

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

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

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

Robert E. Joyce

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

Part I: The Meaning of Morality

- 1. Why Learn about the Natural Moral Law?*
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- 3. Basic Viewpoints on Human Action*
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Part III: Being Who You Really Are

- 5. Your Absolute Responsibility*
- 6. Your Personal Goodness*

Part IV: Making Sure You Love

- 7. Necessary Conditions for a Loving Action*
- 8. How to Resolve Moral Dilemmas*

Part IV: Making Sure You Love

7. Necessary Conditions for a Loving Action

Do you have 20/20 vision? If you do not, wearing corrective lenses can help. If you do, you still need a telescope to see the stars and planets better, and a microscope to see into particles of matter that we all take for granted.

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When we desire to know the physical world in a more intimate way, it is necessary to intensify our physical vision by clothing our eyes with a piece of glass. The glass magnifies our power to see and to identify with the inner workings of matter. Even though telescopes and microscopes are limited means for increasing our vision, they do provide critical assistance in achieving data for the natural sciences.

Similarly, in ethical decision-making, some people seem to be blessed with normal vision concerning a good human life. Their good will is evident and permits them to see the way to act without taking special intellectual efforts to see what is right or wrong and why. They seem to have 20/20 moral vision.

Nevertheless, everyone is susceptible to the pull of emotions that sometimes are difficult to integrate. In our vision of what is the right course of action, we can be deceived or blinded at times. We need the ministrations of sound reasoning about what to do, independent of the clamor of our emotions and the opinions of others, who may be less than impartial in their demands or their advice.

Besides, even the person of the best will may not be sure *why* he or she chooses to engage in a certain behavior that *seems* to be right. Lack of knowing *why* the action is right is a personal loss. Our ethical behavior is not just a matter of "doing what comes naturally." Human action is meaningful action, and the heart of meaning is knowing *why* the action is done. Action that may be ethically good from a surface, behavioral point of view can be ethically weak because it lacks a foundation in sound principles of reason.

So, even though you have 20/20 moral vision, you still need the assistance of intellectual principles that serve, like a telescope or microscope, in helping you to understand *why* what you choose to do is right or wrong. Then you do not take your personal behavior for granted. You become intimately more *person-conscious*, not just individual-conscious.

Sound ethical principles help your intellect to magnify, see clearly, and identify deeply with authentic possibilities for person-

caring action. Unsound ethical principles assist your intellect to magnify, see distortedly, and identify poorly with authentic possibilities for person-caring action. Even though this activity of *intellectiscoping* is a limited means for increasing the vision of what constitutes a good will in this or that circumstance of choice and action, it does provide some basis for developing a moral science or ethics.

It is not always easy to see what a person of good will ought to do or how such a person should form his or her attitudes about individual and social behaviors. Sound principles are necessary, though not alone sufficient, to guide our commitments and activities.

Have you ever wondered how Thomas Jefferson and many moral leaders of his time could honestly justify slavery? Some of them did it on the basis of utilitarianism, thinking that black people were better off as slaves in America than they would have been by living in "uncivilized" Africa. Apart from simply factual considerations, were the slaveholders reasoning well morally, or were they rationalizing for the sake of their own convenience? Many years later, under the influence of abolitionists and his own heartfelt evaluation, Abraham Lincoln's motives for conducting the Civil War seemed to stem, at least partly, from less than utilitarian reasons.

How was Nazi Germany possible? How could good German people overlook the moral implications of Hitler's rise to power? How could they not know about or look the other way when Jews and other "undesirables" were regularly loaded into cattle cars and transported to death camps?

No thinking person can responsibly neglect the study of moral principles and their applicability to the many individual and community issues that confront us everyday. In these final sections of this introduction to the natural moral law, we will consider the most general principles of guidance for morally good attitudes and actions. Some attempt will be made to show briefly how these principles might reasonably apply to individual cases.

The Guidance System

In discussing how we are *absolutely* responsible for our freely-chosen acts, I indicated the primary principle of authentically personal attitudes and action: always choose such that you will be a freer, richer person in making the choice. This kind of choice was called inclusivistic, because the person making it includes all the Goods of being a person in some way—directly or indirectly. Then I sketched the fundamental personal Goods that are always respected in a morally sound choice. Those Goods, however, are *pre-moral* goods. What, then, are moral goods—the goods or values that actually constitute our guidance system for free choice?

Moral goods spell out the general conditions that are necessary if the fundamental (pre-moral) Goods or Values are to be respected. As principles, the moral goods tell in basic, definite terms what it takes for a person's action to be truly loving, caring, person-enhancing.

Moral goods are the ways of responsible choice-making about how to act precisely as a person—as a rational, deliberative, freely-willing being. They are the necessary ways to assure the person that he or she is fulfilling the fundamental needs of personhood.

Moral goods are somewhat like the basic *ways* in which the personal organism is fulfilled as an organism. Food is a basic need, and hunting or shopping is the basic *way* to fulfill it. Shelter is a basic need, and building (or hiring a builder) is the basic *way* to satisfy it. The ways of responsible choosing (moral goods) are the basic *ways* in which a person participates, at least adequately, in the fundamental human Goods.

In terms of our theological image, we can say that these ways or conditions of responsibility (to be discussed below) are like the laws of healthy placental activity. Just as in the womb the child's placenta—belonging to the child and in no way being part of the mother—needs to function properly in order that the whole individual may thrive and grow, so our behavioral relationships with the world need to be properly ordered so that we may thrive and grow as persons.

The fundamental human Goods, then, are like the essential nutrients that the prenatal child absolutely needs in order to live a healthy life. The modes or ways of responsible choice are like the laws of healthy placental operation that assure the attainment of critically needed nourishment.

As personal organisms in the physical womb, you and I did not have the freedom to choose the way our placental relationships were conducted. Even now as postnatal personal organisms we cannot *choose* to go with or against the basic laws of physical development. But, as premortal (pre-death) persons, we *can* choose to go intentionally and attitudinally with or against the basic laws of our being—at the physical, psychic, and spiritual levels. As persons in the space-time world, we have the challenge of choosing to be effective or ineffective at personal development. Our success is determined by how well we learn and practice the natural (person) laws of everyday (“placental”) living.

Judging Not

In contemporary society, people generally are sensitive about judging others. Often one hears proscriptions about making negative judgments on other people’s actions. One is counselled not to be “judgmental.” Christians and others appreciate what Jesus said: “Judge not, lest you yourselves be judged.”

This advice is well taken when it means that no one can evaluate ultimately the quality of anyone’s character or behavior. Although we do attempt in courts of law to determine some practical extent of innocence or guilt in society, we do not attempt, and rightly so, to evaluate the individual’s ultimate moral condition before God.

Unfortunately, many people seem to think that, since no one can effectively apply moral norms to other people’s behavior at the deepest levels of being, no one should attempt to apply them at all. At one and the same time, they expect too little and too much of moral principles.

Not only are we incapable of infallibly applying these principles to the character and behavior of *others* in an ultimate

sort of way, we cannot so apply them even to ourselves. Only God, an all-knowing evaluator of action, is able to know with certainty how well or poorly you or I have lived as a person.

Our inability to judge ultimately, however, does not take away from our responsibility to discover and apply, as best we can, the basic norms of personal behavior to ourselves and to *all* other human persons. In ethics, we do not attempt to "play God," but to "play man": to do a thoroughly and critically human thing. We attempt to reason out, to the best of our ability, the laws of authentic personhood and to develop their applicability to the various kinds of behavior that are common to all of us *as persons* (not simply as individuals). It must be admitted that it is easy to overlook the relevant laws of volitional (moral) behavior, just as it is easy enough to overlook the laws of rational (logical) behavior, of psychologically sound behavior, or of other areas of human behavior.

As Grisez and Shaw say in their basic text on ethics, we are free to choose what we will do, but we are not free to make whatever we choose right.¹ We must follow our best judgment concerning what we ought to do. But our best judgment can be mistaken. We need to reach for objective norms, established through the good use of reason, in order to see whether our best judgment is right.

The essential conditions for responsible choosing (discussed below) are offered as one articulation of the natural law of personal development. Other ways of articulating this (natural) law have been diversely attempted. Such attempts imply a common recognition that your reason and mine demands an objective set of standards for every human as human, just as it demands standards proper to every organism as organism.

These normative ideas are general and will apply somewhat differently and somewhat the same to different individuals in concrete behavior. In addition to the common ground of responsibility, each person has his or her particular set of responsibilities and, at times, it is difficult to say exactly what they are. But we are trying to articulate a universal guidance system that is applicable at all times and in all places to every human being who

has the use of reason and freedom of will.

Natural law does not mean easy law. It is not easy to learn and apply in all cases. It is not "superficial law," but profound and richly rewarding meaning for good-willed, intelligent persons. Disagreements on how to understand and apply it are to be expected and welcomed in the process of growing in moral maturity.

The Essential Conditions For Responsible Choosing

1. *Persons are always treated solely, chiefly, or directly as an end, not a means.* Another formulation of this reasonable demand is: One never acts (or adopts a proposed course of action) directly against a fundamental human Good.

This practical idea for truly personal willing is a direct inference from the primary, general principle for morality: act so that you choose in a way that increases, rather than decreases, your participation in being a person. A person is, above all, a good in himself or herself. So, as soon as you or I choose to act in a way that necessarily involves one or more persons being treated mainly as a means for the good of others, then, *as a person*, everyone is downgraded, including the one making such choice. The chooser inevitably participates less in the goodness of being a person.

For instance, suppose I choose to kill you, even though you are innocent of any wrongdoing and are not an unjust aggressor, because terrorists say that if I do not, they will immediately bomb ten thousand other innocent people. I have good reason to believe they have every intention of carrying out this threat. By choosing to kill you in order to prevent this tragic bombing, I would be degrading myself and every one of the ten thousand. I would be saying, in effect, to everyone of them and to every person as a person: "I would do that to you if you were in this position." I would not really be caring for the ten thousand as persons—as uniquely good in themselves—but as a quantity of more valuable "stuff" than you. I would be anti-personal in the objective features of my choice.

Of course, if I did not realize to any extent how really impersonal such choice is, then I would not be guilty as a moral subject,

despite the choice being objectively wrong. People can commit atrocities with good will. Yet this first condition for responsible attitude and action still stands. To deny its objective truth would be to deny implicitly the primary principle of personal behavior: always act to fulfill your being *as a person*.

This condition for pro-personal choice calls for treating every person always as a person—as an end in himself or herself. The qualification *solely, chiefly, directly* serves to identify the reasonable limits. One inevitably treats others as a means to one's own ends, and oneself as a means to the ends of others. Children use their parents as means to livelihood and self-expression. Husbands use wives as means. Wives use husbands. As human beings we are both means and ends with respect to self and one another, but primarily ends. What is unreasonable is the choice or the attitude wherein the other person or oneself is regarded solely, chiefly, or directly as a means.

A good husband will never treat his wife chiefly as a means for his own sexual satisfaction. And he will never (even with a single, freely-chosen act) violate the fundamental Good of Life in order to foster his relationship with his wife. He will not allow within himself the attitude of regarding his wife mainly as a handiwipe around the house for the sake of his comfort and that of the children. And he will refrain from extorting from his teen-age daughter (and her Authenticity/Integrity) a confidential remark his wife may have shared with her, in order to "know" his wife better.

If you were engaged in family counseling, these kinds of requirements for loving attitudes and actions would probably occur to you. It would be especially important for you to know why such behaviors were inherently unloving. You would then be better able to say or suggest the ethically sound reason for behavior and attitude change. You would be clearer about *why* a husband should behave differently. You could point out how these present actions are wrong, not mainly because they make his wife *feel* bad, but because they *use* every person chiefly as a means—they violate all of us *as persons*.

(The ramifications of this first and most important of the conditions for responsible choice, as well as of the others, can only be brought out when actual issues are discussed.)

2. *The action or attitude is open to all the fundamental human Goods of all persons involved.*

Another reasonable inference from the primary principle of morality is that the person who cares about persons and who truly desires person-worthy activity will never make himself or herself an exception. *All* persons, including self, need to respect *all* of the basic valuing dimensions of personhood. The ethical agent chooses the action or attitude in such a way that every person involved will have reasonable *opportunity* to fulfill whatever fundamental Goods are at stake. From this mode of responsible choosing we can derive the Golden Rule: so act toward others as you would have others act toward you.

A father who lectures his son about cheating in school, although he himself takes undue liberties on his income tax return, is making himself an exception to participation in the basic Good of Authenticity. A physician who requires a nurse to tell a patient about certain life-threatening risks involved with prospective treatment, rather than doing it himself or herself, is making self an exception with respect to participating in the basic Goods of Life and Authenticity. A spouse who leaves the responsibility of family planning methods up to his or her partner is likewise violating this mode of responsibility.

3. *The ethical agent (individual or community) is oriented toward the fullest good of the other.*

This way of choosing entails an *emphasis*: on others, not on oneself. As a principle of guidance, it is necessary because people are self-centered from babyhood. Childhood is necessarily an immature stage in moral development because it is emphatically self-gratifying in its motivations. If the universal Values of personhood are going to be protected and enhanced, then persons need to be directed toward the good of others in a special way, with a special emphasis.

Moreover, we can hardly claim to be person-caring if we only begrudgingly allow for the participation in all basic Goods of all the persons involved with our action. This mode of responsible choice indicates the truth about attitudes toward others. If we do not forsake our normal inclinations to make our own individual ego (or community) Number One, we cannot honestly say that we care for personal nature, rather than simply individual nature. Others are just as truly persons as we are—no more, no less. Without some kind of special intent to act on behalf of another person's fullest good, we are eventually bound to regard him or her largely as a means to an end.

The parent who wants a child to have a rich, full life—with opportunity and achievement even greater than the parent experienced—is likely fulfilling this condition for responsibility toward the child. A teacher is likely failing to fulfill this condition for responsible attitude and action if he or she is jealous of a student's knowledge and accomplishments in their mutual field of learning. A husband or wife is likely failing in this way if he or she is impatient for genital (or other kinds of) intercourse when the spouse is ill or indisposed.

This way of responsible choosing focuses on the *uniqueness* of each person and requires attention to his or her special good. The preceding way focused on the *equality* between each person and oneself.

4. *The intention includes a willingness to pursue limited objectives that necessarily support, sustain, or enhance participation in the fundamental human Goods.*

If someone says to you, "I love you," but gives little evidence that he will do even little things that reveal a love for *you*—not just for himself—then his claim is untrue. Love is revealed and expressed, sustained and enriched, only by the pursuit of countless goals that are compatible with it.

We cannot truly love even ourselves without intending to do things—even at great cost—that protect and cultivate the love. If a person is overweight through overeating, then he or she can be said to have good intentions of healthcare only on condition

that the goal of a good diet is chosen and conscientiously pursued. An overweight person must engage in actions that actually, concretely fulfill the primary Value of Life. These actions are the pursuit of limited objectives (so many pounds by such a date, and by a particular pattern of food consumption) that celebrate and foster—without actually constituting—the primary Value itself, and the goodness of the whole person as a person.

This mode of responsible choice seems to imply that the person will work for the greatest net good or least net harm, once it is certain that the fundamental Goods are not being violated. A student's choice of a college, for instance, will likely be determined specifically by this condition for responsibility. He or she thinks that attendance at the chosen school will produce the greatest good for self, future family, relatives, and friends. In effect, as long as the student respects and does not violate any of the other conditions for responsible choice, this "utilitarian condition" rightly determines his or her choice.

If you were counseling someone in family planning, you would be guided constantly by this condition for responsible action. You would intend to ask the right questions and make the most relevant suggestions. These questions and suggestions would reveal and support your intent to provide the person with the best help possible under the circumstances of the limited time and ability on the part of both counselor and counselee. If the counselee came to a bad decision, you might have to decide whether your open contradiction of that decision would represent the least net harm or not, granted the complexity and sensitivity of your mutual relationship. It is possible you might not express directly your disapproval at the time, in the interests of ongoing growth, as long as your silence did not necessarily imply you agreed with the decision. To imply or say you agreed would directly go against the fundamental Good of Authenticity and be a violation of the first condition for responsible choice.

5. The intention entails a basic detachment from the particular results of the pursuit of limited objectives.

The preceding condition for sound choice stresses the neces-

sity to engage in the actions of second-level freedom: goal-striving. This condition articulates a necessary feature of this pursuit: do not let your goal striving assume the same importance as the good or Good that it attempts to support. In other words, do not treat your goals as goods. People tend to violate this condition for healthy human choice whenever they are more emotionally than rationally attached to the particular object of their actions.

A dramatic example may illustrate the significant difference between a goal and a good.

Susan was a brilliant pianist. In college she studied and practiced devotedly, planning to become a concert pianist. In April of her senior year an automobile crash nearly claimed her life and did result in the loss of three fingers. By late that summer, after a natural period of shock and mourning, she was ready to accept a position teaching music in a high school. She told reporters, "Music is my life. I love it, and want to share it with others in whatever way I can." She exhibited this condition of detachment from particular (goal-striving) ways of participating in the human good of music and in the fundamental human Goods of Play and Aesthetic Experience from which music flows.

Many people who practice family planning violate this condition for a loving choice by treating the act of genital union as a goal on a par with marital union itself. They fail to distinguish and live out the essentially human difference between a means for spousal love and the end or result, the spousal love itself, which can be attained in many other (if not always *wanted*) ways.

6. The choice expresses creative fidelity to the fundamental human Goods and the commitments which embody them.

Susan, the pianist, is a good example of this complementary way of responsible choosing. She manifested a creative commitment to music and a fidelity to the basic human Values of Play and Aesthetic experience which underlie both performance and instruction in music. Of course, other basic human Values are involved, such as Friendship, Integrity, Authenticity. But Play

is the dominant, ultimate human Purpose behind the performance of music.

When she was forced to abandon her striving for the goal of being a concert pianist, Susan did not abandon her deep commitment to Play. She did not develop a sourgrapes attitude, rejecting the very *thought* of the world of musical performance, which she could no longer possess in her desired way. Nor did she try to maintain fidelity to Play and music by an uncreative, stubborn insistence that she could continue to play with an orchestra. She creatively adapted to her new condition and set of options. She used them as a means of expressing and supporting her commitment to the great personal good of music and the fundamental Good of Play—the play of others as well as her own.

In the practice of family planning, people are being called to a creative commitment to marriage and a fidelity to the basic human Values of Life and Friendship which particularly underlie marital union. They do not have to insist stubbornly and uncreatively on their “sexual rights.” They can choose natural family planning as a creative means of expressing and supporting their commitment to the great interpersonal good of marriage and the fundamental human Goods of Life and Friendship.

Conditions 5 and 6, therefore, are two sides of the same coin.

Condition 5 focuses attention on the relation of the ethical agent to the means-to-an-end aspect of his or her activities. The instrumental part of activities should never be treated as being good in itself. This condition (Detachment) ensures that the intention of the agent does not include making either goals or means into goods or ends-in-themselves.

Condition 6, however, focuses attention on the relation of the ethical agent to the goods which the means-to-an-end aspect of activities are created to celebrate and support. This condition (Creative Fidelity) ensures that the intention of the agent includes a continued positive fidelity to proximate human goods (e.g., music, marriage) and to ultimate human Goods (e.g., Play, Friendship) as ends in themselves. The agent is protected from the

mistake of treating goods as though they were either means or goals.

7. *In making a choice, the ethical agent expresses his or her consistent commitment to a harmonious set of purposes and values.*

In some respects, this condition for responsible choice logically follows from the previous one. If a person is going to be creatively faithful to the basic Goods and other human goods, he or she will have to make every choice in a way that is consistent with these goods or purposes. But this condition specifies something further.

The agent holds a responsibility to see that his or her actions are creatively faithful to human nature by proceeding from a wholesome philosophy of life. One's choices must not only be consistent with purposes and values already adopted, but those values themselves must be *harmonious* with one another. This seventh dimension of responsibility demands attention to one's world view and to its over-all reasonability.

While we are not reasonably required to examine explicitly our philosophy of life every time a choice is made, every choice ought to flow from a healthy view of what life is all about; otherwise, it is not growth-producing for the agent—it necessarily constricts the agent's freedom. So, it is reasonable that periodically the ethical agent examines *why* he or she engages consistently in certain actions. The obligation to make this examination quite carefully would seem to be strongest on the occasion of choices about vocation, career, and life-style.

If Joe is living alone as a hermit in the desert, he cannot reasonably expect to make a commitment of marriage and yet retain his solitary mode of living. Marriage and eremitical solitude are basically inharmonious. They are good in themselves; but, lived together, they are rationally impossible. This is only one of countless examples of situations that require a major consideration of the harmony or disharmony in the values to which one is committed in making a given choice.

In attempting to understand this condition for loving choice many people are inclined to think only of the consistency factor.

But this condition reasonably requires more than a consistency of actions in support of one's commitments. It demands a harmonizing of the values underlying the commitments. We can be rather consistent in the actions we take over a period of time, but actually be unconsciously living out values that are inherently contradictory or disharmonious. People engaged in premarital genital intercourse may be quite consistent to their commitment to each other, but the question is also whether this kind of commitment is based on a harmonious set of sexual purposes and values. In family planning, couples often find that in making practical daily decisions regarding means and methods their whole philosophy of life begins to change and their values become more harmonious.

8. *The action fulfills or, at least, does not frustrate the agent's roles in the many communities to which he or she belongs.*²

A person can reasonably recognize that he or she must always act so that his or her true duties are accomplished whenever possible.

Sometimes, of course, one is placed in a situation where these duties clash.

A working mother may find herself with a dilemma over whether to stay home with a sick child or to go to work that day. She may hope that a willing friend can care for the child's needs emotionally as well as physically. But under the unfortunate conditions of stress which illness would bring to a sensitive child, she may suspect that she is the only one able to care for the total needs on that occasion. The mother's presence at her place of employment might be rather critical, too. If she is an attorney, the client's case may be won or lost that day, depending on whether she or a substitute lawyer is present in court.

In cases where duties conflict, one must be careful to analyze honestly to determine which duty should prevail. Not infrequently arrangements can be made so that both duties can be fulfilled. But sometimes, as in the example of the employed mother, only one duty can be fulfilled at a given time. Although the ethical

agent cannot reasonably be expected to do the impossible, he or she is obliged to exercise care in the evaluation and decision concerning which duty is the greater—which role ought to be directly fulfilled.

This condition for responsibility flows from the previous one. Condition 7 requires reasonably periodic examination of one's basic values and personal commitments. The most important of these are embodied in choices about which communities to enter. Each of the many communities into which we freely enter or freely stay (such as marriage, profession, nation, club, neighborhood, and so on), as well as those communities in which we have a necessary membership (sons and daughters of so-and-so; inhabitants of the planet Earth), give us certain roles. The roles are a natural consequence of membership.

Reason tells us that we are fulfilling our human nature only to the extent that we respect and carry out the natural roles of any community to which we belong, if the community is true or just (not something like a band of thieves), and if the exercise of that role does not violate, in a particular case, any of the other conditions for responsible choosing. A virtuous person, a person of good character, is largely determined by the care with which he or she fulfills all the various roles that express his or her communal identity as a human person.

Summary

Whenever we exercise a morally free choice we need a rational, personal guidance system to ensure that we determine ourselves to be loving, rather than unloving. This means that we care to develop, and adhere to, whatever necessary conditions for truly personal attitude and behavior can be found through the use of reason. These conditions ought to be recognizable—even if not readily so in many cases—by sincere seekers of the truth in human action. They ensure our positive participation in the basic human Values. Any act or attitude that violates even one of those Values, violates all human persons *as persons*. It is unethical or immoral. Any act or attitude that accords with all of them is ethical or moral.

Eight formulations have been suggested here. But the number and description of such principles can vary, as long as the basic points of meaning remain and are consonant with our potentially growing insight into the nature of positive development and authentic self-actualization.

These essential conditions for a loving attitude and action are the core of natural (person) law. We are now in a position to consider a few special principles that ensure a true adherence to these conditions even when we are involved in moral dilemmas.



8. How to Resolve Moral Dilemmas

Lydia is your friend. You have known her for several years. In your judgment, she is a person of sterling character. Unfortunately, she is married to a man who has turned out to be scheming, ruthless, and abusive. One day Lydia pounds on your door, frantically begging you to let her in. She says that her husband is coming after her. She has just fled her house after a phone conversation with her husband, Howard. He threatened her. While she is explaining, you see her husband drive up in his car. Quickly, you hide Lydia in the closet and go to answer the door.

Howard is obviously in a rage and wants to know if you have seen or heard from Lydia. He says it is urgent that he find her. With the calmest expression you can muster, you reply that you have not heard from her and that perhaps she went shopping. He insists that she did not. But you say, "I'm very sorry." He leaves your doorstep in a huff.

From an objective, moral point of view, what did you do? Did you lie in order to preserve a greater good, the safety of your innocent friend, Lydia? Did you deceive Howard mainly in order to thwart his efforts, and to exercise some form of retaliation for all the grief that he has caused Lydia? Was it a lie? Perhaps it was only a "white lie" that served as a necessary part of preventing

harm or inconvenience to yourself and Lydia. Do you now feel remorse over your action, thinking that you have obviously failed to tell the truth and therefore are somewhat diminished in your authenticity and credibility before God and humankind? Did you do the wrong thing for the right reason? What was the right thing to say or do, under the circumstances?

Examining the Dilemma

According to the Personal Development Theory of natural law, dilemmas such as this one can be resolved objectively by knowing how to apply properly the principles of morality that we have already considered. We can come to know with certainty whether a given course of action was objectively right or wrong under severe conditions of conflict. But we need to know how to use the intellectiscoping powers of moral evaluation, and we need to analyze the action itself for its basic elements.

What is it that you have done—ethically? We have already described what you have done physically: the words and actions you said. We have implied something about your assessment of Lydia's part and Howard's part in the whole situation, and we have implied that you like Lydia and dislike Howard. But none of this kind of description touches directly upon the moral act as such. What did you *morally* do? Was it *morally* good or bad?

Was your choice of telling Howard that you had not heard from Lydia, rather than telling him to look in the closet, a responsible one? Did you choose in a manner that was truly inclusive of all human Values or Goods? Were you really being a freer or a less free person as you made the choice to withhold information that you definitely possessed?

In examining your moral act, we need to define it carefully. Was it a lie? What is a lie?

A deontological approach might include the definition of a lie as a case of withholding the truth from someone. Since you did withhold the truth concerning Lydia's whereabouts, you told a lie. But lies must never be told, because if one makes of oneself an exception to this universal injunction, there is rational ground

for others making themselves exceptions under various uncomfortable circumstances, and we end in moral bankruptcy. Therefore, you were wrong to act as you did with respect to Howard. You must do your duty to tell the truth under all circumstances, even if it hurts.

A natural law approach, however, might regard your action as a positive participation in the fundamental Good of Authenticity and Social Harmony (Friendship). A lie might be defined as a negative participation in the Good of Authenticity because it involves withholding the truth from *someone who has a right to know*. A lie is not merely withholding the truth. It is a case of depriving someone of a truth that he or she has a right to know and that you have an obligation to reveal. Whether Howard had a right to know and you had an obligation to reveal Lydia's presence in the closet is determined by analyzing the circumstances, the inter-relationships of all people involved, and how these circumstances and inter-relationships stand in the light of the fundamental Goods of human nature.

You spoke to Howard as you did—we will assume—in order to preserve Lydia's safety (Life), her integrity (Integrity), and your friendship (Social Harmony). But did you violate your Authenticity by expressing outwardly what you knew (inwardly) to be untrue? Did you act against the harmony that is a good in itself: the needed harmony between your outer expression and your inner disposition?

Without some further principle to help us, we might be inclined to say, sadly, yes, you did violate the fundamental Good of Authenticity. You acted directly against Authenticity in order to protect other fundamental human Goods, such as Integrity and Friendship. But one may never act directly against a fundamental personal Good. One may never make a Good which is forever a good in itself (like the person himself or herself) primarily a means to anything else. Therefore, you were irresponsible in this personal act; you were acting contra-personally.

If this conclusion seems intuitively to be wrong, that is because

we are missing a crucial principle enabling us to resolve moral dilemmas in accord with our basic natural law theory.

In the case of your "lying" to Howard, we are faced with a conflict about preserving all of the fundamental personal Values. No matter what you did in that case, something bad would follow. It is not good that Howard be deprived of information about his wife's whereabouts and your knowledge of it. But it is also not good that Howard receive such information under the circumstances. If you deliberately withhold the information, you seem to be depriving Howard directly the opportunity to participate in the fundamental Goods of Speculative Knowledge, Integrity (help settle his mind), Social Harmony (Friendship), and the like. But, if you deliberately reveal the information, you seem to be depriving Lydia directly the opportunity to participate in the fundamental Goods of Life (safety, health), Integrity (mental, emotional), Social Harmony (friendship with you), and so forth. You cannot do nothing. You must choose. Are both choices inherently wrong?

For now, we may note that natural law theory does not ask you to weigh the good involved in either course of action. That would be a kind of utilitarian approach. Goods cannot be weighed, if they are fundamental Goods of personhood, because these Goods are identical, each in its own way, with the essence of the person. And a person cannot be weighed . . . as a *person*! So, your dilemma is not a question of deciding whether there is some principle, such as Life, which is higher than truth-telling (Authenticity). Your ethical task is not to weigh goods but to determine *what* you are doing (intending). Are you really lying, going against the basic Value of Authenticity? How are you treating personhood itself in *this* act?

Later we will discuss the traditional principle of so-called double effect, by which one can determine what action to choose among alternatives that necessarily include some foreseen bad results, as well as good results. I will indicate how it can be applied to your dilemma about the way to reply to Howard.

First, we need to focus on the nature of a moral act. The resolution of moral conflicts, such as this one, requires careful attention to what a moral choice really involves.

The Moral Act: Adopting a Proposal

The essence of ethically meaningful activity—good or bad—consists of *who you are in what you choose*. Who do you make yourself to be by choosing freely to do or not to do a certain action.

If you choose to take merchandise from a store without paying for it, you *are* a shoplifter, a thief. You are not simply a being that happened to do an act of thievery. You made yourself a certain kind of person: a property-stealing person. Unless or until you choose to regret your action and to make reasonable efforts to repair any damage you have caused, your intention stands. You intend to *be* a thief.

You *cannot be other* than an air-breather, a thinker, a dreamer, a food-consumer, and so on. But you *can be other* than a property-protector, a life-respector, a friendship-enhancer. You can choose: to be or not to be a property-protector, life-respector, friendship-enhancer, and so forth. That is what it means to act as a person, as a self-determining being. Your choosing, with some degree of deliberation and freedom, makes you, to that degree, the kind of person you *are*. Choice is the crucial act.

In developing a theory of moral choice Germain Grisez uses the analogy of a committee considering proposals for adoption or rejection. When a committee entertains a proposal, the members try to bring out all the reasons for and against adopting it. The several members have the opportunity to bring out many aspects of the proposal and the various assumptions under which it may be adopted or rejected. Some of these aspects a single individual might overlook or might refuse to consider dispassionately. Presumably, the committee provides a greater likelihood of a reasonable course of action than does a single individual. (Obviously, there are disadvantages to the committee approach, too).

When you pause to deliberate about alternative courses of

action, such as how to relate to Howard, you act somewhat like a committee. Even though the pause for deliberation may be brief, it can be effective. The human mind is capable of creative and penetrating reflection in a matter of seconds, especially when a decision must be reached quickly.

You propose to yourself a given course of action, and say why it is good or bad; and then you propose another course of action, and do the same. You try to determine which of the two or more courses of action is right.

In the case of a dilemma, it seems that there is not even one right way to act. Nevertheless, you must act, so you try to do the best you can (or maybe you do not try to do the best you can—and that is ethically significant, too).

The choice of behavior essentially amounts to the adoption of one particular proposal for action among two or more proposals for possible action. There are many factors of limitation on the goodness or badness of an ethical choice (such as an intention to adopt a course of action, but a weakness of will about carrying it out). We cannot entertain them here.

The point is simply that the heart of the moral act is the choice, in as much as it involves some deliberation and freedom to act with respect to the alternative course of action that is chosen. The free and deliberative choice constitutes you as the kind of person you *are*. It does not constitute you as a person, but as this or that *kind* of person—caring or uncaring, and so forth.

Many elements tend to inhibit or enhance the subject's deliberation and freedom. Physical, emotional, and mental states largely condition the act. But insofar as the act is determined *not only* by these many elements—as all choices are—but *also* by the self, as self, the act can be said to be morally good or bad.

We do experience some freedom in some of our acts. We cannot deny that we have some freedom any more reasonably than we can deny that we are conditioned by many hereditary and environmental forces. As a personal self, the ethical agent is *both* dependent on *and* independent of the multitudes of inner and outer forces influencing his or her choice or right and wrong be-

havior. The whole endeavor of ethical reflection presupposes an acknowledgement of the power of essentially free choice, without denying that many or even most of our actions are largely necessitated by something less than the self—their ultimate subject.

I have already observed that the study of ethics is concerned with the recognition of objective principles for specifically personal behavior and with the right use of these principles in evaluating objectively the actions of individuals and communities. When persons are faced with ethical dilemmas, it is not surprising that they can do the wrong thing with good will. One of the critical needs for every ethical agent is a reasonable way to resolve conflicts over alternative courses of action. We will now turn to the two main kinds of conflict: conflict over basic Goods or values, and conflict over duties.

Conflicts over Goods

Your dilemma about relating to Howard in a morally sound way is a conflict concerning what action you can perform that will protect all of the basic Goods of personhood. It is not mainly a conflict of duties.

You might be inclined to say that you have duties to both Howard and Lydia, and that these duties conflict. But the issue is deeper than any conflict between your role as a good neighbor to Howard who is seeking his wife and your role as a good neighbor or special friend of Lydia who is seeking safety. The issue is whether you are to violate your nature as a *person* (with respect to Authenticity, Integrity, and other Goods) no matter what duty you might seem to fulfill.

The most important of all the essential conditions for a loving choice is the first one: choosing so that one does not act against any of the basic Values of personhood. You need to know, with good rational foundation, how to choose in this situation so that you act fully in accord with this first essential condition for responsibility.

The principle for deciding whether a given course of action is ethically permissible—despite foreseen bad effects—has several

parts.

1. The action must not be evil in and of itself.
2. The evil may not be done *in order to* achieve the good.
3. The evil effect is not intended, but merely allowed or tolerated.
4. There must be a proportionate reason for doing an action if it has foreseeable bad consequences.

We can indicate and illustrate these parts by analyzing how you treated Howard and Lydia.

First of all, *the action must not be in and of itself evil*. One may never act directly against the dignity of the person. The person is an absolute end in himself or herself. Murder, rape, stealing, lying, and so forth are always wrong.

In the case of Lydia and Howard, you did not lie. You withheld information from someone who had no right to know. Considering how the seeker of information was going to use it, he had no right to it.

If, for example, someone asks to borrow a hammer, you might do well to loan it as a celebration of friendship, as long as you can be reasonably sure that it will be used to pound nails, not heads. The use of information has similar conditions. There are many kinds of information that certain people have no right to acquire from you. If a stranger comes up to you and asks how much money you have in the bank, you are not obliged to inform him. Intimate details of your life may be inappropriate for even your closest friends. Telling them would violate the fundamental Good of Integrity.

A second part of the principle for settling ambiguous cases is that *the bad or evil may not be done in order to achieve the good*. As the saying goes, the end never justifies the means. A good end or consequence or motivation in no way speaks for the means that is willed to fulfill it. A man or woman may be well-motivated to feed a family, take a vacation, or pay off a loan. But not by robbing banks.

If you really were lying to Howard—if he had a right to the

information—but you did it in order to achieve a good end, such as sparing your friend considerable inconvenience or grief, then the action would be ethically wrong. You would have deliberately chosen to do evil as a means to attain something good. (If Lydia, e.g., were a known criminal, and the police came to the door seeking her arrest, you would be ethically obliged to impart the information.) As it was, *you* did not *will* the misinformation Howard received. You merely foresaw his being misinformed as a bad consequence of his own impertinent (contra-personal) request.

This latter aspect of your decision tends to come under the *third* part of the principle of double effect: *the evil effect is not intended, but merely allowed or tolerated*. You are motivated only by the good that is involved, and you in *no* way *desire* the evil that you foresee. You are not using this occasion as a way to get back at Howard for all the hardships he causes in Lydia's life. You regret the misinformation he carries away with him, but you see that it is *he* who caused it, not you.

You are really choosing only the good effects and the bad effect is not even a part of the proposal for action which you adopt. You choose the proposal to preserve Lydia's safety, integrity, friendship, and the like. Your proposal does not damage your Authenticity in any way. Your outward actions of expressing ignorance concerning Lydia's whereabouts are really proportionate and harmonious with your inner disposition: you know (within yourself) not only that Lydia is in the closet, but that Howard has no right to that information under these conditions (the conditions of his own motivations and intentions, as they are reasonably grasped to you). If you had told Howard the "truth" you would have gone directly against the fundamental Good of Authenticity by expressing outwardly something that was disharmonious with what you knew inwardly. That is the essence of a lie.

The fourth part of the double effect principle in its traditional form says that *there must be a proportionate reason for doing an action that one foresees will have bad consequences*.

When a woman is pregnant such that the new life is rooted in

her fallopian tube, a competent physician may (in fact, *must*) operate to remove the tube and the growing new human being, because he can thereby save the mother's life. If he did nothing, both lives would undoubtedly be lost. He can do nothing to prevent the child's loss of life. But he can do something to prevent the mother's loss of life, even though he foresees the bad effect of having to remove a living human being from its present life-support system and to watch him or her die. The bad effect of his action is not the child's death. In this case, Nature is, so to speak, the agent of death. The bad effect is having to view this death, even to "preside" over it. Yet this effect is proportionately small, compared to the good effect of saving the mother's life.

Unfortunately, some ethicists who regard themselves as exponents of natural law tend to distort the meaning of this fourth part of the principle of double effect. They make it into the whole principle and regard it as a question of weighing the good and the bad consequences: the good of the mother's life outweighs the bad of the child's death; the good of Lydia's safety outweighs the bad of Howard's misconception of her location; and so forth. They make the whole double-effect principle into a kind of utilitarian estimation regarding conflicts of duties (considered below). But there is no place for weighing goods that are ends in themselves. The principle of double effect is designed to show how to resolve the ambiguity in these major dilemmas concerning incommensurable and incomparable Goods.

The essence of this principle is the provision of a rational basis to determine whether the action one is choosing can be willed *without necessarily including* in the choice (the adopted proposal) the evil that will result.¹ If the action is a single moral action in which both good and bad effects are foreseen or foreseeable, then one can choose to do it by being motivated entirely by the good effects and without being motivated at all by the bad effects. (Of course, it is understood that no other courses of action are open which are free from significantly bad effects. Moreover, there must be a proportionate reason for the act. A physician

would be wrong to propose removal of warts found on your hand by removing your hand.) But if there are really two distinct—although, perhaps, continuous—actions, such that the *causing* of the bad effect is the *means* of producing the good effect, then one cannot possibly choose to do the action without including, as part of the adopted proposal, the destructive activity. One would necessarily be acting directly against a basic human Value.

The proposal for action that you adopted in relating to Howard does not necessarily involve doing a wrong act to produce a good result, unless you were motivated that way. (You might have been motivated to save Lydia by doing something bad to Howard; but you could have been motivated simply to save Lydia.) The act was a single moral act in which both good and bad could be foreseen. The very act by which Howard was misinformed (unfortunate occurrence, but not a lie) is the same moral act by which Lydia was saved (at least on this occasion).

In the case of harboring a fugitive from justice, and deliberately misdirecting the police, who have a right to know, you would be choosing an action that necessarily involves making a choice to do wrong (lie [go against Authenticity]) *so that* good might come (saving a friend from disgrace, imprisonment, and so forth [participating in Friendship]). The act by which the police are misdirected would be a lie (a wrong) which you not only foresee has bad effects, but which you deliberately construct as a *means* to produce the desired effect (guilty or suspect friend's safety or convenience).

Even though the act of misinforming would be physically one and the same act as that by which you would save your friend from the police—just as the act of misinforming Howard is physically one with the act by which you saved Lydia—it would be morally distinct. The intentional *act* of saving your fugitive friend (which is good) would not be the same as the intentional *act* by which you would do it (which is bad). And you would be using the bad intention (to lie) as a *means* to fulfill the good intention (to save friendship, life, or whatever).

No act can be good and bad at the same time and in the same respect. The act of giving the police misinformation might be physically good and result in some physical good for the fugitive. But it would be morally bad. Being a lie, it would express an intentional, contra-personal attitude in you. You would say, in effect, "I am willing to affirm and deny the same thing at the same time: the right of persons to personal treatment." By treating the police officer as a non-person, while apparently treating your friend as a person, you would have failed to choose inclusivistically.

Contraceptive intercourse, even in an otherwise loving marriage, represents a violation of the principle of double effect.² Even though they do not *want* or *intend* to lie to each other, a married couple necessarily includes the bad aspect of the action as a *means* to attain a good.³ They are willing (choosing) freely to go against the life-giving power of their act of intercourse *in order to* fulfill the love-giving power. *They* are the ones who *cause* the destruction of the inherent meaning of a free act as life-affirming *in order to* gain the good (an increase in sexual love). Ironically, as a result they do not attain the good they so desire at a moral and spiritual level; although they increase the closeness of their *feelings* for each other in some respect. Contraceptive activity is necessarily contra-personal because the ethical agent says I am willing to affirm and deny the same thing at the same time. With my activity of intercourse I say *yes* to the possibility of a child; but, with my contraceptive, at the same time, I say *no* to this same possibility.

Conflicts of Duties

The other major area in which moral dilemmas are found is the conflict between duties. Caught between fulfilling his or her responsibilities to two or more communities at the same time, how ought the person go about making a decision? What principles are at stake and how can they be applied effectively?

The eighth mode of responsible choosing calls for the fulfillment of one's duties. The working mother whose child is ill and unable to attend school may have both a duty to stay at home in

order to fulfill her role as a mother and to go to work that day in order to fulfill her role as an employee. She must take into account the relative importance of the two conflicting roles. But she must also assess the relative importance of the particular action to the fulfillment of the respective role. In some cases it is quite evident that, even though the role belongs to a more important community, the neglect of an action appropriate to that role is not as serious as the neglect of a conflicting action appropriate to the less important community.

A person may rightly value the role of mother higher than the role of employee. But if, for instance, the respective actions in fulfillment of these roles are either to take a child to a midweek picnic or to put in a working day lest she lose her job, then she is likely right in choosing to fulfill her duty as an employee by working that day, and to try to fulfill her duty as a mother in other significant ways.

At times a person may have to relinquish his or her membership in a community because the exercise of its responsibilities unduly clashes with the exercise of responsibilities to other communities. These other communities, such as marriage and motherhood, are discerned as more valuable because they more readily express, protect, and foster participation in the fundamental human Good.

On the one hand, marriage and motherhood are penultimate human purposes and values, intimately related to the Goods of Life, Social Harmony, and others. On the other hand, one's bridge club and the P.T.A. as communities are worthy human purposes, but they are remotely derived from some of the basic human Goods. Roles in these latter communities are less important, and one's membership may have to be sacrificed in order to carry out effectively the critical roles in primary, vocational communities.

We have already discussed how ambiguity in decisions concerning the basic human Values can be resolved by using the principle of double effect. This principle serves as a key extension

to the first condition for responsibility. When we come to conflicts between the practical fulfillment of different community roles, we are reasonably required to deal with all the conditions of responsibility beyond the first one.

Even the condition for responsible action called Detachment is applicable. If a mother has a child who becomes ill and needs her emotional as well as physical attention at home, part of the mother's consideration should revolve around whether she is so attached to achieving her career goals that they are turning into "goods in themselves" and blocking her vision of her child's need. Or perhaps the child has been pampered lately, and the mother has allowed herself to be unduly fixed on child-care objectives at the expense of fulfilling her career objectives which are supporting the over-all good of the family.

Among the various dimensions of responsible attitude and action that need to be applied in resolving a conflict of duties, the one that implies a readiness to achieve the greatest net good and the least net harm is particularly relevant. Once one is sure that neither of two possible courses of action will directly go against a fundamental human Good, then it may well be the case that one should try to see which of the alternatives will produce the greatest good for the greatest number.

The working mother who is an attorney with a crucial court case on the same day as her child becomes somewhat seriously ill is faced with a significant dilemma that must be analyzed in the light of the other conditions for responsibility. But this condition, ensuring the maximization of the good involved in the pursuit of her many particular objectives for that day and for the future, is certainly relevant.

Which course of action is her real duty? Obviously she is obliged to do whatever she can to minimize the bad effects of not taking the course of action she chooses to relinquish. If she decides to go to court, she is obliged by this mode and others to minimize the trauma to her child by getting the most caring available person to stay with the child. If she decides to stay with the child,

she must try to minimize the risk to her client in court by getting the best possible substitute for herself. In any event, the obligation to pursue limited objectives that maintain, sustain, and enhance one's participation in the basic personal Goods (the fourth condition for responsible choice) is particularly relevant in the resolution of such a conflict.

Unlike conflicts with respect to the basic Goods, role resolutions are often not absolute. No one can ever say with absolute certainty whether a given course of action will lead to the greatest good of the greatest number or the least net harm. As long as person(al) nature itself is not directly at stake, we cannot be absolutely sure—although we can often be relatively sure—that a given action is best.

Conflicts that make it difficult to know one's true duty in a given situation can be reasonably handled by the guidance system already presented. But the *application* of this system to both conflicts of duties and conflicts of Goods is complex and readily subject to error. Let us consider two areas of common confusion.

Commonly Misused Principles

Theorists who falsely claim to be adhering to a natural law approach generally misuse two principles that require careful interpretation.

The first principle might be called the *principle of the proportionate good*. It holds that the goodness of the agent's motivation, together with the relative good of attending circumstances and consequences, can render an action involving significant evil aspects as the proportionately good and right thing to do. This principle is often misunderstood or taken out of context.

Some theorists apply it to the resolution of conflicts concerning whether a course of action entails the direct violation of a basic human Value. They think that in difficult cases, such as your dealing with Howard, you can justify an action by weighing or balancing what amounts to basic personal Goods, such as life and truth. They might try to justify your behavior toward How-

ard by saying that Lydia's safety (Life) in this case is more important than Howard's acquisition of truth. I have already indicated (in discussing part four of the double effect principle) why I think this is an improper rationale.

Some theorists, for instance, will even use it to justify incest by saying that such an act can be morally permissible where both parties consent, as in the case cited earlier in which a father is charged by terrorists to commit this act with one daughter to save the life of another. The idea is that the father's action may be ethically responsible because his good motivation and the severe circumstances render the action proportionately good in comparison with refusal to act in this manner.

Of course, this use of the idea of "proportionate reason" or "proportionate good" is based on the idea that there are no human actions which are absolutely wrong. Rape, incest, murder, and so forth are considered to be *virtually, but not absolutely*, exceptionless actions. This approach is actually a kind of utilitarianism, not natural law.

Another commonly misused principle for resolving ambiguous moral actions is called the *principle of totality*. In biomedical ethics its use is common. One may act responsibly in having surgery to remove cancerous tissues—even vital organs—where it is necessary to save the very life of the person. The principle is derived from the reasonable observation that the parts exist for the sake of the whole, more than the whole exists for the sake of the part. So, part of the body may be sacrificed in order to save the whole (the totality).

Basically, the *principle of totality* is intended to apply to physical or organismic totality. Unfortunately, it is frequently being applied to the moral and spiritual totality of the person. Some theorists have been known to argue that one's moral life must be judged on the basis of a total orientation. According to their view, one cannot be fairly evaluated on the basis of a single moral action, which is only a part of the totality of personal life.

This application of the idea of totality would allow one to say

that a given couple may have an abortion after their sixth child, because their over-all married relations have been supportive of the good of children and the enhancement of their lives. In fact, the abortion might be characterized as morally necessary for the sake of the totality of quality-rearing and education of the many children that they already have. To a great extent, this kind of reasoning is being used to justify contraceptive intercourse in marriage. One hears the argument that such practice is permissible for the sake of the whole (marriage), as long as the predominant attitude and activity in the marriage is open to the gift of life.

This misapplication of the *principle of totality* occurs in part because people confuse the nature of physical or organismic wholes with the nature of moral and spiritual wholes. Unlike in physical wholes, the parts of moral and spiritual wholes are primarily ends in themselves and do not exist principally for the good of the whole. Every moral and spiritual act is a *part* of the whole agent, but as spiritual (non-physical) its relation to the whole is one of *equivalence*. What I am in this part (act, choice, will), I am as a whole. What I am as a whole, I am in this part. The part and whole in morality and spirituality are not identical; but they exist with equal, though different, qualitative significance. Many moralists do not seem to have grasped this aspect of the great difference between physical and spiritual whole-part relationships.⁴

The misuse of this principle of totality is also basically utilitarian. The principle of "totality" is made to be identifiable as a principle of the most good. Human actions are not regarded in themselves, but only as they contribute to some final or larger end. By this argument one could also say that a man is perhaps justified in killing his chronically annoying mother-in-law on the basis that it is only one among countless acts of preserving and procreating new life in which he has engaged and which form the totality of his moral life. In the totality of his personality, the pro-life acts far *outweigh* the pro-death act.

Ethicists seem to have an occupational hazard. They are in constant danger of letting their minds slip away from the intrinsic

meaning of an ethical action as an instance of self-determination. Once a man deliberately and freely determines to kill his mother-in-law he makes himself a murderer (a killer of innocent human life). No amount of other (protective or procreative) acts says otherwise, unless or until he acknowledges the radical wrongness of the act (choice) and is self-determined to do whatever he can to demonstrate his regret that he ever intended it.

In lesser, but serious matters such as extra-marital sex and contraception, a person would be saying even with a single act, "I am an adulteror," or "I am a contraceptor," until he or she acknowledges the radical wrongness of the *act*—an act which is a part of a *moral* whole and is not a quantitative part at all. *We are* what we choose.

Besides, in his or her marital acts of coital union, an adulteror is *necessarily not* intending the action to be *necessarily* marital. By his or her unchanged determination to exercise this kind of activity with a non-spouse (when the occasion arises), such a person cannot give self to spouse in and through *this* kind of activity in a spousal way—even though he or she *feels* as though that is what is happening. He or she may *want* (*intend*, in the sense of motivation) this action to be marital (an exclusive kind of interactivity with one's spouse); but he or she is obviously *willing* (*intends*, in the sense of *permission*) to let it be an expression of diluted care for his or her spouse. A similar inner contradiction of personal determination happens in every act of contraceptive intercourse.

In this section we have discussed how we need a rational way of determining the resolution of extraordinarily complex or profound ethical problems. From the viewpoint of natural law, we saw how an ethical dilemma ought to be analyzed carefully in its relation to the heart of moral action: deliberate, free choice.

Basically there are two kinds of ethical dilemmas: conflicts over how to preserve all essentially human values, and conflicts over determining which one of a conflicting set of duties is to be fulfilled. These two kinds of dilemmas should not be confused.

Finally, it is important to realize how easily even sophisticated moralists can “take their eyes off the ball.” They readily slip into a morality that evaluates actions or choices on the basis of their motivation, circumstances, and consequences without direct attention to the acts themselves, in and through which the person himself or herself is *primarily* revealed. Because of this tendency to undervalue the choice in itself and to misrepresent what it means, many contemporary moralists reject or falsely “develop” natural law theory.

Conclusion: The Meaning of Natural (Person) Law

In the light of the sketch of principles resolving moral dilemmas and the more general considerations in previous sections, we can attempt to state the meaning of natural law in a somewhat succinct manner.

Natural law means personal law, not individual law. As natural, it refers to a necessary, rational system of guidance that can be gradually discovered and understood by thinking persons for the sake of their positive development, their true self-actualization.

Natural law applies to both individuals and communities, because every individual shares with every other individual and with every community a common, stable (not static), dynamic basis for the flourishing of the unique individual and the unique community.

For religious persons, natural law will be seen as the essential condition for human participation in God-given nature. It will be regarded by Christians as God’s basic way of revealing how to live in the likeness and celebrate the goodness of a Personal Creator. For non-religious persons, natural law might be seen as the essential conditions for maintaining the basic dignity and equality of nature’s finest kind of being.

Natural law is the potential for rationally-elaborated conditions fostering personal (natural) development and self-actualization, and is applicable to the whole range of human endeavor. It is person law: caring *for* persons, *as* persons, *by* persons. Natural law is natural love, ever more knowable wherever individual and community consciousness authentically evolves.

Natural Family Planning (NFP) practitioners and counselors are involved with one of the most exciting and intimate participations in the natural law. Growing in the truth and beauty of NFP and natural law increases one's love for everyone as a *person*. Just as instruction in the methods and procedures of NFP requires discussion and practice on the part of the learner, so too, instruction in the theory and philosophy of natural law morality requires discussion and meditation. Discussion broadens and deepens the mind; meditation softens and purifies the heart. Together, natural family planning and natural law can serve as a master plan for growth in loving persons as they are, and as they can be.

Notes: 7. Necessary Conditions for a Loving Action

- 1 Cf. Germain Grisez and Russell Shaw, *Beyond the New Morality*, second revised edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), pp. 58-66. See also, Russell Shaw, *Choosing Well* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982).
- 2 This condition, like all others, also applies to ethical agents that are communities. The community known as the United States, for instance, has a certain role to perform in the community of all nations. This role involves a multitude of duties.

Notes: 8. How to Resolve Moral Dilemmas

- 1 Cf. *Beyond the New Morality*, pp. 146-158.
- 2 The principle of double effect is crucial to ethics in every area of behavior. Using it in the analysis of a variety of critical issues would further clarify its meaning.
- 3 *Intention* is a highly ambiguous word. There seem to be two main uses of the word that signify quite different things. *Intention* can mean *motivation*, as when we ask, "Did you intend to show your love for each other by this intercourse?" The couple might well say, "Yes, that is what we desired or wanted to do." But *intention* can mean what someone is willing to do: what he or she willingly *directs* an action to do or be. We might ask, "Did you intend to render dysfunctional your personal power to give life at that time?" A contracepting couple would have to say *yes* to that question. So their intention as motivation might be said to be good, but their intention as an objective or purpose of their will must be said to be bad (self-negating). They *intended* (though they did not want to intend) something self-destructive as a *means* to attain something self-affirming.
- 4 The difference between physical and spiritual wholes and parts can be illustrated simply. If I give you a part of my candy bar, I no longer have a whole bar. If I give you all or most of my knowledge of what a candy bar is, I still have the whole of my knowledge.