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# NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING



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Caring for Persons:  
An Introduction to Natural (Person) Law, Part III  
*Robert E. Joyce*

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# Caring for Persons: An Introduction to Natural (Person) Law, Part III

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Robert E. Joyce

*Editors' note: The following is Part III of a four-part series on the natural moral law, written with the natural family planning advocate in mind. The next issue of the IRNFP will publish Part IV. Dr. Joyce's outline of the complete series, which follows, will assist the reader in putting Part III in perspective:*

- Part I: The Meaning of Morality*
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  - 7. Necessary Conditions for a Loving Action*
  - 8. How to Resolve Moral Dilemmas*

## **Part III: Being Who You Really Are**

### **5. Your Absolute Responsibility**

**T**HE STORY is told of the Hindu wiseman who lived on a mountain. He was known widely for his insight and advice. Many came to his dwelling for inspiration and counsel on the most serious matters of life.

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One day some young boys from the local community were playing at the foot of the mountain. In a childish burst of bravado, Ravi, a bit of a smart-aleck, said to the others, "Hey, let us see how wise the old man on the mountain really is. See this little bird. We will go up there, and I will put the bird behind my back. Then I will ask him whether the bird in my hand is dead or alive. If he says it is dead, I will open my hand and let the bird fly away. If he says it is alive, I will crush the bird and drop it at his feet.

So the boys climbed the mountain and confronted the sage. Ravi spoke at once. "Oh, wise one, is the bird in my hand dead or alive?" The old man looked at him thoughtfully for a few moments and said, "The answer, my son, lies in your hands."

### *Attitudes*

The answer to life is in our attitudes. More than what Ravi would do to the bird, his attitude toward the bird and the wiseman spoke volumes about the kind of person he was at that time. As a result of this confrontation with the sage, Ravi might be free to take a more deliberate attitudinal stand: with or against reverence for persons and respect for life. Such a decision would be critically personal in a way that his disposal or release of the bird never could be. Ravi's attitude toward himself and all others intimately reveals the kind of person he is coming to be. His attitude is his primary responsibility in life, his basic ethical condition, and the heart of his character.

Attitudes are the spirit of our actions. They serve critically to determine actions. To a certain extent, other people can change our actions—at least much of the sheerly behavioral aspects of them. The other boys could have prevented Ravi from going up to the sage with such a trite, irreverent, mocking question. But neither they nor the wiseman himself could effect a change in Ravi's basic attitude, no matter how assiduously they might try.

I cannot change your attitude. You cannot change mine. Each person is unique. Each person is also responsible for his or her acts, especially at the level of attitude.

Your uniqueness invites me to affirm you, love you, and care greatly about your welfare. At the same time, your radical responsibility for your own acts challenges me to respect your power to know, deliberate, and freely choose the kind of person you *will* to be in each of your acts. How can I creatively and fruitfully *help* you to become a better person, *rather than hinder* you in that primary endeavor? Perhaps, by taking full responsibility for my own attitudes and actions, and sincerely trying to know, express, and *will* into my own life whatever makes attitudes and actions to be truly human and loving.

Our development as responsible persons is the history of our development in attitudes that are mature, healthy, profoundly stable, and dynamic. While our attitudes at any age are largely conditioned by the attitudes and behaviors of our parents, peers, colleagues, friends, and culture generally, something about them says who we uniquely and responsibly choose to be. Attitudes are the primary stuff of the critical level of human freedom: the freedom of self-determination.

#### *Self-Determination and Responsibility*

The word *self-determination* has at least two significantly different meanings.

In the last section, I indicated that the third level of human freedom might be called the freedom of self-determination, because it is in taking a stand toward human nature or your nature as a person—your *self*—that you determine the kind of person you will be. The term *self* here refers to the content of all determinations, good or bad. You have a self or person-nature, which a dog or a tree simply does not have. That self is present within, and forms a structure for every one of your acts, whether you like it or not. Your third-level freedom is your ability to participate well or poorly in the human nature that we commonly share—a nature that is a self-nature, not a thing-nature. You are determined, therefore, not only by your goals, which are necessarily other than your self and your actions (second level freedom), but also by your own self-nature (third level freedom).

Another basic meaning for the word *self-determination* involves the characteristics of uniqueness and responsibility for our own actions. I am not simply *a* self. I am this unique self, Robert Joyce. I determine this self. I do not determine whether I am a self, or whether I am *this* self. Nor do I determine all of the conditions and circumstances under which this self acts. But I do determine at least part of the way in which I, this self, responds to the conditions and circumstances of life. I am *response-able*—able to respond to life, not simply to react. Animals and plants act or react toward life, but you and I as human persons can do more than that. We can respond. We can put ourselves uniquely into each of our self-conscious acts.

Your life is not my life. You are responsible for creatively living in accord with both our common nature as persons and your unique nature as you. Everyone ought to be willing to help you develop in both of these intimately related endeavors of your life. Others can say much by way of giving direct guidance for your healthy participation in our common human nature since they share in it directly. But no one can give you directly any guidance on becoming more richly the unique person that you already are. The study of ethics provides direct guidance on how to act *as a person* (and how not to act). It gives only indirect guidance on how to act *as this unique* person. So, ethics is truly personal in two main ways. Directly by guiding the relationships of a person as a person, and indirectly by guiding the relationships of a person as an individual.

Let us now turn to consider the general criterion for acting responsibly or irresponsibly *as a person*.

#### *A General Criterion for Morally Good and Bad Actions*

The Personal Development Theory of natural law provides a primary criterion for our development as persons. Here we will consider that general criterion. In a later section, I will discuss the necessary conditions for morally sound behavior, which this general criterion implies.

The primary criterion for our development as persons is similar

to the primary criterion for our development as organisms. The latter development is regarded as positive and healthy, if the actions of the organism, along with its interactions with other organisms and the environment, truly foster greater freedom and a more vibrant life. Any action or interaction that really helps to maintain, sustain, or enrich the organism is regarded as good. Any action or interaction that really hinders the maintenance, growth, or vigor of the organism is regarded as bad. If a horse or a man eats an apple under almost any condition, that action or transaction is good for the organism as an organism. If a horse or a man consumes strychnine under any condition, that action is bad for the organism as an organism.

Similarly, development as a person may be regarded as positive and healthy—morally sound—if the actions of the persons and the community directly and truly foster greater human freedom and a more vibrant personal life. Any deliberate, freely chosen action that helps to maintain, sustain, or enrich the person and the community is regarded as morally good. Any such action that really hinders the maintenance, growth, or dignity of the person and the community is regarded as morally bad. If you tell me the truth when I ask you a question for which I have a right to some information, your action or transaction is morally good—good for you *as a person*. If I freely and deliberately kill a two-year-old child, that action is morally bad—bad for me *as a person*.

Your acts of self-determination as *this* unique self, together with your acts of self-determination as *a* self (*a* person), are reasonably evaluated by this general criterion for a morally good or bad act. The act is good insofar as it develops your self as a unique self *and* as a person *positively*. If it makes you a more richly unique person, as unique *and* as a person, then it is a responsible act of self-determination. The act is bad in so far as it develops your self as a self and as a person *negatively*. If it makes you less a unique person, as unique *and* as a person, then it is an irresponsible act of self-determination.

If you tell me the truth, when I have a right and a good reason to know it, then you deepen somewhat your participation in your

nature as a truth-revealing being. Persons find within themselves the ultimate good of sharing what is true. Telling the truth is a good end in itself. Every time we deliberately tell the truth, under appropriate conditions, we enhance our being as persons. If you tell me what is not true, when I have a right and a good reason to know what is true, then you lessen somewhat your participation in your nature as a truth-revealing being. Such an action does not enrich your health and well-being *as a person* (though it could conceivably under certain conditions, keep you alive as an organism). It weakens your health as a person. It is not positive development, but cancerous development—the kind that can metastasize readily to many other occasions of moral action and other areas of your moral being.

Another way in which the general criterion for morally good and bad actions can be understood involves a basic consideration of two kinds of choice, or two significantly different attitudes with which we can do our choosing.

Basically our moral choices are made with either an inclusivistic or an exclusivistic attitude.

The simplest way to see a difference is to consider a case of “sour grapes.” If Tom, a college student, asks Kathy to marry him and she refuses, he might reveal an exclusivistic attitude. Tom might think to himself, in the midst of the pain of rejection, “Oh, well, she wasn’t really a loving woman after all. I pity the poor guy she finally traps!” This revelation of his attitude indicates that even when he chose to ask Kathy, rather than Diane or Grace, to marry him, he did so in an exclusivistic way. He chose a course of action—marriage to Kathy—in such a way that he had to *possess* the good as though it were his own property (Kathy) or else it was *not* a good. Marriage *is* made to be a certain kind of exclusive choice—when marrying one person, all others are excluded from that particular kind of relationship—but it is not made to be chosen exclusivistically. Tom is down-grading the choice of Kathy as a marital partner for any other fellow who might choose to ask her.

If Tom had chosen to seek marriage with Kathy in an inclu-

sivistic way, after her refusal, he might have thought to himself like this: "Kathy is a beautiful person; some other guy is going to be fortunate to share life with her. There is probably someone else 'waiting' for me." If he remains positive toward Kathy *and* toward himself, after the rejection, it can be said that he chose to ask her with an inclusivistic attitude. He cared about her as a person—and about himself and others as persons.

The tendency that all of us have to devalue whatever alternatives we do not happen to choose or that we would choose if they were accessible to us marks our potential for exclusivistic choice. Such choice shrinks us as persons. During and after the choice, we are less alive, less functionally human. We choose in a contra-personal manner, and that is the essence of morally wrong behavior.

When we choose with gratitude, detachment, and various other qualities (examined in a later section), we are choosing inclusivistically. In making our choices, we include the basic good of all others. And we include all the basic goodness, not just that which is advantageous toward attaining our objectives. We are enlarged as persons, right within the choice itself. We are richer, freer beings for having made our choice in that inclusivistic manner. The choice is done in a pro-personal way, and that is the essence of morally right behavior.

This criterion for a morally good action provides a definite principle of guidance for the popular question: What is the loving thing to do? The definite principle of guidance for any attitude or action that would be truly loving might be said this way: So choose that your choice necessarily respects all of the basic goodness of all persons concerned, and thereby fosters, rather than hinders, your growth as an authentic person. In other words, always choose with an inclusivistic attitude.

### *Moral Growth*

Growth as a person *is* moral growth. This kind of growth, through person-fulfilling choices, is like physical growth in some respects. Both are ongoing. But moral growing never stops (at



least not in this world). As persons, we are called to participate in our own nature, which is a good end in itself. No one can become so perverted, even by his or her own freely chosen acts, that he or she becomes no longer a good end in himself or herself. If my actions are contra-personal, they are contra-self; they are contra-good-in-itself. Our inexhaustibly good personhood is the content of our participation.

We are not spectators of ourselves. We are not merely cheering ourselves on. We necessarily participate in being and becoming who we are. Moral growing in the goodness of our natural selves has no limits. But failing to grow or growing negatively (cancerously, disorderly, and wildly) definitely has limits and can become, in effect, terminal.

There may be stages of development and maturity with respect to the motives we adduce for acting in morally sound ways. Moral growth includes the development of our powers to reason about *why* we consider certain kinds of action good or bad. But moral growth is not only cognitive. It is volunative. Good will is more important than good reasons—although the kind of reasons are part of the level of moral maturity that one attains.

Personal growth for human beings—including the moral dimension—requires time. Certain ethical evaluations and decisions in the course of life may catapult us forward or backward in our development. Others inch us, so to speak, positively or negatively along our self-determining way. The choice of a good marriage partner, for instance, if it is made in an inclusivistic manner, will enrich one immensely as a person. Choice of a healthful food at dinner, if similarly made, will form new healthy “cells” in the “body” of one’s moral being. Yet, in anyone’s life there are likely to be both great and small acts of choice that damage and detract from development toward moral fulfillment. No one is perfect.

The Personal Development Theory of natural law respects human weakness as well as human strength. If someone has failed miserably as a person (morally), he or she can realize that since the participants are all involved in inexhaustible goodness, failure

is not far from success. A single act of genuine sorrow (repentance, in religious terms) is a choice that turns one's whole life around. Growth can then proceed in the opposite direction. By a single act of pro-personal commitment, contra-personal acts of the past are transformed into healing wounds. In fact, a single act of inclusivistic choice can serve as the acceptance of oneself as intrinsically good, despite previous ill will. One can find, in the heart of one's attitudes, at least a spark of self-compassion—making it possible to love oneself all the more for having returned from being so alienated from moral goodness.

In trying to account for the importance of moral growth, however, we need to be careful to distinguish between the norm and the ideal. Many people seem to think that ethics or morality is concerned mainly with the ideal. Their misconception may come from the tendency to treat moral good as though it were a *goal*. Moral guidance is not guidance for goal-striving, but for the elementary celebration and participation in personal goodness. So, we can say that ethics is mainly concerned with the *norms* for essentially good or bad action, not with the ideals.

Moral norms are criteria for what is good or bad human action. Moral ideals are criteria for what is extremely (even heroically) good in human action. Ethics or moral philosophy is chiefly concerned with the norms and the natural. Ideals are important. But they pertain to what is abnormally good (even great) personal conduct. Ideals are a necessary part of ethical consideration, just as norms or basic standards are. But ideals presuppose ethics, the critical consideration of what behavior and character is *essentially* good.

In the natural law tradition of ethics, consideration of what is good character has an important place. Good character is the result of both a consistent activity on behalf of harmonious purposes and a disposition toward further activity of this kind. In this brief study of general ethics, we will not be able to develop the idea of virtue or good character. But we can acknowledge that it is the personal fruit of wholehearted effort to do the loving thing, day after day. Good character is the flower of moral growth.

*You, the Basis of Moral Absolutes*

Ethical or moral truth is, like any other truth, absolute. If it were not, then an ordered, harmonious growth as a person would be impossible. Virtuous action and heroic moral deeds, such as those historically celebrated in Socrates, Jesus, Thomas More, Maria Goretti, and Joan of Arc, would be impossible without absolute moral principles. Human nature, the basis of moral absolutes, is both ever changing and ever the same. You *as a person* are the absolute basis for the rightness or wrongness of any of your acts. As a human being, you are the dynamic, everchanging, yet entirely stable source of your own activity.

The *exercise* of your power for self-determination, in the sense that you determine what *kind* of person you are going to be, is relative. It is not the ultimate basis for your own actions. You are free to choose what you want to do. But you are not free to *choose* to make it right. You are free to choose your own values; but you are not free to regard them as true simply because you chose them. Since you are not the originator of your own being, nor of your personhood, you cannot honestly determine—by your own volition—what is good or bad. Self-determination, as an act of a freely operating but limited self, is good only relative to the other kind of self-determination.

The self-determination that is the ultimate structure of one's being—making one to be a person, rather than a thing—is absolute. All action and attitude is relative to that. When we freely choose to go against this kind of self-determination, we exercise our freedom; but we lose some of its functional capacity. We are irresponsibly free. We fail to respond to the absolute possibilities for human fulfillment that our nature affords us at all times in all circumstances. We make it somewhat less likely that our next exercise of the beautiful power of choice will be pro-personal and truly fulfilling. We harm our responsiveness to the ground and absolute condition of all our personal growth. Our nature is the ground for *who* we can become and *how* we can do it.

All truths in ethics, as in any other science or common area of knowledge, are absolute. Many truths are less absolute than

others. Such truths are considered relative. For instance, that water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit is true, relative to the atmospheric conditions, the precision of the observers, and so forth. Similarly, that good people always tell what they know to be true relative to social conditions (such as the right of the inquirer to know), the limitations of definitional expression, and so forth. But even these relative truths are critically based on the stability and knowability of the natures of things in question. They are not arbitrary, even though they can always be developed to greater depth and precision.

An absolute basis for every relative truth is the foundation for any reasoning endeavor. Even those who say that, in physics or psychology or ethics, all things are relative and nothing can be known as an absolute truth have just admitted at least one absolute truth: the one they have just pronounced in making that statement. They hold—implicitly, but actually—that there is no absolutely true point of knowledge. The fact that they contradict themselves ought to prompt a rational reexamination of their position.

Often we forget that we are immersed in absolute truth. It is absolutely true, forever, that at this point in time on this day in this place *you* are reading *these* words and not some others. This truth cannot be overturned in the year 2482 or 6783 A.D. Everything that we observe is overflowing with absolute, eternal truth. All truths are absolute at their root. And that is what we all, at least partially, intend every time we make a declaration.

But some of these (absolute) truths are more readily discernible than others. You are you and no one else—ever. No matter how much you change in the future. That is why we can say that *you* are the basis of moral absolutes. Whenever you act in accord with your absolute self, you are absolutely good—though not infinitely good. Whenever you act against your absolute self, you are absolutely bad—not infinitely bad. You are responsible to your absolute self-determination, not just to your relative self-determination. In any event, the consequences for your ultimate destiny as a person are momentous.

*Attitudes, Your Absolute Responsibility*

The absolute implications of personal responsibility can be readily discerned by reflecting on the importance of attitudes. Your attitude is the personal angle at which you address a range of choices under consideration. Your attitude is the spirit with which you form and execute your particular choices. Your choice of attitudes is absolutely critical for your well being.

An example from the activity of astronauts may serve to illustrate the implications of your attitudes. When astronauts are returning to earth from a flight in outer space, the angle at which the spacecraft is flying proves *both* relatively *and* absolutely critical. This angle is called the attitude. If the spacecraft hits the atmosphere with a certain attitude or angle of contact—and within certain tolerable limits of variation—it will effectively cut through the density, and a safe landing is relatively assured. If the angle of contact is too much one way, the spacecraft and inhabitants will turn over and be consumed in flames. If it is too much the other way, the spacecraft and inhabitants will bounce off the atmosphere and be lost in space forever. For the ultimate destiny of the spacecraft and its mission, the attitude is critical.

Personal Development Ethics holds that your personal attitudes toward self and others are the most critical determinants to authentic self-actualization and ultimate moral destiny. True happiness or joy in human living—as distinct from the pseudo-happiness of various kinds of elation and getting high—comes from the responsible ways in which persons choose their actions. Real happiness comes in service to all the good of personhood in others and in yourself, whatever the cost in time, convenience, and social position. In every situation of deliberation, before you choose freely, you are an astronaut of inner space, coming with a certain attitude toward the task or options at hand. Your attitude determines your *moral* success or failure. And *you* can relatively, yet decisively, determine your attitudes.

If you are a believer in the Christian world view, you might also recognize the implications of attitudinal self-determination in regard to life after death. Death is like striking the atmosphere—

a radically other form of existence. The slightest alteration in attitude during the freely chosen actions of this life might prove ultimately decisive in determining a person's ultimate destiny after death. A *relatively* loving attitude at the time of death might be *absolutely* decisive in determining whether the astronaut of inner (spiritual, moral) space arrives home safely or whether this self-determiner is lost forever. Ethics and moral philosophy can prove to be a critical part of your guidance system, and a growing source of confident responsibility.

In summary, then, every person is directly responsible for his or her own freely chosen acts, and perhaps indirectly for those of others. (Similarly, communities are directly responsible for their own deliberative acts, and indirectly for those of individuals or of other communities). As persons we are able to respond to the demands and opportunities of life through our powers of self-determination. Our personhood, which we share with all others, is the absolute basis for growing as unique individuals and communities. When we freely act in accord with our common personhood, we *are* morally good. When we freely act against this common ground in our being, we *are* morally bad. In either case, *we* are responsible for who we *are*, in and through what we choose or fail to choose.



#### 6. Your Personal Goodness

Have you ever seen Arizona's Grand Canyon? If you have, what was your attitude as you got your first glimpse? If you have not, what would your attitude have been?

In writing about the effects of people's attitudes on ecologically sound care of the earth, Frederick Elder reports the exclamation of a man who had just seen the Grand Canyon for the first time. Walking to the rim of the Canyon with his friend, and

seeing the glorious depths of gold, purple, and lavender rock, the fellow said, "Man, what an ashtray!"<sup>1</sup>

Consistent dedication to goal-striving behavior in everyday existence can lead us to overlook the beauty and the goodness of things in themselves. People in utilitarian-minded societies are inclined to develop the attitude that everything has a use. For many participants on this planet, the only good is the useful good.

Recognition of usefulness as a genuine good is one thing. But the attitude that says "*only* that which is useful is good" is quite another. A viciously pragmatic and utilitarian culture can make it difficult to appreciate the inherent goodness of both useful and non-useful things. Underlying every useful and non-useful entity is the goodness of simply *being*.

Our cultural conditioning begins at an early age. We can be taught nonverbally that our freedom is simply a freedom to get, not a freedom to let. Some time ago I read in a magazine an anecdote that shows what can happen.

A grandmother told about her four-year-old grand-daughter who was visiting her. Grandma lived in a country place along the banks of a river. It was autumn, and the many trees along the river were resplendent with colors of red, gold, and brown. One morning she promised the little girl that they would go for a walk by the river, after she had finished her housework. As the woman did her cleaning and baking the little girl would run into the house at frequent intervals and say, "Grandma, is it time to go for a walk now?" Finally, in a burst of special desire, the girl rushed in, took her grandmother's hand, and pleaded, "Come on, Grandma, let's get some *use* out of the world!"

This little person was eager to participate in certain fundamental goods of human nature. She was anticipating the opportunity to share in the basic Goods of Play, Aesthetic Experience, and Friendship (Social Harmony). But she was conditioned to express her desires in utilitarian terms.

Such conditioning gradually makes it difficult to outgrow our narcissistic and egoistic preoccupation with our own *individual* needs. We are inclined to forsake our potential for growing into the

enjoyment of our *personal* needs—needs that nurture our deepest desires as a person, with a humanity common to all. We can lose touch with why we, as persons, act at all. We lose our sense of being persons, and turn to gratify our narrow, egoistic, goal-striving mechanisms of compensation for that tragic loss.

### *Why Persons Act at All*

Persons are good in themselves. As persons, we never act merely in order to attain some goal. We act for the sake of the action itself. The action is the action of a person, and to that extent it needs to be an act with some goodness in itself, independent of its limited, specific outcomes.

Other creatures are not motivated by the inherent goodness of their own actions. Animals, plants, and inorganic molecules do not act or move because they value their actions as knowable goods. Some animals may act because of the pleasure the action entails, but not because they *value* the pleasure itself or understand some attainable good that the pleasure accompanies. Only persons have the capacity to know and love themselves and others (including their actions) as ends in themselves, whatever their achievements might be. They have the freedom to accept or reject that natural capacity for unqualified valuing.

In an earlier section, we considered the three levels of freedom and focused on the third level as the most significantly human kind of freedom. This freedom is the heart of personal action. We are now ready to reflect on its content.

In the rest of this section, we will be outlining the content or basic ingredients of human freedom: why we, as persons, act at all. We will ask what is our human freedom a *freedom for*? Or better, a *freedom in*. The response will be that the freedom of human persons involves a context and content—something that we are free *within*. I will suggest that we are freely floating and able to swim in the waters of ultimate goodness and value. Every choice we make is a stroke we take—within the Goods of personhood.

So, we will be concerned with personal goods. But not personal goods in the usual sense of the term *personal*, meaning *individual*. Your life, for instance, is not simply an individual good; it is specifi-



cally a personal good, something common to all other human persons. You have a unique or individual way in which you can best maintain and enhance your life. But life can be regarded as good by you, not simply because it is yours, but because it is what it is: a good in itself, for you and for everyone who lives.

Similarly, friendship is not just an individual good; it is a personal good—good for you *as a person* and not simply as an individual. You have a unique or individual way in which you can best participate in friendship with different people in your life. There are many kinds and degrees of friendship. But friendship can be regarded as good by you, not simply because it is yours, but because of what it is: a good in itself, for you and for everyone.

Life and friendship are just two of your essential goods or needs as a person. We will discuss them and each of the other primary, inward horizons of human motivation.

#### *What Persons Really Need*

Every person as a person is free to act, and needs to act, for the sake of goods or values that are ends in themselves. These goods or values are parts of what it is to *be* a person. You and I hold these values in common precisely because we are *human*. To be human is to be able to value, as ends in themselves: Life, Play, Aesthetic Experience, Speculative Knowledge, Integrity, Authenticity, Social Harmony (Friendship and Community), and Religion.

Some people may not acknowledge one or more of these as common human goods and ultimate sources of motivation (e.g., they may exclude Religion, if they are atheistic). Others may wish to phrase them differently or think that they have discovered one or more additional primary goods of human nature. But, generally speaking, this listing is representative.

After I make some preliminary comments each of these fundamental Goods will be characterized.

These primary aspects of human nature may be called Goods, Values, or Purposes. The words are capitalized simply to indicate that we are referring to something necessary and ultimate in human nature. They are not esoteric ideals, like Plato's world of

separated essences. These Goods, Values, or Purposes are intrinsic to each person just as he or she lives in everyday, concrete existence. They cannot be denied as the major motivations for which any person acts. To brush one's teeth is to be ultimately motivated by the value of Life—its protection and enhancement. To shake hands with someone is ultimately to be motivated by the fundamental Good of Social Harmony or Friendship.

Concerning the terms themselves, a few observations may be helpful.

In our highly utilitarian, commercialistic culture, the word *goods* is likely to suggest something useful. We hear people say that a certain store sells only dry goods. Or someone coming out of a courtroom might remark, "Well, the prosecution surely got the goods on him!" In the present ethical context, the term *good* does not refer to any tangible substance or to useful evidence. It refers to anything *as willable*, whether a means or an end, and whether tangible or intangible. The capitalized term *Good* (Value, Purpose) refers only to something *intangible* that is *truly* willable as an *end* in itself.

The word *value* is a relatively recent term in the history of ethics. It is often used as a synonym for *good*, which is the traditional term. The word *value* tends to come from our utilitarian, economically-minded culture. Strictly speaking, a value is something good with a price on it. If you value something, you tend to compare it with something else which is regarded as more or less valuable. People who call human life a great value, even a priceless value, may really mean that it can be weighed in the balance—one life with respect to another, or life itself with respect to other *values*. Even though life is regarded as having no price, it is not necessarily free of the bargaining mentality that makes it ultimately a means, rather than an end itself.

The fundamental human Goods upon which Personal Development Ethics is based are incommensurable. They cannot be weighted as more or less valuable in comparison to one another. None of them can ever rightly serve in our thinking as a common denominator for the others. Each one is absolutely fundamental on

its own; it cannot be reduced to being a derivative of one or more of the others. That is why they are called *fundamental* or *basic* or *primary* Goods or Values. All other human goods are derivative forms of these necessary human Goods.

Marriage, for instance, is a human good, derived principally from the Goods of Life and Friendship. Fatherhood and motherhood are similarly, but somewhat differently, derived from these Goods. Jogging, swimming, or other forms of exercise are human goods that flow from the Primary Goods of Life and Integrity. Community prayer is a human good formed from the fundamental human Purposes of Social Harmony and Religion.

The fundamental Goods are rock-bottom Values. They are qualitatively different from one another as distinct possibilities for ultimate human fulfillment. They cannot truly be *valued* in the ordinary sense of the term.

Despite its highly utilitarian connotations, the term *value* will be used in our study of ethics. It should be taken to mean the same as *good*, but suggesting the importance of the ethical agent's act of *willing* the good. We will let the term *good* connote emphatically *what* is willed, while the term *value* connotes emphatically the importance of this good to the one who is willing it. Yet both terms will be used to mean essentially the same thing: that which is either apparently or truly willable (desirable) by someone.

The term *purpose* will be used at times to suggest that persons always have reasons for acting. But these purposes or reasons *why* persons act can be second-level or third-level. They can be goals (such as a wedding date) or goods (such as the marital relationship). They can be limited objectives (goals) or unlimited "objectives" (goods). When the fundamental human Goods are called Purposes, they are regarded as the primary unlimited "objectives," and in no sense as super-goals.

You and I as persons really need all three levels of freedom: the freedom of nature by which we exercise our whole being spontaneously—physically, psychically and spiritually; the freedom of choice between goals and the means to reach them; and the freedom of choice to participate ever more deeply in our own

nature as persons.

How the third level of freedom is our most critical moral need can be seen by showing its likeness to our physical needs.

Anthropologists distinguish certain basic physical needs of every human being. The person has basic physical *needs*: food, clothing, shelter, hygiene, affection, and space (territory). These needs must be fulfilled if the person is to live physically at all. And they must be properly fulfilled if the person is to live well. If they are improperly or inadequately fulfilled, the person may live but will be physically (and, perhaps, emotionally or mentally) ill.

Lack of affection, for instance, in early infancy has led to the physical death of some young children and to the physical and emotional illness of multitudes. Each of these basic physical needs are needs of the personal organism as an organism. They are critical to a healthy organismic life on the planet.

In a similar way, we can distinguish certain basic needs of every person *as a person*. Every person has basic needs that must be fulfilled if he or she is to become a self-actualizing, vibrant human being. All creative, integrative personalities presuppose self-fulfillment through the fundamental human Goods (Life, Play, Integrity, Social Harmony, and the rest). No matter what our age, we all need to participate in these Goods to the best of our ability. In fact, the primary Good called Life encompasses all of the basic physical goods of the person as an organism (mentioned above).

The fundamental Personal Purposes must be fulfilled if the person is to live in a functionally personal manner. If they are properly fulfilled, the person will be able to live a truly loving life. If they are improperly or inadequately fulfilled the person will be ill as a person. He or she will be physically, emotionally, mentally, intellectually, or spiritually deprived in various ways. (And who of us are not thus deprived to one degree or another?)

Insofar as the improper or inadequate fulfillment of these fundamental personal needs is caused by the deliberate, freely-willed attitude or action of the individual or community in question, that individual or community is also morally deprived and morally ill. For instance, a person deliberately unwilling to

forgive another who sincerely asks pardon is quite likely morally ill through depriving himself or herself and the other of an increase in the fundamental Good of Social Harmony.

What then, do persons really need? They need to value *unconditionally* certain human Goods—those that constitute their very being as a person.

### *The Fundamental Personal Goods*

The following is a brief overview of our essential goods as personal beings. (The meaning of each Good can be developed best only as it is discussed in the context of moral issues).

These primary Goods are *not* moral goods in themselves. They are personal goods that any natural law ethics presupposes. They are the necessary conditions for any significantly human action—artistic, political, moral, scientific, or whatever. (Specifically moral goods will be discussed in the next section).

**LIFE—** Suppose that you are in a boating accident on a lake. You are injured as the boat capsizes, and you are unable to swim. You call for help. Fortunately, a woman, who is walking her dog along the shore, hears your cries. She is a poor swimmer, but her dog is an uncanny creature. Prompted by the woman's urgings he plunges into the lake and swims toward you, while the woman runs for the nearest house in order to get human help. By the time several people arrive on the scene, you have been dragged safely to shore. The dog has saved your life.

In this incident several people have exhibited their ability to value life: you, in your struggle to stay afloat and assist the dog in its rescue; the woman, in her efforts to send the dog to your side and to go for further help; the other people, who arrive ready and willing to do whatever they reasonably can to assure your safe return to shore. All showed a *willingness* to participate in your life as a great good—not simply as an instrumental good, but as a good in itself. Assuming that the people's motivations were not ruled chiefly by the glory or rewards that might come to them, we might say that they regarded your life as a good end in itself, just as you did.

But what about the dog? Since his canine instinct was so

admirably individualized as to strive to rescue you in spite of danger to himself, we might be inclined to say that the dog valued your life, too. It appears as though it saw your life as a good in itself. As remarkable as its actions were in their own way, however, the dog was incapable of *willing* (valuing) your life *as* a good at all. It acted beautifully in the first level of freedom and action. Like a sunset, but in a far more complex way, your rescue by the dog was a beautiful act of nature.

In order to participate directly in the fundamental Good of Life, the individual or community must be able to know life *as life*, as an intelligible good, somewhat independent of feelings and emotions or even of physical tendencies. Also, the persons involved need to exercise more than their ability to choose and pursue goals. Achieving your safe landing on the beach did not essentially affect anyone's direct participation in Life as a primary Purpose for human action. Even if you had drowned, everyone—including you—would have participated directly in the fundamental Good of Life, by his or her efforts, but specifically by truly willing to serve the good of Life as an end in itself. This kind of willing manifests what it means to be a person: to be able (naturally, if not functionally) to choose freely to value (or disvalue) the primary aspects of being personal creatures. One of these aspects is physical life in the space-time world.

Other fundamental human Goods encompass aspects of personal being and development that are not necessarily physical. For instance, the primary personal Goods of Play, Aesthetic Experience, and Speculative Knowledge directly encompass motivations concerning actions or things that are both physical and non-physical. This particular primary Value called Life embraces any action that is freely willed to maintain, support, or enhance any person's physical life. (Having children, for instance, is a good in itself—a primary motivation for any individual or community—apart from any other motivations of the individuals who participate in the genital dimension of this primary Good).

PLAY— A child riding her bicycle, another child throwing his ball against the side of a house, a man hoeing his garden, a

woman knitting a sweater: this family scene exhibits actions that might reveal the fundamental Good of Play. If the participants enjoy what they are doing and find satisfaction *in the activity itself*, independent of any practical benefit that might accrue, then they could be said to be motivated by Play. Even if a person does something that requires considerable effort—including, perhaps, strain, sweat, and tears—it is possible that he or she is participating in the basic Value of Play to some extent.

Persons are created to perform many actions—ideally, perhaps, all actions—largely as good in themselves, whatever might be the success or failure of the performance in their goal-striving aspects. No action can be deeply *personal* without being done as an end in itself, even if also as a means.

Activities that celebrate the fundamental Good of Play, therefore, are by no means only those associated culturally with recreation. Even the most laborious kind of work can also be play, if the person has developed a deeply personal life, and enjoys the very activity of the performance. People who are often bored with the monotony of their own work-tasks reveal a need for specifically personal development. They need to participate deeply in their everyday actions as good in themselves. Thomas Aquinas once wrote that a person can sin by not *playing* sufficiently. He even associated contemplation, the highest human activity, with stroking one's beard.

Of course, we recognize that some people delight in torturing others. They seem to enjoy the act of torturing as a good in itself. But their delight is only apparent as far as the action itself goes. They are not really enjoying the action for its own sake, but for the pleasure it causes. Such action is really a latent goal-striving behavior in which the intelligible Goods involved—Friendship, Life, Play, or whatever—are being used *chiefly* as a *means* to pleasure as a *goal*.

Pleasure is not a fundamental human Good. It is an enriching accompaniment to many human acts that are, first of all, good in themselves. Neither pleasure nor pain is necessarily good or bad. A person can enjoy doing certain actions, under certain conditions, as

good in themselves—despite inevitable pain. A woman can enjoy the act of giving birth to her child, not only because of the result—the child's new condition of residence in the world—but also because giving birth is a natural act of the person. It is a naturally personal, as well as organismic, activity. And it may be willed as good in itself, despite whatever pain is attached unavoidably to it.

Masochists and sadists only *seem* to enjoy their acts as ends in themselves. They may be enjoying the pain that they suffer or inflict, but they fail to will the action as good in itself. They are willing the action as a vehicle for the pain/pleasure that it conveys to them, something like one might “enjoy” the sight of a package or automobile that carries a special object of gratification for the ego.

Pleasure and pain are human goods, but not fundamental human Goods. Pleasure can be a natural secondary motivation for a given action. Pain can be a natural warning concerning one's needs for therapeutic attention. But neither pleasure nor pain *is* the human action itself. Whenever part of an action is mistaken for the action itself, the person is failing to participate—or at least failing to participate well—in the fundamental human Good of Play.

**AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE—** Play has its complementary Good. When a person delights in something that he or she is receiving, rather than doing, then another fundamental motivation for action is involved. The child riding her bicycle may not only delight in the action of pedalling, but also in the shiny newness of the front fender. The man hoeing his garden may not only enjoy moving the blade through the rich, porous earth, but also the sight of fresh greenery popping through the soil.

The essence of the basic Value of Aesthetic Experience is that the person can receive something that is *received* as a good in itself. The receiving experience is good in itself, just as a performing or making experience is good in itself.

An artist is an obvious person for exemplification of the similarity and difference between the fundamental human Goods of Aesthetic Experience and Play. While painting on a canvas, the artist is likely participating simultaneously in both of these radically Personal Values. He or she is delighting in the experience of



colorful pigment as it flows upon the canvas and also enjoying the act of making it flow in certain forms and textures. Aesthetic Experience is the receiving of something beautiful as an end in itself. Play is the making of something beautiful as an end in itself. Both kinds of activity (receiving and giving) are good for the person, inherently and ultimately, *as a person*.

*Aesthetic Experience* is simply a term. One should not think that it applies only to the commonly recognized world of aesthetics. Even watching a sports event on television can be a participation, to some degree, in this fundamental human Good. As long as the person is somewhat delighting in the color of the picture, the roar of the crowd, the excitement in the announcer's voice, and so forth, as an experience that is an end in itself and not *mainly* a means to see who wins (for example), then he or she can be said to be valuing the basic Good of Aesthetic Experience. Unlike *individual* nature, *personal* nature cannot be elitist.

**SPECULATIVE EXPERIENCE**— There is an old expression: Curiosity killed the cat. Curiosity at times may have occasioned even the death of people, but the state of wanting to know just for the sake of knowing is inherently human. Speculative knowledge is knowing for the sheer good of knowing something, apart from whether any real use can be made of the knowledge. It spans a tremendous range, from the heights of philosophical and theological speculation to the query over the backyard fence about who the new neighbors are and where they came from. A child who asks where babies come from and a nuclear physicist who is trying to understand Heisenberg's indeterminacy principle in a new way are participating in the fundamental Good of Speculative Knowledge.

Whenever a person seeks to know something for the sake of what he or she can do with the knowledge, the means-to-an-end character of the knowing serves to render it a second-level endeavor. It is below the threshold of participation in goods for their own sake. The child who wants to know how to tie his shoe or the chemist who wants additional data in order to make a more effective experiment are operating at the level of practical

knowledge. Any knowledge for the sake of action and achievement which is other than the knowledge itself does not represent participation in the basic human Value of Speculative Knowledge. Such knowledge may support or detract from this fundamental human Good, but does not constitute it.

**INTEGRITY**— Integrity is the first of four “existential” kinds of fundamental Good. Each one is a specifically relational good in some way.

Integrity is a primary human need. Personal development largely consists in action for the sake of greater unity among one’s personal powers at the physical, psychic, and spiritual levels. Self-integration is a fundamental human Good that calls for the person to foster harmony among all the various powers and drives of his or her being. Meditation, contemplation, and ascetic practices of one kind or another may be undertaken with Integrity as the primary personal Purpose. Conversation, counseling sessions, and opportunities for aesthetic experience are often motivated by this basic human Good of “getting it all together.”

**AUTHENTICITY**— Another kind of primary personal harmony that constitutes a radical human need is Authenticity.

This basic reason for action consists in harmonizing one’s overt behavior with one’s inner attitudes and disposition. No one likes a phony. People who say one thing (verbally or non-verbally) but think otherwise are violating this fundamental human Good. Knowing the truth is one thing, and it is good (Speculative Knowledge); but telling it is quite another (Authenticity).

*Integrity* consists in harmonizing the various parts of the human being into an integrative, functioning whole. *Authenticity* consists in *expressing* one’s present state of personal development in a way that *harmonizes* with this inner integrity.

Failure to express emotions appropriately is a frequent way in which people in our Anglo-American culture block participation in the fundamental Good of Authenticity. But, perhaps, the most obvious way of participating positively in Authenticity is to tell the truth, and the most obvious way of violating it is to tell a lie.

**SOCIAL HARMONY (FRIENDSHIP AND COMMUNITY)**— Integrity

and Authenticity pertain to relationships *within* the individual person or individual community. Social Harmony is a primary Good that encompasses relationships *between* individual persons or communities. It is the basic Value of Community.

Conversations between two or more people can readily be undertaken for the good of increasing their friendship or social harmony, independent of any practical gain to one or all. Individuals or groups who teach and practice respect and reverence for communities such as the family, the Church, and civic society are likely to be participating positively in the essential human Value of Social Harmony. Social laws and regulations governing fairness among people in their transactions represent apt opportunities for individuals and communities to increase their genuine participation in this fundamental human Good.

**RELIGION**— By the term *religion* here we mean actions that are undertaken to harmonize one's self or the community with the transcendent Source of all things. For those who believe in a wholly Other being with whom we are called to develop a personal relationship, acts of worship are appropriate as ends in themselves. It is good to love and praise the Lord of all beings. If acts of relating to the supreme being are done as good in themselves, independent of their being some particular advantage to the person engaged in them, then the fundamental human Good of Religion is being served.

In Personal Development Ethics, this Good is neither more nor less basic than any of the others. People who treat Religion as *the* most fundamental human Good make it into a goal and the other Goods ultimately into means that serve it. But that is a distortion of true religious activity. The essence of religious fanaticism is to make God into an object and effectively wipe out the value of human persons as *really* like God in being ends in themselves.

Genuine participation in the fundamental Good of Religion entails an attitude of reverence for every person, whether or not he or she believes in God, understood in a particular way. True worship respects the personhood of all potential worshippers as well as the being of God who created him. Sectarian religious practice is a

genuine participation in the fundamental Personal Good of Religion when it respects *all* of these personal Goods for what they are: ends in themselves.

*Premortal Life and the Christian World View*

With the exception of Religion, all of these fundamental personal Goods are readily recognizable to almost everyone. People who are atheistic or agnostic regarding the questions of God and of life after death might appreciate seven of these Values as inherent needs of persons as persons.

Earlier I suggested a secular, nontheistic image for understanding the whole idea of fundamental Goods: Our inherent needs for these Goods were likened to the radical needs of the person as an organism. But, for the Christian, there is a deeper meaning.

Christians believe that every human being is created in the likeness of God. Because of our origin and likeness to God, we have a natural disposition to *act* like God. We thrive on the inexhaustibly Divine-like dimensions of being a person. The fundamental human Goods are those God-like, inexhaustible and absolute, dimensions of being a person. They are our limited but absolute ways of participating in the infinite being of God. They are our natural access to any supernatural gifts of grace.

The Christian world view includes the idea that we are living in a premortal (pre-death) world, destined to be born into a new and wider life after death. This belief is supported by a reflection on our earthly life. We got our start in this life by gestating in our mother's womb and participating in the essential nutrients coming through her body until we were ready to be born into the wider postnatal world. This may suggest that we are even now gestating *as persons* in the womb of God and participating in the essential personal Goods coming through our God-like personal nature until we are spiritually ready to be with God face-to-face in a radically new way.

It is consistent with the Christian world view to think that when the human being dies his or her material remains are buried as the placenta was once discarded, and that the deeper, fetal-like

self (soul) is born into the next life, for better or worse. Willful refusal to participate well in the fundamental Goods in this life will then lead to possible dire consequences in the life to come. Willing participation in these essentially (not merely individually) personal Values will lead quite naturally to fuller life with God in eternity.

Of course, the Christian world view includes much more, but this image suggests part of what Christians really believe about our personal responsibility to choose the kind of person we will be forever.

In summary, we can identify certain primary personal Purposes for which every individual and community acts: Life, Play, Aesthetic Experience, Speculative Knowledge, Integrity, Authenticity, Friendship, and Religion. They are essential parts of being a person. Each one, like a person as a whole, is an end in itself; it is not a means to anything else, including the other Purposes. These are the *ultimate* reasons why people act at all. Everyone has an absolute need to value these Goods unconditionally in every sphere of life—artistic, political, moral, or whatever.

We can now look for a guidance system to provide a rational basis for choosing and acting in such a way as to preserve and enhance all of these essential personal Values. In the next section, we will develop and demonstrate this natural (person) law, ensuring (theoretically) that our choices will create a loving life.

**Note**

- 1 Frederick Elder, *Crisis in Eden* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970).