

Defining conscience

- We need a correct understanding of what conscience is: a specific judgment of the knowing power of the person—that is, the intellect at work in practical moral situations.
- The intellect judges whether a particular choice, decision, or action in the past, present, or future is good or evil for the self.

Defining conscience

- Conscience is the answer given by intellectual judgment to the question "What ought I to do and what I ought not to do?"
- "Conscience is a judgment of reason by which the person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act" (CCC 1796).

Defining conscience

- The judgment of the intellect that we consider "conscience" differs from other judgments of the intellect because of its focus.

Defining conscience

- For example, my intellect may make a judgment about whether Brutus killed Julius Caesar. This judgment is not a moral judgment; it is a historical one.
- If my intellect were to judge whether it was wrong for Brutus to kill Julius, such a judgment would not be called conscience either. Even though it would be a moral judgment, it would not be a practical moral judgment—that is, it would not concern me.

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- But if my intellect made a judgment about whether it would be wrong for me to kill Julius, it would be not only an intellectual and moral judgment but also a practical moral judgment of the intellect, and it would rise to the level of conscience.

Conscience and human nature

- The action of the intellect in judging practical moral matters, or conscience, is an innate faculty of human nature that man is bound to follow.
- Forcing a person to act against conscience is forcing them to *act against their nature. We are told not to be true to ourselves.*

Thomism

- Human Law is law only by virtue of its accordance with reason; and thus it is manifest that it flows from the Eternal Law. Insofar as it deviates from right reason it is called an unjust law. In such case it is no law at all; but rather a species of violence.

Personal experience

- “Behold, I am sending you as sheep amongst wolves: be ye therefore cunning as serpents and simple as doves”
- Thomas More 1535†
- Philip Howard 1595†
- Hawick, Scotland 2001-2002
- Naas 2002
- KDOC 2003