Original Article

Integrity and virtue: The forming of good character

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Moral character is formed by one's actions. The habits, actions, and emotional responses of the person of good character all are united and directed toward the moral and the good. Because human beings are body/soul unities, actions of the body are actions of the self; that is, human beings are self-possessing, self-governing, and self-determining. In order to be of good character, one must know the good, act in morally good ways, and be disposed and inclined toward the good through the development of virtues. Character and action are intertwined so intimately that one's professional duties, or even what is perceived by others as one's duties, cannot override one's conscience without negatively affecting (and changing) one's character. For the physician to be of good character, it is vital that he or she follow his or her conscience in all things: in private life and also in his or her profession, i.e., in the treatment of patients.

Lay summary: *Character cannot be separated from the person. To be of good character means that one's habits, actions, and emotional responses all are united and directed toward the moral and the good. In this, public actions cannot be separated from private actions. Both sets of actions affect one's character. For example, a physician believes use of contraceptives to be immoral yet prescribes them in the office because he or she feels a duty to provide what the patient asks for, or a pharmacist who believes abortion to be immoral fills prescriptions for the abortifacient RU-486. These public acts affect one's character even if one's private belief is the opposite of the action. They leave traces on one's character. Not only do actions reflect the goodness or badness of one's character, one's actions also change one's character. The more one does an immoral action or recommends an immoral action for others, the more it becomes part of one's character to be the type of person who condones that immoral action. In order to be of good character one must not only know and desire the good, one must also pursue it in both private and public actions. Virtue is an aid in this; it is the act of good character. Growing in the virtues, especially prudence (knowing what to seek and what to avoid) forms good character. What is at stake is the integrity of the person. The physician who believes that use of contraception is immoral must also act in ways that display that belief and avoid actions that promote contraception use by his or her patients.*

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There is much controversy in bioethics today, especially in areas such as abortion, contraception, reproductive technologies, and end-of-life issues; and there is much confusion over the role of physician.¹ One side says that physicians should be involved in physician-assisted suicide,

abortion, contraception, etc.; it is their duty to provide the services the patient wants; and, even, they endanger the patient's health by refusing. Another side says that physicians should never be forced to go against their consciences; they should never have to do things that they

think are wrong (and even evil).² Can one's professional duties override one's conscience?³ Is such a conflict even possible? There are many variations of these positions, and some even seek a middle ground between them. The issue is becoming more and more urgent as many US states consider rejecting existing laws that allow conscientious objection or enacting laws specifically to allow it.

What seems even more insidious, and more crucial, is the claim of some physicians that they *can* involve themselves with these things in their public life and still be against them privately. They insist that they can compartmentalize their life in such a way that the two do not affect one another. It could be that they do not consider contraceptives to be abortifacient, and so, there is no moral problem with prescribing them, or that they should not push their Catholic beliefs on non-Catholic patients or other reasons. "If women who come into my practice ask for contraception, as is the culture in our society today, I prescribe it. That's what I do. I'm trained to be an ob-gyn," said Lester Ruppertsberger, D.O., who later stopped prescribing contraceptives (Schierhorn 2013; see also Brinker 2010 and Grisez 1997). Mary Davenport, M.D., explains what happened when she first joined the American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists (AAPLOG):

I asked if one could prescribe IUDs, oral contraceptives, and post-coital contraception and be a member of the organization. I was told that organization existed to fight surgical and medical abortion of established pregnancies, and that the IUDs and hormonal [contraception] didn't violate that principal.... This didn't make sense to me, but I figured if the distinguished physicians who started this organization at the time of *Roe v. Wade* could live with that contradiction, I could too. I later found out that

many AAPLOG doctors actually do not believe that oral contraceptives act as abortifacients, which was a complete surprise to me! (Davenport 1998, 23)

This paper will examine the relationship between one's actions and one's character. When one is pressured or convinced or even willing to perform an action that one considers to be bad or wrong, does it corrupt one's (good) character or can one maintain a separation of character from action? Does one's character regulate one's actions or generate a specific or required set of actions? These seem to be key issues in discussions of conscience, conscientious objection, and character.

CHARACTER

Paul Ricoeur describes character as something, which cannot be separated from the person (Ricoeur 1992, 122). It has "a permanence which we say belongs to us" (Ricoeur 1992, 118). Ricoeur defines "character" as "the set of distinctive marks which permit the re-identification of a human individual as being the same."⁴ We cannot separate character from the person and say here is the person and there is his or her character. A person can be distinguished from his or her actions, what was done is different from who did it. But the same distinction cannot be made between character and action. But Ricoeur's discussion of character seems to include much more than moral character as can be seen from the following statement:

By means of this stability, borrowed from acquired habits and identifications—in other words, from dispositions—character assures at once numerical identity, qualitative identity, uninterrupted continuity across change, and, finally, permanence in time which defines sameness. (Ricoeur 1992, 122)

“Personality” might be a more comprehensive term for such a broad definition than “character” (Audi 1991, 307). This broader category can then include nature or traits, about which one could turn to biology for explanations (Ricoeur 1992, 120 note 5); and position or capacity or reputation, which is the expertise of sociology or the like; and many other aspects of the person.

The rational side, including “moral excellence and firmness,” can more easily be found under the term “moral character.”⁵ From this moral aspect come evaluation, judgment, decision, choice resulting in right or wrong, and moral or immoral action.⁶ It is this last aspect—moral character—which is most involved in a physician’s moral decisions. Character then involves goodness and wickedness, that is, ethics. In this case, one must turn to philosophy (and anthropology), and especially the study of ethics, for assistance and understanding.

A more detailed definition of character, or, more specifically, being of good character, can be found in the three facets of dispositions, desires, and tendencies:

having steady and permanent dispositions to do what is right and to refrain from doing what is wrong; having morally desirable wishes, desires, purposes, and goals; and having the tendency to respond emotionally toward things in the morally appropriate way.⁷

The habits, actions, and emotional responses of the person of good character all are united and directed toward the moral and the good.

Aristotle’s famous four categories of character (the virtuous, the continent, the incontinent, and the vice-filled⁸) in the *Nicomachean Ethics* reflect aspects of this deeper definition.⁹ In the vice-filled person, reason and appetite are united; and reason is a slave to passions and

appetites. The vice-filled person chooses what his or her appetites command. In the incontinent person, reason and appetite are not united; and appetite wins out more often than reason. There is correct knowledge of the right thing to do and desire to do it, to be a virtuous person, but one fails more than one wins; and appetite overrides reason. In the continent person, reason and appetite are not united; but reason wins out more often than appetite. The desire is there; and the right thing gets done more frequently than not. In the virtuous person, reason and appetite are united; and appetite is controlled by reason so the right thing gets done (most of the time). In addition, these categories admit of degrees; one person may be more continent or less incontinent. Also, persons are not static; they (usually) move within a category or between categories during the course of their lifetime. Most persons fall into the categories of continent and incontinent; they know the good and are more or less able to do it.

The physician who writes a prescription for contraceptives knowing that it is wrong may fall into the category of the incontinent.¹⁰ For example, he may be under pressure from his colleagues or society and be acting out of fear or timidity. Or he may think he is acting for a greater good—an obligation to his patient to provide what is requested. This second case does not seem to quite fit into Aristotle’s categories as the physician seems to be choosing the good (fulfilling the requests of his patients) and overriding his emotions (toward contraception). Reason seems to be in control of appetites and passions. The problem here is not that appetite is controlling reason, but that reason is faulty. The knowledge of the good is not lacking in one respect—the evil of contraception is recognized—but is lacking in another, the knowledge of the relationship between character and action

is insufficient resulting in bad choices. Here then is another facet of character: one must have *right* reason or, more specifically, a *rightly formed* reason—that is, not just knowledge of the good but correct knowledge of the good, in this case, correct knowledge of the human person, a sufficient anthropology, if you will.¹¹ The physician also needs correct knowledge of the ends of medicine (more on this later). This is why truth is so important for character (and human action, and moral decision making).

One's character is based upon the truth (as one knows it). That the truth about something (and about everything) makes a difference can be seen in terms such as "dirty money." It makes a difference to a person of good character where money they have received as a gift comes from. Donations are usually accepted at face value, but when the truth about the source of the money is revealed, another determination is made about its acceptability. A donation of hard-earned money from honest work is seen as acceptable; while a donation from stolen funds or money made from illegal drug trade or other illegal activities would be refused. "Dirty" money is seen as tainting the character even of one who simply receives it as a gift.

It is a trait of human beings, not non-human animals, that they need right reason in order to become fully human beings. It is a trait of human beings, not spirits, that they are in the process of change, of becoming what they are. Edith Stein makes this clear.

The human soul must gradually gain possession of its essence or nature, and its life is the way that leads to that goal. This is why in the case of the human soul *formation* is possible and necessary. But so that this formation may be *free*, ... the human soul must have self-knowledge and be capable of taking a stand with

respect to its own self. It must find itself in a dual sense: It must *learn to know* itself, and it must *come to be* what it is destined to be.¹²

Therefore, the more one knows the truth about reality, the world, the human being, the better able one is to form a good character. A consequence of this is that the one who thinks he knows the good is harder to correct than the one who is incontinent yet has right reasoning, "because reasoning does not teach the principles" (Aquinas 1993, bk. 7, lec. 8, n. 1432). The incontinent person knows he is doing something wrong, and wants to and tries to change. The person who thinks he is doing something right when he is not is hard to convince, because he thinks he is right. In other words, he thinks he has the truth.¹³

In both cases described above, the physician may think he or she can perform a bad act yet stay of good character. As a physician, he or she writes prescriptions for contraception, but in his or her private life, he or she thinks use of contraception is immoral. This belief—ultimately about the separation of character and action—is the reasoning for continuing the behavior (writing prescriptions for contraception). If this belief is true, then these physicians are upholding good character (at least in this area). If it is false, then they are changing their character. However, any truth found may not lead the physicians in this example to change: the one may still be unable to overcome passions, and the other may then become obstinate (Aquinas 1993, bk. 7)—but on the other hand, truth is an essential component of good character and a better understanding may lead to better reasoning and improved moral character.

Can character be compartmentalized either so that it is unaffected by certain actions or that one has more than one

character (say a character in one's role as physician and a different character in one's private life)? Fundamental to answering these questions is the relationship of character to the person, the amount of control over character development a person has, and the effects of one's actions on character.

Sign

A United States flag is a sign. It conveys more meaning than a rectangle of the colors red, white, and blue, and stars and stripes. It stands for honor and courage, blood shed in battles, freedom, the unity of fifty states, and more. A traffic light indicates more than three circles of red, amber, and green lights. It controls actions of cars and pedestrians, makes busy intersections safe, and allows people moving in opposing and conflicting directions to progress safely.

In the same manner, the character of a human being means more than "this is a human being"; it also indicates what manner of human being this is (good or evil, virtuous or vice-filled, saint or beast, etc.). Being of good character is not a description of the uniqueness of Joe in the same way that physical indicators, such as fingerprints or DNA, are, but Joe does have a unique character in that it is a unique mixture of strengths, weaknesses, virtues, vices, knowledge, and experience.

While a sign, such as a flag or a traffic light, expresses its meaning through its physical presence, a human being expresses character through actions. I cannot determine Joe's character through watching him stand in one spot (unless that spot is atop a pole in the desert like the desert Fathers) or through his physical description. To find out about his character, I must observe Joe's actions. Does he kick the cat or pet it? Does he give a coin to the beggar or turn his face

away? It is not even any one action that resolves the issue, but the accumulation of all my observations and interactions with the person, which reveals his or her character. But even then, I cannot know Joe's character fully. One action can cause one to re-evaluate the whole of a person's character, just as a single pebble can cause ripples across much of a small pond. A multitude of good actions can confirm the good character of a person, but one bad action leads the observer to question that good character.¹⁴

Maybe the person is of less good character than one thought, or maybe in this particular area, the person has a weakness¹⁵ (The same can be said of someone who is vice-filled but does something truly charitable; maybe they are less bad then at first seems.) Even further, because human beings change over time, character cannot really be fully known until after changes stop (at death). And one can hardly know one's own character without some external input (Crosby 1996, 152–57). This does not mean that character is completely unknowable. Character does express itself through actions. Others help us by reflecting back to us what our actions are telling them about our character. If we know Joe well enough, we can generally predict his actions. This is why one bad action from an otherwise good character mostly seems to come as a shock to those who are familiar with the person.

It also seems that we are better able to know another's character when the other person is closer to the virtuous or vice-filled ends of the spectrum. The more one's moral character tends toward one end of the spectrum (good or bad), the less unique it becomes but the more rare. Good character is an ideal outside of oneself that all strive for. In Christianity, the ideal is Christ; we are to constantly strive to be Christ-like, having the character of Christ.¹⁶ The human being's "salvation, his perfect realization, will be accomplished when he is fully conformed to the risen,

glorified Christ.... Revelation has as its end this perfect assimilation to Christ" (Caffara 1987, 170). At the extremes of moral character, uniqueness is found more in personality, rather than in character. All the saints have similar characters, and all the beastly humans have similar characters. The virtue of prudence (or fortitude or temperance or justice, etc.) is the same in all who possess it though it may express itself differently depending on circumstances and personalities. We recognize Joe as different from Jane or Peter, but we recognize patience as being the same virtue in Joe and in Jane and in Peter.

Formation

Another facet of character is that it is able to be changed. Sometimes a child who was a "little angel" (or "little devil") when young is the opposite as an adult. One reason criminals are imprisoned is to give them a chance to reform. One of the big issues in the education of children recently, especially in the US in light of school shootings such as Columbine, is character formation.¹⁷ Even traits acquired whether through DNA or environment seem to be redirectable or even reversible. Shyness can sometimes be (more or less) overcome through training and practice in social or group settings. Aggressiveness can be directed toward useful or good purposes rather than bad or criminal ones. Anecdotal evidence for the changeability of character abounds. It is generally observable that character is subject to change over time, whether the change is small or a complete reversal.

Aristotle, in a more philosophical examination of character and the human being, found three things in the soul: passions (appetite and emotions), faculties (the capability to experience passions), and states of character (being well- or ill-

disposed to each passion, the best state being moderation between extremes, for example, feeling anger moderately rather than too weakly or too violently) (Aristotle n.d., bk. 2, chap. 5). Aquinas took these up interpreting them as passion (*passio*), power (*potentia*), and habit (*habitus*). He then analyzed in which of these three character resides. Character is not a passion because passions come and go but character is indelible. Character is not a habit because a bad habit cannot be good nor a good habit bad, but character can be good or bad, in other words, it is indifferent to goodness and badness. Therefore, character must be a power, a *potentia*.¹⁸ Here then is the root of the mutability of character, namely, a power is an ability or potential for change of some sort. There is movement from potential to actual, from power to action.

Ricoeur sees this power of character as a disposition acquired over time (Ricoeur 1992, 120–21). This disposition is both immutable and mutable, stable and changeable. The source of these two seemingly incompatible traits is habit, that is, one is continually forming habits (mutability) and making use of already realized habits (a type of immutability). This last is what Ricoeur refers to as "sedimentation": that "which confers on character [a] sort of permanence in time" (Ricoeur 1992, 121). Therefore, through the acquiring and the breaking of habits, character is formed and formable.¹⁹

Once a physician starts writing prescriptions for contraception when a patient asks and no longer thinks about it overmuch but just does it, then this becomes a habit and consequently becomes part of his or her character. This does not mean that only habits form character. Rather, character is something incomplete in a sense. It develops over time. Dispositions, inclinations, and desires, which stabilize over time, are also part of the formation of character.

ACTION

The other side of the relation between moral character and action is the effect of action on character. Three aspects of action relevant to this are repetition of action and its effect on the person, the type of action, and intention and responsibility.

Habits, skills, and *habitus*

Actions can be repetitive or automatic in (at least) three different ways: by habit, by education, and by *habitus*. When an action is constantly repeated, over time it can become a habit. Every time I see the straggly haired man in the orange beanie and three sweaters, I give him a dollar; the orange caught my eye at some time in the past, and ever since then, I respond with a dollar. Or I habitually put my keys on the bookshelf by the front door. The action gradually becomes unconscious or automatic, and the will is less involved in the initiation of the action. Consequently, a habit takes away some freedom (Aquinas 1993, bk. 7, lec. 6, n. 1403). I am no longer as free to do something different. I can change my habit, but it usually requires continual, conscious effort and much struggle (until a new habit is established). I put the keys on the bookshelf again when I really wanted to put them on the new hook by the door, so I take them off the shelf and put them on the hook. Eventually, I will remember to put them on the hook instead of the bookshelf, and that will then become a new habit. The physician who automatically writes a prescription for contraception for patients who ask and no longer thinks it through has acquired a habit. The physician who automatically says no to such a request also has acquired a habit.

Another type of automatic action is a skill. Actions become skills through

repetition and experience. The rugged-terrain hiker automatically reaches a hand out to steady the inexperienced hiker who is losing his or her balance on the steep path. The potter's hands automatically smooth out the small bumps in the clay pot he or she is making. The baker automatically stops kneading the bread dough when it reaches a certain elasticity. These actions are done without consciously thinking through all the steps and reasoning and judgments. These actions are skills.

Physical education thus means much more than merely bodily hygiene, physical exercise, or physical habituation. It means directing the will to a planful, conscientious, and free forming of the body. And such a free forming is possible because of the fact that the soul is the form of the body, so that the soul's attitude expresses itself naturally in the body. (Stein 2002, 428–29, original emphasis)

One trains one's body through experience and repetition in how to act and react in a certain environment or under certain circumstances. This functions as a kind of physical memory, a memory in the body. These are skills.

A third way actions become automatic is through what Aquinas calls *habitus*, that is, inclination or disposition. I may give a dollar to the man in the orange beanie every time I see him, and that is a habit. But if every time I see someone begging, I give them a dollar; and I regularly give my restaurant leftovers to a homeless person; and I see a person without a coat shivering in the middle of winter and give them my coat, and on and on, example after example, that is a *habitus*, an inclination, a will-iness, to respond charitably to anyone in need as the situation arises. The will has been trained to recognize the situation when it arises and to be willing to act in a charitable way. Rather than a

habit as a type of muscle memory (always putting my keys on the bookshelf), the repeated actions of a specific kind (e.g., charitable) in different situations become a disposition to act in a specific way in all situations, in this case, in a charitable way. With *habitus*, one becomes a charitable person rather than a person with a habit. The source of this last type of action is character. In order for the physician to write a prescription for contraception (or not) out of a *habitus* rather than a habit, he or she needs to act out of the detailed definition of character discussed at the beginning of this paper: desires, inclinations, tendencies, knowledge, and virtue.

While this example is about charity, there is nothing about *habitus* that requires it to be good. One may also will to be miserly and act in a miserly way and therefore develop a bad disposition or *habitus* of miserliness. The morality of the action also determines the morality of the *habitus*. But not all acts can be cataloged as moral or immoral. There are different types or categories of actions.

Moral action

Because human beings are body/soul unities, actions of the body are actions of the self. "As an instrument of my acts, my body is an integral part of the unity of my personality" (Stein 2002, 367). Even the biological functions of the body are (or can be) part of the self. When my stomach growls, I do not say "my body is hungry" but "I am hungry." I do not say "my body has a fever," but "I have a fever."

Digestion of food is certainly an action, as is jumping when startled or yawning when tired. Aquinas calls these acts of a human being (*actus humanus*) and distinguishes them from human acts (*actus humanis*). Human acts are rational acts,

"those springing from man's will following the order of reason" (Aquinas 1993, bk 1, lec. 1, n. 3) those "of which man is master... through his reason and will."²⁰ Consequently, they are moral acts. Human acts are more closely associated with character than are acts of human beings, because the former actions come from the whole person. They are a commitment of the whole person²¹; the body did what the will willed. In other words, the person threw the whole of themselves, as a psycho-somatic unity, into the action. The person could have chosen to do something different, but chose this particular action.

In contrast, an act of a human is not a matter of choice. A person cannot choose to stop the physical act of their stomach growling. A growling stomach is not a choice. One can choose to eat something and thereby stop the growling but cannot choose to stop the growling directly by willing it. Even laughing at funny things is a moral act, in contrast to laughing because one is being tickled, which is an act of a human being. In the former, there is choice. One can choose to laugh or not. Laughing that is ridicule is a bad moral act. Laughing at oneself can be good (e.g., humbling). In fact, training oneself to not laugh at racist jokes or sexual innuendos is considered by many to be a moral responsibility.²² Writing a prescription, likewise, is a human, and therefore moral, act; it is a matter of choice. One can write it or not write it as one wills and chooses. In Karol Wojtyła's thought, this sort of "action draws together all of the elements in the experience of the person."²³ And so, "action reveals the person."²⁴

Responsibility and intention

Two important aspects of the revelatory nature of action are responsibility and intention. To ask who did a specific action

is to ask who is responsible, and to say that “Joe did it” is to assign responsibility to Joe for his actions. In other words, human beings own their actions and the consequences of them. This even applies to actions that are accidental rather than willed and chosen. If I unintentionally bump into someone while walking on a crowded sidewalk, the person I bumped into does not stop to ask if I did it on purpose but instead automatically expects an apology, and I automatically (hopefully) give it.

This intimacy between an action and the person who performs it is also recognized when a “why” is added to the “who did it.” And while an external observer can see who did an action, the why is more intimate and internal to the agent. In non-human animals, the why is instinct and nature, in human acts of human beings, it is a combination of will, freedom, and choice. The will is the rational power of human beings to act. It is the ability to choose what is good (or what one thinks is good) directed by reason.²⁵ In the will, then, is found intention. Voluntary actions have their source in intention while involuntary actions, such as being startled, do not.²⁶ There are forward-looking motives or intentions, such as “to heal”; backward-looking motives or reasons, such as fear of ridicule or loss of job or loss of reputation; and motives-in-general, such as love of God or wanting to do the right thing. The incontinent physician mentioned above is writing the prescription out of a backward-looking motive, fear. The continent (or continent-like) physician is writing the prescription out of a forward-looking motive, health of the patient. Both are acting for a good end (keeping job or reputation, and health of patient). But both are acting out of a limited freedom. The former’s freedom is limited by fear, the latter’s by ignorance or obstinacy. Most importantly, the actions

of both are coming from what is internal and inseparable from them, the will (John Paul II 1993, n. 67).

Responsibility and intention are rooted in the will, which is the source of the self-possession and self-governance of human beings. Self-possession is different from possession of an object. One can own or hold an object, such as a rock, and therefore have possession of it. But one owns and holds oneself internally in a way one cannot with a rock. We are conscious of the rock as something that is external, but we are conscious of ourselves from the inside. We are both the object of our consciousness and the subject.²⁷ As such, we have possession of ourselves in a more intimate way than we have possession of a rock.

Human beings are what they possess; they possess what they themselves are. Even under duress, a person is self-possessing. One can be stopped from doing something through external sources such as obstacles put in one’s way or even physical restraint, but no one can be forced to do something. The interesting thing here is that a physician may *feel* forced to write prescriptions for contraception through fear of ostracism or losing his job, but at the point at which he actually writes the prescription, he is no longer forced but actually willing the writing of the prescription. One can be prevented from doing something by external forces, but carrying through with an action has an element of the voluntary, of willing to do it and therefore cannot be forced.²⁸

Another way the will can be hindered is by lack of knowledge.²⁹ One may attempt to drive across a flooded bridge thinking the water is low enough to get through but then get stuck, because it was really two feet above the bridge. But if one knows that the water is that high, one would not drive across it or will to drive across it, because one knows the car will

stall in the middle. In other words, while the will cannot be forced to will something, it can be hindered from doing what is willed (Aquinas 1948, I-II, q. 6, a. 4).

A corollary of self-possession is self-governance. Self-governance includes self-control but is farther and wider reaching into the interior of the self (Wojtyla 1979, 107). It is not mere control, but rule, which includes control and more. The human being is self-governing in that he can carry out a human action or not carry it out as he wills. He can choose to write a prescription or chose not to write it. Because of self-possession and self-governance, human beings both intend their actions and have responsibility for their actions.

INTEGRATION

Along with self-possession and self-governance, comes self-determination. To say that one's actions have no effect on one's character is a form of Cartesian dualism in which the mind controls the body as it would a machine. In this case, the body has no effect on the mind or the person; and one's character is only what one makes of it. The person is self-directed and formed in an internal process isolated from external events and influences.³⁰

Paul Ricoeur seems to lend support to this view when he says that one can separate an action from an agent, but cannot separate character from agent. For character, what I am and who I am are the same: "Character is truly the 'what' of the 'who'" (Ricoeur 1992, 122). The what is internal to the who. Whereas, for action, they are separable; we can isolate the what, writing a prescription, from the who, the physician. The what is external to the who. One can "distinguish between what someone does and the one who does something" (Ricoeur 1992, 122).

Certainly, it is true that the who can be *distinguished* from the what, but they cannot really be *separated* from each other. A particular person did this specific action.

If one changes perspective, from an external examination of the action performed and the person performing, to an internal examination of the person performing this action, then one can see that while there is distinction there is not separation. The person is the source and cause of his or her own actions.

All voluntary action upon the body, however, and all formative influence which the I—through the instrumentality of the body—exerts upon the external world rest upon the fact that human freedom is not restricted to the purely spiritual realm and that the realm of the spirit is not a separate, isolated sphere. The foundation upon which the spiritual life and free acts arise and to which they remain attached is the matter which is placed at the disposal of the human being's intellect and free will to be illuminated, formed, and used. In this way the bodily sentient life of the human being becomes a personally formed life and a constituent part of the human person. (Ricoeur 1992, 372–73)

Ricoeur's separation of an agent from an act is a separation only externally and on the surface. Internally the agent, possessing will, self-governing, and self-possessing, is the direct cause of his or her action and therefore inseparable from it. Therefore, whichever choice is made (to write a prescription or not), the action is an expression of one's character and also reinforces or changes one's character, i.e., human beings are self-determining.

When a person recognizes a habit in himself as bad (e.g., smoking or biting one's nails), he or she usually seeks to change it. We recognize when someone is acting out of character. Our character

allows others to predict, in a way, the types of actions we will do. We do not expect Mother Teresa of Calcutta to throw a sick person into the gutter, such an action would be out of character for her, rather we expect her to pick up a person out of the gutter. Being of good character means that some actions are excluded, but also that some are included and expected. We expect to perceive the virtues being expressed in the actions of one of good character. At the same time, one of good character tries to increase the virtues in oneself. Actions are expressive of character precisely because human beings are self-possessing, self-governing, and self-determining.

Acts which are “deliberate and chosen are essentially self-determining—that is, internal to and constitutive of an individual’s character.”³¹ A simple way in which this happens is when a bad (or good) action becomes a habit. That habit then becomes part of one’s character. As previously noted, Ricoeur called this sedimentation, a permanence acquired over time that therefore is seen as expressive of one’s character (Ricoeur 1992, 121).

Another way in which action becomes character is through inclinations or virtues. Recall the difference noted above between the habit of giving a dollar to a beggar in an orange beanie and the *habitus* of acting charitably in any situation in which one finds someone in need. Virtues are acquired only after hard work, attention to one’s actions, and much repetition:

More than a crackerjack lecture on temperance is going to be required if you are to become temperate. You must change your heart. Only by dint of repeated acts, performed with difficulty and against the grain, will temperance become your good such that acting in accord with it in changing circumstances is merely a

matter of your acting in character. (McInerny 2004, 109)

Even a single act forms character in that it expresses one’s will and one’s acceptance of the action.³² Since the human being is continually maturing and changing, actions leave “traces” on the human being.³³

It is neither the intellect that knows nor the will that decides, but it is the human being as acting person who recognizes, initiates, and determines. To act with efficacy is to integrate the rich complexity of the embodied human agent in a way that transforms him or her ...

Action, then, redounds upon the whole person, so that self-determination is also self-formation and self-development.³⁴

Moral actions especially have a significant effect on the person, because they are determinative of good or bad character.

Because action draws upon the whole person as agent, it affects the whole person; and because ethical action engages the good of the person through personalistic values, it cannot leave the person indifferent to his or her action. It transforms the person, for better or for worse.³⁵

Self-determination is key to becoming of good moral character. Paul Taylor sees four ways in which we can train ourselves to be morally good: (1) simply doing good and avoiding evil; (2) deliberately placing ourselves in situations of moral significance (e.g., volunteering at a soup kitchen); (3) imagining ourselves in such situations and acting rightly; and (4) “reflective thinking about moral matters” (Taylor 1964, 22).

If a physician sees use of contraception as morally bad, then acting out of his good moral character or if he wants to develop good character, he will not facilitate the use of contraception by writing

prescriptions for it. It is intrinsic to the definition of a prescription that the physician is recommending and expecting that it will be filled and the medication taken by the patient, and this for the good of the health of the patient. It cannot be separated from this context.

If a physician acts against his judgment that contraception is morally bad and still writes a prescription for it, his character is affected. By his action, he actually wills that contraception be used, he wills what he considers an evil. If it becomes a habit then he may no longer even be thinking of the evil but just doing it automatically. Through repetition, it may become an inclination or *habitus* such that he starts recommending it (in appropriate situations) even to patients who do not ask for it. Through his actions, he also risks being associated with the category of physicians who write prescriptions for contraception thinking it morally good. For, acts are not only self-determinative of an individual but also self-determinative of a group or community (Finnis 1998, 41). He may not recognize himself in that group but others will, simply due to the fact that one of the group's traits is that they write prescriptions for contraception (Ricoeur 1992, 121–22). According to Aquinas, this is hypocrisy, that is, “simulat[ing] a character which is not his own” (Aquinas 1948, II-II, q. 111, a. 3). This in fact indicates a fifth way of training one's character that we can add to Taylor's four above: associating with a group or community which embodies the character traits one wishes to acquire.³⁶ In such association one can seek to imitate the group's traits and character.

So far, we have seen that one's actions reflect one's character, and they also form one's character. Consequently, the morality of one's actions also reflects and forms one's character. Good moral actions come from a good character and form a good

character. Bad moral actions come from and form a bad character.

BEING OF GOOD CHARACTER

The good

One of the most essential—if not *the* most essential—requirements of good moral action is knowledge of the good. Knowledge of the good frees us to act well, that is, to act in accordance with the good that we have come to know. “Moral behavior is a response to reality and therefore requires a knowledge of reality” (Ratzinger 1984, 10). This knowledge is not made up by the person, nor is it found exclusively in Revelation or the Scriptures (Caffara 1987, 162). Knowledge of the good is found in study of the world around us and in study of human beings (anthropology, biology, medicine, etc., and *including* philosophy and theology), in other words, in reality and in truth.³⁷

Everyone chooses the good (or what they believe to be the good), even someone acting immorally or breaking the law has some good in mind.³⁸ The thief steals a jacket, because he thinks looking cool is a good or steals money, because he thinks being able to buy things is a good. The physician who writes a prescription for contraception is choosing the good of keeping a job or a reputation or (what he or she thinks is) the good of the patient's health. But to know only an apparent good is to be hampered in choosing the good. Full(er) knowledge of the good frees us to choose the true good rather than an apparent good and therefore frees us to act in a truly moral way.³⁹ More concretely, choosing the good is “do[ing] those things which truly constitute our fulfillment and perfection.”⁴⁰ The good is not only goods outside the person or goods for the person, it is also the very human being per

se.⁴¹ These goods are knowable to us and perfective of us:

Intelligible human goods such as bodily life itself, health, knowledge of the truth, etc., are “goods *of* the person” in the sense that they are goods intrinsically perfecting the person: they are “noble goods” (*bona honesta*), not mere “useful goods” (*bona utilia*), that is, merely instrumental goods extrinsic to the person. (Melina 2001, 43 note 13)

For the physician, choosing the good also includes choosing the good for him or her as physician, that is, pursuing the ends medicine—the health of the patient and all that that entails.⁴² The act of choosing the good is the process of self-determination with its roots in self-possession and self-governance (see Wojtyła 1979, 106, 107). In this way, we are responsible for our own character.⁴³

Some theologians, for example, McCormick (1968, 7–18), have contended that if one chooses God then even mortal sin cannot cut one off from God unless one consciously chooses to turn away from God; this is known as the “fundamental option” theory.

[This theory] maintains that for a mortal sin to be committed an action must be accompanied by an option against God, or one’s ultimate Good. Failing this, even actions which are knowingly and willingly committed in grave matter, such as taking life, adultery, . . . , may not be mortal sins in the sense of cutting the person off from the life of God and communion with Him External behavior according to this, is only a partial indicator of interior orientation and attitudes. (Bristow 2009, 195–96)

On the contrary, our responsibility is more than for a (single) fundamental option for the good or for God, and it is more than having a good intention or choosing actions with good consequences

(John Paul II 1993, nn. 67, 74, 77, 78). The object of the action must be good, one cannot choose evil means even for a good end, and still say one is choosing the good.⁴⁴ “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” (John Paul II 1993, n. 65). The true “fundamental option” is not a single choice for the good (or for God) made at one point in one’s life. It is a decision made for or against the good in each and every moral act. Therefore, even at this most basic level, to say that one is against contraception and then to write prescriptions for contraception is in fact to be for contraception because one chooses it by the act of writing the prescription. This is to choose contraception as in some way a good.

Good character and virtue

In order to be of good character, then, once one knows the good, one must also desire it. In the simple case, the physician who knows that the use of contraception specifically to avoid pregnancy is not good—whether for the patient’s health or from a Christian moral perspective—yet still prescribes it, does not desire the good. This seems a rather strong statement, but when one knows that (1) contraception is only an apparent good, not a true good; and (2) one knows that evil means may not be used even for good consequences or from a good intention, then (3) to still act on the apparent good is to be obstinate, to desire the apparent good not the true good. “The original or originating practical situation calls out not only for reason but also for affectivity and desire; thus it is that the grasp of the Good depends on the dispositions of the

subject.”⁴⁵ The will must actually desire and incline itself to the good.

Choosing for or against the good, for or against the evil, is something that the will is constantly struggling with. It is easy to fall into evil; it is hard to continuously do good moral acts, this requires constant work. It is difficult to ascertain knowledge and establish truth. Human beings’

struggle to arrive at a deeper and deeper knowledge of the demands of God’s divine and eternal law can be impeded because of their own biases and passions and because of the prejudices and misconceptions common to the cultures in which they live. The heart of the problem is human sinfulness, which afflicts the whole human race and each individual personally. (May 2003, 88)

Our reason can be overcome by (unreasonable) passions or mislead by false or incomplete knowledge (Aquinas 1993, bk. 7, lec. 3, n. 1348). Our conscience guides us to judging right or wrong action but that needs training and informing also. Conscience needs to know the good and to be listened to in order for us to act according to it. To listen and to act both require dispositions, desires, and tendencies ordered to the good.

Morality is therefore that ordering of desire and of will required for a good life: this ordering is not an external regulation of acts because they are in harmony with law or because they produce better results in the world; it is rather that interior harmony that reason introduces into our passions and choices precisely so that man might *be* himself. It is a harmony, an order that is not only a subjectivistic psychological expression but the reflection of the truth about the Good that fulfills man’s desire. (Melina 2001, 45)

As we saw above, Aquinas calls this *habitus*, that is, inclination or disposition. When speaking of moral or good

character, this then is an inclination or disposition to the good, in other words, virtue. While habits diminish freedom, virtue and virtues diminish potency (Melina 2001, 54). Potency is diminished by being put into act. Character is a potency, and when it is put into act, it becomes good character or bad character. Virtue is the act of good character, and virtues are the “principles of good action.”⁴⁶ Virtues are formative of the moral life, are developed through education, and are linked to time and the incompleteness (that is, potency) of the human being (Melina 2001, 56). One could say that virtue is habit, skill, and *habitus*. Virtues “forge” character.⁴⁷ They perfect the will and freedom (Caffara 1987, 166). Consequently, they perfect the human being. “The realization of the human person is not principally in morally good actions, but in the acquisition of the moral virtues.”⁴⁸ The virtues then are not just dispositions but an actualization of the human being, a changing from wanting to be of good character to actually being of good character (Von Hildebrand and Von Hildebrand 1966, 87). The human being “acquires right evaluation regarding the principle of things to be done, that is, the end, by the *habitus* of virtue either natural or learned by custom.”⁴⁹ This even leads one of virtuous character to act with regret when the right choice in a situation is not ideal (Anscombe 1963, 89–90). While all human beings have a natural inclination to the good and therefore to virtue,⁵⁰ the virtues need to be trained and developed so that they become a “second nature,” an actuality rather than a potency, a *habitus* of good character (Melina 2001, 51–53).

The most important of the virtues is prudence: good character and moral action depend on it.⁵¹ Prudence is right judgment in moral matters.

This is not some prim conformity to convention or rule, but excellence and strength (*virtus*) of character involving a disposition and readiness to act with *intelligent* love in pursuit of *real* goods—the basic human goods towards which the primary practical principles direct—and successful resistance to the ultimately unreasonable lure of bad options. (Finnis 1998, 84, original emphasis)

As Aquinas says, quoting Augustine, “Prudence is the knowledge of what to seek and what to avoid.”⁵² It is the virtue “which perfects the reason [and] surpasses in goodness the other moral virtues which perfect the appetitive power” (Aquinas 1948, I-II, q. 66, a. 1). The more prudence one has, the more one judges correctly the right action to take. At the same time, prudence depends on the other virtues: one may determine through prudence that fortitude is required in a particular situation, but if one does not have fortitude then one cannot carry out what prudence concludes is the right course of action.⁵³ It is prudence that ties all the other virtues together; by judging the right thing to do, it steers all the virtues to right action and the good.⁵⁴

In the case of the physician who sees contraception as immoral, it may seem prudent for him to write prescriptions for contraception, because, for instance, he has to support his family and so cannot afford to lose his position or patients.⁵⁵ But the effect on his character, changing him into someone he does not want to be—that is, a physician who wills the writing of prescriptions for contraception and therefore wills the evil of contraception—may be unwelcome and unwanted. Therefore, it may be more prudent for him to look for a different place in which to practice in which he does not feel compelled to write prescriptions for contraception.

HYPOCRISY OR INTEGRITY

What is at stake then is the integrity of the human being. As Pope John Paul II said: “To separate the fundamental option from concrete kinds of behavior means to contradict the substantial integrity or personal unity of the moral agent in his body and in his soul.”⁵⁶ In the case under discussion, to separate one’s view that use of contraception is immoral from one’s action of writing prescriptions for it is a contradiction of the unity of the physician as moral agent. In fact, such a separation is not really possible, because character and action interact with each other. One could say that they spontaneously tend toward assimilation and amalgamation. This is the meaning and the consequence of self-possession, self-governance, and self-determination.

It is in ourselves that the drama of our liberty is played out, and it is played through what we do. The human person is more than his or her liberty; but it is in action that the whole person is gathered into the task of responsible freedom. If we are to possess ourselves and to govern ourselves through our liberty, then we are faced with the task of integration—not only of coordinating the various strands of our consciousness, but of integrating into our actions our whole human being, body and soul, *physis* and *psyche*.⁵⁷

To be of good moral character, a person must have knowledge of the good, act in morally good ways, and be disposed and inclined toward the good through the virtues. The physician who believes that use of contraception is immoral must also act in ways that display that belief and avoid actions that promote contraception use by his patients.

ENDNOTES

1. I will limit this paper to physicians, but similar questions arise for hospitals and for pharmacists and other healthcare personnel.

2. Similarly, should pharmacists be allowed to refuse to fill contraception prescriptions in the name of conscientious objection or should they be forced to fill them? Should employers be forced to provide contraception in their prescription drug insurance plans? See, for example, Curlin et al. (2007) and Stein (2006a, 2006b).
3. Some call this "value neutrality"; for a discussion of this, see Pellegrino (2000).
4. Ricoeur (1992, 119). This, he says, is "the overlapping of *ipse* by *idem*" (Ricoeur 1992, 121).
5. See *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. "character," <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/character>.
6. Ricoeur (1992, 122): "the aspects of evaluative preference ... define the moral aspect of character."
7. Taylor (1964, 21). See also Melina (2001, 46): "[According to St. Augustine] for happiness, subjective satisfaction (to have everything one wants is not enough; it is also necessary that there be rectitude of the will (not to want anything evil) ... 'To desire happiness is nothing other than to desire the satisfaction of the will,' but then he affirms that only the true Good can *fully* satisfy the will."
8. Rather than "vicious," which is how W.D. Ross translates Aristotle's word, I will use "vice-filled." Aristotle uses φάυλος (low in rank, mean, and common) vs. ἐπιεικής (reasonable, fair, kind, gentle, and good); with related terms κακός (bad, evil, and wicked) vs. ἀγαθός (good); and αἰσχρόν (shameful, disgraceful, base, and infamous) vs. καλόν (well and rightly). See Aristotle (n.d.), for example, bk. 3, n. 5 (1113b10).
9. See especially bk. 7 in the *Nicomachean Ethics*; and Thomas Aquinas's discussion of bk. 7 in Aquinas (1993). There are also two more categories: the godlike and the brutish, but, Aristotle says, such persons as these are rare. See Aristotle (n.d., bk. 7, chap. 1, 1145a15–30).
10. Other examples are assisting in euthanasia, writing prescriptions for euthanasia drugs, referring for abortions, etc. I will use the contraception example throughout. Also, contraception can be prescribed to treat medical conditions such as endometriosis. In this example, I will be discussing it purely as contraception, leaving aside medicinal uses.
11. Aquinas (1975, bk. 3, chap. 106, n. 7); Ratzinger (1984, 10): "Moral behavior is a response to reality and therefore requires a knowledge of reality."
12. Stein (2002, 429–30). See also Wojtyła (1979, 158–59).
13. See Aquinas (1993, bk. 3, lec. 8, n. 474), on ends; also Audi (1991, 313), on changing beliefs.
14. This also is Pope John Paul's point about the fundamental option: one bad act can change one's orientation to the good. Each action must orient one towards the good. See John Paul II (1993, n. 70).
15. Keep in mind that character does not go from good to neutral to bad, but all along the scale the good and the bad overlap. On the side of good character, the person is mostly good and maybe a little bad, and on the bad side, the person is mostly bad and maybe a little good.
16. See, for example, Gal 2:20 and Eph 4:15. See also John Paul II (1993, n. 73) and Clarke (1993, 96): "No one can reach mature development as a person without the experience of opening oneself, giving oneself to another in self-forgetting love of some kind." For more on this self-transcendence, see Clarke (1993), esp. "Personal Being as Self-Transcending," 94–108: the loss of oneself in becoming united with God, a movement from self-centeredness to God-centeredness, is a "finding of one's true self at a deeper level" (Clarke 1993, 99). It would be interesting to see how Stein's thoughts, in Stein (2002, esp. 510–27), on the unity of human beings in Christ relate to this.
17. See, for example, CNN (2000) and Wright and the Associated Press (2006).
18. Aquinas (1948, III, q. 63, a. 2, s.c.; q. 72, a. 5, obj. 2).
19. Though this is limited more or less by one's DNA, environment, and other factors as discussed above. Some interesting comments on the formability of character have been made, which cannot be explored in detail in this paper but are worth mentioning. Aquinas says, in Aquinas (1948, I-II, q. 96, a. 4), that "a law that inflicts unjust hurt on its subjects" (ad 3) that is "wicked laws," "often bring loss of character" (obj. 3). Leo XIII (1878, nn. 14–15) said that character is "reformed" through teaching, "pursuit of virtue," and obedience; and weakened by

- “seeking after self-interest alone”; also Leo XIII (1893, n. 15), “discover[ing] the true relation between time and eternity ... form [s] strong and noble characters.” And Vatican Council II (1975) said, in *Gaudium et spes*, n. 61, that understanding of others “refines man’s character.”
20. Aquinas (1948, I-II, q. 1, a. 1, c.) and John Paul II (1993, n. 71). See also, Wojtyla (1979, 207–19).
 21. Von Hildebrand and Von Hildebrand (1966, 88). Even what seem to be purely mental acts, such as believing in God, manifest themselves bodily (e.g., worship, prayer, almsgiving, and admitting one’s faith to others). When the mental act does not manifest itself physically, one is labeled either deluded about oneself or a hypocrite. More on this later.
 22. Even something seemingly mundane such as choosing which color dress to buy is still a moral act: I am choosing a purple dress because my sister hates purple (choosing the evil or uncharitable) vs. because purple looks good on me or it is my favorite color (choosing the good).
 23. Schmitz (1993, 66). Schmitz continues: “The basis and source of action is ... the whole person The whole person is caught up in and fully engaged through his or her own action.” See also Von Hildebrand and Von Hildebrand (1966, 87–92).
 24. Wojtyla (1979, 11), quoted in Schmitz (1993, 66).
 25. See Aquinas (1948, I-II, q. 1, a. 1, c.; q. 8, a. 1) and Wojtyla (1979, 124–39, 161).
 26. For this discussion of intention, see Anscombe (1981, 75–82) and Anscombe (1963, nn. [19–20], 21–28b, 45–49).
 27. See Wrathall (2005, 111–12); also, the body is “a third term in between mind and matter” (113).
 28. Aristotle (n.d., bk. 3, ch. 1) and Aquinas (1993, bk. 3, lec. 1).
 29. Aristotle (n.d., bk. 3, ch. 1), Aquinas (1993, bk. 3, lec. 3), and John Paul II (1993, n. 52).
 30. Maurice Merleau-Ponty says that to even consider the relationship of soul to body is to engage in dualism. See Wrathall (2005, 111–12).
 31. Finnis (1998, 41). Schmitz (1993, 83): “Through our human acts (*actus humanus*) we effect ourselves and other persons and things; and in this efficacy lies the root of our responsibility.”
 32. Finnis (1998, 41 note 68): “Even though a single choice (Aquinas thinks) cannot form a habitual disposition in the strict sense (which is formed by reiteration of acts: I-II q. 51, a. 3), still a choice lasts in, and shapes, one’s will(ingness) until one repudiates or repents of it (see e.g., *Ver.* q. 24, a. 12, c.).”
 33. Stein (2002, 429): “[Human beings’] free modes of action are not co-extensive with the soul’s total being but are rather an exertion of influence on something that is engaged in a process of evolution, and these free modes of action leave certain traces in the soul by virtue of which the soul attains to its final structural formation and firm contour.”
 34. Schmitz (1993, 85–86). See also, John Paul II (1993, n. 52).
 35. Schmitz (1993, 89). Wojtyla (1979, 99): “The becoming of man in his moral aspect that is strictly connected with the person is the decisive factor in determining the concrete realistic character of goodness and badness, of the moral values themselves as concretized in human acting. Without in any way constituting the content of consciousness itself they belong integrally to the personal, human becoming. Man not only concretizes them in action and experiences them but because of them he himself, as a being, actually becomes good or bad. Moral conduct partakes of the reality of human actions as expressing a specific type and line of becoming of the man-subject, the type of becoming that is most intrinsically related to his nature, that is, his humanness, and to the fact of his being a person.” See also, John Paul II (1993, nn. 39, 71).
 36. Audi (1991, 311–12). See also Aquinas (1948, III, q. 63, obj. 1 and 2, and c).
 37. Wojtyla (1979, 162): “Without truthfulness (or while out of touch with it) the conscience or, more broadly speaking, the whole specific system of the moral function and order cannot be properly grasped and correctly interpreted.”
 38. Aquinas (1948, I, q. 63, a. 1, ad 4; I-II, q. 10, a. 1; q. 74, a. 1, ad 1; q. 75, a. 1, ad 3).
 39. John Paul II (1993, n. 72): “*The morality of acts* is defined by the relationship of man’s freedom with the authentic good Acting is morally good when the

- choices of freedom are *in conformity with man's true good*. The rational ordering of the human act to the good in its truth and the voluntary pursuit of that good, known by reason, constitute morality. Hence human activity cannot be judged as morally good merely because it is a means for attaining one or another of its goals, or simply because the subject's intention is good. Activity is morally good when it attests to and expresses ... the conformity of a concrete action with the human good as it is acknowledged in its truth by reason. If the object of the concrete action is not in harmony with the true good of the person, the choice of that action makes our will and ourselves morally evil." See also Vatican Council II (1975, n. 17).
40. McInerney (2004, 100): "The moral task is to acquire a character which enables us to maneuver through the contingencies of life in such a way that we act well and thus achieve what is perfective of us. The desire for the good is a given, that is what is meant by calling it natural. However, reflection not only reveals the notion of ultimate end, but makes clear that we must do those things which truly constitute our fulfillment and perfection. The criteria for the true good must be sought in our nature as rational agents."
 41. Melina (2001, 43): "When one speaks of the 'moral good' one understands, first of all, the moral good that is the very person who chooses, that is, it is the 'good of the person'—what makes the *person* good—insofar as he becomes good by means of his choices. This is only possible because his will has the unique characteristic of being 'sealed' by the way in which the subject freely realizes himself with respect to different intelligible human goods... the moral goodness of the person is determined not only by the subjective intentionality of 'willing the good' but also by the adequate relationship that the will establishes regarding these concrete good objects of choices, on the basis of a rational knowledge that has a connotation specifically practical."
 42. See John Paul II (1995, n. 4), Ashley and O'Rourke (1997, 47–48) (Ashley and O'Rourke word it a little too strongly, physicians can make *some* ethical judgments autonomously just based on the ends of medicine), Hauser (2005), Pellegrino and Thomasma (1993, 38), and Melina (1998, 392): "the act of recognizing the value of life is laden with consequences for the subject who performs it. Not only does it immediately reveal definite moral obligations that he is bound to observe, but it also dramatically mirrors the very human identity of the person who makes a judgment about life's value.... To recognize the personal dignity of a nascent human embryo or fetus, or of a terminally ill person, means at the same time to perceive definite moral obligations towards him."
 43. Taylor (1964, 21–23) and Audi (1991, 304 note 1) (and other places): "See, e.g., *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. 1, in which Aristotle says that moral virtue is formed by habit..., and that we are praised and blamed for virtues and vices.... Compare his remarks, in bk. 3, that our character is determined by our choosing good or evil..., and that the virtues 'are in our power and voluntary.'"
 44. John Paul II (1993, n. 78). See also Caffara (1987, 162): "To say, then, that an act is good by its nature is to say that it has *in itself* the capacity to realize the human person as such, so that a properly ordered will can choose to perform it without destroying the will's rectitude. The act is in itself able to mediate, to concretize, a *true* self-determination of the person."
 45. Melina (2001, 44). See also Wojtyła (1979, 124–39).
 46. Melina (2001, 51), see also 51–53.
 47. Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994, n. 1810) and Leo XIII (1891, n. 50).
 48. Caffara (1987, 167). See also Finnis (1998, 84–85) and Melina (2001, 44): "by means of a connaturality of the subject with the true Good, they [the virtues] make it possible for what really is good in itself and in accordance with the truth also to appear good to the virtuous person. By means of a virtuous connaturality, that which is good 'in itself' (*bonum simpliciter*) is perceived also as good 'for me' (*bonum conveniens*)."
 49. Aquinas (1993, bk. 7, lec. 8, n. 1431), see also n. 1432.
 50. Finnis (1998, 84–85 note 114): "[All human] virtues pre-exist in one's natural orientation towards the good of virtue

[*naturali ordinatione ad bonum virtutis*], which exists in one's reason in so far as one is aware of this kind of good, and in one's will in so far as one is naturally interested in that good, and also exists somehow in one's lower powers in so far as they are naturally subject to one's reason."

51. Caffara (1987, 168) and Finnis (1998, 119).
52. Aquinas (1948, II-II, q. 47, a. 1, s.c.). See also, Ratzinger (1984, 10): "It was not without reason that the ancients placed prudence as the first cardinal virtue: They understood it to mean the willingness and the capacity to perceive reality and respond to it in an objective manner."
53. Melina (2001, 53–54). See also Aquinas (1948, I-II, q. 65, a. 4, ad 1).
54. Aquinas (1948, I-II, q. 73, a. 1): "the intention of every man acting according to virtue is to follow the rule of reason, wherefore the intention of all the virtues is directed to the same end, so that all the virtues are connected together in the right reason of things to be done, namely, prudence."
55. John Paul II (1993, n. 67): "Judgments about morality cannot be made without taking into consideration whether or not the deliberate choice of a specific kind of behavior is in conformity with the dignity and integral vocation of the human person. Every choice always implies a reference by the deliberate will to the goods and evils indicated by the natural law as goods to be pursued and evils to be avoided. In the case of the positive moral precepts, prudence always has the task of verifying that they apply in a specific situation, for example, in view of other duties which may be more important or urgent. But the negative moral precepts, those prohibiting certain concrete actions or kinds of behavior as intrinsically evil, do not allow for any legitimate exception. They do not leave room, in any morally acceptable way, for the "creativity" of any contrary determination whatsoever. Once the moral species of an action prohibited by a universal rule is concretely recognized, the only morally good act is that of obeying the moral law and of refraining from the action which it forbids." I am leaving aside here, as beyond the scope of this paper, a discussion of whether or not writing a prescription for contraception (as opposed to using

contraception) is intrinsically evil and allows for no legitimate exception.

56. John Paul II (1993, n. 67). See also Stein (2002, 367).
57. Schmitz (1993, 77); see also 79, 85–86, 118.

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