

MORAL THEOLOGY

INTRINSIC EVIL: THE TRADITION, THE DEBATE, AND SOME EFFORT AT RESOLUTION

Presenters: James J. Walter, Loyola University Chicago
Lisa Sowle Cahill, Boston College

Each presenter was allotted twenty minutes to offer some initial reflections. This format was chosen both to permit the presenters greater flexibility and tentativeness in their material and to allow reasonable time for scholarly discussion to follow. Originally Michael Place (Archdiocese of Chicago) was to have been the first presenter. The news of Cardinal Bernardin's cancer led to Fr. Place's early departure. He passed his notes and apologies along to the conveners, who pressed James Walter into service with only twenty-four hours notice.

Walter's task was to sketch the history of the concept "intrinsic evil" and to give some shape to the current proportionalist debate. He divided his presentation into four segments: (1) definition and brief history of "intrinsic moral evil"; (2) categories of intrinsic moral evil, behavioral norms, and moral principles; (3) presuppositions to the doctrine of intrinsic moral evil; and (4) problematic areas. Drawing on the writing of John Dedek, Walter differentiated the concept of intrinsic evil from the Thomistic notions of natural evil and physical evil as well as from what was meant by *malum in se* and *malum secundum se*. Durandus of St. Pourcain (14th c.) is credited with applying the term "intrinsic evil" to actions in the concrete which are seen as morally wrong in themselves (*ex objecto*), apart from and regardless of circumstances and consequences.

These intrinsically evil acts fall into two categories, those *contra naturam* (e.g., lying and sex not open to unitive and procreative meanings) and those *ex defectu juris in agente* (e.g., suicide and direct killing of the innocent). These norms are grounded deontologically by reference either to God's creative will or to divine preogative and find expression in the principle of double effect. After naming some of the anthropological, theological, moral, psychological, social, and ecclesiological presuppositions of the doctrine, Walter concluded with a succinct overview of the 1965-present proportionalist discussion.

Lisa Sowle Cahill began by noting that traditional double effect discussions assume a neo-Scholastic, neo-Kantian, and modern scientific model of knowl-

edge, which claims to offer a "formula" which can give certain and consistent results. Thus, moral knowledge is seen as rational and intellectual, while the movement from principles to cases is deductive, syllogistic, logical, "algorithmic."

Proportionalism might best be viewed as a set of questions pointing to the emergence of newer models of "knowledge" and "judgment," influenced by historical consciousness and postmodernism. The "due proportion" criterion introduces the importance of *balance* in acting prudently and, hence, opens the door to a more inductive, practical, affective, and, at times, ambiguous moral method.

Drawing on the work of Jonsen/Toulmin and Jean Porter, Cahill proposes that moral thinking is *analogical* and *practical*. A concept of "intrinsic evil" is not derived from first principles, but is generalized from cases (what harms or destroys human dignity and relationships), which is then applied analogically to other cases. The test of whether we understand the rationale behind a general prohibition (e.g. murder) is *action*, not an intellectual concept. Both Aquinas and the NT demonstrate the importance of generalization from experience, analogical thinking, practical wisdom, and virtue within the community, in upholding moral ideals and discerning evil.

A discussion followed among the more than 90 attendees. Philip Rossi (Marquette University) was selected as coconvener with Dolores Christie (Ursuline College) for 1996.

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