

III. False Moral Ideas

A. Definitions

1. Intrinsically Evil Acts

- a) these acts are always evil non matter what the circumstances or intentions
- b) Examples are rape, murder, adultery
- c) Can never become a good act
- d) A person could commit an intrinsically evil act but not commit a sin

2. Objective Morality

- a) Examines the rightness or wrongness of human acts as they are in themselves
- b) Focuses on principles and asks questions like, "Are abortion and euthanasia seriously wrong; and if so, why?"

3. Subjective Morality

- a) Examines the personal guilt or merit an individual has for his moral acts
- b) Focuses on particular moral choices
- c) Asks questions like: "Did this person have sufficient knowledge and intent to commit a mortal sin?"
- d) While objectively immoral acts might not be subjectively sinful, they remain objectively immoral

B. False Ideas

1. So-called Freedom of Conscience

- a) The idea that Catholics can disobey "in good conscience" the teachings of the Catholic Church
- b) Before we follow our conscience, we have a prior obligation to form it according to the teachings of the Church
- c) Vatican II (Gaudium et Spes) says conscience is God's voice speaking within us, not just our own opinion
 - 1) God's voice, our conscience, can never conflict with Church teaching
 - 2) If it does conflict, then we know our conscience is not the voice of God speaking

3) Saint Pope John Paul II often said, "True freedom isn't the ability to do whatever you want, but the ability to do what you ought."

4) True freedom is found in obeying the teachings of the Church

2. The "Fundamental Option" Theory

a) Claims that once we choose to follow God, then we cannot break our relationship with God except by a direct, explicit rejection of Him

b) Claims that if we commit adultery or practice contraception but do not explicitly reject God, then we do not commit a mortal sin

c) Saint JP II condemned this in *Veritatis Splendor* - if we willfully and knowingly engage in a seriously sinful act, then we have deliberately disobeyed (and indirectly rejected) God, and have lost sanctifying grace

d) Smacks of assurance of salvation - Protestant

e) Goes against 2000 years of Catholic tradition

3. Situation Ethics

a) The idea that moral absolute laws don't exist - that there are no such things as universal moral norms that hold for all times and places

b) Idea that we must determine the morality of acts by looking at what each situation calls for, not by relying on objective, universal principles

c) Condemned by the Vatican in 1956

d) Fancy way of saying, "do our own thing" - make up our own morality as we go

4. Values Clarification

a) Sophisticated version of situation ethics

b) To be a moral person, you just have to be consistent

c) Can consult other moral systems, but he or she is the final authority on what is right or wrong

d) Person is asked to replace the objective moral law with his or her own subjective fallible opinion

5. The End Justifies the Means

a) The idea that you can do evil to achieve a desired good

b) Examples

1) We can kill a baby to save the life of a mother

2) We can use contraception to avoid economic hardship

c) Usually accept the universal moral law and acknowledge the evil acts like abortion, but claim that evil acts can be justified to achieve good results

d) Contradicts Romans 3:8 - cannot do evil to attain good

e) Absurd to say we can violate the moral law in order to keep it

f) Hitler and Stalin killed millions of people to advance political stability and economic prosperity

g) Some Catholics try to justify abortion and euthanasia in certain situations because they say the good outweighs the bad

1) Example: What if a retarded girl is raped and her pregnancy is life-threatening?

h) Also known as "Consequentialism" and "Proportionalism" - both condemned by JP II in *The Splendor of Truth*

6. Cultural Cliches

a) A lot of people don't even think out their moral decisions

b) Just rely on cultural cliches

1) "Look out for number one"

2) "You only live once"

3) "Follow your heart"

4) "But I love her (or him)!"

5) "If it feels good, do it."

6) "We can't impose our morality"

7) "We must be tolerant" vs "If tolerance is your highest virtue, you believe in nothing" - "Don't be so tolerant that your brain falls out"

8) "God wouldn't want me to be unhappy"

C. All these false theories are just clever ways of making human beings, not God, the final judge of what is right and wrong - Divine revelation teaches that the power to decide right and wrong does not belong to humanity, but to God alone