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Paul Flaman

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Moral Discernment and Culpability

by

Dr. Paul Flaman

*The author is Associate Professor of Christian Theology,
St. Joseph's College, University of Alberta, Canada*

It is widely agreed that a responsible person will seek to become adequately informed in making decisions, especially regarding actions that can have significant consequences for oneself and others. Many agree that a person of moral integrity will follow one's well informed and formed conscience, one's best judgment about what one should or should not do in a given situation. An important question with regard to this is, "How does one discern what really is the right or the best option to choose?" The first part of this article is meant to provide some guidance with regard to this in the light of human experience and some relevant biblical and Catholic values and principles. The reader is invited to consider these criteria for moral discernment in the light of his or her own experience and reflections. The second part of this article addresses the question of personal responsibility. Among other things, the question of whether certain factors can mitigate or eliminate the culpability of a person who behaves in an objectively harmful or immoral way is addressed.

I. Moral Discernment

Goals and Means

Moral discernment involves discerning (discovering, judging) which goals (ends, intentions) and means (actions) really are conducive to human fulfillment and according to God's will. Note: when a person (moral agent) acts deliberately, he or she always acts for some reason or goal (end, intention). Deliberately chosen actions are means to some goal.¹ From a Christian perspective, God wants our complete or integral fulfillment.

Consider two students who both have the goal to get a good mark in a course. One student chooses the means of doing his or her own work, including doing all the required readings for the course, studying for the exams and doing his or her own research for and writing of the term paper. The other student chooses different means, to cheat on the exams and to plagiarize for the term paper. Is there any difference in the means they choose? They may both receive the same mark (goal). If we consider relevant values such as honesty, fairness, knowledge and personal integrity, there is a significant moral difference in the means. The student who does his or her own work is honest, fair to others (other students, future employers and clients) and will have learned more knowledge than if he or she had cheated and plagiarized. The student who does the latter is dishonest and unfair to others. He or she may also face serious negative consequences (e.g., get expelled from university) if he or she is caught. Regarding "knowledge", which doctor would you prefer to go to, one who cheated his or her way through medical school or one who did his or her own work?

Some ethicists think that the most significant "consequence" of one's actions is that they are self-determining. The student who does his or her own work, even if difficult at times, builds his or her character and personal moral integrity as an honest, fair, hard-working, and persevering person. The student who cheats and plagiarizes forms his or her character as a dishonest, unfair and lazy person. Actions are habit forming. A person who cheats now will tend to justify more easily cheating, being dishonest and unfair to others in the future unless he or she sincerely repents of such immoral behavior.

With regard to goals and means consider another issue, family planning. A couple who chooses to use a method of contraception and another couple who chooses to use natural family planning may both have the same intention (goal) of trying to avoid conceiving a child now. Morality, however, is not only determined by goals but also by means and respecting relevant values and God's purposes. With regard to this, one can consider other moral issues such as a teenager having an abortion or giving up her child for adoption so that she can more easily continue her education, and stealing or working for a living.

Regarding goals, consider a person's short-term, long-term, and ultimate goals in life. To pass or to get a good mark in a course is a relatively short-term goal when one considers one's whole life. Longer-term goals include such things as one's career and family goals, which may only be realized over several decades. People's ultimate goals may include such things as to have no regrets at the end of one's life on earth or to get to heaven. Some ethicists also speak of a person's fundamental commitment,

the basic freely chosen moral orientation of a person which is related to his or her specific free choices and actions.

What is the ultimate goal or fundamental commitment of a Christian, a follower of Jesus? While one could refer to some other New Testament texts, consider two. In Mt. 6:33 Jesus teaches that one should first seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. In a journey or trip it makes sense to first of all consider one's destination (goal of one's journey), e.g., Paris, if one hopes or expects to get there. What is the ultimate goal or destination of the journey of life? According to Jesus, it is the Kingdom of God, a reign of complete and perfect mutual love, justice, life, peace, beauty, truth, joy... and unity with God and others in union with God. God's righteousness which is related to truth, goodness and right relationships is connected to this. In Mt. 22:34-40 Jesus teaches that the greatest commandment (of God) is to love God with all one's heart, soul and mind. The second commandment, to love one's neighbor as oneself, is related to it. On these two hang all the law and the prophets. According to Jesus, one's fundamental commitment should be to love God, oneself, and others properly. All of Christian morality is related to this.

Consider the ultimate goals and fundamental commitments or moral orientations of others who are not Christians, e.g., a believing Jew or Muslim, an atheist humanist, a hedonist. Not all people's ultimate goals or fundamental commitments are the same. Aristotle, a great philosopher of ancient Greece, thought all people naturally seek happiness, but not in the same things. Some seek happiness in pleasures or fame or wealth. Aristotle thought that God, truth and good friendships were especially relevant in actually finding happiness. Among the different possible ultimate goals or fundamental commitments it makes sense to consider what really will lead to true happiness or fulfillment, what really is conducive to true union and communion with God and others.

With regard to other goals such as career or family goals, one can consider Jesus' call (see, e.g., Mt. 25:14-30) to make fruitful use of one's talents (God-given gifts, deep inclinations and so forth). Any honest form of work (contrast, e.g., the "career" of a bank robber) can be a way of serving other human persons and giving glory to God, a way to fulfill the greatest commandments of love. One can also fulfill these commandments, serve human persons and give glory to God, by getting married and raising a family or by remaining single and celibate (e.g., as a religious brother or sister or priest or serving others as a lay celibate person like Jean Vanier who lives and works with mentally disabled people).

Do Good and Avoid Evil

The Christian New Testament calls people to do good and avoid evil. Here we will only consider a few texts. In Mt. 25:31-46 Jesus teaches that

those who give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, and so forth, will go into eternal life, whereas those who do not do these things will go into eternal punishment. This is a strong call to do good in the sense of responding concretely to the real needs of other human beings. In Rm. 2:5-11 the Apostle Paul teaches that God, Who shows no partiality, will judge righteously. Those who patiently do good will receive glory, honor and eternal life from God. Those who do evil will experience anguish and distress. In Rm. 3:8 the Apostle Paul condemns the view that it is all right to do evil that good may come. In other words, one may not use an evil means for a good end. Contrast utilitarianism which seeks to justify any means by a good end. The author of 1 Th. 5:15 also teaches: "See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without constantly, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything, hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil."(RSV)

An important question related to the above is, "What makes an action good or evil?" With regard to this question let us consider the traditional Christian and official Catholic approach.

Traditional Christian and Official Catholic Approach to the Morality of Human Actions

With regard to the following approach and official Catholic teaching see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997), nn. 1749-61. In his Encyclical Letter Regarding Certain Fundamental Questions of the Church's Moral Teaching *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), nn. 71-83, Pope John Paul II explains this approach in some depth. This is not a new approach but is rooted in biblical teaching, as some examples will show, and has been developed by various theologians such as Thomas Aquinas. With regard to the morality of human actions, this approach considers three things: the object chosen, the end in view or the intention and the circumstances of the action.

Object: This means the kind of act that is the object of choice. "Kind" of act refers to the moral meaning or nature of the action, e.g., telling the truth or lying. In assessing the moral meaning of a human action one considers not only what physically happens, but the action's relationship to relevant goods or values, and to our ultimate end, God. For example, marital sex and adultery may be quite similar actions physically, but they are actions whose moral meaning or nature is very different. Marital sex can express and honor the couple's marital commitment or covenant and the value of faithful love, which are rooted in God's faithful love, whereas adultery violates these important values. Human actions can be morally good (e.g., feeding the hungry), evil (e.g., murder), or neutral

(e.g., moving one's hand) per se. According to Catholic teaching some kinds of acts, e.g., willful killing of innocent human beings (this is distinguished, e.g., from a police officer protecting the lives of one or more innocent human beings by killing an unjust aggressor as a last resort) and nonmarital sexual relations, are intrinsically disordered and always wrong to choose. There is a biblical basis for this position and these examples. Jesus Himself teaches that to enter into eternal life one must keep the commandments, including "... You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery ..." (Mt. 19: 16-19 RSV) Such actions violate important values, such as the sacredness of human life created in God's image and faithful love, which are rooted in God and cannot be ordered to a person becoming like God (cf. 1 Jn. 3), to the ultimate goal of true union and communion with God and others.

Intention: This refers to a person's motive or motives (reasons) for acting or not acting. Consider, e.g., how the same kind of act, murder, can have various motives such as those related to revenge, jealousy, greed and/or blackmail. From a Christian perspective one's motives should all be in accord with loving God, oneself and others properly. Bad motives can corrupt even good actions. For example, Jesus criticizes those who give alms to the poor or pray (good kinds of actions per se) for selfish motives, to try to appear good in others' eyes, rather than to help the poor and to please God (see Mt. 6:1-6). As another example, consider a surgeon who has no love for people and whose motives for performing properly-done surgeries (which also actually help people although this is not his or her intention) are only to make money and protect his reputation. Good motives also cannot make an intrinsically disordered action morally good, e.g., mercy killing, willfully killing an innocent human being to end suffering, or having an abortion to continue one's schooling without interruption.

Circumstances: Every human action is performed in a certain situation or set of circumstances. The circumstances include the consequences of an action. The important issue here is whether or not any morally relevant values are involved in the circumstances. For example, in itself it is a good thing for a married couple to express their love to each other sexually. This does not mean, however, that it is okay for them to have sexual relations anytime or anywhere. A married couple having sexual relations in private is an appropriate circumstance, whereas their having sexual relations in public is not. Certain circumstances can make it irresponsible to do even good kinds of actions because doing the actions in these circumstances involves failing to respect properly morally relevant values.

Consider two other examples. Vigorous exercise is normally a good thing but would be irresponsible for a person whose life would be

threatened by it because of his or her heart condition. A biblical example includes the following: In 1 Cor. 10:23-33, the Apostle Paul teaches that one should feel free to eat with gratitude whatever is sold in the meat market. Nevertheless, if another person would be offended if one were to eat meat which has been offered to pagan gods, that is, it is against the other person's conscience, one should refrain from eating such meat in those circumstances. The Apostle Paul does not see anything wrong with eating such meat per se since he does not believe in those gods. His moral conclusion here is rather based on the circumstances, to avoid the negative effect it could have of unnecessarily offending another person.

Related to the circumstances of actions, we can also note here that according to the traditional Christian view, the fact that an action may result in some good consequences does not justify using an evil means (cf. Rm. 3:8), doing something that is intrinsically disordered. For example, some medical research which has violated the rights to free and informed consent of competent human subjects has resulted in beneficial knowledge. Today, doing medical research without a competent subject's free and informed consent is widely considered an evil means and is not to be done even if it is expected to have some beneficial results. Embryonic stem cell research, which involves the evil means of destroying tiny embryonic human beings, is also not justified even if it may result in some good consequences for other human beings. The alternative of research on stem cells obtained from umbilical cord blood after birth or from adults without harming anyone does not involve the use of such evil means.²

According to the traditional Christian approach to the morality of human actions, a person's will should be properly ordered, one should show due respect for the morally relevant values, with regard to all three: the object or kind of act chosen, the end in view or the intention, and the circumstances of the action. Today many people including many non-Christians would agree that motives and circumstances including consequences are relevant to morality. The most controversial issue in this area is with regard to what kinds of actions are intrinsically disordered or always wrong to choose, regardless of motives and circumstances. Today many people would agree with Catholic teaching that rape, pedophilia, genocide, and murder are kinds of acts that are always wrong to choose. There is more disagreement with regard to Catholic teaching that some other kinds of actions such as all non-marital sex, direct abortion, direct contraception and direct euthanasia, are also always wrong to choose. If you consider some kinds of acts as always wrong to choose such as pedophilia and genocide but not some of the others listed here, what are your criteria? The important consideration for all of these is not public opinion but whether or not choosing a certain action for certain motives in certain circumstances is properly ordered to becoming like God, to true

union and communion with God and others. As we considered above, 1 Th. 5:22 teaches that we should do good and abstain from *every* form of evil. Jesus relates all of morality to loving God, oneself and others properly. How can we do this if we deliberately choose to act in ways that violate values such as the dignity of persons, the sacredness of human life, justice, the procreative and marital meanings of human sexual relations, the truth and faithful love, values which are rooted in who God is and who we are created in God's image, as well as God's covenant with human beings in Jesus Christ?³

II. Moral Responsibility and Culpability

Consider Human Actions Objectively and Subjectively

Christian teaching on morality considers human actions both objectively and subjectively. Considering actions objectively or according to reality means to consider whether or not they really fulfill human needs and correspond to integral human fulfillment and God's will. Does choosing a certain action for certain reasons (motives or intentions) in a given set of circumstances really involve properly respecting morally relevant values and God's purposes? Is it really according to loving God, oneself and others properly? The above section on Moral Discernment relates to considering human actions objectively.

We can also consider human actions subjectively, that is, from the inside or the perspective of the human subject(s) who is (are) doing the action(s). With regard to this we can consider the person's background, moral education, moral awareness, conscience (the person's best judgment with regard to what he or she should or should not do in a given situation), as well as the person's mental and emotional state, and so forth. It is widely held that certain factors can mitigate (or even eliminate in certain cases) a person's moral awareness (e.g., ignorance or a defective moral education that is not the person's fault) and/or freedom (e.g., a certain behavior may be due in whole or part to an uncontrollable compulsion, addiction or overpowering emotion such as fear related to a serious threat) and therefore also mitigate or eliminate one's moral responsibility including one's culpability for an objectively harmful behavior or action. One is culpable for an immoral action (or omission) to the degree that one freely chooses to act (consider also internal actions such as a deliberate choice to hate someone or regard someone merely as a sex object in one's mind – cf. Mt. 5:21-28) contrary to one's own conscience.⁴

With regard to this, consider Lk.. 12:47-8. In this passage Jesus says: "That slave (the Greek can also mean servant) who knew what his master wanted, but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has

been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.”(NRSV) We do not need to interpret this passage as Jesus endorsing the institution of slavery or a master beating a slave who misbehaves. In His teaching, Jesus commonly uses analogies from the experience of the people of His time to teach deeper lessons about our relationships with God and others. Sometimes the Gospels explicitly explain these lessons, but not always. With regard to this passage, we can consider two people who both do something that is wrong, objectively contrary to God’s will (cf. what the master wanted), but one knows it is wrong whereas the other does not. The moral awareness of the two individuals is different. If we relate the analogy of the severe and light beatings to this, we do not need to see God as a “punishing God” (1 Jn. 4 teaches that God is love). Rather, if one deliberately chooses to do something that is wrong, against God’s will and one knows that it is wrong and/or against God’s will, this will more negatively affect one’s relationship with God and moral integrity than if one does not know that this is wrong and against God’s will. Choosing something that is objectively immoral, e.g., failing to respect properly a morally relevant value rooted in who God is, can still negatively affect one’s relationship with God (cf. the analogy of the slave who received a light beating), even if one thinks that what one is choosing is okay or even good.

With regard to considering the morality of human actions objectively and subjectively, as well as the question of personal responsibility and culpability, let us briefly consider a few examples related to homicide, abortion and alcoholism.

Two men may both behave externally in a way which causes the death of other persons. One man is convicted of first degree murder due to his planning this for some time, deliberately carrying this out, and having no excuse for not knowing the law against this. The other man is only convicted of manslaughter since it seemed that at the time he was either mentally insane or not of a state of mind to appreciate what he was doing. Note how our criminal justice system also distinguishes between looking at crimes (which are also immoral actions) objectively and subjectively.

Two women both have an abortion. One woman is married, thirty-five years old, has two children in elementary school, and is advancing in her career when she gets pregnant despite using a means of birth control. She realizes that having this baby will require her to take some time off from work and someone else will probably get a better position in her company, one which she has been hoping to get. When she was pregnant with her other two children, she regarded them as babies from the beginning. She knows the facts about development of the unborn, has always regarded the human fetus as a human being, and cannot convince herself that this pregnancy is any different. Even though she considers it

morally wrong, she chooses to have the abortion anyway. The other woman is only thirteen years old and is pregnant from her fifteen-year-old boyfriend. She talks to her parents about the pregnancy. They tell her that the responsible thing for her to do is to get an abortion so her schooling will not be interrupted and that she is too young to raise a baby. When she asks them if this would be killing a human being they say no, that it is only a "mass of cells" at this time. She is convinced by them and has an abortion, thinking that she is doing the responsible thing. Although both of these cases of abortion objectively involve the destruction of innocent human life, the two women's levels of moral awareness and culpability are very different. In this example, I have deliberately presented two extremes with regard to moral awareness. Probably most women who have abortions are somewhere in between these two with regard to their degree of moral awareness and culpability.

A man has been an alcoholic for a long time. He finally realizes that this lifestyle is very harmful – his boss is threatening to fire him, his wife is threatening to leave him, and some other concerned friends have also talked openly with him about the seriousness of his drinking problem. He has gone to some Alcoholics Anonymous sessions and realizes that the only way for him to deal effectively with his drinking problem is for him to stop drinking alcohol completely. He resolves to do this and makes some plans accordingly. Sometime later, however, there is a social at work at which alcoholic beverages are available. The compulsion to drink overrides his free will and he ends up getting very drunk. Those who have heard of the man's resolution to stop drinking may be inclined to judge him. We should keep in mind the theme in Scripture that human beings judge by appearances but God sees the heart (cf. 1 Sam. 16:17). For all we know, an alcoholic who resolves to stop drinking but fails on occasion may really be trying more to improve his or her life and be more pleasing to God than someone else who does not have a drinking problem and who condemns the alcoholic for getting drunk again.⁵

Judging the Morality of Actions but not Condemning Persons

Jesus teaches that we should not judge or condemn other persons. But his teaching and example also calls us to correct some persons sometimes, to share what is morally true with them. With regard to Jesus teaching that we should not judge other persons, consider Mt. 7: 1-5: "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye."(NRSV) From Scripture we learn that God, Who is infinitely just and merciful, as

well as all-knowing, Who knows the secrets of every human heart and what is done and thought in secret, will judge all human beings fairly and impartially. We, who do not know the depths of another person's heart, or even our own, fully, should not presumptuously usurp God's role.

On the other hand, Jesus also points out our responsibility of fraternal correction. Mr. 18: 15-17 reports Jesus as teaching in part: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have regained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church..."(RSV) Among other things, this teaching needs to be balanced with the teaching of Mt. 7:1-5 which we considered above. With regard to this role of fraternal correction one can consider, for example, the responsibilities of family members, members of the Christian community, and even colleagues at work, with regard to each other. When someone has a fault or sins, many of us gossip to others about this rather than speak directly with the person concerned in private. Jesus' teaching promotes loving and effective communication in a way that respects the other's legitimate rights of confidentiality. Others are only informed and involved as necessary to help the person.

With regard to this, let us also consider Jesus' example as presented in Jn. 8:3-11:

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him [Jesus], "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote in the ground [Some ancient authorities add, "the sins of each of them"]. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again." (NRSV)

Jesus does not teach a moral relativism that considers morality only relative to personal opinion or culture, etc. He is quite clear in affirming the moral truth that adultery is a sin and He exhorts the woman to "not sin

again." On the other hand, He does not condemn her. Rather, He saved her from the condemnation of others. Jesus provides us with a powerful example here. Today if someone shares one's view that certain behaviors are irresponsible or immoral, one may be accused of being intolerant or judgmental. With regard to this we can ask, is it possible to care for someone and not approve something he or she has done? For example, should parents who really love their son or daughter who is taking illegal and harmful drugs disapprove of this and try to help him or her to stop? Should a student or colleague speak up about another student cheating or another colleague who is doing something unethical? If we really care for others, will we not share with them our moral views, how we understand relevant moral truths, when called for and in an appropriate and loving manner? I think so.

Christianity has been accused by some of laying guilt trips on people. The Catholic Church in particular, with its clear moral teaching on many issues, is sometimes said to "impose its morality on others." With regard to this, Pope John Paul II has said more than once that the Church proposes but does not impose. The pope and bishops, in trying to live up to their responsibilities as successors of Peter and the other apostles, whom Jesus chose and commissioned to share His teachings with people of all nations (cf. Mt. 28: 16-20), have presented teaching on many matters of faith and morality in the name of Jesus. In so doing, they have tried to be faithful to God's word and moral law, to the truth, and to the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised to send to guide "into all the truth." (Jn. 16:13 RSV) Following Jesus' example (I am not saying that every bishop and pope always followed Jesus' example perfectly), Who taught openly and Who did not coerce anyone to follow Him (cf. Jn. 6: 52-71), they do not force anyone to follow their teaching. Rather, they propose teaching to help people to form their consciences correctly, according to God's moral law or truth. In a similar way, but not with the same authority as the Church's magisterium, many moral theologians and ethicists propose but do not impose. In their teaching and writing, they often present their conclusions and thinking with regard to the morality of various human actions, also on new issues such as cloning which the biblical authors did not address. If this is done properly, this, too, can be a great service in helping others to form their consciences better.

In conclusion, I would like to relate this all very briefly to three mysteries of Christian faith: creation, sin, and redemption. The Bible teaches that we human beings, and the rest of the universe, were created by God, Who is a mystery of infinite love (cf. Gen. 1 and 1 Jn. 4). Human beings, created in the image of God (Gen. 1: 26-27), are called to love one another as God loves us (cf. Jn. 15: 9-17). The first human beings and all others in the past and today have sinned, however, (except Jesus, Who was

also God, and His mother Mary, who by a special privilege of God's grace was kept free from sin according to Catholic teaching). That is, we have failed to love God, ourselves, and others properly. This has had various effects including alienation from God, oneself, and others. We often do not perceive moral truth clearly and even when we grasp certain moral truths we often fail to live up to them. God, however, Who loves us more than we love ourselves, does not want to leave us in our alienated, broken, and sinful state. He wants to liberate (redeem, save) us from sin and all its harmful consequences. If we allow God and His infinite love and mercy into our lives, this process can begin in this life. Ultimately, it will be completed with our entry into eternal life, the final resurrection of the dead, and God's creating a new heaven and earth. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to lead us into the complete truth (Jn. 16: 12-13). He also taught that God will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask (Lk. 11:13). Humble prayer can help us in our moral discernment, to form our consciences correctly, to grow in understanding moral truth, how we should live. The Apostle Paul also speaks of God's love being poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rm. 5:5). God, through the Holy Spirit, and His various gifts and graces, not only wants to help us to grow in understanding how we ought to live. God also wants to help us to grow in actually realizing this, to grow in loving one another as He, as Jesus, loves us. The Gospel is not illusory "pie in the sky" but truly is "good news," in fact the best news we humans have ever heard!

References

1. Compare, e.g., Benedict Ashley and Kevin O'Rourke, *Health Care Ethics: A Theological Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1997), "Principle of Moral Discrimination," 187-91; and Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Christian Ethics* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1953), 302-8.
2. See, e.g., Paul Flaman, *Genetic Engineering, Christian Values and Catholic Teaching* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 85-89.
3. See von Hildebrand (see note 1, the whole work) for one of the best book-length treatments of Christian ethics. With regard to the wonderful consistency of Catholic moral teaching see, e.g., Pope John Paul II's Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, "The Gospel of Life," and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997), "Part III, Life in Christ." In some of my other publications and writing I have argued in support of Catholic teaching on such specific issues as contraception,

abortion and non-marital sex (for more information see: www.ualberta.ca/~pflaman).

4. Cf., e.g., *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997), nn. 1790-4 re “Erroneous Judgment.”

5. With regard to limits to human freedom see, e.g., also Rm. 7: 15-25 where the Apostle Paul speaks of not understanding his actions. Although he agrees with God’s law with his mind, he sometimes does what he does not want. He attributes this to “sin which dwells within me.” He concludes this section by affirming his faith in deliverance through Jesus Christ our Lord.