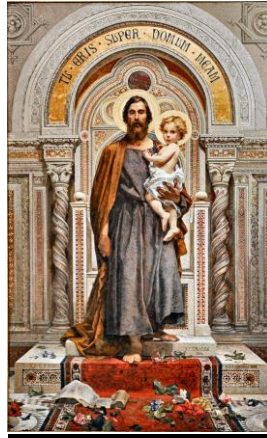


St. Joseph Society



Objective: Catholic morality is the practical outworking of the great dogmas of the Catholic faith. St. Paul commands us to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13). This course examines various methods of making moral decisions and the core concepts of conscience, sin, freedom, law, and dignity. As we study these great truths of Catholic morality, we’ll also challenge ourselves to apply these principles in our daily life.

- Unit 1 – Introduction to Moral Theology
- Unit 2 – The Nature of Man
- Unit 3 – The End of Man
- Unit 4 – Making Moral Choices
- Unit 5 – Freedom
- Unit 6 – Conscience

Unit 1 Podcast Schedule

- Episode #1 – Intro to Ethics
- Episode #2 – Intro to Moral Theology
- Episode #3 – Sources of Moral Theology
- Episode #4 – Moral Relativism

Episode #1 – Intro to Ethics

I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: What is ethics?
2. Over the next six months, we are going to go through a basic introduction to moral theology. This month I will give a 30,000-foot overview on the topic before turning our attention to the five most fundamental topics in moral theology.
3. This week, we are going to discuss the two basic approaches to ethics and the three postulates of ethics. We will not only define the two approaches and three postulates, but we will also discuss what two of the greatest philosophers, Immanuel Kant and St. Thomas Aquinas, thought about these topics.

II. Two Basic Approaches to Ethics

1. What is ethics?
 - a. Vernon Bourke – Ethics is “the systematic study of human actions from the point of view of their rightness and wrongness as means for the achievement of ultimate happiness” (*Ethics*, 4).
 - b. The material cause, or the subject matter of ethics, is human conduct. The formal cause or the point of view of ethics is the rightness or wrongness of conduct.
2. Two Basic Approaches to Ethics: Morality of Obligation (Duty-Centered) – Immanuel Kant
 - a. If you hold a morality-of-obligation perspective, then determining which rules should be followed is a matter of determining who or what the proper authority is in some situation, and what that authority (ex. God, church, family, laws, etc.) says to do.
 - b. Rules are imposed on us as obligations according to this perspective because they are not inherently connected to the further goal of human happiness and flourishing.
3. Two Basic Approaches to Ethics: Morality of Happiness (Virtue Theory) – St. Thomas Aquinas
 - a. From a morality-of-happiness perspective, living morally is simply living a most fulfilling, happy life. Rules that we follow not only point us toward that further goal but are a very participation in that goal.
 - b. In this approach, authorities are indeed important. We heed them because we do not know fully by ourselves the best way to live. But authorities are heeded not simply due to their status (as my God, my church, my family, or my nation), but as conduits to a better life.

III. Three Postulates of Ethics

1. “Postulates are truths or propositions not proved by the science in question but presupposed by it” (Fagothey, 23). Three philosophical truths stand out as of primary importance to any sound system of ethics:
 - a. Postulate 1: The Existence of God
 - b. Postulate 2: The Freedom of the Will
 - c. Postulate 3: The Immortality of the Soul
2. St. Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant on the Postulates of Ethics
 - a. St. Thomas Aquinas believes that because God exists, the will is free, and the soul is immortal there must be a moral law.
 - b. Immanuel Kant does not believe that pure reason can demonstrate the truth of these three postulates, but because we have direct intuition of the moral law, then we must admit that God exists, the will is free, and the soul is immortal.
 - c. Both Aquinas and Kant agree that these three truths must be accepted in order to give meaning to moral sciences.
3. Three philosophical truths stand out as of primary importance to any sound system of ethics:
 - a. Postulate 1: The Existence of God – “Without God as the Absolute Lawgiver and Supreme Judge there could be no moral law prescribing what we ought to do, and therefore no ought and no ethics” (Fagothey, 23).
 - b. Postulate 2: The Freedom of the Will – “Unless the human will is free, a man cannot choose between right and wrong, is not responsible for what he does, and cannot direct the course of his life” (Fagothey, 23).
 - c. Postulate 3: The Immortality of the Soul – “Unless the human soul is a spirit that outlives the present life, there is no sufficient motive for doing the right and avoiding the wrong, since we see that virtue often goes unrewarded and vice unpunished in this world. Why be good, especially when it is hard, if it makes no difference in the long run” (Fagothey, 24).

III. Application

1. Keep practicing the Rule of Life
2. Reflection
 - a. Have you approached morality from a duty centered approach, or do you really believe that the moral life is the pathway to the good life?
 - b. Meditate on Death

Episode #2 – Intro to Moral Theology

I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: What is distinctive about St. Thomas Aquinas's approach to moral theology?
2. Last week, we discussed the two basic approaches to ethics and the three postulates of ethics. We not only defined the two approaches and three postulates, but we also discussed what two of the greatest philosophers, Immanuel Kant and St. Thomas Aquinas, thought about these topics.
3. This week, talk about the difference between dogmatic and moral theology before we turn our attention to St. Thomas Aquinas's approach to moral theology by looking at the theme of *exitus-reditus* and the four primary elements of Thomistic moral theology which we'll explore in detail over the next six months.

II. Introduction to Thomistic Moral Theology

1. Introduction to Theology

- a. The entire field of theology is divided into dogmatic and moral theology, which differ in subject-matter and in method. Dogmatic and moral theology are two closely related parts of universal theology. Dogmatic theology concerns what one must *believe* and moral theology concerns what one must *do*.
- b. Moral theology is that branch of theology which studies the practical implications of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. It is concerned with the kind of people we ought to be and the kinds of actions we ought to perform or avoid.

2. *Exitus-Reditus*

- a. The theme of *exitus-reditus*, which envisions a movement composed of both downward "procession" and upward "return," is central to theology as a whole and moral theology in particular.
- b. St. Thomas Aquinas – "So because . . . the fundamental aim of divine teaching (*sacra doctrina*) is to make God known, not only as he is in himself, but as the beginning and end of all things and of reasoning creatures especially, we now intend to set forth this divine teaching by treating, first, of God, second, of the journey to God of reasoning creatures, third, of Christ, who, as man, remains our road to God (ST I, q. 2, prologue).

3. The Four Elements of Thomistic Moral Theology

- a. **Beatitude:** The moral life is essentially a response to the question of happiness and the ultimate end of human action.
- b. Humans progress toward beatitude by their actions. There are two types of principles that guide human actions.

- i. **Interior Principles:** The virtues and gifts and their contrary vices and sins are the interior and personal sources of action.
 - ii. **Exterior Principles:** Laws, precepts, and grace are the exterior or superior principles of action.
- c. **Prudential Judgment:** The entire goal of moral theology is to form, from universal principles, the choice that generates the concrete act.

III. Application:

1. Keep practicing the Rule of Life
2. Reflection – Meditate upon the theme of *exitus-reditus* and how that should motivate us to practice our rule of life with more devotion.

Episode #3 – Sources of Moral Theology

I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: Should we be moral fundamentalists or moral rationalists?
2. Last week, I introduced you to St. Thomas Aquinas's approach to moral theology by looking at the theme of *exitus-reditus*, and I introduced you to the four primary elements of Thomistic moral theology.
3. This week, we are going to discuss the sources of moral theology which will help us understand the primary difference between moral theology and ethics. When we are thinking seriously about the moral life, we must consult a variety of sources to get an accurate outlook. Today, we will discuss those sources, so start developing a method for making progress.

II. Sources of Moral Theology

1. Two Primary Sources of Moral Theology:

- a. Faith: Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, the Magisterial teaching of the Church,
- b. Reason: Relevant human sciences (such as psychology, sociology, economics), and human reason (philosophy).
- c. What is the difference between moral theology and ethics? – “Moral theology and ethics both study the rightness and wrongness of human conduct; they differ in the source from which they derive their knowledge and in the method of pursuing their conclusions, rather than in any difference of content or purpose. Moral Theology proceeds from the standpoint of divine revelation and ecclesiastical law, ethics from the standpoint of natural human reason alone” (Fagothey, 21).

2. The Role of Reason

- a. CCC 50 - By natural reason man can know God with certainty, on the basis of his works. But there is another order of knowledge, which man cannot possibly arrive at by his own powers: the order of divine Revelation.
- b. What is Philosophy?
 - i. Literally the love of wisdom. It is the science in which natural reason, apart from divine revelation, seeks to understand all things by a knowledge of their first causes.
 - ii. Three Levels of Philosophy
 1. Theory
 2. Art
 3. Table Talk

3. The Role of Faith

- a. What is Faith? – belief based on authority
- b. Faith is certain (CCC 157) – The certainty of faith is always based on the truthfulness of God.
- c. Sacred Deposit of Faith – Revelation of God contained in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.
 - i. The Gospel is handed on orally (Sacred Tradition) and in writing (Sacred Scripture).
 - ii. Magisterium – The teaching authority of the Church. The Magisterium of the Church has the authority to teach infallibly in matters of dogma and morals that are binding on the consciences of the people of God.

III. Application:

1. Keep practicing the Rule of Life
2. Try to identify the roles faith and reason play in your spiritual life from day to day. Also, think about the ways that faith and reason can identify errors in our understanding of each.

Episode #4 – Moral Relativism

I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: Is there such a thing as moral truth?
2. Last week, we discussed the sources of moral theology which will help us understand the primary difference between moral theology and ethics. We discovered that when we are thinking seriously about the moral life, we must consult a variety of sources to get an accurate outlook. Once we understand what sources we may use, we can start developing a method for making progress in our understanding of the spiritual life.
3. This week, we will conclude our introduction by answering the question: Is there such a thing as moral truth? We'll define what moral relativism is and give some objections to that view. Then, we'll turn our attention to a proper understanding of moral absolutism.

II. Is there such a thing as moral truth?

1. Is moral truth objective and absolute?
 - a. Are there moral truths that are true for all people, at all times, and in every place or is morality relative?
 - b. Are moral laws prescriptive or simply descriptive?
 - c. In other words, can you reasonably dismiss everything we are going to discuss over the next six months, because it is not true for you?
2. Moral Relativism?
 - a. In philosophy, relativism is the view that there is no absolute truth or certitude. It is claimed that truth depends entirely on variable factors such as person, place, time, and circumstances.
 - b. Moral relativism holds that there are no unchangeable principles of human behavior, either because all truth is relative or because there are no inherently evil actions, since everything depends on other factors, such as customs, conventions, or social approval.
 - c. Arguments for Relativism
 - i. Argument #1 – Values differ from culture to culture.
 - ii. Argument #2 – People have different values.
 - iii. Argument #3 – Morality is determined by situations.
 - iv. Argument #4 – Morality comes from evolution.
 - v. Argument #5 – Moral relativism promotes tolerance.

d. Objections to Moral Relativism

- i. Relativists Can't Accuse Others of Wrong-Doing
 - ii. Relativists Can't Complain About the Problem of Evil
 - iii. Relativists Can't Place Blame or Accept Praise
 - iv. Relativists Can't Claim Anything Is Unfair or Unjust
 - v. Relativists Can't Improve Their Morality
 - vi. Relativists Can't Hold Meaningful Moral Discussions or Promote Tolerance
- e. Question for those claiming to be moral relativists: Do you really believe that there are no objective moral standards? Or, do you simply have questions (or objections) regarding some of the values you have been taught to this point?

3. Moral Absolutism

- a. What is truth? – Truth is that which corresponds to reality
 - i. Aristotle's definition of truth: "If a man says of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, he speaks the truth, but if he says of what is not that it is, or of what is that it is not, he does not speak the truth."
 - ii. Telling the truth means "telling it like it is," and know the truth means "knowing what is." Truth is the conformity of thought to thing, mind to reality, thought's subject to thought's object. And we express what-is in true propositions (and what-is-not in false propositions).
- b. Yes, there are moral truths (absolutes) that correspond to reality. Moral absolutes are:
 - i. objective (not subjective – true for all persons),
 - ii. eternal (not temporal – true at all times),
 - iii. and universal (not local – true for all places).
- c. For example, it is absolutely immoral to torture young children. This is true for every person, at all times, in all places. However, it is important to keep in mind that there are three things that make a moral act good or bad: situation, motive, and the act itself. This means objective principles must be applied to real situations to determine the moral quality of an act.

III. Application:

1. Keep practicing the Rule of Life
2. We have the courage to stand for our convictions and defend the truth.