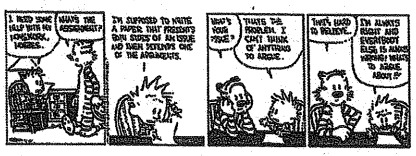
Morality, Natural Law, Virtue

- Our final end is beatitude, the contemplation of God in seeing the divine Essence
- We achieve this end by our freely-willed human actions that are in accord with the divine Will, which is perfect Good

- ***What does Aquinas say about the path we are to follow to achieve this end?***

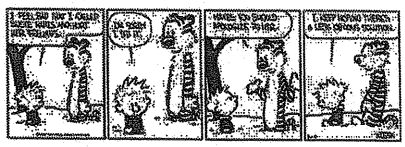
- We are morally responsible for our human acts – those which proceed deliberately from intellect and will – or "voluntariness"
- That responsibility for <u>objectively</u> wrong actions is correlative to our concrete freedom – that freedom can be lessened (and thus our <u>subjective</u> culpability diminished) for individual acts by force, fear, ignorance, or habit



- The goodness of a particular human act is judged therefore by the "three fonts" of morality:
  - <u>Means</u> – the method or object used in the act – what is actually done
  - <u>Intention</u> – the agent's purpose or goal that motivates the action
  - <u>Circumstances</u> (who, what, where, by what aids, why, how, when)

  - ***The means and the intention together form the "moral object" of an act*** – thus even a subjectively good intention cannot justify a wrongful means, and a bad intention can taint an otherwise good means

- We can have more than one intention (nested or parallel) when we act
- In practice: we take counsel (thought), we choose a means (choice), we consent to the means, we employ (use) the means – though we rarely parse these steps in ordinary choices
- "Goodness" and "Evil" are ascribed to human acts insofar as they do or do not conform to God's will and lead to the proper end of the human person



- Aquinas' ethical theory combines natural law and virtue ethics
- By volume, the vast majority is about virtue and vice; but premised upon an understanding of the human person to outline the goods or evils towards which those habits tend

- Begins with "habit" – a stable inclination towards repeated actions of the same kind
- Habits that incline toward the good = virtues
- Habits that incline toward the harmful = vice

- Note that virtue and vice are not simply moral terms
  - Artistic virtue
  - Intellectual virtue
  - Rhetorical virtue
  - Athletic virtue ... etc.

- *In medias stat virtus* – virtue lies in the mean

- Moral virtue, however, is naturally the most important as it relates to the highest end or good of the person
- Theological virtues (infused): Faith, Hope, Charity
- Moral (Cardinal) virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance
- All the virtues are linked (*nexus virtuti*)

- Virtues make is easier for us to keep the Law
- In general: law is ***"an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by the one with the care of the community, and promulgated"***
  - Divine / Eternal Law – the will of God
  - Natural Law – the rational creature's participation in the Eternal Law
  - Positive / Human Law – civil, canonical

- Natural law is often misunderstood, caricatured, confused with the laws of nature
- For humans, because we are free, natural law is <u>not</u> mere biological necessity or a constraint on human freedom

- "The precepts of the natural law are to the practical reason, what are the first principles of demonstrations are to speculative reason; because both are self-evident principles. ...
- "The first principle in the practical reason is that good is that which all things seek after. Thus the first precept of law is that good is to be done and evil is to be avoided. All other precepts of the natural law are based on this: so that whatever the practical reason naturally apprehends as human good (or evil) belongs to the precepts of the natural law as something to be done or avoided."

- "According to the order of natural inclinations is the order of the precepts of the natural law.
  - Re: being – "First, whatever is a means of preserving human life, and of warding off its obstacles, belongs to the natural law.
  - Re: "anima-l" life: "Second, those things belong to natural law which nature has taught all animals, such as sexual intercourse, education of offspring, and so forth.
  - Re: reason: "Third, a natural inclination to know the truth about God and to live in society ... to shun ignorance, to avoid offending those among whom one has to live, and other such things regarding this inclination."
  - See I/II, 94

- Natural law is the same for all, though unequally known; unchanging; and cannot be "blotted out from the heart of man"
- II/II, qq. 1-189 is entirely about the Virtues (and correlative vices) and their allied virtues and parts – 827 pages!
- III is Christology and Sacraments

- A few words on the Moral Virtues
- Prudence: right reason about things to be done
- Justice: rendering another what is due
- Fortitude: the courage to resist evil and the patience to accept evil
- Temperance: due moderation in matters of food, drink, and sex

- Adoro Te devote, latens Deitas, quae sub his figuris vere latitas: Tibi se cor meum totum subiicit, quia Te contemplans totum deficit.
- Visus, tactus, gustus in Te fallitur, sed auditu solo tuto creditur; credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius: nil hoc verbo Veritatis verius.