: ‘Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?’ (I Cor. 6:9).

According to Germain Grisez, there is a long tradition that has taken a passage in St Paul as marking the distinction between mortal and venial sin. Paul says that people build differently on the foundation which is Jesus. Some build with gold, silver, and jewels, others with wood, hay, or straw. In his judgement God will test the quality of each one’s work. Those whose structure burns because of its poor material can be saved, but, as Grisez observes, ‘as fleeing through a fire.’[20] Others, however, completely destroy God’s temple, for in their actions they completely separate themselves from Jesus. In the final judgement, these will be destroyed, not saved (see 1 Cor. 3:10-17).

1.4. Criteria for Discerning Whether a Sin is Mortal or Venial: Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica*

In this section we shall examine some texts from St Thomas’s *Summa Theologica* in order to see why the Church uses the criteria of grave matter, full knowledge, and deliberate consent in its reflections on mortal and venial sin. While this section deals with the themes of knowledge and consent, it is only intended to supply a brief background to official magisterial teaching. The author understands that the brevity of the section and the limited selection of texts cannot begin to do justice to the complexity and the development of St Thomas’s thought on these topics. Part two of this dissertation offers a more comprehensive analysis of a Thomistic approach to these themes in the work of Bernard Lonergan.

[20] Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus Christ*, Vol. 1, *Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), 364.

1.4.1. Grave Matter I-II, 18, 2

In this article, St Thomas asks: Does a human act get good or moral evil from its objective? He begins by suggesting that it would appear that an act does not get good or evil from its objective. For the objective, he says, is a thing, and evil does not lie in things, but in the use to which sinners put them. He concludes, therefore, that a human act does not get its good or evil from the objective.

He further suggests that the objective is like the act's material in which it works. Now a thing's goodness comes not so much from its material as from its form that actually shapes it. Likewise in acts as well – it is not their objective which makes them good or bad.

On the other hand, St Thomas suggests, a man becomes abominable in the sight of God because of the evil he does, which in its turn is because of the evil objects he chooses. The same reasoning applies when he does good.

St Thomas's response is that good or bad in actions, as elsewhere in things, is judged according to the completeness or incompleteness of their reality. In relation to this criterion for judging the good or bad in actions, he asks: 'what provides a thing's specific character?' As in a physical thing the specific character is supplied by its form, so in an action it is supplied by its objective character. Hence as a natural thing's basic goodness is provided by its form, which makes it the kind of thing it is, so also a moral act's basic goodness is provided by the proper objective on which it set itself. Hence, St Thomas observes, some moralists refer to an act as being 'good of its kind,' *bonum ex genere*, for example, using what belongs to you.

Continuing the comparison, St Thomas continues: as in things of nature the basic evil is for the specific form to be missing, likewise the basic evil in moral acts arises from the objective, for instance to take what does not belong to you: then an act is referred to a being 'bad of its kind,' *malum ex genere*.

St Thomas concludes that external things, while good in themselves, are not always proper objectives for particular actions. Considered, then, as the objectives of such actions, they are not invested with the quality of being good.

He further concludes that an objective is not the material out of which an act is made, but the material with which it deals. Thus it takes on the role of form in that it gives an act its specific nature.

1.4.2. Full Knowledge I-II, 6, 8

In this article St Thomas poses the question, 'Does ignorance render an act involuntary?' He begins by suggesting that apparently it does not. He points out that Damascene says that the involuntary deserves forgiveness. This is not so with some acts which are done through ignorance. Thomas quotes St Paul: 'If a man know not, he shall not be known.' (1 Cor. 14:38) So then, Thomas concludes, ignorance does not cause the involuntary.

Besides, he says, every sin stems from ignorance, quoting a text from Proverbs: 'They err that work evil' (Prov. 14:22) If ignorance makes an action involuntary it follows that all sins are involuntary. This goes against Augustine's saying that all sins are voluntary.[21]

Thomas continues by referring to Damascene's remark that distress goes with involuntary action. However, some acts are done in ignorance and yet without regret, for example when a man shoots an enemy he wishes to kill while thinking he is shooting a buck. Therefore, Thomas concludes, ignorance does not make for involuntariness.

On the other hand, both Aristotle and Damascene allow that some sort of involuntariness results from ignorance.

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[21] 'Sin is so voluntary an evil that it is by no means sin if it is not voluntary.' From Augustine's *Vera Religione*, quoted by Augustine in his *Retractations*. See vol. 60 of *The Fathers of the Church*, trans., Mary Inez Bogan (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968), 53.

St Thomas's reply: Ignorance makes an action involuntary insofar as it deprives it of the prerequisite knowledge. Not every sort of ignorance does this. Thomas considers three ways in which ignorance is considered relevant to willing: concomitantly, consequentially, and antecedently.

1. Concomitant ignorance. This form of ignorance affects the deed that is done. However, the deed would still be done even if knowledge was present; the ignorance does not lead to its being done, it merely happens that deed and ignorance are conjoined. Such is the case in the example given above, of a man desiring to kill his enemy and succeeding unbeknown to himself when he thought he was shooting game. Such action does not cause an involuntary action, for, as Aristotle points out, it does not produce an effect against a man's will. The effect is, however, non-voluntary, for we cannot will what we do not recognize.

2. Consequent ignorance. This is the case when the ignorance itself is voluntary or willed. This can happen in two ways: First, and positively, the ignorance may be willed, as when a person chooses not to be informed, so that he might find some excuse for sin or for not avoiding it. Thomas cites the Book of Job: 'They say to God, Depart from us! We do not desire the knowledge of thy ways' (Job 21:14). Thomas calls this 'affected ignorance.' Second, and negatively, ignorance may be voluntary in the sense that not willing and not acting can be voluntary: it is an ignorance of what we can and should know.

Consequent ignorance is present when a person does not actually attend to what he could and should consider. St Thomas calls this 'ignorance in wrongly choosing,' and it may result, he says, from passion or a settled attitude. Or a person may have made no effort to acquaint himself with the proper notions. He calls this 'ignorance of right principles.' It is voluntary insofar as it is a not knowing of what one should know and insofar as it results from negligence.

Since these types of ignorance are voluntary they cannot have the effect of making an action simply involuntary. However, Thomas points out that in a qualified sense consequent ignorance may be regarded as involuntary, inasmuch as the ignorance precedes the motion of will towards doing something, an act that would not occur if knowledge was present and operative.

3. Antecedent ignorance. This precedes the act of willing, and consequently is not voluntary. Nevertheless, it is the cause of willing that which otherwise would not be willed. Such is the case when a man is ignorant of some circumstance of his act which he was not bound in duty to know, although if he was aware of it he would not complete the act. For example: having used all due care a man fires a shot which kills another man who unknown to the shooter has entered the line of fire. The effect of such ignorance is quite simply involuntary.

1.4.3. Deliberate Consent I-II, 10, 2

In this article St Thomas asks the question, is volition moved of necessity by its object? He begins: 'It seems so.' Aristotle, he says, makes it clear that the influence of its object on the will is one of the mover on the movable. If strong enough, a mover will necessarily move the movable. The will, therefore, can be moved of necessity by its object.

Thomas continues: The will, like the mind, is a spiritual power; both are ordered to a universal object. The motion of mind is necessitated by its object. Hence the motion of the will is also necessitated by its object.

Furthermore, Thomas continues, whatever we will is either an end or a means. It would seem, according to Thomas, that the end is willed of necessity, as it is compared to the first principles of thought which are necessarily assented to. The end is the reason of willing

the means. So they too (the means), it would seem, are willed of necessity. The will, therefore, is moved of necessity by its object.

On the other hand, according to Aristotle the rational powers are open to opposites. The will is a rational power. Aristotle says in the *De Anima* that will is in the reason. It is therefore able to take alternative courses, and as a result is not moved of necessity by a particular object.

In response, Thomas suggests that the will's motion can be looked at in two ways: first, in regard to the exercise of its activity, and second, in regard to the meaning it holds, which comes from the object it engages.

Regarding the first, Thomas says that no object necessitates the will. Whatever the object, a person always has the power not to think about it, and as a result not to actually will it.

Regarding the second, however, he says that the will is necessitated, but not by every object. When we are studying a power's motion from its object, he says, we should focus on that part of it which is the power's special interest. A visible object moves the sight by its colour being actually seen. If the colour is presented then it is registered – unless we turn away our gaze or close our eyes, which, however, regards the exercise of the act. Now if an object is presented which is not coloured in every part, but only in one, then it would not necessarily be seen: in struggling to see the part in the shade the eye might miss the rest. As being coloured is the object of sight, so being good is the object of will. Accordingly if the will is presented with an object which is universally good, that is, good from every point of view, then it will of necessity respond to it. It cannot, Thomas says, will the opposite. But if the object presented is good, but not good from every point of view, then the will will not go out to it of necessity.

The good alone which is complete, and which lacks for nothing at all, is that object which the will is unable not to want. This, Thomas says, is beatitude. All other particular goods, inasmuch as they fall short of some good, can strike us as being in some sense not completely good, and the will is able to refuse them or accept them, for it is able to respond to one and the same object from different points of view.

Hence: 1. Only that object which completely answers to a power is its sufficient moving force. If there is anything lacking in this regard, the power will not move towards it of necessity.

2. An object which is at all times and necessarily true inevitably moves the mind, but not one which may be either true or false, that is, a contingent truth. In a parallel way, this also applies to that which is contingently good.

3. Because it is the complete good, the ultimate end of necessity moves the will. Those things, without which the possession of the end is impossible, such as being and life, are also willed of necessity. Other goods, however, which are not strictly necessary for the possession of the end may or may not be willed when the end is willed.

2. MORTAL SIN AS NEGATIVE FUNDAMENTAL OPTION: BERNARD HÄRING AND RICHARD GULA

In this section, we shall examine the theologies of sin of Bernard Häring and Richard Gula. In order to understand the notion of mortal sin as negative fundamental option, it is vital to study the work of Bernard Häring. As one of the key figures in the renewal of moral theology in the twentieth century, Häring contributed greatly to the development of a theology of sin based on the more historicist approach to moral truth mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. The work of Richard Gula has also contributed to the on-going

renewal of moral theology. His book, *Reason Informed by Faith*, which draws heavily on Häring's work, has been widely used in seminaries and theological colleges since its publication in 1989.

In this section, we shall examine the themes of sin, knowledge of the good, and human freedom. As I have already indicated, the discussion of sin in this chapter will focus on the notion of mortal sin. The notion of the good is critical to theological discussions on sin, as it is the good that we seek in our efforts to counteract sin. As Gula puts it: 'the good is the foundation and the goal of all moral striving.'[22] Finally, our discussion of the notion of freedom will focus on our theologians' attempts to supply some sort of empirical basis for positing this notion.

2.1. Mortal Sin

In this subsection we shall examine the notion of mortal sin in the work of Bernard Häring and Richard Gula. We shall place particular emphasis on the sections of their works that speak of mortal sin as negative fundamental option.

2.1.1. Häring's Notion of Mortal Sin as Negative Fundamental Option

While the notion of mortal sin as negative fundamental option can be found in all of Häring's reflections on sin,[23] it is best observed in the first volume of his *Free and Faithful in Christ*. In this work, Häring writes comprehensively on the meaning of fundamental option and its implications for the theological distinction between mortal and venial sin.

For Häring, the concept of fundamental option is close to the concept of 'basic intention.' This basic intention is not merely a pious intention regarding particular works.

[22] Richard M. Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 43.
[23] In Häring's earlier major work, *The Law of Christ*, he uses the term 'fundamental orientation.' The meaning, however, is essentially identical.

Rather, it is ‘an intention that has at least the dynamics of being all-pervasive in the orientation and quality of all one’s free decisions and actions.’[24] Arising from the basic intention, then, are the ever increasing basic attitudes. The basic intention is invalid if it fails to show the dynamics that penetrate and reshape all convictions and patterns as well as the very character of the person.

Häring considers whether the fundamental option, as an expression of ‘basic freedom,’ is also an option for creative freedom and creative fidelity. Looked at from this perspective, he says, the very fundamental option, although theoretically pointing towards the good, can be ineffective if, for example, the ‘good’ is conceived legalistically and statically.

Häring claims that a person’s way of life may seem to express faith in God, but it is often more a kind of polytheism. Although, he says, we profess in the creed our faith in one God, in our lives we worship many other gods. The fundamental option or basic intention, he says, ‘truly reaches out to the ultimate end in the one God if all our life gradually becomes adoration of God in spirit and in truth.’[25] The healthy fundamental option involves being open to what Häring calls ‘the Other and the others.’[26] The fundamental option is false or ineffective unless it includes ‘cooperative relationship in trust and self-transcending love.’[27]

While we can explicitly and with purpose, Häring claims, make a basic intention, for example, to serve God with all our being, the fundamental option is, by its very nature, more than just a single act set into our lives. ‘Rather, it includes a continuing free activation that is inherent in all our important choices, or at least tends to give all of them the character of basic freedom.’[28] However, Häring observes that the fundamental option can be ‘contradicted by superficial inconsistencies, which, although they do not reverse, can still weaken the

[24] Bernard Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ: Moral Theology for Priests and Laity*, Vol. 1, *General Moral Theology* (Slough: St Paul Publications, 1978), 167.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

fundamental option for the good.'[29] It can also be contradicted, he argues, by free actions sufficiently deep and relevant that they can turn basic freedom and fundamental option in the opposite direction.

Fundamental option, according to Häring, is 'the activation of a deep knowledge of self and of basic freedom by which a person commits himself.'[30] The fundamental option is not fully activated, he says, by dedicating oneself to a mere idea, for a person is more than an idea. Fundamental option is authenticated in its very being only when the person, as a person, dedicates herself to the Other. In the fundamental option, human freedom shows itself as 'the capacity for the eternal.'[31] However, this does not leave out the fact that a radical commitment to one's fellow human being in self-transcendent love can implicitly be dedication to the Eternal, to a personal God.

Häring goes on to discuss the fundamental option against God and the good. He considers the possibility that human beings can, with adequate freedom, choose false gods over the true God. A fundamental option such as this corresponds to the theological concept of mortal sin. This does not mean, Häring argues, that all grave sins are a fundamental option against God and the good, just as not every serious sickness results in death. However, a person who has committed a mortal sin and persists in it is in a state of death.

In speaking of mortal sin in this way, Häring says that he is not speaking of the many sins but of *the sin* that underlies the many sins. St Paul, he says, in Romans 5-7, and often in other places, distinguishes between *hamartia* and *hamartiai*, the former signifying sin in the singular and the latter signifying the many sins.

Sin, in its most malevolent sense, is turning away from God; it terminates the fundamental option for the good self-commitment to serving God and loving neighbour. Häring provides a similar definition of mortal sin is his book, *Sin in the Secular Age*: 'Mortal

[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., 168.
[31] Ibid.; Karl Rahner, *Grace in Freedom* (New York: Burns & Oates), 214.

sin is always grave, as death is grave. It is a refusal of God's friendship, opposition to the covenant, and total alienation of the person from God, from himself and from the community. It is a fundamental option against God and, explicitly or implicitly, a conscious idolatrous option for one's own egotism or idols.'[32] Häring argues that it is impossible to make a distinction between serious and non-serious sins, as by its very nature sin is always serious. The venial sins that slowly lead to the grave danger of mortal sin, that is, the fundamental option against God, are to be regarded as being very serious.

Häring points out the important difference between the grave venial sin of one who remains in the state of grace and any grave sin of the person who has already turned his/her back on God's friendship. In the enemy of God there is 'that utter poison of his inimical fundamental option affecting each sin.'[33] On the other hand, one whose fundamental option is for friendship with God does not hold this mark of hostility in the caverns of his/her being. A similar distinction between venial and mortal sin can be observed in the first volume of Häring's *The Law of Christ*: 'Venial sin by its very nature can co-exist with the soul's fundamental orientation to God, does not involve opposition to the habit of divine love, but fails transiently to realize or actualize it.'[34] However, Häring warns that if a person is sick but does not care for healing, that very neglect may become the cause of his/her ultimate destruction.

2.1.2. Gula's Notion of Mortal Sin as Negative Fundamental Option

In his discussion of mortal sin in his book, *Reason Informed by Faith*, Gula points out that some theologians speak of mortal sin as a negative fundamental option. This, he says, means that 'mortal sin, as an expression of the person from deep levels of knowledge and

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[32] Bernard Häring, *Sin in the Secular Age* (Slough: St Paul Publications, 1974), 158.
[33] Häring, *Free and Faithful*, 211.
[34] Bernard Häring, *The Law of Christ*, Vol. 1, *General Moral Theology* (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1963), 353-354.

freedom, is a conscious decision to act in a way which fashions a style of life that turns us away from relating to God, others, and the world in a positive and life-giving way.'[35] Through mortal sin, he says, we no longer erect and foster healthy relationships, nor are we instrumental in the well-being of the human community and all creation.

Gula goes on to provide a quotation from *Persona Humana*, which in its presentation of the notion of mortal sin refers to the theory of fundamental option:

> In reality, it is precisely the fundamental option which in the last resort defines a person's moral disposition. But it can be completely changed by particular acts, especially when, as often happens, these have been prepared for by previous more superficial acts. Whatever the case, it is wrong to say that particular acts are not enough to constitute mortal sin.[36]

Clearly, Gula suggests, *Persona Humana* embraces at least the basic features of the theory of fundamental option. However, in its treatment of fundamental option, it is critical of exaggerated forms of the theory which down-play the importance of the individual act in evaluating sin. Responsible use of the theory, he says, would not allow this minimizing. In fact, he says, 'the theory of fundamental option, properly understood, can help us to take sin more seriously by showing how sin is truly a corruption of the person.'[37] It can also, he says, aid in restoring a balance between the three essential requirements for mortal sin by demonstrating that actions are certainly important and must always be examined in the context of the person if we are to effectively and truly evaluate sin.

The way in which *Persona Humana* uses the fundamental option theory, Gula suggests, demonstrates two serious ways of committing mortal sin. The first happens when a person, although keenly aware that a particular act is contrary to God's love, nevertheless

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[35] Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith*, 110.
[36] Ibid.; Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Persona Humana* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1976), sec. 10.
[37] Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith*, 110.

chooses that act in such a way that it reaches into the core of the person's being, reshaping his or her entire self. The second happens when regular failures to love and to do the good that one may reasonably do result in mortal sin. Such growing neglect, Gula suggests, stifles the person's receptiveness to the good and his or her duty to other people. If such neglect persists, it reaches a point where a particular act symbolizes more clearly than others the deterioration of the partnership of love. This treatment of mortal sin does not deny that we may in a definitive action alter our fundamental dedication to the good. It does, however, demonstrate why we should consider the pattern of our decisions and actions rather than just single acts taken out of context. The theory of fundamental option, Gula suggests, while conceding that individual actions can drastically affect a person's fundamental orientation, stresses the fact that these actions are not 'isolated, self-contained units of personal meaning.'[38] They are, rather, considered to be mortal sins as they embody an increased lack of concern for others and secure an already on-going process of degeneration.

According to Gula, actions cannot be divided from persons or from a relational context. A single act is the result of interactions, deliberations, and desires over a period of time. In order to help the reader understand the contextual nature of our actions, Gula provides an analogy. He suggests that we may consider the moral life as a story. Individual actions are like the various occurrences that comprise the story. No act has real moral significance if it separated from the whole narrative. 'Since all moral action is interaction, each individual action finds its proper meaning from within the total narrative that is the moral life.'[39] The plot of our story, Gula suggests, is 'the fundamental orientation which flows from our basic commitment and gives shape to the stable identity of our moral character.'[40] We realize the plot only after we are well into the story. The plot is discovered by looking back at what has occurred in the past and how it occurred. By this retrospective,

[38] Ibid., 111.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

we can gather from the series of on-going incidents a plot line on which each incident is positioned. Once realized, the plot produces a sense of unity to the story and provides each particular incident with a relevance that stretches beyond its immediate context. In this way, we regard every incident not as a detached episode, but as in continuity with other episodes. Only taken together do the individual episodes comprise the story.

In order to illustrate the personal and relational nature of the particular act, Gula takes as an example the sin of adultery. What makes adultery sinful, he argues, is not merely the physical act of intercourse with someone who is not our spouse. The physical act becomes truly significant only in the larger context of the interaction between husband and wife and the experiences of neglect, plans to meet another, regular meetings, and other unfaithful acts. Adultery, Gula argues, is 'the accumulation of a lack of concern and infidelities.'[41] We understand the seriousness of a single act only in the context of the broader orientation of the person's life and within the larger context of moral growth and decline.

In understanding mortal sin in this way, Gula suggests, we should be cautious about designating as 'mortal sin' physical actions in themselves separated from the person and the broader context of interpersonal relations. Gula refers to a tradition in Catholic theology that draws a distinction between formal and material sin. Formal sin is sin in the truest sense of the term. 'It is precisely the action for which we are morally culpable because it proceeds from knowledge and freedom and so carries a significant degree of personal involvement.'[42] On the other hand, material sin is only 'sin' by analogy. A material sin is an act of objective wrongdoing. Although the act may cause great harm, the objective wrongdoing itself does not necessarily result in moral culpability; nor does it make the action subjectively sinful. It is only when we evaluate the level of self-possession and self-determination involved in an

[41] Ibid., 112.
[42] Ibid.

action that we can truly call it sin, or more specifically 'mortal sin,' in the fullest sense of the term.

2.1.3. Summary and Analysis

The notions of knowledge and freedom are included in the presentations of mortal sin of both Häring and Gula. Both of these authors speak of mortal sin in terms of a person's fundamental option towards God and the good. Häring defines fundamental option as 'the activation of a deep *knowledge of self* and of *basic freedom* by which a person commits himself.'[43] It includes, he says, 'a continuing free activation that is inherent in all our important choices, or at least tends to give them the character of basic freedom.'[44] Sin, he says, 'in its fully malicious sense [i.e., mortal sin], is turning away from God, and it destroys the fundamental option for the good self-commitment to the service of God and love of neighbour.'[45] In other words, in mortal sin, one's deep knowledge of self and one's basic freedom is turned away from God and neighbour, and is turned instead towards the self. Gula provides a similar definition of mortal sin. Mortal sin, he says, 'as an expression of the person from deep levels of *knowledge* and *freedom*, is a conscious decision to act in a way which fashions a style of life that turns us away from relating to God, others, and the world in a positive and life-giving way.'[46]

Häring's and Gula's approach to moral truth in general, and to mortal sin in particular, is that of the historicist. In the introduction to this chapter we looked at Keenan's definition of the historicist, in which he says that 'historically minded theologians look at the world and the truth as constantly emerging.' Consequently, Häring and Gula tend not to focus on particular acts which they regard as universally and immutably sinful. Instead they focus on

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[43] Häring, *Free and Faithful*, 168, my italics.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 211.
[46] Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith*, 110, my italics.

the person's general orientation towards God and the good, recognizing that the act itself tells us something of the person's fundamental option, i.e., whether it is for God and the good, or whether it is for the self. What this approach has in common with the classicist approach (as we see in the next main section of this chapter), is the emphasis on knowledge and freedom in its reflections on mortal sin. Knowledge and freedom are essential prerequisites for determining whether or not a person is in a state of mortal or venial sin. For this reason, we shall examine in the next subsections Häring's and Gula's approaches to the notions of knowledge of the good and human freedom. We seek to determine whether their approaches to these themes provide a sufficient empirical grounding to their notions of sin, thus making their theologies of sin capable of dialoguing with the moral sceptic or determinist.

2.2. Knowledge of the Good

In this subsection, we shall analyse and critique Häring's and Gula's discussions of the notion of the good and of the possibility of discerning the good.

2.2.1. Knowledge of the Good in Häring

Exposition

In the section on natural law in his book, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, Häring discusses the question, 'what is abiding in natural law?' He says that neither Christian nor humanist ethics relies on a natural law theory that suggests that we establish rationally an ethics for all people. However, he continues, the acceptance of historicity and the possibility of approaching natural law in a number of different ways, does not mean that we accept an unlimited relativism. 'We always insist that man has to discover what is good and evil; he cannot determine it arbitrarily.'[47] There are abiding truths, he says, and we may hope that,

[47] Häring, *Free and Faithful*, 323.

throughout history, humankind will affirm more and more clearly these abiding human rights and moral values. He cites as examples the abolition of slavery, the United Nations' declaration on human rights, and the right to conscientious objection to military service.

According to Häring, there is one enduring purpose for humankind and this purpose necessitates faithfulness to knowledge of the past, and receptivity to current opportunities for better knowledge and teaching about the faith. It also requires growth in duty towards the future. This growth can be continually endangered, however, by individuals' sins and by the decay in culture that is so often just the manifestation of the many sins of numerous people, particularly of those in positions of power and influence. Widening the discussion and sharing human experience and reflection, according to Häring, should result in greater deepening of our moral knowledge and to greater discrimination regarding what is enduring and what is time-bound.

He continues by pointing out that our conception of human nature is relational. This does not mean, he says, that we deny our individuality. It simply means that the individual person understands himself or herself as one who acts in fellowship with other people and with communities. One cannot understand the particular shape of morality outside this relational context.

Häring suggests that by appreciating the relational character of human nature we bridge the vital and enduring insight that no group, nation, or section of the Church may inflict time-bound norms on others. This, he says, is 'a warning for all times against a superiority complex that leads to ethical colonialism, to dangerous tensions and even to wars.'[48] The United Nations' affirmation on basic human rights to be recognized and safeguarded by all civilized states is an important development in the perception and advancement of the unchangeable demands of human nature.

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[48] Ibid., 324.

In the section on conscience, Häring discusses the notion of synderesis. The synderesis, according to Häring, 'tells the person that "the good is to be done," or "love your neighbour as yourself." '[49] He discusses a number of theories regarding conscience which he regards as incomplete because they emphasise either the practical intellect or the inborn disposition of the will. Häring attempts to develop a more holistic view of conscience that gives equal weight to intellect and will and also emphasises human emotions.

Most moral theologians today, he says, concur with the view of psychologists and therapists who maintain that conscience is not just a single faculty. Conscience does not reside more in the will than in the intellect; it is a 'dynamic force in both because of their belonging together in the deepest reaches of our psychic and spiritual life.'[50]

Quoting Erich Fromm, Häring describes the dynamic of our conscience as 'the reaction of our total personality to its proper functioning and disfunctioning, not to the function of this or that capacity but to the capacities which constitute our human and individual existence.'[51] Human beings are begotten for wholeness biologically, psychologically, and spiritually. In the innermost depths of our being, Häring contends, we are acutely aware of what can either foster or jeopardize our wholeness and integrity.

The particular judgement of prudence, recognized as a judgement of conscience, is dependent on many conditions. However, that which makes the judgement of prudence urgent and at once attractive is the longing for wholeness which belongs to conscience. Because we are created for wholeness, we are able to 'dynamically decipher and experience the good to which God calls us in the particular situation.'[52] One's conscience, Häring tells us, is only healthy when the complete person – the emotional and the intellectual as well as the energies of the will – is working in profound harmony at the deepest levels of a person's

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[49] Ibid., 230.
[50] Ibid., 234.
[51] Ibid.; Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself: An Enquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* (Greenwich, CT.: Fawcett Premier Books, 1969), 162.
[52] Häring, *Free and Faithful*, 235.

being. This innermost depth is the point where the person is moved by the creative Spirit and led to continually greater wholeness and integrity. It is 'the pivotal personal centre of man's total response to the dynamics, direction and personal thrust of the divine claim on him.'[53] Conscience involves the person's complete selfhood as a moral agent. The intellectual, volitional, and emotional aspects of the conscience are not divided; rather they come together in the innermost depths where, as Häring puts it, 'the person is person to himself.'[54]

Insofar as a person's conscience is complete and receptive he or she is a true sign of the encouragement of the Spirit who restores his or her heart and, through him or her, the whole world. Although on the deepest levels of the human spirit, Häring tells us, intellect and will are separate, they are unable to survive without each other. However, the fact that intellect and will can counter each other is a sign of their limited nature. This opposition of intellect and will does not take place without releasing a depth of sorrow in the very centre in which they are united. The conflict that this opposition creates is felt intensely. In this wound, Haring maintains, the soul cries out for healing. This cry is a sign of the closeness of the Spirit who calls the person to shut the awful rift of opposition by restoring the integrity and balance that makes the person a veritable image and likeness of God.

Because of the deep interpenetration and integration of intellect, will, and affectivity in a person's very being, the intellect's desire for the true and the good is perturbed when, out of malevolent motives, the will works against it. The will also must struggle as it attempts to resist the longing of the intellect for improved knowledge and realization of the good. The person suffers in his or her entire being if there emerges a separation into two different selves, the true self that desires wholeness and truth and the selfish self that looks for that which is merely an image of the good. As the foundation and origin of the oneness of all one's powers, the soul is tormented, torn apart by conflict.

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[53] Ibid.; Paul Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 253/254.
[54] Häring, *Free and Faithful*, 235.

Critique

According to Häring, as we have seen, 'we always insist that man has to discover what is good and evil; he cannot determine it arbitrarily.' There are, he says, abiding truths, and we may hope that humankind will affirm ever more clearly these abiding human rights and moral values. He cites as examples the abolition of slavery, the United Nations' declaration on human rights, and the right to conscientious objection to military service.

It seems sensible to suggest that human beings should not determine arbitrarily what is good and evil, and that we should discover this for ourselves. However, the possibility of such discovery of the good, or even the existence of the good, is presupposed in Häring's work. The fact that Häring 'insists' that we must discover for ourselves what is good and evil is not evidence that such a discovery is possible. Simply citing a few examples of 'abiding human rights and moral values,' is an insufficient method of engaging with the sceptic's suggestion that knowledge of the good is impossible.

According to Häring, the enrichment of moral knowledge and a greater discernment between that which is abiding and that which is time-bound will come from a broadening of dialogue and a sharing of human experience and reflection. Agreement on issues pertaining to morality will no doubt be fostered by dialogue, as long as the partners in the dialogue agree that moral knowledge is possible. If, however, one of the dialogue partners cannot see how moral knowledge is possible, it is up to the other partner to attempt to convince his opponent of this possibility. This is a necessary first step in a dialogue with somebody who does not necessarily share our world-view. Unless this first obstacle is overcome, any further discussion regarding the particulars of the moral life, i.e., questions of what is morally acceptable or not, is meaningless.

In his discussion of conscience, Häring says that the synderesis 'tells the person that "the good is to be done," or "love your neighbour as yourself." ' Very few people would

argue with the statement 'the good is to be done.' There are those, however, who might add to this statement in something like the following terms: yes, the good should be done, but how do we determine what exactly is good? Is such discernment possible? Can we really say that there exists something which we can objectively call the good? Is the good not just a human construction dependant on the time, place, and culture of the person attempting to decide what is good or evil?

Häring doesn't really engage with these questions. His notion of conscience is based on the understanding that human beings are begotten for wholeness biologically, psychologically, and spiritually, and because we are created for wholeness, we are able to 'dynamically decipher and experience the good to which God calls us in the particular situation.' This argument fails to engage with the sceptic because it is just too theological. This may seem like a strange criticism. After all, why should a theologian not be as theological as he or she wishes to be? My answer to this question is that theology is essentially about communication. In doing theology we attempt to understand something of our faith and to communicate our understanding to others. By suggesting that knowledge of the good is possible because we are 'begotten for wholeness' and that because of this we can decipher and experience the good to which God calls us, Häring limits his audience to those who already share his basic world-view, namely other Christians.

In discussing the interpenetration of intellect, will, and affectivity, Häring claims that 'the intellect's desire for the true and the good' is perturbed when the will works against it. He makes the further claim that the will must struggle as it attempts to resist 'the longing of the intellect for improved knowledge and realization of the good.' This argument rests on two presuppositions: 1) there is an objective reality called the good, 2) the intellect desires knowledge of and realization of the good. Häring fails to demonstrate empirically the reality

of these positions. As a result, his argument is unconvincing to anybody who does not share his basic world-view.

2.2.2. Knowledge of the Good in Gula

Exposition

In his book, *Reason Informed by Faith*, Gula discusses the notion of the good in two different contexts. The first discussion of the good is within the context of the debate on the distinctiveness of Christian morality; the second is within the context of his discussion of conscience.

(a) Gula begins by observing that philosophers' convictions about the good have for a long time influenced moral dispositions and actions. For Aristotle, Gula points out, the good is happiness, for hedonists it is pleasure, and for utilitarians it lies in that which is most useful. Scholastic philosophy establishes an identity between 'good' and 'being's own perfection.'[55] This means that the nature of the good is to fully realize one's potential, or to attain perfection. The inborn propensity within the person to search for perfection is 'the ontological basis for the fundamental moral obligation – to realize one's potential, or to be all that one can be.'[56] Moral actions are those that proceed from this inborn propensity and contribute to the full realization of human possibilities. As faith informs reason on the nature of the good, the believer regards God as the fullness of being. Consequently he or she sees God's actions as good because they proceed from love, which is the divine nature.

Gula points out that Christians are not set apart by the fact that they have strong beliefs about the good; they are set apart by the kinds of beliefs they hold. Christian conviction regarding the good is directed by the religious beliefs revealed in biblical stories, especially in Jesus, and further developed in the Church's theological tradition. The

[55] For example, in the *Summa Theologica* I, q. 5, a. 1 St Thomas says that '" being good" describes a mode of existence when used without qualification to mean achieving complete actuality.'
[56] Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith*, 43.

fundamental Christian assertion regarding the good and where the good can be found is that God is good. All other things are good only as they relate to God as an image or mediation of God. Christianity, which proclaims a belief in one God, permits only one source of value. Other types of goodness always have their source in and are reliant on the antecedent goodness of God. To set up anything else but the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus as the source of that which is good is idolatrous.

God's goodness, Gula continues, is revealed in scripture, especially in Jesus the Christ. Knowledge of God's goodness is attained through knowledge of Jesus in scripture, and through interpreting human experience in view of Jesus and the scriptures. The beliefs we hold regarding God shape our assumptions about the moral life. According to Gula, the fundamental belief in the goodness of God, who is the only source of goodness and the unchanging point of reference for morality, gives Christian morality an objective grounding. It also makes response to God a categorical moral duty.

The conviction that God is the source of the good gives the Christian a reason for being moral. In answer to the question 'Why be moral?' the Christian looks to his or her experience and belief in God's goodness. The Christian is moral because God is good, and because the goodness of the omnipresent God allows and obliges us to take responsibility for the world's goodness. This belief about God's goodness and presence produces a normative assertion regarding the moral life informed by faith: 'Human moral striving ought to be responsive to God and to be governed by what we can know of the goodness of God and of God's own good activity.'[57] The central question that this outlook broaches for morality is: 'What is God enabling and requiring me to be and to do?' To answer this question, Gula tells us, continuing discernment is an essential aspect of the moral life so that we may bring to light the ways in which we may be more receptive to God.

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[57] Ibid., 44.

(b) In his discussion of conscience, Gula speaks of the three dimensions of conscience to which, he tells us, the Catholic tradition ascribes. The first is the synderesis, which Gula defines as 'the basic tendency or capacity within us to know and to do the good.'[58] The second is moral science, the process of realizing the particular good which should be done or the bad that must be avoided. The third is conscience, 'the specific judgement of the good which "I must do" in this particular situation.'[59]

Synderesis is the ability to know and do that which is good and to avoid that which is evil. The reality of this inclination to the good makes possible lively debate about what is right or wrong in each occurrence of moral choice. The vast display of moral disagreement that we experience in our lives does not invalidate the existence of synderesis; rather it affirms it. Synderesis gives us a general perception of moral value and the general perception that it matters that we do the right thing in every particular instance.

We also, Gula tells us, need moral science. The strength of synderesis gives us power to seek the objective moral values in each particular instance so that we may uncover the right thing to do. The discovery of the active moral values and the right thing to do is the function of moral science. Its primary functions are precise discernment and right moral reasoning. Consequently, much attention is given to moral science in moral debates and in moral education. It is the domain of moral blindness or insight, moral disagreement or error. It requires education, formation, information, examination, and transformation. In other words, moral science is the subject of the practice we call 'the formation of conscience.' This practice aims at accurate seeing and correct thinking. In its responsibility to moral truth, moral science is enlightened and aided in diverse ways to apprehend and take hold of this truth. Moral science, then, is shaped in community and extracts from numerous sources of moral wisdom in order to know what it means to be a truly moral human being.

[58] Ibid., 131.
[59] Ibid.

Conscience in the third sense of the term ('the specific judgement of the good which "I must do" in this particular situation') takes us from perception and reasoning to action. The general inclination to the good (synderesis) and the process whereby we consider the significant moral factors (moral science) meet to create 'the judgement of what I must now do and the commitment to do it'[60] (conscience). Others can aid us in making this judgement, but nothing can take the place of making the judgement that only I can make. That which characterizes the judgement of conscience (in the third sense) is that it is invariably a judgement for me. It is never a judgement of what someone else must do, but only what I must do. The essence of conscience's dignity and freedom is to be found in this third sense of conscience. The demand that conscience in this sense makes on me is this: 'I must always do what I believe to be right and avoid what I believe to be wrong.'[61] If one sincerely believes with one's whole being that a particular course of action rather than another is the objective will of God, then that course of action is no longer just one alternative among a multitude. It becomes, rather, a moral requirement for the person; this is the meaning of the term 'bound to follow one's conscience.' Conscience, in the third sense, must not be contravened. It is what *Gaudium et Spes* calls the 'most secret core and sanctuary of the person'[62] where he or she is alone with God.

Critique

Like Häring, Gula fails to dialogue with the moral sceptic by directly equating the good with God: 'The basic Christian conviction about what is good and where it can be found is that God is good.'[63] In terms of knowledge of the good, Gula asserts that knowledge of God's goodness is attained through knowledge of Jesus in scripture, and through interpreting

[60] Ibid., 133.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.; GS 16.
[63] Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith*, 44.

human experience in view of Jesus and the scriptures. The beliefs we hold regarding God shape our assumptions about the moral life. The fundamental belief in the goodness of God, who is the only source of goodness and the unchanging point of reference for morality, gives Christian morality an objective grounding.

By simply equating the good with God, Gula, as I have already suggested, alienates the more sceptical reader. Furthermore, his notion of how knowledge of the good is attained causes the same alienation. The idea that knowledge of the good is only to be found through knowledge of Jesus in scripture, and through interpreting human experience in view of Jesus and the scriptures, rules out the possibility that the non-Christian can properly know anything about the good. More importantly though, for the purposes of this dissertation, is the fact that Gula's assertion that knowledge of the good is to be found through knowledge of Jesus in the scriptures, fails to provide an adequate empirical grounding to the notion of the good and the possibility of its been discerned by human beings. Leaving aside for a moment the fact that God is, from our perspective, the complete good, and that we come to know God through the scriptures, we must, if we are to communicate with the moral sceptic, be able to speak of the good and the possibility of its discernment in terms that are not so overtly theological.

As we have seen, in his discussion of conscience, Gula speaks of the three dimensions of conscience: 1. Synderesis; 2. Moral Science; 3. Conscience. Gula describes the synderesis as 'the basic tendency or capacity within us to know and to do the good.' In arguing for the existence of the synderesis, Gula claims that the reality of the inclination to the good makes possible lively debate about what is right or wrong in each occurrence of moral choice. The vast display, he says, of moral disagreement that we experience in our lives does not invalidate but in fact affirms the existence of synderesis. Synderesis gives us a general perception of moral value and the general perception that it matters that we do the right thing in every particular instance. Gula's argument effectively states that the fact that we disagree

on matters pertaining to morality is evidence that we have a general perception of moral value and that doing the right thing matters. This argument makes sense up to a point. I agree with Gula that the fact of moral disagreement indicates a general perception that doing the right thing matters. However, this still leaves us with the same questions we observed in relation to Haring's presentation of synderesis, questions regarding the possibility that there exists an objective reality called the good, and the possibility of human discernment of this reality. Gula's argument for the existence of something called synderesis is plausible, but the question of whether or not what we perceive in the synderesis reveals an objective reality is left unanswered (and indeed unasked).

Because Gula's presentation of the synderesis has not established the possibility of revealing an objective reality that we call the good, the notion of moral science, the process of realizing the particular good, falls apart. According to Gula, as we have seen, moral science has a responsibility to moral truth; it is enlightened and aided in diverse ways to apprehend and take hold of this truth. Gula's notion of moral science, looked at empirically, is invalidated by the failure of his discussion of synderesis to rationally demonstrate the existence of the good and the possibility of its discernment, as the realization of the particular good presupposes the existence of the good in general. The third dimension of conscience, 'the specific judgement of the good which "I must do" in this particular situation,' is also invalidated by the failure of Gula's presentation of the synderesis to demonstrate the possibility of human discernment of the objective good. The imperative 'I must do' is only binding if we can establish the possibility of discerning an objective reality called the good.

2.3. Human Freedom

In this subsection, we shall examine Häring's and Gula's discussions of the notion of human freedom, focusing on their attempts to supply some sort of empirical grounding to this notion.

2.3.1. Häring's Notion of Human Freedom

Exposition

In a book entitled *Free and Faithful in Christ* it is not surprising that Häring gives 'great attention throughout this book to the nature and dynamics of freedom.'[64] In a section of this book entitled 'Responsibility in Creative Liberty,' Häring's intention is to 'show that creative freedom is a main trait of a Christian ethics of responsibility.'[65] Indeed, he continues, 'no genuine ethics can be understood without explaining clearly what freedom means and does not mean.'[66] It is because of this positive statement of intent to clearly set out the meaning of freedom that we turn our attention to this section of Häring's work.

According to Häring, 'we can be creative in freedom only because we are called and liberated by Love Incarnate, Jesus Christ, our Redeemer.'[67] In his creative love, he beckons us and makes us participants and co-revealers in his continuing creative and redemptive work. For Häring, God's creative and redemptive love is the overflowing of God's own freedom. But, he says, if this is so, God desires that we become co-creators and co-artists, not just insipid perpetrators of his will.

Following Bultmann, Häring conceives love as the object and the law of freedom.[68] The law of Christ is, then, in essence a law of pure and perfect freedom. The freedom we attain through that freedom whereby God makes known his boundless love is complete

[64] Häring, *Free and Faithful*, 67.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid., 67-68.
[67] Ibid., 68.
[68] See chapter 3 of Bultmann's *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (London: SCM Press, 1960).

freedom for genuine love. God, Häring tells us, has no need for us. However, in his limitless freedom he made us to be co-creators through the world's history. In Christ God has selected human beings to be collaborators in the continuing redemptive work.

Through his creativity, God has demonstrated that he does not want spiritless administration of his laws or tedious, unoriginal responses. He gives us and asks from us 'a creative response in generosity beyond general norms.'[69] The relationship is one of dialogue. A sincere dialogue is somewhat different from reeling off a studied text. If we listen attentively to the other, something new is created within us. While we keep positively in our minds that everything is a gift from God and warrants thankfulness, this does not imply that our response is in any way determined by God. Through God's very gift, he assists and wants human beings to creatively enhance salvation history.

This history is one where people communicate with God and with each other, where all participants take part in the co-creative dialogue. The consequences of our response are not already established. 'It is something which God does not reveal directly to man but he looks to man to complete the revelation himself.'[70] This, of course, does not imply that the revelation is a human creation. The creative discernment that takes place through the course of history is very much God's work. Yet it is also the work of human beings in what Häring calls 'co-creativity.' This gift of co-creativity has its origins in the deepest levels of God's freedom.

God does not bestow these gifts upon us without a purpose. He wills that we use these gifts in his work of redemption. Those who squander or refuse God's gift of creativity impede the redemptive mission, and are accountable. Such absence of creativity is most apparent in a legalism that fails to highlight the freshness of a Christian morality that transcends the letter

[69] Häring, *Free and Faithful*, 69.
[70] Ibid.; see Nicolai Berdiaev's *Truth and Revelation*, trans. R. M. French (New York: Collier Books, 1962).

of the law. To be so deficient in creativity is to sin against the Lord of history who desires at all times to reveal his own creative love and freedom, through our participation.

According to Häring, it is only in sin that human freedom is utterly uncreative. When a person neglects to do the good he/she could and should do, or does the bad he/she could have refrained from, he/she not only lessens his/her own freedom but also impoverishes salvation history by the uncreative or damaging use of his/her freedom.

Yet, Häring says, it must be clearly understood that we are able to talk about personal sin only because we possess freedom. The human being 'has the power of contradicting himself and his essential nature. Man is free even from his freedom; that is, he can surrender his humanity.'[71] Through the misuse of the 'very freedom which is our title to the human dignity granted by God, the sinner gradually destroys his freedom to choose the good.'[72] In freedom he/she chooses to disregard the truth that 'the freedom of the Christian is a freedom for Jesus: to be free for a divine purpose that is from the beginning.'[73]

Critique

The notion that our freedom stems from God's own freedom insofar as God calls us to participate in his redemptive work, from a theological point of view is unobjectionable. However, in terms of demonstrating empirically the existence of human freedom, this way of viewing freedom is of little use. Again, Häring is being too theological to convince anyone who does not hold the same basic world-view as himself. For Häring, love is the object and the law of freedom, and the law of Christ is a law of pure and perfect freedom. This notion of freedom is Christocentric, an extremely important element in Häring's work, as the title of his two major treatises on moral theology suggest: *The Law of Christ* and *Free and Faithful in*

[71] Häring, *Free and Faithful*, 70; see Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 32.
[72] Häring, *Free and Faithful*, 70.
[73] Ibid.; Robert T. Osbourn, *Freedom in Modern Theology* (Westminster: Westminster Press, 1968), 125.

Christ. The same critique, however, applies: Häring's conception of freedom is just too theological to engage with people with other world-views.

Häring understands human freedom as an historical 'co-creative dialogue' between human beings and God. The creative discernment that takes place through the course of history, he says, is very much God's work. Yet it is also the work of human beings in 'co-creativity.' This gift of co-creativity, Häring says, has its origins in the deepest levels of God's freedom. This argument for human freedom contains a number of presuppositions: 1) the existence of a supernatural being, namely God, 2) the ability of human beings to communicate with this supernatural being, 3) the freedom of this supernatural being. These are things that as Christians we take for granted. However, if we are to convince those who do not share our basic world-view that human freedom is possible, we must leave aside these presuppositions and attempt to dialogue with the sceptic or determinist in terms that he/she can engage with. This is not to suggest that our Christian presuppositions are unimportant or that we should lose sight of who we are. On the contrary, it is probably precisely because we are Christians and because as Christians we hold certain views about the world, that we find ourselves in a position of defending the possibility of human freedom. However, if our dialogue is to be fruitful, we must engage with our dialogue partners in a way that takes account of and respects their often quite contradictory world-views.

To say that we can only speak of personal sin because we possess freedom makes perfect sense. Insofar as we are not free, we cannot be held accountable for our actions, and where there is no culpability we cannot speak of sin. However, Häring goes on to attempt to demonstrate the existence of freedom in a manner that is completely unscientific and therefore incapable of convincing the non-Christian. He simply quotes two theologians who claim that freedom is a reality. He prefaces the second of these quotations with the assertion

that it is the truth. However, he presents no rational argument or empirical evidence to support this position.

For Häring, as we have seen, it is only in sin that human freedom is utterly uncreative. When one neglects to do the good one could and should do, or does the bad one could have refrained from, one not only lessens one's own freedom but also impoverishes salvation history by the uncreative or damaging use of one's freedom. Häring again provides us with an argument that contains many presuppositions: 1) Human beings have free will, 2) there is an objective good and an objective bad, 3) there is such a thing as salvation and salvation history. As I noted in relation to the presuppositions of Häring's argument that freedom is a 'co-creative dialogue' between human beings and God, these are things that the Christian takes for granted. The world, however, contains more than just Christians, and effective dialogue is essential if we are to find some common ground on which to discuss matters pertaining to morality. For this reason, we must set aside our presuppositions and engage with our dialogue partners – in this instance, determinists – in a way that does not alienate them.

2.3.2. Gula's Notion of Human Freedom

Exposition

In his book, *Reason Informed by Faith*, Gula gives an account of freedom which directly engages with the notion of determinism. As we grow in self-knowledge, he says, we come to identify the restrictions to who we can become and to what we are able to accomplish. We become aware that we are the product of something outside ourselves. To illustrate, Gula looks at the influence of genetics and social-cultural conditioning. Our genetic endowment, he argues, is unchangeable. No matter how much we will, we cannot change what has been passed on to us through heredity; we may, however, change the way we develop what is there. Genetic tendencies emphasize our uniqueness and influence our

possibilities. Genetic inheritance, however, does not determine definitively what we do or who we become. Our freedom, Gula argues, 'can be exercised across a broad spectrum of genetic possibilities and is subject to environmental influences. We must find our way within the limits of these potentials and the forces of the social-cultural conditions which shape our worldview and influence not only the way we interpret experience but even the kinds of experience we have.'[74] The regularly offered advice 'Be yourself' is not just consent to 'turn in on oneself;' it is, rather, a prompting to 'express oneself within one's own limits according to one's own predispositions.'[75] Freedom inevitably acts within the already existing restrictions of genetic inheritance and milieu.

In confronting these restrictions or limitations, Gula argues, we risk selling out to determinism. This selling out is an effort to flee freedom by suggesting that human beings are impelled to be who they are and to do what they do by inheritance or environment. By selling out, we fail to take responsibility for any of our choices or actions. By rejecting the freedom which belongs to us, we demonstrate fear of taking responsibility for ourselves. One of the goals of life is to accomplish freedom in the areas where we have not yet attained freedom. The principle aim, therefore, of moral education is to liberate us from becoming guided by the unchangeable specifics of genetic inheritance or by the variable restrictions of an external authority. It is to free us to live a good life within the restrictions of inheritance and environment.

Gula proceeds by arguing that 'the behavioural sciences have clearly shown that our freedom is limited. Our actions fall somewhere on the continuum between absolute freedom and absolute determinism.'[76] If this was not the case, he continues, we would not experience feelings of unease or indecision about the choices we make. Furthermore, reflection and deliberation would be invalidated if human beings were totally free or totally determined.

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[74] Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith*, 76.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.

‘Assuming, then, some freedom of self-determination in the moral life, we recognize that one purpose of this freedom is to appropriate actively what happens to us into the persons we are and can yet become.’[77] We do not, Gula argues, look at human life as if we should be given a winning hand. What matters, rather, is that we skilfully play the hand we have been dealt. Freedom allows human beings to incorporate the ‘slings and arrows of outrageous fortune’ into their lives in order that they may move toward wholeness and integrity and live in harmony. In order to accomplish this we must make the events of our lives part of who we are. The ability to turn necessity into virtue is an indication that we possess a robust moral character; it is a manifestation of our potential for self-determination.

We cannot, Gula argues, be considered morally culpable for the determining factors of our lives. However, since these factors make up a part of who we are, we must appropriate them into ourselves. As we become ever more conscious or ourselves and as we possess ourselves more and more, including all determining factors, we will see ourselves as being responsible for our actions and for the people we become.

Our freedom to choose what we make of ourselves puts us directly in contact with what theologians refer to as basic or core freedom. Basic freedom looks toward a loving relationship with God, who is the ultimate goal or end of our lives. However, because we experience God by various means of mediation, we finally build our friendship with God in and through the means by which we connect with everything in the world. This is why basic freedom of self-determination before God is always manifested in the specific decisions we make in our lives.

[77] Ibid.

Critique

In his discussion of freedom, Gula directly engages with the notion of determinism. The way in which he does this, however, is unscientific and unconvincing. He argues that genetic inheritance does not determine definitively what we do or who we become. In terms of a dialogue with determinism, this is a very important point. However, Gula provides no evidence to support his argument. In fact to call this an argument is inaccurate: he simply *states* this as a fact and the reader is expected to accept it without question.

He proceeds by suggesting that freedom inevitably acts within the already existing restrictions of genetic inheritance and milieu. Gula speaks of freedom as if it is a given. His attempts to engage with the notion of determinism amount to nothing more than an assertion, unsupported by evidence, that determinism is wrong and that freedom is a reality. He suggests that determinism is a sell out, a fear of taking responsibility for ourselves. This is a plausible suggestion up to a point. It makes sense that people might take the notion of determinism and use it to avoid taking responsibility for their actions. Indeed, the refusal to take responsibility for one's actions is one of the defining characteristics of sin. However, the implication is that all determinists are moral cowards. This is unfair, unwarranted, and, more importantly, unsupported by evidence.

Gula goes on to state that 'the behavioural sciences have clearly shown that our freedom is limited. Our actions fall somewhere on the continuum between absolute freedom and absolute determinism.' However, he fails to provide any support for this contention. He does not provide even a footnote to suggest where one might find evidence of this assertion.

If it was not the case that human beings possessed some level of freedom, he suggests, we would not experience feelings of unease or indecision about the choices we make. This is a weak argument. It could just as easily be argued that feelings of unease about decisions we make do not come from a genuine freedom, but rather from a *belief* that we are free. We

could reason that the psychological experience of trying to make the right choice regarding an action would be identical whether or not freedom was an objective reality or merely an intellectual belief.

Apparently satisfied that his argument is convincing, Gula continues: '*Assuming*, then, some freedom of self-determination in the moral life, we recognize that one purpose of this freedom is to appropriate actively what happens to us into the persons we are and can yet become' (my italics). This is a big assumption and, as we have seen, it is based on unsupported arguments. Gula attempts to say what the purpose of our freedom is, but fails to achieve what is more fundamental, namely the necessary first step of demonstrating the *possibility* of freedom.

Gula's discussion of freedom gets progressively worse as he resorts to a number of clichéd expressions in an effort to explain the meaning of freedom. We do not, he says, look at human life as if we should be given a winning hand. What matters is that we *skilfully play the hand we have been dealt*. Shakespeare is then invoked as Gula suggests that freedom enables human beings to incorporate the *slings and arrows of outrageous fortune* into their lives in order that they may move toward wholeness and integrity and live in harmony. The ability to *turn necessity into virtue*, he continues, is an indication that we possess a robust moral character; it is a manifestation of our potential for self-determination. This method of argumentation is one of personal reflection on personally held beliefs. Gula is apparently attempting to be somewhat poetic in his reflections. The result, however, is a sentimental account of human freedom that is scientifically weak and completely incapable of convincing anyone who does not share his presuppositions.

3. MORTAL SIN AS CONSCIOUS AND FREELY CHOSEN ACT: GERMAIN GRISEZ AND WILLIAM E. MAY

In this section, we shall examine the theologies of sin of Germain Grisez and William E. May. The work of these theologians is representative of a more classicist approach to moral theology than that of Häring and Gula. For Grisez and May mortal sin lies not in one's fundamental option against God or the good, but in particular acts that demonstrate a conscious and free decision to go against God's will. This approach to moral theology emphasises the universality and immutability of moral truths as revealed in scripture and interpreted unquestionably by the magisterium.

As in the previous section, our discussion will focus on the themes of mortal sin, and Grisez's and May's attempts to provide a solid rational foundation for this notion in their discussions of knowledge of the good and human freedom.

3.1. Mortal Sin

In this subsection, we shall examine the notion of mortal sin in the work of Grisez and May.

3.1.1. Grisez's Notion of Mortal Sin

Grisez, in his book *Christian Moral Principles*, defines mortal sin as 'a sin which is incompatible with divine life.'[78] Those, he says, that commit and remain in mortal sin exclude themselves from the kingdom of God, separate themselves from Jesus, and banish the Holy Spirit from their hearts. They render themselves incapable of life in the Church, especially of receiving Holy Communion, which communicates and nurtures the living oneness of humankind redeemed in Christ.

[78] Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles*, 365.

Grisez goes on to discuss the three conditions required for mortal sin: grave matter, sufficient reflection, and full consent. We shall focus on the second and third conditions, as it is these conditions that are most relevant to our discussion.

Sufficient reflection, Grisez begins, necessitates more than mere consciousness of what one is doing. Without this consciousness, he says, an act is not human at all. Sufficient reflection also involves knowing that the act is gravely wrong. Reflection sufficient for mortal sin exists, then, if two conditions are met: first, if one disregards one's conscience, and second, if one's conscience tells one that the matter is either grave or may be grave.

At the relevant time, a person must in fact be conscious of the wrongness of the act. It is not enough that one could be, and indeed has a responsibility to be, aware. In such a situation one is responsible chiefly for failing to form one's conscience; one is not, however, gravely responsible for every unseen evil that results from this failure.

The relevant time, according to Grisez, is not the time of execution, but the time of decision. He gives the example of an alcoholic who, while realizing that he or she has a serious duty to look for help, and foreseeing future neglect of family responsibilities if help is not sought, nevertheless makes a decision not to seek help at this time. The relevant time is the time when one makes this decision. While the decision is made with sufficient reflection, the neglect that results from the decision occurs later, when the alcoholic can no longer reflect properly on or demonstrate proper concern for family responsibilities.

Reflection can be insufficient when one's mental state incapacitates one to think clearly about what one is about to do. Grisez gives the examples of extreme fatigue, semiwakefulness, partial sedation, great pressure, and distraction. In these instances it can signify insufficient reflection that the person in question did not in any way plan the act in that situation, that the act was not the type of act normally committed by this person, and that it was strongly renounced the moment it was reflected upon with complete attention.

Full consent, Grisez continues, is a definite choice. Even when one knows that an act would be gravely wrong, one has not sinned until a positive decision has been made. The choice itself need not pertain to a wrongful act; it can effect an immoral commitment, or it can be concerned instead with an omission. It may also involve acquiescence to outcomes we have a serious duty to avoid.

According to Grisez, one can make a choice without communicating it in words or implementing it in any type of behaviour. One can also, he says, choose in such a way that a range of possibilities is left open to be settled by additional choices. He gives the example of a person who decides to indulge in some form of immoral satisfaction and only after the decision thinks about specifics. In such a situation, the choice required for a mortal sin is made at the moment when a suggestion concerning grave matter, however generally this term is understood, is assented to with sufficient reflection.

Judgements of conscience can pertain to the activity of deliberation itself as well as to other acts. If a person is sufficiently conscious of a serious duty to reflect upon and decide a particular matter and chooses not to do so, or is sufficiently conscious of a serious duty to put aside a particular reflection (perhaps by thinking about something else) yet chooses to continue in it, then, according to Grisez, a definite choice has been made which is mortally sinful.

To illustrate, Grisez provides the following example: knowing that someone else is committing a seriously wrong act, a person can be conscious of a duty to reflect upon possible ways of rectifying the situation. Although this duty might be acknowledged as serious, the potential discomfort of carrying it out could cause the person to be a tempted to abandon this duty. Such a choice would be inconsistent with a judgement of conscience that recognized the graveness of the duty to reflect, and would therefore constitute a mortal sin.

3.1.2. May's Notion of Mortal Sin[79]

May defines sin as 'a morally evil act, i.e., a freely chosen act known to be contrary to the eternal law as this is made manifest in our conscience.'[80] According to May, the freely chosen act, as morally evil, is stripped of the goodness it can and should have. The sinful act, seen as an evil or privation in the moral order, obstructs the realization of human beings on all levels of existence, damaging and distorting the person in his or her depths. The sinful act also injures human community and fractures the friendship that God wants to exist between himself and all of humanity.

May continues by defining sin as 'a freely chosen act of self-determination opposed to the eternal law.'[81] Seen in this way, he says, sin is an act bereft of the openness it can and should have to the complete good of human beings, the good to which they are guided by God's eternal law. Sin, he says, is a consciously chosen act which the person knows contravenes the fundamental rule or basic norm of human activity, namely, that such activity, 'in accord with the divine plan and will, should harmonize with the members of society to pursue their total vocation and fulfil it.'[82]

According to May, God's eternal law, his sagacious and benevolent design for guiding human beings to their full realization, is known, to some degree at least, even by those who do not believe. This is because the basic requirements of God's eternal law are, as St Paul put it, written in their hearts.[83] Or as Vatican II puts it, the requirements of God's eternal law are revealed to persons through the mediation of conscience.[84] For this reason one who knowingly acts against the truth revealed in conscience always diverges from the

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[79] May does not use the heading 'mortal sin' for the discussion that I shall presently summarize. However, in the next section he makes the following statement about this discussion: 'the understanding of sin developed in the previous pages applies properly only to what the Catholic tradition has come to call 'mortal' or deadly or grave sin.' William E. May, *An Introduction to Moral Theology*, Revised Edition (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1994), 165.
[80] Ibid., 160.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid., 161; GS 35.
[83] Rom. 1:18-22.
[84] DH 3; GS 16-17.

benevolent plan of the eternal law; in this way he or she offends and resists God. May here quotes St Thomas: ‘it is precisely from the perspective of its nature as an offence against God that sin is considered in theology.’[85] Indeed, May continues, St Thomas maintained that even those who are not baptized can, due to their power of self-determining free choice and with the aid of God’s unfaltering grace, acknowledge God and his law of love or renounce him and his law in their first completely human act of self-determining free choice.

The substance or matter of the sin, for May, is the word, deed, or desire. What makes the particular word, deed, or desire sinful is the fact that the person freely chooses what he or she knows to be opposed to God’s benevolent design. In doing this he/she gives him/herself the identity of one opposed to this benevolent design, that is, a sinner. For believers, moreover, God’s eternal law is revealed not just through the mediation of conscience illuminated by reason but also through the mediation of the revelation pronounced by the Church and acquiesced to in faith. The faithful know, or should know, that immoral acts that are freely chosen not only contravene God’s benevolent design for the human race but also savagely reject his gift of life and love. For May, sin, regarded as an offence against God, becomes particularly heinous for the faithful as it is an act of ingratitude and unfaithfulness. It is for this reason, May observes, that the prophets frequently equated sin with adultery.

By sinning, Christians substitute the life of liberty procured for them by Christ for continued death and slavery.[86] Furthermore, since the Christian, because he or she is baptized, is irreversibly a member of Christ’s body the Church,[87] there is an ecclesial dimension to every sin of a Christian. Sin, in other words, contravenes the Christian’s duty to Christ and to the Church.[88]

[85] May, *Moral Theology*, 161; St Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* I-II, 71, 6, ad 5.
[86] May, *Moral Theology*, 162; cf. Rom 6 and Gal 5.
[87] May, *Moral Theology*, 162; cf. 1 Cor. 6.
[88] May, Moral Theology, 162; cf. Rom 14:7-8; Gal 5:13 – 6:10.

3.1.3. Summary and Analysis

In contrast to the approach of Häring and Gula who speak of mortal sin in terms of the person's fundamental option against God and the good, for Grisez and May mortal sin is constituted by particular acts committed in full awareness of the seriousness of the act and in full freedom. For example, Grisez defines mortal sin in terms of a single act that destroys human union with God. Mortal sin, he says, is '*a sin* which is incompatible with divine life.'[89] When Grisez speaks of the second criterion for discerning whether or not a sin is mortal or venial, he says that 'sufficient reflection also requires awareness that *the act* is gravely wrong.'[90] And when speaking of the third criterion, he says that 'even when aware that *an act* would be gravely evil, one has not sinned until one has made a definite choice.'[91] Similarly, May defines mortal sin as 'a morally evil act, i.e., a freely chosen act known to be contrary to the eternal law'[92] and as 'a freely chosen act of self-determination opposed to the eternal law.'[93] This approach is generally classicist as it emphasises universal and unchanging truths that human beings are capable of knowing and expressing. This is in contrast to the generally historicist approach of Häring and Gula which emphasises a person's general orientation towards God and the good, and regards truth as continually emerging. These approaches are strikingly different, and the differences have been, and continue to be, the subject of much controversy and debate.

However, while these two approaches to moral theology in general and to the notion of sin in particular are very different, they have something very important in common: they both use the traditional criteria used by the Church for discerning whether a sin is mortal or venial: grave matter, sufficient reflection, and full consent. Grisez and May, like Häring and Gula, attempt to ground their notions of mortal sin in their discussions of knowledge of the

[89] Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles*, 365, my italics.
[90] Ibid., 366, my italics.
[91] Ibid., 367, my italics.
[92] May, *Moral Theology*, 160.
[93] Ibid.

good and human freedom. In the following subsections, we shall examine these discussions. As in our examination of Häring and Gula, we seek to determine whether or not these discussions provide sufficient empirical evidence for positing the notions of ethical knowledge and human freedom to an audience that does not necessarily share our religious presuppositions, namely, moral sceptics and determinists.

3.2. Knowledge of the Good

In this subsection, we shall examine and critique Grisez's and May's notions of the good and the possibility of discerning the good.

3.2.1. Knowledge of the Good in Grisez

Exposition

As a Thomist, the first principle of practical reason for Grisez is the synderesis. In chapter 7 of volume 1 of his *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, he formulates the synderesis as follows: 'The good is to be done and pursued; the bad is to be avoided.'[94] The first principle of practical reason, Grisez contends, is a self-evident truth. One understands it to be true as soon as one understands the meaning of its terms. In chapter 5, Grisez has already examined the central meaning of the term 'good.'

As it originates from the hand of God, he says, all creation is good. Grisez here cites Genesis: 'God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good'.[95] Even things contaminated by sin, he continues, can be saved, for their primary goodness is not completely corrupted. 'For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is

[94] Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles*, 178; St Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* I-II, 94, a 2.
[95] Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles*, 115; Gen. 1:31.

received with thanksgiving; for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.'[96] Made in the likeness of God, human beings as created and carnal are completely good.

Grisez goes on to discuss the notion of good as 'fullness of being.' Creatures, he says, do not possess complete fullness of being, but they can possess true fullness in keeping with their kind and condition – in keeping with their particular and real potentialities for developing and becoming more. As creatures, human beings develop, that is they do not exist fully from the beginning. Their goodness necessitates that they come to be the most that they can be at each successive juncture of their lives. Yet, Grisez observes, not every fulfilment of potentialities is good. Goodness consists in a realization of potentialities which results in being and being more, whereas badness lies in the fulfilment of a potentiality which stifles further possibilities and decreases prospects for self-realization which would otherwise be available to a person.

Because God is infinite in being, Grisez says, he is also infinitely good; in God there can be no deficiency. God creates in order to communicate and give something of his unfathomable perfection. While in God there can be no separation between what he is and what he should be, every creature has a function in the universal order which it has a duty to realize. Its realization and completeness of being will be that share in the communication of his goodness which God designated for it in creating it. Badness is want of that fullness to which every created entity is invited. But what, positively, Grisez asks, is this fullness? Clearly, he says, it is not the limitless perfection of God himself, as the badness of creatures lies not in the fact that they are finite as God intended them to be.

According to Grisez, the fullness of being and the goodness of every created being is that fullness of which it is able, insofar as it is a creature of a particular type, with particular capabilities and prospects, to be and be more. A turtle, he says, is not deficient inasmuch as it

[96] Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles*, 115; 1 Tm 4:4-5.

unable to run like a gazelle, nor is there anything wrong with an ape because it does not have a sense of justice. Goodness is the fullness or completeness befitting each created being. Badness is not mere lack; rather, it is privation, a lack of what should be.

In a certain sense, every created being is good by possessing the reality which makes it the sort of being and the peculiar thing it is. This basic goodness, however, is not what we usually intend when we name something 'good.' Usually, when we say that X is good, we mean that it has a completeness which not every X has. 'Good' endorses some X by comparing it with another X. This, Grisez says, is the goodness we are trying to understand.

Creatures are not like God in the sense that they do not exist all at once; rather they come into being slowly and progressively, that is, they grow and develop. Their fullness in being necessitates their fulfilling their potential.

Goodness, then, according to Grisez, is in the realization of potentialities. Yet not all realizations of potentialities, he says, are good. People who fall ill and die, who make errors in judgement, who burn the potatoes, or who hurt others are fulfilling potentialities just as surely as those who live a healthy life, who reason and judge well, who cook good meals, and who help other people. Numerous types of badness are objectively possible, and the realization of privations as such is not good. Goodness, Grisez repeats, is in the realization of potentialities which results in a person being and being more.

Critique

Grisez begins his examination of the central meaning of good with a quotation from Genesis: 'God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.' This approach is fine if we presuppose that our readers share our faith and acknowledge the authority of scripture. If, however, we wish to convince others of the possibility of moral discernment, our starting-point must be something other than scripture. One might argue that

Grisez's starting-point is not scripture but the synderesis, but, as Grisez himself observes, the first principle of morality is understood as soon as one understands the meaning of its terms. In explaining the meaning of the term 'good' Grisez begins with scripture, and, as I shall presently argue, does not go beyond his point of departure.

Even things contaminated by sin, he continues, can be saved, for their primary goodness is not completely corrupted. 'For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving; for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.' Again we see Grisez using scripture to equate the good with God's creation.

In Grisez's discussion of the notion of good as 'fullness of being,' he says that creatures do not possess complete fullness of being, but they can possess true fullness in keeping with their kind and condition – in keeping with their particular and real potentialities for developing and becoming more. He does not, however, state explicitly the nature of such developing and becoming more. The reader may infer from the general thrust of Grisez's argument that this developing and becoming more refers to a person's behaviour and being in the world coming more and more into harmony with the will of the Creator. He goes on to say that the goodness of creatures necessitates that they come to be the most that they can be at each successive juncture of their lives. Goodness consists in a realization of potentialities which results in being and being more. Again Grisez here fails to be explicit. The phrase 'being and being more' appears meaningless because it is not supported by a vision of what this being and being more consists. The notion of 'being and being more' is rooted in a theology of creation that is incapable of communicating to an audience that does not hold the same presuppositions as Grisez, namely, that we can accept the authority of scripture which tells us that we are creatures created by God.

Because God is infinite in being, Grisez says, he is also infinitely good; in God there can be no deficiency. God creates in order to communicate and give something of his

unfathomable perfection. The creature's realization and fullness of being will be that share in the communication of his goodness which God designated for it in creating it. The notion that God is perfect, or even that he exists, is not self-evident; it is, rather, a matter of faith and belief. Grisez contends that human goodness is a share in God's perfection that will lead to fullness of being. Again he provides an argument for human morality that is supported by faith presuppositions not held by everyone, thereby failing to dialogue with the more sceptical reader.

Grisez's discussion of the central meaning of 'good' continues in the same manner. In the next few paragraphs we find the phrases 'creature,' 'created,' 'fullness of being,' 'realization of potentialities,' and 'being and being more' continually repeated. This approach to the possibility of moral discernment is important insofar as it roots the notion of human morality in a theology of creation, thereby providing a strong anthropological foundation to human morality. In other words, human morality is not something arbitrary; rather, it stems from our very nature as beings created by God. However, while this approach to morality reveals a vital truth, it is incapable of convincing anyone who does not necessarily believe in the authority of scripture which tells us that we are created by God. In order to convince those who do not share our faith presuppositions we must be able to provide an account of the good which does not begin and end with a biblical theology of creation.

3.2.2. Knowledge of the Good in May

Exposition

In his book, *An Introduction to Moral Theology*, May discusses the natural law theory of Germain Grisez, John Finnis, and Joseph Boyle.

These authors, he says, in company with St Thomas, contend that the first principle or starting point of practical reasoning is that good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be

avoided. This is a prescription for discerning and positive human activity. This principle, May suggests, is instantly understood to be true once one comprehends the meaning of 'good' and 'evil.' 'Good' refers not only to the morally good but also to whatever can be said to be genuinely perfective of human beings, while 'evil' or 'bad' refers to whatever divests human persons of their perfection or completeness of being.

The first principle of practical reasoning, according to May, guides human beings to their fulfilment as it will be realized in and through human acts. Grisez, Finnis, and Boyle, again developing the thought of St Thomas, contend that this first principle is given its general determinations by detecting the goods which in truth fulfil human beings. May contends that the general determinations of this first principle of practical reasoning can be formulated as follows; 'such and such a basic human good is to be done and/or pursued, protected, and promoted.'[97]

Grisez, Finnis, and Boyle seek to locate all the basic human goods. They contend that these goods can be differentiated by observing 'the assumptions implicit in the practical reasoning of ordinary people, by considering the "ends" or "purposes" for whose sake people ultimately engage in various activities.'[98] The basic goods of persons, while manifold, are similar insofar as each of these goods is a good *of* persons, not a good *for* persons. The basic goods make perfect various features or elements of human beings in their single and collective flourishing. Grisez, Finnis, and Boyle, May tells us, have, to some extent, differed a little in their catalogue of basic human goods. They now concur that there are seven categories of such fundamental goods. Four of these categories have as their common theme the notion of harmony, with the following relevant goods: (1) self-integration or 'inner peace,' which comprises harmony among a person's judgements, feelings, and choices; (2) 'peace of conscience and consistency between one's self and its expression,' a good in which

[97] May, *Moral Theology*, 69; Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles*, 180.
[98] May, *Moral Theology*, 69.

a person takes part by setting up harmony among one's judgements, choices, and performances; (3) 'peace with others, neighbourliness, friendship,' or harmony between and among individual persons and groups of persons; and (4) 'peace with God . . . or some more-than-human source of meaning and value,' a good that we can name the good of religion.[99]

Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis call these basic human goods 'reflexive' or 'existential.' This is because 'they fulfil persons precisely insofar as they are able to make choices and are thus capable of moral good and evil.'[100] Choice is incorporated into the precise meaning of these goods, because the choice by which a person acts for them is included in the actualization or 'instantiation' of these goods. May provides us with the following example: one is unable, he says, to take part in the good of friendship without making a choice whose object encompasses harmony between that choice itself and the other person's will, i.e., the person whose friend one wishes to be.

May points out that it would be an error to see these goods, which have harmony as their unifying theme, as having moral value per se. We should not, he says, in formulating these goods, bring moral value into them. This is because a person can choose to establish in immoral ways these various goods whose unifying motif is harmony. For example, one can look to bring about the good of harmony between judgements and choices by rationalizing immoral decisions; one can look to take part in the good of friendship and harmony with others by compromising his or her moral principles or by collaborating with others in immoral ventures. Consequently, not every decision to take part in these reflexive goods is a morally good choice.

The first principle of practical reason, May contends, is used by bad people as well as good ones to justify their actions to themselves and to others. As May puts it: 'one chooses to

[99] Ibid., 69-70. The other human goods, which these authors call 'substantive,' are human life, knowledge of truth and appreciation of beauty, and play and activities involving skill. See the joint article by Grisez, Joseph Boyle, and John Finnis: 'Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends,' *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 32 (1987): 108; see also Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles*, 123.
[100] May, *Moral Theology*, 70.

do what is morally bad only because one thinks that by doing so one will ultimately participate in some good and avoid some evil.'[101] For this reason, Grisez, Finnis, and Boyle, again taking the lead of St Thomas, 'explicitly distinguish between the first principles of natural law that are *principles of practical reasoning*, i.e., principles directing us to pursue and do good and avoid evil and identifying the goods we are to pursue and do, and the first principles of natural law that are *moral* principles.'[102] Grisez, Finnis, and Boyle, May contends, demonstrate that there has to be a first principle of morality or of practical reasonableness corresponding to the first principle of practical reasoning. The function of the first principle of practical reasoning is to guide human beings to the goods which perfect them and to rule out meaninglessness in human decision and action. The purpose of the first principle of morality, on the other hand, is to provide a means of differentiating between choices that are morally good and ones that are morally bad. Grisez, Finnis, and Boyle note that St Thomas considered the twofold command of love to be the first principle of morality: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind;'[103] 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'[104]

Critique

Grisez, Finnis, and Boyle, according to May, contend that the basic human goods can be distinguished by observing 'the assumptions implicit in the practical reasoning of ordinary people, by considering the "ends" or "purposes" for whose sake people ultimately engage in various activities.' This approach at first glance appears to be scientific insofar as it is based upon observation of people in the process of practical reasoning. However, what Grisez et al observe are the implicit *assumptions* of people. This is hardly a solid foundation on which to

[101] Ibid., 73.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Mt. 22:37.
[104] Mt. 22:39; cf. Mk. 12:30-31, Lk. 10:27.

build an indisputable list of human goods. There is in fact a double assumption at play here: the assumptions of the 'ordinary people' observed by Grisez et al, and the assumptions of Grisez et al that these assumptions provide a solid empirical basis for the possibility of moral discernment. I shall challenge the second of these assumptions.

May provides the following list of basic goods which are considered the 'ends' or 'purposes' for whose sake people ultimately engage in various activities: (1) self-integration or inner peace, (2) peace of conscience, (3) peace with others, (4) peace with God or the good of religion. It seems to me highly questionable that ordinary people in reality engage in various activities for these reasons. If we were in fact to ask a group of ordinary people why they engage in their various activities – their work, their family life, their hobbies, etc. – I doubt very much that many of them would name even one or two of the above list as answers. I think that if asked why he does the work he does, the average man would give one of two answers: money, or enjoyment (or possibly both). If asked the same question about family life, I think the same man would answer by saying that he does things with and for his family out of a sense of responsibility and love. If asked the same question about his hobby, I think the same man would answer by saying that he engages in his hobby for fun or enjoyment.

Perhaps this is why May uses the word 'ultimately.' This word allows that while people may on one level be acting for other reasons, their 'ultimate' motivation is in fact self-integration, peace of conscience, etc. For example, a man works hard for his family out of a sense of duty and feelings of love. Ultimately, however, the sense of doing the right thing for his family gives him a feeling of self-integration or inner peace or peace of conscience . . . and so on.

This may be true, but it does not completely solve our problem. Let us return to our list. How many 'ordinary' people engage in their various activities for the sake of inner peace

and harmony of conscience? It is true that people do not want to experience feelings of inner turmoil or an uneasy conscience, but to turn this into a suggestion that these people are acting for the specific purpose of inner peace and peace of conscience is, in my view, not rationally defendable. How many people engaged in everyday activities are doing so for the sake of 'peace with others, neighbourliness, and friendship'? Normally ordinary people act for themselves and perhaps their families. This may seem pessimistic but I think it is a realistic observation. And how many people act out of a desire for peace with God or the good of religion? Again I think it realistic to say that most ordinary people in this society do not engage in any of their various activities for this reason. Not only would they not recognize that they were doing so, some of them might explicitly deny it. This list of human goods does not, then, come from ordinary people, but from the assumptions of Grisez et al about what constitutes the good of human persons. The list, therefore, has no value in terms of an empirical analysis of the notion of human morality.

My second critique relates to what May terms 'the first principle of morality.' A brief summary is necessary here. May observes that it would be an error to see the above goods as having moral value per se, because one can choose to establish in immoral ways these various goods. The synderesis, or the first principle of practical reason, he further contends, can be used by bad people as well as good ones to justify their actions to themselves or to others. For this reason, Grisez, Finnis, and Boyle 'explicitly distinguish between the first principles of natural law that are principles of practical reasoning . . . and the first principles of natural law that are moral principles.' The function of the first principle of morality is to provide a means of distinguishing between choices that are morally good and ones that are morally bad. Grisez, Finnis, and Boyle, following St Thomas, present the double commandment of love as this first principle of morality.

If we follow the logic of this argument we may reasonably conclude that the first principle of practical reason, the good is to be pursued and evil avoided, as a foundational principle for human morality, does not work without the accompanying first principle of morality, namely, the two-fold commandment of love. This is because, as we have seen, taken on its own the first principle of practical reason can be used to justify bad actions as well as good. The first principle of morality is a necessary supplement which ensures that the synderesis is related to what in fact are objectively good or bad choices.

The first principle of practical reason, then, while it may be self-evident, does not provide us with a fully satisfactory foundation for human morality. This is why May, following St Thomas, brings in the two-fold command of love. My problem with this is by now probably obvious. May's first principle of morality comes straight from scripture. That we should love God and neighbour is not a self-evident truth but a truth of faith. For this reason, May's attempts to provide a rational foundation for human morality ultimately fail because in the final analysis he resorts to scripture instead of rational principles to demonstrate the possibility of moral discernment.

3.3. Human Freedom

In this subsection, we shall examine and critique Grisez's and May's notions of human freedom.

3.3.1. Grisez's Notion of Human Freedom

Exposition

In chapter 2 of his book, *Christian Moral Principles*, Grisez attempts to answer the question: 'Can human persons make free choices?' He begins his discussion by pointing out the fact that human beings' ability to freely choose their actions is taken as a given

throughout the Bible. The reality of free choice, he says, is made clear in the book of Sirach. The most commonly cited portion of this text is as follows: 'It was he who created humankind in the beginning, and he left them in the power of their own free choice.'[105] Human persons, Grisez says, are 'not simply subject to fate, to natural necessity, or to their heredity and environment. In what is most important, human persons are of themselves.'[106]

Grisez goes on to point out that during the period of the Reformation, Luther and others, in their desire to stress sinful humankind's utter dependence on God's grace, denied human free choice. Against them, the Council of Trent solemnly defined the truth that human beings, even after Adam's sin, can make free choices.[107]

Free choices, Grisez says, are created entities. They exist because God causes them. The free choice to believe in God and to obey his commandments is the result of God's grace; neither saints nor sinners can do anything without God.

If God's causality was similar to causality as we generally understand it, then for something to be both created and a free choice would make no sense at all. However, Grisez continues, we do not comprehend what God is in himself, and consequently, we have no understanding of what it means for him to cause. The reality of free choice in the world is part of the existence of the entire creation; this is explained by referring all things to God the creator. There is no contradiction, Grisez says, in God 'creating human-persons-making-free-choices.' We know there is no contradiction, he says, because 'it is a fact that there are free choices, and they could not exist if God did not cause them to be.'[108]

Grisez goes on to engage with the philosophical concept of determinism. Experience and philosophical reflection, he says, concur with faith that human persons are capable of free choice. Yet determinists, he continues, deny the existence of free choice. Since, Grisez

[105] Sir. 15:14.
[106] Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles*, 43.
[107] Ibid.; see DS 1555.
[108] Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles*, 44.

argues, this denial goes against experience, determinists must prove their case. In attempting to do so, determinists appeal to our reason and attempt to demonstrate that we ought to accept their position. The problem is, however, that this 'ought' itself encompasses an appeal to freedom. Determinists entreat us to be faithful to the search for truth, but such faithfulness is impossible if we are unable to make free choices. Any attempt, therefore, to show that the experiences of choice and moral guilt are imaginary is ultimately self-defeating.

Underlying most deterministic arguments, Grisez continues, is the assumption that nothing can come into existence without a 'sufficient reason' which explains it. A 'sufficient reason,' he explains, would be one that establishes clearly why the thing has come into existence rather than not coming into existence, and why it has come into existence exactly as it is rather than in some other form. Grisez explains that free choice has an adequate cause, namely, the person who chooses. However, he says, the notion of sufficient reason entails more than just adequate cause: it attaches the idea that all things can be fully explained. Thus a sufficient reason for a choice would clearly state why the person made this precise choice, and not another. However, Grisez contends, the theory that there must always be a sufficient reason is not self-evident. If in fact either human persons or God make free choices, the theory will prove to be false.

Grisez continues: 'God does act freely – that is, without a sufficient reason – for example, in creating and redeeming.'[109] Of course, he says, God at all times acts in accordance with his own wisdom; his love, however, is not determined by his wisdom. With regards to human beings, Grisez argues that they too have reasons, but not sufficient ones, for their choices. In order to explain why they made the decisions they made, people draw attention to the good promised by the possibility on which their decisions were based. Yet, Grisez contends, if they had made other decisions, they would also have explained these other

[109] Ibid., 45.

decisions in a comparable manner. Thus, he concludes, there are reasons but not sufficient reasons to explain human free choices.

Determinists also indicate that there are numerous elements which restrict the possibilities open to us, some of which we are normally not even aware of. The determinists are, however, Grisez says, mistaken in surmising that elements which are not in our control which restrict our possibilities also decide what we will choose within these restrictions. While there are restrictions or limitations on what we can choose, this does not mean that we cannot choose freely within these restrictions or limitations.

Critique

Grisez begins his discussion of human freedom by pointing out that the human person's ability to make free choices is taken for granted throughout the Bible. He proceeds by citing the standard biblical text for demonstrating the reality of freedom: Sirach 15:14. Grisez goes on to cite, against the Reformation theologians, the Council of Trent which 'solemnly defined' the truth that human beings, even after Adam's sin, can make free choices. Thus far Grisez has presented no rational argument or empirical evidence for the existence of human free will. Those who accept the authority of scripture and magisterial teaching will have no difficulty accepting the reality of human free will. In terms of a dialogue with those who do not hold our religious presuppositions however, this approach to the notion of human freedom is woefully inadequate, as it fails to challenge the notion of determinism on its own terms, i.e., using rational principles. Consequently, it will ultimately fail to convince anyone who does not already believe in the reality of human free will.

Grisez proceeds by observing that free choices are created entities: they exist because God causes them. He goes on to observe that the free choice to believe in God and to obey his commandments is the result of God's grace. He further observes that if God's causality was

similar to causality as we generally understand it, then it would make no sense to say that something is both created and a free choice. To explain this apparent paradox, Grisez contends that we do not comprehend what God is in himself, and we therefore have no understanding of what it means for him to cause. The reality of free choice in the world is part of the existence of the entire creation; this is explained by referring all things to God the creator. This brings us to the crux of Grisez's argument. There is no contradiction, he says, in God 'creating human-persons-making-free-choices.' We know there is no contradiction because 'it is a fact that there are free choices, and they could not exist if God did not cause them to be.'[110]

This argument can be broken down and analysed as follows: There are four premises, a conclusion, and the 'evidence.' Premise 1: free choices are created entities; Premise 2: free choice is the result of God's grace; Premise 3: God's causality and human causality are different; Premise 4: free choice is part of creation; Conclusion: there is no contradiction in God creating 'human-persons-making-free-choices;' Evidence: we know this because 'it is a fact that there are free choices, and they could not exist if God did not cause them to be.' The argument that there is no contradiction in God creating 'human-persons-making-free-choices' is fairly convincing if we accept Grisez's premises. However, his premises are by no means self-evident and he has not demonstrated them. Furthermore, as 'evidence' that his conclusion is true he simply provides a synthesis of his undemonstrated premises. Again this approach to the notion of human freedom will only make sense to someone who holds the same religious presuppositions as Grisez himself. To anyone who may be sceptical about the possibility of human freedom, this approach will not be convincing.

In Grisez's discussion of determinism, he presents the following argument: in attempting to prove their position, determinists appeal to our reason and attempt to

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[110] Ibid., 44.

demonstrate that we ought to accept their position. However, this 'ought' itself encompasses an appeal to freedom. Determinists entreat us to be faithful to the search for truth, but such faithfulness is impossible if we are unable to make free choices. Any attempt, therefore, to show that the experiences of choice and moral guilt are imaginary is ultimately self-defeating. Analysis: Do determinists in fact claim that we 'ought' to accept their position? This, it seems, is an assumption on Grisez's part. We could, however, assume a quite different attitude of the determinist. For example: the determinist presents a thesis, realizing that a number of people will hear or read this thesis, and that depending on their heredity, past experiences, etc., some of them will accept it and some will reject it. While the hearer or reader of the thesis might 'feel' like he/she is conscious of choosing to accept or reject it, he/she is in fact bound by heredity, or environment, or experience to accept or reject it. The determinist has not appealed to anyone's freedom; he or she has, rather, simply presented a position with the understanding that some will accept it and others reject it.

Grisez continues his discussion of determinism by observing that the notion of 'sufficient reason' underlies most deterministic arguments. A sufficient reason, he explains, would be one that establishes clearly why the thing has come into existence rather than not coming into existence and why it has come into existence exactly as it is rather than in some other form. Grisez contends that the theory that there must always be a sufficient reason is not self-evident, and that if in fact either human persons or God make free choices, the theory will prove to be false. Grisez proceeds by presenting the 'proof': 'God does act freely – that is, without a sufficient reason – for example, in creating and redeeming.' Again Grisez makes no attempt to convince anyone who does not share his religious presuppositions that free choice is a reality. What he presents as 'proof' that the theory that there must always be a sufficient reason is false, is in fact a theological statement which is grounded not in rational principles, but in religious faith.

Grisez concludes his discussion of determinism by observing that determinists indicate that there are numerous elements which restrict the possibilities open to us, some of which we are normally not even aware. While Grisez essentially agrees with the determinists on this point he argues that they are mistaken in surmising that these unconscious elements which restrict our possibilities also decide what we will choose within these restrictions. While there are restrictions or limitations on what we can choose, he observes, this does not mean that we cannot choose freely within these restrictions or limitations. Apparently, for Grisez, that we can freely choose within these restrictions or limitations is self-evident. I draw this conclusion on the basis that he in fact presents no evidence. Furthermore, he not only presents no evidence, he also presents no positive argument. He simply observes that just because we have limitations 'this does not mean' that we cannot choose freely within these limitations. Grisez, however, makes no positive argument for the opposite position, namely, that we *can* choose freely within these limitations.

3.3.2. May's Notion of Human Freedom

Exposition

May begins his discussion of human freedom by noting that the truth that human beings can decide their own fates through their own free choices is a matter of Catholic faith. It is integral, May observes, to the scriptures. Like Grisez, May cites the book of Sirach: 'It was he [God] who created man in the beginning, and he left him in the power of his own inclination.'[111] This text, May also notes, was used by the Fathers of Vatican II in *Gaudium et Spes* 17.

The reality of human free will, which is so integral to the biblical anthropology, was clearly professed by Church Fathers such as Augustine and by all the great scholastics. May

[111] May, *Moral Theology*, 26; Sir. 15:14.

here cites St Thomas: 'it is only through free choice that human persons are masters of their own actions and in this way beings made in the image and likeness of God.'[112] May goes on to point out that the Council of Trent also solemnly defined the truth that human beings are free to decide what they will do and, through their decisions, to create themselves to be the persons that they are. The Second Vatican Council, he further observes, emphasised that the capacity to freely choose 'is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man.'[113]

May contends that 'free choice is an existential principle or source of morality.'[114] It is an existential principle of moral good and evil because moral good and evil rely for their existence on the human capacity for free choice. This is so because the things we do we do *ourselves*; they can be good or evil only if we choose in freedom to do them. A dog or a cat, May tells us, cannot be morally good or evil, but human beings can because they possess the capacity for free choice. It is by freely choosing that human beings make themselves morally good or morally bad persons. This is why, May explains, free choice is considered to be an existential principle of morality.

Free choice, May continues, is experienced when a person is conscious of a conflict. Various choices of action present themselves to a person, but they cannot all be actualized at the same time. One reflects upon these possible choices, but reflection cannot decide the matter. It cannot decide which of the possible choices guarantees unquestionably the greater good. It cannot do so because each possible choice, in order to be attractive and to qualify as a viable alternative, must guarantee involvement in some good that is simply unequal to the good promised by other alternatives. May provides the following example: if a person is considering purchasing a house and wants a house that is (a) within a particular price range, (b) has four bedrooms and a living room, (c) is close to church and school, and (d) has access to good public transportation, and if one out of four houses viewed guarantees all the above

[112] May, *Moral Theology*, 27; St Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* Prologue.
[113] May, *Moral Theology*, 27; GS 17.
[114] May, *Moral Theology*, 27.

advantages, while none of the other three do, then, according to May, no choice is possible or even necessary, as long as the person is still willing to purchase a house that satisfies these conditions. Of the available choices only one has all the advantages one is searching for; the attractiveness of the other houses – that which makes them possible choices – just disappears. They are no longer viable options because they offer no benefit that is not available in the house that has all the advantages one is searching for. However, if a person must buy a house and none of the houses available has *all* the 'goods' or advantages one seeks, then he or she will have to choose from among those that provide some of these advantages; each of these houses is a viable alternative because each provides some advantage unequal to the good or benefit provided by the other houses. Ultimately, May says, the issue is settled by the choice itself. By way of explanation, he offers the following quotation from Grisez: 'One makes a choice when one faces practical alternatives, believes one can and must settle which to take, and takes one. The choice is free when choosing itself determines which alternative one takes. . . . Only one's choosing determines oneself to seek fulfilment in one possibility rather than another. Inasmuch as one determines oneself in this way, one is of oneself.'[115]

May concludes with the following summary of what he terms 'the experience of free choice.'[116] First, he says, one finds oneself in a predicament where one is drawn to alternative possibilities of choice and there is no way to get rid of the incompatibility of the various alternatives of choice or to restrict the alternative to just one. One can do this thing or that thing, but not both; the alternatives are real, that is, they are 'choosable' but incompatible possibilities. Second, one works out that only he or she can settle the issue and decide which possibility is actualized. Third, one is conscious of making the choice and knows that nothing 'makes' him or her make it. In other words, one is conscious that one has freedom in deciding the matter, in choosing among the various possible alternatives.

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[115] Ibid., 28; Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles*, 50.
[116] May, *Moral Theology*, 28.

Critique

For May, the truth that human persons can decide their own fates through their own free choices is a matter of Catholic faith. To demonstrate this he provides a number of references to scripture and the theological tradition: Sirach 15:11-20, *Gaudium et Spes*, St Augustine, St Thomas, and the Council of Trent. This, of course, amounts to nothing more than a statement that free choice is a reality and an argument for this position that consists of pointing out that others have also said that free choice is a reality. Take for example the quotation that May uses from St Thomas: 'it is only through free choice that human persons are masters of their own actions and in this way beings made in the image and likeness of God.' This single sentence reveals nothing of St Thomas's elaborate philosophical method of arriving at this position. May's use of St Thomas here is a kind of proof-texting that relies not on St Thomas's method but on his reputation as a masterful theologian and philosopher. The same is true of May's use of the other sources: it relies not on reasoned argument but on the authority of the cited texts. These texts, however, are only authoritative for religious believers. This approach, therefore, is inadequate in terms of dialoguing with anyone who might doubt the existence of human free will.

May proceeds by suggesting that free choice is an existential principle or source of morality. This is so, he contends, because moral good and evil rely for their existence on the human capacity for free choice. It is by freely choosing, he says, that human beings make themselves morally good or morally bad persons. The argument that free choice is an existential principle or source of morality makes perfect sense up to a point. It is obvious that if a person does not have freedom of choice he/she cannot be held responsible for her actions. It is also true that the person's level of culpability for a wrongful act corresponds to the level or degree of freedom he/she had while carrying out the act. It is precisely because free choice

is so integral to the notion of morality that we must attempt to prove the existence of free choice. May, however, simply takes the notion of free choice as a given.

May goes on to analyse a situation in which it is necessary for a person to make a choice. The example he gives is that of a person buying a house. If a person must buy a house and none of the houses he looks at has all the goods he is looking for, then he/she will have to choose from among those that provide some of the advantages; each of the houses is a viable alternative because each provides some advantage unequal to the good or benefit provided by the other houses. The issue, May contends, is settled by the choice itself. This is undoubtedly true: the issue is, indeed, settled by the choice itself. This, however, does not prove that the choice that settles the issue is one made in freedom. May attempts to reinforce his argument with a quotation from Grisez: 'One makes a choice when one faces practical alternatives, believes one can and must settle which to take, and takes one. The choice is free when choosing itself determines which alternative one takes . . .' This argument is very weak. The fact that 'choosing itself determines which alternative one takes' in no way indicates that the choosing is done in freedom. The choice made *without freedom* will equally determine which alternative one takes. For example, if I have the opportunity to buy house no. 1 and I choose in freedom to do so, I will buy house no. 1. My free choice will have determined the outcome. Similarly, if I have the opportunity to buy the same house and I choose to do so due to some unconscious motivation resulting from my genetic inheritance or my past experiences – thereby making my choice compelled rather than free – the result will be exactly the same: I will buy house no. 1. In this case my *unfree* choice will have determined the outcome. May argues that the choice to buy a particular house will be made either because it is the obvious choice as it has everything I am looking for, or because I freely choose one alternative over another. He simply ignores all sorts of possible unconscious motivations that might make a person choose as they do.

May concludes his discussion of free choice with a summary in which he breaks the process of freely choosing into three parts. First, he says, one finds oneself in a situation where one is drawn to alternative possibilities of choice and there is no way to get rid of the incompatibility of the various alternatives of choice or to restrict the alternative to just one. Second, one works out that only he or she can settle the issue and decide which possibility is realized. Third, one is conscious of making the choice and knows that nothing 'makes' him or her make it. In other words, one is conscious that one has freedom in deciding the matter, in choosing among the various possible alternatives. The first two parts of this summary I find unproblematic. The third part, however, is flawed. May's observation that 'one is conscious of making the choice and knows that nothing "makes" him or her make it' has no empirical evidence to support it. That the person 'knows' that nothing makes him or her choose is by no means evident. If in fact the person merely *believes* that nothing makes him or her make the choice, there is nothing to suggest that this experience would be any different to that of 'knowing' that nothing makes him or her make the choice. If, for the sake of argument, the determinists are correct and human beings are not in fact making free choices, this does not suggest that we do not *feel* and consequently *believe* that we are making free choices. May's contention that the person 'knows' that he or she is making a free choice is based on observation of what *appears* to people to be what is happening when they make a choice. That this is in fact what is happening, however, requires a lot more evidence.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have examined two distinct approaches to the theology of sin: the generally historicist approach of Häring and Gula, and the more classicist approach of Grisez and May. We have seen that both of these approaches to sin draw on the traditional notion of mortal sin, and the three criteria for discerning whether or not a sin is mortal or venial.

Because of the use of these criteria in both of these approaches, we went on to examine in some detail Häring's, Gula's, Grisez's, and May's notions of knowledge of the good and human freedom. I have argued that their discussions of knowledge of the good and human freedom contain much theological presupposition as well as some poor philosophical arguments. This, I conclude, renders their notions of sin incapable of dialoguing with the moral sceptic or determinist.

In the next chapter, we shall examine contemporary magisterial teaching on sin. The same procedure will be followed: an examination of the notion of sin, followed by an examination of the notions of ethical knowledge and human freedom. The same question will be asked in relation to this teaching, namely, how convincing is this teaching to someone who doesn't hold Christian beliefs, i.e., the moral sceptic or determinist?

CHAPTER TWO

MAGISTERIAL TEACHING ON SIN

The notion of sin is of great importance to the Church's understanding of herself and the world. The Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* speaks of the negative consequences of sin for both the individual and society as a whole. According to this document, sin is at the very heart of many of the world's problems.

> Without doubt frequent upheavals in the social order are in part the result of economic, political, and social tensions. But at a deeper level they come from selfishness and pride, two things which contaminate the atmosphere of society as well. As it is, human beings are prone to evil, but whenever they are confronted with an environment where the effects of sin are to be found, they are exposed to further inducements to sin, which can be overcome only by unremitting effort with the help of grace.[117]

For those of us who accept the reality of sin, this passage contains a powerful message about the consequences of our sinfulness for the world around us, as well as a message of hope. Such an acceptance of the reality of sin, however, cannot be taken for granted due to scepticism about the possibility of an objective morality and human beings' ability to act in freedom. In order to combat such scepticism the Church needs to engage with the notions of moral scepticism and determinism. It needs to examine not just the nature of sin, but also the question of its possibility.

In this chapter we shall examine the magisterium's teaching on sin and how effective it is at conversing with two philosophical schools of thought, the first that denies the existence of objective moral norms, and the second that denies the existence of human

[117] GS 25.

freedom. In part one we shall examine the notion of sin contained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church.* Drawing on a number of sources including scripture, the Church Fathers, and the Second Vatican Council (especially *Gaudium et Spes*) part three of the *Catechism* sets out systematically the Church's teaching on sin, natural law, moral conscience, and human freedom. In part two we shall examine sections of Pope John Paul II's works, *Fides et Ratio*, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, and *Veritatis Splendor*. *Veritatis Splendor* is unique among papal encyclicals insofar as it is the only such document that engages systematically with questions regarding the moral life. *Fides et Ratio* is concerned with the relationship between faith and reason, a subject of central importance to this dissertation. Finally, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* is an important document for understanding John Paul II's theology of sin, as it is in this work that he develops the notion of social sin, a key notion in both the Christian hamartology and in Catholic social doctrine.

1. THE THEOLOGY OF SIN IN THE *CATHECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH*

In part one of this chapter, we shall attempt to discern how successful the *Catechism* is in dialoguing with moral sceptics and determinists by asking how effective it is in grounding its notions of sin in reality. In the Introduction to this dissertation we observed that the concept of sin presupposes the existence of an objective moral order and the person's ability to apprehend this order, as well as the person's ability to act in freedom. Following the logic of this assertion, this examination of the notion of sin in the *Catechism* will be divided into four sections. Firstly we shall examine the various notions and definitions of sin contained in this document, and how these notions of sin rely – either explicitly or implicitly – on the Church's understanding of ethical knowledge and human freedom. Secondly we shall examine in greater detail the notion of ethical knowledge. This section will be divided into two subsections, the first examining natural law and the second examining the notion of

conscience. Thirdly we shall examine the notion of human freedom. These three sections shall be mainly descriptive in character, setting out in as much possible detail the *Catechism*'s moral theology. This description of the *Catechism*'s moral theology shall, however, be interjected with a number of references to Michael T. Walsh's *Commentary on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This is to attempt to clarify certain ambiguities which occur in the text of the *Catechism*. Fourthly we shall critique the theology of sin contained in the *Catechism*. We shall focus on the question of how successful this document is at dialoguing with moral sceptics and determinists about the possibility of objective moral norms and human freedom.

1.1. Notions and Definitions of Sin (paragraphs 1846-1864)

In the spirit of hope which is at the heart of the Christian Gospel, the *Catechism* begins its discussion of sin by setting the notion alongside the notion of mercy. 'The Gospel is the revelation in Jesus Christ of God's mercy to sinners.'[118] With a quotation from the first letter of John, the author of this document points to the necessity of recognising our sinfulness if we are to receive this mercy: 'If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'[119] The *Catechism* points to the necessity of conversion, quoting John Paul II, who notes in his *Dominum et Vivificantem* that 'conversion requires convincing of sin.'[120] In this 'convincing of sin,' John Paul tells us, there is a two-fold gift: the gift of the truth provided by our conscience and the gift of the assurance of our salvation.

[118] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1846.
[119] Ibid., 1847; 1 John 1:8-9.
[120] *Catechism*, 1848; *Dominum et Vivificantem*, sec. 31, John Paul II, *Encyclicals* (Trivandrum, India: Carmel International Publishing House, 2005), 849.

The *Catechism* goes on to provide a number of definitions of sin. Sin is defined as 'an offence against reason, truth and right conscience,' and a 'failure in genuine love of God and neighbour caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods.' Sin 'wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity.'[121] It is an 'an utterance, a deed or a desire contrary to the eternal law,' a quotation from St Augustine which St Thomas analyses in the *Summa Theologica*.[122] Sin is also considered to be a violation against God. It is at odds with God's love for us and it hardens our affective response to it.[123] By our sin we rebel against God as we will to become 'like gods,'[124] determining for ourselves what is good and what is evil. Sin, therefore, is 'love of oneself even to contempt of God,'[125] another quotation from St Augustine. Such vain self-inflation of one's ego is 'diametrically opposed to the obedience of Jesus, which achieves our salvation.'[126]

Again in the spirit of hope, the *Catechism* points to the power of Christ's Passion to overcome the effects of sin. It is in the Passion, when Christ's compassion is about to defeat it, that the destructiveness and the many modes of sin appear most clearly. There is the unbelief in and the murderous hatred of Jesus, and the arrogant dismissal and ridicule of him by the leaders and the people. There is Pilate's cowardice and the soldiers' brutality. There is the betrayal by Judas, the denial by Peter, and the running away by the disciples. Despite all of this sin, however, it is 'at the very hour of darkness, the hour of the prince of this world'

[121] *Catechism*, 1849.
[122] Ibid.; St Augustine *Contra Faustum* 22; St Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* I-II, 71, 6; Gerard J. Hughes points out that this quotation needs to be understood within its context in the *Summa*. When Aquinas says that sin is 'an utterance, a deed or a desire contrary to the eternal law,' it is, according to Hughes, voluntary desires which are in question, not simply spontaneous ones. Unless this paragraph is read in this context, it could give the impression that the mere occurrence of a desire might constitute a sin. See ed. Michael J. Walsh's *Commentary on the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 351. Hughes is apparently referring to Aquinas's Reply to question 71, article 6, in which he states that sin is nothing other than a bad human act. Aquinas goes on to say that what makes an act human is the fact that it is voluntary, whether this voluntariness is internal, to will or to choose, or external, to speak or to act.
[123] *Catechism*, 1850.
[124] Ibid.; Gen. 3:5.
[125] *Catechism*, 1850; St Augustine *City of God* book IV, chap. 28. *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 14, trans. Gerald G. Walsh and Grace Monahan (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1952), 410.
[126] *Catechism*, 1850.

that 'the sacrifice of Christ secretly becomes the source from which the forgiveness of our sins will pour forth inexhaustibly.'[127]

The *Catechism* observes that there are many types of sins, citing St Paul's letter to the Galatians, which contrasts 'the works of the flesh' with the 'fruit of the Spirit.' The works of the flesh in Paul's letter are listed as fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, and carousing.[128]

According to the *Catechism* there are a number of ways in which sins can be distinguished. Like all human acts, they can be distinguished according to their objects, or according to their antithetical virtues, or by surfeit or deficiency, or according to the commandments they contravene. Sins can also be grouped according to the following categories: whether they concern 1) God, 2) neighbour, or 3) oneself. Further distinctions are made between spiritual and carnal sins, and between sins of thought, word, deed, or omission. The foundations of sin, according to the *Catechism*, are in the person's affective responses, in his free will: 'For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man.'[129] However, charity, the fountain of all good works, also lives within the person, and sin damages this charity.

Another way that sins are evaluated is according to their gravity or seriousness. The *Catechism* makes a distinction between mortal and venial sin, which, it points out, is evident in scripture. This distinction between mortal and venial sin became part of ecclesial tradition, and is, according to the *Catechism*, verified by human observation.

The *Catechism* proceeds by explaining the difference between mortal and venial sin. Mortal sin, it says, 'destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law.'[130]

[127] Ibid., 1851.
[128] Ibid., 1852; Gal. 5:19.
[129] *Catechism*, 1853; Mt. 15:19-20.
[130] *Catechism*, 1855.

By favouring a lesser good, one is turned away from God, who is one's highest goal and source of happiness. Venial sin, on the other hand, 'allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it.'[131] By its assault on charity, the fundamental truth contained within us, mortal sin makes necessary a new movement of divine mercy, as well as a new affective orientation in the sinner. Such an affective reorientation is usually achieved through the sacrament of confession.

The criteria involved in the determining of mortal sin are explained. The *Catechism* quotes John Paul II, who, in his *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* defines mortal sin as follows: 'Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent.'[132] That which constitutes grave matter is made clear in the Decalogue; this accords with Jesus' response to the rich young man: 'Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honour your father and your mother.'[133] The *Catechism* points out that some sins are more serious than others; for example murder is more serious than stealing. The relationship between the person sinning and the person sinned against has also to be taken into account. So being violent to one's parents is a more serious offence than being violent towards someone we hardly know.

Mortal sin presupposes knowledge of the sinfulness of the act, and of how it contravenes God's law. It also presupposes a consent that is deliberate enough that it amounts to an actual choice. In other words, for sin to be considered mortal there must be full knowledge and deliberate consent. Protestations of ignorance and hardened emotional attitudes, rather than decreasing the free nature of sin, in fact increase it.

The culpability for a serious infraction can be decreased or even removed by what the *Catechism* terms 'unintentional ignorance.'[134] No one, however, is considered to be lacking

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[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid., 1857; John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* , sec. 17.
[133] *Catechism*, 1858; Mk. 10:19.
[134] *Catechism*, 1860.

in knowledge of the precepts of the moral law, as these laws are inscribed in every person's conscience. Other factors that can decrease the voluntary nature of the infraction are feelings, passions, external pressures, and pathological disorders. The most serious sin is the one committed out of a deliberate desire to inflict harm on another person.

The *Catechism* describes the consequences for the sinner of mortal sin. Mortal sin, it says, is 'a radical possibility of human freedom.'[135] It results in the loss of benevolent feeling and the dispossession of the grace that unites us with God. If this sin is not recovered by God's compassionate response to our call for forgiveness, the result is rejection from Christ's kingdom and everlasting damnation. This is because our freedom has such power that it can make choices that have irreversible consequences. The *Catechism*, however, points out that 'although we can judge that an act is in itself a grave offence, we must entrust judgement of persons to the justice and mercy of God.'[136]

A person commits a venial sin when in a minor issue he or she does not follow the proscriptions of the moral law, or when he or she disregards the moral law in a major issue, but without full understanding or deliberate acquiescence. Venial sin damages benevolent feeling and demonstrates a perverse attachment to created goods. It restricts the soul's advancement in the practice of the virtues. Such sin, according to the *Catechism*, deserves not eternal, but only temporal punishment. If venial sin, however, is committed freely and without repentance, this results in an increased disposition to commit mortal sin. Venial sin, however, does not put us in a position of outright hostility to the divine friendship and will. Nor does it destroy our allegiance to God. It is, with God's grace, capable of restoration.

In the final paragraph of this section, the *Catechism* points out the seriousness of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. 'Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has

[135] Ibid., 1861.
[136] Ibid.

forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.'[137] God's mercy is boundless. However, if anyone, by failing to repent, intentionally refuses to accept this mercy, he or she refuses the absolution of sins and the redemption given by the Holy Spirit. Such coldness of one's affective responses can result in a final refusal to repent and eternal privation.

1.2. Knowledge of the Good

In the previous section we saw that the *Catechism*'s notion of sin presupposes the existence of an objective moral order and the person's ability to apprehend this order. The person's sin is more serious if he or she has 'full knowledge' of the wrongfulness of their act. In this section we shall examine more closely the idea that there is an objective moral order that human beings are capable of apprehending, by examining the notions of natural law and moral conscience.

1.2.1. Natural Law (paragraphs 1954-1960)

As human beings, according to the *Catechism*, we take part in the wisdom and benevolence of our Creator. He gives us the ability to understand and master our behaviour and to conduct ourselves with an eye to that which is good and true. The natural law conveys the primordial moral apprehension that allows human beings to distinguish by their reason between that which is good and that which is evil. 'The natural law is written and engraved in the soul of each and every man, because it is human reason ordaining him to do good and forbidding him to sin.'[138] The divine and natural law demonstrates to human beings the way in which they should practice the good and achieve their ultimate fulfilment. It asserts the necessary commandments that guide our efforts to obey God. It rests upon a desire for and acquiescence to God, the foundation and arbiter of everything good, and upon our

[137] Ibid., 1864; Mk. 3:29
[138] *Catechism*, 1776; *Libertas Praestantissimum*, in *The Great Encyclical Letters of Leo XIII* (New York, Cincinnati, Chicago: Benzinger Brothers, 1903), 140.

understanding of our equality with others. The primary principles of the natural law are articulated in the Ten Commandments.

The natural law, which exists in the hearts of all people and is founded by reason, is all-encompassing in its dictates. Its jurisdiction includes the entire world. It speaks to the dignity of the person and settles the foundation for his or her inalienable rights and duties. The *Catechism* provides a quotation from Cicero's *Republic* that captures the unchanging aspect of the natural law and its connection with human reason: 'For there is a true law: right reason. It is in conformity with nature, is diffused among all men and is immutable and eternal; its orders summon to duty; its prohibitions turn away from offence. . . To replace it with a contrary law is a sacrilege; failure to apply even one of its provisions is forbidden; no one can abrogate it entirely.'[139]

The way in which the natural law is applied varies greatly according to the conditions of life in various times and places. Even in the vast difference of cultures, however, the natural law abides as an order that unites human beings and places upon them shared principles that go beyond their unavoidable differences. It is unchangeable and everlasting, persisting through the differences of history, remaining under the flow of ideas and traditions and assisting their advancement. The precepts that convey the natural law retain their validity. Even when the natural law is denied in its very precepts, it cannot be obliterated or removed from the human heart. It always springs up again in the lives of persons and in the societies in which these persons live.

The natural law provides the firm ground on which human beings are able to construct the framework of ethical precepts to influence their choices. It also supplies the vital moral substructure for constructing the human community. It supplies the vital grounds of the civil

[139] *Catechism*, 1956; Cicero *The Republic* III 22, 33.

law, either by deliberation which concludes from its principles, or by positive and legal additions.

Not everyone intuits the precepts of the natural law clearly and at once. As things stand, sinful humanity requires God's grace and revelation so that the truth of morality and religion may be known 'by everyone with facility, with firm certainty and with no admixture of error.'[140] The natural law supplies a substructure for revealed law and grace.

1.2.2. Conscience (paragraphs 1776-1794)

In the section on moral conscience, the *Catechism* provides a quotation from *Gaudium et Spes* that connects conscience with the natural moral law:

> Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment. . . For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. . . His conscience is man's most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths.[141]

Moral conscience, which is the possession of all, entreats him or her at the right time to do that which is good and to avoid that which is evil. It also evaluates particular choices, affirming the good ones and rejecting the evil ones. It attests to the sovereignty of truth regarding the supreme Good to which we are attracted, and it openly accepts the commandments. If we are wise, and we listen to our conscience, we will hear the voice of God.

Conscience is an evaluation one makes by one's reason. By such an evaluation, a person judges whether a tangible act that he/she either intends to perform, is presently performing, or has already completed is good or evil. In all that one says or does, one is

[140] *Catechism*, 1960; Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1950), sec. 3.
[141] *Catechism*, 1960; GS 16.

required to be truly guided by what one knows is just and right.[142] It is by the evaluation that one makes, guided by one's conscience, that one apprehends and identifies what God's law dictates. Reflection and self-examination are crucial if we are to apprehend and adhere to the voice of our conscience, especially as the busyness and noisiness of life can very easily obscure this voice. 'Return to your conscience, question it. . . Turn inward, brethren, and in everything you do, see God as your witness.'[143]

A person's dignity suggests and necessitates righteousness of moral conscience. Conscience includes an intuitive grasp of the principles of morality, the application of these principles in particular circumstances by a practical judgement of reasons and goods, and finally judgement about substantial acts that either have or have not yet been carried out. The truth regarding the moral good, articulated in the law of reason, is identified practically and substantially by the wise conscientious judgment.

Conscience allows a person to take responsibility for his or her actions. If one does an evil deed, the fair evaluation of conscience which attests to the all-embracing truth of the good, can exist simultaneously with the evil of his or her particular choosing. The finding of the conscientious judgement is left as an offer of mercy and hope. In bearing witness to the wrong-doing, it reminds us that we must ask for forgiveness and continue to practice and develop, with the aid of God's grace, the various virtues.

According to the *Catechism*, 'conscience must be informed and moral judgement enlightened.'[144] A fully developed conscience is characterised by its desire for what is right and true. It frames its evaluations according to reason, and in compliance with the true good willed by God's wisdom. We cannot do without the education of conscience, as human

[142] Hughes points out that it is true to say that we must follow faithfully what we know to be just and right, but that we are equally obliged to follow faithfully what we sincerely *believe* to be just and right, even if we are mistaken. Although there is a sub-section in the *Catechism* dealing with erroneous conscience, this and other statements taken on their own can give the misleading impression that it is only judgements of conscience that are certain which are morally binding. Walsh, ed., *Commentary on the Catechism*, 348.
[143] *Catechism*, 1779; St Augustine *Homilies on First John* 8, 9.
[144] *Catechism*, 1783.

beings are exposed to adverse pressures and tempted by sin to favour their own views to those of the teaching authority.[145]

To educate one's conscience is an ever-enduring job. From the beginning of human life, such education stimulates in the child the practice of the inner law known by conscience. A good education teaches virtue, as well as curing fear, selfishness and pride, a bitterness stemming from guilt, and feelings of smugness originating in human frailty and shortcomings. An informed conscience brings freedom and a feeling of peace.

As we develop and educate our conscience we must use God's word to illuminate our way. We must absorb it faithfully and prayerfully, and let it inform our actions. We are also required to inspect our conscience in the light of Christ's Passion. We are aided by the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the testimony or counsel of others. Our way is further illuminated by the authoritative teaching of the Church.

When confronted with a moral decision, conscience can make a correct judgement that conforms to both reason and God's law, or a mistaken judgement that deviates from them. Human beings are sometimes faced with events that make moral judgements less certain, and decision problematical. The person, however, must sincerely search for what is right and good, and discover God's will as it is communicated in the divine law. To this end, human beings endeavour to decipher the experiential data and events that signal a changing society, aided by prudence, advice from capable people, and the Holy Spirit. There are, however, some rules that are applicable in every case. These rules are: 1) One must never do evil in order to achieve good; 2) The Golden Rule: 'Whatever you wish that men would do to

[145] The last sentence of this paragraph is misleading, as it gives the impression that to prefer one's own judgement to that of some authority is to be tempted by sin. This, according to Hughes, would be an absurd position, as it would rule out dissent from one's parents, or from the laws of a state which is in general a good one, or from non-infallible teachings of the Church. See *Commentary on the Catechism*, 349.This sentence could indeed be misleading if we read it as saying that to prefer our own judgement and to reject authoritative teachings is *necessarily* to be tempted by sin. It is more accurate to say that a sinful attitude or disposition *may* lead to the preferring of one's own judgement and the rejection of authority, but that such preferring and rejecting may also be legitimate, the result of a genuine desire for and love of truth.

you, do so to them;'[146] 3) Charity is always advanced by consideration of one's neighbour and his or her conscience: 'Thus sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience . . . you sin against Christ.'[147] Therefore 'it is right not to . . . do anything that makes your brother stumble.'[148]

A person is obliged to always act according to the determined judgement of his or her conscience.[149] If a person purposely acts against conscience, this person condemns him/herself. Despite this obligation to obey conscience, it is a fact that moral conscience can remain in darkness and make incorrect evaluations of future or past acts. Such ignorance is often the responsibility of the individual concerned. Such is the case when a person 'takes little trouble to find out what is true and good, or when conscience is by degrees almost blinded through the habit of committing sin.'[150] In these situations, one is accountable for one's wrong-doing.

The *Catechism* lists a number of factors that can contribute to poor moral judgements. They are: 1) Lack of knowledge or understanding of Christ and the Gospel; 2) The negative influence of others; 3) Being imprisoned by one's passions; 4) The disavowal of Church teaching and authority; and 5) A failure to be converted to the truth, and a lack of charity. If one's lack of understanding in moral matters cannot be rectified or if one is not responsible for one's false judgement, then one should not be held accountable for the wrong one has done. Despite these extenuating circumstances the evil committed is no less evil. It is still depraved and disordered. It is therefore vital that one strives to educate one's moral conscience by seeking out and eliminating errors.

[146] *Catechism*, 1789; Mt. 7:12.
[147] *Catechism*, 1789; 1 Cor. 8:12.
[148] *Catechism*, 1789; Rom. 14:21.
[149] See footnote 142.
[150] *Catechism*, 1791; GS 16.

An upright moral conscience is one that is illuminated and guided by deep faith, as charity comes 'from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith.'[151] This section of the *Catechism* concludes with a quotation from *Gaudium et Spes* which explains how that which is truly good can be discerned by the faculty of conscience: 'The more a correct conscience prevails, the more do persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and try to be guided by objective standards of moral conduct.'[152]

1.3. Human Freedom (paragraphs 1730- 1742)

Even if there is an objective moral order discernible by human reason, the question remains whether human beings are in fact free to act according to what they have discerned to be true and good. For this reason, the *Catechism* looks at the notion of human freedom.

The human person, created by God, is a rational being. God bestowed on the human being the dignity of a person who can instigate and direct his/her own actions. To support this notion of human freedom, the *Catechism* quotes *Gaudium et Spes*, which in turn quotes the Book of Sirach: 'God willed that man should be "left in the hand of his own counsel," so that he might of his own accord seek his Creator and freely attain his full and blessed perfection by cleaving to him.'[153] St Irenaeus is also quoted: 'Man is rational and therefore like God; he is created with free will and is master over his acts.'[154]

The *Catechism* defines freedom as 'the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility.'[155] By free will a person carves out his or her own existence. Human freedom has a power that enables us to develop and grow in truth and goodness; it realizes the highest level of perfection when it is guided toward God, the ultimate source of our happiness.

[151] *Catechism*, 1794; 1 Tim 1:5.
[152] *Catechism*, 1794; GS 16.
[153] *Catechism*, 1730; GS 17; Sir. 15:14.
[154] *Catechism*, 1730; St Irenaeus *Adv. Haeres* 4, 4, 3.
[155] *Catechism*, 1731.

If freedom does not cling once and for all to its final good which is God, it remains possible to choose between good and evil, and consequently to either develop and mature in moral virtue, or to fall short in this virtue. This freedom is characteristic of acts that are truly human, and is the basis upon which we hold a person accountable for his or her actions.

As a result of an increase in the performance of good actions, a person becomes freer. Real freedom can only come through an allegiance to goodness and justice. By the decision to rebel and to do evil a person ill-uses his/her freedom and imprisons him/herself in sin.

Freedom makes one accountable for one's actions insofar as these actions are intentional. Developing one's virtue and moral understanding, and exercising self-discipline increase the will's command over its actions. However, responsibility for an action can be reduced and even abolished completely by lack of knowledge, oversight, coercion, trepidation, disposition, immoderate attachments and other social or psychological factors.[156] All actions committed with freedom and knowledge, however, are attributable to their initiators.

An action can be indirectly voluntary if it is caused by carelessness or thoughtlessness about something one was duty-bound to know or do, as when an accident occurs due to a driver's lack of knowledge of the rules of the road.

An effect can be endured without being willed by its instrument. The *Catechism* gives the example of the extreme fatigue of a mother caring for an ill child. A negative effect is not attributed to a person if he or she did not intend the effect either as an end in itself or as a way to achieve an end, e.g., if someone dies by coming to the rescue of someone who is in danger. For a negative effect to be attributed to a person he/she must have been able to predict the

[156] In Hughes's judgement, these psychological and social factors refer to mental illness and also to defects in a person's upbringing and social conditioning. Such defects might bring it about that some choices, which perhaps theoretically a person might make, simply do not even occur to him or her as possibilities to be considered, or could not, considering his or her cultural background, even appear to him or her to be in any way good. Hughes also points out that the question of how these various factors diminish responsibility, and whether they do so by removing free will, is not sufficiently dealt with in the *Catechism*. Walsh, ed., *Commentary on the Catechism*, 344.

effect; it must also have been possible for him/her to avoid it. The example given is the death of another caused by a drunken driver.

Freedom is practiced in human interactions and relationships. Because we are created in the image of God, we have the right to be acknowledged as persons who possess freedom and responsibility. We all ought to respect one another. Our right to exercise our freedom, especially with regard to morality and religion, is essential to our sense of worth, our dignity. This right must be acknowledged and safeguarded by civil authority as long as this does not interfere with the public's safety or with the common good.

Human freedom has its limitations and is capable of making mistakes. This truth has been made known in history by the fact that humankind has failed by freely sinning. By rejecting God's offer of redemption, by rejecting his love, human beings have deluded themselves and become imprisoned in sin. This first estrangement from God led to a great number of others. From its very beginnings, human history tells of the wickedness and slavery stemming from twisted human emotions that result from the misuse of our freedom.

The fact that we are free does not suggest that we are justified in anything we say or do. It is a mistake to say that 'the subject of this freedom' is 'an individual who is fully self-sufficient and whose finality is the satisfaction of his own interests in the enjoyment of earthly goods.'[157] Furthermore, the economic, social, political, and cultural conditions required for human beings to exercise fairly and justly their freedom, are too often ignored or infringed. Such circumstances of darkness and violation of another's rights are harmful to the moral life and cause both the strong and the weak to be seduced into sinning against charity. By straying from the moral law the human person infringes upon her own freedom, becomes a slave to sin, disturbs neighbourly companionship, and rises up against God's word.

[157] *Catechism*, 1740; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Libertatis Conscientia* (United States Catholic Conference), sec. 13.

By his glorious Passion, Christ has liberated all people. He has freed us from the sin that has held us in captivity. 'For freedom Christ has set us free.'[158] In Christ we are in solidarity with the 'truth that makes us free.'[159] God has granted to us the Holy Spirit and 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.'[160] We already rejoice in the 'liberty of the children of God.'[161]

Christ's grace in no way competes for our freedom when this freedom conforms to the intuition of goodness and truth that God has given to human beings. Rather, as our experience of prayer confirms, the more we yield to the exhortations of grace, the more we develop our freedom and courage during life's tribulations. Through grace the Holy Spirit instructs us in spiritual freedom so that we may freely participate in his work in both the Church and the world.

1.4. Critique

In this section we shall critically examine the *Catechism*'s notions of sin, ethical knowledge, and human freedom. This critique will focus on the question of how successful the *Catechism* is in dialoguing with those who are sceptical about the possibility of objective moral norms and those who are sceptical about the possibility of human freedom.

1.4.1. Sin

In paragraph 1849 sin is defined as 'an offence against reason, truth and right conscience'[162] and as 'an utterance, a deed or a desire contrary to the eternal law.'[163] These definitions strongly imply that there is a truth about morality, and that sin is in opposition to

[158] *Catechism*, 1741; Gal. 5:1.
[159] *Catechism*, 1741; Cf. Jn. 8:32.
[160] *Catechism*, 1741; 2 Cor. 3:17.
[161] *Catechism*, 1741; Rom. 8:21.
[162] *Catechism*, 1849.
[163] Ibid.; St Augustine *Contra Faustum* 22; St Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* I-II, 71, 6.

that which is reasonable and true. While this is, from our perspective, true, the *Catechism* provides no rational support for sceptical readers to sustain its position. It simply pays lip-service to a philosophical tradition, namely the natural law tradition, which has been used by the Church for centuries.

While the *Catechism* is right to draw on a philosophical tradition that is quite capable of dialoguing with modern moral sceptics, it needs to do so more explicitly. Rather than merely using words like 'reason' and 'truth,' and phrases like 'right conscience' and 'eternal law,' it needs to engage with the question of the possibility of truth and right conscience, and the possibility of their being an eternal law.

The above definitions also imply that a person has the freedom to act in a certain manner or not so. The word 'offence' in the first definition suggests culpability and implies that the person knows that a certain act is morally wrong but chooses to do it anyway. However, the question of the possibility of human freedom is never discussed.

This lack of engagement with vital questions pertaining to the notion of sin is evident in paragraph 1857 which discusses the notion of mortal sin. 'For a sin to be *mortal*, three conditions must together be met: "Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent."'[164] In terms of establishing the possibility of sin, the notions of knowledge and consent are of the utmost importance. Knowledge here, however, for the *Catechism* is simply knowledge of the Ten Commandments, as grave matter is specified by the Ten Commandments.[165] Mortal sin, the *Catechism* continues in paragraph 1859, presupposes knowledge of the sinful character of the act, of its opposition to God's law. The *Catechism* does not engage with the vital question of how human knowledge is possible. As to the question of human freedom, the *Catechism* here simply says that mortal sin 'implies a consent sufficiently deliberate to be a personal choice.

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[164] *Catechism*, 1857; John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, sec. 17.
[165] *Catechism*, 1858.

Feigned ignorance or hardness of heart do not diminish, but rather increase, the voluntary character of a sin.'[166] The question of how human freedom is possible is here neither asked nor answered.

1.4.2. Knowledge of the Good

Paragraph 1956 states that 'the natural law, present in the heart of each man and established by reason, is universal in its precepts and its authority extends to all men.'[167] What does it mean to say that the natural law is 'established by reason'? Don't reasonable people disagree in matters pertaining to morality? The quotation from Cicero in this passage speaks of 'right reason.' Again, what is it that makes one person's reason 'right' and another person's reason wrong? The *Catechism* seems to be saying that a person's reason is 'right' if he/she draws moral conclusions that conform to the Ten Commandments or the Church's teaching. It seems to be saying, basically, if you agree with us, you are being reasonable, if you do not, your reason is flawed.

Furthermore, if the natural law is present in the heart of each person, why do people come to different conclusions in moral matters? Paragraph 1960 attempts to answer this question: 'The precepts of the natural law are not perceived by everyone clearly and immediately. In the present situation sinful man needs grace and revelation so moral and religious truths may be known "by everyone with facility, with firm certainty and with no admixture of error"'[168] Imagine for a moment that the above question, 'if the natural law is present in the heart of each person, why do people come to different conclusions in moral matters?' is being asked by a moral sceptic. The *Catechism*'s answer to this person is, essentially, 'Because you are somewhat deprived of grace and revelation, your sinfulness has stopped you from perceiving things clearly.' This may indeed be true, but it is highly unlikely

[166] Ibid., 1859.
[167] Ibid., 1956.
[168] Ibid., 1960.

that the sceptic in this case will accept the argument. She will require a rational proof for the existence of objective moral norms and the possibility of human freedom. If the Church wishes to combat moral scepticism, it must do so, at least in part, on the sceptic's own terms.

Paragraph 1778 describes conscience as 'a judgement of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed. In all that he says or does, man is obliged to follow what he knows to be just and right.'[169] We have already seen (footnote 142) that it is also true that the person is obliged to follow what he sincerely believes to be right. Let us suppose, however, that a person can know what is just and right. The *Catechism* says nothing about how the person can know this, except to say that it is by a judgement of reason. Again, however, we are left with the same questions we asked in relation to the *Catechism*'s teaching on natural law: what is it that makes one person's reason 'right' and another person's reason wrong? Neither the cognitive process by which this reasoning occurs or its connection to reality, are dealt with in the *Catechism*.

Paragraph 1780 speaks of reason in relation to conscience in the same vague manner: 'The truth about the moral good, stated in the law of reason, is recognized practically and concretely by the *prudent judgement* of conscience.'[170] The truth about the moral good is 'stated in the law of reason.' The *Catechism* here uses a confusing phrase which it does not really explain. Earlier in the same paragraph the *Catechism* speaks of the perception of the principles of morality, their application in the given circumstances by practical discernment of reasons and goods, and judgement about concrete acts yet to be performed or already performed. This is perhaps what is meant by the 'law of reason,' although this is not entirely clear. However, the *Catechism* does not say *how* the principles of morality are perceived,

[169] Ibid., 1778.
[170] Ibid., 1780.

what is involved in the practical discernment of reasons and goods, or what is entailed in the judgement of concrete acts.

1.4.3. Human Freedom

Paragraph 1730 reads: 'God created man a rational being, conferring on him the dignity of a person who can initiate and control his own actions. "God willed that man should be left in the hand of his own counsel, so that he might of his own accord seek his Creator and freely attain full and blessed perfection by cleaving to him."'[171] The *Catechism* makes the claim that as human beings we are endowed with the capacity to make free choices, supporting this claim with the above quotation from the book of Sirach. It also quotes Irenaeus: 'Man is rational and therefore like God; he is created with free will and is master over his acts.'[172] The question of whether human beings are in fact capable of free choice is one that philosophers have been asking for millennia and are still asking today. Despite this, all the *Catechism* does to demonstrate that human freedom is a reality is quote one line from the OT another from one of the Fathers of the Church.

The *Catechism* goes on to define freedom as 'the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility'[173] The phrase 'rooted in reason and will' opens up a minefield of questions that the *Catechism* completely fails to engage with. Such questions include: What is the connection between freedom and reason? What is the will and how exactly does it function? These are major philosophical questions that are of great relevance to the freedom versus determinism debate. The *Catechism*, however, offers this definition of human freedom and simply ignores the complexity of the problem.

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[171] Ibid., 1730; GS 17; Sir. 15:14.
[172] *Catechism*, 1730; St Irenaeus *Adv. Haeres* 4, 4, 3.
[173] *Catechism*, 1731.

Paragraph 1734 reads: 'Freedom makes man responsible for his acts to the extent that they are voluntary. Progress in virtue, knowledge of the good, and ascesis enhance the mastery of the will over its acts.'[174] This paragraph speaks of the two most important criteria for establishing moral culpability, freedom and knowledge of the good. It states that progress in virtue, knowledge of the good, and self-discipline enhance the mastery of the will over its acts, but offers no rational evidence that knowledge of the good is possible, that there indeed exists something which we can call 'the good.' Nor does it supply any rational evidence that self-discipline is not merely an illusion as human behaviour has been determined in advance.

1.4.4. Conclusion

For the Christian reader, the *Catechism* provides a comprehensive and useful teaching on the notions of sin, natural law, moral conscience, and human freedom. The moral theologian, as one engaged in understanding his or her faith and its implications for human living, may believe that most or indeed all of what the *Catechism* teaches on these matters is true. If he/she is prudent, however, he/she will understand that the fact that something is true does not mean that it will be believed. He/she will also understand that the truth must be communicated in such a way that it respects people's present beliefs and engages with rather than alienates them. *Gaudium et Spes* recognizes the importance of communicating the faith in such an inclusive manner: 'theologians are now being asked, within the methods and limits of theological science, to develop more efficient ways of communicating doctrine to the people of today, for the deposit and the truths of faith are one thing, the manner of expressing them – provided their sense and meaning are preserved – is quite another.' It is my view that the *Catechism* has not succeeded in communicating its moral theology to the 'people of today.'

[174] Ibid., 1734.

In the Prologue to the *Catechism* catechesis is defined as ‘the totality of the Church’s efforts to make disciples, to help men believe that Jesus is the Son of God so that believing they might have life in his name, and to educate and instruct them in this life, thus building up the body of Christ.’[175] Instead of helping people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, however, the *Catechism* assumes this belief in its readers. The reader’s acceptance of the authority of scripture and the Church’s theological tradition is assumed and the world-views and questions of the non-Christian reader are never considered. While the *Catechism* is a useful instrument in the education and instruction of Christians, it is extremely unlikely that it will challenge the world-view of the moral sceptic, or engender in the sceptic a moral or religious conversion.

2. POPE JOHN PAUL II’S THEOLOGY OF SIN

During his pontificate, Pope John Paul II produced a number of documents in which he discussed the notion of sin. Of central importance on this subject is the apostolic exhortation, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, in which there is a chapter length discussion on the ‘mystery of sin,’ and in which John Paul II develops his notion of social sin. Also of central importance to John Paul II’s understanding of sin is his 1993 encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor*. In this work he discusses central issues in fundamental moral theology, including the notions of sin, natural law, moral conscience, and human freedom. In this section we shall examine portions of these works of John Paul II, asking the same question that we asked in relation to the *Catechism*, namely: How successful is John Paul II’s moral theology in dialoguing with moral sceptics and determinists?

[175] Ibid., 4.

2.1. The Notion of Sin in *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* and *Veritatis Splendor*

2.1.1. *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*

In article 16 of *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* John Paul II discusses personal and social sin. Sin, he says, 'is always a *personal act*, since it is an act of freedom on the part of an individual person, and not properly of a group or community.'[176] This individual, he says, may be influenced by a number of powerful external conditions. He may also be dominated by dispositions, faults, and proclivities connected to his individual psychology. In many cases these exterior and interior factors may diminish, to a greater or lesser extent, the person's freedom and consequently his accountability and culpability. It is, however, John Paul II proceeds, 'a truth of faith, also confirmed by our experience and reason, that the human person is free.'[177] This truth, he says, cannot be ignored, so that we may put the blame for individuals' sins on exterior factors such as social or political structures, or on other people. To do this would be to fail to give the person due dignity and freedom, dignity and freedom which is made known – albeit destructively – also in the culpability for sin perpetrated. There is, then, nothing as personal and irremovable in each person as praiseworthiness for virtue or culpability for sin.

John Paul II proceeds to explain the various ways that the term 'social sin' has been understood. To speak of social sin, he says, is to acknowledge that due to human fellowship which is as enigmatic and impalpable as it is real and substantial, every person's sin affects others in some way. It is for this reason that we can speak of a communion of sin, by which a soul that degrades itself through sin pulls down both itself and the Church and, somehow, the entire world. In other words, not even the most personal and private sin concerns only the person perpetrating it. According to this understanding of the term, all sins can with certainty be regarded as social sins.

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[176] JP II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, sec. 16.
[177] Ibid.

Some sins, however, by their very substance represent a straight-forward assault on one's neighbour and, more precisely, against one's brother or sister. Through these sins we violate both God and neighbour. Such sins are normally called social sins. Understood in this way social sin is sin against our neighbour, and in terms of Christ's law it is considerably more grave as it pertains to the second commandment, which is 'like unto the first'[178] Similarly the designation 'social' pertains to all sins of injustice in interpersonal relations, perpetrated by a person against his/her community or, alternatively, by the community against him/her. Every sin that violates individual human rights, beginning with the right to life, including foetal life, or against a person's physical person, is a social sin. Similarly, every sin against others' freedom, especially against the ultimate freedom to believe in and worship God, is a social sin. Every sin against our fellow human beings' dignity and integrity is also regarded as social. Sins against the common good and its demands in relation to the broad ranging civil rights and obligations are also deemed to be social. The designation 'social' can pertain either to sins of commission or omission. John Paul II uses as an example political, economic, and trade union leaders, who do not work assiduously and prudently for the betterment and renewal of society according to the needs and possibilities of the particular historical moment. He also mentions workers who, by their lack of cooperation and their absenteeism, fail to guarantee that their businesses will continue to further the welfare of individual workers and their families, and also the well-being of the wider society.

The third meaning of the term social sin, according to John Paul II, touches on the relationships between diverse human communities. These relationships do not always accord with God's plan; he desires a just world, and freedom and harmony between individual persons and groups of people. So the grappling for economic and political power between capitalist and working classes, whoever leads it or in a given situation attempts to give it a

[178] Ibid.; Mt 22:39; Mk 12:32, Lk 10:27f.

theoretical justification, is a social evil. Similarly, unyielding conflict between blocs of nations, or between one nation and another, or between varying groups within the one nation are all social evils. In both cases it is feasible to ask whether ethical culpability for such evils, and therefore sin, can be assigned to any one person. John Paul II concedes that we must admit that situations like the ones just related, when they become generalized and arrive at expansive dimensions as social phenomena, almost inevitably become anonymous, just as the reasons for these situations are intricate and not readily known or understood. If one speaks of social sin here, then, the meaning of the term is analogical. However, even if we converse about social sins analogically, we must not minimize the accountability of the individuals who have committed these sins. It is intended as a petition to all consciences, an appeal to help each individual to solemnly and fearlessly accept his or her responsibility in order to change those dire conditions and unacceptable situations.

When the Church refers to 'situations of sin,' John Paul II continues, or when she denounces as social sins particular situations or the concerted actions of certain social groups, or even of entire nations and blocs of nations, she knows and declares that such cases of social sin are caused by the build up of a multitude of personal sins. Situations of sin are caused by the personal sins of those who bring about or promote or take advantage of evil. They are caused by those who are in a position to avert, eradicate, or at least control certain social evils but who do not do so due to indolence, trepidation, or by conspiring to keep silent, or through covert collusion or apathy. John Paul II also mentions those who hide behind what seems to them to be the hopelessness of bringing about change in the world, and those who evade the toil and renouncement required, producing superficially plausible reasons for this behaviour. It is with individuals, then, that true culpability for social sin rests.

No situation or structure or society as a whole is in itself the cause of a moral act. Accordingly, situations should not be regarded as being in themselves good or bad.

‘At the very heart of every situation of sin,’ John Paul II continues, ‘are always to be found sinful people.’[179] This is so true that even when such a situation can be changed in its foundational and institutional features by the implementation of new laws, the change, in actuality, turns out to be incomplete, short-term, and in the end futile and to no avail, if those immediately responsible or indirectly responsible for the situation do not undergo a change of heart.

2.1.2. *Veritatis Splendor* (articles 65-67)

In *Veritatis Splendor* John Paul II discusses the notion of ‘fundamental option.’ He points out that increased concern for freedom in contemporary society has resulted in many students of psychology and theology undertaking a more in-depth exploration of its nature and of its characteristics. Freedom is not only the choice for one action over another; it is also a decision about oneself, a decision to live in a way that is either for or against goodness, truth, and God. Important are particular choices which mould one’s moral life, and which function as limits within which other specific commonplace decisions can be located and permitted to thrive.

John Paul II proceeds by pointing out that some authors have suggested an even more revolutionary reinterpretation of human moral dynamics. These authors speak of a ‘fundamental freedom,’ more profound and distinct from freedom of choice. If human actions are to be correctly judged and appraised, this fundamental freedom needs to be considered. Fundamental option, which results from the fundamental freedom by which one determines, in a way that goes beyond specific decisions, who he/she is to be, is to be credited with a crucial role in the moral life. Particular acts which proceed from this option would make up only incomplete and never conclusive attempts to represent it; they would, rather, be merely

[179] JP II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, sec. 16.

symptomatic or symbolic. The direct object of such acts would not be the definitive Good, but specific or 'categorical' goods. According to some theologians, none of these goods, which are naturally incomplete, could settle the freedom of a person in his/her wholeness, even though it is only by realizing these goods or declining to do so that one is capable of communicating one's fundamental option.

Hence fundamental option is distinguished from intentional choices of a definite type of conduct. In some authors, John Paul II continues, such distinction is inclined to become a separation, as they confine the moral terms 'good' and 'evil' to the transcendental realm which belongs to the fundamental option, and refer to as 'right' or 'wrong' the choices of particular 'innerworldly' types of conduct, those, that is, that pertain to one's relationship with one's self, with others, and with the physical world. It appears, therefore, that human actions can be categorised into two distinct levels of morality. Firstly, there is the order of good and evil, which relies on the will. Secondly, there are particular types of conduct, which, John Paul II tells us, are deemed morally right or wrong based on a technical calculation of the ratio of 'premoral' or 'physical' goods and evils which in fact are caused by the action. This kind of argument reaches the point where a definite type of conduct, even one that is freely chosen, is regarded as a 'merely physical process,' and not according to the standards appropriate to a human act. John Paul II submits that such arguments eventually lead to the conclusion that the correctly moral evaluation of the person is to be found in his/her fundamental option, more or less leaving out of consideration his/her choice of concrete actions, of specific types of conduct.

John Paul II recognizes the importance of a fundamental choice 'which qualifies the moral life and engages freedom on a radical level before God.'[180] It is a matter, he says, of the acquiescence of faith 'by which man makes a total and free self-commitment to God,

[180] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1993), sec. 66.

offering "the full submission of intellect and will to God as he reveals." '[181] This faith, which operates through love, comes from the very centre of person, from his/her affective responses, from where it is entreated to come to fruition in charitable acts.

However, John Paul II proceeds to say that by one's fundamental choice, one can give purpose to one's existence, and advance, by grace, towards one's object, following the beckoning of God. This ability, however, is in reality practiced in the determinate choices of particular actions, by which a person purposely complies with the will, wisdom, and law of God. It therefore needs to be asserted, John Paul II continues, that the so-called fundamental option is always manifested in conscious and free decisions. For just this reason, it is invalidated when one uses one's freedom to consciously stand against God's wisdom and law, regarding morally grave matter.

2.2. Knowledge of the Good

The notion of 'mortal sin' is central to John Paul II's hamartology. As we have seen, he defines mortal sin as follows: 'Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent.'[182] This section will examine the second of these criteria for designating particular sins as 'mortal': knowledge. As in our examination of knowledge in the section on the *Catechism*, we shall proceed by examining the notion that there is an objective moral order. This will be done by investigating John Paul II's teaching on natural law. We shall also examine the further notion that human beings are capable of apprehending the moral order, by investigating John Paul II's teaching on conscience.

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[181] Ibid.; the speech marks here (both external and internal) are in the text of *Veritatis Splendor* itself. John Paul II cites *Dei Verbum*, article 5, which in turn cites the First Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, *Dei Filius*, chap. 3.
[182] JP II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, sec. 17.

2.2.1. Natural Law (*Veritatis Splendor*, articles 42-45)

John Paul II begins his discussion on natural law by saying that human beings' freedom, which is modelled on God's freedom, is not invalidated by acquiescence to God's law; in fact it is only through this acquiescence that it remains in the truth and conforms to human dignity. This, he says, is clearly stated by the Council: 'Human dignity requires man to act through conscious and free choice, as motivated and prompted personally from within, and not through blind internal impulse or merely external pressure. Man achieves such dignity when he frees himself from all subservience to his feelings, and in a free choice of the good, pursues his own end by effectively and assiduously marshalling the appropriate means.'[183]

In moving towards God, the One who 'alone is good,' one must in freedom do good and avoid evil. In order to achieve this, however, one must be capable of determining what is good and what is evil. This can happen above all due to 'the light of natural reason, the reflection in man of the splendour of God's countenance.'[184] St Thomas, commenting on a verse from psalm 4, writes: 'after saying: Offer right sacrifices (Ps 4:5), as if some had then asked him what right works were, the Psalmist adds: *There are many who say: Who will make us see good?* And in reply to the question he says: *The light of your face, Lord, is signed upon us*, thereby implying that the light of natural reason whereby we discern good from evil, which is the function of the natural law, is nothing else but an imprint on us of the divine light.'[185] It also, John Paul II continues, becomes clear why this law is called the natural law: it is given this name not because it speaks of the nature of irrational beings but because the reason which makes it known is proper to human nature.

John Paul II proceeds by quoting *Dignitatis Humanae*, which points out that the 'supreme rule of life is the divine law itself, the eternal, objective and universal law by which

[183] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 42; GS 17.
[184] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 42.
[185] Ibid.; Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* I-II, q. 91, a. 2.

God out of his wisdom and love arranges, directs and governs the whole world and the paths of the human community. God has enabled man to share in this divine law, and hence man is able under the gentle guidance of God's providence increasingly to recognize the unchanging truth.'[186]

St Augustine defines God's eternal law as 'the reason or the will of God, who commands us to respect the natural order and forbids us to disturb it,'[187] and St Thomas associates it with 'the type of the divine wisdom as moving all things to their due end.'[188] God's wisdom is in his beneficence; it is a 'love which cares.' God himself loves and is concerned for all created beings. However, God provides for human beings in a way that is different to the way that he provides for non-personal beings. He cares for persons not 'from without,' through the physical laws that govern the universe, but 'from within,' that is, through reason, which, by its inherent understanding of God's eternal law, is therefore able to instruct people in relation to what route they should take in their free actions. It is in this manner that God calls one to become involved in one's own providence, because he wishes to direct the world – both the natural and the human – through persons themselves, through their rational and honest care. Thus the natural law is seen as 'the human expression of God's eternal law.' John Paul II again quotes St Thomas: 'Among all others, the rational creature is subject to divine providence in the most excellent way, insofar as it partakes of a share of providence, being provident both for itself and for others. Thus it has a share of the Eternal Reason, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end. This participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called natural law.'[189]

Pope John Paul II points out that the Church often refers to St Thomas's doctrine of natural law, and has integrated this doctrine into her own moral teachings. Thus Leo XIII, he

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[186] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 43; DH 3.
[187] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 43; St Augustine *Contra Faustum* 22, 27.
[188] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 43; Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* I-II, q. 93, a. 1.
[189] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 43; Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* I-II, q. 91, a. 2.

tells us, stressed the necessity of making reason and human law secondary to divine wisdom and law. Quoting Leo XIII, John Paul II speaks of the natural law which 'is written and engraved in the heart of each and every man, since it is none other than human reason itself which commands us to do good and counsels us not to sin.'[190] Leo XIII goes on to appeal to the 'higher reason' of the divine Lawgiver: 'But this prescription of human reason could not have the force of law unless it were the voice and the interpreter of some higher reason to which our spirit and our freedom must be subject.'[191] Indeed, John Paul II continues, the force of law is made up of its power to set duties, to accord rights, and to permit some behaviours while restricting others. He continues to cite Leo XIII: 'Now all of this, clearly, could not exist in man if, as his own supreme legislator, he gave himself the rule of his own actions.'[192] Leo XIII concludes that 'it follows that the natural law is itself the eternal law, implanted in beings endowed with reason, and inclining them towards their right action and end: it is none other than the eternal reason of the Creator and Ruler of the universe.'[193]

The human person is capable of distinguishing between good and evil because of that perception of good and evil which he/she implements by his/her reason, in particular by his/her reason as it is illuminated by God's Revelation and by faith, particularly through the law – beginning with the Decalogue – that God gave to the Jewish People. Israel was called to avow and to live out God's law as a distinct inheritance and symbol of its appointment and of God's Covenant, and also as a promise of divine favour. In this way Moses was able to address the children of Israel and ask them: 'What great nation is that that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this

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[190] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 44; *Libertas Praestantissimum* (20 June 1888), in *The Great Encyclical Letters of Leo XIII* (New York, Cincinnati, Chicago: Benziger Brothers, 1903), 140.
[191] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 44; *Great Encyclical Letters*, 140.
[192] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 44; *Great Encyclical Letters*, 140.
[193] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 44; *Great Encyclical Letters*, 140.

day?'[194] John Paul II points out that in the Psalms we are met with expressions of glorification, thankfulness, and adoration which the Chosen People is called upon to display towards God's law, together with an injunction to know it, contemplate it, and convert it into life. 'Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night.'[195] 'The law of the Lord is Perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.'[196]

The Church, John Paul II tells us, accepts with gratitude and lovingly safeguards the complete consignment of Revelation, regarding it with religious respect and realizing her duty of properly interpreting God's law as it is illuminated by the Gospel. The Church also inherits as gift the New Law, the 'fulfilment' of the divine law in Christ and the Holy Spirit. This is an interior rather than an exterior law: it is 'written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts;'[197] it is a law of perfection and freedom; 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.'[198] John Paul II quotes St Thomas who writes that this law 'can be called law in two ways. First, the law of the spirit is the Holy Spirit . . . who, dwelling in the soul, not only teaches what it is necessary to do by enlightening the intellect on the things to be done, but also inclines the affections to act with uprightness . . . Second, the law of the spirit can be called the proper effect of the Holy Spirit, and thus faith working through love, which teaches inwardly about the things to be done . . . and inclines the affections to act.'[199]

[194] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 44; Dt. 4:7-8.
[195] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 44; Ps. 1:1-2.
[196] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 44; Ps. 18/19:8-9.
[197] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 45; 2 Cor. 3:3.
[198] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 45; Rom. 8:2.
[199] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 45; Thomas Aquinas *In Epistulam ad Romanos* c. VIII, lect. 1.

John Paul II contends that even if theological ethics normally differentiates between positive or revealed law and natural law, and between the 'old' and the 'new' law, we must remember that these and other helpful distinctions always point to that law whose architect is the one God and which is always intended for human beings. Throughout history, God has cared for the world and human beings in different ways. These ways, however, are not antagonistic. They should, rather, be seen as being supportive of one another and as integrating with one another. They have as their foundation and end the eternal, wise, and benevolent guidance by which God preordains that men and women will 'be conformed to the image of his Son.'[200] God's plan does not endanger people's authentic freedom; rather, submission to God's plan is the only way to secure that freedom.

2.2.2. Conscience (*Veritatis Splendor*, articles 57-61)

John Paul II begins his discussion on conscience by quoting the following text from the book of Romans, which, he says, indicates the biblical understanding of conscience, especially in its specific connection with the law: 'When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law unto themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them.'[201]

According to St Paul, conscience in a way confronts the human person with the law. Thus it becomes a 'witness' for human persons, either of our own fidelity or infidelity in relation to the law, or of our basic moral goodness or badness. Conscience, moreover, is the only witness, since that which occurs in the person's heart is obscured from the sight of those outside. Conscience only makes its vision discernible by the person him/herself. And, in turn,

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[200] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 45; Rom. 8:29.
[201] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 57; Rom. 2:14-15.

only the individual, whose conscience has been activated, knows how he/she will answer his/her conscience.

John Paul II points out that the importance of this inner conversation of the person with him/herself can never be sufficiently recognized. It is, however, also a conversation between the person and God, who is the architect of the law and human beings' original likeness and ultimate goal. John Paul II draws on St Bonaventure in order to bring out this special relationship between the human person and God. Conscience, Bonaventure says, 'is like God's herald and messenger; it does not command things on its own authority, but commands them as coming from God's authority, like a herald when he proclaims the edict of the king. This is why conscience has binding force.'[202] It can be said, therefore, that conscience observes the person's own moral goodness or badness to humankind itself but, along with this and indeed even previously, conscience is the observation of God himself, whose voice and judgement infiltrate the very recesses of a person's soul, calling him or her gently and firmly to obedience. 'Moral conscience does not close man within an insurmountable and impenetrable solitude, but opens him to the call, to the voice of God. In this, and not in anything else, lies the entire mystery and the dignity of the moral conscience: in being the place, the sacred place where God speaks to man.'[203]

As well as acknowledging that conscience acts as a 'witness,' St Paul also exposes the manner in which conscience discharges that function. He mentions the 'conflicting thoughts' which indict or pardon the Gentiles in relation to their actions.[204] The term 'conflicting thoughts,' John Paul II argues, makes clear the exact nature of conscience. Thus he defines conscience as 'a *moral judgement about man and his actions*, a judgement either of acquittal or of condemnation, according as human acts are in conformity or not with the law of God

[202] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 58.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid., 59; cf. Rom. 2:15.

written on the heart.'[205] In the same text, he says, St Paul clearly converses on the judgement of actions, the judgement of their initiators and the precise time when that judgement will be decisively delivered: '(This will take place) on that day when, according to my Gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.' [206]

The judgement of conscience, John Paul II tells us, is a practical judgement that helps a person to know what he or she must or must not do, or which evaluates an action that he or she has already carried out. Such judgements apply to a definite situation the rational assurance that one is obligated to love and do good and avoid evil. This, the first principle of practical reason, is part of what constitutes the natural law. In fact it makes up precisely the foundation of the natural law, insofar as it communicates that first insight about good and evil, reflecting God's creative wisdom which, like an 'imperishable spark,' illuminates the heart of every person. However, while the natural law reveals the objective and universal exigencies of the moral good, conscience applies the law to a specific instance. Thus it becomes an interior principle for the individual, a call to do what is good in the specific instance. Conscience therefore states definitively one's moral obligation in the light of the natural law: it is the duty to do what the individual, through the operations of his/her conscience, *knows* to be a good he/she is summoned to perform in the present time and place. The all-inclusiveness of the law and our responsibility to observe it, are recognized once reason has confirmed the law's implementation in definite situations that are presently occurring. The conscientious judgement ultimately asserts whether a specific sort of conduct complies with the law. It expresses the standard of measurement by which is judged the morality of a free act, 'applying the objective law to a particular case.'[207]

The judgement of conscience, like the natural law itself and all applied wisdom, has a vital character: in other words, one must comply with it. If one acts against this judgement or,

[205] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 59, italics in original text.
[206] Ibid., 59; Rom. 2:16.
[207] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 59.

in a situation where one is unsure about the rightness and goodness of an intended act, still carries out the act, one remains convicted by his/her own conscience, the standard of measurement of personal morality. The eminence of this rational convention, and the force of its utterances and decisions, stem from the truth about moral good and evil, which it is called to heed and communicate. This truth is shown by the 'divine law,' the '*universal and objective norm of morality*.'[208] The judgement of conscience, John Paul II tells us, does not establish the law but attests to the natural law's dominion and to the practical reason in relation to the ultimate good, whose desirability one perceives and whose precepts one accepts. 'Conscience is not an independent and exclusive capacity to decide what is good and what is evil. Rather there is profoundly imprinted upon it a principle of obedience vis-a-vis the objective norm which establishes and conditions the correspondence of its decisions with the commands and prohibitions which are at the basis of human behaviour.'[209]

The truth regarding the moral good, as articulated in the law of reason, is in practice identified by the judgement of conscience, which helps one to take responsibility for the good or the evil one has committed. If a person does evil, the right judgement of his/her conscience stays within him/her to attest to the unchanging truth of the good, as well as to the malevolence of his/her specific choice. But the judgement of conscience stays in him/her also as a vow of hope and mercy. While attesting to the evil he/she has committed, it reminds him/her also of his/her need, with the aid of divine grace, to seek forgiveness, to do good, and to develop virtue ceaselessly.

As a result, in the practical judgement of conscience, which places upon the person the duty to carry out a particular act, the connection between freedom and truth becomes apparent. For just this reason conscience communicates in moments of 'judgement' which demonstrate the truth about the good, and not in random 'decisions.' The sophistication of,

[208] Ibid., 60, italics in original text.
[209] Ibid.; *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986), sec. 43, in John Paul II, *Encyclicals* (Trivandrum, Kerala, India: Carmel International Publishing House, 2005), 863.

and the obligation presented by these judgements, and of the individual who is their subject, are not gauged by the freeing of conscience from objective truth, in favour of a supposed independence in individual choices, but, contrariwise, by a persistent quest for truth and by permitting oneself to be directed by that truth in all of one's endeavours.

2.3. Human Freedom (*Veritatis Splendor*, articles 38-41)

In this section we shall examine the third of John Paul II's criteria for designating particular sins as 'mortal': deliberate consent. We shall proceed by investigating his notion of human freedom.

John Paul II begins his discussion on human freedom by citing the Second Vatican Council, which explains the meaning of that 'genuine freedom' which is 'an outstanding manifestation of the divine image'[210] of humankind. The Council quotes from the OT book of Sirach: 'God willed to leave man in the power of his own counsel, so that he would seek his Creator of his own accord and would arrive at full and blessed perfection by cleaving to God.'[211] These words, John Paul II says, are indicative of the profound depth of the sharing in God's sovereignty to which the human person has been beckoned. They signify that humankind's rule in a sense stretches over humankind itself. This, John Paul II tells us, is a theme which has often recurred in theological reflection on human freedom, and has been described as a type of kingship. To take just one instance, St Gregory of Nyssa writes: 'The soul shows its royal and exalted character . . . in that it is free and self-governed, swayed autonomously by its own will. Of whom else can this be said, save a king? . . . Thus human nature, created to rule other creatures, was by its likeness to the King of the universe made as it were a living image, partaking with the Archetype both in dignity and in name.'[212]

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[210] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 38; GS 17.
[211] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 38; Sir. 15:14.
[212] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 38.

The exercise of power or dominion over the world represents a considerable and important task for the human person, one which involves his/her freedom in compliance with the command of the Creator: 'Fill the earth and subdue it.'[213] In light of this, a proper autonomy is owed to every person, and also to the community as a whole, a fact which is given special notice in the Council's constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. This autonomy relates to 'earthly realities,' which means that 'created things have their own laws and values which are to be gradually discovered, utilized and ordered by man.'[214]

Not just the world, John Paul II continues, but also human beings themselves have been made responsible for their own care. God left the human person 'in the power of his own counsel,' so that he might pursue his maker and in freedom achieve transcendence. Achieving such transcendence or perfection means establishing that perfection in oneself. Just as humankind in ruling over the world forms it according to human intelligence and will, so also in carrying out morally good acts, a person fortifies, advances, and secures within him/herself her likeness to God.

The Council, however, John Paul II tells us, cautions against a false idea of the self-governing nature of worldly realities; for example, one which would suggest that 'created things are not dependent on God and that man can use them without reference to their Creator.'[215] In relation to human persons themselves, such a conception of autonomy creates particularly troublesome results, and sooner or later results in atheism: 'Without its Creator the creature simply disappears . . . If God is ignored the creature itself is impoverished.'[216]

On the one hand, the teaching of the Council stresses the part played by human reason in the locating of and application of the moral law. The moral life, according to John Paul II, calls for a creativity and originality which characterizes the human person, who is the origin

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[213] Ibid.; Gen. 1:28.
[214] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 38; GS 36.
[215] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 39.
[216] Ibid.

and author of his/her own considered acts. However, reason also takes its own truth and testimony from the eternal law, which is nothing less than God's wisdom. Right at the centre of the moral life, therefore, we find the idea of a 'rightful autonomy' of the person, the subject of his or her own actions. The moral law begins in God and without exception discovers in him its provenance. Concurrently, by means of natural reason, which stems from God's wisdom, it is correctly called human law. The natural law 'is nothing other than the light of understanding infused in us by God, whereby we understand what must be done and what must be avoided. God gave this light and this law to man at creation.'[217] The proper autonomy of the practical reason indicates that the human person has within him/herself his/her own law, a law inherited from God. In spite of this, the autonomy of reason does not mean that reason itself produces values and moral norms. If this autonomy suggested a refutation of the involvement of practical reason in the wisdom of the supreme Creator and Lawgiver, or if it suggested a freedom that produces moral norms, based on historical circumstances or the disparity between societies and cultures, this kind of supposed autonomy would oppose the Church's teaching on the nature of the human person. It would be the end of real freedom: 'But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'[218]

Humankind's authentic moral autonomy in no way suggests the denial of but rather the affirmation of the moral law, of God's command: 'The Lord God gave this command to the man . . .'[219] Human freedom and God's law come together and are called to intertwine, in the sense of humankind's free acquiescence to God and of God's wholly voluntary kindness towards humanity. Obedience to God is not, therefore, as some suggest, a heteronomy, as if the moral life were dependent on the will of some omnipotent and absolute being who is alien to the human person and is disdainful of humanity's freedom. If in actuality a heteronomy of

[217] Ibid., 40.
[218] Ibid.; Gen. 2:17.
[219] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 41; Gen. 2:16.

morality indicated a negation of the human person's self-determination or the inflicting of standards disconnected from his/her good, this would oppose the Revelation of the Covenant and God's salvific action in the Incarnation. Such a heteronomy would be nothing less than a type of alienation; it would oppose both the divine wisdom and the dignity of the human person.

Others correctly speak of theonomy, or participated theonomy. This suggests that humankind's free acquiescence to God's law essentially implies that human reason and will partake in the wisdom and providence of God. By prohibiting the human person to 'eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,' God clearly reveals that the human person does not originally hold such 'knowledge' as something that is rightly his/her own; rather he/she merely takes part in it illuminated by natural reason and by Divine Revelation, which make known to him/her the demands and the encouragement of eternal wisdom. It is therefore necessary that law be thought of as a manifestation of divine wisdom: by yielding to the law, freedom yields to the reality of creation. As a result, one is obliged to acknowledge in the human person's freedom the likeness and the closeness of God, who abides in all. But one must also, in a similar way, recognize the splendour of the God of the universe and venerate the blessedness of the law of God, who is 'infinitely transcendent: *Deus semper maior*.'[220]

2.4. Critique

In his 1998 encyclical letter, *Fides et Ratio* John Paul II discusses at some length the importance of metaphysics for theological reflection. Responding to postmodern trends in both philosophical and theological thought, he stresses the importance of a philosophy that emphasizes foundation rather than phenomenon.[221] John Paul II also stresses the importance of using this form of philosophical reflection in moral theology: 'In order to fulfil its mission,

[220] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 41; The phrase '*Deus semper maior*' can be translated as 'God is always greater.' See St Augustine's *Exposition on the Psalms* (psalm 63).
[221] John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (Sherbrooke: Médiaspaul, 1998), sec. 83.

moral theology must turn to a philosophical ethics which looks to the truth of the good, to an ethics which is neither subjectivist nor utilitarian. Such an ethics implies and presupposes a philosophical anthropology and a metaphysics of the good.'[222] While he does not recommend 'a specific school or a particular historical current of thought,'[223] John Paul II himself draws largely on the metaphysics of St Thomas. However, the way in which he does this is somewhat limited. St Thomas's metaphysics is an ontology, and yet there is in John Paul II's reflections in moral theology no discussion of the notion of 'being.' Because of this he ultimately fails to ground the notions of sin, natural law, conscience, and human freedom in reality. In this section I will support this contention with a critique of the sections of *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* and *Veritatis Splendor* that we examined above.

2.4.1. Sin and Freedom

In article 16 of *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* John Paul II says that sin is always a personal act, since it is an act of freedom on the part of the individual person. He observes that the individual in question may be 'conditioned, incited and influenced by numerous and powerful external factors,' and that he may also be 'subjected to tendencies, defects and habits linked with his personal condition.'[224] These external and internal factors may attenuate, he says, to a greater or lesser degree, the person's freedom and therefore his responsibility and guilt. He continues: 'it is a truth of faith, also confirmed by our experience and reason, that the human person is free.'[225] This last sentence is revealing in terms of John Paul II's method of demonstrating the possibility and reality of freedom and sin. He simply asserts that freedom is a reality and that we know this through our faith, experience, and reason. He makes no attempt, however, to say *how* experience tells us that freedom is a

[222] Ibid., sec. 98.
[223] Ibid., sec. 83.
[224] JP II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, sec. 16.
[225] Ibid.

reality, or to present a rational argument that concludes that freedom is a reality. In this article, John Paul II is attempting to demonstrate that social sin is the accumulation of many personal sins. He fails to do this, however, because he fails to demonstrate the reality of personal sin by not providing sufficient evidence for the possibility of human freedom.

In his discussion of sin in *Veritatis Splendor*, John Paul II critiques various theories of fundamental option. In doing so he emphasizes the importance of individual acts carried out with knowledge and freedom. 'The so-called fundamental option,' he says, 'is always brought into play through conscious and free decisions.'[226] This is vital to John Paul II's moral theology as he points out the dangers of neglecting the importance of individual acts for a theory that emphasizes instead a person's general moral orientation. A person's orientation for John Paul II can be seriously affected by the individual choices he or she makes. Unfortunately, however, John Paul II does not adequately demonstrate the possibility of such choices. As in *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* so also in *Veritatis Splendor* the freedom involved in the making of these choices is not demonstrated but merely assumed.

In *Veritatis Splendor*'s discussion of human freedom, John Paul II quotes the Second Vatican Council, which in turn quotes the OT book of Sirach: 'God willed to leave man in the power of his own counsel, so that he would seek his Creator of his own accord and would freely arrive at full and blessed perfection by cleaving to God.'[227] He also quotes St Gregory of Nyssa: 'The soul shows its royal and exalted character . . . in that it is free and self-governed, swayed autonomously by its own will.'[228] The exercise of dominion over the world, John Paul II tells us, represents a great and responsible task for man, one which involves his freedom in obedience to the Creator's command: 'Fill the earth and subdue it.'[229] These references to scripture and to St Gregory are all that John Paul II offers the reader of

[226] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 67.
[227] Ibid., sec. 38; GS 17; Sir. 15:14.
[228] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 38.
[229] Ibid.; Gen. 1:28.

this text to support his contention that human freedom is a reality. There is no recognition of or attempt to dialogue with hard determinism, which claims that human freedom is just an illusion, as every human act is predetermined.

John Paul II's approach is in complete contrast to that of St Thomas, who demonstrates rationally and systematically the possibility of human beings not being constrained in their actions by necessity, but rather being able to freely choose their actions. By answering questions such as: 'Does the will set itself in motion?' and 'Is volition moved of necessity by its object?' St Thomas demonstrates that the will is self-moving, and consequently that the human being is capable of making free decisions.[230] John Paul II, on the other hand, does not engage with these questions. In *Fides et Ratio*, as we have seen, he states the importance of metaphysics for moral theology. However, when it comes to demonstrating the possibility of human freedom, a concept of central importance in ethical reflection, he refrains from metaphysics and instead resorts to quoting scripture and the Church Fathers. By taking this approach, John Paul II fails to engage with the hard determinist.

2.4.2. Natural Law

In his discussion of natural law, John Paul II argues that human beings are capable of distinguishing good from evil because of 'the light of natural reason, the reflection in man of the splendour of God's countenance.'[231] To support this thesis he cites Thomas Aquinas's commentary on Psalm 4: 'Who will make us see good? The light of your face, Lord, is signed upon us.'[232] For St Thomas, this implies that the light of natural reason, whereby we discern good from evil, is nothing else but an imprint on us of the divine light. In this approach John Paul II gives mere lip-service to reason. The human being is capable of discerning good from

[230] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 9, a. 3; q. 10, a. 2; *De Malo*, q. 6, a. 1. We cannot here enter into the details of St Thomas's argument. A detailed analysis of a Thomistic approach to the question of human freedom will appear in the next section of this dissertation that deals with Lonergan's approach to ethics.
[231] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 42.
[232] Ibid.; Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* I-II q. 91, a. 2; Ps. 4:6.

evil because of the light of natural reason. He does not engage with the process whereby the human mind comprehends truth and goodness. By simply stating that the person is capable of such comprehension because of the light of natural reason, John Paul II fails to engage with moral sceptics who regard such comprehension as impossible.

The same kind of lip-service to reason can be seen in article 43: 'God provides for man differently from the way in which he provides for beings which are not persons. He cares for man not "from without," through the laws of physical nature, but "from within," through reason, which, by its natural knowledge of God's eternal law, is consequently able to show man the right direction to take in his free actions.'[233] If a moral sceptic were to ask us to demonstrate the possibility of knowing right from wrong, we must be able to give a more adequate response than this. We must be able to demonstrate the process whereby the human mind apprehends the good. We cannot merely mention reason in relation to moral discernment, without saying how human reason functions in this regard.

The same approach to natural law can be seen in article 44: 'Man is able to recognize good and evil thanks to that discernment of good from evil which he himself carries out by his reason, in particular by his reason enlightened by Divine Revelation and by faith . . .'[234] In this sentence, reason is not merely mentioned on its own. Very importantly, from a theological perspective, there is the addition of the phrase 'enlightened by Divine Revelation and faith.' However, while this addition is obviously important from a purely theological perspective, in terms of dialoguing with moral sceptics it is of no help. The theologian who wishes to dialogue with the modern moral sceptic must demonstrate the rational possibility of moral discernment and the cognitive process whereby such discernment occurs. While not neglecting the purely theological aspects of moral discernment, the theologian must be capable of conversing with the moral sceptic on the sceptic's own terms.

[233] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 43.
[234] Ibid., sec. 44.

2.4.3. Conscience

In articles 57 to 61 of *Veritatis Splendor* John Paul II discusses the notion of moral conscience. He defines a judgement of conscience as ‘a practical judgement, a judgement which makes known what man must do or not do, or which assesses an act already performed by him. It is a judgement which applies to a concrete situation the rational conviction that one must love and do good and avoid evil.’[235] This, John Paul II tells us, is the first principle of practical reason and constitutes the very foundation of the natural law. But, he continues, ‘whereas the natural law discloses the objective and universal demands of the moral good, conscience is the application of the law to a particular case; this application of the law thus becomes an inner dictate for the individual, a summons to do what is good in this particular situation.’[236]

John Paul II again draws on St Thomas and his first principle of practical reason, ‘Good is to be done and pursued, and evil avoided.’[237] The problem with this approach is that it fails to take into account something even more fundamental, namely, the first conception of the human intellect, which, according to St Thomas, is being: ‘That which the intellect first conceives, as best known, and into which it resolves all its conceptions, is being.’[238] This observation is fundamental to St Thomas’s philosophy and forms the basis of his epistemology: ‘Now the first idea met with in intellectual conception is that of an existent, for as Aristotle says in order to be known a thing must actually be. This is why existent being is the primary and distinctive object of intellect . . .’[239] While it may be true to say that good is to be done and pursued, and evil avoided, this statement is only truly foundational if the

[235] Ibid., sec. 59.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* I-II, 94.2.
[238] Thomas Aquinas *De Veritate* 1.1.
[239] Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* I, 5.2.; Aristotle *Metaphysics* IX, 9.

notion of the good is rationally grounded in reality or being. St Thomas grounds the good in reality by demonstrating its 'convertibility' with being.[240]

If one wishes, then, to establish a connection between natural law and conscience, one must proceed in three steps. Firstly, the notion of the good must be grounded in reality or being. Secondly, having established the reality or being of the good, we are now in a better position to ground in reality the precept 'good is to be done and pursued, and evil avoided.' Thirdly, in the judgement of conscience this principle is applied in a particular situation. By omitting the vital first step, John Paul II fails to establish a connection between natural law and conscience. This is because the principle, 'good is to be done and pursued, and evil avoided' is not, as John Paul II suggests, the very foundation of the natural law. At an even more foundational level, there is the notion of being, the first conception of the human intellect. John Paul II does not discuss this primary notion and its relation to or convertibility with the good, with the result that he fails to ground the first principle of practical reason in reality.

2.4.4. Conclusion

John Paul II insists on the importance of metaphysics for moral theological reflection. Yet, when it comes to grounding the notions of sin, knowledge, and human freedom in reality, he resorts to quoting scripture and the Church's theological tradition instead of serious metaphysical reflection. There is in the works of John Paul II examined here no serious engagement with the philosophical questions of the possibility of human knowledge and freedom.[241] There is no discussion of the notion of being and its primary function in metaphysical thought. Because of this failure to practice the kind of philosophical reflection

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[240] Thomas Aquinas *De Veritate* 21.1; *Summa Theologica* I q. 5, a. 1.

[241] In some of his earlier, more philosophical works John Paul II engages much more seriously with these issues. See for example Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki (Dordrecht, Boston, London: D Reidel, 1979). The original Polish edition, *Osoba i Czyn*, was published in 1969.

which he recommends, John Paul II ultimately fails to engage with the modern moral sceptic and determinist.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have argued that the authors of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in their reflections on sin, assume too much belief on the part of their readers. They presuppose that the reader accepts the authority of scripture and the Church's theological tradition and consequently they fail to engage with the moral sceptic or determinist. I proceeded to argue that the works of Pope John Paul II demonstrate the same approach, namely, relying on scripture and tradition. I further argued that John Paul II, despite advocating a turn in moral theology to a philosophical ethics which looks to the truth of the good, ultimately fails to utilize his own choice of method, namely, that of St Thomas, to anywhere close to its maximum potential. Consequently, John Paul II also fails to engage with contemporary notions of moral scepticism and determinism.

In the next section of this dissertation, I shall examine Bernard Lonergan's notion of sin. I shall argue that this notion of sin, grounded as it is in a critical metaphysics of being, is far more effective in terms of communicating with the moral sceptic and the hard determinist.

PART TWO

BERNARD LONERGAN'S CONCEPTION OF SIN

CHAPTER THREE

KNOWLEDGE AND FREEDOM IN *INSIGHT*'S CONCEPTION OF SIN

The notion of sin in Lonergan's *Insight* is supported by a critical metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical framework. While the broader category of ethics is given significantly more attention in this work than the category of sin, the notions of the good and human freedom are explored in a depth that gives Lonergan's notion of sin a solid philosophical foundation, making it capable of dialoguing with moral scepticism and determinism.

Our account of Lonergan's ethics will not be exhaustive. In order to provide a solid foundation for a theology of sin, it is necessary to examine both the notion of the good and the notion of freedom, two notions that Lonergan explored in great detail throughout his career. While there is much of Lonergan's account of ethics that we must omit, there are a few key arguments in his *Insight* that are capable, I shall argue, of providing a solid rational foundation for both Lonergan's notion of sin and for a theology of sin in general.

This chapter will be divided into three main sections. In the first we shall treat Lonergan's notion of sin, particularly how his notions of knowledge and human freedom are central to his conception of sin. In the second we shall treat Lonergan's notions of the good and moral discernment, particularly the question of the relationship between the good and being. Finally, in the third part we shall treat Lonergan's notion of human freedom, particularly the role of human will in establishing a world that emerges not by necessity, but contingently.

1. THE NOTION OF SIN

This section will be divided into three subsections. In the first we present Lonergan's definition of sin. In the two subsections that follow we shall examine separately the two central components of this definition.

1.1. A Definition

In Lonergan's discussion of the notion of God, he provides the following definition of sin:

> By basic sin I shall mean the failure of free will to choose a morally obligatory course of action or its failure to reject a morally reprehensible course of action.[242]

He elaborates:

> Thus, basic sin is at the root of the irrational in man's rational self-consciousness. As intelligently and rationally conscious, man grasps and affirms what he ought to do and what he ought not to do; but knowing is one thing and doing is another; if he wills, he does what he ought; if he wills, he diverts his attention from proposals to do what he ought not; but if he fails to will, then the obligatory course of action is not executed; again, if he fails to will, his attention remains on illicit proposals; the incompleteness of their intelligibility and the incoherence of their apparent reasonableness are disregarded; and in this contraction of consciousness, which is the basic sin, there occurs the wrong action . . .[243]

In what follows, we shall divide Lonergan's definition into two parts. In the next subsection we shall examine the question: What is it that makes a particular course of action 'morally obligatory'? In the subsection that follows we shall examine the precise nature of the 'failure of free will' to choose this moral obligation.

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[242] Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Revised Students' Edition (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958), 666.
[243] Idid.

1.2. The Morally Obligatory Course of Action

What precisely does it mean to speak of a morally obligatory course of action? What is it that makes one course of action morally obligatory and another morally reprehensible? Lonergan's elaboration of his definition of sin, which I quoted above, provides us with a clue: 'As intelligently and rationally conscious, man grasps and affirms what he ought to do and what he ought not to do; but knowing is one thing and doing is another . . .' This grasping and affirming, this 'knowing' is what makes a particular course of action morally obligatory. In this subsection we shall examine the question of what precisely it means, according to Lonergan, for somebody to 'know' something. This question is of course the central one of *Insight* and so cannot be adequately dealt with here. What we shall examine, therefore, is what Lonergan terms 'the form of deductive inference.' In this examination we shall see precisely, if not comprehensively, what Lonergan means by 'grasping and affirming.' We shall then proceed to ask what exactly it is that the subject grasps and affirms. Finally, we shall briefly examine the connection between Lonergan's understanding of knowledge and his ethics.

1.2.1. The Virtually Unconditioned

In the introduction to the chapter in *Insight* on reflective understanding, Lonergan indicates his intention of attempting to determine what exactly is meant by the sufficiency of the evidence for a prospective judgement, or, in other words, what the nature of the evidence that allows for an affirmative judgement is.

> There is presupposed a question for reflection, 'Is it so?' There follows a judgement, 'It is so.' Between the two there is a marshalling and weighing of evidence. But what are

the scales on which evidence is weighed? What weight must evidence have, if one is to pronounce a 'Yes' or a 'No'?[244]

For Lonergan, this pronouncement of a 'yes' or a 'no' involves what he terms a 'virtually unconditioned judgement.' He begins his explanation of this term with a kind of definition:

> To grasp the evidence as sufficient for a prospective judgement is to grasp the prospective judgement as virtually unconditioned.[245]

He continues by distinguishing between the formally and the virtually unconditioned. The former has no conditions, while the latter has conditions that are fulfilled. A virtually unconditioned judgement, then, involves three elements: a conditioned, a connection between the conditioned and its conditions, and the fulfilment of the conditions. A prospective judgement, therefore, will be virtually unconditioned if 1) it is the conditioned, 2) its conditions are known, and 3) the conditions are fulfilled.

The simple fact that a question for reflection has been presented makes the prospective judgement a conditioned, as it requires evidence sufficient for a reasonable pronouncement of a 'yes' or a 'no.' The role of reflective understanding is to meet the question for reflection by changing the status of the prospective judgement from that of a conditioned to that of a virtually unconditioned. This change occurs as reflective understanding grasps the conditions of the conditioned and their fulfilment.

Lonergan illustrates this general scheme with a basic syllogism that demonstrates the form of deductive inference:

> If *A*, then *B*.
>
> But *A*.
>
> Therefore *B*.

Or, more concretely:

[244] Ibid., 279.
[245] Ibid., 280.

If X is material and alive, X is mortal.

But men are material and alive.

Therefore, men are mortal.[246]

The conclusion is a conditioned, as it needs to be supported by an argument. The major premise connects the conditioned to its conditions by affirming, If *A*, then *B*. The minor premise presents the fulfilment of the conditions by affirming the prior *A*. The role of the form of deductive inference is to show a conclusion as virtually unconditioned. Reflective insight apprehends the pattern, and the one reflecting is rationally compelled to make a judgement.

1.2.2. Grasping and Affirming Being

The question that was presupposed in Lonergan's analysis of the form of deductive inference, 'Is it so?', stems from what he terms 'the pure desire to know.' In this subsection we shall examine the following question: What is the objective of the pure desire to know? We shall begin with a definition of the pure desire to know.

> By the desire to know is meant the dynamic orientation manifested in questions for intelligence and for reflection. It is not the verbal utterance of questions. It is not the conceptual formulation of questions. It is not any insight or thought. It is not any reflective grasp or judgement. It is the prior and enveloping drive that carries cognitional process from sense to imagination to understanding, from understanding to judgement, from judgement to the complete context of correct judgements that is named knowledge. The desire to know, then, is simply the inquiring and critical spirit of man.[247]

[246] Ibid., 280-281.
[247] Ibid., 348.

The objective of this pure desire to know, according to Lonergan, is being. (This is in fact how he defines being).[248] It follows that being is 1) all that is known, and 2) all that remains to be known. Since a complete increment of knowledge happens only in judgement, being is 'what is to be known by the totality of true judgements.'[249] This totality consists of the complete set of answers to the complete set of questions. We do not yet know what these answers are and the questions have yet to arise. What is important for Lonergan is not the complete set of answers or the complete set of questions, but the fact that 'there exists a pure desire to know, an inquiring and critical spirit, that follows up questions with further questions, that heads for some objective which has been named being.'[250]

1.2.3. Grasping and Affirming the Good

Let us return for a moment to a segment from Lonergan's definition of sin. 'As intelligently and rationally conscious,' he says, 'man grasps what he ought to do and what he ought not to do.' In other words, as intelligent and reasonable, human beings grasp what is good and what is evil. The desire that motivates this judgement of good or evil is the same as that which motivates judgement in matters of fact, namely, the desire to know. There is, however, a difference between judgement in matters of fact and judgement in matters of action, as Lonergan explains in chapter 18:

> While speculative and factual insights are concerned to lead to knowledge of being, practical insights are concerned to lead to the making of being. Their objective is not what is but what is to be done. They reveal not the unities and relations of things as they are, but the unities and relations of possible courses of action.[251]

[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid., 350.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid., 609.

Significant in this passage is the connection between being and the good. Practical insights, Lonergan says, are concerned to lead to the *making of being*. Their objective is *what is to be done*, or, in others words, the good. We shall further examine this connection between being and the good in the next major section of this chapter.

What I have attempted to do in this subsection is to demonstrate the centrality of knowledge in Lonergan's definition of sin. While sin is the failure of free will, this failure is only sinful because of the obligatory nature of the proposed course of action. What makes a particular course of action morally obligatory, as we have seen, is knowledge. This is not simply knowledge of moral codes or of social mores, but knowledge that stems from a rational judgement that a proposed course of action is either good or evil. This judgement in turn stems from the human person's nature, which, as we have seen, Lonergan describes as 'the inquiring and critical spirit of man.'

The question of whether knowledge of the good or moral discernment is possible needs to be examined in greater detail. We shall undertake this examination in the next major section of this chapter. For now, let us examine the precise nature of the failure of free will that Lonergan speaks of in his definition of sin.

1.3.

The Failure of Free Will

As we have already observed, Lonergan's definition of sin contains the concept of free will and its failure to choose a morally obligatory course of action. In this subsection, we shall examine Lonergan's notion of will, particularly his notion of a prior or antecedent willingness. We shall then proceed to examine the distinction he makes between essential and effective freedom. Through these examinations we shall be able to proceed to the issue at hand: the failure of free will.

1.3.1. Antecedent Willingness

In chapter 18 of *Insight*, Lonergan examines the notion of will. He divides the will into three parts, namely, will, willingness, and willing, corresponding, respectively, to the Thomistic division of being into potency, form, and act. He defines will as intellectual or spiritual appetite. 'As capacity for sensitive hunger stands to sensible food, so will stands to objects presented by intellect.'[252] This is will as potency. There is also the act itself, which is willing. However, our primary concern here is that aspect of will that corresponds to form, namely, willingness. Lonergan speaks of an 'habitual inclination' that consists of the prior willingness or unwillingness with which persons are inclined to making certain decisions and choices. He provides a concrete illustration of this prior or antecedent willingness:

> Just as a person that has not yet learnt a subject must go through a laborious process to acquire mastery, yet, once mastery is acquired, can grasp readily the solution to any problem that arises in the field, so too a person that has not acquired willingness needs to be persuaded before he will will, yet, once willingness is acquired, leaps to willing without any need of persuasion.[253]

The lack of antecedent willingness leads to what Lonergan terms 'moral impotence.' Before exploring this notion, we must examine the distinction he makes between essential and effective freedom.

1.3.2. Essential and Effective Freedom

Not unusually for Lonergan, he begins his discussion of the distinction between essential and effective freedom with a kind of definition:

> The difference between essential and effective freedom is the difference between a dynamic structure and its operational range. Man is free essentially inasmuch as possible

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[252] Ibid., 598.
[253] Ibid.

> courses of action are grasped by practical insight, motivated by reflection, and executed by decision. But man is free effectively to a greater or less extent inasmuch as this dynamic structure is open to grasping, motivating, and executing a broad or narrow range of otherwise possible courses of action. Thus, one may be essentially but not effectively free to give up smoking.[254]

He proceeds to list four conditions of effective freedom: 1) external circumstance, 2) the subject as sensitive, 3) the subject as intelligent, and 4) the subject as antecedently willing.

External circumstance. Whatever one's external circumstances are, they provide only a certain number of possible alternatives and only limited means for effecting the enlargement of this number.

The subject as sensitive. Lonergan speaks of the limitations that arise from one's psychoneural state. In modern terms this would refer to a person's mental health, with the term 'neurosis' being a shortened version of psychoneurosis. In such a state of neurosis, or, as Lonergan puts it, when perfect adjustment between the orientations of intellectual and psychoneural development is lacking, then 'the sensitive subject is invaded by anxiety, by obsessions, and by other neurotic phenomena that restrict his capacity for effective deliberation and choice.'[255]

The subject as intelligent. The greater a person's practical intelligence is developed, according to Lonergan, the broader is the range of possible courses of action he or she can grasp and consider. On the other hand, if the person's practical intelligence is not sufficiently developed there will result a narrowing of the range of possible courses of action that will presently occur to the person.

The subject as antecedently willing. Lonergan explains the problems arising in moral decision making when antecedent willingness is lacking:

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[254] Ibid., 619-620.
[255] Ibid., 622.

> What one does not understand yet, one can learn; but learning takes time, and until that time is devoted to learning, otherwise possible courses of action are excluded. Similarly, when antecedent willingness is lacking, persuasion can be invoked; but persuasion takes time, and until that time is devoted to persuading oneself or to being persuaded by others, one remains closed to otherwise possible courses of action.[256]

This lack of antecedent willingness, as we shall presently see, results in what Lonergan terms 'moral impotence.'

1.3.3. Moral Impotence

Again Lonergan begins with a definition:

> To assert moral impotence is to assert that man's effective freedom is restricted, not in the superficial fashion that results from external circumstance or psychic abnormality, but in the profound fashion that follows from incomplete intellectual and volitional development.[257]

When such development is incomplete, there are practical insights that could be attained if only the person would take the time to procure the necessary, preparatory insights. Furthermore, there are courses of action that a person would choose if he/she would just take the time to persuade him/herself to willingness. There is, then, a divergence between the effective freedom that he/she in fact possesses and the theoretical effective freedom that he/she would enjoy if it happened that certain conditions were fulfilled. This divergence, according to Lonergan, is the measure of one's moral impotence. He describes moral impotence in terms of a problem in the person's moral development:

> For complete self-development is a long and difficult process. During that process one has to live and make decisions in the light of one's undeveloped intelligence and under

[256] Ibid., 623.
[257] Ibid., 627.

> the guidance of one's incomplete willingness. And the less developed one is, the less one appreciates the need for development and the less one is willing to take time out for one's intellectual and moral education.[258]

The person, then, is powerless to make good choices because of his/her lack of intellectual and volitional development. This lack of power is further manifested in his/her inability to see just how much he or she needs to further his or her intellectual and moral education.

This blindness, however, is not total. As Lonergan puts it: 'the moral impotence of the essentially free subject is neither grasped with perfect clarity nor is it totally unconscious.'[259] He proceeds by providing a kind of verbal diagram in which he describes the person's moral consciousness.

> For if one were to represent a man's field of freedom as a circular area, then one would distinguish a luminous central region in which he was effectively free, a surrounding penumbra in which his uneasy conscience keeps suggesting that he could do better if only he would make up his mind, and finally an outer shadow to which he barely if ever adverts. Further, these areas are not fixed; as he develops, the penumbra penetrates into the shadow and the luminous area into the penumbra while, inversely, moral decline is a contraction of the luminous area and of the penumbra.[260]

As well as the increasing tension between limitation and transcendence illustrated by this verbal diagram, consciousness of moral impotence can also, Lonergan tells us, provide ambivalent materials for reflection. If the contents of these self-realizations are interpreted correctly, they can help a person to discover that his life involves development and that he should not be disheartened by his failures. Rather, he should see them as opportunities to gain further insight into his personal weaknesses and as an encouragement to try harder. The same

[258] Ibid.
[259] Ibid.
[260] Ibid.

data, however, can also be seen as proof that it is useless to even try, that what moral codes ask is unachievable, and that it is better to just be happy with oneself as one is.

To return once again to Lonergan's definition of sin, we saw that sin is 'the failure of free will to choose a morally obligatory course of action.' This failure to choose stems from a lack of what Lonergan terms 'antecedent willingness,' which is one of the central restrictions upon one's effective freedom. The gap between the effective freedom that the person actually possesses and the theoretical effective freedom that he/she would enjoy if certain conditions were fulfilled is the measure of his/her moral impotence.

1.4. Conclusion

While Lonergan's notion of sin does not draw directly on scripture and the theological tradition, it does contain some of the elements of a classical understanding of sin. Specifically, the notions of knowledge and freedom are particularly important in Lonergan's understanding of sin. Already we have seen that Lonergan's notion of sin contains in-depth philosophical analyses of moral obligation as knowledge and the notion of moral impotence resulting from failure of freedom. There seems to be good potential in Lonergan's notion of sin for dialoguing with the moral sceptic and determinist. Lonergan, however, does much more than this. In the sections that follow we shall examine his understanding of how moral knowledge is possible through discernment of 'the good,' a concept he firmly grounds in the notion of being. We shall also further examine his understanding of freedom. While we have in this section examined his distinction between essential and effective freedom, we have not yet examined his method of demonstrating essential freedom. We shall do this in the third section of this chapter.

2. THE INTRINSIC INTELLIGIBILITY OF THE GOOD

In the first section of this dissertation, I argued that the notions of the good in both magisterial teaching and theological reflection on sin were inadequate in terms of establishing a dialogue with the moral sceptic. Although these approaches to the notion of the good were predominantly metaphysical, they were so on a merely superficial level. The authors of the various documents examined, I argued, in their discussions of such themes as natural law and conscience, failed to establish a substantial link between the notion of being and that of the good. Consequently, they failed to establish the possibility of moral discernment or knowledge of the good.

In this section we shall critically examine Lonergan's notion of the good in *Insight*, particularly how he links it with the notion of being. We seek to determine whether Lonergan is more successful than the authors previously examined in his attempt to establish the possibility of moral discernment. We begin (1) with a very brief outline of Lonergan's argument. This will provide some necessary background to the argument as well as indicating his general method. It will also better situate us for a more in-depth analysis of the argument. (2) We proceed by examining the structure of the good in *Insight*. (3) We then continue with an examination of Lonergan's notions of potential, formal, and actual good; this is the heart of his argument for the intrinsic intelligibility of the good. (4) We offer a critique of said argument.

2.1. Background and Method

In Lonergan's argument for the possibility of knowledge of the good or moral discernment, the good is identified with the intelligibility that is intrinsic to being. This intelligibility consists in the fact that proportionate being is 'whatever is to be known by

experience, intelligent grasp, and reasonable affirmation.'[261] Corresponding to these elements of human cognition, namely experience, understanding, and judgment, are the ontological components of potency, form, and act.

In chapter 18, in the subsection entitled 'The Method of Ethics,' Lonergan speaks of the 'parallel and interpenetration of metaphysics and ethics.'

> For just as the dynamic structure of our knowing grounds a metaphysics, so the prolongation of that structure into human doing grounds an ethics. Just as the universe of proportionate being is a compound of potency, form, and act, because it is to be known through experience, understanding, and judgement, so the universe of man's proportionate good is a compound of objects of desire, intelligible orders, and values, because the good that man does intelligently and rationally is a manifold in the field of experience, ordered by intelligence, and rationally chosen.[262]

In his argument for the ontology of the good, Lonergan takes the cognitional activities of experiencing, understanding, and judging and the corresponding ontological components, potency, form, and act and 'extends' this heuristic structure to incorporate the good.

2.2. The Structure of the Good in *Insight*

In chapter 18 of *Insight*, 'The Possibility of Ethics,' Lonergan differentiates three levels of the good, corresponding to the three levels of cognitional activity that he espouses throughout this work: the empirical, the intellectual, and the rational, or, as we have it above, the levels of experience, understanding, and judgment. On a fundamental level, the good is conceived as the object of desire which, when acquired, feels pleasant or enjoyable or satisfying. However, as well as feelings of desire and pleasure, the human being, in equal

[261] Ibid., 431.
[262] Ibid., 602.

measure, feels aversion and suffering. On the basic level of experience, then, the good is paired with its antithesis, the bad.

Lonergan proceeds to discuss a human desire that is unique, namely, the detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know that we examined in the previous section of this chapter. As with other desires, our desire to know can be satisfied. Unlike other desire, however, it requires more than satisfaction. It is not content with the mere satisfaction of attaining an insight; rather, it moves beyond this satisfaction to ask whether or not the insight is correct. The movement from understanding, which is on the second of the three levels of cognitional activity in *Insight*, to the third level of judging whether or not one's understanding is correct, brings us into the realm of objectivity, or to use specifically Lonerganian terms, the realm of the virtually unconditioned. The desire to know seeks not just insight but correct judgement. 'It is a desire to know and its immanent criterion is the attainment of an unconditioned that, by the fact that it is unconditioned, is independent of the individual's likes and dislikes, of his wishful and his anxious thinking.'[263]

Through the knowledge generated by this desire, according to Lonergan, there is revealed a second sense in which the good can be understood. Apart from the good that is mere object of desire, there is the good of order, which includes the polity, the economy, and the family as institution. The good of order is not the object of any one desire; rather it is related to individual desires as system is related to systematized, or as universal condition is related to particulars that are conditioned.

The third aspect of the good is value. The good of order is connected, not only with the multiple manifestations of natural longings and repulsions which it organises, but also with a third type of good which arises on the level of reflection and judgement, of deliberation and choice. The desires and aversions of the senses, like experiential data,

[263] Ibid., 596.

precede questions and insights, reflections and judgements. The good of order, on the other hand, is essentially 'a formal intelligibility that is to be discovered only by raising questions, grasped only through accumulating insights, formulated only in conceptions.'[264] Nevertheless, while the good of order is located completely outside the area of the sensitive appetites, it is in itself subject to human devotion, or, in other words, a value. As Lonergan explains:

> Individualism and socialism are neither food nor drink, neither clothes nor shelter, neither health nor wealth. They are constructions of human intelligence, possible systems for ordering the satisfaction of human desires. Still, men can embrace one system and reject others. They can do so with all the ardour of their being, though the issue regard neither their own individual advantage nor that of their relatives, friends, acquaintances, countrymen.[265]

The fact that human beings can be so devoted to such systems is, for Lonergan, not surprising. For human intelligence, he says, is practical as well as speculative. It is not satisfied to work out the unities and correlations in things as they are; it is also continually observing to discover the possibilities that bring to light things as they could be. The detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know 'grasps intelligently and affirms reasonably not only the facts of the universe of being but also its practical possibilities. Such possibilities include intelligent transformations not only of the environment in which man lives but also of man's own spontaneous living.'[266] Such spontaneous living, Lonergan argues, displays 'an otherwise coincidental manifold [i.e., series of events unexplainable by classical laws[267]] into which man can introduce a higher system by his own understanding of

[264] Ibid., 597.
[265] Ibid., 597-598.
[266] Ibid., 598-599.
[267] Lonergan provides two criteria for discerning whether or not a manifold or an 'aggregate' is coincidental: 'An aggregate is coincidental if (1) the members of the aggregate have some unity based on spatial juxtaposition

himself and his own deliberate choices.'[268] It is in this way that the detached and disinterested desire to know broadens its area of influence from cognitional activities through knowledge to intentional human acts. This, for Lonergan, is how 'the empirically, intelligently, rationally conscious subject of self-affirmation [who affirms, "I am a knower,"[269]] becomes a morally self-conscious subject.'[270]

According to Lonergan, it is in rational, moral self-consciousness that the good as value comes to light. He offers the following definition of value: 'the value is the good as the possible object of rational choice.'[271] He proceeds to make a tri-fold division of values. (1) Values are true if the possible choice is rational; they are false if the possibility of the choice is the product of what he terms a 'flight from self-consciousness' – this occurs when one refuses insights into his or her own moral failings. They are also false if the possibility of the choice is the product of rationalization, when, as Lonergan puts it: 'inconsistency between knowing and doing can be removed by revising one's knowing into harmony with one's doing,'[272] or from moral renunciation, as when one acknowledges one's failings but gives up hope in the possibility of change. (2) Lonergan distinguishes between what he terms terminal and originating values. Values are terminal insofar as they are objects for possible choices; they are originating when through our choices there occurs a transformation in our habitual willingness – that is, our willingness to act without the need for persuasion – and our effective orientation in the universe. (3) Values are actual if they have been implemented already; they are in process if they are in the course of being realized; finally, they are in prospect if they are merely being deliberated upon.

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or temporal succession or both, and (2) there is no corresponding unity on the level of insight and intelligible relation.' Lonergan, *Insight*, 49-50.

[268] Ibid., 599.

[269] Ibid., 328.

[270] Ibid.

[271] Ibid., 601.

[272] Ibid., 599.

2.3. Potential, Formal, and Actual Good

Our examination of the good has thus far focused on the human good, that is, with objects of desire, intelligible orders, terminal and originating values. However, because of the close relations between metaphysics and ethics that we briefly examined in 2.1, Lonergan suggests that 'it should be possible to generalize this notion and, indeed, to conceive the good as identical with the intelligibility that is intrinsic to being.'[273]

Lonergan's method of generalizing the notion of the good is to speak of the good in terms of the three-fold division of being into potency, form, and act. So, rather than speaking of objects of desire, the intelligible orders within which these desires are fulfilled, and the terminal and originating values involved in deciding upon these orders and their components, Lonergan speaks instead of a potential, formal, and actual good. He identifies the potential good with potential intelligibility (that which is to be known by experience), the formal good with formal intelligibility (that which is to be known by intelligent grasp), and the actual good with actual intelligibilities (that which is to be known by reasonable affirmation).

Lonergan argues that such a generalization of the notion of the good is justifiable, as it is already implicit in the narrower notion, that is, in the notion of the good in purely human terms. Objects of desire, he says, are manifold, 'but they are not an isolated manifold. They are existents and events that in their concrete possibility and in their realization are bound inextricably through natural laws and actual frequencies with the total manifold of the universe of proportionate being.'[274] In other words, the many objects of desire, as existing and occurring, are part of the total manifold of the universe of proportionate being; consequently they cannot be separated from every other thing that exists and occurs in our universe. If objects of desire, Lonergan argues, are examples of the good because of the pleasures they give, then the remainder of the manifold of existents and events are also good,

[273] Ibid., 604.
[274] Ibid., 605.

because desires are fulfilled only in the concrete universe and not in a fantasy world. In other words, objects of desire are produced as a result of a total manifold of existents and occurrences that constitute not some ideal world, but the actual world in which we live.

Lonergan proceeds to apply the same argument to humanly devised social orders. For Lonergan, the intelligible orders that human beings invent, implement, adjust, and improve, are merely further exploitations of pre-human intelligible orders.[275] Patrick H. Byrne, in his paper, 'The Goodness of Being in Lonergan's *Insight*,' explains this rather complex argument quite well:

> In advancing his argument, Lonergan points out that neither objects of desire nor human social orders (goods of order) are abstract, isolated monads. Rather, concretely and actually, all objects of desire and all human orders are what they are by virtue of the events, natural laws, and statistical frequencies that condition and underpin their actuality. In their actuality, they are inextricably bound up with both the human and pre-human schemes of recurrence and conditioning events that elevate their mere intelligible possibilities into virtually unconditioned realities.[276]

All objects of desire and all human orders, then, come about not by necessity but contingently through a process that Lonergan terms 'emergent probability,' or, to repeat a section of the above quotation, 'all objects of desire and all human orders are what they are by virtue of the events, natural laws, and statistical frequencies that condition and underpin their actuality.' As we have seen, for Lonergan, objects of desire, while manifold, are not an isolated manifold but are, rather, actualities and occurrences that in their actual possibility and in their fulfilment are inseparably bound through natural laws and statistical frequencies with the

[275] In chapter 4 of *Insight* Lonergan provides some examples of prehuman intelligible orders or prehuman 'schemes of recurrence.' They are: the planetary system, the circulation of water over the earth's surface, the nitrogen cycle, and the routines of animal life. In contrast we have human schemes of recurrence such as the 'economic rhythms of production and exchange.' *Insight*, 118.

[276] Patrick H. Byrne, 'The Goodness of Being in Lonergan's *Insight*,' *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81/1 (2007): 46.

complete manifold of proportionate being. Similarly, humanly devised social orders are inextricably bound to all human orders that emerge in the world as a result of the same natural laws and statistical frequencies, so that we cannot argue that some orders are good and others bad. As Lonergan puts it: 'if the intelligible orders of human invention are a good because they systematically assure the satisfaction of desires, then so also are the intelligible orders that underlie, condition, precede, and include man's invention.'[277]

In the final part of this argument, Lonergan turns again to the notion of value. Intelligible orders and their contents as possible objects of rational choice, he says, are values. However, the universal order of emergent probability conditions and penetrates, corrects and develops every particular order. So, he argues, 'rational self-consciousness cannot consistently choose the conditioned and reject the condition, choose the part and reject the whole, choose the consequent and reject the antecedent.'[278] And so, since human beings are involved in choosing and since every consistent choice is, at least tacitly, a choice of universal order, the actualization of universal order is a true value.

Lonergan draws the reader's attention to the fact that the third part of the argument includes the other two. For, he says, 'the actual good of value presupposes the formal good of order, and the formal good of order presupposes the potential good of a manifold to be ordered.'[279] Furthermore, the actualization of universal order is the actualization of *all existents* and *all events*. Universal order includes all intelligibilities as its component parts, and universal order assumes all manifolds that are ordered or to be ordered. So, Lonergan concludes, 'the good is identified with the intelligibility intrinsic to being.'[280] Or, in other words, the good is identified with what is to be known by experience, intelligent grasp, and reasonable affirmation. This includes potential, formal, and actual good, or the total manifold

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[277] Lonergan, *Insight*, 605.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Ibid.,
[280] Ibid., 606.

of proportionate being. So the good is identified with the total universe of proportionate being.

Again, Byrne is quite helpful in breaking down this complex argument. Lonergan, he says, 'is arguing that if realizing the intelligibility embodied in any reflective human choice is good, then the whole, actual intelligibility of proportionate being (which underlies and conditions the realization of that choice) is also good.'[281] Byrne continues his analysis by suggesting that Lonergan is arguing that all human choices are in reality the choice of a 'good wholeness – the wholeness of the "universal order," the emergent probability of proportionate being.'[282] Human consciousness is explicitly and thematically fixed on a part of the whole, the part revealed in one's practical insight, practical reflection, and deliberate choosing. In reality, however, 'one is choosing that part *as part* of a whole goodness.'[283] Without this wholeness, the part chosen, i.e., the course of action, would not be actual, substantial goodness at all.

This argument would seem to imply that the entirety of the universal order is good, and so it would seem to deny the existence of evil in the world. Lonergan follows up his argument for the identification of the good with being by denying this implication.

> As the identification of the good with being in no manner denies or attempts to minimize pain or suffering, so it has not the slightest implication of a denial of unordered manifolds, of disorder, or of false values. For the middle term in the identification of the good with being is intelligibility.[284]

The intelligibility of the universe, Lonergan argues, is to be grasped not by any one method but by a fourfold series of classical and genetic, statistical and dialectical methods. We shall examine briefly just one of these methods, the statistical, as it relates to the present argument,

[281] Byrne, 'Goodness of Being,' 46-47.
[282] Ibid., 47.
[283] Ibid.
[284] Lonergan, *Insight*, 607.

in order to see just what Lonergan is getting at here. Insofar as the intelligibility of this universe is statistical, he argues, its goodness is contained potentially in unordered manifolds, formally in the effective probability of the emergence of order, and actually in the eventual emergence of order. I think what Lonergan is getting at here is the Thomistic notion that everything that has an essence is, by virtue of that fact, a good thing, and that evil of itself has no essence.[285] This is why Lonergan places 'unordered manifolds' in the realm of the potential good. What he is saying is that the order that eventually emerges in the universe is actually good, and that evil results from the fact that in many areas of life order has not yet emerged. So, Lonergan is not denying the existence of evil in the world; rather he is suggesting that the nature of evil is that of privation of the good or lack of order.

To summarize: objects of desire, intelligible orders, and values are existents and events that come about through a universal process that Lonergan calls emergent probability. These things cannot be extricated from the universal order which conditions and underlies them. Consequently, every choice that human beings make is at least implicitly a choice of a whole goodness. To repeat a section of Lonergan's argument: 'rational consciousness cannot consistently choose the conditioned and reject the condition, choose the part and reject the whole, choose the consequent and reject the antecedent.'[286] The value, as the possible object of rational choice, cannot be isolated from the total manifold of the proportionate universe. The good, in other words, cannot be isolated from being, and so Lonergan concludes that 'the good is identified with the intelligibility intrinsic to being.'[287] Lonergan does not deny the existence of evil in the world; rather he suggests that the nature of evil is that of privation of the good or lack of order, or to use his actual terminology, evil lies in the area of 'unordered manifolds, disorder, and false values.'

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[285] See for example the *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3, 1, 7.
[286] Lonergan, *Insight*, 605.
[287] Ibid., 606.

2.4. Critique

Our critique of Lonergan's argument will be divided into two sections. In the first, we shall take a closer look at Byrne's paper, 'The Goodness of Being in Lonergan's *Insight*.' This paper provides a good critical evaluation of Lonergan's argument. Secondly, we shall compare Lonergan's argument with those of the magisterium and the theologians that we examined in the first two chapters.

2.4.1. Patrick H. Byrne's Critique of Lonergan's Argument

Byrne is critical of the structuring of Lonergan's argument for the intrinsic intelligibility of the good. Because of this structure, there arise a number of problems with Lonergan's argument, which we shall presently examine. He suggests that the way that Lonergan develops his argument does not adhere to the plan that he set out at the beginning of *Insight*.

> . . . it is clear that he intended his approach to the issues of being and intelligibility to provide a model for how to proceed methodically with regard to questions regarding the good.
>
> Unfortunately, in his chapter on ethics Lonergan does not actually follow this procedure. In fact, he completely inverts the order that he follows in his philosophy of being.[288]

According to Byrne, despite the problems in Lonergan's exposition, all of the elements for a convincing argument are contained in various passages from *Insight*. Therefore, rather than attempting to supplement Lonergan's argument with his own ideas, he attempts instead a reconstruction of the argument based on Lonergan's ideas and on Lonergan's proposed methodology.

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[288] Byrne, 'Goodness of Being,' 48-49.

The first problem that arises from the structuring of Lonergan's argument is the way in which he extends the notion of the good to include humanly devised orders. This extension, according to Byrne, 'is undertaken without philosophical argument or justification.'[289] He points out that if we consider not only Kant's but also Plato's criticisms of desires in light of the good, even Lonergan's identifying of the good with objects of desire is philosophically problematic.[290] He asks therefore: 'why should human orders, or even the objects of human desire, be called "good"?'[291] The answer to this question, as we have seen, is that 'all objects of desire and all human orders are what they are by virtue of the events, natural laws, and statistical frequencies that condition and underpin their actuality.' This answer is contained in Lonergan's exposition and indeed in Byrne's own account of Lonergan's exposition. So what, we might ask, is the problem? The problem, for Byrne, is in the sequence of Lonergan's argument. The idea that the good can be identified with human social orders is introduced long before his argument for the ontology of the good (in chapter 7, 'Common Sense as Object,' 11 chapters prior to his argument for the ontology of the good). Byrne's problem, as I understand it, is that the reader must take Lonergan at his word that the good can be identified with human orders for too long before he or she is eventually offered any real philosophical support for this idea. Byrne suggests, as we have seen, that a restructuring of Lonergan's argument based on sections of *Insight* and Lonergan's own suggested methodology can solve this difficulty.

[289] Ibid., 44.
[290] Ibid. The following passages from Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and Plato's *Republic* will serve to illustrate Byrne's point.
'But the good or evil always indicates a relation to the will so far as it is determined by the law of reason to make something its object, for the will is never determined directly by the object and our conception of it. Rather, the will is a faculty which makes a rule of reason the efficient cause of an action which can make an object real. Thus good or evil are properly referred to actions and not to the sensory state of the person.' Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 169.
'What about the definition of goodness as pleasure? Aren't its proponents just as thoroughly misguided as the others? I mean, they too are forced to make a concession, in this case that there are bad pleasures, aren't they?' Plato *Republic* 505c.
[291] Byrne, 'Goodness of Being,' 45.

The second problem is that Lonergan's argument 'depends upon certain unarticulated and unexamined assumptions about rational choice and the compound structure of human knowing and doing – namely, that the actualities which they realize are indeed good.'[292] Or, to put it another way, proportionate being is good as it conditions the course of action designated 'good.' But why, Byrne asks, should a course of action arrived at in this way be considered good? Again, he recognises that the elements of a solution to this problem are contained within *Insight*, but again he is critical of Lonergan's structuring of the argument. The main exposition of the compound structure of knowing and doing, he points out, is found in the section 'The Notion of Freedom.' The following is Lonergan's own brief recapitulation of this exposition found in the subsection 'Freedom.'

> In the coincidental manifolds of sensible presentations, practical insights grasp possible courses of action that are examined by reflection, decided upon by acts of willing, and thereby either are or are not realized in the underlying sensitive flow. In the process there is to be discerned the emergence of elements of higher integration. For the higher integration effected on the level of human living consists of sets of courses of action, and these actions emerge inasmuch as they are understood by intelligent consciousness, evaluated by rational consciousness, and willed by rational self-consciousness.[293]

The problem with this exposition, according to Byrne, is that it comes *after* his argument for the ontology of the good or the intrinsic intelligibility of the good. Even then, he says, Lonergan does not offer sufficient detail on this structure:

> Lonergan's actual discussions [in the section 'The Notion of Freedom'] are not entirely helpful in arriving at a full understanding of this compound structure. In that section he does not treat these activities [experiencing, practical insight, deciding, and doing] or

[292] Ibid., 47-48.
[293] Lonergan, *Insight*, 617.

> their structural relationships with the same care and thoroughness that characterizes his numerous renditions of cognitional structure.[294]

Byrne offers what he argues is a more lucid reconstruction of the compound structure of knowing and doing than Lonergan's, but which he says 'is at least consistent with his text and seems to be well supported by the data of consciousness of a subject immersed in the practical and ethical reflection about doing the right thing.'[295]

In conclusion, Byrne is critical of the structure of Lonergan's argument for the intrinsic intelligibility of the good. He makes a number of interesting observations regarding the problems that arise from the sequence of Lonergan's argument, namely certain presuppositions regarding the identifying of the good with human orders and certain 'unarticulated and unexamined assumptions' about the compound structure of knowing and doing. However, while Byrne is critical of the structure of Lonergan's argument, he is not at all critical of the content. The elements, he suggests, of a cogent argument for the intrinsic intelligibility of the good are contained within *Insight*; it is a matter of reconstructing the argument using these elements. So, while there may be some lack of clarity in Lonergan's argument, due to its structuring, the argument, it seems, ultimately holds together.

2.4.2. Lonergan's Argument Compared to Contemporary Theological Discussion of the Good

In the first section of this dissertation, we examined the notions of the good in contemporary theological reflection and magisterial teaching. A recurring theme in the critical sections of these examinations was how the various authors failed to establish the synderesis as foundational to ethics because they failed to solidly ground the notion of the good. In fact, this theme occurs in our critique of all of the theologians examined, including John Paul II and the *Catechism*. In this section, we shall examine Lonergan's argument for

[294] Byrne, 'Goodness of Being,' 56.
[295] Ibid., 61.

the intrinsic intelligibility of the good to see whether it can provide a more solid foundation for the synderesis than that of the theologians we have already examined.

Let us begin with a reiteration of the synderesis: *the good is to be done, and evil avoided*. This precept is often considered self-evident, and on a superficial glance it does seem to be so. What sane person would deny that the good is to be done, and evil avoided? However, as we observed in the first section of this dissertation, what is not self-evident is the fact that the good has a foundation in reality, that, for example, it is not just a matter of the particular prejudices of the person or group that belongs to a particular time and culture. So while nobody would deny that the good is to be done, there are those who would argue that the good should be done, but would ask: How do we discern what is good, and is such discernment in fact possible? Is the good not just relative to time and place?[296]

Lonergan's argument for the intrinsic intelligibility of the good has significant implications for ethics in general and for the notion of synderesis in particular. As the notion of 'good' (and its opposite 'evil') is central to the synderesis, a solid grounding of this notion in reality or being gives the synderesis a power that it lacks without this grounding.

Let us examine the questions just posed regarding the possibility of moral discernment. 1) Is the good not just relative to time and place? Lonergan's argument provides a direct antithesis to moral relativism by presenting a vision of the good that is universal and objective. It is rooted in his notion of 'emergent probability' which speaks of classical and statistical laws that are independent of time, place, and culture. 2) Is moral discernment possible, and if so, how is it possible? In Lonergan's treatment of the good in *Insight*, he not only provides an argument for the ontology of the good, he also gives an account of the cognitive processes by which human beings discern the good. In the previous subsection (2.5.1) we briefly examined the 'compound structure of knowing and doing' in which

[296] Such questions pertain to what is called 'moral relativism,' which is a form of moral scepticism. We shall examine this and other forms of moral scepticism in chapter 5.

Lonergan explains how human beings arrive at moral action through grasping possible courses of action contained in the coincidental manifold of sensible presentations, reflectively examining these possible courses of action, and eventually deciding upon these actions through the use of their will. While Byrne has argued that Lonergan's account of this structure is not as detailed and nuanced as his numerous accounts of cognitional structure, still at least Lonergan provides some approximation of the process whereby human beings discern the good that does not depend on the religious notion of conscience, and is therefore capable of convincing the moral sceptic.

We may return for a moment to the synderesis: *the good is to be done, and evil avoided*. Lonergan has provided us with a solid grounding of the good in reality or being, thus answering the vital question: Is the good not just relative to time and place? Lonergan has also provided an answer to those who would ask how discernment of the good is possible. Thus far, however, we have only dealt with the first part of the synderesis, 'the good is to be done.' There remains to be dealt with the second part, 'evil is to be avoided.' How can Lonergan's treatment of the notion of the good help us in this regard?

An immediate difficulty that comes to mind is Lonergan's (and Aquinas's) notion that evil of itself has no essence. How do we avoid something that has no substantial reality? The answer to this question lies in Lonergan's understanding of sin. We shall briefly examine three ways of sinning which we mentioned earlier in this chapter (2.2), namely, the flight from self-consciousness, rationalization, and moral renunciation.

The Flight from Self-consciousness. The flight from self-consciousness occurs when one refuses insights into his or her own moral failings. Such a refusal of insights is evil in the sense that Lonergan understands it, as it does not consist in anything substantial; rather the refusal results in a *lack* of self-knowledge which in turn results in immoral behaviour. Lonergan's solution to this, although not explicit in the texts we have examined, is to face our

darker side head on. The evil to be avoided, in other words, is the refusal to face the light. The solution is to avoid our own avoidance.

Rationalization. This occurs, as we have seen, when, as Lonergan puts it: Inconsistency between knowing and doing is removed by revising one's knowing into harmony with one's doing. Such rationalization is related to the flight from self-consciousness insofar as it is a refusal of insight into the true nature of a possible course of action for the purpose of behaving badly with a clear conscience. This again conforms to Lonergan's understanding of evil as having no essence. The solution, again implicit in Lonergan, is to avoid rationalization, to avoid our own avoidance of truths that do not suit our personal desires for superficial fulfilment.

Moral Renunciation. This occurs, as we have seen, when one acknowledges one's failings but gives up hope that one can ever change. Again, moral renunciation constitutes a refusal of insight and therefore conforms to Lonergan's understanding of evil as lacking essence. And again the solution is to avoid this avoidance of insight by accepting the possibility of change even if this change seems impossible.

In conclusion, Lonergan's treatment of the good in *Insight* provides us with a solid foundation for the synderesis, by presenting a cogent argument for the ontology of the good as well as an account of the cognitive processes by which human beings discern the good. He also provides an account of the nature of evil, the various forms it can take in people's consciousness, and, implicitly, the ways that we may avoid these evils. Lonergan presents a notion of the good that, in contrast to magisterial and theological reflection on sin, not only alludes to metaphysics but utilizes this metaphysics to solidly ground the notion of the good in reality. Because of its scientific and philosophical nature, this approach to the notion of the good is much more effective in terms of dialoguing with the moral sceptic.

We have argued that Lonergan's approach to the notion of the good in *Insight* establishes the possibility of an objective moral order and the human being's capacity to apprehend this order. The question remains: Even if human beings are capable of moral discernment, are they in fact free to carry out the action that they have deemed 'good' or 'right'?

3. LONERGAN'S NOTION OF HUMAN FREEDOM IN *INSIGHT*

In the first two chapters of this dissertation, we examined the notion of human freedom in both magisterial teaching and fundamental moral theology. I argued that the fact of human freedom was often presupposed rather than deduced systematically, and that the arguments for human freedom usually relied heavily on scripture and theological tradition. I also argued that this method of argumentation was ineffective in terms of dialoguing with determinism.

In this section, we shall examine Lonergan's notion of human freedom in *Insight*. Firstly, we shall examine Lonergan's notion of 'statistical residues.' The implication of the existence of statistical residues is that events cannot be deduced systematically using a deductive method. In other words, the existence of statistical residues suggests that hard determinism is wrong. Secondly, we shall examine three of Lonergan's arguments for the contingency of the will. Through these examinations we seek to ascertain whether he is any more successful in propounding a notion of human freedom that is more effective in terms of dialoguing with determinism.

3.1. Statistical Residues

In *Insight*'s account of human freedom, Lonergan examines the significance of what he calls 'statistical residues.' The meaning of this term is explained in chapter 3 of *Insight*,

which deals with the rules that govern scientific inquiry. In dealing with the question of the relationship between abstract systems of classical laws and the particular cases to which these laws can be applied, he asks whether the manifold of particular cases can be cast into an ordered sequence. The implication of an affirmative answer is that knowledge of a few carefully chosen particular cases would be enough to turn mastery of classical laws into a scientific understanding of the universe. The implication of a negative answer, however, is that classical laws can be implemented only in a limited range of particular cases, so that new methods will be required if we are to attain understanding of the concrete universe as a whole.

Lonergan explains that schemes of recurrence such as our planetary system, which displays such an ordered sequence of particular cases, are many in both number and kind. However, he argues, each scheme of recurrence presupposes that materials are suitably grouped together, a grouping together not brought about by that scheme, and that each scheme subsists only as long as external disrupting influences do not occur. The periodicity of the planetary system, he argues, does not explain its origin; nor can it guarantee its survival. Furthermore, there does not appear to exist a universal scheme that regulates the coming into being and continuance of the schemes that we know. Lonergan concludes, therefore, that the manifold of particular cases cannot be cast into an ordered sequence. He summarizes his argument as follows:

> There does not exist a single ordered sequence that embraces the totality of particular cases through which abstract system might be applied to the concrete universe. In other words, though all events are linked to one another by law, still the laws reveal only the abstract component in concrete relations; the further concrete component, though mastered by insight into particular cases, is involved in the empirical residue from which systematizing intelligence abstracts; it does not admit treatment along classical lines; it is

> a residue, left over after classical method has been applied, and it calls for the implementation of statistical method.[297]

The significance of statistical residues in general is that they indicate the necessity of employing not just classical but also statistical method in our efforts to understand the concrete universe in its entirety.

In the chapter on ethics, under the heading, 'The Notion of Freedom,' Lonergan demonstrates the relevance of the existence of statistical residues to the notion of human freedom. He begins with a summary of the argument he presented earlier.

> While any physical event, Z, is implicit in a spatially and temporally scattered set of antecedents, P,Q,R, . . . , none the less this implication does not admit systematic formulation. For the implication is constituted by the combination of a major and a minor premise; and while the major premise resides in laws and systematic unifications of laws, the minor premise lies in the concrete pattern of a diverging series of conditions that cannot be determined systematically.[298]

The objective significance of statistical laws, according to Lonergan, is that in general physical events cannot be predicted by using a deductive method. However, he continues, the existence of statistical residues brings with it the possibility of higher integrations. The sciences of physics, chemistry, biology, and psychology can operate independently because on each earlier level of systematization there exist statistical residues that constitute the merely coincidental manifolds to be systematically organized on the next level. It follows that higher laws and higher schemes of recurrence cannot be deduced from lower laws and lower schemes of recurrence, as the higher is employed in regulating what the lower leaves as merely coincidental. Lonergan explains this in chapter 14, 'Elements of Metaphysics':

[297] Lonergan, *Insight*, 87.
[298] Ibid., 607-608.

> Chemical elements and compounds are higher integrations of otherwise coincidental manifolds of subatomic events; organisms are higher integrations of otherwise coincidental manifolds of chemical processes; sensitive consciousness is a higher integration of otherwise coincidental manifolds of changes in neural tissues; and accumulating insights are higher integrations of otherwise coincidental manifolds of images or of data.[299]

So, chemical laws cannot be deduced from physical laws, nor biological laws from chemical or physical laws, nor psychological laws from biological or chemical or physical laws, because each of these areas of scientific enquiry is separate from the others. They are separate because each successive area of enquiry deals with purely coincidental phenomena that cannot be explained in terms of the lower laws or schemes of recurrence. Furthermore, Lonergan continues, since statistical residues exist on every level, it follows that events on any given level cannot be deduced systematically by uniting all the laws and all the schemes of recurrence of that and of all previous levels.

The significance of the canon of statistical residues is not that it indicates that our choices are free. Rather 'its significance lies in the fact that it makes possible an account of the autonomy of the successive departments of science, that this autonomy excludes a determinism of the higher by the lower, and that the canon of statistical residues itself excludes a deductive determinism either in the lower or the higher.'[300] Lonergan proceeds to make the following statement, which has important implications for this dissertation: 'Undoubtedly, these exclusions make it far easier to dispose of arguments against the possibility of freedom, and they narrow down the field in which impediments to freedom can be found.'[301] In other words, the autonomy of the various sciences excludes the possibility of an exclusively deductive method of predicting events, including human actions. The broader

[299] Ibid., 451.
[300] Ibid., 608.
[301] Ibid.

approach suggested by Lonergan is capable of combating deterministic arguments against the possibility of human freedom. We shall test this assertion in the final section of this dissertation when we examine a deterministic argument and how we might use categories from Lonergan to respond to this argument.

A comprehensive account of freedom, Lonergan tells us, must take into account more than just the above-mentioned exclusions, as they are, he says, 'only exclusions.' It also involves a positive account of freedom that examines the notion of will. In the following subsections, then, we shall examine three of Lonergan's arguments for the freedom of the will.

3.2. The Contingence of Acts of the Will

It is possible, Lonergan claims, for practical reflection to arrive with certainty at the conclusion that a recommended course of action is imperative, that I either decide in favour of the recommendation or, alternatively, that I relinquish consistency between my knowing and my doing. In these situations it seems that 'the emergence of an obligation is the emergence of a rational necessity in rational consciousness.'[302] I cannot stop questions for reflection from emerging; however, once they emerge, I cannot put to one side the insistence of my rationality that I acquiesce only if I grasp the virtually unconditioned. Furthermore, once I determine that I should act in a fixed manner, that to do otherwise would be unreasonable, then my reasonableness is beholden to the act by 'a link of necessity.'[303] This, according to Lonergan, is what is meant by the term 'obligation.'

It remains, however, that we can fail to carry out our known obligations, that, as Lonergan puts it, 'the iron link of necessity can prove to be a wisp of straw.'[304] How, he asks, can this be? How is it that what seems to be necessity turns out to be contingence? The

[302] Ibid., 614.
[303] Ibid.
[304] Ibid.

answer resides in 'the enlarging transformation of consciousness.'[305] The rationality that lays a duty or obligation is not conditioned internally by an act of will. The rationality that executes a duty is conditioned internally by the occurrence of a reasonable act of will. In other words, the rational subject as putting a duty upon himself is merely a knower; he is rational insofar as he does not permit other desire to get in the way of the unfolding of the detached and disinterested desire to know. The rational subject as executing a duty, however, is not just a knower but also a doer; his rationality lies not merely in excluding interference with cognitional process but also in 'extending the rationality of his knowing into the field of doing.'[306] Such extension, however, does not come about simply because one knows one's duties or obligations. Rather, it happens just insofar as one *wills* to fulfil one's obligation.

How exactly, then, does necessity turn out to be contingence? Clearly the necessity itself has not changed, but there has occurred a change in the context, as now rational consciousness is being changed into rational self-consciousness. That which in the context of rational consciousness is a rational necessity becomes, in the context of rational self-consciousness, a rational exigence. This brings us to the crux of Lonergan's argument for the contingence of the act of will. In the following two sentences he sums up quite neatly the relationship between knowledge and action, particularly the argument that the former does not necessitate the latter:

> If a proposed action is obligatory, then one cannot be a rational knower and deny the obligation, and one cannot be a rational doer and not fulfil the obligation. But one can be a rational knower without an act of willing, and one cannot be a rational doer without an act of willing.[307]

[305] Ibid.
[306] Ibid.
[307] Ibid., 615.

It is, he says, ‘the addition of the further constitutive requirement of an act of will’[308] that indicates the movement from rational consciousness to rational self-consciousness, and changes what is rational necessity in the area of knowledge into rational exigence in the larger area of both knowledge and action.

3.3. The Contingence of Actuality

Actuality, according to Lonergan, is known principally by comprehending the virtually unconditioned, that is, ‘the conditioned that happens to have its conditions fulfilled.’[309] Because it is unconditioned, he tells us, it has a high rating in the area of intelligibility. Still, he continues, it is only coincidental that it has its conditions fulfilled, and so it is merely a coincidence that it is an unconditioned. Although, he says, it is unconditioned, it is also contingent. And this contingence appears in 1) in its being, 2) in its being known, and 3) in its being willed.

1) It is evident in its being.

> For actuality as act is existence or occurrence, and actuality as of the actuated supposes at least existence and also at times occurrence. But *there is no systematic deduction of existence or occurrence*. The most that understanding can do is set up ideal frequencies from which actual frequencies of existence and occurrence do not diverge systematically. But *actual frequencies can and do diverge non-systematically from the ideal*, and so in every instance actuality is *just what happens to be*.[310]

Actuality cannot, then, be systematically deduced. The implications of this for ethics, is that the actuality that comes about through human action cannot be systematically deduced. Furthermore, human actions themselves, as actually occurring events, cannot be deduced systematically.

[308] Ibid.
[309] Ibid.
[310] Ibid., emphasis added.

2) Again, Lonergan continues, contingence is evident in actuality as known. Actuality is known by comprehending the virtually unconditioned, and the virtually unconditioned can be comprehended only if realization of its conditions *happens* to be given. And the realization is never more than what happens, for it resides in the appearance of relevant data, and the appearance of data, like all appearance or occurrence, is contingent. For it is merely coincidental that I exist, or that I experience the world in a particular manner, etc.

3) Lonergan concludes by arguing that the possible courses of action created by human intelligence, impelled by reason, and carried out by willing, are contingent in their actuality. For the insights, he says, 'that reveal possible courses of action also reveal that they are not necessities but mere possibilities in need of reflective evaluation. Reflective evaluation in turn brings to light not what must be so but merely what for such and such reasons may be chosen or rejected.'[311] Finally, even when reflective evaluation reveals that only one course of action is the reasonable thing to do, there still is required, Lonergan argues, 'the reasonableness of actual willing.'[312] However, he continues, 'the reasonableness of human acts of will is not a natural endowment but an ever uncertain personal achievement.'[313] There is, then, a third and final contingence to the actuality of courses of action. This brings us to the crux of Lonergan's argument. In particular, he says,

> one should note the fallacy in every argument from determinate knowing to determinate willing. For every argument of that type must postulate a conformity between knowing and willing. But such conformity exists only when in fact willing is actually reasonable. Hence, to deduce the determinate act of will one must postulate the conformity; and to verify the postulate one must already have the determinate willing that one is out to demonstrate.[314]

[311] Ibid., 616.
[312] Ibid.
[313] Ibid.
[314] Ibid.

However, this determinate willing is, as we have just seen, 'not a natural endowment but an ever uncertain personal achievement.' The fallacy in the argument from determinate knowing to determinate willing can be noticed simply by observing that we, as human beings, do not always do what we know we should; that when we do what we know we should, we feel it as a success, or as a growth in personal development.

3.4. The Spiritual Nature of the Act of Will

In 3.2 we looked at the contingence of the act of will. Specifically, we examined Lonergan's question, 'How does necessity turn out to be contingence?' We concluded that it is the act of will that constitutes the movement from what is merely rational necessity on the level of knowing, to rational exigence on the level of both knowing and doing. In this subsection, we shall examine further the nature of the act of will.

Intelligibility, Lonergan tells us, is intrinsic to being. It is either spiritual, i.e., an intelligibility that is also intelligent, or material, that is, an intelligibility that is not also intelligent. This differentiation between the spiritual and the material highlights the fact that 'practical insight, reflection, and decision are a legislative function; instead of being subject to laws, as are physical and chemical events, they are what make the laws of the distinctively human level of operations.'[315] While material reality is subordinate to law and so intelligible, spiritual reality possesses intelligibility, not through subordination to law, but by its innate intelligence. Furthermore, Lonergan argues, spiritual reality is revealed through the higher organization or order it places on lower levels of being. However, this organization or order is not imposed upon spiritual reality; it is 'generated by practical insights, rational reflection, and decision.'[316]

[315] Ibid., 617.
[316] Ibid., 618.

Lonergan continues by pointing out the ambiguity of the notion of law. There are, he says, the laws of matter and the laws of spirit. The former are investigated by empirical scientists, and when one says that spirit is legislative, one means that spirit sets in motion intelligible orders that correspond to the intelligibilities studied by scientists. On the other hand, he argues, 'the laws of spirit are the principles and norms that govern spirit in the exercise of its legislative function; and they differ radically from the laws of matter, not only in their higher point of application, but also in their nature and content.'[317] The laws of matter, he continues, are abstract and can be concretely employed only by adding further results obtained from a non-systematic manifold. The laws of spirit, on the other hand, dwell in the vital structure of its cognitional and volitional activities; their concrete employment is implemented through spirit's own activities within this vital structure.

It follows, Lonergan says, that there is a profound difference between the contingence of the act of willing and the general contingence of existence and occurrence in the remainder of the realm of proportionate being. The latter contingence, he says, 'falls short of strict intelligible necessity, not because it is free, but because it is involved in the non-systematic character of material multiplicity, continuity, and frequency.'[318] The contingency of an act of the will, on the other hand, not only does not result from the non-systematic, it in fact issues in the enforcement of further intelligible order upon manifolds that are otherwise merely coincidental. Furthermore, this enforcement of further intelligible order stems from intelligence, rational reflection, and ethically guided will. Still, this enforcement of intelligible order is contingent, as even when there is but one possibility, with the result that rational consciousness has no options, still this sole possibility is not of necessity actualized. This brings us to the following argument from experience, another central point in Lonergan's argument for the contingency of the act of will.

[317] Ibid.
[318] Ibid.

> To claim that the sole reasonable course of action is realized necessarily is to claim that willing is necessarily consistent with knowing. But that claim is preposterous, for it contradicts the common experience of a divergence between what one does and what one knows one ought to do.[319]

Furthermore, he continues, this claim is preposterous not only in fact but also in principle, as consistency between knowing and deciding ensues from deciding reasonably, and what ensues from deciding reasonably cannot be elevated into a universal principle that establishes all decisions as necessarily reasonable.

In summary: we have located four distinct arguments for the possibility of human freedom. Firstly, there is the existence of statistical residues, which, according to Lonergan, excludes the possibility of a deductive determining of events. Secondly, there is the argument for the contingence of the act of will, in which Lonergan asserts that what is rational necessity in the realm of knowing (rational consciousness), becomes rational exigence in the realm of both knowing and doing (rational self-consciousness). Thirdly, there is the argument for the contingence of actuality. Here Lonergan argues that the contingence of actuality is evident 1) in its being, as the somewhat random nature of existence and occurrence means that actuality is 'just what happens to be;' 2) in its being known, as actuality is known by grasping the virtually unconditioned, a conditioned that merely happens to have its conditions fulfilled; and 3) in its being willed. Here Lonergan argues that knowing cannot necessitate willing as this implies a conformity between knowing and willing that can only be demonstrated by a reasonable act of willing, and that such a reasonable act of willing, because it is not a natural occurrence, is not necessary but contingent. Fourthly, we examined the spiritual nature of human freedom, specifically, how practical insight, reflection, and

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[319] Ibid., 618-619.

decision are not subject to laws, but, rather, make the laws on the particularly human level of operations.

3.5. Critique

Our critique of Lonergan's notion of freedom will be divided into two parts. In the first we shall examine Lonergan's position on willing the end, a position based on his controversial reading of St Thomas. We shall ask whether this position, which stems from his book *Grace and Freedom* (originally his doctoral dissertation), is compatible with the arguments he espouses in *Insight*. In the second part we shall compare Lonergan's notion of freedom with those of the magisterium and the theologians examined in the first section of this dissertation.

3.5.1. Lonergan on Willing the End and Choosing the Means

In his book *Grace and Freedom* (1971), Lonergan examines the development of St Thomas's theory of the freedom of the will. One aspect of this development that he examines is the role played by the idea of freedom as noncoercion. In essence this idea states that the will can be both necessitated and free. This freedom stems from the fact that the will is in no way coerced. According to Lonergan, while elements of this idea appear in St Thomas's earlier work, he rejects the idea in his later work. The following quotation from *Grace and Freedom* provides a clear statement of Lonergan's position:

> More complex is the role played by the idea of freedom as non-coercion. This relic of the pre-philosophic period of medieval thought appears in the *Commentary on the Sentences*, but there any tendency to assert that the will is necessitated but not coerced and therefore free is rejected. On the other hand, in the *De Veritate*, the *De Potentia* and the *Pars Prima* one does find incidental statements to the effect that non-coercion makes

> necessary acts free: of necessity yet freely God wills his own excellence, the Holy Spirit proceeds, the human will tends to beatitude, the demonic will is fixed in evil, and perhaps the sinner is impotent to avoid further sin. This lapse in the face of contrary theory was repudiated with extreme vehemence in the later *De Malo* as heretical, destructive of all merit and demerit, subversive of all morality, alien to all scientific and philosophical thought, and the product of either wantonness or incompetence. The Church agrees that it is an heretical view, and the historian cannot but regard the relevant passages in the *De Veritate*, the *De Potentia* and the *Pars Prima* as a momentary aberration.[320]

In a paper published in the *Gregorianum* in 1990,[321] and later in his book *Lonergan and Thomas on the Will* (1993), Terry Tekippe disputes Lonergan's reading of St Thomas. According to Tekippe's reading, there is in the works of St Thomas a consistent position on the freedom of the will, which he summarizes as follows:

> Thomas distinguished between a willing of the end and the choosing of means to that end. In willing the end, the will is free in that it is not coerced; or, more positively, in that it responds to the good (or happiness) by a spontaneous inclination, and is in no way violently forced by factors outside itself. The means to the end, however, are multiple, and so the will's choice is contingent; hence means are willed with a freedom of choice.[322]

It is hardly surprising that we here have two very different interpretations of St Thomas, as it is well known that interpretations of St Thomas are almost as numerous as are interpreters of St Thomas. We are not concerned here, however, with the correctness of interpretations. Rather, the question we shall ask is as follows: What exactly is Lonergan's position regarding

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[320] Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St Thomas Aquinas* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971), 93-94.
[321] Terry J. Tekippe, 'Lonergan's Analysis of Error: An Experiment,' *Gregorianum* 71 (1990): 353-74.
[322] Terry J. Tekippe, *Lonergan and Thomas on the Will: An Essay in Interpretation* (Lanham: University of America Press, 1993), 67.

willing the end, and is this position logically consistent with his arguments for the freedom of the will in *Insight*?

According to Tekippe, Lonergan's position regarding willing the end is as follows:

> Rather than concluding that willing the end is now contingent and free, he supposes that it is necessitated, and so not free. In the earlier work, then, Thomas held that willing the end was free, though necessitated, because non-coerced; now he sees the difficulty of that position, rejects the sufficiency of non-coercion and concludes, since willing the end is necessary, that it is not free.[323]

Tekippe suggests that Lonergan presents this argument in *Grace and Freedom*, where he discusses a text in which Thomas speaks of the mind 'moved but not moving.' Lonergan interprets this to mean, according to Tekippe, that in willing the end, God alone is active, while the will is passive, and that therefore any freedom proceeds from God, not from the will. Tekippe suggests that Lonergan's interpretation of Thomas's later thought in *Grace and Freedom* may not be overly clear, but that in a book review written shortly afterwards, Lonergan leaves no doubt as to his position: 'It is true that in later Thomist doctrine not only is such passivity incompatible with freedom, but also that the act of willing an end is not free.'[324] So, according to Lonergan the later Thomas says that willing the end is necessitated, and so not free.

Lonergan's position on willing the end is now quite clear. He suggests that in willing the end the will is necessitated, and therefore not free. This brings us to the second part of our question: Is this position logically consistent with his arguments for the freedom of the will in *Insight*? The first thing to note is that in *Insight* Lonergan does not directly engage with the Thomistic distinction between willing the end and choosing the means. In the above examination of Lonergan's notion of freedom we observed that he speaks of the will

[323] Ibid., 68.
[324] Ibid., 69. Tekippe quotes from Lonergan's paper, 'On God and Secondary Causes,' in *Collection: Papers by Bernard J.F. Lonergan*, *Collected Works* v. 4 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 63.

accepting or rejecting the 'possible course of action.' Furthermore, we observed that this accepting or rejecting of the possible course of action, even when the possibility is unique, is contingent, and therefore free.

> But the contingence of the act of will, so far from resulting from the non-systematic, arises in the imposition of further intelligible order upon otherwise coincidental manifolds. . . . None the less, that imposition of intelligible order is contingent. For, on the one hand, even when possibility is unique, so that rational consciousness has no alternative, still the unique possibility is not realized necessarily.[325]

Lonergan, then, in his account of the freedom of the will, is concerned with the 'unique' possible course of action that may be either accepted or rejected. He is concerned, that is, with choosing the means to the end rather than with willing the end itself. In speaking extensively on 'the good,' he does of course speak of the end. In the section on freedom, however, his concern is exclusively with the means to procuring the good.

According to Lonergan's doctrine of freedom, – as we extrapolate it from his two books, *Grace and Freedom* and *Insight* – particularly his positions on willing the end and choosing the means, the end (the good) is willed necessarily. The means to the good, however, i.e., the possible course of action that will bring about the good, is contingent and can therefore be rejected. These two positions are it seems, compatible; there is no inherent contradiction in the suggestion that a person may be free to choose the means to the good and, at the same time, not free to will the end. Lonergan's position on freedom in *Insight*, then, appears to be consistent with his earlier work, *Grace and Freedom*. It is unfortunate, however, that Lonergan does not in *Insight*'s chapter on ethics engage with St Thomas's distinction between willing the end and choosing the means. Such an engagement would be important for two reasons: Firstly, it would attempt to answer a fundamental question relating

[325] Lonergan, *Insight*, 618.

to ethics, namely, whether human beings necessarily will the good or whether such willing of the good is contingent. This seems to me to be a very important question to be left out of such a substantial chapter on ethics by a Thomist philosopher. Secondly, it would establish a closer connection between the two main notions dealt with in this chapter, the notion of the good and the notion of freedom.

In conclusion, Lonergan's lack of engagement in *Insight* with St Thomas's distinction between willing the end and choosing the means leaves unclear certain aspects of the relationship between the two main components in his chapter on ethics, the good and freedom. It also leaves unanswered the important and fundamental ethical question of whether human beings necessarily will the good. Despite this critique, however, Lonergan's account of the freedom of the will contains some convincing arguments that when it comes to choosing the means to bring about the good, the will is not necessitated and is therefore free. These purely philosophical arguments are capable of dialoguing with the various notions of determinism which claim that such freedom is illusory.

3.5.2. Lonergan's Argument Compared to Contemporary Theological Discourse on Freedom

In this subsection, we shall contrast Lonergan's arguments supporting the notion of freedom with some of those that we examined in the first section of this dissertation, namely, John Paul II, Richard Gula, and Germain Grisez. This selection is based on the fact that these three theologians explicitly engage with the notion of determinism.

In chapter one, we examined the arguments supporting the notion of freedom of Richard Gula. I contended that his arguments were weak for the following three reasons: 1. He suggests that genetic inheritance does not determine definitively what we do or who we become, but that freedom acts within the already existing restrictions of genetic inheritance and milieu. However, he makes no attempt to demonstrate, by scientific means, the existence

of human freedom. Freedom, rather, is merely assumed. 2. Furthermore, he goes on to state that 'the behavioural sciences have clearly shown that our freedom is limited,' that 'our actions fall somewhere on the continuum between absolute freedom and absolute determinism.'[326] This statement is unsupported by argument or even reference to the particular behavioural scientists implicated in his assertion. 3. The closest that Gula comes to a real argument for human freedom is his suggestion that if human beings did not possess some level of freedom, we would not experience feelings of unease or indecision about the choices we make. I contended, however, that it could just as easily be argued that the psychological experience of trying to make the right choice regarding an action would be identical whether or not freedom was an objective reality or merely an intellectual belief.

In contrast to Gula's arguments, Lonergan's arguments supporting the notion of freedom are based on prolonged and systematic rational reflection. They are based on scientific analyses of the laws by which events in the universe occur, and of the cognitive processes by which human beings make decisions. For example, by demonstrating the existence of statistical residues, Lonergan precludes the possibility that events, including human actions, can be determined by classical laws. Rather, such events occur according to what Lonergan terms 'emergent probability.'[327] This means that statistical as well as classical laws must be taken into account when attempting to understand events occurring in the universe. In other words, events cannot be determined systematically; they cannot, that is, be determined in a manner that would enable us to say that because *A* occurs it necessarily follows that *B* will occur. This is merely a very brief summary of an argument we examined

[326] Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith*, 76.
[327] Kenneth Melchin writes of the significance of Lonergan's notion of emergent probability as a response to both determinism and moral relativism: 'At its core emergent probability is Lonergan's response to the challenges of mechanist determinism and aimless indeterminism. In ethics these two alternatives correspond, roughly, to a reductionism which precludes human freedom and responsibility (or, in a less extreme formulation, reduces them to a form of biologically based "emotivism"), and a moral relativism or moral voluntarism which admits of a moral self-constitution but proclaims it to be haphazard, lacking in a foundationally normative *telos*.' Kenneth R. Melchin, 'Ethics in *Insight*,' *Lonergan Workshop* 8, ed. Fred Lawrence (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1990), 135.

in greater detail earlier in this chapter, and even that examination was limited. My point is that this particular argument against determinism, in contrast to Gula's, is strong and convincing because it is a proper, sustained rational argument based on scientific analyses of the structure of the universe, as opposed to Gula's arguments, which are based on unsupported statements and undeveloped arguments.

Grisez's discussion of determinism, like Gula's, may be divided into three parts. 1. He argues that in attempting to prove their position, determinists appeal to our reason and attempt to demonstrate that we ought to accept their position. However, Grisez argues, implicit in this 'ought' is an appeal to freedom. Determinists entreat us to be faithful to the search for truth, but such faithfulness is impossible if we are unable to make free choices. Any attempt, therefore, to show that the experiences of choice and moral guilt are imaginary is ultimately self-defeating. Against this argument, I asserted that the suggestion that determinists claim that we 'ought' to accept their position is an unwarranted assumption on Grisez's part, and that it could just as easily be argued that the determinist presents his argument with the full understanding that it will be accepted or rejected depending on the hearer's heredity, past experiences, etc. 2. Grisez goes on to argue that the notion of 'sufficient reason' underlies most deterministic arguments. He contends that the theory that there must always be a sufficient reason is not self-evident, and that if in fact either human persons or God make free choices, the theory will prove to be false. Grisez argues that this is the case by simply observing that 'God does act freely – that is, without a sufficient reason – for example, in creating and redeeming.'[328] 3. Grisez contends that while there are restrictions or limitations on what we can choose, this does not mean that we cannot choose freely within these restrictions or limitations. However, he presents no evidence or even argument to support this contention.

[328] Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles*, 45.

In contrast to Grisez's arguments, which, like Gula's, are based on unsupported statements and undeveloped arguments, Lonergan presents an argument for the freedom of the will which is based on sustained, logical argument. If a proposed course of action, he says, is obligatory, then a person cannot be a rational knower if he denies the obligation. Furthermore, he observes, a person cannot be a rational doer and not fulfil the obligation. However, he concludes, a person can be a rational knower without an act of willing, but he cannot be a rational doer without an act of willing. So, for Lonergan, it is the act of will that changes what is rational necessity in the field of knowing into rational exigence in the larger field of both knowing and doing. In other words, actions are not determined by the subject's knowledge of the nature of the proposed act, but by the decision of the subject's will. Again this is merely a brief summary of Lonergan's argument for the contingence of the act of will. The full argument is much more comprehensive and is supported by a metaphysical and epistemological framework supplied by Lonergan in *Insight* as a whole.

John Paul II argues that sin is always a personal act, since it is an act of freedom on the part of the individual person. He observes that the individual in question may be 'conditioned, incited and influenced by numerous and powerful external factors,' and that he may also be 'subjected to tendencies, defects and habits linked with his personal condition.'[329] These external and internal factors may attenuate, he says, to a greater or lesser degree, the person's freedom and therefore his responsibility and guilt. However, John Paul II contends that 'it is a truth of faith, also confirmed by our experience and reason, that the human person is free.'[330] John Paul II simply asserts that freedom is a reality and that we know this through our faith, experience, and reason. He makes no attempt, however, to say how experience tells us that freedom is a reality, or to present a rational argument that concludes that freedom is a reality.

[329] John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, sec. 50.
[330] Ibid.

In contrast to John Paul II's arguments, Lonergan presents an argument for the contingency of the act of will that tells us how experience shows us that freedom is a reality. He suggests that even when there is only one possibility of action, so that the rational person has no alternative, it does not follow that this course of action will be realized necessarily. To suggest that this is so, according to Lonergan, is to claim that willing is necessarily consistent with knowing. This claim, he says, is preposterous because it contradicts the common experience of a divergence between what one does and what one knows one ought to do.

In conclusion, Gula's, Grisez's, and John Paul II's arguments for the existence of human freedom are based on theological presupposition and/or undeveloped rational arguments. In contrast, Lonergan's arguments are based on sustained philosophical engagement and scientific analyses of the laws by which events in the universe occur, and of the cognitional processes by which human beings make their choices.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have examined the notion of sin in Lonergan's *Insight*, and how it is supported by a solid metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical framework. I argued that Lonergan's notions of ethical knowledge and human freedom are more effective than those of the magisterium and contemporary theologians in terms of dialoguing with the moral sceptic and determinist because of the scientific nature of his discourse. Specifically, I argued that Lonergan provides a much more solid basis for the synderesis by grounding his notion of the good in being or reality. This grounding of the good in being also provides a much more solid basis for dialogue with the moral sceptic. In our analysis of Lonergan's notion of freedom, I argued that magisterial and theological reflection on freedom was based on scriptural presupposition and undeveloped philosophical arguments. In contrast to this, Lonergan's notion of freedom is based on a much more philosophically sound scientific analysis. This

makes Lonergan's notion of freedom much more capable of dialoguing with the modern determinist.

While Lonergan's notion of sin has much potential for dialoguing with the moral sceptic and determinist, a theology of sin must also be rooted in scripture and the theological tradition. Indeed, the notion of sin is central to both the Old and New Testament's understanding of human beings' failure to relate properly to God and neighbour. A theology of sin that would be capable of contributing to this Christian self-understanding, while at the same time broadening the discussion to include non-Christians, would draw upon scripture and the theological tradition as well as the philosophical insights of a thinker such as Lonergan. For this reason, in the final chapter of this dissertation I shall attempt a synthesis that combines theological approaches to sin with Lonergan's more philosophical approach.

Before attempting this synthesis however, we must examine the notion of sin in Lonergan's other major work, *Method in Theology*.

CHAPTER FOUR

KNOWLEDGE AND FREEDOM IN *METHOD IN THEOLOGY*'S ACCOUNT OF SIN

It is necessary to examine the notions of sin, ethical knowledge, and human freedom in *Method in Theology*, not just because this is one of the two (along with *Insight*) most important texts in the Lonergan corpus, but also because Lonergan's thought underwent a significant development in all of these areas from the publication of *Insight* in 1957 to that of *Method in Theology* in 1972.

The questions addressed in this chapter will be the same as those of the last. Is Lonergan's notion of the good capable of effectively dialoguing with moral scepticism? Is his notion of freedom capable of effectively dialoguing with determinism?

This chapter will be divided into three main sections. In the first we shall examine the definition of sin in *Method in Theology*. In our examination of this definition, we shall follow the same procedure that we followed in our examination of *Insight*'s definition of sin. We shall, that is, explore this definition by dividing it into its component parts and analysing each of them separately. We shall focus again on the importance of knowledge and freedom in *Method in Theology*'s account of sin. In the second part we shall critically examine Lonergan's notions of value and value judgements. We shall ask whether these notions are sufficiently critical, especially when compared to Lonergan's approach to the same problems in his earlier work, *Insight*. Finally, in the third section we shall critically examine Lonergan's notion of freedom in *Method in Theology*.

1. THE NOTION OF SIN

Sin, as in *Insight*, is not a major category in *Method in Theology*. In this work, Lonergan makes only brief and sporadic references to sin. Also as in *Insight*, however,

Lonergan here provides a definition of sin which, while brief, is built upon an ethical framework that includes the notions of objective value judgements and human freedom. In this section, we shall examine *Method in Theology*'s definition of sin by analysing its component parts in the light of this ethical framework. In the final part of this section, we shall examine the importance of knowledge and freedom in *Method in Theology*'s conception of sin.

1.1. A Definition

Lonergan provides a very brief definition of sin in *Method in Theology* in his discussion of the Church and the Christian message. I shall quote the entire passage in which this definition is given in order to put it in context. The actual definition I shall indicate with italics.

> The Church is a redemptive process. The Christian message, incarnate in Christ scourged and crucified, dead and risen, tells not only of God's love but also of man's sin. *Sin is alienation from man's authentic being, which is self-transcendence*, and sin justifies itself by ideology. As alienation and ideology are destructive of community, so the self-sacrificing love that is Christian charity reconciles alienated man to his true being, and undoes the mischief initiated by alienation and consolidated by ideology.[331]

Sin, then, in the language of *Method in Theology*, is 'alienation from man's authentic being, which is self-transcendence.' This definition of sin contains three terms that we shall examine in order to gain a deeper understanding of *Method in Theology*'s account of sin. The terms are alienation, authenticity, and self-transcendence. While these terms in themselves are not exclusive to Lonergan, he explains in other parts of *Method in Theology* precisely what *he*

[331] Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972), 364, my italics.

means by these terms. An examination of Lonergan's understanding of these terms will enrich our understanding of his notion of sin.

1.2. Alienation

In order to understand precisely what Lonergan means by alienation, it is necessary to briefly examine his cognitional theory.

In his account of transcendental method, Lonergan describes a basic pattern of cognitional operations. These operations are seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, inquiring, imagining, understanding, conceiving, formulating, reflecting, marshalling and weighing the evidence, judging, deliberating, evaluating, deciding, speaking, and writing.[332] Lonergan later denotes these various operations by the principle occurrence on each of the four levels on which these operations occur. So he speaks of the operations as experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding. In his account of transcendental method, he describes the movement through each of these four levels as 'the native spontaneities and inevitabilities of our consciousness.'[333]

> Spontaneously we move from experiencing to the effort to understand; and the spontaneity is not unconscious or blind; on the contrary, it is constitutive of our conscious intelligence, just as the absence of the effort to understand is constitutive of stupidity. Spontaneously we move from understanding with its manifold and conflicting expressions to critical reflection; again, the spontaneity is not unconscious or blind; it is constitutive of our critical rationality, of the demand within us for sufficient reason, a demand that operates prior to any formulation of a principle of sufficient reason; and it is the neglect or absence of this demand that constitutes silliness. Spontaneously we move from judgements of fact or possibility to judgements of value and to the deliberateness of

[332] Ibid., 6.
[333] Ibid., 18.

> decision and commitment; and that spontaneity is not unconscious or blind; it constitutes us as conscientious, as responsible persons, and its absence would leave us psychopaths.[334]

This account of cognitional structure should be fairly familiar to us now through our study of the notions of sin and ethics in *Insight*. There is, however, one major difference between *Insight*'s and *Method in Theology*'s cognitional theory: the familiar three-level structure in *Insight* which speaks of the empirical, intellectual, and rational patterns of cognitional activity has been replaced in *Method in Theology* by a four-level structure which speaks of the empirical, intellectual, rational, and responsible patterns of cognitional activity.

The basic form of alienation, for Lonergan, reflects this four-level structure: Alienation is disregard of the transcendental precepts, Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible. The idea that a person should be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible seems fairly self-evident, and one might wonder why Lonergan would bother to make such an obvious suggestion. However, Lonergan presents these precepts as if they are more than mere suggestions, but as if they are absolutes. This is because, for Lonergan, to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible constitutes the very structure of our cognitional activity. The spontaneous move from experience to the effort to understand, as we have seen, is 'constitutive of our conscious intelligence.' The move from understanding to critical reflection is 'constitutive of our critical rationality.' Finally, the move from factual judgements to judgements of value 'constitutes us as conscientious, as responsible persons.' In other words, being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible is not just the proper thing to do; it constitutes our basic humanity. This is what Lonergan means by 'the native spontaneities and inevitabilities of our consciousness.'

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[334] Ibid.

One might ask why the precepts are necessary if attention, intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility are so constitutive of our humanity. This is where Lonergan's notion of alienation comes in. Human beings are capable of alienating themselves from their authentic being by disregarding the transcendental precepts. Lonergan suggests a number of consequences that will result from such a disregard of these precepts.

> In various detailed manners, method will bid us be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible. . . . But the normative force of its imperatives will reside, not just in its claims to authority, not just in the probability that what succeeded in the past will succeed in the future, but at root in the native spontaneities and inevitabilities of our consciousness which assembles its own constituent parts and unites them in a rounded whole in a manner *we cannot set aside without,* as it were, *amputating our own moral personality, our own reasonableness, our own intelligence, our own sensitivity*.[335]

In other words, the failure to observe the transcendental precepts, Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible will cut us off from our authentic selves in a number of different ways. In effect, the disregard of these precepts amounts to a neglect of the very things that constitute our basic humanity: our sensitivity, our intelligence, our rationality, and our moral sense.

1.3. Authenticity and Self-transcendence

The next two terms in *Method in Theology*'s definition of sin, authenticity and self-transcendence, we shall examine together, as their meanings in *Method in Theology* are closely interconnected. Indeed, this interconnectedness is revealed in the very first sentence of Lonergan's account of self-transcendence: 'Man achieves authenticity in self-transcendence.'[336]

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[335] Ibid., my italics
[336] Ibid., 104.

Lonergan proceeds with an analysis of how human beings transcend themselves by asking questions.

Human beings can live in a world and have a horizon only insofar as they are not locked up in themselves. The first step towards freeing oneself, according to Lonergan, is the sensitive nature we have in common with the higher animals. However, while these animals are restricted to a habitat, human beings live in a universe. 'Beyond sensitivity,' Lonergan says, 'man asks questions, and his questioning is unrestricted.'[337]

Initially, there are questions for intelligence: What? Why? How? What for? The answers to these questions bring unity and relatedness, classification and construction, serialization and generalization. From the limited area of the material universe that we can access through our immediate experience, we proceed to build a world-view and begin to explore the questions of what we can be and what we can do in this world.

Following questions for intelligence, there are questions for reflection by which we go beyond mere imagination and guess-work, beyond the hypothetical, the theoretical, and the systematic to ask: Could this really be so? Could that really be? By these questions

> self-transcendence takes on a new meaning. Not only does it go beyond the subject but also it seeks what is independent of the subject. For a judgement that this or that is so reports, not what appears to be, not what I imagine, not what I think, not what I wish, not what I would be inclined to say, not what seems to me, but what is so.[338]

However, the self-transcendence that one achieves by judging 'what is so' is not the ultimate human achievement. Such self-transcendence is, Lonergan says, 'only cognitive. It is in the order not of doing but only of knowing.'[339] On the final level of questions for deliberation, human beings achieve a moral self-transcendence.

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[337] Ibid.
[338] Ibid.
[339] Ibid.

> When we ask whether this or that is worth while, whether it is not just apparently good but truly good, then we are inquiring, not about pleasure or pain, not about comfort or ill ease, not about sensitive spontaneity, not about individual or group advantage, but about objective value.[340]

Because we are capable of asking and answering these questions and living by the answers, we can achieve in our lives a moral self-transcendence. Such moral self-transcendence is the possibility of benevolence, of honest cooperation and true compassion, of complete liberation from the dwelling of an animal, and of becoming a person in human society.

Let us return for a moment to our definition: 'Sin is alienation from man's authentic being, which is self-transcendence.' First of all we have seen that alienation is disregard of the transcendental precepts, Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible. In this subsection we have seen that authenticity which is self-transcendence is achieved insofar as we share a common sensitive nature with the higher animals, and insofar as we proceed from observing the data of sense to ask questions for intelligence, reflection, and deliberation, or, in other words to observe the transcendental precepts, Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible. Insofar as we fail to be attentive to the data of sense, and insofar as we fail to ask questions for intelligence, reflection, and deliberation, we alienate ourselves from our authentic being which is self-transcendence. This alienation, this failure to transcend ourselves, Lonergan equates with sin.

1.4. Knowledge and Human Freedom in *Method in Theology*'s Conception of Sin

We have analysed in a general way Lonergan's definition of sin as we find it in his *Method in Theology*. We must now look to the specific question of the role of knowledge and freedom in this conception of sin.

[340] Ibid.

In his account of self-transcendence, Lonergan makes a clear distinction between a self-transcendence which is 'only cognitive' and a moral self-transcendence. The difference between the two, as we have seen, is that cognitive self-transcendence 'is in the order not of doing but only of knowing.' In his discussion of value-judgements, Lonergan elaborates further on the difference between a self-transcendence that involves only knowing and one that involves both knowing and doing. He also associates the failure to transcend oneself morally with sin.

> True judgements of value go beyond merely intentional self-transcendence[341] without reaching the fulness of moral self-transcendence. That fulness is not merely knowing but also doing, and man can know what is right without doing it. Still, if he knows and does not perform, either he must be humble enough to acknowledge himself to be a sinner, or else he will start destroying his moral being by rationalizing, by making out that what truly is good really is not good at all.[342]

The most important phrase from this quotation for our purpose is the following one: 'man can know what is right without doing it.' We have already come across this idea in our chapter on *Insight* where Lonergan speaks of the transition from rational consciousness to rational self-consciousness. Perhaps a brief recapitulation of Lonergan's argument would not be amiss here. We saw that what in the context of rational consciousness is rational necessity is in the context of rational self-consciousness rational exigence. If a proposed course of action, Lonergan argues, is obligatory, 'then one cannot be a rational knower and deny the

[341] Here Lonergan rather confusingly introduces the term 'intentional self-transcendence.' He has spoken of a self-transcendence which is cognitive, corresponding to questions for reflection which occur on the third level of consciousness, and a moral self-transcendence which begins to occur on the fourth level of questions for deliberation. What Lonergan means by the term 'intentional self-transcendence' is that in both the judgement of fact and the judgement of value 'the meaning is or claims to be independent of the subject; judgements of fact state or purport to state what is or is not so; judgements of value state or purport to state what is or is not truly good or really better' (*Method*, 37). So the term 'intentional self-transcendence' is a kind of umbrella term that covers both judgements of fact and judgements of value. It points to the fact that both judgements of fact and judgements of value 'intend' objects with a meaning that is or claims to be independent of the one making the judgement.

[342] Lonergan, *Method*, 37.

obligation, and one cannot be a rational doer and not fulfil the obligation. But one can be a rational knower without an act of willing, and one cannot be a rational doer without an act of willing.'[343] It is, Lonergan says, 'the addition of the further constitutive requirement of an act of will'[344] that indicates the movement from rational consciousness to rational self-consciousness, and changes what is rational necessity in the field of knowing, into rational exigence in the larger field of both knowing and doing. Of course in *Method in Theology* Lonergan does not say all this; he simply states that 'man can know what is right without doing it.' I think, however, that while the language is different, and that while Lonergan's approach to these matters is also different, there is contained in both works the same general idea, namely that sin occurs when a person knows that something is right but fails to do it, or when a person knows that something is wrong and does it anyway.

Let us return for a moment to the above quotation from Lonergan's discussion of value-judgements, and let us repeat just a small section of it: 'Man can know what is right without doing it. Still, if he knows and does not perform . . . he must be humble enough to acknowledge himself to be sinner.' This statement seems fairly unambiguous: sin occurs when one knows but fails to perform. This understanding of sin would seem to imply that knowledge and freedom are necessary prerequisites for sinning. Still, the fact that one fails to perform despite his or her knowledge does not necessarily mean that he or she has a choice in the matter. The failure to perform is just a fact and Lonergan says nothing here of why the person has failed to perform. It is necessary to read free will into this statement. It is not as unambiguous as *Insight*'s definition of sin which describes sin as 'the failure of free will to choose a morally obligatory course of action or its failure to reject a morally reprehensible course of action.'[345] Here the reader is left in no doubt about Lonergan's position on human

[343] Lonergan, *Insight*, 615.
[344] Ibid.
[345] Ibid., 666.

free will. In *Method in Theology*'s account of sin, however, the fact of the human person's freedom is not defined clearly but merely implied.

1.5. Conclusion

As in *Insight*, Lonergan, in *Method in Theology*, presents the reader with a notion of sin that fails to draw on scripture and the theological tradition yet retains some of the essential elements of a classical, theological understanding of sin, namely the importance of knowledge and freedom. The fact of Lonergan's failure to draw on scripture and the theological tradition is perhaps more surprising in a book that contains the word 'theology' in its title. However, in the introduction to this book, Lonergan explains this lack of engagement with the theological tradition: 'Let me beg them [his readers] not to be scandalized because I quote Scripture, the ecumenical councils, papal encyclicals, other theologians so rarely and sparingly. I am writing not theology but method in theology. I am concerned not with the objects that theologians expound but with the operations that theologians perform.'[346] For the purposes of a balanced theology of sin, however, it is necessary to incorporate scriptural and magisterial elements of this doctrine with a more philosophical approach like Lonergan's. This, as I have already indicated, I shall attempt in the final chapter of this dissertation.

In the sections that follow we shall further examine the notions of ethical knowledge and human freedom as they relate to sin. In the next section we shall critically examine Lonergan's approach to value judgements. Again we shall examine the question of Lonergan's ability to dialogue with moral scepticism. In the third section we shall examine *Method in Theology*'s approach to human freedom and its ability to dialogue with determinism.

[346] Lonergan, *Method*, xii.

2. THE OBJECTIVITY OF JUDGEMENTS OF VALUE

It is well known that Lonergan's thought on value and the good underwent a significant development from the publication of *Insight* in 1957 to that of *Method in Theology* in 1972. In a paper entitled, '*Insight* Revisited,' Lonergan outlines this development in his thought:

> In *Insight* the good was the intelligent and reasonable. In *Method* the good is a distinct notion. It is intended in questions for deliberation: Is this worthwhile? Is this truly or only apparently good? It is aspired to in the intentional response of feeling to values. It is known in judgements of value made by a virtuous or authentic person with a good conscience. It is brought about by deciding and living up to one's decisions.[347]

The various implications of this development in Lonergan's thought have been examined by a number of different commentators over the years.[348] In one of the earliest of such examinations, Frederick Crowe traces the development of Lonergan's thought in the works he wrote between the publication of *Insight* and *Method in Theology*.[349] Crowe also asks critical questions relating to the development of Lonergan's thought in this area, some of which we shall examine when we come to critically examine *Method in Theology*'s account of the good.

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[347] Bernard J.F. Lonergan, '*Insight* Revisited,' in *A Second Collection* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1974), 277.

[348] Frederick E. Crowe, 'An Exploration of Lonergan's New Notion of Value,' in Michael Vertin, ed., *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989); Michael Vertin, 'Judgements of Value, for the Later Lonergan,' *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 13:2 (Fall 1995): 221-48; Terry J. Tekippe and Louis Roy, 'Lonergan and the Fourth Level of Intentionality,' *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 70/2 (1996): 225-242; Robert M. Doran, 'Discernment and Lonergan's Fourth Level of Consciousness,' *Gregorianum* 89/4 (2008): 790-802.

[349] Crowe, *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*, 54. Crowe traces the development of Lonergan's thought in this area through the following works: *Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston College Lectures on Mathematical Logic and Existentialism*, Vol. 18 of the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Philip McShane (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2001) – these lectures were given by Lonergan in 1957; *The Triune God: Systematics*, Vol. 12 of the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, trans. Michael G. Shields, eds. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), esp. Chap. 5, 'The Divine Persons in Relation to One Another' – this book is based on lectures given by Lonergan in 1964 at the Gregorian University; 'Cognitional Structure,' in *Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967); 'The Subject,' in *A Second Collection*, eds. William F.J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974).

In the first two parts of this section, we shall outline Lonergan's notion of the good as it is presented in *Method in Theology*. We shall focus generally on the notions of value and value judgements, and specifically on the question of the objectivity of judgements of value. In the third and fourth parts of this section, we shall critically examine the problem of objectivity in Lonergan's value judgements, and how he uses various notions of conversion as criteria for grounding value judgements.

2.1 The Notion of Value

Method in Theology's discussion of the notion of value begins by asserting that 'value is a transcendental notion.'[350] In chapter 1 of this book, Lonergan explains what he means by the term 'transcendental' by comparing it to the 'categorical.'

> Categories are determinations. They have a limited denotation. They vary with cultural variations. . . . In contrast, the transcendentals are comprehensive in connotation, unrestricted in denotation, invariant over cultural change. While categories are needed to put determinate questions and give determinate answers, the transcendentals are contained in questions prior to the answers. . . . So if we objectify the content of intelligent intending, we form the transcendental concept of the intelligible. If we objectify the content of reasonable intending, we form the transcendental concepts of the true and the real. If we objectify the content of responsible intending, we get the transcendental concept of value, of the truly good.[351]

In the same way that the intelligible is what is intended in questions for intelligence, and truth and being are what are intended in questions for reflection, value is what is intended in questions for deliberation. This intending is not the same as knowing. When one asks what, or why, or how, or what for, one does not know the answers, but is already intending or

[350] Lonergan, *Method*, 34.
[351] Ibid., 11-12.

anticipating what would be known if one knew the answers. When one asks whether this or that is true, one does not know yet whether or not either is true, but is already intending what would be known if one knew the answers. When one inquires, then, whether something is truly and not just seemingly good, whether that is worthwhile or not, one does not yet know value but is intending value.

The transcendental notions, for Lonergan, are 'the dynamism of conscious intentionality.'[352] They bring the subject up through the various levels of consciousness, from experiential to intellectual to rational to existential. With respect to objects, the transcendentals are the intermediaries between ignorance and knowledge. For example: the notion of the intelligible causes the subject to ask, 'What does this mean?', and the answer will make him knowledgeable. And the notions of the true and the real make him or her ask 'Is this true?', and the answer will again make him or her knowledgeable. The transcendentals 'refer to objects immediately and directly, while answers refer to objects only mediately, only because they are answers to the questions that intend the objects.'[353] For example: the notion of the intelligible refers directly to a given object by asking, 'What does *this* (the given object) mean?' The answer to this question, however, mediates between the object and the question. In other words, the answer is always an answer *to* a question that directly refers to an object; it is not an answer to the object itself.

As well as promoting the subject to full consciousness and directing him to his goals, the transcendental notions also supply the criteria by which one can tell whether the goals are being achieved. The desire to understand is satisfied when understanding is achieved but it is dissatisfied when complete attainment of understanding is lacking. So this desire is the source of ever further questions. The desire for truth urges rationality to give consent when evidence

[352] Ibid., 34.
[353] Ibid., 35.

is sufficient but refuses consent and insists upon doubt whenever evidence is insufficient.[354] Finally, the desire for value 'rewards success in self-transcendence with a happy conscience and saddens failures with an unhappy conscience.'[355]

Self-transcendence is the accomplishment of what Lonergan terms 'conscious intentionality.' Such conscious intentionality involves four steps: firstly, the subject attends to the data of sense and of consciousness; secondly, inquiry and understanding result in a grasp of a theoretical or possible world mediated by meaning; thirdly, through reflection and judgement we reach an absolute. Through such reflection and judgement 'we acknowledge what is really so, what is independent of us and our thinking.'[356] Fourthly, by deliberating, evaluating, deciding, and acting 'we can know and do, not just what pleases us, but what truly is good, worth while.'[357]

For Lonergan, the transcendental notions, while broader than any category, are not abstract. They are, rather, 'utterly concrete.'[358]

> For the concrete is the real not under this or that aspect but under its every aspect in its every instance. But the transcendental notions are the fount not only of initial questions but also of further questions. Moreover, though the further questions come only one at a time, still they keep coming. There are ever further questions for intelligence pushing up towards a fuller understanding and ever further doubts urging us to a fuller truth.[359]

In the same way, when we speak of the good we do not refer to some abstraction. Only that which is concrete is good. Just as the transcendental notions of the intelligible, the true, and the real seek complete intelligibility, truth, and reality, so, Lonergan says, 'the transcendental

[354] See section 1.2.1. in previous chapter on Lonergan's notion of the virtually unconditioned.
[355] Lonergan, *Method*, 35.
[356] Ibid.
[357] Ibid.
[358] Ibid., 36.
[359] Ibid.

notion of the good heads for a goodness that is beyond criticism.'[360] He proceeds to describe how the notion of the good manifests itself in human consciousness.

> For that notion is our raising questions for deliberation. It is our being stopped with the disenchantment that asks whether what we are doing is worth while. That disenchantment brings to light the limitation in every finite achievement, the stain in every flawed perfection, the irony of soaring ambition and faltering performance. It plunges us into the height and depth of love, but it also keeps us aware of how much our loving falls short of its aim. In brief, the transcendental notion of the good so invites, presses, harries us, that we could rest only in an encounter with a goodness completely beyond it powers of criticism.[361]

So, the transcendental notion of the good causes us to ask questions for deliberation and it also causes us to keep asking them. Through these questions for deliberation we seek to discern value. In the next subsection we shall examine the general nature of these discernments or judgements of value, with the specific question in mind: Are these judgements of value objective?

2.2. Judgements of Value

Lonergan begins his discussion of value judgements by asserting that they may be either simple or comparative. They confirm or dispute that something is truly good or only seems to be so, or they compare separate instances of the truly good to confirm or dispute that one has more importance or urgency than the other.

He proceeds to explain the criterion involved in the objective judgement of value.

[360] Ibid.
[361] Ibid.

> Such judgements are objective or merely subjective inasmuch as they proceed or do not proceed from a self-transcending subject. Their truth or falsity, accordingly, has its criterion in the authenticity or the lack of authenticity of the subject's being.[362]

Lonergan goes on to draw a distinction between the criterion and the meaning of the judgement of value. He explains the meaning of such judgements as follows:

> To say that an affirmative judgement of value is true is to say what objectively is or would be good or better. To say that an affirmative judgement of value is false is to say what objectively is not or would not be good or better.[363]

These two quotations are vital for our purposes. In them Lonergan does two things: firstly, he strongly affirms the reality of objective judgements of value; secondly, he provides the criterion that makes such judgements true or false. Lonergan proceeds to compare judgements of value with judgements of fact. They are different in content because one can *approve of* (judgement of value) what does not exist (for example a plan that has not yet been implemented) but one cannot *affirm* (judgement of fact) what does not exist. Similarly, one can *disapprove of* (negative judgement of value) what exists, but cannot *deny the reality of* (negative judgement of fact) what exists. They are not, however, different in structure as in both judgements of fact and judgements of value we can distinguish between criterion and meaning. In both of these kinds of judgement, the criterion is the self-transcendence of the subject. However, the self-transcendence involved in judgements of fact and the self-transcendence involved in judgements of value differ in meaning. In the former, the self-transcendence is 'only cognitive,'[364] while in the latter the subject is moving toward moral self-transcendence. The meaning in both kinds of judgement is or purports to be independent of the one making the judgement. Factual judgements claim knowledge of a reality apart from the thinking of the one judging. In other words, factual judgements claim to state not

[362] Ibid., 37.
[363] Ibid.
[364] Ibid.

just personal opinion but actual facts about the universe. Similarly, judgements of value claim to know what is or is not *truly* good or *really* better.

True judgements of value, as we saw in 1.4, go beyond merely intentional self-transcendence (see footnote 341) without reaching the fullness of moral self-transcendence. That fullness is not just knowing but also doing, and a person is capable of knowing what is right and not doing it. However, by the judgement of value, one 'moves beyond pure and simple knowing.'[365] By such judgements one makes oneself capable of moral self-transcendence or true loving.

Midway between factual judgments and judgements of value there are apprehensions of value. These apprehensions, according to Lonergan, are 'given in feelings.'[366] The apprehension of value occurs in what Lonergan (drawing on Dietrich von Hildebrand) terms an 'intentional response.'[367] He explains this term in his analysis of the role of feelings in value judgements:

> Intentional responses . . . answer to what is intended, apprehended, represented. The feeling relates us, not just to a cause or an end, but to an object. Such feeling gives intentional consciousness its mass, momentum, drive, power. Without these feelings our knowing and deciding would be paper thin.[368]

Such intentional responses meet either the ontic value of a person, that is, the person's intrinsic worth, or the qualitative value of beauty, understanding, truth, noble deeds, virtuous acts, or great achievements. As human beings, according to Lonergan, we are constituted in such a way that we not only ask questions that lead to self-transcendence; we not only

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[365] Ibid.
[366] Ibid.
[367] Ibid., 30. Von Hildebrand makes the following distinction between intentional and non-intentional experiences: 'In saying "intentional," we refer to a conscious, rational relation between the person and an object. Not all human experiences imply such a conscious relation to an object. All pure states, such as being tired, being in bad humor, being irritated, and so forth, have no conscious relation with an object. They do not imply the specific polarity of the person on the one hand, as against the object on the other. They do not possess the character of transcending the realm of our mind.' Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Ethics* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1953 & 1972), 191.
[368] Ibid., 30-31.

acknowledge correct answers that make up intentional self-transcendence (see footnote 341), but we 'also respond with the stirring of our very being when we glimpse the possibility or the actuality of moral self-transcendence.'[369]

2.3. The Problem of Objectivity

As we saw in the last chapter, Lonergan's notions of the good and value in *Insight* are set upon a metaphysical structure built with almost 600 pages of reflections on the nature of, and the possibility of knowledge. The change of direction in Lonergan's approach to these notions, from *Insight*'s approach which is primarily intellectualist (where activities such as deliberation, deciding, choosing, and willing are regarded as an 'extensions' of intellectual activity) to *Method in Theology*'s approach which puts responsibility on a new level of cognitional activity, opens up the question of the objectivity of value judgements as they are presented in the latter work. Frederick Crowe examines this question in a paper presented at the first annual Lonergan Workshop in 1974. He asks: 'How escape the vicious circle of judging our judgement of the values we choose as good for us? How do we go beyond the good for me or the good for us, to what is truly good, to what transcends the self?'[370]

In attempting to answer this question, Crowe takes us in a number of different directions. Firstly, he suggests that we look to Cardinal Newman's view, developed by Lonergan, on 'the true way of learning.' This, Crowe says, deals more directly with escaping from the vicious circle that seems to enclose our cognitional efforts. However, he suggests, it should also work well as a means of escaping from the vicious circle that seems to imprison us in our attempts to provide a solid foundation for our judgements of value. In Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, he critiques Descartes' way of moving forward in knowledge. Whereas Descartes begins with a universal doubt, Newman begins with a universal credulity, with the

[369] Ibid., 38.
[370] Crowe, *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*, 59.

expectation of eliminating error in due course as the truth evolves and engages the mind. Crowe provides the following quotation from Newman's *Grammar of Assent* to illustrate his general approach:

> Of the two, I would rather have to maintain that we ought to begin with believing everything that is offered to our acceptance, than that it is our duty to doubt everything. The former, indeed, seems the true way of learning. In that case, we soon discover and discard what is contradictory to itself: and error having always some portion of truth in it, and the truth having a reality which error has not, we may expect, that when there is an honest purpose and fair talents, we shall somehow make our way forward, the error falling off from the mind, and the truth developing and occupying it.[371]

In *Insight*, Lonergan develops this procedure in what he calls the 'self-correcting process of human learning.' The following quotation, again provided by Crowe, will illustrate Lonergan's approach:

> So it is the process of learning that breaks the vicious circle. Judgement on the correctness of insights supposes the prior acquisition of a large number of correct insights. But the prior insights are not correct because we judge them to be correct. They occur within a self-correcting process in which the shortcomings of each insight provoke further questions to yield complementary insights. Moreover, this self-correcting process tends to a limit. We become familiar with concrete situations . . . and we can recognize when . . . that self-correcting process reaches its limit in familiarity with concrete situation and in easy mastery of it.[372]

Crowe strongly emphasises the importance of understanding Lonergan's idea of the self-correcting process if we are to understand both *Insight* and *Method in Theology*. While Lonergan uses it mostly in the areas of concrete judgements of fact, of the critique of beliefs,

[371] John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London: Longmans, Green, 1930), 377, quoted in Crowe, *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*, 60.
[372] Lonergan, *Insight*, 286-287, quoted in Crowe, *Appropriating the Lonergan* Idea, 61.

and of the hermeneutic circle, it seems, in Crowe's view, to have a much wider application. Furthermore, it 'seems to have as competitor only a fixed and indubitable starting-point, a premise which is somehow self-validating and really involved in a vicious circle.'[373]

In *Method in Theology*, this self-correcting process of learning is most comprehensively and most clearly set out in the chapter on dialectic. We have seen already that the criterion of objectivity in value judgements in *Method in Theology* is the authenticity of the one judging, and that 'man achieves authenticity in self-transcendence.' There is another aspect to this authenticity and self-transcendence in Lonergan's theory, namely, conversion. While one achieves authenticity in self-transcendence, he or she also achieves self-transcendence through conversion. In Lonergan's discussion of dialectic, he makes conversion the criterion by which true judgements of value are worked out in dialogue with one's intellectual, ethical, and religious opponents.

> There are fundamental conflicts stemming from an explicit or implicit cognitional theory, an ethical stance, a religious outlook. They profoundly modify one's mentality. They are to be overcome only through an intellectual, moral, religious conversion. The function of dialectic will be to bring such conflicts to light, and to provide a technique that objectifies subjective differences and promotes conversion.[374]

In the following subsection, we shall examine Lonergan's three-fold distinction between intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. We shall then proceed to examine the role of conversion in the dialectical process of coming to true value judgements.

[373] Crowe, *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*, 61.
[374] Lonergan, *Method*, 235.

2.4. Conversion as Criterion of the Truth of Value Judgements

2.4.1. Intellectual, Moral, and Religious Conversion

Lonergan defines intellectual conversion as 'a radical clarification and, consequently, the elimination of an exceedingly stubborn and misleading myth concerning reality, objectivity, and human knowledge.'[375] This myth suggests that knowing is like looking and that objectivity is seeing what is there to be seen and not seeing what is not there. It further suggests that the real is that which is out there now to be looked at. This myth, according to Lonergan, fails to take into account the distinction between the world of immediate sense experience and the world mediated by meaning. The world of immediacy, of the senses, is only a very small part of the world mediated by meaning. The world mediated by meaning is a world that is known not merely by the sense experience of a single person, but by the outer and inner experience of the cultural community, and 'by the continuously checked and rechecked judgements of the community.'[376] Knowing, then, is more than just seeing. It is, rather, experiencing, understanding, judging, and believing.

> The criteria of objectivity are not just the criteria of ocular vision; they are the compounded criteria of experiencing, of understanding, of judging, and of believing. The reality known is not just looked at; it is given in experience, organized and extrapolated by understanding, posited by judgement and belief.

Intellectual conversion, then, is a move away from any of the various philosophical forms that this myth takes,[377] towards what Lonergan terms a 'critical realism' that widens the criteria of objectivity to include various forms of experiencing, as well as understanding, judgement, and belief.

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[375] Ibid., 238.
[376] Ibid.
[377] Lonergan provides a brief description of three different forms that this myth can take, namely, naive realism, empiricism, and idealism. 'The naive realist knows the world mediated by meaning but thinks he knows it by looking. The empiricist restricts objective knowledge to sense experience; for him, understanding and conceiving, judging and believing are merely subjective activities. The idealist insists that human knowing always includes understanding as well as sense; but he retains the empiricist's notion of reality, and so he thinks of the world mediated by meaning as not real but ideal' (*Method*, 238-239).

Moral Conversion 'changes the criterion of one's decisions and choices from satisfaction to values.'[378] Children and adolescents are persuaded or compelled to do the right thing. However, as our knowledge of the world increases, and as our responses to human values become stronger and more sophisticated, those guiding us leave us more and more to ourselves in order that 'our freedom may exercise its ever advancing thrust toward authenticity.'[379] So, Lonergan continues, 'we move toward the existential moment when we discover for ourselves that our choosing affects ourselves no less than the chosen or rejected objects, and that it is up to each of us to decide for himself what he is to make of himself.'[380] Moral conversion involves choosing the truly good; even choosing value over satisfaction when the two conflict. But such conversion, Lonergan says, 'falls short of moral perfection.'[381] Deciding to do what is right is one thing, while doing it is another. One must continue to develop one's knowledge of human reality and potentiality as they are in the existing situation. One must be willing to learn from others, 'for moral knowledge is the proper possession only of morally good men and, until one has merited that title, one has still to advance and learn.'[382]

Lonergan describes religious conversion as 'being grasped by ultimate concern.'[383] It is 'other-worldly falling in love.'[384] It is 'total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations.'[385] It is, however, such a surrender, not as a single act, but as a 'dynamic state that is prior to and principle of subsequent acts.'[386] For Christians, religious conversion is God's love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us (Rm. 5:5). It is God's gift of grace. Lonergan proceeds to draw the reader's attention to the

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[378] Ibid., 240.
[379] Ibid.
[380] Ibid.
[381] Ibid.
[382] Ibid.
[383] Ibid.
[384] Ibid.
[385] Ibid.
[386] Ibid.

traditional distinction between operative and cooperative grace, and identifies religious conversion with the former:

> Operative grace is the replacement of the heart of stone by a heart of flesh, a replacement beyond the horizon of the heart of stone. Cooperative grace is the heart of flesh becoming effective in good works through human freedom. Operative grace is religious conversion.[387]

Cooperative grace, Lonergan describes as the effectiveness of conversion, the steady movement toward a complete transformation of the entirety of one's living and feeling, as well as one's thoughts, words, deeds, and omissions.

2.4.2. Conversion and Value Judgements

Dialectic, the fourth of Lonergan's 'functional specialties,' deals with conflicts. It is structured on two levels. On the upper level are the operators, and on the lower there are the materials to be operated on. The operators are the following two precepts: develop positions; reverse counter-positions. Lonergan defines the positions as 'statements compatible with intellectual, moral, and religious conversion.'[388] Such positions are developed by being combined with fresh information and further discoveries. Counter-positions, on the other hand, are statements that are incompatible with intellectual, or moral, or religious conversion. They are reversed by the removal of the incompatible elements.

In chapter 10 of *Method in Theology*, under the heading 'Dialectic as Method,' Lonergan provides a brief explanation of how dialectic functions. The following quotation should serve as a useful summary.

> Our fourth functional specialty moves beyond the realm of ordinary empirical science. It meets persons. It acknowledges the values they represent. It deprecates their short-

[387] Ibid., 241.
[388] Ibid., 249.

> comings. It scrutinizes their intellectual, moral, and religious assumptions. It picks out significant figures, compares their basic views, discerns processes of development and aberration. As the investigation expands, there are brought to light origins and turning-points, the flowering and the decadence of religious philosophy, ethics, spirituality.[389]

Positions and counter-positions are to be understood concretely as opposed moments in ongoing process. They must be understood in their proper dialectical character. Lonergan proceeds to explain how human authenticity does not guarantee truth and that there is a need for an on-going conversion:

> Human authenticity is not some pure quality, some serene freedom from all oversights, all misunderstanding, all mistakes, all sins. Rather it consists in a withdrawal from unauthenticity, and the withdrawal is never a permanent achievement. It is ever precarious, ever to be achieved afresh, ever in great part a matter of uncovering still more oversights, acknowledging still further failures to understand, correcting still more mistakes, repenting more and more deeply hidden sins.[390]

Human development, Lonergan tells us, comes about primarily through resolving conflicts. In the area of intentional consciousness, the basic conflicts are delineated by the opposition of positions and counter-positions.

Lonergan proceeds by explaining the importance of overcoming one's own conflicts if we are to properly understand our dialogue partners:

> Now it is only through the movement towards cognitional and moral self-transcendence, in which the theologian overcomes his own conflicts, that he can hope to discern the ambivalence at work in others and the measure in which they resolved their problems. Only through such discernment can he hope to appreciate all that has been intelligent, true, and good in the past even in the lives and the thought of opponents. Only through

[389] Ibid., 252.
[390] Ibid.

> such discernment can he come to acknowledge all that was misinformed, misunderstood, mistaken, evil even in those with whom he is allied.[391]

He goes on to explain that this action is reciprocal. Just as it is one's own self-transcendence that allows one to truly know others and to fairly judge them, so, inversely, it is through our understanding and recognition of others that we come to know ourselves and to increase and cultivate our apprehension of values.

2.5. Critique

In this section we shall critically examine Lonergan's use of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion as criteria for grounding judgements of value.

2.5.1. Intellectual Conversion as Criterion of the Truth of Value Judgements

Let us begin with a reiteration of Lonergan's definition of intellectual conversion: 'Intellectual conversion is a radical clarification and, consequently, the elimination of an exceedingly stubborn and misleading myth concerning reality, objectivity, and human knowledge. The myth is that knowing is like looking, that objectivity is seeing what is there to be seen and not seeing what is not there, and that the real is what is out there now to be looked at.' Lonergan identifies three forms of this myth; namely, naive realism, empiricism, and idealism (see footnote 377). Lonergan's own view he calls 'critical realism.' He makes intellectual conversion one of the criteria for discerning the truth of value judgements. In order to reach the truth we must, he tells us, 'develop positions,' that is, 'statements compatible with intellectual, moral, and religious conversion,' and 'reverse counterpositions,' that is, 'statements that are incompatible with intellectual or moral or religious conversion.'

[391] Ibid., 252-253.

Positions are developed by being combined with fresh information and further discoveries, while the counterpositions are reversed by the removal of the incompatible elements.

This procedure may work if our aim is to reach the truth of a particular judgement of value. Let us say, for argument's sake, that we hold a certain moral view, and that the view we hold is the truth because we have undergone an intellectual and moral and religious conversion. Now, because of a diametrically opposed intellectual and spiritual horizon, our opponent cannot share our view. If we can foster a conversion or conversions in this person, to make her or his world-view conform more or less to ours, we may be in a better position to convince this person that our view on this particular matter is true. However, as Lonergan himself points out, the fact that we have undergone such conversions does not guarantee that our judgements will be correct, or that we will be immune to all mistakes and to all sins. So, even if we have undergone the three conversions which Lonergan speaks of, the intellectual ground upon which we stand is not a completely solid basis upon which to argue our position.

I shall not elaborate further on this argument because I said in the preceding paragraph that this procedure may work if our aim is to reach the truth of a particular judgement of value. But this is *not* our aim here. Our question is one of foundations; we are attempting to discern the *possibility* of true judgements of value, not whether this or that judgement is true or false, but whether it is meaningful to speak of true judgements of value. In such an endeavour Lonergan's grounding of value judgements in intellectual conversion is not, in my view, useful. Lonergan's dialectical procedure, particularly his grounding of value judgements in intellectual conversion, will not work for the foundational question of the possibility of true judgements of value. If we assume that judgements of value can be objective, dialectic may be an adequate procedure for determining the truth of particular judgements of value in discussion with those who hold opposing views. However, in terms of establishing the *possibility* of objective judgements of value, dialectic will not help us. We

must first place judgements of value within an epistemological framework. While *Insight* establishes such an epistemological foundation for value judgements, *Method in Theology* does not. This is unfortunate, as the moral sceptic will not argue with us over the truth or falsity of a particular value judgement; we will have to first convince him or her that such truth or falsity in relation to value judgements is possible.

2.5.2. Moral Conversion as Criterion of the Truth of Value Judgements

Lonergan says of moral conversion that it 'changes the criterion of one's decisions and choices from satisfaction to values,' and that it involves choosing the truly good. Again we must distinguish between a procedure for arriving at true judgements of value and the foundational question of the possibility of true value judgements. With regard to the former it makes sense that if one is to arrive at a true judgement of value, the criterion of one's decisions and choices should be values and not satisfaction. If the criterion is that of satisfaction, this will lead to a biased assessment and evaluation of the situation, and ultimately to a judgement that will lead to personal satisfaction and may or may not be a true judgment of value.

Again, I shall not develop this argument any further as we are concerned not with procedure but with foundations. With regard to the foundational question, Lonergan's use of moral conversion as criterion of the truth of value judgements is again of no use to us. Moral conversion is from satisfaction to values. The use of values as the criterion of truth in value judgements amounts to a circular argument that makes choosing value or the truly good the criterion for establishing the possibility of value or the truly good. In order to make values a criterion of the truth of judgements of value we must first establish the possibility of values. In *Method in Theology*, Lonergan does not, in my view, accomplish this.

2.5.3. Religious Conversion as Criterion of the Truth of Value Judgements

In a paper given at the Lonergan Congress of 1970, David Tracy examines Lonergan's foundational theology. In this paper, Tracy asks the following question of Lonergan's notion of religious conversion as it relates to theology in general:

> Is the 'religious' 'conversion' mediated here dogmatically or critically? . . . Is it mediated by dialectical reflection upon the results of earlier historical theology – thereby *assuming* (as a dogmatic affirmation) the truth-value of the data (presumably religious) interpreted and critically investigated by the historian? Or is it, too, to be critically mediated, thus transcendentally justifying the use of religious – in fact of a specific religious – God-language?[392]

Tracy proceeds to draw out the implications of a dogmatically rather than critically mediated religious conversion.

> If the former alone be the case then Lonergan's enterprise may be dialectically *foundational* for a *collaborative methodological* theological enterprise for all those theologians (of whatever tradition) who accept an authoritative (and, in that sense, dogmatic) grounding for all genuine theological work. But it will not be for those (viz., in the Liberal, Modernist or neo-Liberal traditions) who demand a *critical* dialectical mediation of religious and theological meaning and language.[393]

The various traditions that Tracy here either alludes to or mentions explicitly are different Christian and theological traditions. But the question, I think, may be transposed to include non-Christian traditions, particularly the tradition of philosophical scepticism, or, more specifically, moral scepticism, which will certainly demand a critical mediation of religious and theological meaning and language. Put simply, Tracy's question, as we adapt it for our

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[392] David Tracy, 'Lonergan's Foundational Theology: An Interpretation and a Critique,' ed. Philip McShane, *Foundations of Theology: Papers from the International Lonergan Congress 1970* (Dublin & London: Gill & Macmillan, 1971), 210.
[393] Ibid.

discussion, would read as follows: Is Lonergan's notion of dialectic, which grounds value judgements in religious conversion, sufficiently critical to be capable of dialoguing with moral scepticism?

Let us examine the data. Lonergan provides a number of definitions of religious conversion, some of which are explicitly Christian, and some of which are not. The explicitly Christian definitions are as follows: Religious conversion is 'God's love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us.' Religious conversion is also described as 'the gift of grace.'[394] The first reference is to Romans 5:5, the second to the notion of grace, a scripturally and dogmatically founded Christian doctrine. It is obvious that these notions of religious conversion are not capable of dialoguing with the moral or religious sceptic. Like the various theological approaches that we examined in the first section of this dissertation, this grounding of value judgements relies too heavily on theological presupposition. To be fair to Lonergan, he does preface these definitions of religious conversion with the words, 'For Christians it is,' which indicates an understanding that this kind of language will not be convincing to the non-Christian.

Lonergan uses three less explicitly Christian phrases to define religious conversion: Religious conversion is 'being grasped by ultimate concern;' it is 'other-worldly falling in love;' it is 'total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations.' We shall examine each of these phrases separately in order to see whether or not they will be more effective in dialoguing with the moral or religious sceptic.

The phrase, 'being grasped by ultimate concern,' Lonergan borrows from Paul Tillich. Let us examine this phrase in its original context, which is Tillich's definition of religion in his discussion of the encounter between the various world religions:

[394] Lonergan, *Method*, 241.

> Religion is the state of being grasped by ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of our life. Therefore this concern is unconditionally serious and shows a willingness to sacrifice any finite concern which is in conflict with it. The predominant religious name for the content of such concern is God – a god or gods.[395]

This is Tillich's definition of religion as it relates to specifically theistic religions. He continues to draw out the meaning of 'ultimate concern' for nontheistic religions and what he terms 'quasi-religions.'

> In nontheistic religions divine qualities are ascribed to a sacred object or an all-pervading power or a highest principle such as the Brahma or the One. In secular quasi-religions the ultimate concern is directed towards objects like nation, science, a particular form or stage of society, or a highest ideal of humanity, which are then considered divine.[396]

The original context of Tillich's phrase, 'being grasped by ultimate concern,' is explicitly religious. It is a definition of religion within a discussion of religions. Even where he discusses so-called secular quasi-religions, he considers the ultimate concern, whether it be nation or science or a highest ideal of humanity, to be deified. The question which concerns me is as follows: What meaning can the phrase 'being grasped by ultimate concern,' have to the sceptic who denies the possibility of any kind of divinity? Or, to return to Lonergan: What meaning can religious conversion, understood as being grasped by ultimate concern, have to such a religious sceptic? I contend that while Tillich's phrase 'being grasped by ultimate concern,' when taken out of its original context, is not explicitly Christian or religious, becomes, when returned to its original context, very religious. Even in the case of the 'quasi' religions, where the concern is with entities that we would not normally consider

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[395] Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1963), 4-5.
[396] Ibid., 5.

religious, the term ‘ultimate’ suggests a sense of meaning in life that is not necessarily shared by everyone. For this reason, Lonergan’s use of this term to ground value judgements in religious conversion is, I contend, dogmatic rather than critical, and so not very useful in terms of dialoguing with the moral or religious sceptic.

The next phrase that Lonergan uses to define religious conversion is ‘other-worldly falling in love.’ Again this is not explicitly Christian or explicitly religious. But it certainly implies some form of religion. For the Christian, the use of the phrase ‘other-worldly’ poses no problem. The other world here referred to is the world that transcends the spatio-temporal realm that all creatures inhabit, the world which is inhabited by God, the object that we fall in love with. Other religions too have various notions of a world that transcends space and time. While it may not be unheard of for someone to hold a belief in such an infinite realm of existence without holding what we would call religious beliefs, the phrase, ‘other-worldly,’ has strong religious overtones. This phrase, while it does not refer to any particular religion or to religions in general, strongly implies a religious mentality. For this reason, it will not be convincing to the moral or religious sceptic.

The final phrase that Lonergan uses to define religious conversion is ‘total and permanent self-surrender, without conditions, qualifications, reservations.’ My question is: Self-surrender to what? If we read on, the answer is plain: it is self-surrender to God.

> But it is such a surrender, not as an act, but as a dynamic state that is prior to and principle of subsequent acts. It is revealed in retrospect as an under-tow of existential consciousness, as a fated acceptance of a vocation to *holiness*, as perhaps an increasing simplicity and passivity in *prayer*.[397]

As is indicated by my italics, the language here is undeniably religious and so incapable of effectively dialoguing with the moral or religious sceptic.

[397] Lonergan, *Method*, 240-241, my italics.

2.6. Conclusion

In this section we have examined Lonergan's notions of value and value judgements. We have seen that he places a lot of emphasis on the objectivity of such judgements of value by using phrases such as 'true judgements of value' and 'truly good.' We proceeded to examine the problem of objectivity in *Method in Theology*'s account of value and value judgements by examining Frederick Crowe's question: 'How escape the vicious circle of judging our judgement of the values we choose as good for us?' Crowe directed our attention to Lonergan's self-correcting process of learning and we went on to examine this process in Lonergan's account of dialectic. We saw that in this account Lonergan uses intellectual, moral, and religious conversion as criteria for discerning the truth of value judgements. We concluded that this procedure is ineffective in terms of dialoguing with the moral or religious sceptic for a number of different reasons: *Method in Theology*'s failure to establish a firm epistemological grounding for value judgements; the circular nature of an argument that offers values as a criterion of truth in a discussion on the possibility of values; the religious language, explicit or implicit, in Lonergan's definitions of religious conversion.

Because of what I have argued are *Method in Theology*'s failures with regard to effectively dialoguing with moral scepticism, we shall revert to *Insight* in our attempts to construct a synthetic account of sin that is capable of such dialogue. Before doing this, however, it remains to examine Lonergan's notion of freedom in *Method in Theology* and the question of whether it is capable of effectively dialoguing with determinism.

3. THE NOTION OF HUMAN FREEDOM

Lonergan's notion of human freedom in *Method in Theology* is closely related to his notion of authenticity, which we examined in the first section of this chapter (1.3). In *Method in Theology*'s chapter on dialectic, Lonergan speaks of freedom exercising its 'ever advancing thrust towards authenticity.'[398] In this section, we shall examine this conception of freedom. Our critique will focus on the question of its ability to effectively dialogue with determinism.

3.1. Human Freedom and Authenticity

According to Lonergan, 'we experience our liberty as the active thrust of the subject terminating the process of deliberation by settling on one of the possible courses of action and proceeding to execute it.'[399] Insofar as that thrust of the self regularly chooses, not what merely seems to be good, but what is truly good, the self achieves moral self-transcendence and exists authentically. Contrarily, insofar as one's decisions are primarily motivated, not by the values at stake, but by the measure of the satisfactions and discomforts involved, one fails to self-transcend, to achieve authentic human existence.

Lonergan calls this thrust towards authenticity an exercise of vertical freedom. He distinguishes between horizontal and vertical liberty.

> Horizontal liberty is the exercise of liberty within a determinate horizon and from the basis of a corresponding existential stance. Vertical liberty is the exercise of liberty that selects that stance and the corresponding horizon.[400]

Such vertical liberty may be either implicit or explicit. Implicit vertical liberty occurs insofar as we respond to the motives that direct us to ever greater authenticity, or insofar as we ignore these motives and fall into a decreasingly less authentic selfhood. This vertical liberty

[398] Ibid., 240.
[399] Ibid., 50.
[400] Lonergan, *Method*, 40.

may also be explicit. In this case one responds to the transcendental notion of value by deciding what kind of person one should aim to be, and what kinds of activities one should engage in, in the service of one's fellow human beings.

Lonergan further elaborates on the relationship between freedom and authenticity in his discussion of how the fourth level of intentional consciousness goes beyond, while at the same time retaining, the other three. He describes this fourth level as 'the level of freedom and responsibility, or moral self-transcendence . . . of self-direction and self-control.'[401] It fulfils or fails to fulfil its responsibility insofar as we are attentive or inattentive in experiencing, intelligent or unintelligent in our investigations, reasonable or unreasonable in our judgements. From this understanding of how freedom and responsibility function cognitively, we can, according to Lonergan, dispose of the notion of will as arbitrary power, choosing indifferently between good and evil. Arbitrariness, he says, is just another name for unauthenticity. 'To think of will as arbitrary power is to assume that authenticity never exists or occurs.'[402]

The emergence of the fourth level of consciousness, according to Lonergan, is a gradual process that takes place between the ages of three and six.

> Then the child's earlier affective symbiosis with the mother is complemented by relations with the father who recognizes in the child a potential person, tells him or her what he or she may and may not do, sets before him or her a model of human conduct, and promises to good behaviour the later rewards of the self-determining adult. So the child gradually enters the world mediated by meaning and regulated by values and, by the age of seven years, is thought to have attained the use of reason.[403]

This, however, is only the beginning of human authenticity.

[401] Ibid., 121.
[402] Ibid., 122.
[403] Ibid., 121.

> One has to have found out for oneself that one has to decide for oneself what one is to make of oneself; one has to have proved oneself equal to that moment of existential decision; and one has to have kept on proving it in all subsequent decisions, if one is to be an authentic human person.[404]

Again we see here the connection between freedom and authenticity: one becomes an authentic person by realizing that one must choose in freedom what kind of person one will become, and one must continue to make the right choices.

Such an exercise of vertical freedom involves a movement from one horizon to another. There may, Lonergan says, be a sequence of such vertical exercises of freedom, where in each case the new horizon, while having more depth and breadth and richness, none the less is consistent with the old and is formed out of its potentialities. But it is also possible, Lonergan says, 'that the movement into a new horizon involves an about-face; it comes out of the old by repudiating characteristic features; it begins a new sequence that can keep revealing ever greater depth and breadth and wealth.'[405] This about-face and new beginning is what Lonergan means by conversion.

As we have seen, Lonergan speaks of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. As it is moral conversion that deals most directly with choices made in freedom, we shall briefly examine this notion again. As this will involve some repetition, I shall simply quote Lonergan's account of moral conversion verbatim, emphasising the notions of freedom and authenticity.

> Moral conversion changes the criterion of one's decisions and choices from satisfaction to values. As children or minors we are persuaded, cajoled, ordered, compelled to do what is right. As our knowledge of human reality increases, as our responses to human values are strengthened and refined, our mentors more and more leave us to ourselves so

[404] Ibid.
[405] Ibid., 237-238.

> that *our freedom may exercise its ever advancing thrust towards authenticity*. So we move to the existential moment when we discover for ourselves that our choosing affects ourselves no less that the chosen or rejected objects, and that it is up to each of us to decide for himself what he is to make of himself. Then is the time for *the exercise of vertical freedom* and then moral conversion consists of opting for the truly good, even for value against satisfaction when value and satisfaction conflict.[406]

The notion of moral conversion involves the subject choosing in freedom the type of person he or she is to become. We become either authentic or unauthentic persons insofar as we choose either the values of community and fellowship, or those of our own personal satisfaction.

3.2. Critique

In this section, we shall analyse each of the above points in order to judge whether or not they have any value in terms of a dialogue with determinism.

For Lonergan, as we have seen, 'we experience our liberty as the active thrust of the subject terminating the process of deliberation by settling on one of the possible courses of action and proceeding to execute it.' Insofar as that thrust of the self chooses not what merely seems to be good, but what is truly good, one achieves moral self-transcendence and exists authentically. It is true that we experience ourselves 'terminating the process of deliberation,' as Lonergan puts it, or making a decision and then proceeding to execute it. This experience, however, does not constitute evidence that what we experience is in fact free. By making positive decisions, according to Lonergan, we achieve moral self-transcendence and exist authentically. From a purely philosophical standpoint, this is uncertain. Self-transcendence and authenticity can only be convincingly argued if the possibility of free decisions has been

[406] Ibid., 240, my italics.

demonstrated. While Lonergan links decisions made in freedom with self-transcendence and authenticity, he does not demonstrate the possibility of such free decisions. Such possibility is, it seems, presupposed.

Lonergan further elaborates on this active thrust of the subject making a decision by distinguishing between horizontal and vertical liberty, and then making a further distinction between implicit and explicit vertical liberty. These distinctions describe different types of freedom. Lonergan speaks of horizons and existential stances: 'Horizontal liberty is the exercise of liberty within a determinate horizon and from the basis of a corresponding existential stance.' The *bare fact* of freedom, the *possibility* of freedom, is here presupposed; there is no argument presented to demonstrate it. Implicit vertical liberty occurs in responding to motives that lead one to ever fuller authenticity. Lonergan does not engage with the question of whether such responses are determined by psychological, sociological, or historical factors. Explicit vertical liberty occurs as one responds to the transcendental notion of value by determining what it would be worthwhile for one to make of oneself. Again, such responses could, arguably, be determined by psychological, sociological, or historical factors. This leaves the question of the possibility of freedom still to be settled.

Lonergan proceeds to speak of the fourth level of intentional consciousness as the level of freedom and responsibility, self-direction and self-control. It fulfils or fails to fulfil its responsibility insofar as we are attentive or inattentive in experiencing, intelligent or unintelligent in our investigations, reasonable or unreasonable in our judgements. The emergence of this fourth level of consciousness occurs in childhood and culminates in an existential moment in which a person decides what kind of person he or she is going to be, and continues to live up to this decision in the subsequent decisions he or she makes. Freedom, responsibility, self-direction, self-control are all realities that need to be demonstrated if one is to dialogue with determinism. The suggestion that responsibility is

fulfilled insofar as we are attentive in our experiencing, intelligent in our investigations, and reasonable in our judgements does not constitute a convincing argument for the possibility of freedom. As I have already argued, the notion that one reaches an existential moment when one decides what one is going to make of oneself is not convincing in terms of demonstrating the possibility of the freedom of such a decision, as such a moment could be determined by psychological, sociological, or historical factors. The same argument applies to all subsequent decisions.

Lonergan's notion of moral conversion, which, as I have said, deals most directly with decisions made in freedom, adds no new element to his notion of freedom. The same arguments are presented and the same language used: we change the criterion of our decisions from satisfaction to values as our freedom exercises its ever advancing thrust towards authenticity. While there can be no doubt that historically certain people have changed the criterion of their decisions from satisfaction to values, thereby undergoing what Lonergan would call a moral conversion, there is no evidence in Lonergan's presentation of moral conversion that demonstrates that this 'existential' moment has not been predetermined by one or a host of different factors.

3.3. Conclusion

Lonergan's notion of freedom in *Method in Theology* will not be convincing to the determinist. Because of the nature of this work – it is a treatise on theological method, written, presumably, for theologians – it is understandable that it contains much presupposition regarding things that Christians in general, and theologians in particular, accept as true, such as human freedom. In contrast, *Insight* is a purely philosophical work, written, not only for theologians, but for anyone interested in the cognitive processes whereby human beings acquire knowledge. Chapter 18 of this work, as we have seen, deals

directly with the general question of the possibility of ethics, and the particular questions of the possibility of objective moral knowledge, and of human freedom. It should not be surprising, then, that Lonergan's earlier work on human freedom contains arguments that are far more effective in terms of dialoguing with determinism. For this reason, we shall again revert to *Insight* in our attempt to construct a synthetic account of sin that is capable of such effective dialogue.

CONCLUSION

Although Lonergan's approach to sin in *Method in Theology* fails to take into account scriptural and traditional theological insights, it retains some of the essential elements of a classical, theological understanding of sin, namely, the importance of knowledge and freedom. However, in terms of constructing an effective dialogue with moral sceptics and determinists, I have argued that Lonergan's notions of the good, value judgements, and human freedom are inadequate. I contended that there are problems with Lonergan's grounding of value judgements in intellectual, moral, and religious conversion; namely, *Method in Theology*'s failure to provide a firm epistemological foundation for value judgements and dialectic; the circular nature of an argument that offers values as a criterion of truth in a discussion on the possibility of values; and the religious language, explicit or implicit, in Lonergan's definitions of religious conversion. I also argued that Lonergan's notion of freedom in *Method in Theology* is inadequate in terms of constructing an effective dialogue with determinists as, like the theology we examined in the first section of this dissertation, it contains too much presupposition regarding the fact or the reality of freedom. While Lonergan's discussion of the nature of freedom is interesting, it lacks the critical capabilities of the arguments for human freedom presented in his earlier work, *Insight*.

These inadequacies in *Method in Theology*, I further argued, are due to the fact that Lonergan's intended audience for this work is more specific than that of *Insight*. While *Insight* is aimed at whoever might be interested in epistemology, regardless of their faith presuppositions, *Method in Theology*'s intended reader is the theologian. Without this observation it could be construed that I am arguing that Lonergan lost all of his critical powers sometime between the publication of *Insight* and the writing of *Method in Theology*. I am, of course, not suggesting this. *Method in Theology* is a seminal work by a brilliant and respected philosopher and theologian. Its notions of the good and freedom have much merit and have been the subject of critical scrutiny by many scholars, none of which has dismissed *Method in Theology* as an inferior work to *Insight*.[407] Furthermore, Lonergan's notions of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion have received much attention and have been found to be very useful by many authors working in various areas of theology including religious education and moral theology.[408] What I am suggesting, then, is not that *Insight*'s notions of the good and freedom are better than those of *Method in Theology*, but that because of the different intended readers of the two works, and the consequent lack of presupposition in the former, *Insight* will be more effective in terms of dialoguing with the moral sceptic and determinist. For this reason, in the next chapter, I shall draw upon the arguments for the good and human freedom presented in *Insight* to construct a theology of sin that is capable of such effective dialogue.

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[407] See footnote 348.

[408] On the significance of Lonergan's notion of conversion for religious education, see J.W. Sullivan, 'Lonergan, Conversion and Objectivity,' *Theology* LXXXVI, no 713 (1983): 345-353; Mary C. Boys, 'Conversion as a Foundation for Religious Education,' *Religious Education* 77 (1982): 211-24; Thomas H. Groome, 'Conversion, Nurture and Educators,' *Religious Education* 76 (1981): 482-96. On the significance of Lonergan's notion of conversion for moral theology, see Stephen Happel and James J. Walter, *Conversion and Discipleship: A Christian Foundation for Ethics and Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); Walter E. Conn, ed. *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation* (New York: Alba House, 1978); Donal Harrington, 'Conversion and Moral Theology,' *Milltown Studies* 26 (1990): 23-49; B. Kiely, *Psychology and Moral Theology: Lines of Convergence* (Gregorian University Press, 1980).

PART THREE

SYNTHESIS

CHAPTER FIVE

A DIALECTICAL APPROACH TO SIN

The notion of sin in its fullest sense presupposes knowledge and freedom. This fact is reflected in the use the Church makes of the classical criteria for discerning whether sin is mortal or venial: grave matter, full knowledge, and deliberate consent. However, in order to develop a theology of sin that is capable of communicating to the moral sceptic and determinist, it is vital that we critically examine the following three notions: 1. There is an objective moral order, 2. Human beings are capable of discerning this order, and 3. Human beings are free to act morally. In the first section of this dissertation I argued that contemporary Church teaching and theological reflection on these themes fails to provide a solid rational basis for the notions of moral knowledge and human freedom. In section two we examined the work of Bernard Lonergan and I argued that his book, *Insight* is capable of providing this more secure rational foundation. However, I also noted that Lonergan fails to consider (at least explicitly) scripture and the Catholic theological tradition. I suggested, therefore, that a synthesis is needed in order to provide a balanced theology of sin that is both faithful to traditional theological method and also capable of communicating with the moral sceptic and determinist.

In this chapter I shall attempt to provide such a balanced theology of sin by using St Thomas's dialectical method. In the first section we shall recap briefly on the notion of sin in Church teaching and contemporary theological reflection and its dependence on the notions of moral knowledge and human freedom. We shall then proceed to ask two questions, the first relating to concerns of moral sceptics, and the second to concerns of determinists. These questions are: 1. Is there an objective moral order which is discernible by human beings? and 2. Are human beings free to act morally?

We shall consider these questions first from the point of view of the moral sceptic or determinist. Secondly, we shall look at the antithesis to these points of view in the theological tradition. Finally, we shall draw on Lonergan to respond to the various objections of the moral sceptic or determinist.

1. KNOWLEDGE AND HUMAN FREEDOM IN THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON SIN

In this section, we shall briefly recap on the notions of sin in the Church teaching and theological reflection that we examined in the first section of this dissertation, focusing on how these notions of sin rely on the anterior notions of knowledge and freedom.

The *Catechism* defines sin as 'an offence against reason, truth and right conscience,' and as a 'failure in genuine love of God and neighbour caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods.' Sin 'wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity.' It has been defined as 'an utterance, a deed or a desire contrary to the eternal law.'[409]

Mortal sin, in the *Catechism*, is defined as follows: 'mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law,'[410] and turns human beings away from their ultimate end and beatitude. By attacking charity, the vital principle within us, mortal sin makes necessary a new action of God's mercy and a conversion of heart.

There are three criteria for discerning whether or not a sin is mortal or venial: 'Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent.'[411] Mortal sin presupposes knowledge of the sinful nature of the act, and of its opposition to God's law. It also implies a consent that is sufficiently deliberate that it may be said to constitute a personal choice.

Bernard Häring defines mortal sin in terms of fundamental option, which is 'the activation of a deep *knowledge* of self and of basic *freedom* by which a person commits

[409] *Catechism*, 1849.
[410] Ibid., 1855.
[411] Ibid., 1857; John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, sec. 17.

himself.'[412] He speaks of the fundamental option against God and the good. Human beings, he says, can, with adequate freedom, choose false gods over the true God. Such a fundamental option corresponds to the theological concept of mortal sin. Sin, in its most malevolent sense, is turning away from God; it terminates the fundamental option for the good self-commitment to serving God and loving neighbour. Mortal sin is 'a refusal of God's friendship, opposition to the covenant, and total alienation of the person from God, from himself and from the community. It is a fundamental option against God and, explicitly or implicitly, a conscious idolatrous option for one's own egotism or idols.'[413]

Richard Gula provides a definition of sin that captures well its reliance on the notions of knowledge and freedom: 'mortal sin, as an expression of the person from deep levels of knowledge and freedom, is a conscious decision to act in a way which fashions a style of life that turns us away from relating to God, others, and the world in a positive and life-giving way.'[414]

Germain Grisez defines mortal sin as 'a sin which is incompatible with divine life.'[415] He discusses the criteria for discerning whether a sin is mortal or venial. Sufficient reflection involves knowing that the act is gravely wrong. Reflection sufficient for mortal sin exists if two conditions are met: first, if one disregards one's conscience, and second, if one's conscience tells one that the matter is either grave or may be grave. Full consent, for Grisez, is a definite choice. Even when one knows that an act would be gravely wrong, one has not sinned until a positive decision has been made.

William May provides a succinct definition of sin, which, like Gula's, captures well its reliance on the notions of knowledge and freedom. Sin, he says, is 'a morally evil act, i.e.,

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[412] Häring, *General Moral Theology*, 168, emphasis added.
[413] Häring, *Secular Age*, 158.
[414] Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith*, 110.
[415] Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles*, 365.

a freely chosen act known to be contrary to the eternal law as this is made manifest in our conscience.'[416]

It is clear that the notion of sin, whether it is conceived in terms of fundamental option, or in terms of individual acts, includes the notions of knowledge and freedom. But how are we to communicate such an understanding of sin to the moral sceptic and determinist? We shall attempt to do so by drawing on Lonergan's notions of sin, knowledge, and freedom to complement Church teaching and theological reflection on sin by answering, on their own (i.e., philosophical) terms, the concerns of moral sceptics and determinists.

As we saw in chapter three, Lonergan's notion of sin in *Insight*, like the ones we have just examined, rely on the anterior notions of knowledge and freedom. Let us recall *Insight*'s definition of sin:

> By basic sin I shall mean the failure of free will to choose a morally obligatory course of action or its failure to reject a morally reprehensible course of action.

In our analysis of this definition we saw that what makes a course of action morally obligatory or morally reprehensible is grasping and affirming what one ought to do or what one ought not to do. In other words, what makes a particular course of action either morally obligatory or reprehensible is knowledge. Furthermore, in Lonergan's analysis of sin, one sins when one freely chooses to reject the morally obligatory course of action or to accept the morally reprehensible one. We also saw that this notion of sin is supported by a critical metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical framework.

As I have indicated in the introduction to this chapter, I shall attempt a synthetic account of sin by utilizing St Thomas's dialectical method to answer the following questions: 1. Is there an objective moral order which is discernible by human beings? and 2. Are human beings free to act morally? Our attempt to answer these questions will involve an examination

[416] May, *Moral Theology*, 160.

of philosophical speculation on these issues, Church teaching, and Lonergan's notion of sin and the anterior notions of knowledge and freedom.

2. IS THERE AN OBJECTIVE MORAL ORDER WHICH IS DISCERNIBLE BY HUMAN BEINGS?

We begin by examining sections from two seminal texts in the area of moral scepticism, J. L. Mackie's *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (1977) and A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936). Both of these texts explicitly deny the possibility of objective truth in ethics. We shall proceed by examining the antithesis to these positions in the theological tradition, namely, the tradition's affirmation of the possibility of ethical knowledge. Finally we shall draw on ideas from Lonergan's *Insight* to respond to some of the objections of the above moral sceptics.

2.1. Propositum: Moral Scepticism

The term 'moral scepticism' covers a multitude of different approaches to the question of the possibility of objective moral truth. A systematic elaboration of all of these approaches is beyond the scope of this work. For the purposes of this dissertation, then, I have selected two seminal texts in this area, J. L. Mackie's *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* and A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*. While both of these texts deny the possibility of objective truth in ethics, they do so in very different ways. So, while our treatment of moral scepticism is by no means exhaustive, it will provide us with an analysis of two very important approaches to moral scepticism, 'error theory,' which denies that there are objective values, and 'emotivism,' which denies that ethical propositions have any validity in terms of truth – they are, rather, merely expressions of emotion.

2.1.1. J. L. Mackie's 'Error Theory'

According to Mackie, 'there are no objective values.'[417] He offers three arguments to support this thesis, which we shall presently summarize.

The first argument Mackie makes to support his thesis is what he calls the argument from relativity. This argument, according to Mackie, is based on the well-known fact that different societies, conditioned as they are by the prevailing culture, show a diversity of moral codes. He also points out that there can be differences in moral beliefs between different groups and classes within a complex community. Mackie argues that radical differences between the moral judgements of various societies make it difficult to regard these judgements as apprehensions of objective truths. However, he says, it is not simply the fact that disagreements occur that tells against the objectivity of values. He points out that while disagreement exists on issues within the various sciences, this does not suggest that there are no objective issues for scientists to disagree about. However, such scientific disagreement results from speculative deductions or explanatory theories based on insufficient evidence. It is hardly plausible, Mackie suggests, to interpret moral disagreement in the same way. Instead he offers the following explanation for moral disagreement.

> Disagreement about moral codes seems to reflect people's adherence to and participation in different ways of life. The causal connection seems to be mainly that way round: it is that people approve of monogamy because they participate in a monogamous way of life rather than that they participate in a monogamous way of life because they approve of monogamy.[418]

Mackie concludes that the argument from relativity has some power simply because the diversity of moral codes is more convincingly explained by the theory that they are a

[417] J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 15.
[418] Ibid., 36.

reflection of the particular ways of life of those practicing these codes, than by the theory that they somehow express apprehensions or perceptions of objective values.

The second argument Mackie calls the argument from queerness. This argument has two parts, the first metaphysical, the second epistemological. Mackie argues that 'if there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe.'[419] Correspondingly, he goes on to argue, 'if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else.'[420] Mackie observes that these points were recognized by Moore when he spoke of non-natural qualities[421] and by intuitionists who speak of a faculty which they call moral intuition. According to Mackie, the central thesis of intuitionism is one to which any objectivist view of values is in the end committed. The suggestion that moral judgements are made or moral problems solved simply by sitting down and having an ethical intuition is, Mackie argues, a travesty of actual moral reasoning. But, however complex the real process of ethical reasoning is, if it is to produce 'authoritatively prescriptive conclusions,'[422] it must involve either premises or forms of argument or both. Mackie sums up his argument neatly in the following sentence:

> When we ask the awkward question, how we can be aware of this authoritative prescriptivity, of the truth of these distinctively ethical premises or of the cogency of this distinctively ethical pattern of reasoning, none of our ordinary accounts of sensory perception or introspection or the framing and confirming of explanatory hypotheses or inference or logical construction or conceptual analysis, or any combination of these,

[419] Ibid., 38.
[420] Ibid.
[421] In his book, *Principia Ethica* G. E. Moore discusses the impossibility of defining the term 'good.' Only natural, complex objects, he argues, can be defined. 'Good,' he contends, is not such a natural object.
[422] Mackie, *Ethics*, 38.

> will provide a satisfactory answer; 'a special sort of intuition' is a lame answer, but it is one to which the clear-headed objectivist is compelled to resort.[423]

According to Mackie, to assert that there are objective values or intrinsically prescriptive entities or features of some kind, which ordinary moral judgements presuppose, is not, as a logical positivist would suggest, meaningless, but false. Hence Mackie's is an 'error theory.'

Mackie suggests that another way of demonstrating the 'queerness' of these supposed objective values is to ask, about anything that is said to have some objective moral quality, how this quality is linked with its natural features. How do we connect the natural fact that an act is an event of intentional cruelty – for example, inflicting pain just for sport – and the moral fact that it is wrong? It cannot be, Mackie argues, a logical or semantic necessity. Neither is it the fact that the two features occur simultaneously. The wrongness, he says, must somehow be 'consequential' or 'supervenient.' In other words, it is wrong because it is an act of intentional cruelty. But, Mackie asks, 'just what *in the world* is signified by this "because"?'[424] And how can we know the relation that it signifies? Does this 'wrongness' not simply consist in the fact that such actions are socially condemned, by us as well as others, perhaps through our having developed attitudes to certain actions through social conditioning? It is not, Mackie continues, even enough to posit a faculty that enables one to 'see' the wrongness. Rather, something must be posited that can see simultaneously the inherent features that make up the cruelty, and also the wrongness, and the strange consequential connection between the two. Alternatively, the required intuition might be the apprehension that wrongness is a property of a higher order, a property which belongs to certain natural properties. But what, Mackie asks, is entailed in this belonging of properties to other properties? And furthermore, how can we discern it? Mackie suggests that the situation would make more sense if we could replace the moral quality with some kind of subjective

[423] Ibid., 38-39.
[424] Ibid., 41.

response which would be causally related to the identification of the natural features on which the alleged quality is said to be supervenient or consequential.

In the third argument Mackie attempts to explain how the false belief in objective values 'has become established and is so resistant to criticisms.'[425] From a subjectivist viewpoint, he argues, those values which are generally considered to be objective, will in fact be based on the particular attitudes of the person, even though he considers himself to be recognizing and responding to objective values. Mackie attempts to explain this with reference to what Hume calls the mind's 'propensity to spread itself on external objects.'[426] The supposed objectivity of moral qualities arises from 'the projection or objectification of moral attitudes.'[427] Mackie draws an analogy with the 'pathetic fallacy,' the propensity to read our feelings into their objects. If a fungus, he says, gives rise to feelings of disgust, we may tend to attribute to the fungus itself a non-natural property of repulsiveness. In moral contexts, however, there is something other than this tendency operating. Moral attitudes, Mackie contends, are at least partly social in origin. That is, patterns of behaviour which are socially established, and, he adds, socially necessary, put pressure on individuals, and each individual is inclined to internalize these pressures and to begin to expect these patterns of behaviour of herself and of others. The attitudes projected and objectified into moral values do in fact have an external source, but not the one given to them by the belief in their categorical authority. Moreover, Mackie continues, people are motivated to objectify morality. Morality regulates interpersonal relations and controls some of the ways in which people act towards one another, ways that often oppose our own contrary inclinations. We therefore want our moral judgements to be decisive for others as well as for ourselves. Objective validity, Mackie contends, would give such moral judgements the decisiveness or authority needed.

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[425] Ibid., 42.
[426] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985), 217.
[427] Mackie, *Ethics*, 42.

2.1.2. The 'Emotivism' of A. J. Ayer

We begin our summary of Ayer's moral scepticism with his contention that 'a synthetic proposition [a statement whose predicate is not included in the subject] is significant only if it is empirically verifiable.'[428] Working from this principle, Ayer analyses the nature of ethical statements in order to judge whether such statements can be said to be empirically verifiable and therefore significant. He contends that 'in our language, sentences which contain normative ethical symbols are not equivalent to sentences which express psychological propositions, or indeed empirical propositions of any kind.'[429] In other words, statements that contain judgements of value that are held to be applicable to all, in fact have no objective validity. His argument can be divided into two parts.

The first argument proceeds as follows. If we concede that normative ethical concepts cannot be reduced to empirical concepts, we leave the way clear for the 'absolutist' view of ethics – this is the view that value statements are not, as ordinary empirical propositions, controlled by observation, but by a mysterious faculty known as 'intellectual intuition.' However, this theory, according to Ayer, 'makes statements of value unverifiable.'[430] For, he says, it is well known that what appears to be intuitively certain to one person may seem doubtful, or even false, to another. So unless we can provide some criterion by which one can choose between conflicting intuitions, simply appealing to intuition is valueless in terms of testing a proposition's validity. In the case of moral judgements, Ayer argues, no such criterion can be provided. Some moralists, he points out, claim to settle the matter simply by asserting that they 'know' that their particular moral views are the correct ones. Such an assertion, he argues, is of purely psychological interest, and is completely incapable of proving the validity of any moral judgement. Moralists of the opposite view may make the identical claim that their particular moral judgements are correct, and 'as far as subjective

[428] A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, 2nd edition (London: Victor Gollancz, 1948), 106.
[429] Ibid., 105.
[430] Ibid., 106.

certainty goes, there will be nothing to choose between them.'[431] When these opposing views arise in connection with ordinary empirical propositions, we may attempt to resolve this opposition by adverting to, or actually conducting, some relevant empirical test. But, Ayer argues, 'with regard to ethical statements, there is, on the "absolutist" or "intuitionist" theory, no relevant empirical test.'[432] He concludes, therefore, that on this hypothesis moral statements are deemed to be unverifiable.

The second argument: Fundamental ethical concepts are unanalysable because they are 'mere pseudo-concepts.'[433] The fact that a proposition contains an ethical symbol adds nothing to its factual content. So if we say to a person, 'You acted wrongly in stealing that money,' we are not asserting anything more than if we had simply said, 'You stole that money.' By adding that the action is wrong we are not making any further assertion about it. We are simply indicating our moral disapproval of it. It is as if we had said, 'You stole that money,' in a distinct tone of horror, or written it adding special exclamation marks. Neither the tone nor the exclamation marks adds anything to the literal sense of the proposition. It simply demonstrates that its expression is accompanied by particular sentiments in the speaker.

If we now generalize our previous statement and say, 'Stealing money is wrong,' we create a sentence that has no factual meaning; it expresses no proposition which we can say is either true or false. It is as if we wrote 'Stealing money!!,' where the shape and thickness of the exclamation marks demonstrates that a particular type of moral disapproval is the feeling that is being conveyed. It is clear, according to Ayer, that 'there is nothing said here which can be true or false.'[434] Another person may disagree with us about the wrongness of stealing, in that he/she may not feel the same about stealing as we do, and he/she may argue with us

[431] Ibid.
[432] Ibid.
[433] Ibid., 107.
[434] Ibid.

about our moral sentiments. But he/she cannot, strictly speaking, contradict us. This is because in stating that a particular type of action is right or wrong, we are not making any factual assertion, not even an assertion about our own state of mind. We are simply conveying particular moral feelings. And the one who seems to be contradicting us is in fact merely expressing his/her moral sentiments. So, Ayer concludes, 'there is plainly no sense in asking which of us is in the right. For neither of us is asserting a genuine proposition.'[435]

What has just been said regarding the symbol 'wrong' applies to all normative ethical symbols. Sometimes these symbols occur in sentences that document ordinary empirical facts as well as conveying moral feeling about these facts. They may also occur in sentences which simply convey moral sentiments regarding a particular type of action or situation, without making an assertion of fact. However, in all cases in which a person would usually be said to be making an ethical judgement, 'the function of the relevant ethical word is purely "emotive."'[436] Its function is to express sentiments about particular objects, not to assert anything about them.

2.2. Sed Contra: The Theological Tradition's Affirmation of the Possibility of Moral Discernment

The Catholic theological tradition affirms the possibility of moral discernment in its teaching on natural law and conscience. In contrast to both Mackie's and Ayer's theories, the Catholic doctrines of natural law and conscience assert that there is an objective moral order, a truth about morality which is discernible by the human person. In this section, we shall examine the Church's teaching on natural law and conscience and how it contradicts both Mackie's and Ayer's theories.

[435] Ibid., 108.
[436] Ibid.

2.2.1. Natural Law

In its discussion of natural law, the *Catechism* uses the terms 'true' and 'good.' It is these terms that provide the basis for the objectivity of morality.

> Man participates in the wisdom and goodness of the Creator who gives him mastery over his acts and the ability to govern himself with a view to the true and the good. The natural law expresses the original moral sense which enables man to discern by reason the good and the evil, the truth and the lie.[437]

In his encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor* John Paul II uses similar terminology:

> In his journey towards God, the One who 'alone is good,' man must freely do good and avoid evil. But in order to accomplish this he must *be able to distinguish good from evil*. And this takes place above all *thanks to the light of natural reason*, the reflection in man of the splendour of God's countenance.[438]

These texts are in direct opposition to Mackie's theory, according to which there are no objective values. The terms 'true' and 'good' when used in an ethical context, will hold little or no meaning for Mackie. They certainly will not serve as means to providing an objective grounding to morality. In contrast the terms 'true' and 'good' form the very foundation of the Church's teaching on natural law. Because these terms hold such meaning for the Church it confidently asserts the objectivity of values. This assertion is grounded in the fact that there is a discernible truth regarding the way in which people live their lives. This truth is that some actions are incompatible with productive, happy, and healthy living for both the person acting and for those around her, and are therefore deemed 'evil,' and that others are compatible with such living and are therefore deemed 'good.'

The *Catechism* proceeds to explain how the natural law is expressed in ethical precepts that provide human beings with a sense of meaning and direction in their lives:

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[437] *Catechism*, 1954.
[438] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 42.

> The 'divine and natural' law shows man the way to follow so as to practise the good and attain his end. The natural law states the first and essential precepts which govern the moral life. It hinges upon the desire for God and submission to him, who is the source and judge of all that is good, as well as upon the sense that the other is one's equal. Its principle precepts are expressed in the Decalogue.[439]

John Paul II provides a similar statement of the importance of ethical precepts in giving a person meaning and direction:

> Man is able to recognise good and evil thanks to that discernment of good from evil which he himself carries out by his *reason, in particular by his reason enlightened by Divine Revelation and by faith*, through the law which God gave to the Chosen People, beginning with the commandments on Sinai. Israel was called to accept and to live out *God's law as a particular gift and sign of its election and of the divine Covenant*, and also as a pledge of God's blessing.[440]

These texts are in stark contrast to Ayer's theory that ethical statements have no meaning. Ethical statements, for the Church, have profound meaning as they provide a sense of purpose to people's lives. Of course the kind of meaning that Ayer is speaking of and the kind that the Church is speaking of are very different. Ayer is speaking of meaning in the sense that a proposition can be said to be empirically verifiable. The Church, on the other hand, is speaking of meaning in terms of what gives a statement or precept value in terms of a person's relationship with God and with his/her fellow human beings. However, if Ayer is correct and ethical statements have no meaning in his sense of the term, it is difficult to see how they could be meaningful in the Church's sense. The Church's teaching on the profound meaning of ethical precepts necessarily presupposes that these precepts are meaningful in the more scientific sense of the term.

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[439] *Catechism*, 1955.
[440] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 44.

So, the Church's teaching on ethics is in direct opposition to Mackie's and Ayer's, as it positively affirms both the profound, and, implicitly, the scientific meaning of the terms 'true' and 'good.'

2.2.2. Conscience

The Church's teaching on conscience also reflects the importance of the terms 'true' and 'good' in establishing a foundation for morality, and the importance of ethical precepts in providing a person with a sense of meaning and direction. There is also a further dimension to this teaching, namely conscience itself, that faculty which assists human beings in discerning good and evil, truth and falsehood. The following texts from the *Catechism* and *Veritatis Splendor* respectively illustrate these three elements in the Church's teaching on conscience:

> Moral conscience, present at the heart of the person, enjoins him at the appropriate moment to do good and to avoid evil. It also judges particular choices, approving those that are good and denouncing those that are evil. It bears witness to the authority of truth in reference to the supreme Good to which the human person is drawn, and it welcomes the commandments. When he listens to his conscience, the prudent man can hear God speaking.[441]

> The judgement of conscience is a *practical judgement*, a judgement which makes known what man must do or not do, or which assesses an act already performed by him. It is a judgement which applies to a concrete situation the rational conviction that one must love and do good and avoid evil. The first principle of practical reason is part of the natural law; indeed it constitutes the very foundation of the natural law, inasmuch as it

[441] *Catechism*, 1777.

> expresses that primordial insight about good and evil, that reflection of God's creative wisdom which, like an imperishable spark (*scintilla animae*), shines in the heart of every man.[442]

Again, these texts are in direct opposition to both Mackie's and Ayer's theories. The terms 'true' and 'good' establish a metaphysical foundation for ethics, thus opposing Mackie's theory that there can be no such foundation. Moreover, we have already seen how the ethical precepts expressed in the Decalogue provide people with a deep sense of meaning and direction in their lives, and how this is in direct opposition to Ayer's theory that such ethical precepts contain no scientific meaning whatsoever. Furthermore, the teaching on the faculty of conscience itself provides an even deeper sense of meaning. By listening to one's conscience, one is in direct relationship to God; he or she can 'hear God speaking.'

The positing of a faculty such as conscience is directly opposed to Ayer's theory for another reason. The notion of conscience would presumably fall into Ayer's category of 'intellectual intuition.' This notion for Ayer, as we have seen, makes ethical statements unverifiable, as what may seem certain to one person may appear doubtful or even false to another. For Ayer, then, the faculty of conscience would prove to be unreliable in terms of grounding an ethics. For the Church, however, it is vital, as, while the terms 'true' and 'good' provide the metaphysical grounding for ethics, conscience provides an epistemological one, as it is an informed conscience that allows the person to discern or know the true and the good.

Magisterial teaching on natural law and conscience, by unequivocally asserting the objectivity of values and the possibility of moral discernment, directly opposes the theories of Mackie and Ayer. However, as I argued in the first section of this dissertation, this teaching is not sufficiently developed philosophically, and is therefore not capable of adequately

[442] JP II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 59.

dialoguing with the moral sceptic. For this reason we turn once again to Lonergan to respond to the philosophical theories of Mackie and Ayer.

2.3. Responsio: Drawing on Lonergan to Answer the Objections of Moral Sceptics

In this section we shall attempt to respond to the objections of Mackie and Ayer by drawing on ideas from Lonergan's *Insight*.

Mackie's argument is primarily metaphysical: there are no objective values, because if there were they would have to be entities or qualities or relations completely different from anything else in the universe. While there is an epistemological aspect to Mackie's argument – namely, his argument against any kind of intuitionism – this argument is built directly upon the metaphysical one. Basically, then, Mackie's argument can be summed up in the simple sentence that he begins his book with: 'there are no objective values.' To oppose this argument we shall draw upon Lonergan's metaphysical argument for the intrinsic intelligibility of the good.

Ayer's argument is primarily epistemological: ethical statements are unverifiable; in other words, we cannot know if they are true or not. Against this argument we present Lonergan's notion of the virtually unconditioned judgment. Such judgements include judgements of value and are understood to be not just meaningful but also verifiable and objectively true.

2.3.1. Lonergan's 'Intrinsic Intelligibility' Argument vs. Mackie's Denial of Objective Values

Lonergan speaks of the good in terms of the three-fold division of being into potency, form, and act. In chapter three we examined Lonergan's method of speaking of the good in

terms of objects of desire, the intelligible orders within which these desires are fulfilled, and the terminal and originating values involved in deciding upon these orders and their components, and how he generalizes this method to speak instead of potential, formal, and actual good. He identifies the potential good with potential intelligibility (that which is to be known by experience), the formal good with formal intelligibility (that which is to be known by intelligent grasp), and the actual good with actual intelligibilities (that which is to be known by reasonable affirmation).

Lonergan argues that such a generalization of the notion of the good is justifiable, as it is already implicit in the narrower notion, that is, in the notion of the good in purely human terms. Objects of desire, he says, are manifold, 'but they are not an isolated manifold. They are existents and events that in their concrete possibility and in their realization are bound inextricably through natural laws and actual frequencies with the total manifold of the universe of proportionate being.'[443] In other words, the many objects of desire, as existing and occurring, are part of the total manifold of the universe of proportionate being; consequently they cannot be separated from every other thing that exists and occurs in our universe. If objects of desire, Lonergan argues, are examples of the good because of the pleasures they give, then the remainder of the manifold of existents and events are also good, because desires are fulfilled only in the concrete universe and not in a fantasy world. In other words, objects of desire are produced as a result of a total manifold of existents and occurrences that constitute not some ideal world, but the actual world in which we live.

Lonergan proceeds to apply the same argument to humanly devised social orders. For Lonergan, the intelligible orders that human beings invent, implement, adjust, and improve, are merely further exploitations of pre-human intelligible orders.

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[443] Lonergan, *Insight*, 605.

All objects of desire and all human orders, then, come about not by necessity but contingently through a process that Lonergan terms 'emergent probability.' In other words, 'all objects of desire and all human orders are what they are by virtue of the events, natural laws, and statistical frequencies that condition and underpin their actuality.'[444] For Lonergan, objects of desire, while manifold, are not an isolated manifold but are, rather, actualities and occurrences that in their actual possibility and in their fulfilment are inseparably bound through natural laws and statistical frequencies with the complete manifold of proportionate being. Similarly, humanly devised social orders are inextricably bound to all human orders that emerge in the world as a result of the same natural laws and statistical frequencies, so we cannot argue that some orders are good and others bad. As Lonergan puts it: 'if the intelligible orders of human invention are a good because they systematically assure the satisfaction of desires, then so also are the intelligible orders that underlie, condition, precede, and include man's invention.'[445]

Intelligible orders and their contents as possible objects of rational choice, Lonergan says, are values. However, the universal order of emergent probability conditions and penetrates, corrects and develops every particular order. So, he argues, 'rational self-consciousness cannot consistently choose the conditioned and reject the condition, choose the part and reject the whole, choose the consequent and reject the antecedent.'[446] And so, since human beings are involved in choosing and since every consistent choice is, at least tacitly, a choice of universal order, the actualization of universal order is a true value.

Lonergan draws the reader's attention to the fact that the third part of the argument includes the other two. For, he says, 'the actual good of value presupposes the formal good of order, and the formal good of order presupposes the potential good of a manifold to be

[444] Ibid.
[445] Ibid.
[446] Ibid.

ordered.'[447] Furthermore, the actualization of universal order is the actualization of *all existents* and *all events*. Universal order includes all intelligibilities as its component parts, and universal order assumes all manifolds that are ordered or to be ordered. So, Lonergan concludes, 'the good is identified with the intelligibility intrinsic to being.'[448] Or, in other words, the good is identified with what is to be known by experience, intelligent grasp, and reasonable affirmation. This includes potential, formal, and actual good, or the total manifold of proportionate being. So the good is identified with the total universe of proportionate being.

According to Mackie, there are no objective values. He argues that 'if there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe.'[449] Correspondingly, he continues, an awareness of such objective values would necessitate some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, completely different from our regular modes of knowing everything else.

In Lonergan's *Insight* the objectivity of values stems from his notion of the good. The good, like being, is that which is to be known through experience, intelligent grasp, and reasonable affirmation, as well as the further cognitive activities of deliberation and decision, choice and will.[450]

The objectivity of values in *Insight* stems from the ontological grounding of the notion of the good. But how do Lonergan's notions of being and the good stand up against Mackie's critique that if there were objective values they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe? Certainly the notion of being can seem extremely abstract, a generalization removed from any concrete

[447] Ibid., 605-606.
[448] Ibid., 606.
[449] Mackie, *Ethics*, 38.
[450] Lonergan, *Insight*, 596.

reality. However, in turning to the subject in the search for the meaning of objectivity, Lonergan provides us with a notion of being which is grounded in an understanding of the self-evident cognitional activities of human beings. Being, in *Insight*, is the objective of the pure desire to know. The fact that human beings desire to know is indisputable. What Lonergan does in *Insight* is to postulate this desire first and then ask the question, What is the objective of the pure desire to know? The answer he comes up with is being.

As the objective of the pure desire to know, being is intimately connected with human cognitional activity. This grounding of the notion of being in the activity of the subject gives it a concreteness which is lacking in a notion of being that does not have this grounding. To speak of being without speaking of particular beings is to abstract, and some abstraction may be necessary in dealing with foundational issues in ethics or indeed in other foundational areas. But to speak of being without speaking of particular beings, *or* without connecting the notion to human cognitional activity is just too much abstraction. We are left with a notion that seems to have no connection to anything and can appear therefore to be unreal. Lonergan avoids this excessive abstraction by turning to the subject.

Lonergan's notion of the good, as we have seen, is intimately connected with his notion of being. The good is identified with the intelligibility intrinsic to being. In other words, the good is that which is to be known through experience, intelligent grasp, and reasonable affirmation. Like his notion of being, Lonergan's notion of the good is intimately connected with the cognitional activities of the human subject, giving it a concreteness that it would lack without such a connection.

In answer, then, to Mackie's thesis that there are no objective values as they would have to be entities or qualities or relations of a strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe, we offer Lonergan's notion of objective value which stems from his notions of being and the good which are solidly grounded in human cognitional activity. Seen

as the objective of the pure desire to know, there is nothing 'strange' about Lonergan's notions of being and the good. If, with Lonergan, we assume that there is a pure desire to know – which, it seems, is fairly self-evident – it is natural to assume that there is an object or objective towards which this desire strives. This objective is being or the good. As to the question that Mackie raises regarding our awareness of objective values – that this awareness would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else – we may answer that Lonergan's way of knowing value is essentially the same as his way of knowing everything else in the universe, namely, through experience, intelligent grasp, and reasonable affirmation.

2.3.2. Lonergan's 'Virtually Unconditioned' vs. Ayer's Unverifiability Theory

In the introduction to the chapter in *Insight* on reflective understanding, Lonergan indicates his intention of attempting to determine what exactly is meant by the sufficiency of the evidence for a prospective judgement, or, in other words: What is the nature of the evidence that allows for an affirmative judgement?

> There is presupposed a question for reflection, 'Is it so?' There follows a judgement, 'It is so.' Between the two there is a marshalling and weighing of evidence. But what are the scales on which evidence is weighed? What weight must evidence have, if one is to pronounce a 'Yes' or a 'No'?[451]

For Lonergan, this pronouncement of a 'yes' or a 'no' involves what he terms a 'virtually unconditioned judgement': 'To grasp the evidence as sufficient for a prospective judgement is to grasp the prospective judgement as virtually unconditioned.'[452] He distinguishes between the formally and the virtually unconditioned. The former has no conditions, while the latter has conditions that are fulfilled. A virtually unconditioned judgement, then,

[451] Ibid., 279.
[452] Ibid., 280.

involves three elements: a conditioned, a connection between the conditioned and its conditions, and the fulfilment of the conditions. A prospective judgement, therefore, will be virtually unconditioned if 1) it is the conditioned, 2) its conditions are known, and 3) the conditions are fulfilled.

The simple fact that a question for reflection has been presented makes the prospective judgement a conditioned, as it requires evidence sufficient for a reasonable pronouncement of a 'yes' or a 'no.' The role of reflective understanding is to meet the question for reflection by changing the status of the prospective judgement from that of a conditioned to that of a virtually unconditioned. This change occurs as reflective understanding grasps the conditions of the conditioned and their fulfilment.

Lonergan illustrates this general scheme with a basic syllogism that demonstrates the form of deductive inference:

If *A*, then *B*.

But *A*.

Therefore *B*.

Or, more concretely:

If *X* is material and alive, *X* is mortal.

But men are material and alive.

Therefore, men are mortal.[453]

The conclusion is a conditioned, as it needs to be supported by an argument. The major premise connects the conditioned to its conditions by affirming, If *A*, then *B*. The minor premise presents the fulfilment of the conditions by affirming the prior *A*. The role of the form of deductive inference is to show a conclusion as virtually unconditioned. Reflective

453 Ibid., 280-281.

insight apprehends the pattern, and the one reflecting is rationally compelled to make a judgement.

The question that was presupposed in Lonergan's analysis of the form of deductive inference, 'Is it so?', stems from what he terms 'the pure desire to know.' But just what is the objective of the pure desire to know? It is, of course, as we saw in the last subsection, being. Before further analysing this notion of being as the objective of the pure desire to know, let us look at Lonergan's definition of the pure desire to know itself.

> By the desire to know is meant the dynamic orientation manifested in questions for intelligence and for reflection. It is not the verbal utterance of questions. It is not the conceptual formulation of questions. It is not any insight or thought. It is not any reflective grasp or judgement. It is the prior and enveloping drive that carries cognitional process from sense to imagination to understanding, from understanding to judgement, from judgement to the complete context of correct judgements that is named knowledge. The desire to know, then, is simply the inquiring and critical spirit of man.[454]

The objective of this pure desire to know, according to Lonergan, is being.[455] It follows that being is 1) all that is known, and 2) all that remains to be known. Since a complete increment of knowledge happens only in judgement, being is 'what is to be known by the totality of true judgements.'[456] This totality consists of the complete set of answers to the complete set of questions. We do not yet know what these answers are and the questions have yet to arise. What is important for Lonergan is not the complete set of answers or the complete set of questions, but the fact that 'there exists a pure desire to know, an inquiring and critical spirit, that follows up questions with further questions, that heads for some objective which has been named being.'[457]

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[454] Ibid., 348.
[455] Ibid.
[456] Ibid., 350.
[457] Ibid.

In his definition of sin in *Insight*, Lonergan states that 'as intelligently and rationally conscious, man grasps what he ought to do and what he ought not to do.' In other words, as intelligent and reasonable, human beings grasp what is good and what is evil. The desire that motivates this judgement of good or evil is the same as that which motivates judgement in matters of fact, namely, the desire to know. There is, however, a difference between judgement in matters of fact and judgement in matters of action, as Lonergan explains in chapter 18:

> While speculative and factual insights are concerned to lead to knowledge of being, practical insights are concerned to lead to the making of being. Their objective is not what is but what is to be done. They reveal not the unities and relations of things as they are, but the unities and relations of possible courses of action.[458]

Significant in this passage is the connection between being and the good. Practical insights, Lonergan says, are concerned to lead to the *making of being*. Their objective is *what is to be done*, or, in others words, the good. The virtually unconditioned judgement, then, includes judgements not only on what is 'so' but also on what is to be done. The practical, ethical judgement, in other words, is, in Lonergan's *Insight*, a virtually unconditioned judgement.

How can Lonergan's notion of a virtually unconditioned judgement answer Ayer's objections to the objectivity of ethical judgements? Let us attempt to respond to Ayer's two main arguments by drawing on Lonergan.

Firstly, Ayer contends that ethical judgements cannot be validated on the basis of intellectual intuition. Rather, such judgements would need to be empirically verifiable. The question we need to ask, then, is as follows: Does the virtually unconditioned judgement contain this empirical criterion? Let us examine the notion again in light of this question. The virtually unconditioned judgement takes the form of a deductive inference. This involves an

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[458] Ibid., 609.

empirical analysis of the evidence resulting in a conclusion or judgement deduced from the evidence. But what, we may ask, is the nature of the evidence examined in this way in the case of ethical judgements? According to Lonergan, judgements of value are concerned to lead to the making of being. They are concerned with the unities and relations, not of things as they are, but with the unities and relations of possible courses of action. The procedure, however, for reaching a judgement of value is the same as that for reaching a judgement of fact. In each case the judgement will be a virtually unconditioned one. The evidence will be examined empirically and a conclusion or judgement will be deduced from the evidence. Lonergan's procedure for reaching ethical judgements is completely scientific. It involves not 'intellectual intuition' but intellectual judgement deduced from empirically analysed data.

Ayer's second argument is that fundamental ethical concepts are unanalysable because they are mere pseudo-concepts. The fact that a proposition contains an ethical symbol adds nothing to its factual content. The main ethical symbol that Lonergan uses is 'the good.' As we have seen, this notion is grounded in a notion of being, which in turn is grounded in an analysis of human cognition. So, if a proposition contains the ethical concept 'good,' as Lonergan understands it, this would indeed add something to the content of the proposition. To say that something is 'good' is to say that it corresponds with being. This is another way of saying that it is true or that it is real. So to say that stealing is wrong or bad, as Lonergan would understand these terms, is to say that it does not correspond with being, or that it is untrue or unreal. Of course the act of stealing is just a fact; it cannot be denied. However, to say that stealing is wrong is not to deny the fact of stealing; rather, it is to say that stealing is an act that goes against our true natures, an act that runs contrary to our true being. The addition of ethical symbols, then, as Lonergan understands them, adds greatly to the content of a proposition. 'Stealing is wrong' expresses much more than mere sentiment about the act of stealing. It says something about the act of stealing as it relates to our true

nature as human beings. The addition of the ethical symbol 'wrong,' points far beyond the mere act of stealing to the significance of this act for human beings. Furthermore, the judgement that 'stealing is wrong,' understood in Lonergan's terms, will not only have meaning because of the grounding of ethical concepts in the notion of being; it will also have meaning as it is a virtually unconditioned judgement based on observation of the relevant data.

3. ARE HUMAN BEINGS FREE TO ACT MORALLY?

Our method of investigating this question will be the same as the one we used to investigate the prior question of moral objectivity and knowledge, namely, St Thomas's dialectical method. In the first section we shall present one version of the complex thesis known as determinism, followed by a brief examination of the implications of this thesis for ethics. In the second section we shall examine the contrary thesis, namely the theological tradition's affirmation of free will. Finally, we shall present Lonergan's notions of statistical residues and the contingency of the will in response to the thesis presented in the first section.

3.1. Propositum: Determinism

In our discussion of freedom in this dissertation we have often referred to the notion of determinism. This term, however, has been used in a very broad sense to refer to any notion that suggests that human actions are not free but necessitated for one reason or another. However, when we come to investigate a little further the notion of determinism, we find two important things. Firstly, the term 'determinism' is indeed a very broad one. In fact, in his essay, 'Chaos, Indeterminism, and Free Will,' Robert Bishop, citing a study by Jordan

Sobel, points out that there are at least ninety varieties of determinism.[459] Bishop also observes that there are several ways that determinism can be construed – he gives as examples physical, psychological, theological, logical, and metaphysical determinism. Secondly, in terms of the implications of determinism for ethics, philosophers have drawn diametrically opposed conclusions. On one side we have the philosophers who argue that determinism is incompatible with free will, and on the other we have those who argue that determinism and free will are compatible.

In this section, we shall examine an argument for physical determinism by Ted Honderich. My justification for choosing to examine this type of determinism is that the paradigm of all scientific enquiry today is natural science. So, in *Method in Theology*, Lonergan makes the following observation: '. . . today the English word, science, means natural science. One descends a rung or more in the ladder when one speaks of behavioural or human sciences. Theologians finally have to be content if their subject is included in a list not of sciences but of academic disciplines.'[460] If we wish, therefore, to demonstrate scientifically that human actions are free, we shall do well to critique physical determinism, which is based on the paradigm of scientific enquiry, natural science.

In the second part of this section, we shall briefly examine the implications of determinism for ethics. Specifically, we shall examine the notions of hard determinism or incompatibilism, and soft determinism or compatibilism. The notion that determinism is incompatible with free will has obvious implications for ethics. The contrary notion that determinism and free will are compatible is also important to us as we present determinism as a contrary thesis to the notion of free will, which, as we shall see when we come to examine the notion of 'soft' determinism, does not tell the whole story.

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[459] Robert C. Bishop, 'Chaos, Indeterminism, and Free Will,' in Robert Kane, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (Oxford: University Press, 2002), 111; Jordan Howard Sobel, *Puzzles for the Will* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 77-166.
[460] Lonergan, *Method*, 3.

While it is important to mention these contrasting implications of determinism for ethics, later, when we come to respond to determinism by drawing on Lonergan, I intend to argue that determinism itself is false, thus making the issue of its compatibility with free will irrelevant.

3.1.1. Ted Honderich's Deterministic Argument from Common Experience

In a paper published in the *Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, Ted Honderich offers an argument for the truth of determinism based on our common experience of how physical events occur. We begin by looking at his definitions of three important terms: 1. Event, 2. Explanation, 3. Effect. This will help us to better understand his basic argument.

1) An event, Honderich says, is 'something in space and time, just some of it, and so it is rightly said to be something that occurs or happens.'[461] It is not a number or a proposition or any other abstract object. Events, then, are 'individuals in a stretch of time and space.'[462]

2) Explanation: Honderich offers the following prerequisite for saying that an event has an explanation, in the fundamental sense. There must be, he says, 'something else of which it is the effect.'[463] In other words, if there is to be an answer to the fundamental question of why an event occurred, there must be something of which it was the effect.

3) Finally, we have Honderich's definition of the term 'effect.' 'A standard effect is an event that had to happen, or could not have failed to happen or been otherwise than it was, given the preceding causal circumstance, this being a set of events.'[464]

Let us now examine Honderich's basic argument for determinism. He begins by observing that in his life so far he has never known a single event to lack an explanation in

[461] Ted Honderich, 'Determinism as True, Compatibilism and Incompatibilism as False, and the Real Problem,' Kane, ed., *Handbook of Free Will*, 461. Honderich provides a more comprehensive argument for determinism in his book, *A Theory of Determinism: The Mind, Neuroscience, and Life-Hopes* (Oxford: University Press, 1998).
[462] Kane, *Handbook of Free Will*, 461.
[463] Ibid.
[464] Ibid.

the fundamental sense. No spoon, he says, has mysteriously levitated at breakfast. There has been absolutely no evidence of there being no explanation to be found of a particular event. On the contrary, he claims, despite the fact that we neither seek out nor arrive at the full explanations in question, our experience is basically made up of events that we understand to have such explanations. So, he argues, putting to one side such events as choices and decisions, our lives are made up only of events that we understand to have fundamental explanations. Thus, he concludes, 'no general proposition of interest has greater inductive and empirical support than that all events whatever, including the choices or decisions and the like, have explanations.'[465] In other words, returning to Honderich's definitions, all events, including choices and decisions, are the result of something else of which the events are the effect. And a standard effect is 'an event that *had to happen*, or *could not have failed to happen* or been otherwise than it was, given the preceding causal circumstance, this being a set of events.'[466] Honderich's basic argument is that going on our everyday experience of the occurrence of events, it is reasonable to conclude that all of these events are necessitated by prior circumstances of which the event is the effect. There is nothing in our experience that suggests that things are otherwise.

This argument is based on a particular scientific paradigm, namely, classical physics, which, put very simply, is a set of theories based on an understanding that every event is the effect of a prior cause. However, the twentieth century saw a paradigm shift in science from classical physics to quantum mechanics. Honderich examines quantum mechanics as a possible refutation of his argument.

According to Honderich, so-called 'quantum events,' are, reportedly, 'far below the level of spoon movements and, more importantly, far below the neural events associated with

[465] Ibid., 462.
[466] My emphasis.

consciousness and conscious choices or decisions in neuroscience.'[467] On this lower level of reality, so-called 'micro events' are not, like the ordinary macro events of our lives, necessitated by prior circumstances, but occur randomly or by chance.

According to Honderich there is '*no direct and univocal experimental evidence* of the existence of quantum events.'[468] He proceeds, however, to consider how such quantum events, if they do exist, are to be conceived: 'How are we to think of these items that are supposed to turn up in our heads and, as some say, leave room for traditional free will?'[469] According to Honderich, physicists say that they are 'baffling, weird and wonderful, self-contradictory, inexplicable, etc., etc.'[470] These so-called events do not involve 'particles' as we generally understand and define the term, and the special use of the word 'particle' within analyses of the mathematics of quantum theory cannot be adequately defined. This is true also with uses of terms such as 'position' and 'location.'

Honderich proceeds by noting what he says is a well-known collection of physicists' own speculations regarding the nature of quantum events. They are: observer-dependent facts, subjective ideas, contents of our consciousness of reality, epistemological concepts, ideal concepts, propositions, probabilities, possibilities, features of a calculation, mathematical objects or devices, statistical phenomena, measures and measurements, abstract particles, probability waves, waves in abstract mathematical space, waves of no real physical existence, abstract constructs of the imagination, theoretical entities without empirical reality. According to Honderich, this noted collection of speculations about the nature of quantum events shows that 'physics has not started on the job . . . of showing that there are events that lack explanations. This is so, simply, because it remains a probability that quantum events, so-called, are not events. . . . it is probable that they are not things that occur or happen, but

[467] Kane, ed., *Handbook of Free Will*, 462.
[468] Ibid., 463.
[469] Ibid.
[470] Ibid.

are of the nature of numbers and propositions, out of space and time. They are theoretical entities in a special sense of that term, not events.'[471] Honderich's argument for determinism is both a positive argument from experience based on classical physics, and also a denial of a posited micro level of reality that some claim is capable of refuting this kind of argument.

Honderich goes on to deal specifically with one of the items on the list of physicists' speculations about the nature of quantum events, namely, probability. The first thing he notes is that while events may be very probable, there is no answer to the question of why, fundamentally, these events have occurred. To give an event a 95 percent probability is precisely not to maintain that it had to, or could not have failed to occur. Rather, this assignation of a 95 percent probability of an event precisely keeps open the possibility that it might *not* have occurred. In fact, he says, there is no answer to the question of why in the fundamental sense the event happened; there is no relevant fact to be known.

There is, however, according to Honderich, a sense in which an event is explained if it is established as having been very probable. His argument proceeds as follows: What is it, he asks, for event A to have made the occurrence of event B 95 percent probable? He answers that in 95 percent of the situations where an event of the type of A occurs, there is a causal circumstance for an event of the type of B. He argues that we have good evidence for this, even if we do not know exactly what the circumstance consists of. Whatever this non-fundamental explanation of B turns out to be, then, it presupposes the possibility of a fundamental explanation of B. It presupposes precisely the existence of an as yet unnamed causal circumstance for B. Honderich concludes that this non-fundamental explanation of B presupposes that B was a *necessitated event*.

[471] Ibid.

3.1.2. Implications of Determinism for Ethics and Sin

The notion that events, including human actions, are determined by prior circumstances has obvious implications for ethics and sin. The notion of determinism puts in question the idea that human actions are free. Or so it would seem. In fact philosophers who assume determinism to be true can be divided into two distinct groups. On the one hand we have the incompatibilists or hard determinists who contend that determinism is incompatible with free will, and on the other we have the compatibilists or soft determinists who contend that determinism is compatible with free will. In this subsection we shall examine each of these notions of determinism and their implications for ethics and sin. We shall also attempt to discern what the Church's position is with regard to this debate.

A. Incompatibilism or Hard Determinism

Incompatibilism or hard determinism is the thesis that free will and determinism are, as the first of these terms suggests, incompatible. The arguments for this thesis are many and complicated, but we need not concern ourselves with them here. As I have already indicated, when we come to examine Lonergan's notion of freedom and how it responds to determinism, we shall argue that determinism itself is false, thus making the issue of its compatibility (or incompatibility) with free will irrelevant. Still, we need to briefly examine both the incompatibilist's and the compatibilist's arguments in order to get the full story of the relationship between determinism and its implications for ethics and sin.

In his book, *An Essay on Free Will*, Peter van Inwagen provides the following argument for the incompatibility of determinism and free will.

> If determinism is true, then our acts are the consequences of the laws of nature and events in the remote past. But it is not up to us what went on before we were born, and

> neither is it up to us what the laws of nature are. Therefore, the consequences of these things (including our present acts) are not up to us.[472]

The implications of this argument for the notion of sin are rather obvious, so we shall not dwell on them here. Suffice it to say that if the incompatibilist's argument is true, this seriously undermines the notion of sin as it is traditionally understood. If determinism is true, and this truth is incompatible with free will, the third of the traditional criteria for discerning whether or not a sin is mortal or venial, deliberate consent, is rendered meaningless. This is so because when we deliberate on an act, we can give our consent to it only if we have the freedom to choose or reject the act. However, if the incompatibilist is right, we do not have this freedom as our acts are determined by the laws of nature and past events.

There is, however, another view regarding determinism and free will that we must examine, as it does not, as the view we have just examined, undermine the traditional understanding of sin.

B. Compatibilism or Soft Determinism

Compatibilism or soft determinism is the thesis that determinism and free will are compatible. In this subsection, we shall briefly examine a synopsis of this thesis and its implications for the traditional understanding of sin.

In his paper, 'Ifs, Cans, and Free Will: The Issues,' Bernard Berofsky provides a useful summary of the compatibilist's notion of freedom and its relation to determinism.

> Basically, the compatibilists charged the opposition with two confusions. Causation, which is not freedom-undermining even in its deterministic forms, is confused with compulsion or coercion, which, of course, is freedom-undermining. A physical barrier or even an internal compulsion or addiction can be an impediment to action; but when one

[472] Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 56.

> acts simply because one wants to, one is not being impeded from acting otherwise. Hence, one is expressing one's freedom by doing what one wants. Second, although determinism entails that all human behaviour is subsumable under universal law, freedom is not thereby threatened, for the sorts of laws involved are merely descriptive (natural, scientific), not prescriptive, like the laws of a legislative body. They just describe the way in which people behave; they do not force or constrain adherence.[473]

This approach to the question of the compatibility of determinism and freedom seems quite reasonable. In fact it bears some resemblance to Lonergan's notions of essential and effective freedom. In Lonergan's terms the compatibilist is saying that there are restrictions upon a person's effective freedom caused by 1: external constraint and 2: scotosis which results in a conflict between the operators of intellectual and psychoneural development. The person is, however, essentially free to do what he/she wants to do; he/she is not being impeded from acting otherwise. However, the major difference between Lonergan and the soft determinist is that Lonergan denies the reality of determinism.

While the soft determinist's argument is somewhat plausible, the notion that natural laws are merely descriptive and not prescriptive is rather unconvincing. The classic expression of Newton's law of gravity is not 'What goes up also comes down,' but 'What goes up *must* come down.' The law of gravity not only describes what happens but also predicts what will happen based on an understanding of cause and effect. For this reason, the compatibilist's argument that natural, scientific laws merely describe the way that people behave, but that they do not force adherence is, as I've said, rather unconvincing.

[473] Bernard Berofsky, 'Ifs, Cans, and Free Will: The Issues,' Kane, ed., *Handbook of Free Will*, 182.

C. Church Teaching

What, we might ask, is the Church's position regarding the compatibility or incompatibility of determinism and freedom? Church teaching and theological reflection on freedom, while obviously in conflict with hard determinism is not, it seems, necessarily in conflict with soft determinism. Let us take for example the *Catechism*'s definition of freedom: 'the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility.'[474] It is obvious that this definition is an affirmation of human freedom, but this, as we have seen, does not necessarily mean that it is a denial of determinism. So, in order to ascertain precisely what the Church's position is, we must ask whether this definition of freedom also implies a denial of determinism. The question is not whether the Church's position can be considered 'hard determinist' – obviously it cannot as the hard determinist denies the reality of human freedom – but whether it can be considered 'soft determinist.'

The soft determinist's view of freedom is one of non-coercion, of not being physically constrained or impeded by compulsion or addiction. The *Catechism* recognises the reality of these impediments to freedom. While freedom, it says, makes a person responsible for her acts insofar as they are voluntary, there are a number of impediments to such voluntariness: '*Imputability* and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments and other psychological or social factors.'[475] Putting aside these factors, the person is free to 'perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility.' This is in accordance with the soft determinist's position. Both the *Catechism* and the soft determinist recognise serious impediments to freedom, but ultimately affirm its reality. While it may be argued that the *Catechism*'s view

[474] *Catechism*, 1731.
[475] Ibid., 1735.

of freedom is much richer than that of the soft determinist's, still there seems to be nothing in its view of freedom that obviously refutes the soft determinist's position.

I contend, then, that the Church's position *could* be construed as soft determinist, although I am not suggesting that it *is* soft determinist. It is impossible to be sure about this as it is not the Church's business to take decisive positions on purely scientific arguments such as causal determinism. For this reason, we shall examine magisterial teaching on freedom as a contrary thesis to hard determinism only. Our response, which will draw on Lonergan, by refuting causal determinism itself, will serve as a refutation of both hard and soft determinism. The position we shall be left with will be what's known as indeterminism, the doctrine that determinism itself is false. This doctrine leaves room for the possibility of human free will and, consequently, sin as it has been traditionally understood.

3.2. Sed Contra: Magisterial Teaching on Freedom as a Contrary Thesis to Hard Determinism

Hard determinism, as we have seen, is the thesis that causal determinism is true, and that this truth is incompatible with human freedom. Freedom, therefore, according to this thesis, does not exist. Contrary to this thesis is magisterial teaching on freedom, which unequivocally affirms the truth that human beings are free with regard to their actions. This truth stems from a theological anthropology that asserts that human beings are created by God with the freedom to choose. In this section we shall briefly examine some important magisterial texts that reflect this teaching on human freedom. While I examined these texts in the first section of this dissertation, I focused on what I argued were the texts weaknesses, whereas here I shall focus on their strengths. The Church's teaching on freedom is strong in the following two areas: 1) Its pastoral sensitivity in recognising a number of psychological

and social impediments to freedom, and 2) Despite this recognition it unequivocally affirms the freedom and the consequent dignity of the human person.

Paragraph 1730 of the *Catechism*, which quotes scripture, *Gaudium et Spes*, and St Irenaeus, perfectly reflects the doctrine of freedom stemming from the aforementioned theological anthropology.

> God created man a rational being, conferring on him the dignity of a person who can initiate and control his own actions. 'God willed that man should be "left in the hand of his own counsel," so that he might of his own accord seek his Creator and freely attain his full and blessed perfection by cleaving to him.'[476]

'Man is rational and therefore like God; he is created with free will and is master over his acts.'[477]

Despite the fact that the *Catechism*, as we have seen, recognises a number of impediments to freedom, it also unequivocally asserts that human beings are, to borrow Lonergan's terminology, essentially free. Human beings are 'created with free will' and are masters of their own behaviour. This teaching is directly opposed to the hard determinist's position, which denies the reality of human freedom.

Paragraph 1731 defines freedom as 'the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility.'[478] This too is in contradiction with the hard determinist's position, as one of the implications of the hard determinist's position is a lack of moral culpability of the person acting. If determinism is true and all human actions are the result of the laws of nature and past events, then the person cannot be held responsible for his or her actions because of his or her lack of freedom. On the contrary, the *Catechism* again unquestionably asserts the culpability of the person acting, as such a person is said to 'perform deliberate actions *on one's own*

[476] GS 17; Sir 15:14.
[477] Irenaeus *Adv. Haeres.* 4, 4, 3
[478] *Catechism*, 1731.

responsibility.' Such freedom, according to the *Catechism*, is 'the basis of praise or blame, merit or reproach.'[479] While past events are taken into account as they can affect a person in a number of different ways – namely the above-mentioned social and psychological factors – human freedom and culpability are unambiguously proclaimed.

Gaudium et Spes also gives an account of freedom, which, while pastorally sensitive, in that it recognises both social and psychological factors that can impede human freedom, unequivocally affirms the freedom and consequent dignity of the human person.

> Genuine freedom is an exceptional sign of the image of God in humanity. . . . Their dignity therefore requires them to act out of conscious and free choice, as moved and drawn in a personal way from within, and not by their own blind impulses or by external constraint. People gain such dignity when, freeing themselves of all slavery to the passions, they press forward towards their goal by freely choosing what is good, and, by their diligence and skill, effectively secure for themselves the means suited to this end. Since human freedom has been weakened by sin it is only by the help of God's grace that people can properly orientate their actions towards God.[480]

Like the *Catechism*, the Council reflects the theological anthropology behind its teaching on freedom: 'Genuine freedom is an exceptional sign of the image of God in humanity.' Again like the *Catechism*, the Council recognises impediments to freedom, namely 'blind impulses' and 'external constraint,' but unequivocally asserts that human beings are free, that they can 'act out of conscious and free choice.'

This is again in contradiction with the hard determinist's position which denies the reality of 'conscious and free choice.' For the hard determinist, human perception of acting in freedom is merely an illusion. The reality is that the choices that human beings make are

[479] Ibid., 1732.
[480] GS 17.

inevitable given the laws of nature and past events. The Council, on the other hand, recognises that human freedom has been weakened but not completely diminished by sin.

Like the *Catechism*, the Council unquestionably asserts the accountability of the acting person. Citing St Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, it proclaims that 'before the judgement seat of God everybody will have to give an account of their life, according as they have done either good or evil.'[481] This culpability is a consequence of the fact that despite the impediments to freedom and the fact that freedom has been weakened by sin, human beings are still fundamentally free. So, while the hard determinist denies that human beings can be held accountable for their actions, as these actions are determined by natural laws and past events, the Council on the other hand contends that human beings, because fundamentally free, are responsible for their actions.

In *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* John Paul II provides the following account of sin and freedom:

> Sin, in the proper sense, is always a *personal act*, since it is an act of freedom on the part of an individual person, and not properly of a group or community. This individual may be conditioned, incited and influenced by numerous and powerful external factors. He may also be subjected to tendencies, defects and habits linked with his personal condition. In not a few cases such external and internal factors may attenuate, to a greater or lesser degree, the person's freedom and therefore his responsibility and guilt. But it is a truth of faith, also confirmed by our experience and reason, that the human person is free.[482]

This text displays both of the strengths I mentioned in the introductory paragraph to this section. In it John Paul II recognises various impediments to human freedom and how these impediments can reduce a person's responsibility for his or her action. He deals with both

[481] Ibid.; 2 Cor. 5:10.
[482] John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, sec. 16.

external (social) and internal (psychological) factors. However, despite his recognition of these impediments to freedom, John Paul II leaves the reader in no doubt that the human person is essentially free: 'It is a truth of faith, also confirmed by our experience and reason, that the human person is free.' This, again, is in direct contrast to the hard determinist's position. For the hard determinist, everything, including the condition of a particular society and a person's psychological condition, is determined by the laws of nature and past events. Regardless, then, of whether social conditions are positive or negative, or whether a person is psychologically healthy or ill, human actions are inevitable given the laws of nature and past events. The human being, in the hard determinist's conception, is left with neither freedom nor dignity.

Despite the strengths of these texts, they remain philosophically weak. They are, I argued earlier, incapable of engaging with determinism on its own terms. For this reason we now turn to Lonergan to respond to Honderich's argument for causal determinism. As I have already mentioned, this response will serve to refute both hard and soft determinism, and the position we shall be left with is indeterminism. This position is in accordance with the Catholic doctrine of freedom as it affirms the freedom and dignity of the human person. It also fits in with the traditional Catholic doctrine of sin in that it allows for 'deliberate consent.'

3.3. Responsio: Drawing on Lonergan to Answer Honderich

In their discussions of determinism both Lonergan and Honderich deal with classical physics and probability. The conclusions they draw, however, are diametrically opposed. For Honderich the existence of probability does not refute the argument that all events, including human actions, are the result of prior causes. Lonergan's notions of statistical residues, emergent probability, and will on the contrary, allow for human freedom. In this section we

shall draw on Lonergan to respond to Honderich's argument that all events, even those that have been established as probable, are necessitated.

This section will be divided into two subsections. In the first we shall briefly recap on Lonergan's notion of statistical residues. In the second we shall compare this notion with Honderich's arguments. We shall also in the second section revisit Lonergan's notion of the contingency of the act of will as part of our refutation of Honderich's argument.

3.3.1. Statistical Residues

In dealing with the question of whether abstract classical laws can be applied to the concrete universe, Lonergan provides the following response:

> There does not exist a single ordered sequence that embraces the totality of particular cases through which abstract system might be applied to the concrete universe. In other words, though all events are linked to one another by law, still the laws reveal only the abstract component in concrete relations; the further concrete component, though mastered by insight into particular cases, is involved in the empirical residue from which systematizing intelligence abstracts; it does not admit treatment along classical lines; it is a residue, left over after classical method has been applied, and it calls for the implementation of statistical method.[483]

Statistical method, then, will be needed if we are to understand the concrete universe in its entirety.

The objective significance of statistical laws, according to Lonergan, is that in general, physical events cannot be predicted by using a deductive method. As we have seen, for Lonergan, physical events occur according to what he terms 'emergent probability.' For

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[483] Lonergan, *Insight*, 87.

him, reality is not what must be, but 'just what happens to be.'[484] However, he continues, the existence of statistical residues brings with it the possibility of higher integrations. The sciences of physics, chemistry, biology, and psychology can operate independently because on each earlier level of systematization there are statistical residues that constitute that which is merely contingent and that therefore needs to be systematized on the next level. It follows that higher laws and higher schemes of recurrence cannot be deduced from lower laws and lower schemes of recurrence, as the higher is employed in regulating what the lower leaves as merely coincidental.

In other words, chemical laws cannot be deduced from physical laws, nor biological laws from chemical or physical laws, nor psychological laws from biological or chemical or physical laws, because each of these areas of scientific enquiry is separate from the others. They are separate because each successive area of enquiry deals with purely coincidental phenomena that cannot be explained in terms of the lower laws or schemes of recurrence.

According to Lonergan, the significance of the canon of statistical residues 'lies in the fact that it makes possible an account of the autonomy of the successive departments of science, that this autonomy excludes a determinism of the higher by the lower, and that the canon of statistical residues itself excludes a deductive determinism either in the lower or the higher.'[485] This 'determinism of the higher by the lower' is precisely the kind of argument that Honderich uses. For him, psychological events, including choices and decisions, are determined by physical laws. In the next subsection, we shall draw on Lonergan's notion of statistical residues in order to respond to Honderich's arguments. We shall also briefly examine Lonergan's argument for the contingency of the act of will.

[484] Ibid., 615.
[485] Ibid., 608.

3.3.2. Lonergan in Response to Honderich

Honderich's argument for determinism is based on classical physics, on laws based on the observation that events have prior causes. Every event, then, for Honderich, is necessitated, because it is the result of prior circumstances. While Lonergan does not dispute the existence or the validity of these classical laws, he does point out their limitations. The example he uses of a phenomenon based on classical laws is the periodicity of the planetary system, which, he says, displays and ordered sequence of particular cases to which classical abstract laws can be applied. However, he continues, the periodicity of the planetary system can neither explain its origin nor guarantee its survival. Lonergan concludes more generally that 'there does not exist a single ordered sequence that embraces the totality of particular cases through which abstract system might be applied to the concrete universe.' So, while Lonergan is in agreement with Honderich on the existence and validity of classical laws, he points out that the existence of such laws is limited in terms of a full explanation of the universe. For Honderich, classical laws are sufficient to provide a 'fundamental explanation' of phenomena, while for Lonergan the introduction of statistical laws is necessary.

The existence of statistical residues and the consequent necessity of introducing statistical laws, means that the sciences of physics, chemistry, biology, and psychology are completely autonomous. Lonergan demonstrates this autonomy of the sciences by arguing that although all events are linked to one another by law, the laws reveal only the abstract component in concrete relations, and that the further concrete component is involved in the empirical residue from which systematizing intelligence abstracts. One of the implications of this autonomy of the sciences is that there can be no 'determinism of the higher by the lower.' This determinism of the higher by the lower is what Honderich has attempted to achieve in his argument. He argues that choices and decisions, which are the domain of psychology, are determined by physical laws, which are the domain of classical physics. This argument fails

to respect the autonomy of the aforementioned sciences. Lonergan's argument for the autonomy of the sciences, and the consequent impossibility of psychological events being determined by physical laws, provides a strong counter-argument to Honderich's notion that choices and decisions are necessitated as they are the result of prior circumstances.

To be fair to Honderich, he does not completely ignore statistical method. Part of his argument deals with probability. There is, he says, a sense in which an event is explained if it is established as having been very probable. What is it, he asks, for event A to have made the occurrence of event B 95 percent probable? He answers that in 95 percent of the situations in which an event of the type of A occurs there is a causal circumstance for an event of the type of B. He argues that there is good evidence for this, even if we do not know exactly what the circumstance consists of. This non-fundamental explanation of B, he argues, presupposes the possibility of a fundamental explanation of B. It presupposes precisely the existence of an as yet unknown circumstance for B. It presupposes, Honderich argues, that B was a necessitated event.

My response to this argument will be twofold. Firstly, I shall point out what I consider to be a flaw in its logic. Secondly, I shall present as a counter-argument Lonergan's argument for the contingence of the act of will.

The main problem with Honderich's argument is that he argues for the necessity of events that have already occurred, and not for events that *will* occur. I shall illustrate this by quoting him directly, and adding my own emphasis. He begins by asking the question: 'What is it for event A *to have made* it 95 percent probable that event B *would* occur?'[486] He answers that 'in 95 percent of the situations in which an event of the type A occurs, there is precisely a causal circumstance for an event of the type B,' and concludes from this that 'B *was* a necessitated event.'[487] Let us assume for a moment that Honderich's argument is

[486] Kane, ed., *Handbook of Free Will*, 466, my emphasis.
[487] Ibid., my emphasis.

correct. What, in terms of the argument against free choice, does it actually demonstrate? It demonstrates that B *was* a necessitated event. Let us say that event B was a decision made by a person. All that Honderich's argument demonstrates (still assuming it is correct) is that given the prior causal circumstances, the person's decision *was* inevitable. However, Honderich's argument does not demonstrate the general theory that people's decisions are determined. This is because when we look backwards at a decision a person made in the past, we can say that given *all* of the circumstances which resulted in the person making that decision, the decision was inevitable. The 'all' here includes everything in the circumstance, including all of the elements (whatever they may be) that constitute the free decision. However, if we look forward to ask whether a person will *in the future* make a particular decision, we do not have all of the circumstances at our disclosure. The all important elements that constitute the free decision are missing, because the person has not yet made the decision. So, one may argue that events *were* necessitated, but this is entirely different to arguing that events, including decisions and choices, *are* necessitated.

Perhaps we can advance this argument further by drawing on Lonergan's argument for the contingency of the act of will. For Lonergan, the main constituent of a choice or decision is the will, and the act of will is not necessitated but contingent. We may recall the following argument that we looked at in chapter three:

> If a proposed action is obligatory, then one cannot be a rational knower and deny the obligation, and one cannot be a rational doer and not fulfil the obligation. But one can be a rational knower without an act of willing, and one cannot be a rational doer without an act of willing.[488]

It is 'the addition of the further constitutive requirement of an act of will'[489] that indicates the movement from rational consciousness to rational self-consciousness, and changes what is

[488] Lonergan, *Insight*, 615.
[489] Ibid.

rational necessity in the area of knowledge into rational exigence in the larger area of both knowledge and action. For Lonergan, then, the will is an absolutely essential component in human action, and the act of will is not necessitated but contingent. So, returning to Honderich's argument, the essential component missing when we ask what a person might do *in the future* is the contingent and free act of will. If we look backwards to a decision a person made in the past, we may take into account all of the factors, including the decision itself with its constituent part, the will, and argue that the decision was inevitable. However, if we attempt to look to the future, we do not possess all of the factors: we do not possess the decision itself with its constituent will. So, while we *may* be able to argue that a past decision was necessitated, we cannot argue that our future decisions are necessitated or determined because we cannot take into account a decision that has not yet occurred.

One might ask how a person can said to be free even if we only say that his decision *was* determined, and not that his future decisions *are* determined. After all, future decisions will become past decisions, so how can we say that one and the same decision is not determined, and then later say that it *was* determined? This seems paradoxical. My response to this apparent paradox is as follows: it is possible to say, without contradiction, that a past decision was necessitated by a number of different factors, *including a free act of will*. The decision, then, was both necessitated and free. There is no contradiction here because the necessity stems from past events, and one of the past events in the case of the past decision is the free act of will.

Our critique of Honderich's argument, and our analysis of Lonergan's notions of statistical residues and the contingence of the act of will, leaves us with a position known as indeterminism. This position, as I have said, is compatible with the Catholic doctrine of sin, as it allows for deliberate consent.

CONCLUSION

By following St Thomas's dialectical procedure we have examined some notions of moral scepticism and determinism and provided a two-fold response to these theses. Firstly I presented a contrary thesis, namely the Church's teaching on knowledge and freedom respectively. This provided us with an authoritative rebuttal of the sceptical arguments. These rebuttals are authoritative not only because they are supplied by the magisterium, but because they are supported by scripture and two thousand years of theological tradition. Secondly we drew on Lonergan to respond to the same sceptical arguments. The purpose of this was to compliment Church teaching on knowledge and freedom by providing a more thorough rational response to moral scepticism and determinism.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have attempted to demonstrate the rational plausibility of the concept of sin. In doing so I have dealt with two fundamental questions in moral theology: Is there an objective moral order which is discernible by human beings? and are human beings free to act morally? I have argued that a traditional theological approach to these issues, because it presupposes that the reader has strong religious beliefs and accepts the authority of scripture and the theological tradition, is inadequate in terms of providing a critical theology of sin. While it is impossible within the confines of a single work to provide a comprehensive analysis of theological reflection and Church teaching on sin, an analysis that would include every relevant magisterial text and the work of all of the major moral theologians, I have attempted to be as comprehensive as possible. While there are limits to my exposition and critique of theological reflection and magisterial teaching on sin, I contend that the approach to the themes of sin, objectivity and knowledge, and freedom in the texts I have selected represents a general trend in moral theology.

My own approach to these questions has been to construct a synthetic account of sin that incorporates the ideas of Lonergan with scripture and the theological tradition in response to questions raised by a selection of moral sceptics and determinists. This method too has its limitations. The terms 'moral scepticism' and 'determinism' describe a whole host of philosophical ideas that one could not possibly hope to deal with adequately in a single thesis. However, while there are many varieties of moral scepticism and 'hard' determinism, there is a central tenet at the heart of each of these types of philosophy: the moral sceptic claims that moral knowledge is impossible, while the hard determinist claims that free human action is impossible. Convincing arguments for the possibility of moral objectivity and

knowledge, and for the possibility of freedom should, therefore, be capable of responding to any form of moral scepticism or hard determinism.

My use of Lonergan to provide these arguments also has its limitations. The body of Lonergan's works is extensive (a projected 25 volume Collected Works is underway with the University of Toronto Press), while I have analysed only his two most important works and rejected one of these as a means to providing critical arguments for the possibility of sin. Furthermore, the single work that I have drawn upon in constructing a synthetic account of sin, namely *Insight*, is long and notoriously difficult. This book is also structured in such a way that each chapter builds upon the previous one so that abstracting ideas from chapter 18 (the chapter on ethics) in order to utilize these ideas for one's own purposes is an endeavour fraught with difficulties. My interpretation of Lonergan, then, could no doubt be scrutinized by expert Lonergan scholars and found wanting. However, Lonergan's approach to foundational moral issues is too valuable to be left only to the experts. Even if we fail to grasp every contextual nuance (the contexts I have in mind are *Insight* as a whole and the larger field of Thomistic studies) this does not mean that we cannot implement these ideas in a critical theology of sin. After all, even the experts will disagree on how Lonergan should be interpreted. So, while we may not be Lonergan experts we are still capable of comprehending well structured, logical, and coherent arguments and such arguments Lonergan has supplied us with in abundance in *Insight*.

While my method of constructing a critical theology of sin has its limitations, it also has its merits. A synthetic account of sin that integrates magisterial teaching on sin with the more philosophical insights of Lonergan should make a significant contribution to the theology of sin. Such an account of sin achieves three things.

Firstly, it considers and takes seriously the theological anthropology provided by the magisterium through their use of scripture and tradition. This is important as without a solid

grounding in scripture and tradition a theology loses its connection with a body of reflections, experiences, and insights that constitutes a living faith. Such a theology would merely be the reflections of a single individual and would be in opposition to the meaning of faith and of Church.

Secondly, such a theology of sin investigates a philosophical anthropology that uses a more scientific method than that of arguing from the "evidence" of scripture and tradition. This too is important, as while a theology must take into account scripture and tradition if it is to maintain its connection with the Church, it is also vital that we do not alienate those who are not completely immersed in the faith, for example people who are perhaps no longer as certain about their faith as they used to be but are still open to education, or people who struggle with the idea of belief in God in a world where such belief has been widely rejected and is often ridiculed. The investigation of a philosophical anthropology in a theology of sin will help to make such a theology convincing to those who are uncertain of their faith. If one can first convince a person that the notion of sin is plausible, this may lead to the same person being more open to the theological anthropology provided by scripture and the theological tradition.

Thirdly, this synthesis attempts to merge current theological approaches to sin with Lonergan's more philosophical approach, in order to create an account of sin that is acceptable to both a Christian and secular audience. Such an account of sin would be capable of withstanding critical scrutiny from other academic disciplines apart from theology, as well as conforming to a more traditional approach to theology that has faith as its starting-point.

Such a synthetic account of sin is vital today as we can no longer presuppose the faith suggested in the traditional definition of theology as *fides quaerens intellectum*. If we alienate those who struggle to accept our particular world-view, we fail in our Christian responsibility to 'make disciples of all nations' (Mt. 28:19).

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