

STUDY MATERIALS: Introduction to Moral Theology

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Lesson 1

Review Questions

What are some common misconceptions about Catholic moral theology?

What are some methods people use to make moral choices?

What is the subjectivist or relativist approach to morality?

Define situation ethics.

What is consequentialism?

Define utilitarianism.

What is the legalistic approach to the moral life?

Is Catholic moral theology based on legalism?

Are evil acts wrong because they are forbidden or are they forbidden because they are wrong?

What does happiness have to do with morality?

Explain the words "eudaemonistic," "ontological," and "teleological".

What is the end, the goal, the purpose of human existence?

What are the two purposes of revelation?

What does revelation have to do with happiness and morality?

Assignment

Write a short paper answering one of these questions.

How would a proponent of each of these moral methodologies view assisted suicide?

- situation ethics
- consequentialism
- utilitarianism
- legalism

What does happiness have to do with morality?

How does moral theology differ from moral philosophy?

Lesson 2

Review Questions

What is the Natural Law? How does it differ from the laws of nature?

What separates human beings from other natural creatures?

What is the Eternal Law?

How can reason direct our biological inclinations?

Do non-Catholics have any way of knowing the Natural Law?

Explain how the laws of nature are descriptive and Natural Law is prescriptive.

What is Prudence? Why is it important?

What is Temperance? How does it differ from Prudence?

How can Natural Law help us from slipping into subjectivism?

How is Natural Law valuable in discussing morality with non-Catholics? Does the Church teach that contraception is wrong because it is artificial?

Assignment

Choose one.

Write an essay responding to the argument that natural law is part of Catholic moral theology and that non-Catholics should therefore not have to obey it.

How does natural law make it easier for Catholics to communicate with non-Catholics?

Respond to the assertion that the real natural law is the survival of the fittest.

Lesson 3

Review Questions

In the Summa Contra Gentiles, St. Thomas Aquinas wrote: "God is offended by us only when we act _____ _ _ _ _." Fill in the blanks.

Why must we understand the nature of the body and of passions to make good moral choices?

Some people believe that the soul is good and the body is evil. What is the Catholic response to this opinion?

What is a human act? How does it differ from an act of a human being?

What is an appetite?

What is a moral agent?

Give several examples showing how human beings both act and are acted upon.

Can circumstances make a bad act good? Can they make a good act bad?

What seven questions can you ask to identify the circumstances of an act?

What are the three components of a moral act?

Explain the importance of habits in the moral life. What is another word for good habits? What is another word for bad habits?

What effect do vices have on freedom?

Explain Aristotle's hylomorphic theory.

In what sense can a moral act have matter and form?

Assignment

Albert kills Ernest. Describe three different imaginary situations based on intentions and circumstances (who, what, where, when, by what means, how) that make it (1) murder, (2) self-defense, (3) heroism. Explain how this sort of analysis differs from situation ethics.

Lesson 4

Review Questions

What is conscience?

What is prudence?

In what sense is prudence the mother of all the virtues?

How does conscience liberate us?

What is invincible ignorance?

If we have doubts about the morality of an act, what should we do?

What is prudential certitude in moral matters?

Why must we respect the consciences of others? How does antecedent conscience differ from consequent conscience?

Why should we examine our conscience every night?

How does commanding conscience differ from forbidding conscience?

What is a permitting conscience?

What responsibility do I have to form my conscience correctly? How can I go about achieving this reform?

Assignments

Choose one

Imagine that a friend of yours says: "Prudence does not seem to be a virtue to me at all, but only the cowardice of people afraid to live life fully, with intensity and courageous recklessness." Write a response based on a traditional Catholic understanding of prudence.

What actions or habits contribute to the formation of a correct conscience? What actions or habits lead to an erroneous conscience?

Lesson 5

Review Questions

What are moral absolutes?

What are material norms?

What is a material or ontic or pre-moral evil?

Does the end justify the means? Does a good end justify evil means?

What are some examples of acts that are always wrong?

Why may we never do evil?

If people naturally seek the good, why do they ever do evil?

Explain the difference between a directing will and a permitting will.

Tell how to apply the principle of double effect. Give an example.

What are the four conditions for the application of this principle of double effect?

What is formal cooperation in the evil act of another? Is it ever permissible?

What is immediate material cooperation in evil? Is it ever permissible?

What is mediate material cooperation in evil? Is it ever permissible?

Assignment

An enemy grenade landed in the midst of a small group of soldiers. William Foster threw himself on the grenade which immediately exploded. He died; the others lived. Suicide is always wrong. Analyze his actions according to the principles of doing good and avoiding evil, double effect, and formal cooperation in the evil act of another.

Lesson 6

Review Questions

Why do we need to understand sin?

How did sin come into the world?

What were the effects of original sin?

Why do we need to know about salvation to understand moral theology?

What is sanctifying grace? What does it bring about in us?

What are the three theological virtues? Define each one.

What is concupiscence?

Define actual sin.

Define habitual sin.

Distinguish between mortal and venial sin.

What three conditions have to be met for a sin to be mortal?

Assignment

Choose one

Describe a sinful social structure. Show how individuals bear the guilt for it.

Develop an example that illustrates the habitual nature of sin and virtue.

Develop an example of a particular mortal sin and show how the three conditions for mortal sin are present in it.

Lesson 7

Review Questions

What is the Magisterium?

Can the Bible alone serve as our infallible guide? Explain.

Who can supply an authentic authoritative interpretation of the Bible?

To whom did Jesus give authority to go forth and teach all nations?

Define apostolic succession.

What are the implications of the primacy of Peter?

Who determined the Christian canon of scripture (i.e. which books make up the Bible)?

Name three ways in which the Church teaches infallibly.

What does "*ex cathedra*" mean?

Do we have to assent to teachings of the Magisterium that have not been identified as infallible?

Does the Church teach only general principles, or does it provide specific moral norms?

Assignments

A friend of yours says: "The pope may be infallible, but unless a pope speaks *ex cathedra* on a particular moral issue, we are all free to follow our own opinions and do what we want to do." How would you explain the ecumenical councils and the ordinary magisterium to this friend? What should our attitude be towards the teachings of the pope that are not spoken *ex cathedra*?

Lesson 8

Review Questions

What does teleological mean?

Define social justice.

What is the common good? How does it depend upon an acknowledgement of God and of objective right and wrong?

Why does a law have binding power? How must every law relate to natural law?

What are the three species of justice?

What is commutative justice?

What is distributive justice?

What is legal justice?

Does property itself have dignity? Explain.

What does marriage have to do with social justice?

Why is fornication wrong?

What is wrong with contraception?

What is the end of medicine?

Is physician-assisted suicide consistent with the end of medicine? Explain.

Why do physicians have to get the informed consent of patients?

Why do we sometimes need to use punishment?

How can punishment be medicinal?

Should due punishment be regarded as violence? Explain.

What is the present view of the bishops of the United States concerning capital punishment?

What are the conditions for just war?

Assignments

Choose one

Develop examples showing how specific rights are means to fulfill obligations.

Rumor has it that many inexpensive toys made in China are produced with slave labor, including child labor. Is it immoral to buy such toys for your children if you cannot afford similar more expensive toys made elsewhere? What if you find the toy at a garage sale or yard sale? Justify your answer using principles of Catholic moral theology.

A friend of yours says: "Catholics believe that pleasure is evil." How would you respond?

A man gives orders that he should not be put on artificial life support systems. His physician agrees. Is this assisted suicide? Explain.