

4

The Moral Act

The moral act is a complex association of thinking and acting. One can think morally without doing anything about it. One may act in a way that is later judged to be moral without giving it any thought. In this chapter we will consider the interaction of thinking and acting that make up the deliberate moral act.

Modern physics recognizes that light can be thought of as a wave or as a particle. Different conditions at the beginning of an experiment can make light seem to be one way or another. Somewhat analogous, the moral act can be viewed in several different ways. These are not mutually exclusive but give different appearances that provide us additional information. We will begin with a very modern concept.

Rest suggests that the moral act can be considered as having four components:¹

1. Moral sensitivity
2. Moral judgment
3. Moral discrimination
4. Moral courage

All of these are required in order to act morally; three out of four are not good enough.

Moral sensitivity is the ability to recognize an issue as having a moral dimension. If you do not see a situation as being a moral issue, you will not make any attempt to think about it morally. For example, one's residence determines, to an astonishing extent, what type of education is available. If one views this as just an example of how society is constructed, and does not realize that this is an issue of justice for little children, it will not seem immoral.

Moral judgment is the process of looking at a situation, gathering all of the information available concerning it, and making a judgment. This will be considered in great detail below.

Moral discrimination is the ability to rank the importance of a moral judgment against other claims. A physician who worked for a for-profit medical company owned a great deal of stock in the company. He was able to make good medical decisions and treatment plans for his patients, but if these were likely to cost the company a great deal of money, he would not recommend them but would rather choose a cheaper, usually

less effective treatment. He described himself as a “company whore;” a very insightful remark.

Moral courage is the ability to act out a moral decision in the face of opposition. Moral courage requires stamina, endurance, perseverance, and persistence. It is the ability to withstand opposition to doing the right thing. A university president one of us once worked for had a deficiency in moral courage. He was able to make excellent moral judgments, for he could choose that these have priority over competing interests. But he wilted under pressure. Before knowing of the four component model of the moral act, I (WHB) would say that his heart was in the right place and he had a good head but that there just was not backbone connecting the two. As a spine surgeon I could imagine the various constructs that might stiffen his spine. He is an excellent example of the fact that being sensitive, making good judgments, and understanding the importance of those judgments are simply not enough. It is necessary to act on those judgments; this, he frequently could not or would not do.

Having said that making moral judgments is not enough, the remainder of this chapter will focus on our judgments. The reason is their necessity, even though they are not sufficient for the moral act.

Being sensitive to moral issues suggests that almost any human action can be considered a moral action because it involves deliberate judgments about a desired effect.¹ Aquinas stated it this way: “Those actions are properly called human actions which proceed from a deliberate will.”² This effect, or what is judged to be desirable, is generally called an “end.” In thinking about moral actions, it is essential that this end be specified. If we do not know the intended end, we cannot judge the morality of the action.

This brings to the fore the issue of intentions: What do we intend the end to be? This issue of intentions is important in judging the actions of others, but it is critical in judging our own actions. We cannot just focus on individual actions as if they occurred in a vacuum, they come from the interior of our selves and thus Christians stress intentions.

To consider the role that intentions, circumstances, and the desired end have in making judgments concerning morality, imagine the following scenario:

¹ In this chapter we will not be considering involuntary or reflex actions such as scratching an itchy nose which one does without thinking and certainly has no moral significance.

A forty-year-old black man took a knife and plunged it into the abdomen of an elderly white woman. Blood squirted out in every direction. The woman, unable to cry out, lay there passively. Soon she had lost vast amounts of her blood and the doctors were unable to save her life. She never again spoke with her grandchildren. She never enjoyed a walk in the park. Make no mistake about it; she died because of what that man did to her. He did it deliberately, intentionally, and even now is probably out spending her money. The witness did nothing to stop him. In fact, a woman handed him the knife just before the act.³

What can we say about such an action?

Perhaps it will help to know that the black man was a world famous surgeon at a major university hospital. The elderly woman was a patient who was dying of cancer; the operation was her only hope of survival. The procedure and its possible consequences had been discussed at length with her and her family, and all had consented to the procedure. She could not cry out because she was under anesthesia. It was the nurse who handed the knife, really a scalpel, to the surgeon. The witnesses, all hospital anesthesiologists and nurses, agreed that the surgery was necessary even though risky. They not only did not stop him; in fact, they assisted in every way. The money the surgeon is said to be spending is the fee for the operation, to which he is entitled even if the procedure goes poorly. The intended end and the circumstances make a great difference in the moral judgments we make.

It is consistent with biblical teaching to say that the circumstances of an action make a difference. In Exodus 20 there is the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." In Exodus 21:12 and 14 this commandment is expanded to have a penalty attached: "Whoever strikes a man and he dies shall be put to death." But in Exodus 22:2 we find that there are circumstances in which this penalty is not to be applied: "If a thief is breaking in at night and is struck, there shall be no blood guilt." Contrary to the laws of most states, the use of deadly force in protecting one's property was considered acceptable. Another example of a property exception is found in Exodus 21:20 where it is directed that if a man strikes a slave and kills the slave, he shall be punished, but the punishment is not spelled out. But if the slave lives for a couple of days and dies later there is to be no punishment. Nowhere does the Bible say that these specified killings

are not wrong; there is just different moral weight applied to the actions.

In thinking about the moral weight to be applied to various actions it is helpful and important to distinguish between what is called the “moral act” and the “physical act.” The physical act is “what happens” and the moral act is the judgment we place on the action. The physical act is a careful description of what happens considered abstractly and concretely. Imagine that you come across a dead body. Somebody was killed – the physical act. In the abstract, you cannot make a moral judgment about this obvious fact that a person was killed. It could be a case of self-defense; it could have been an accident. Perhaps it was a court ordered execution, or it might have been murder. Just knowing that a person has been killed does not allow a decision about the morality of the action.

To be more concrete, the physical act, that which is done, is qualified by the circumstances once we know what these might be. Killing an innocent is always physically wrong, but it may not be morally wrong. If it were an accident, a mistake, it would be regretted and mourned, but not judged to be morally wrong. The killing might have been the result of self-defense. The person who killed would probably regret being in a situation where deadly force was required for survival and might mourn that a person died before old age, but he would not be morally wrong for having defended his own life. An act may be physically wrong but not necessarily morally wrong.

The moral act is the human action that the person most immediately intends. A human moral action is specified formally by consideration of the result that is intended by the person as the end of his or her action. A person decides that a certain result (object) is desired and makes a decision as to what action is necessary to reach that objective (result, end).

The role of intention is crucial in determining the moral act. A few examples will illustrate this. A student picks up a paper in a teacher’s office believing it is her graded paper and finds out it is the final exam. The physical act is cheating; the moral act is not; the student made a mistake. Perhaps a student picks up a paper in a teacher’s office intending to get an early look at the final exam. Morally this is cheating. In each case there was the same physical action; there were two very different moral actions.

A person cashes a check received in the mail, believing it is the refund they expected and deserved, but in fact it belongs to another. The physical act is theft, taking that which belongs to another; the moral act is a mistake. But the person who

cashes the check knowing that it is for another has committed theft.

This role of intention in determining the morality of an action is not limited to moral theology. One of the key issues in the Supreme Court decision against the file-sharing companies was that the intent of the software was to induce consumers to infringe copyrights. The distinction between it and previous case law focused on the intentions of the company.⁴

More recently, in the various corporate-corruptions cases the prosecutors have the daunting task of proving that the executive had the intention to do wrong. It seems inconceivable that these men who amass immense fortunes at the expense of the shareholders can not intend to do so, and the guilt or innocence is determined by decisions concerning intentions.⁵

The role of intention in determining morality is well recognized by philosophers and by the law. However, Christians take intentions even more seriously than do others. This seriousness comes directly from Jesus' teaching about "the heart" which was the language for the most central part of the person. (Mark 7:21-22) Here Jesus says that what makes a deed good or bad, sinful or not sinful, is not the doing of it, nor its consequence, but the motive, the impelling purpose that gives rise to it. Sin is primarily and basically a condition of our hearts, an expression of our will.

Imagine the case that has been discussed by so many philosophers that the source has long been lost. Fred is angry at Tom. He is so angry that he finally decides that he will kill Tom, regardless of the consequences. Fred sets out in his car to drive aimlessly while he decides how and when to accomplish the dastardly deed. Suddenly a pedestrian steps out in front of the car and because Fred is so deep in thought he does not react swiftly. He hits the pedestrian and kills him. It was Tom!

Is he guilty of murder? Most philosophers and lawyers would say "no." He did not intend to kill a nameless pedestrian; that was an accident. But he fully intended in his "heart" to kill Tom just as soon as he could get his plan together.

Christians push the importance of intention further than do philosophers. Assume that someone intends to kill an innocent person, believing at that moment that the person is both human and innocent. This is morally murder, even if the person survives. Someone who is intending to have sex with another's spouse is morally committing adultery even if they miss the tryst due to traffic. President Jimmy Carter received a great deal of negative press when he admitted that he "lusted in his heart."

Many of us know exactly what he was talking about and that he had it right: this was a moral act. (Matt. 5:27-28) The reason the press was so abusive to him was that this is a Christian teaching, not a societal standard.

Now let us put together the two ideas we have introduced: 1) the moral act is different from what happens (the physical act) and 2) intention is critical in determining the moral act. Imagine that a hunter shoots and kills another hunter, believing him to be a deer (a not uncommon occurrence). Physically, this is the wrongful killing of an innocent human being. Morally, it is an act of hunting, which is generally considered to be a moral activity. Another example would be to imagine a nurse who gives the wrong medicine to a patient who consequentially dies. (This does not happen as often as the press would suggest, but it does happen too often.) Physically, this is the wrongful killing of a human being. Morally, it is an act of nursing, a morally worthy activity. Both of these actions are physically wrong but morally right. Each would be regretted and mourned by the doer; perhaps the person would feel extreme guilt. But morally, neither is culpable.

Aristotle was the first to systematically discuss the moral importance of circumstances. The questions he asked to determine these circumstances were questions such as the teacher of a freshman writing class in college would ask, "Who? What? Where? When? Why?" Aristotle would ask that we consider who did it, by what aids or instruments was it done, where was it done, what was its effect, in what manner was it done, and when was it done? Not all of these questions are helpful in every situation, but they illustrate the considerations to be given when making judgments about the morality of an action.

In order to clarify the different types of circumstances Aristotle divided them into what he called "categories." The first category of circumstances he called accidental and morally irrelevant. They may be interesting details, but they do not change, aggravate, or diminish the moral character of the act. Whether the murder occurs by means of a knife or gun is of great interest to the police, but either way it still is murder. The accidentals of the murder are morally irrelevant. A man may decide that he has the opportunity and therefore will commit adultery with Joe's wife or John's wife. There may be significant differences in what actually occurs, where, and what the consequences will be, but it still is adultery.

The second category was also called accidental, but these issues are morally

relevant. They do not change the moral nature of the act, but they aggravate or diminish its moral character and the weight that we attach to it. Stealing from the poor might be considered more despicable than stealing from the rich, but both are wrong. Lying by a president is certainly worse than lying by a homeless man, although both are still liars. Without changing one's general attitude toward drug use, it might be possible to say that cocaine use by an airline pilot was morally more offensive than the same action by a beach bum.

The third category of circumstances specifies or actually changes the objective nature of the moral act. A person is killed; that person may be an innocent or an unjust aggressor. In one case we judge it to be murder, in the other self-defense. (Notice that the law of the state views this exactly as does moral theology.) Consensual sex may be experienced with a spouse or with another's spouse. The first is an act of marriage that is a moral act; the second is an act of adultery. It is possible, of course, that sex, either with a spouse or another's spouse, might not be consensual. That would morally and legally be an act of rape. If this were the case, that circumstance would take precedence in the determination of the morality of the act.

Economic decisions can take on elements of morality. Consider two hospitals in a single small town, St. Mary's and Valley General. All of the physicians on the obstetrics staff threaten to leave St. Mary's and go to the other hospital if they are not allowed to do sterilizations, which are forbidden by Roman Catholic teaching. Contrast the morality of that decision with the morality of a decision to leave a hospital because the doctors were forced to do abortions. In one case, leaving a hospital is a moral act; in the other, it is an act of economic coercion.

Location might make a difference in the morality of an act. A seminary student of my knowledge was so angry with the school that he vowed to have sex with his wife on the communion table in the school chapel the night after he graduated. It would not be adultery, but I doubt that most people would think it would be moral. He had expressly stated his intentions; they were not those of love for his wife. (I don't know that it was ever carried out.)

Finally, there are circumstances that involve the agent rather than the action. This is known as motivation. Recall Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:1-6:

Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So

whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Giving alms, even if the motive is pride, is itself a morally right act; it is an act of almsgiving. Someone or some institution will benefit from the gift. But the wrong motive of the agent has an effect beyond this good act, and the almsgiving becomes an act of pride. Now the agent is not only an almsgiver but also a proud almsgiver. In fact it would be accurate to say that the agent is more a proud person than an almsgiver. In Jesus' teaching, pride was first in intention and almsgiving was only second. Jesus is teaching that even our best deeds, such as to sacrifice, to pray, and to do alms, are worthless from a moral standpoint unless they proceed from a right attitude of the heart.

This can become even more complex since the end of one action may be the means of the next for quite a sequence. Consider the person who decides to cheat on an organic chemistry test in college to get a better grade to get into medical school in order to become a medical missionary. At first glance, one might say that the end, becoming a medical missionary, is good (and it is), so the action must be good. But this ignores the fact that there are several actions between the beginning and the end of the sequence. The intention of cheating on the test is not missionary activity but presenting a false impression to the teacher. In plain English this is called lying. Therefore, the end is wrong, and the action is wrong.

We have stressed the importance of intentions and that unfortunate bad physical actions with good intentions are not judged to be morally wrong. Specifically, these have been labeled "mistakes." It is important to consider the next action of the morally good person who makes a mistake. The morally good person immediately attempts to correct the mistake. The student who has inadvertently seen the final test will immediately tell the teacher what has happened. The person who mistakenly cashed a check not intended for him or her will make immediate restitution. The hunter and the nurse cannot bring back to life their unintended victim, but they will seek the pardon of the family and perhaps make some type of restitution. Intentions, if they are truly good, will drive the person to produce the best possible results out of the bad situation.

The Importance of Language

In the above section we have meticulously dissected the physical act from the moral act. This, like an anatomic dissection, is to allow understanding; it does not mean that the physical and moral aspects are so sharply divided in real life. Every human action is a moral action.

In our language, we tend to compress the two so that we appear to describe a physical action but also put a moral descriptive on it. There is a risk to such compression; once we have named something we allow the moral language to do the moral thinking for us.⁶

Consider the word “murder.” This word includes a physical action, the killing of a human being, and the moral judgment, that it was a deliberate, intentional action against an innocent person. When we use this word, we have collapsed the physical action and the moral action into what appears to be a single “action” – murder.

The same phenomenon holds for the word “adultery.” This word includes a physical action, sexual activity, and a moral action, that it involved a married person who was not a spouse. Once again we have collapsed a physical action and a moral judgment into what appears to be a single “action” – adultery.

Another example is the word “rape.” This includes the physical activity, sexual intercourse, and a moral action of force upon the unwilling recipient. Again, our language has collapsed a physical action and a moral action into a single word.

These three cases are not a problem in communication, but other words can be and frequently are. Consider the word “abortion.” For a physician, this is a physical action without a moral judgment. It may be a therapeutic abortion to save a mother’s life. It may be a criminal abortion done in a back alley that threatens the mother’s life. It may be the social abortion that is so common today. For the physician, the word “abortion” describes the physical act and must have the moral aspect supplied.

However, for most Evangelical Christians the word “abortion” is like “murder” or “adultery,” referring to the social abortion of which 1,000,000 are done every year in the United States, and applies a moral judgment. They are collapsing the physical action and the moral action into a single word. This is not to justify these abortions in any way, only to point out the need for care in the use of words.

This can occur more frequently than many realize, and when it does, it leads to great misunderstanding. Language is important in moral discussions and must be used carefully.

Indirectly Voluntary

We are now ready to consider another class of actions: those things that occur as a result of an intended action but are not themselves directly intended. These actions are said to be “outside of the intention” and are therefore “indirectly voluntary.” Until now, we have considered actions that are “directly voluntary,” the effects of which are intended. I am directly responsible for what I intend to happen. Now we are considering actions called “indirectly voluntary,” where the effect of the action is foreseen and permitted but not intended. I am not responsible for something I foresee and permit, but do not intend.

This difference between knowing what will happen and being responsible is important, but we accept it in everyday life. My wife knows me so well that she can quite accurately predict (foresee) what I will do in a given situation. (Fortunately for me, she is very gentle about this ability.) But the fact that she can foresee what I will do does not make her responsible for my actions; they are mine, and I bear the moral weight of them.

Consider a soldier who jumps on a hand grenade to save the life of the others in his squad. This was a real life occurrence in WW II and continues in the present conflict. In Iraqi, in April 2004 Corporal Jason Dunham covered a grenade with a helmet and the helmet with his body. He died shortly afterward, but several marines survived the blast due to his action.⁷ In January, 2007, Johnathon Millican covered a grenade and saved four of his fellow soldiers.⁸

The physical act is that these soldiers killed themselves; the moral act is that they saved the lives of others in the squad. The physical act of jumping on the grenade is technically the activity required to achieve the desired end: saving the lives of colleagues. He did not desire to die; he did not directly intend his death, even if he thought about it. He is not morally culpable for having caused his own death. He is a hero.

In previous examples of the hunter who shot another hunter and the nurse who gave the wrong medicine, the end result was not foreseen. This is different because the soldier can foresee that his action will cause his own death, but this consequence is unintended. This is not an act of suicide but an act of saving others.

Another example would be to consider an act of self-defense that results in the attacker being killed. Assuming that the intention was only self-protection to keep the

attacked person alive, this is morally a good motivation. But someone has just been killed, and this is physically wrong. The intentions, however, were self-defense; in fact there was no intention to kill the attacker, and the person used no more force than necessary. In the struggle, the person being attacked grabbed the gun and pulled the trigger. He knew that pulling the trigger would cause death; he allowed that to happen. The death of the assailant was indirectly voluntary; it was morally an act of self-defense. The death of the aggressor was the physical act; self-defense is the moral act. Pulling the trigger was only the technical means of accomplishing the act; the intention determines the morality.

It might seem that this line of reasoning is a very slippery slope and that one could contort almost any situation into an indirectly voluntary act. This was recognized long before the authors or readers were born, and a set of very rigid criteria has been established to prevent sloppy application of the principle.

Criteria for Indirectly Voluntary (Principle of Double Effect)

1. The intention must be morally right.

In the examples above, the intention has been specified. This is the first criteria: moral intentions. Some will complain that we cannot know the intentions of others, which is a correct observation. But we are not judging others, we are judging ourselves. The fact that another person may not see the intentions of the heart does not change the importance of right intentions.

2. The agent must not desire the wrong effect but only foresee and permit it.

We do not cause everything that we can anticipate and foresee. We can look at the sky and know that it will rain, but we did not cause the weather. A physician knows that, in a certain percentage of people who are treated with a drug or procedure, a certain side effect will occur. If it happens that your mother is that person, the doctor did not cause the unpleasant effect.

3. The good effect must occur with the wrong effect.

The timing is important in order to prevent wrong actions that might have a good effect at sometime in the future. The good and the bad must occur together. This criterion also prevents thinking that the end justifies the means.

4. The good effect is sufficiently desirable to compensate for allowing the bad.

Knowing that a bad effect will occur gives one the opportunity to compare

the moral value of the two effects. The good must be very good in order to compensate for allowing the bad to happen.

These criteria can be considered with an experience from my time as medical director in a hospital on an Indian reservation. A 25 year old woman with rheumatic aortic valve disease became pregnant and within a few weeks developed severe heart failure. Two years before she had been pregnant and developed heart failure in the last months of the pregnancy, and the baby was delivered prematurely in order to reduce the load on the mother's heart. This time she went into failure within the first six weeks of pregnancy. (This story also illustrates the magnitude of medical progress within my professional lifetime. Today, she would have had her incompetent valve replaced after the first pregnancy and probably carried the second pregnancy without difficulty.)

She was sent to the regional referral center where the physicians decided that the only possible treatment was to do an immediate abortion to save her life. The treating physician did not like this choice and obtained special and unusual permission of the Government to send her to the Mayo Clinic for a second opinion. The advice was identical and the urgency of the timing emphasized. Three days after abortion, she was out of heart failure and went home to be with her husband and child.

We can analyze this event in terms of indirectly voluntary. The intention of all of the medical care and the many consultations was to save the mother's life. The physician did not desire the death of the fetus; in fact, he did everything he could to prolong the pregnancy and would have saved the fetus if possible. The good effect for the mother came from removing the fetus, not from killing it, and the two effects occurred at the same time. Finally, saving the life of a wife and mother was of great moral value and partially compensated for the loss of the fetus.

The fact that the physician knew that removing the fetus would result in its death did not make him morally culpable for its death. His intentions were to save the life of the mother; he would also have saved the life of the fetus if this had been possible.

A major criticism of the principle of double effect is that it is a form of moral evasion, something like Pilate washing his hands to free him of Christ's blood. In fact, a book review once commented how difficult it is to make a situation "look like" it is the principle of double effect. To do this is a form of self-deception that all Christians should deplore. To use it in this fashion is an abuse and is a variant of the ritualistic legalism that both Paul and Jesus strongly condemned. Double effect is a way of testing our intentions and motives to be certain that we are not really setting our hearts on doing

evil.

In thinking about two actions that occurred at the same time we can recall the story of Samson and ask if, morally, Samson committed suicide. Samson is remembered as a judge of the tribe of Dan who was a Nazirite but compromised his vows because of a strong passion for foreign women.



Peter Paul Rubens, National Gallery, London

As a result, he was in constant conflict with the surrounding nations and devoted his life to war. The story of his death is recorded in Judges 16 and is shortened slightly here:

Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon, and to rejoice; for they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand." They called Samson out of the prison, and made him stand between the pillars; and Samson said to the attendant who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, so that I may lean against them."²⁷ Now the house was full of men and women; all the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about three thousand men and women. Then Samson called to the LORD and said, "LORD GOD, remember me and strengthen me only this once, O God, so that with this one act of revenge I may pay back the Philistines for my two

eyes.” And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. Then Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines.” He strained with all his might; and the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed during his life.

Samson had devoted his life to harassing and killing Philistines and had done so with a variety of creative methods. His intention, at this moment, was to continue his life’s work, and this time he would be able to include victory over the rulers and nobles. The foreseen result of pulling down the pillars was his own death, but there is no evidence that he wanted to die. This was foreseen and allowed but not necessarily desired. The good effect, killing a host of Philistines including the leaders, and the bad effect, taking his own life, occurred at same time. In that culture and in that time, the good action was so desirable it compensated for his death.

Principles To Determine Intention

It is frequently impossible to understand the intention of others; it is sometimes hard to determine our own intention. Frequently there are conflicting desires, and it is difficult to sort out exactly what is intended and what is accepted. There are three principles that help in understanding our thoughts.

The first is to ask about the proportion between the means used to reach the end and the end itself. Again, this is best explained by a series of examples. In the case of physical murder, there is a proportion in the case of killing in self-defense; there is no proportion in killing to protect property. The means used to protect the property are out of proportion to the end. There is proportion in abortion to save the life of a mother; there is no proportion in abortion to save money to buy a car. Imagine that you are driving home to pick up your spouse for a wedding anniversary dinner. Stopping to save a life has the property of proportion for missing the dinner; stopping for a cup of coffee does not. A small but aggressive child comes at me with a knife. If I run away or knock him down with a stick I am demonstrating proportion. If I shoot the child six times with a shotgun I am not.

The second question to assist in determining intent is to ask if I truly want the bad effect to occur. Trying to protect my life, am I so angry that I want the aggressor whom I shoot to die? In the case of an abortion to save the mother’s life, does the physician

really want the fetus to die, perhaps because he had a part in the pregnancy? In the case of the anniversary dinner, do I really want to miss that dinner so that I could sit home and watch football?

Third, the means used to achieve what is intended must not in themselves be intended. In the case of self-defense, the killing is not intended; it is the only means of protecting me. The blow or the bullet physically causes the intended action that is my safety. In the abortion to save the mother's life the death of the fetus is not intended, but its death is a result of reaching the good intention: saving the mother's life. The death was the means, not the intention; it was outside the intention, termed indirectly voluntary. Finally, is there a less harmful way of bringing about the intention? If so, it must be taken.

Conclusion

For some readers this may seem to be a long way to get to what most believed anyway. Intuitively, most people never suspected that the soldier who saved his buddies by falling on a grenade was guilty of suicide. Most denominations have dealt with the issue of abortion to save the life of a mother in a statement somewhere, voted by some general convention, at some time. But what do you do when you do not have a vote to guide you? Without the reasoning behind church teachings, we have only the specifics and are tied to them without a way to generalize to other situations.

This is a rational and well thought out method of making moral judgments that the Christian church has used for hundreds of years. It is still a very valid method of thinking about our actions today.

Copyright Wilton H. Bunch, 2007 ©

References

¹ James R. Rest and Darcia Narvaez, *Moral Development in the Professions* Hillsdale, NJ Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1994) 23.

² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (New York, Benzinger Brother, 1947) I-II.1.1

³ Cite lost, but this story is not original with me.

⁴ "Grokster, StreamCast Can Be Sued Over Online Piracy" Wall Street Journal 28 June 2005, B1

⁵ Kara Scannell and Mark Maremont, "The Tyco World" The Wall Street Journal, C 1, April 8, 2004.

⁶ Hawking, Jennifer S. and Emanuel, Ezekiel J. "Clarifying Confusions about Coercion" Hastings Center Report 35(5) 16-19, 2005.

⁷ "The undecorated," *The Economist* Nov. 18, 2005, p.34

⁸ Tom Miller, "Today, he is a Silver Star Recipient," *The Birmingham News*, July 4, 2007, A1.