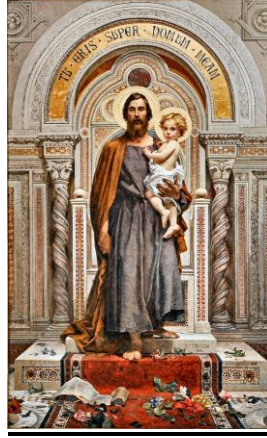


St. Joseph Society



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). Last month, we looked at the nature of authentic freedom. This month, we are going to look at the nature of conscience.

- 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 6 Podcast Schedule

- Episode #21 – What Conscience Is
- Episode #22 – How Conscience Works
- Episode #23 – Kinds of Conscience
- Episode #24 – Forming One’s Conscience & Virtue

Episode #21 – What Conscience Is

I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: What is a conscience?
2. Last month, we discussed the nature of authentic freedom, to what extent a person is responsible for his actions, and how our freedom and responsibility can be modified by a variety of factors. We rounded out our discussion by considering the role of law in promoting our freedom.
3. This week, we are going to discuss the nature of conscience.

II. What Conscience Is

1. The Subjective Aspect of Morality
 - a. The law gives the general principle (ex. Murder, lying, etc. are immoral), but it does not tell us whether this particular act done by this particular person here and now is an act of lying, stealing, or murdering.
 - b. Laws would be useless unless each person had some ability to apply the law to the concrete situations in which he finds himself. This ability, this connecting link between the law and the individual act, is conscience.
 - c. Conscience stands as the subjective basis of morality, for by it the individual person determines whether this individual act of his, done here and now in these circumstances and with this intention in mind, taking into consideration all the factors that may modify his knowledge or consent, is good or bad for him.
2. What Conscience is Not
 - a. Conscience is not majority opinion – The majority may align with correct conscience, but majority opinion does not determine correct conscience.
 - b. Conscience is not a feeling – Feelings can be out of touch with reality (or morality)
 - c. Conscience is not superego – Superego is the leftover rules of childhood from a time and place when we were primarily interested in pleasing authority figures.
 - d. Conscience is not a gut-instinct – Gut-instincts may be correct, but conscience is an intellectual faculty.
 - e. Conscience is not “Jiminy Cricket” – Conscience is not a separate person who lives inside of us, dictating what we should do.
 - f. Conscience is not myth – Conscience is not a fake concept and a denial of conscience leads to the death of morality.

3. What Conscience Is

- a. The word conscience comes from the Latin *conscientia* (literally, knowing with), which covers the two ideas of consciousness and conscience.
- b. Conscience is a judgment 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 (CCC 1778).
- c. *Gaudium et Spes* – “In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience, when necessary, speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor” (16). This definition reveals three interlocking aspects of conscience:
 - i. Conscience is awareness of God’s call to be
 - ii. Conscience is awareness of God’s call to know and do the good, that is, to love.
 - iii. Conscience is a practical judgment of the intellect.
- d. Conscience is not a special faculty distinct from the intellect. Conscience is but the intellect itself in a special function, the function of judging the rightness and wrongness of our own individual acts.
- e. Conscience is a function of the practical intellect. Conscience may be defined as the practical judgment of reason upon an individual act as good and to be performed, or as evil and to be avoided.

III. Application

1. Keep practicing the Rule of Life
2. Meditation – Consciousness is sometimes called the voice of God. God speaks to us through our ordinary human nature and through the ordinary faculties of that nature.

Episode #22 – How Conscience Works

I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: How does your conscience work?
2. Last week, we discussed what conscience is. We looked at certain views of conscience which are misguided before turning our attention to the proper definition of conscience, namely, that it is “a judgment 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” (CCC 1778).
3. This week, we are going to discuss how a person’s conscience works.

II. How Conscience Works

1. Deriving the Judgment of Conscience – The reasoning process involved in arriving at a judgment of conscience is the same as in any logical deductive argument.
 - a. The major premise (the first premise) is a general moral principle. Synderesis is the habit of general moral principles, the habit of having such principles ready formed in mind and of using them as the basis of one’s conduct. The major premise is the moral norm.
 - b. The minor premise brings the particular act here and now to be done under the scope of the general principle enunciated in the major. The conclusion logically following is the judgment of conscience itself.
 - c. Deriving the Judgment of Conscience – Example
 - i. Lies are not allowed. (Major Premise – General Moral Principle)
 - ii. This explanation of my conduct is a lie. (Minor Premise – Particular Act)
 - iii. This explanation of my conduct is now allowed. (Conclusion)
2. Two Kinds of Practical Syllogisms
 - a. Aristotle distinguishes between weakness (A person who deliberates about what to do, they want to do the right thing, but they have weak passions and appetites.) and impetuosity (A person who cannot even get started deliberating.). Within persons like this there are two practical syllogisms:
 - i. Prohairesis Syllogism (Choice)
 1. (U) What is unhealthy should not be eaten. (predicable of the object)
 2. (P) This particular food is unhealthy.
 3. (C) “I chose not to eat”

ii. Appetitive Syllogism (Passions/Appetites)

1. (U1) I want to eat what is unhealthy. (predicable of the agent)
2. (P1) This particular food is unhealthy.
3. (C1) “I eat” - these are the syllogisms of the weak person.

b. This is Aristotle’s account of self-deception. The agent no longer uses the prohairetic syllogism even though it is still ‘in there.’ The flair up of the appetites distracts him from his own deliberation.

III. Application

1. Keep practicing the Rule of Life
2. Meditation – Spend some time this week reflecting on the difference between the prohairetic and appetitive syllogism. I have found Aristotle’s explanation of self-deception very helpful in my spiritual life. This should help motivate us to practice our rule with more diligence so that we can grow in virtue and not be deceived by the lures of sin.

Episode #23 – Kinds of Conscience

I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: Are there different kinds of consciences?
2. Last week, we discussed how a person's conscience works.
3. This week, we are going to discuss the different kinds of conscience.

II. Kinds of Conscience

1. Kinds of Conscience

- a. Antecedent Conscience vs. Consequent Conscience
- b. Correct Conscience vs. Erroneous Conscience
- c. Certain Conscience vs. Doubtful Conscience

2. Antecedent Conscience vs. Consequent Conscience

- a. Antecedent Conscience: A guide to future actions, prompting us to do them or avoid them. For ethics, this is more important.
- b. Consequent Conscience: A judge of our past actions, the source of self-approval or remorse.

3. Correct Conscience vs. Erroneous Conscience

- a. A correct conscience judges as good what is really good, or as evil what is really evil.
- b. An erroneous conscience judges as good what is really evil, or as evil what is really good.
 - i. We have a vincibly erroneous conscience if the error can be overcome and the judgment corrected.
 - ii. We have an invincibly erroneous conscience if the error cannot be overcome and the judgment cannot be corrected, at least by means any normally prudent person would be expected to use.

4. Certain Conscience vs. Doubtful Conscience

- a. A certain conscience judges without fearing that the opposite may be true.
- b. A doubtful conscience either hesitates to make any judgment at all, or does make a judgment but with misgivings that the opposite may be true.

c. Two Chief Rules:

i. Always obey a certain conscience

1. "In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right" (CCC 1778).
2. Deliberately to act against conscience brings condemnation (CCC 1790).
3. The judgement of conscience requires us to do the good that we have recognized.

ii. Never act with a doubtful conscience

5. Qualification: Notice the difference between a correct conscience (objectively) and a certain conscience (subjectively). The kind of certitude meant here is a subjective certitude, which can exist along with object error.

a. Hence there are two possibilities:

- i. A certain and correct conscience
- ii. A certain but erroneous conscience

b. What happens when one has an erroneous conscience?

- i. A certain and correct conscience offers no difficulty and our obligation is clear (i.e. obey it).
- ii. If the error is vincible, it must be corrected.
- iii. If the error is invincible, we have a dilemma.
 1. On the one hand, it does not seem right that a person should be obliged to follow an erroneous judgment.
 2. On the other hand, he does not know that he is in error and has no means of correcting it.
 3. Solution: A person acting with an invincibly erroneous conscience may do something that is objectively wrong, but, since he does not recognize it as such, it is not subjectively wrong. The person is free of guilt by the invincible ignorance bound up in his error.

III. Application

1. Keep practicing the Rule of Life
2. Always follow your conscience and never Act with a Doubtful Conscience

Episode #24 – Forming One’s Conscience & Virtue

I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: How does a person form his conscience?
2. Last week, we discussed different kinds of conscience.
3. This week, we are going to discuss some strategies for forming our consciences.

II. Forming One’s Conscience

1. Section Overview

- a. Sacred Scripture on Conscience Formation
- b. The Catechism on Conscience Formation
- c. The Three Stages of Conscience Formation

2. Sacred Scripture on Conscience Formation

- a. “In the formation of conscience, the Word of God is the light for our path” (CCC 1785).
- b. “The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” (Mt. 6:22-23).
- c. “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2).

3. The Catechism on Conscience Formation

- a. Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened. . . . The education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings (CCC 1783).
- b. The education of the conscience is a lifelong task. . . . The education of the conscience guarantees freedom and engenders peace of heart (CCC 1784).

4. The Stages of Moral Education – The three stages of moral education correspond to the three stages of human development and the three stages of spiritual development (purgative, illuminative, and unitive).

a. Stage 1: The Stage of Disciple (Childhood)

- i. Servais Pinckaers – “In the first stage of moral education, the child must be formed to accept the “discipline of life, based on rules, which are the moral laws” (*Sources of Christian Ethics*, 360).

- ii. During this first stage, the Ten Commandments are particularly central as an expression of the moral law. Jesus himself speaks to this stage in Matthew's gospel: "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments (19:17)."
 - iii. St. John Paul II – "A close connection is made [by Jesus] between eternal life and obedience to the commandments: God's commandments show man the path of life and they lead to it" (*Veritatis Splendor*, 12).
- b. Stage 2: The Stage of Progress (Adolescence)
- i. We begin, at this stage, to gradually put aside physical pleasure, the expectation of a reward, and the avoidance of punishment as the primary supporting motives for doing something good.
 - ii. The Sermon on the Mount is the text most fitting for the second stage.
 - iii. St. Paul – "When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to 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 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" (Romans 2:14-16).
 - iv. *Gaudium et Spes* – "In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil" (16).
- c. Stage 3: The Stage of Maturity or Perfection of Freedom (Adulthood)
- i. This is the period of moral and spiritual adulthood. Servais Pinkaers characterizes it by two features: "mastery of excellent actions and creative fruitfulness" (366).
 - ii. Servais Pinkaers – The human person now performs his actions "according to a plan, a higher goal which will profit himself and others . . . [That his moral freedom is perfected] is shown by the response to a vocation, by devotion to a great cause, however humble it may appear to be, or the accomplishment of important tasks in the service of one's community, family, city, or Church" (366).
 - iii. The Third Stage in Scripture: "Become the perfect man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself" (Eph. 4:13).

III. Application

1. Keep practicing the Rule of Life
2. The Virtuous Life – The cardinal virtues may rightly be called the path to the good life, or happiness, in this world. These four virtues, and all of the sub-virtues under each of the four, cover all aspects of a good life as it concerns activities in this world. However, these must be complimented by the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. We will discuss this in far greater depth in our unit on the Introduction to Spiritual Theology.