

ACTING MORALLY

MORAL TRUTHS

28. There are good or valuable aspects to life that are acknowledged by virtually everyone: friendship, peace, rewarding labour, knowledge and understanding, health in mind and body, integrity of character. On the other hand, we know all too well that there are also actions and attitudes that disfigure the human character: fear, prejudice, greed, envy, love of violence and abuse of power.

30. The Golden Rule 'do to others as you would have them do to you' (*Matthew 7:12*) bears witness to a principle recognised by all people of goodwill: do nothing unjust or unfair to someone else. The scope of the moral law goes beyond avoiding harm to others. It is also necessary to show positive human solidarity with others in various ways, for instance, by supporting communal projects especially for the needy, by paying tax, by showing courtesy to those we meet and love and gratitude within our families. The requirements of the Gospel go further still, demanding that we concern ourselves with the needs of strangers and foreigners and that we love our enemies and pray for them (*Matthew 5:44*).

31. There have been several international attempts to identify a definite list of human rights so that these can be protected. International conventions such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights spell these rights out*. However, the concept of rights used in this document needs to be examined carefully, for rights imply responsibilities. Personal autonomy is not the only human good, and an adequate theory of rights will place the need for individual freedoms in the context of the common good. This includes for instance, the requirement to support the institutions of marriage and family life.

32. Contemporary British society is characterised by a plurality of approaches to moral questions. One influential approach is the utilitarian idea that something is right if it results in the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. This might seem reasonable at first sight. However, it can easily lead to discrimination against minorities, especially if happiness is defined simply as what people want or prefer. However, the prospect of good outcomes cannot justify acts which are morally wrong in themselves.

33. Another common attitude to moral questions is to claim that morality is based solely on feelings and is a purely private matter for the individual. Someone might say 'I feel this is right, but it might not be right for you' or 'I feel this is wrong, but I can't impose my moral views on others'. However, those who use such expressions usually do so inconsistently: for example, if no actions can be said to be wrong, then imposing views on others cannot be said to be wrong. Experience shows that people engage in serious moral arguments precisely because they think that something objective and important is at stake. Furthermore, moral relativism is harmful if it leads people to remain silent in the face of injustice.

Questions

Do people generally believe in the objective moral order (an action being wrong or right in its essence even though the gravity may vary depending on circumstances) or is moral relativism (an action being wrong or right depending of a host of factors) the order of the day?

Do people generally view the stance of the church on moral issues as a just one voice among many, all with equal legitimacy? Discuss.

Has the church placed too much emphasis on its role as being the ultimate teacher of moral truth, the voice of Christ in the world? Discuss

Does the Church's moral teaching come across as being too negative (things to avoid)? Should it instead concentrate more on stressing the immorality of the neglect of things we ought to be doing rather than things to avoid? Discuss