The existential significance of human acts as freely chosen

Introduction

In order to achieve the goal I will use the methods of comparative analysis and synthesis.

1. The existential significance of human acts as freely chosen

Already St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that “the morality of the human act depends primarily and fundamentally on the ‘object’ rationally chosen by deliberate will.” We see that at the core of a human act is a free self-determining choice whereby one gives to oneself his or her identity as a moral being; one’s moral character, in fact, can be described as one’s integral existential identity as shaped by one’s freely chosen acts. As the Pope writes in the encyclical Veritatis Splendor: “Freedom is not only the choice for one or another particular action; it is also, within that choice, a decision about oneself and a setting of one’s own life for or against the Good, for or against the Truth, and ultimately for or against God.” We see the importance of certain choices because they shape a person’s entire moral life. The choice abides within the person, disposing him or her to act in the same way in the future until a contradictory kind of choice is made. According to Germain Grisez, free choices must be distinguished from the particular acts one chooses.

To understand Christian morality one must reflect on the reality of free choice and the reality of divine and human love. A free choice is made when a person could choose this or that, and the person himself determines which he will select. The reality of free choice is explicitly affirmed in Scripture: “It was he who created man in the beginning, and he left him in the power of his own inclination. If you will, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. He has placed before you fire and water: stretch out your hand for whichever you wish. Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him” (Sirach 15, 14 -17). This teaching has also been explicitly affirmed by the authentic teaching of the Church. The object of this research - human acts. The goal of this paper is:

2 to show that human acts have moral, existential significance insofar as they are freely chosen;
3 to explain why the primary moral significance of human acts is determined by the “object” freely chosen and willed;
4 to show why it is always morally wrong intentionally to kill an innocent human person.
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to do because particular acts come and go, but “a choice, once made, determines the self unless and until one makes another incompatible choice. That is why choosing to commit sin is said to put one in a ‘state of sin.’” If, for instance, I freely choose to commit adultery, I make myself to be an adulterer, and I remain an adulterer until, by another free, self-determining choice, I repent of my adultery and become a repentant adulterer. It is exactly what the Pope says about human acts which “do not produce a change merely in the state of affairs outside of man, but, to the extent that they are deliberate choices, they give moral definition to the very person who performs them, determining his profound spiritual traits.”

Later on he quotes Saint Gregory of Nyssa: “All things subject to change and to be coming never remain constant, but continually pass from one state to another, for better or worse... Now, human life is always subject to change; it needs to be born ever anew... But here birth does not come about by a foreign intervention, as is the case with bodily beings...; it is the result of a free choice. Thus, we are in a certain way our own parents, creating ourselves as we will, by our decisions.”

According to Germain Grisez, people make themselves the persons they are by their choices in two ways: First, ... in some large choices a person accepts a status, undertakes a way of life, or enters into a relationship. The consistent carrying out of such large choices gives an individual’s life obvious continuity. Second, ... choices are not natural events or processes but spiritual realities which endure. They actualise and limit the self and so settle one’s orientation toward further possibilities. Choices would be unnecessary if one were already so settled in one’s way that only one path through life could meet one’s requirements. But choices are needed to resolve the indeterminacy which is present when one might still find various goods fulfilling. Hence, in making choices one brings it about that some possible goods rather than others will be fulfilling for oneself— the self, that is, whom one constitutes by these choices.

In the case of euthanasia, one choosing to hasten or to cause death even in order to eliminate suffering becomes a murderer. Unfortunately, many people think that the morality of actions depends more on the results to which they lead than on the object freely chosen. In order to choose well and rightly, we need to guide our choices by moral truth. The fundamental moral principle expressed in religious language is that we are to love God and neighbour. And we can love our neighbour only if we respect the good of our neighbour, and we can respect his good only if we respect the goods perfective of him, the goods meant to flourish in him, goods such as life itself, including bodily life, knowledge of the truth, the marital communion, etc.

Fathers of the Second Vatican Council insist that the one who does evil harms himself more than those who are harmed by his wicked deeds: All offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, and wilful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical or mental torture, undue psychological pressures; all offenses against human dignity ... all these and the like are criminal: they poison civilisation; and they debase the perpetrators more than the victims and militate against the honor of creator.

Our genuine freedom is an outstanding manifestation of the divine image in man. Man is called in “sharing in God’s dominion,” and as John Paul II says, “man’s dominion extends in a certain sense over man himself” and he quotes Saint Gregory of Nyssa: “The soul shows its royal and exalted character...in that it is free and self-governed, swayed autonomously by its own will. Of whom else can this be said, save a king?... Thus, human nature, created to rule other creatures, was by its likeness to the King of the universe made as it were a living image, partaking with the Archetype both in dignity and in name.”

5 to show why it is always morally wrong intentionally to kill an innocent human person.

In dealing with key themes of fundamental moral theology, it is also very important to understand that human acts are specified primarily by the “object” freely chosen and willed by the acting person. The object freely chosen is the primary determinant of the morality of a human act precisely because this object is
2. Human acts are specified primarily by the "object" freely chosen and willed by the acting person

Object is the proximate end of a deliberate decision which determines the act of willing on the part of the acting person.7

We can say that the "object" that is the primary source of the morality of a human act is precisely what one freely chooses to do, and, in so choosing, ratifies in his heart and endorses. It is, one could say, the intelligible proposal that one adopts by choice and then executes externally. For example, "adultery" is a human act specified by the choice - and in this sense, the intention - to have genital sex with someone other than one's spouse.

Here it must be noted that acts so specified by their objects are not specified already as morally wicked. One could ask, "Why ought one not, given certain conditions, have intercourse with someone other than one's spouse?" It is not self-evident that a willingness to do a deed of this kind is morally wicked. The acts in question are simply identified accurately by describing "what" they are in light of the object freely chosen and willed by the acting person. It is obviously necessary to know precisely "what" one is freely choosing to do in order to determine whether or not this is in conformity with the order of reason. Pope John Paul II explicitly rejects the view that the "object" specifying an act morally is a mere process or event in the physical world, described independently of any will act of the acting person. Rather, the object is specified precisely by what the acting person chooses to do. The Pope clearly acknowledges that a human act, a moral act, cannot be evaluated without relating it to an act of the agent's will, in particular, the will act of choosing, the voluntas eligens. A human or moral act is not something given in nature.

"Object" in the perspective of human actions could be seen from the viewpoint of the "first person" (the agent's perspective) and from the viewpoint of the third person (the observer's viewpoint). As Martin Rhonheimer says, "These two perspectives correspond to two quite different concepts of human action: the intentional and the causal-eventistic concept."10 The intentional concept looks at actions from inside, from the perspective of acting person; the causal-even-tistic concept looks at actions "from outside and sees them as events which cause determinate effects," but "events which cause effects, however, are not yet actions (it could, for example, be an earthquake)."

Martin Rhonheimer articulates the crucially significant difference between these perspectives, saying: "From such a perspective (causal-eventistic concept), 'acting' can only be reconstructed, as it were, by interpreting the foreseen connection between act-event and its effect as being the reasons for which a rational subject has performed this particular act. An action would be explained precisely when it was possible to indicate those reasons which the agent might have had for performing the action. The same applies to its moral qualification: the action itself and its effects are simply events or states of affairs (that is, non-moral realities). Only those reasons which an agent might have for causing through the action - event x the effect y (the state of affairs) are morally qualifiable.... What here, however, is entirely put aside is precisely the acting person as a subject which intends something in doing x; the acting subject, there-fore, which verforms x for the sake of causing P's death (with the purpose of killing him). That is, what is put aside is the choice of "killing P" as a setting of A's will against the life of P. This also means: What is put aside is A's taking a position with regard to a specific person to which he owes, as willed and intended.

The Pope in his encyclical Veritatis Splendor speaks about "acting person": In order to be able to grasp the object of an act which specifies that act morally, it is therefore necessary to place oneself in the perspective of the acting person. The object of the act of willing is in fact a freely chosen kind of behaviour. To the extent that it is in conformity with the order of reason, it is the cause of the goodness of the will: it perfects us morally ... By the object of a given moral act, then, one cannot mean a process or an event of the merely physical order, to be assessed on the basis of its ability to bring about a given state of affairs in the outside world. Rather, that
to his fellow-man, this and that. This act of choice can adequately be seen only by looking at human actions in the perspective of the first person. From such a viewpoint there are not only two states of affairs (an action-event and its resulting effect), but also the act of intending P’s death. This intentionality cannot be reduced to “causing the state of affairs of P’s death.” ... the object and intentional content of “causing P’s death” means to set one’s will against the life of P (= against P in the dimension of what fundamentally is “good-for-him”) and this positioning of one’s will constitutes a specific relation between the acting person and P. The content of this “taking a position” shapes the agent’s will and is, as such, the content of a free will, and is “good” or “evil” wholly independently of other (foreseeable) resulting states of A’s abstaining from killing P (as, for example, saving the lives of Q, R, S...T).

Also, Martin Rhonheimer correctly observes that “to kill P is not simply ‘to cause P’s being dead,’ but rather is to choose, to intend, to want P’s death (for the sake of whatever further end). Those practical goods which are the objects of our actions ... are never such objects simply in their natural, ontic value ... but rather as objects of an act of the will guided by reason. That is why objects of actions - precisely because of their being objects of a human action - are goods in a moral sense.” Only looking from an observer’s viewpoint there would not be a difference between “causing P’s death” and “killing P,” that is, doing something/or the sake of causing P’s death.” We could say in the same way “John killed 10 persons” and “the earthquake killed 10 persons,” and we would not see besides the 10 killed persons that there also was a murderer.

In studying the question about the distinction between killing and letting die, it should be kept in mind that the will’s orientation, in intending and choosing, toward life and other basic human goods makes an act be the kind of moral act it is. Thus, it will not seem surprising that similar behaviors with similar results often constitute acts differing in moral quality.

Hence, here we should go into more detailed discussion on the distinction between intentional and nonintentional killing. We see that not all killings of one human being by another are held by the law to be crimes. In some cases killing is excused. For example, some who kill lack criminal intent (killing by accident; one who kills another while incapable of distinguishing right from wrong - such incapacity is always assumed in the case of very young children; etc.). But on the other hand there are cases in which a killing is intentional, yet the law does not hold the act and intent criminal since the killing is considered justified: for example, capital punishment, which executes a legal sentence; acts of war carried out under lawful authority; killing in self-defense.

Today many people think that one can be justified in killing oneself or someone else, either to end suffering or to prevent some other evil or achieve some good. Some also think circumstances can mitigate the gravity of killing, since not all who take life act with the same malice.

Here most important is the distinction between our doing something intentionally and doing it nonintentionally. We do things nonintentionally not only when we bring about unforeseen effects, but also when we do things not properly and per se but by permitting foreseen side effects. Theologians gradually clarified the distinction between intentional - or direct (per se) and indirect (per ac-cidens) - killing.

Intentional killing is killing per se and properly, whereas nonintentional killing is not. Catholics who reject proportionalism differ from proportionalists about the importance of the distinction between intentional and nonintentional killing. Catholic teaching holds that the intentional killing of an innocent is always wrong. Proportionalists deny this, and hold that both the choice to destroy life as a means to some other end and the acceptance of death as a foreseen side effect of some other choice should be evaluated in the same way: by consideration of whether the good realized is proportionate to the evil of the destruction of life. Proportionalists also recognize that there is a difference between what is intended and what is not intended or only indirectly intended. The problem is that they hold that this difference is not morally significant.

Nonproportionalists all accept the moral significance of this difference. Where they might disagree is in the application of this distinction to specific acts of action. In other words, they
sometimes disagree on whether, e.g., an abortion is intended or outside the scope of one’s intention. Nonetheless, the distinction is recognized as a clear distinction.

Choosing to kill is adopting a proposal precisely to kill or to do something understood in such a way that its meaning includes bringing about death. People who choose to administer a lethal dose of opiates ordinarily understand what they choose as a way of ending life, and when a proposal is so understood, its very meaning includes bringing about death. We see that choosing to kill (direct killing) is choosing to do or omit something precisely as a means of bringing about death. That is exactly the case in euthanasia.

According to Germain Grisez, people intend only what they choose as a means or seek as an end. For example, a surgeon who removes a cancerous uterus gravid with a twelve-week fetus in order to prevent the cancer’s spread accepts but does not intend the certain consequence of the death of the unborn (does not directly kill the baby). The other classical example is given about a rapist’s death. The rapist’s death is not what is chosen as a means or sought as an end when the woman shoots him in the head to stop his attack (the shooting is not direct killing). Her end is to avoid being raped; her means is to prevent the would-be rapist from carrying out the behavior which would constitute rape. The nonhomicidal character of her intention (that this shooting was not a case of direct killing) would be manifested if the shot resulted in an incapacitating wound rather than death, and the woman, rather than shooting the wounded man again, promptly summoned an ambulance and, while awaiting it, did everything she could to save his life.

In the case of euthanasia, we are talking about causing the death by omission. Omission can be a means of intentional killing. Someone can intentionally kill another by an omission. If a person can do something necessary to sustain life, but deliberately omits to do it in order that death will ensue, that omission is a means of intentional killing. It is possible “to commit murder (morally speaking by omission, as when, in order that the patient should die, a medical attendant omits, e.g., to turn on an apparatus; or when people deliberately neglect to feed their child). Thus, the fact that one ‘did nothing’ is not of itself proof that there is not the gravest responsibility for a death.”

3. Why it is always wrong intentionally to kill an innocent human being?

After all that was said above, one could ask why it is always wrong intentionally to kill an innocent human being. Catholic tradition, under the guidance of the Magisterium, has affirmed that intentional killing of the innocent is always a grave matter. What excludes acts of killing shaped by an intention to kill an innocent person and why does it admit of no exceptions whatsoever? The Declaration on Euthanasia clearly says that "Nothing and no one can in any way permit the killing of an innocent human being whether a fetus or an embryo, or infant, or an adult, an old person, or one suffering from an incurable disease, or a person who is dying” because...
their nature ‘incapable of being ordered’ to God because they radically contradict the good of the person made in his image. These are the acts which, in the Church’s moral tradition, have been termed ‘intrinsically evil’ (intrinsece malum); they are such always and per se, in other words, on account of their very object, and apart from ulterior intentions of the one acting and the circumstances.”

The Pope shows us that absolute moral norms proscribing semper et ad semper acts intrinsically evil by reason of their object go hand-in-hand with inviolable human rights. Such norms, according to him, “in fact represent the unshakable foundation and solid guarantee of a just and peaceful human coexistence, and hence of genuine democracy, which come into being and develop only on the basis of the equality of all its members, who possess common rights and duties. When it is a matter of the moral norms prohibiting intrinsic evil, there are no privileges or exceptions for anyone”.

It is clear that innocent persons have an inviolable right to life if and only if all other persons have an absolute obligation to forbear intentionally killing them. We always have to choose alternatives whose willing is compatible with a love for all the goods of human persons, especially the good of life. We ought not freely choose to destroy the good of innocent human life; moral norms proscribing actions in which, of necessity, our will ratifies the deprivation of these goods are absolute, exceptionless. We talk about moral absolutes, i.e., specific moral norms which identify in descriptive terms possible objects of human choice which are always immoral and hence never to be freely chosen because one willing to do them is willing to make himself to be an evildoer. According to William May, “Moral absolutes show us what love cannot mean: it cannot mean that we set our wills against the good gifts that God wills to flourish in his children and close our hearts to our neighbors.”

So intentional killing is always incompatible with love because acts of intentional killing are done either out of emotional hatred or for some ulterior end, for whose sake the person to be killed is treated as a disposable thing. But even intentional mercy killing, or suicide motivated by feelings of sympathy or sadness, is incompatible with volitional love, since willing that someone be deprived of the intrinsic good of life is incompatible with willing his or her complete good.

The Church’s teaching on the absolute inviolability of innocent human life is eloquently affirmed by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical Evangelium Vitae: Therefore, by the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his Successors, and in communion with the Bishops of the Catholic Church, I confirm that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral. This doctrine, based upon that unwritten law which man, in the light of reason, finds in his own heart (cf. Rom 2:14-15) is reaffirmed by Sacred Scripture, transmitted by the Tradition of the Church, and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium.

In teaching that some objects of human choice are intrinsically evil and that the norms proscribing them are absolute and without exception, the Church serves the truth. Ultimately, the Crucified Christ provides the answer to the question, why must we obey “universal and unchanging moral norms?” He does so because he gave his life - himself - to manifest his love for the persons made in God’s image and called to divine life. He suffered evil rather than do it. And so did the martyrs. John Paul II insists that martyrdom is senseless unless there are

killing the innocent follows not only from the inherent goodness of human life, but from the order of creation and the purpose of redemption. The dignity of the human person comes from God because only humans were made in his own image. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its instruction Classical Catholic thought stresses the centrality of action because our free actions are the existential centre of our lives. In our freely chosen acts we not only affect the world and other persons but also shape our own personalities and character. We are in certain way our own parents, creating ourselves as we will, by our decisions.

It is very important to understand that human acts are specified primarily by the “object” freely chosen and willed by the acting person. The object freely chosen is the primary determinant of the morality of a
absolute moral norms prohibiting intrinsically evil acts, for the martyrs suffered death rather than freely choose to do evil: “Martyrdom, accepted as an affirmation of the inviolability of the moral order, bears splendid witness both to the holiness of God’s law and to the inviolability of the personal dignity of man, created in God’s image and likeness.”

Conclusion: human act precisely because this object is willed and intended. “Object” in the perspective of human actions has to be seen from the viewpoint of the “first person” (the agent’s perspective). Also it is very important to grasp the distinction between our doing something intentionally and doing it non intentionally.

Catholic tradition has affirmed that intentional killing of the innocent is always a grave matter. There can never be any objectively good reasons for violating this moral absolute. The renewal of moral theology called for by Vatican II does not lead to an abandonment of the norms always taught in the Church but rather to a fuller understanding of why these norms are essential to the fabric of authentic Christian living. To act so as deliberately to harm a basic human good - his life - is to act against the fulfillment of a human person and that is incompatible with loving the person.

As we see these themes are crucially significant in understanding the morality of human actions and have a practical application, especially in the field of biomedical ethics.

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Santrauka

Žmogus yra moralinė būtybė, nors ne visi jo veiksmai gali būti vertinami doriniu požiūriu. Egzistencinę reikšmę turi laisvai pasirinkti žmogiški veiksmai. Šie žmogaus veiksmai "kuria" visą to žmogaus moralinį gyvenimą. Anot šv. Grigaliaus Nysiečio, mes esame patys sau tėvai, kuriantys save per laisvus savo apsisprendimus. Laisvai pasirinkdamas kažką daryti ar kažko nedaryti, žmogus pasirenka gėrį arba blogį, jis elgiasi pagal Dievo valią arba prieš Dievo valią. Taigi žmogaus pagrindinis pasirinkimas apibūdina patį žmogų.

Žmogiškiai veiksmai apibūdinami pagal laisvai pasirinktą ir valingą "objektą". Labai svarbu vertinti veiksmo moralumą iš veikiančiojo asmens perspektyvos. "Objektas" yra tai, ką žmogus būdamas laisvas ir suvokdamas pasirenka atlikti. Vertinant veiksmo mo-

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: žmogiški veiksmai, moralumas, laisvas pasirinkimas, intencija, egzistencinis, proporcionalizmas, tiesioginis, netiesioginis, ralumą labai svarbių "valingas" ir "nevalingas", "tiesioginis" ir "netiesioginis" sąvokos.

Pagal Katalikų Bažnyčios mokymą "tiesioginis" ir "valingas" nekalto žmogaus nužudymas visada yra moralinis blogis. Jeigu veiksmo "objektas" yra nekalto žmogaus nužudymas, tai jokios aplinkybės tokio veiksmo pateisinti negali. Bažnyčios moralinis mokymas kalba apie tokį veiksmą kaip intrinsece malum.

Jonas Paulius II pabrėždamas žmogaus, sukurto pagal Dievo paveikslą ir panašumą, orumą ir vertingumą pabrėžia sakydamas, kad mes mylime savo artimą tik tada, kai mes saugome jo gėrį. Taigi, jei kas nors laisvai pasirenka sunaikinti šį kito asmens gėrį, tai toks jo veiksmas nesiderina su artimo meile.

KEY WORDS: human acts, morality, free choice, intention, existential, proportionalism, direct, indirect.

Martin Rhonheimer makes it clear that the object morally specifying a human act is always the object of a human act “just insofar as it is an act of a human being. Without the act of practical reason
which relates to any object in a specifically moral way, there is neither a human act nor a personal meaning of such acts. To speak of the 'object of an action' is to speak of the content of an intentional action... the morally relevant object of an action is the content of an act insofar as it is the object of an intentio voluntatis (whether this is on the level of the choice of concrete, particular actions or on the level of intending further ends for the sake of which a concrete action is chosen as a means).”

This is "a question of the violation of the divine law, an offense against the dignity of the human person, a crime against life and an attack on humanity. "

Already divine revelation teaches that killing the innocent is wrong. According to Germain Grisez, the serious wrongness of