

Theory 4

PRUDENCE & FORTITUDE

Virtues

Virtues are habits that lead us to fulfillment/happiness. Happiness is to possess those good things that fulfill or complete our human nature.

“Virtue becomes happiness when living in friendship.”
~ Dr. John Cuddeback in *True Friendship: Where Virtue Becomes Happiness*

“Virtue *is* the good life.”
~ Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics*

Virtues are the good actions we turn into habits that get us what we need to be happy.

- 7 Root Virtues:
 - Prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance (cardinal or acquired virtues)
 - Faith, hope, and love (theological virtues)

Vices are the bad actions we turn into habits that destroy what we need to be happy.

- 7 Deadly Sins:
 - Pride, envy, anger, greed, gluttony, sloth, lust

Prudence

Definition: Prudence is to do the right thing, for the right reason and in the right circumstances (CCC 1806).

How do we determine what is right and wrong / good and evil?

CCC 1750: The morality (goodness) of human acts depends upon three things:

1. The object chosen; what you are doing
2. The end in view, intention, or motive; why you did it
3. The circumstances surrounding the action

A good act requires the goodness of all three simultaneously.

CCC 1751: Object (what the person chooses to do)

- Have you decided to buy your secretary flowers?
- Have you chosen to donate to a political campaign?
- Have you decided to lie under oath?

The first two are fine in themselves but lying is always wrong. It is always wrong to perform an evil action. No reason or circumstance justifies doing evil. One cannot do evil hoping for a good outcome.

Some actions are *intrinsically* evil. In other words, they are wrong regardless of your motivation or intention, regardless of the circumstances.

Examples of intrinsically evil actions:

- Theft; slavery; exploitation; prostitution; torture; murder; lying
- Fornication (sex outside of marriage); adultery
- Contracepted sex (sterilizing a given act of intercourse of your own will through the Pill, Patch, tubal ligation, vasectomy, etc.); this includes oral sex, AI and IVF, and homosexual acts (CCC 2357)

Here we must recall the most basic moral principle: do good and avoid evil.

People often try to come up with extreme scenarios to justify using evil to bring about good. But the most basic principle remains: it is never permissible to do evil.

There are times in life when we are left with only two choices:

1. Heroism
2. Sin

God will always give us the grace to remain faithful to Him.

For example, there's no such thing as a prudent abortion because the act always violates the good of innocent human life. One can never attack the life of a child to save the mother or to relieve the suffering of rape. Difficult cases only prove that sometimes heroism is necessary to do what is right.

St. Gianna Molla († 4/28/62) was pregnant with her 4th child when a large ovarian cyst was discovered. The surgeon recommended abortion.

“If you must decide between me and the child,
do not hesitate, choose the child.
I insist on it. Save him.”
~ St. Gianna Beretta Molla

CCC 1752: Intention (reason for action)

- Why are you doing this?
- Is the purpose of the act good?
- Is your motivation good?

Choosing to do an evil so that good may come of it makes one an evil-doer. “...and I will respond to them, ‘Depart from me you evil-doers, into the lake of hellfire’ (Mt 7:23).

Think of the man who is giving flowers to his secretary. Did he buy her flowers as an expression of gratitude, to lift her spirits, or with the hope of seducing her?

The first two reasons are good; the last reason makes the action unacceptable.

CCC 1754: Circumstance (surrounding factors of the action)

- Are the circumstances good?

The circumstances are all those factors surrounding the concrete, immediate situation. If the circumstances are all wrong, even a good act or a good intention is spoiled.

For example, suppose the father of a starving family has been given a complete turkey dinner to bring home to his poor wife and children for Thanksgiving. As he is carrying this meal home, he sees several starving dogs at the roadside. Filled with pity, he gives them the turkey originally intended for his family.

In such a case, the *object is good*; there is nothing wrong with feeding a hungry animal. The *intention is good*; the man just wants to ease the suffering of the dogs.

But *it's the wrong thing to do* because the man's family situation is such that the meal should have gone to his family.

That is why it is necessary to consider *all* relevant facts surrounding an action before deciding to pursue it.

Prudence Begins with the End in Mind

Prudence is first because it places before us our true goal:

- Happiness through union with God, the Supreme Good and the human goods
- Prudence directs all our choices to the goal

Three steps to making a prudent choice:

1. Deliberate
2. Make a judgment / choose
3. Act / execute

Three dangers to avoid: being...

1. Rash
2. Indecisive
3. Irresolute

Step one: Deliberation

Understand reality:

- We want our choices based on reality
- Too often we make decisions manipulated by preferences, feelings, disordered desires, or emotions instead of basing them on *reality, truth, and goodness*
- To get to the truth of the matter:
 - Think before you act.
 - Know before you choose.

Gather all the relevant information:

- Take counsel with those who are experienced, knowledgeable, and wise in the matter at hand
- Take counsel with God (pray)
 - Talk to God about it; ask Him what to do
 - Listen to Him
- Take counsel with your Spiritual Director

Rashness or thoughtlessness: The failure to deliberate, think before you act, or look before you leap.

Step two: Judgment

Weigh the evidence and options fairly:

- Make your list of pros / cons
- Then choose the best course of action

Indecision: You can't just think about something forever; you must choose. Failure to make a choice is called *indecision*. Thinking about some issue without actually arriving at a practical result does no one any good.

Who here is indecisive?

Step three: Execution

Once we judge the right thing to do, do it!

Irresoluteness: The failure to follow through, to carry out the choices and resolutions we have made is called inconstancy. It is the *inability to follow through*.

Some find it easy to make decisions, but they don't follow through; they can't execute.

Which of these dangers describes you best?

- Rash – rushing headlong
- Indecisive – paralyzed
- Irresolute – no follow through or perseverance

Once you identify your weakness:

- Work on that area
- Turn a weakness into a strength
- What we lack by nature we gain by virtue

Fortitude

CCC 1808: Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions. It disposes one to even renounce and sacrifice his life in defense of a just cause.

Definition: Fortitude is to do what is right even when you don't want to.

There are two basic aspects of fortitude: *Attack* and *endurance*.

Attack: do what you can, taking action

- Acting to possess the good things we need for happiness
- Defending the good – speak up, defend what is right and good
- Correcting evil

Endurance: patience

- When we are faced with something evil/bad what should we do?
- Think: what can I do? Do that.

Once I have done all that I can to change things...But you cannot change it

- Chronic illness
- Divorce
- Death
- Failure of a loved one
- An evil another person committed

...Then accept it with Trust, offer it with love, and endure without becoming evil yourself.

God works all things for good for those who trust Him.
Romans 8:28

Patience is a specific form of endurance that harnesses anger and directs it to the good.

Anger is the neutral, God given energy or power of the soul to fight, to rise up, resist evil and take action for good.

Patience harnesses the emotion of anger to:

- Give you energy
- Accept what you cannot change
- Offer it up to God as reparation for sin or for the conversion of sinners
- To resist becoming evil in the midst of suffering

Trust that God is all good. God works all things for good for those who trust Him.

Resources:

Toolbox 1: Summary of Virtues

Toolbox 2: 3 Steps in Making a Prudent Choice