

Catholic Principles in Medicine Martin Stallone

Various Principles embodied by the Catholic Church
Autonomy (respect for “persons”)
Benevolence / Non - malevolence
Justice

These are the “Belmont principles” – do you think they are Catholic principles?

Case 1

76 y.o. female NH resident w/ end stage heart failure. Admitted to the hospital from nursing home. Quick assessment shows that she needs a breathing tube to live – otherwise she will probably die. Her living will (comes with her records) states she does not want long term intubation- but nothing about a short term reversible illness. She is a Catholic patient, and a nurse that came in her ambulance said she received last rights less than one week ago from a priest who came to see her in the NH. She is currently unable to speak with waxing / waning mental status. Phone call to her daughter is one hour away and begs to hold on so that she can “say goodbye.” You hear audible sobbing in the background and she hangs up because she is getting in the car right now. Her last appeal is to beg you to hold on so that she can say goodbye. She is the patient’s only daughter. The primary care doctor is not on call and no one really knows the patient besides the nurse who brought her.

Case 2

A 55 year old patient has a heart attack. He has a history of cocaine abuse. His heart attack is treated with a drug eluting stent (DES). The treatment of post-heart attack patients with stents in plavix (anti-platelet / anti-clotting), and four or five other medications. (Plavix is arguably the most important.) Three months after the first heart attack, the patient has stopped taking his plavix and relapsed on cocaine. He comes to an outside hospital and is found to be having a second heart attack. It is likely that the original stent has clotted (in-stent thrombosis). On arrival, the cardiologist refuses to take the patient to the cath lab, citing a certain failure of future medical therapy and ongoing cocaine abuse.

To complicate the matter, a patient in the very next room was taken to the cath lab the prior day for the same diagnosis (in-stent thrombosis and heart attack) after failing to take his plavix. His story was that he ran out of his meds and did not realize the value of the plavix. He is a middle-upper class white gentleman who is a corporate executive in a well-known Philadelphia based business.

Was the cardiologist’s actions acceptable?

Case 3

52 y.o. man with history of severe alcoholism and end-stage cirrhosis and liver failure is admitted through the emergency room in severe shock. He has both liver failure and kidney failure. His blood pressure is so low that he requires IV medication to artificially raise his pressure. He also has a breathing tube and is responsive only to severe pain. He is morbidly obese at over 340 pounds. He has bloody stools which means his cirrhotic liver is causing bleeding near his stomach. His only chance for survival is a liver transplant, which would require that he greatly improve first, pass a transplant evaluation, be allocated an organ, survive the operation, and then have a positive post operative course.

He has three children – all college age and a wife who are dedicated to saving him. They are at his bedside constantly. His chance of surviving is less than 2%.

Case 4

A 35 y.o. woman comes to the office for a cold. She is a patient of a colleague and you have never seen her before. It is nearly 5 PM – your last patient of the day and you are already 30 minutes later than you wanted to be in the office. You take extra time and explain that she does not need antibiotics and she understands, accepting advice on conservative management (Fluids, Tylenol, sudaphed, etc.) She wanted antibiotics and you convinced her not to take them. This was difficult and she makes it clear that she equated antibiotics with the standard of care. As you ask for any last minute questions, she asks for a refill for oral contraceptives that your colleague prescribes for her.

Excerpts from “The Impact of International Bioethics on the ‘Sanctity of Life Ethics’, and the Ability of OB Gyn’s to Practice According to Conscience”. By, Dianne N. Irving, M.A., Ph.D.

While conscience is the subjective norm in philosophical natural law theory, it must be a *correctly formed conscience* — one in accord with objective reality and objective truth — starting with and including this objective scientific truth. Any scientific error or scientific misinformation in this regard precludes us from forming our consciences correctly or making morally correct medical decisions.

A. Different Ethics, Different Conclusions:

First, I would like to historically identify the anti-life philosophy inherent to international bioethics by sketching quite briefly the recent formal “birth” of bioethics in the USA. Just what IS “bioethics”? Most people would say that it is just the application of traditional philosophical and theological principles to current technological issues in medicine and medical research — e.g., cloning or experimenting with new AIDS drugs, right? Not really. The philosophical underpinnings of bioethics are completely different — even contradictory to — the philosophical underpinnings of traditional secular medical ethics or Roman Catholic medical ethics. Traditional medical ethics focuses on the physician’s duty to the individual patient, whose life and welfare are always sacrosanct. The focus of bioethics is fundamentally utilitarian, centered on “maximizing total human happiness”, or, as we shall see, maximizing total “preferences” and “interests.”

To put my endeavor into sharp focus, consider for a moment the strikingly different conclusions reached by secular bioethics and Roman Catholic medical ethics on an array of issues. Secular bioethics generally considers the following as *ethical*: abortion, contraception, the use of abortifacients, prenatal diagnosis with the intent to abort defective babies; surrogate motherhood; human embryo and human fetal research; human cloning; the formation of human chimeras (cross-breeding with other species); human embryonic and fetal stem cell research; “brain birth”; purely experimental high risk research with the mentally ill; euthanasia; physician-assisted suicide; and living wills documenting consent to just about anything. In contrast, Roman Catholic medical ethics considers all of these *unethical*.

How is it that these *two different ethical systems* lead to such opposite and contradictory ethical conclusions? The answer is rather predictable. Every academic ethical theory has its own idiosyncratic ethical principles. *Deducing from different ethical principles necessarily leads to different ethical conclusions.* For example, Roman Catholic medical ethics is grounded in the ethical principles embedded in the Moral Law (a combination of natural law philosophical ethics, Divine Revelation, and the teachings of the Magisterium). Secular bioethics, as predominantly understood and applied, is grounded in the National Commission’s three ethical principles as articulated in their *Belmont Report*. Deducing from these two very different sets of ethical principles leads inexorably to these different ethical — and therefore medical ethical — conclusions. Nor is there any such thing as a “neutral” ethics, including bioethics. All ethical theories are normative — i.e., they take a stand on what is right or wrong. Therefore no “ethical theory”, it would seem, should be forced on any members of a pluralistic, multicultural, democratic society!

B. Birth of Bioethics:

...In 1974, the Secretary appointed an eleven-member National Commission that in 1978 issued a document called *The Belmont Report*, which identified and defined three “ethical principles”: respect for “persons” (immediately deconstructed to mean pure “autonomy”), “justice”, and “beneficence.” To this day, those principles are called “the Belmont principles”, the “Georgetown mantra”, “principlism”, “federal ethics”, or simply “bioethics.” Obviously, as we have seen, deducing from these different *normative* ethical principles will lead to quite different conclusions about what is right or wrong in health care, as compared to deducing from other ethical principles such as the Moral Law.

C. Short Analysis of Bioethics “Theory”:

What is perhaps helpful for [obstetricians and gynecologists] to understand is that bioethics was fatally flawed from the beginning, and therefore it can be easily challenged. The three Belmont Principles — respect for “persons” (autonomy), justice, and beneficence — were supposedly derived from the *normative* ethical systems of various secular moral philosophers, especially Emanuel Kant, J. S. Mill, and John Rawls

The fact that each of these theories fundamentally and systematically contradicted each other seemed to be irrelevant to the early “ethics-makers”. In effect, they quite selectively took bits and pieces from different and theoretically irreducible ethical systems and rolled them up into one ball. Furthermore, each of these principles was defined as *prima facie*, i.e., no one principle could overrule any of the others. The way we come to know these bioethics principles is by taking courses, attending seminars, and listening to bioethicists lecture at conferences.

But theoretically and practically it was soon discovered that these bioethics principles simply could not, and would not, work. Because bioethics was derived from bits and pieces of fundamentally different and contradictory theoretical philosophical systems, the result was *theoretical* chaos, rendering it academically indefensible.

More problematic, when people *practically* tried to apply the theory, it didn’t work because there was no way to resolve the inherent conflicts among these three *prima facie* principles. Caution concerning this inherent conflict among the three bioethics principles had been voiced at the beginning of the field, e.g., by Paul Ramsey, who noted, “Within the amplitude ... of general ethics, our authors fail to address clearly and rigorously the issue: which of these moral principles has priority (e.g., in the case of

conflict)?” For example, how could a patient appeal to “autonomy” to have any and every medical treatment regardless of its efficacy or cost without contradicting an appeal to “justice” and the “fair” allocation of scarce medical resources? It couldn’t.

Furthermore, while the Belmont Report gave a little nod to the traditional Hippocratic understanding of beneficence as doing “good” for the *individual patient*, it also included a second lengthy definition of *beneficence* that was essentially utilitarian: doing “good” for *society*, or, “the greatest good for the greatest number”. The report even declared that citizens have a “strong moral obligation” to take part in experimental research for the greater good of society. This obviously contradicts the Hippocratic interpretation of beneficence, and it also violates time-honored international guidelines, such as the Nuremberg Code and the Declaration of Helsinki, in which the “good” of society may never outweigh the “good” of the individual patient.

The second Belmont principle, justice, was also defined along utilitarian lines, i.e., in terms of “fairness” — “fairness”, that is, in allocating the benefits and burdens of research fairly across the social spectrum. This Rawls-influenced definition of justice is surely quite different from the classic Aristotelian definition of “justice” as treating people fairly as individuals. Rawl’s “theory” of justice also profoundly influenced the theory-makers of bioethics from several other different academic disciplines. For example, it would later be adapted by his student Norman Daniels and applied to health care; it began to “creep into law”, e.g., through lawyer/bioethicist John Robertson, who quoted from Rawls in influencing the justices’ decision in the Saikewicz case — resulting in the still controversial legal concept of “substituted judgment”; it has also been applied by Arthur Dyck in international population policy issues.

Even the third Belmont Principle, respect for persons, ended up serving utilitarian goals. Respect for persons is supposed to be a Kantian notion, in which respect for the individual is absolute. But the Belmont Report blurred that idea with Mill’s utilitarian views of personal autonomy. In Mills’ view, only “persons” — that is, fully conscious, rational adults capable of acting autonomously — are defined as *moral agents with moral responsibilities*. Unfortunately, this issue of mere “moral agency and responsibility” was reinterpreted by bioethics to “read” that those incapable of acting “autonomously” — infants, the comatose, those with Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s, drug addicts, alcoholics, the mentally ill and mentally retarded, etc. — were “non-moral agents”, and thus “*non-persons*” with no rights. It is only a short step from this blurred reasoning to that of Princeton’s Peter Singer — a “preference” utilitarian who argues that some animals have more moral value than young human children or ill, disabled human adults.

CONCLUSION:

But we should know it for what it is: a form of extreme utilitarianism in both its theoretical and practical forms. It bears no relation to the patient-centered Hippocratic ethics that for nearly 2500 years required physicians to treat every human being in their care as worthy of respect, no matter now sick or small, weak or disabled. It certainly bears no relation to Roman Catholic medical ethics, which bases its ethics on the principles of the Moral Law.

ESSENCE of Natural Law:

In its strictly ethical application the natural law is the rule of conduct which is prescribed to us by the Creator in the constitution of the nature with which He has endowed us.

According to St. Thomas, the natural law is "nothing else than the rational creature's participation in the eternal law".

The eternal law is God's wisdom, inasmuch as it is the directive norm of all movement and action. When God willed to give existence to creatures, He willed to ordain and direct them to an end. In the case of inanimate things, this Divine direction is provided for in the nature which God has given to each; in them determinism reigns. Like all the rest of creation, man is destined by God to an end, and receives from Him a direction towards this end. This ordination is of a character in harmony with his free intelligent nature. In virtue of his intelligence and free will, man is master of his conduct. Unlike the things of the mere material world he can vary his action, act, or abstain from action, as he pleases. Yet he is not a lawless being in an ordered universe. In the very constitution of his nature, he too has a law laid down for him, reflecting that ordination and direction of all things, which is the eternal law. The rule, then, which God has prescribed for our conduct, is found in our nature itself. Those actions which conform with its tendencies, lead to our destined end, and are thereby constituted right and morally good; those at variance with our nature are wrong and immoral.

The norm, however, of conduct is not some particular element or aspect of our nature. The standard is our whole human nature with its manifold relationships, considered as a creature destined to a special end. Actions are wrong if, though subserving the satisfaction of some particular need or tendency, they are at the same time incompatible with that rational harmonious subordination of the lower to the higher which reason should maintain among our conflicting tendencies and desires (see "GOOD"). For example, to nourish our bodies is right; but to indulge our appetite for food to the detriment of our corporal or spiritual life is wrong. Self-preservation is right, but to refuse to expose our life when the well-being of society requires it, is wrong. It is wrong to drink to intoxication, for, besides being injurious to health, such indulgence deprives one of the use of reason, which is intended by God to be the guide and dictator of conduct. Theft is wrong, because it subverts the basis of social life; and man's nature requires for its proper development that he live in a state of society. There is, then, a double reason for calling this law of conduct natural: first, because it is set up concretely in our very nature itself, and second, because it is manifested to us by the purely natural medium of reason. In both respects it is distinguished from the Divine positive law, which contains precepts not arising from the nature of things as God has constituted them by the creative act, but from the arbitrary will of God. This law we learn not through the unaided operation of reason, but through the light of supernatural revelation.

We may now analyze the natural law into three constituents: the discriminating norm, the binding norm (norma obligans), and the manifesting norm.

The discriminating norm is, as we have just seen, human nature itself, objectively considered. It is, so to speak, the book in which is written the text of the law, and the classification of human actions into good and bad. Strictly speaking, our nature is the proximate discriminating norm or standard. The remote and ultimate norm, of which it is the partial reflection and application, is the Divine nature itself, the ultimate groundwork of the created order.

The binding or obligatory norm is the Divine authority, imposing upon the rational creature the obligation of living in conformity with his nature, and thus with the universal order established by the Creator. Contrary to the Kantian theory that we must not acknowledge any other lawgiver than conscience, the truth is that reason as conscience is only immediate moral authority which we are called upon to obey, and conscience itself owes its authority to the fact that it is the mouthpiece of the Divine will and imperium.

The manifesting norm (norma denuntians), which determines the moral quality of actions tried by the discriminating norm, is reason. Through this faculty we perceive what is the moral constitution of our nature, what kind of action it calls for, and whether a particular action possesses this requisite character.

THE CONTENTS OF THE NATURAL LAW

Radically, the natural law consists of one supreme and universal principle, from which are derived all our natural moral obligations or duties.

Catholic moralists, though agreeing upon the underlying conception of the Natural Law, have differed more or less in their expression of its fundamental formula. Among many others we find the following:

"Love God as the end and everything on account of Him";

"Live conformably to human nature considered in all its essential respects";

"Observe the rational order established and sanctioned by God";

"Manifest in your life the image of God impressed on your rational nature."

The exposition of St. Thomas is at once the most simple and philosophic. Starting from the premise that good is what primarily falls under the apprehension of the practical reason—that is of reason acting as the dictator of conduct—and that, consequently, the supreme principle of moral action must have the good as its central idea, he holds that the supreme principle, from which all the other principles and precepts are derived, is that **good is to be done, and evil avoided.**

Passing from the primary principle to the subordinate principles and conclusions, moralists divide these into two classes:

(1) those dictates of reason which flow so directly from the primary principle that they hold in practical reason the same place as evident propositions in the speculative sphere, or are at least easily deducible from the primary principle. Such, for instance, are "Adore God"; "Honor your parents"; "Do not steal";

(2) those other conclusions and precepts which are reached only through a more or less complex course of inference. It is this difficulty and uncertainty that requires the natural law to be supplemented by positive law, human and Divine. As regards the vigor and binding force of these precepts and conclusions, theologians divide them into two classes, primary and secondary.

To the first class belong those which must, under all circumstances, be observed if the essential moral order is to be maintained.

The secondary precepts are those whose observance contribute to the public and private good and are required for the perfection of moral development, but are not so absolutely necessary to the rationality of conduct that it may not be lawfully omitted under some special conditions. For example, under no circumstances is polyandry compatible with the moral order, while polygamy, though inconsistent with human relations in their proper moral and social development, is not absolutely incompatible with them under less civilized conditions.

THE QUALITIES OF THE NATURAL LAW

(a) The natural law is *universal*, that is to say, it applies to the entire human race, and is in itself the same for all. Every man, because he is a man, is bound, if he will conform to the universal order willed by the Creator, to live conformably to his own rational nature, and to be guided by reason. However, infants and insane persons, who have not the actual use of their reason and cannot therefore know the law, are not responsible for that failure to comply with its demands.

(b) The natural law is *immutable* in itself and also extrinsically. Since it is founded in the very nature of man and his destination to his end – two bases which rest upon the immutable ground of the eternal law—it follows that, assuming the continued existence of human nature, it cannot cease to exist. The natural law commands and forbids in the same tenor everywhere and always. We must, however, remember that this immutability pertains not to those abstract imperfect formulae in which the law is commonly expressed, but to the moral standard as it applies to action in the concrete, surrounded with all its determinate conditions. We enunciate, for instance, one of the leading precepts in the words: "Thou shalt not kill"; yet the taking of human life is sometimes a lawful, and even an obligatory act. Herein exists no variation in the law; what the law forbids is not all taking of life, but all unjust taking of life.

With regard to the possibility of any change by abrogation or dispensation, there can be no question of such being introduced by any authority except that of God Himself. But reason forbids us to think that even He could exercise such power, because, given the hypothesis that He wills man to exist, He wills him necessarily to live conformably to the eternal law, by observing in his conduct the law of reason. The Almighty, then, cannot be conceived as willing this and simultaneously willing the contradictory, that man should be set free from the law entirely through its abrogation, or partially through dispensation from it. It is true that some of the older theologians, followed or copied by some later ones, hold that God can dispense, and, in fact in some instances, has dispensed from the secondary precepts of the natural law, while others maintain that the bearing of the natural law is changed by the operation of positive law. However, an examination of the arguments offered in support of these opinions shows that the alleged examples of dispensation are: (a) cases where a change of conditions modifies the application of the law, or (b) cases concerning obligations not imposed as absolutely essential to the moral order, though their fulfillment is necessary for the full perfection of conduct, or (c) instances of *addition* made to the law.

As examples of the first category are cited God's permission to the Hebrews to despoil the Egyptians, and His command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. But it is not necessary to see in these cases a dispensation from the precepts forbidding theft and murder. As the Sovereign Lord of all things, He could withdraw from Isaac his right to life, and from the Egyptians their right of ownership, with the result that neither would the killing of Isaac be an unjust destruction of life, nor the appropriation of the Egyptians' goods the unjust taking of another's property. The classic instance alleged as an example of (b) is the legalization of polygamy among the Hebrews. Polygamy, however, is not under all circumstances incompatible with the essential principles of a rationally ordered life, since the chief ends prescribed by nature for the marital union—the propagation of the race and the due care and education of offspring—may, in certain states of society, be attained in a polygamous union. The theory that God can dispense from any part of the law, even from the secondary precepts, is scarcely compatible with the doctrine, which is the common teaching of the School, that the natural law is founded on the eternal law, and, therefore, has for its ultimate ground the immutable essence of God himself. As regards (c), when positive law, human or Divine, imposes obligations which only modify the bearing of the natural law, it cannot correctly be said to change it. Positive law may not ordain anything contrary to the natural law, from which it draws its authority; but it may—and this is one of its functions—determine with more precision the bearing of the natural law, and for good reasons, supplement its conclusions. For example, in the eyes of the natural law mutual verbal agreement to a contract is sufficient; yet, in many kinds of contract, the civil law declares that no agreement shall be valid, unless it be expressed in writing and signed by the parties before witnesses. In establishing this rule the civil authority merely exercises the power which it derives from the natural law to add to the operation of the natural law such conditions as the common good may call for.

Contrary to the almost universally received doctrine, a few theologians held erroneously that the natural law depends not on the essential necessary will of God, but upon His arbitrary positive will, and taught consistently with this view, that the natural law may be dispensed from or even abrogated by God. The conception, however, that the moral law is but an arbitrary enactment of the Creator, involves the denial of any absolute distinction between right and wrong—a denial which, of course, sweeps away the very foundation of the entire moral order.

GOOD: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06636b.htm>

“Good is to be done, and evil avoided” .. St Thomas Aquinas

"Good" is one of those primary ideas which cannot be strictly defined. In order to fix its philosophical significance we may begin by observing that the word is employed firstly as an adjective and secondly as a substantive. This distinction which is clearly marked in French by the two different terms, bon and le bien, may be preserved in English by prefixing an article to the term when it is employed substantively. We call a tool or instrument good, if it serves the purpose for which it is intended. That is to say, it is good because it is an efficient means to obtain a desired result. The result, in turn, may be desired for itself, or it may be sought as a means to some ulterior end. If it is sought for itself, it is or it is estimated by us to be a good, and therefore desirable on its own account. When we take some step to obtain it, it is the end of our action. The series of means and ends either stretches out indefinitely, or it must terminate in some desired object or objects which are ends in themselves. Again we sometimes call a thing good because it possesses completely, or in a high degree, the perfections proper to its nature, as a good painting, good respiration. Sometimes, too, things are termed good because they are of a nature to produce something desirable; that is, they are good casually. Finally, we speak of good conduct, a good man, a good intention, and here the adjective has for us a sense different from any of the foregoing, unless indeed, we are utilitarian philosophers, to whom morally good is but another term for useful.

- Now in all these locutions the word conveys directly or indirectly the idea of desirability. The merely useful is desired for the end towards which it is employed; the end is desired on its own account. The latter is conceived as possessing some character, quality, power, which renders it an object of desire. Two questions now arise:
- What is it which, in the nature or being of any object, constitutes it desirable? Or, in more technical phrase, what, metaphysically speaking, constitutes the good or goodness in a thing, absolutely considered?
- What is the relationship existing between the good thus absolutely constituted and the subject to which it is desirable? Or what is implied by good, relatively considered?

These two questions may be combined in one: "What is the good in the ontological order?" In exposing the reply to this question we shall come across the moral good, and the ethical aspect of the problem, which shall be treated in the second place.

ONTOLOGICAL

In Greek philosophy no topic receives more attention than the nature of the good. The speculations of Plato and Aristotle especially have had a notable influence on Christian thought; they were adopted, in eclectic fashion, by the early Fathers, who combined many of the ancient philosophic ideas with revealed truth, by correcting some and amplifying others. The synthesis was carried on by the earlier Scholastics, and took definitive form from the hand of St. Thomas, and is a good approximation of Catholic teaching in this regard).

Plato

According to Plato, in the objective order corresponding to our thought, there are two different worlds: the world of things, and the incomparably higher, nobler world of ideas, which transcends the world of things. The objects corresponding directly to our universal concepts are not things, but ideas. The objective idea is not indwelling in the essences of those things which fall within the scope of our corresponding universal concept, but the thing borrows or derives something from the idea. While the being or existence proper to the world of things is imperfect, unstable, essentially transitory, and therefore not truly deserving of the name of being, which implies permanence, ideas on the contrary are incorruptible, unchangeable, and truly existence. Now, among ideas the noblest and highest is the idea good: it is the supreme and sovereign idea. Whatever things possess goodness have it only because they participate in or draw from, the Sovereign Good. Their goodness then, is something distinct from, and added to, their proper essences or being. This sovereign idea, the Good, is identical with God. It is not a synthesis of all other ideas but is unique, transcendent, and individual. The Supreme Good imparts to the intellect the power to perceive, and gives intelligibility to the intelligible. It is, therefore, the source of truth. God, the essential and supreme Good, can impart nothing that is not good. This view leads to the inference that the origin of evil lies beyond the control of God.

Aristotle

Starting from the Platonic definition, good is that which all desire, Aristotle, rejecting the Platonic doctrine of a transcendent world of ideas, holds that the good and being are identical; good is not something added to being, it is being. Everything that is, is good because it is; the quantity, if one may use the word loosely, of being or existence which a thing possesses, is at the same time the stock of goodness. A diminution or an increase of its being is a diminution or increase of its goodness. Being and the good are, then, objectively the same, every being is good, every

good is being. Our concepts, being and good differ formally: the first simply denotes existence; the second, existence as perfection, or the power of contributing to the perfection of a being. It follows from this that evil is not being at all; it is, on the contrary, the privation of being. As god is the fullness of being, so, therefore, the supreme, infinite Being is also the Supreme Good from which all creatures derive their being and goodness.

Neo-Platonism

The neo-Platonists perpetuated the Platonic theory, mixed with Aristotelean, Judaic, and other oriental ideas. Plotinus introduced the doctrine of a triple hypostasis, i.e. the one, the intelligence, and the universal soul, above the world of changing being, which is multiple. The intelligence is ordained to good; but, incapable of grasping it in its entirety, it breaks it up into parts, which constitute the essences. These essences by becoming united with a material principle constitute things. The Pseudo-Dionysius propagated the Platonic influence in his work "De Nominibus Divinis", the doctrine of which is based on the scriptures. God is supereminently being -- "I am who am" -- but in Him the good is anterior to being, and the ineffable name of God is above all His other names. The good is more universal than being, for it embraces the material principle which does not possess any being of its own. The bond which unites beings among themselves and to the Supreme Being is love, which has for its object the good. The trend of the Pseudo-Dionysius is away from the dualism which admits a principle of evil, but on the other hand, it inclines towards pantheism.

The Fathers

The Fathers, in general, treated the question of good from the standpoint of hermeneutics rather than from the philosophic. Their chief concern is to affirm that God is the Supreme Good, that He is the creator of all that exists, that creatures derive their goodness from Him, while they are distinct from Him; and that there is no supreme independent, principle of evil. St. Augustine, however (De Natura boni, P.L., XLIII), examines the topic fully and in great detail. Some of his expressions seem tinged with the Platonic notion that good is antecedent to being; but elsewhere he makes the good, and being in God fundamentally identical. Boethius distinguishes a double goodness in things created; first, that which in them is one with their being; second, an accidental goodness added to their nature by God. In God these two elements of good, the essential and the accidental, are but one, since there are no accidents in God.

Scholastic Doctrine / St. Thomas

St. Thomas starts from the Aristotelean principle that being and the good are objectively one. Being conceived as desirable is the good. The good differs from the true in this, that, while both are objectively nothing else than being, the good is being considered as the object of appetite, desire, and will, the true is being the object of the intellect. God, the Supreme Being and the source of all other being is consequently the Supreme Good, and the goodness of creatures results from the diffusion of His goodness. In a creature, considered as a subject having existence, we distinguish several elements of the goodness which it possesses:

- Its existence or being, which is the ground of all the other elements.
- Its powers, activities, and capacities. These are the complement of the first, and they serve it to pursue and appropriate whatever is requisite for and contributory to sustaining its existence, and developing that existence into the fullness of perfection proper to it.
- Each perfection that is acquired is a further measure of existence for it, hence a good.
- The totality of these various elements, forming its total good subjectively, that is, its entire being in a state of normal perfection according to its mind, is its good complete. This is the sense of the axiom: *omne ens est bonum sibi* (every being is a good unto itself).

The privation of any of its powers or due perfections is an evil for it, as, for instance, blindness, the loss of the power of sight, is an evil for an animal. Hence evil is not something positive and does not exist in itself; as the axiom expresses it, *malum in bono fundatur* (evil has its base in good).

Let us pass now to good in the relative sense. Every being has a natural tendency to continue and to develop itself. This tendency brings its activities into play; each power has its proper object, and a conatus pushing it to action. The end to which action is directed is something that is of a nature to contribute, when obtained, to the well-being or perfection of the subject. For this reason it is needed, pursued, desired, and, because of its desirability, is designated good. For example, the plant for its existence and development requires light, air, heat, moisture, nutriment. It has various organs adapted to appropriate these things, which are good for it, and, when by the exercise of these functions it acquires and appropriates them, it reaches its perfection and runs its course in nature. Now if we look into the cosmos, we perceive that the innumerable varieties of being in it are bound together in an indescribably complex system of mutual action and interaction, as they obey the laws of their nature. One class contributes to the other in that orderly relationship which constitutes the harmony of the universe. True -- to change the metaphor -- with our limited powers of observation we are unable to follow the innumerable threads of this large and varied sweeps to warrant the induction that everything is good for some other thing, that everything has its proper end in the great whole. *Omne ens est bonum alteri*. Since this orderly correlation of things is necessary to them in order that they may obtain from one another the help which they need, it too is good for them. This order is also a good in itself, because it is a created reflection of the unity and harmony of the Divine being and goodness. When we consider the Supreme Being as the efficient cause, conserver, and director of this majestic order, we reach the conception of Divine providence. And then arises the question, what is the end towards which this

Providence directs the universe? The end again is the good, i.e. God Himself. Not indeed that, as in the case of creatures He may derive any advantage or perfection from the world, but that it, by participating in His goodness, may manifest it. This manifestation is what we understand by the expression, giving glory to God. God is the Alpha and the Omega of the good; the source from which it flows, the end to which it returns. I am the Beginning and I am the End. It must be remembered that, throughout the treatment of this subject, the term *good*, like all other terms which we predicate of God and of creatures is used not univocally but analogically when referred to God.

This one, only, true God, of His own goodness and almighty power, not for the increase of His own happiness, not to acquire but to manifest His perfection by the blessings which He bestows on creatures, with absolute freedom of counsel created from the beginning of time both the spiritual and the corporeal creature, to wit, the angelic and the mundane; and afterwards the human creature.

In Canon 4 we read: "If anyone shall say that finite things, both corporeal and spiritual, or at least spiritual, have emanated from the Divine substance; or that the Divine essence, by the manifestation and evolution of itself, becomes all things; or lastly, that God is universal or indefinite being, which by determining itself constitutes the universality of things distinct according to genera species, and individuals, let him be anathema."

Ethics:

The moral good is not a kind, distinct from the good viewed ontologically; it is one form of perfection proper to human life, but, because of its excellence and supreme practical importance, it demands special treatment with reference to its own distinctive character which differentiates it from all other goods and perfections of man. It is again, in Greek philosophy, that we find the principles which have supplied the school with a basis for rational speculations, controlled and supplemented by revelation.

Plato

The supreme good of man is, as we have seen, the idea *good*, identical with God. By union with God man attains his highest subjective good, which is happiness. This assimilation is effected by knowledge and love; the means to achieve it is to preserve in the soul a due harmony throughout its various parts in subordination to the intellect which is the highest faculty. The establishment of this harmony brings man to a participation in the Divine unity; and through this union man attains to happiness, which remains even though he suffers pain and the privation of perishable goods. To regulate our actions harmoniously we stand in need of true knowledge, i.e. wisdom. The highest duty of man, therefore, is to obtain wisdom, which leads to God.

Aristotle

The end of man, his highest subjective good, is happiness or well-being. Happiness is not pleasure; for pleasure is a feeling consequent upon action, while happiness is a state of activity. Happiness consists in perfect action, i.e. the actual exercise by man of his faculties -- especially of his highest faculty, the speculative intellect -- in perfect correspondence, with the norm which his nature itself prescribes. Action may deviate from this norm either by excess or defect. The golden mean is to be preserved, and in this consists virtue. The various faculties, higher and lower, are regulated by their respective virtues to carry on their activities in due order. Pleasure follows action duly performed, even the highest form of activity, i.e. speculative contemplation of truth; but, as has been noted, happiness consists in the very operation itself. A life of contemplation, however, cannot be enjoyed unless a man possesses enough goods of the lower orders to relieve him from the toils and the cares of life. Hence happiness is beyond the reach of many. It is to be observed therefore that, while both Plato and Aristotle, as well as the Scholastics, hold that happiness is the end of man, their conception of happiness is quite different from the hedonistic idea of happiness as presented in English utilitarianism. For the utilitarian happiness is the sum total of pleasurable feelings, from whatever source they may be derived. On the other hand, in our sense, happiness -- *eudaimonia*, *beatitudo* -- is a distinct state or condition of consciousness accompanying and dependent on the realization in conduct of one definite good or perfection, the nature of which is objectively fixed and not dependent on our individual preferences. (*See UTILITARIANISM*).

Hedonists

The supreme good of man according to Aristippus is pleasure or the enjoyment of the moment, and pleasure is essentially gentle motion. Pleasure can never be bad, and the primary form of it is bodily pleasure. But, in order to secure the maximum of pleasure, prudent self-control is necessary; and this is virtue. Epicurus held that pleasure is the chief good; but pleasure is rest, not motion; and the highest form of pleasure is freedom from pain and the absence of all desires or needs that we cannot satisfy. Hence an important means towards happiness is the control of our desires, and the extinction of those that we cannot gratify, which is brought about by virtue.

The Stoics

Everything in the universe is regulated by law. Man's highest good, or happiness, is to conform his conduct to universal law, which is Divine in its origin. To pursue this end is virtue. Virtue is to be cultivated in scorn of consequences, whether pleasurable or painful. The Stoic principle, "duty for duty's sake alone", reappears in Kant, with the modification that the norm of right action is not to be regarded as imposed by a Divine will; its original source is the human mind, or the free spirit itself.

St. Thomas:

The radical difference which distinguishes the nobler forms of ancient ethics from Christian ethics is that, whereas the former identifies virtuous life with happiness, that is, with the possession and enjoyment of the highest good, the Christian conception is that a virtuous life, while it is, indeed, the proximate end and good of man, is not, in itself, his ultimate end and supreme good. A life of virtue, the moral good, leads him to the acquisition of an ulterior and ultimate end. Furthermore the happiness, which in an imperfect measure attends the virtuous life, may be accompanied with pain, sorrow, and the privation of terrestrial goods; complete happiness (*beatitudo*) is not to be found in earthly existence, but in the life to come, and will consist in union with God, the Supreme Good.

(A) *The Proximate End and Good (Bonum Morale)*

Like all creatures involved in the cosmic system, man requires and seeks for the conservation and perfection of his being a variety of things and conditions, all of which are, therefore, good for him. A composite being, partly corporeal and partly spiritual, he possesses two sets of tendencies and appetites. Rational, he employs contrivance in order to obtain goods not immediately within his reach. That he may attain the perfection of this highly complex nature, he must observe an order in the pursuit of different kinds of goods, lest the enjoyment of a good of lower value may cause him to lose or forfeit a higher one, in which case the former would be no true benefit to him at all. Besides, with a hierarchy of activities, capacities, and needs, he is a unity, an individual, a person; hence there exists for him a good in which all his other goods focus in harmonious correlation; and they are to be viewed and valued through the medium of this paramount good, not merely in isolated relation to their respective corresponding appetites.

There are, then, several divisions of good;

- corporeal good is whatever contributes to the perfection of the purely animal nature;
- spiritual good is that which perfects the spiritual faculty-knowledge, truth;
- useful good is that which is desired merely as a means to something else; the delectable or pleasurable good is any good regarded merely in the light of the pleasure it produces.

The moral good (*bonum honestum*) consists in the due ordering of free action or conduct according to the norm of reason, the highest faculty, to which it is to conform.

This is the good which determines the true valuation of all other goods sought by the activities which make up conduct. Any lower good acquired to the detriment of this one is really but a loss (*bonum apparens*). While all other kinds of good may, in turn, be viewed as means, the moral good is good as an end and is not a mere means to other goods. The pleasurable, though not in the order of things an independent end in itself, may be deliberately chosen as an end of action, or object of pursuit. Now let us apply these distinctions. Good being the object of any tendency, man has as many kinds of goods as he has appetites, needs, and faculties. The normal exercise of his powers and the acquisition thereby of any good is followed by satisfaction, which, when it reaches a certain degree of intensity, is the feeling of pleasure. He may and sometimes does pursue things not on account of their intrinsic worth, but simply that he may obtain pleasure from them. On the other hand, he may seek a good on account of its intrinsic power to satisfy a need or to contribute to the perfection of his nature in some respect. This may be illustrated in the case of food; for as the old adage has it, "the wise man eats to live, the epicure lives to eat."

The faculty which is distinctively human is reason; man lives as a man properly speaking, when all his activities are directed by reason according to the law which reason reads in his very nature. This conformity of conduct to reason dictates is the highest natural perfection that his activities can possess; it is what is meant by rectitude of conduct, righteousness, or the moral good. "Those actions", says St. Thomas, "are good which are conformable to reason. Those are bad which are contrary to reason" "The proximate rule of free action is reason, the remote is the eternal law, that is, the Divine Nature". The motive impelling us to seek the moral good is not self-interest, but the intrinsic worth of righteousness. Why does a just man pay his debts? Ask him and he will reply, perhaps, in the first instance, "Because it is my duty". But ask him further: "Why do you fulfill this duty?" He will answer: "Because it is *right* to do so". When other goods are pursued in violation of the rational order, action is deprived of its due moral perfection and, therefore, becomes wrong or bad, though it may retain all its other ontological goodness. The good which is the object of such an action, although it retains its particular relative goodness with regard to the want which it serves, is not a good for the whole personality. For example, if, on a day when flesh meat is forbidden, a man dines on roast-beef, the food is just as good physically as it would be on any other day, but this goodness is outweighed, because his action is a violation of reason which dictates that he ought to obey the command of lawful authority.

While the moral good is fixed by the Author of nature, yet, because man is endowed with free will or the power of electing which good he shall make the goal of action, he can, if he pleases, ignore the dictates of right reason and seek his other goods in a disorderly manner. He may pursue pleasure, riches, fame, or any other desirable end, though his conscience -- that is, his reason - tells him that the means which he takes to satisfy his desire is wrong. He thereby frustrates his rational nature and deprives himself of his highest perfection. He cannot change the law of things, and this privation of his highest good is the immediate

essential punishment incurred by his violation of the moral law. Another punishment is that the loss is attended, generally speaking, by that peculiar painful feeling called remorse; but this effect may cease to be perceived when the moral impulses of reason have been habitually disregarded.

In order that an action may possess in an essential degree -- no action is absolutely perfect -- its moral perfection, it must be in conformity with the law in three respects:

- The action, considered under the character by which it ranks as an element of conduct, must be good. The physical act of giving another person money may be either an act of justice, when one pays a debt, or it may be an act of mercy or benevolence, as it is if one give the money to relieve distress. Both, of these actions possess the fundamental element of goodness (*bonum ex objecto*).
- The motive, if there is a motive beyond the immediate object of the act, must also be good. If one pays a man some money that one owes him with the purpose, indeed, of paying one's debts, but also with the ulterior purpose of enabling him to carry out a plot to murder one's enemy, the end is bad, and the action is thereby vitiated. The end which is the motive must also be good (*bonum ex fine*). Thus, an action, otherwise good, is spoiled if directed to an immoral end; conversely, however, an action which in its fundamental character is bad is not rendered good by directing it to a good end. The end does not justify the means.
- The circumstances under which the action is performed should be in entire conformity with reason, otherwise it lacks something of moral completeness, though it may not be thereby rendered totally immoral. We frequently say that something which a person has done was right enough in itself, but he did not do it in the proper place or season.

This triple goodness is expressed in the axiom: *bonum ex integra causa, malum ex quocumque defectu* ("**An action is good when good in every respect; it is wrong when wrong in any respect**").

(B) *The Ultimate Good -- God -- Beatitude*

The perfection of life, then, is to realize the moral good. But now arises the question: "Is life its own end?" Or, in other words: "What is the ultimate end appointed for man?" To answer this question we must consider the good first under the aspect of end. We consider the good first under the aspect of end. "We do not act alone", says St. Thomas, "for an immediate end, but all our actions converge towards an ultimate end or good, otherwise the entire series would be aimless." The test by which we may determine whether any object of pursuit is the ultimate end is: "Does it satisfy all desire?" If it does not, it is not adequate to complete man's perfection and establish him in the possession of his highest good and consequent happiness. Here St. Thomas, following St. Augustine, examines the various objects of human desire -- pleasure, riches, power, fame, etc. -- and rejects them all as inadequate. What then is the highest good, the ultimate end? St. Thomas appeals to Revelation which teaches that in life to come the **righteous shall possess and enjoy God himself in endless fruition**. The argument is summed up in the well-known words of St. Augustine: "Thou has made us, O Lord, for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee". The moral condition necessary to this future consummation is that our wills be here conformed to the Divine will as expressed in the moral law and in His revealed positive law. Thus the attainment of the proximate good in this life leads to the possession of the Supreme Good in the next. Another condition indispensable is that our actions be vivified by Divine grace. What precisely will be the act by which the soul will apprehend the Sovereign Good is a disputed question among theologians. The Thomist theory is that it will be an act of the intellect, while the Scotist opinion is that it will be an act of the will. However this may be, one thing is dogmatically certain: the soul in this assimilation shall not lose its selfhood, nor be absorbed according to the pantheistic sense in the Divine Substance.

In conclusion, we may now state in a word the central idea of our doctrine. God as Infinite Being is Infinite Good; creatures are good because they derive their measure of being from Him. This participation manifests His goodness, or glorifies God, which is the end for which he created man. The rational creature is destined to be united to God as the Supreme End and Good in a special manner. In order that he may attain to this consummation, it is necessary that in this life, by conforming his conduct to conscience, the interpreter of the moral law, he realizes in himself the righteousness which is the true perfection of his nature. Thus God is the Supreme Good, as principle and as end. "I am the beginning and I am the end."