



Chapter 1

Why Be Good?

Overview questions

1. Why should you study morality?
2. What are some of the moral issues that confront you and the world today?
3. What is morality? What makes something right or wrong?
4. Why try to be a moral person? Why try to be good?



Prayer

God, our Creator, there is much goodness in your beautiful world. I am especially grateful for the kind and loving people in my life. But there's also so much unkindness, cruelty, and evil all around us. Why do people do such mean and terrible things to each other? Why do I sometimes do wrong and stupid things that end up hurting myself or others? It's so hard to understand. When I feel like giving up on myself, give me your wisdom and strength so that I can become a better person. When we have fears or doubts about our future, give us hope and renew our belief in doing our best to help make this a better world.

decisions

conclusions arrived at after consideration

morality

a sense of right and wrong

obedience

submission to the command of another

Why study moral decision making?

How to make wise decisions in tough situations is one of the most important things you can learn in life, and one of the most practical. That is what this course and this text are all about—making wise decisions. When you were a very small child, **morality**—determining right from wrong—was simple for you in one sense. To find out what was okay or not okay to do, all you had to do was ask someone older—your mother, your father, or someone else you trusted. At that time in your life, they seemed always to know the answers.

Right and wrong were clearly spelled out. It was right to say “please” and “thank you” for favors, to eat all your peas at the dinner table, and to put your toys away. It was wrong to cross the street by yourself, accept candy from strangers, or pick on your brother, sister, or playmate. Figuring out the right or the wrong thing to do sure was much simpler way back then!

Probably the most difficult thing about making moral decisions when you were a child was whether or not to obey those who told you what was “right” or “wrong.” Morality back then was mainly a matter of **obedience**—of “do as you’re told,” “do as I say,” and “you know you’re not suppose to . . .”

While you live in your family home under the authority of a parent or adult guardian, this is probably still the case, at least to some extent. You are expected to abide by certain rules, and sometimes you probably find it hard to comply with them. At these moments, your decision remains whether to do “right” by obeying, or to do “wrong” by disobeying.

But you are also being given greater independence and more personal freedom than you had as a child. Your experiences and discoveries of the past few years have led you to look at other dimensions of right and wrong. You may have questions and doubts about the “rightness” or “wrongness” of certain things or about the necessity of obeying. You now realize that the almost godlike adult figures of your childhood are only human and can make mistakes.

As you’ve become more aware of the society around you, you have found that even the highest and mightiest can fall—that national leaders and the superstars you once viewed as heroes and heroines are sometimes far less than perfectly moral men and women. You’ve experienced how even trusted peers can sometimes let you down. You now realize that the world is filled with very human beings—people who don’t know all the answers and who do make mistakes.

Although, as a teenager, you have a new set of do’s and don’ts—“Mow the lawn,” “Take out the garbage,” “Help with the dishes”—some of the old ones remain: “Clean up your room,” “Stop picking on . . . !” There are still some similarities between what was expected of you as a child and what is asked of you now. In fact, this might irritate you at times and lead you to resent still being “treated like a child.”

Parents and legal guardians have a sacred duty as well as a legal right to expect their teenage sons and daughters to fulfill certain responsibilities. You undoubtedly realize that you owe obedience to the authority figures in your family as they legitimately exercise the obligation to look out for your welfare and that of your family.

Yet, as you grow into adulthood and confront new questions, you may find that

some of the old answers don't always seem to fit the situation. The people you once relied on for answers no longer appear to have suitable answers for everything. More and more you may feel that **you** must solve your problems. In some ways this is a freeing thing. At times you might like to decide everything for yourself. Yet, like most people, you also wonder how you can do a better job of making decisions and finding solutions to your problems. This text will give you some help—some moral road signs that will help you find the right direction in your journey through life. First, though, it's a good idea to take a look at some of the ways you've changed over the years.

For discussion

1. What were some of the "bad" things that, as a very young child, you were taught not to do?
2. What were some of the good things that you as a child were taught you should do?
3. What major moral decisions do you think confront most teenagers today? What are the main moral dilemmas you have faced thus far as a teenager?

What is morality?

Morality, in general, is concerned about the rightness and wrongness, goodness and badness of human behavior. Whereas psychology and sociology are concerned mainly with how people **do** in fact behave, morality's concern is with how people **ought** to behave. When psychologists, sociologists, politicians, judges, parents, teachers, or students begin discussing how people **ought** to conduct themselves, they are entering the realm of morality.

A common mistake people make is to think that morality has to do only with religion, or should be confined to religion. Every major religion does have its moral **guidelines** or codes of conduct. But throughout history even people with no religious convictions have always had opinions about how people **ought** to act. In fact, it is difficult to think of any major decision that seriously involves or affects people that does not in some way involve moral questions, dilemmas, and **principles**.

People often confuse and misuse the following terms. It's important that you understand them.

- **Morality** generally refers to the broad area of deciding what is right or wrong, good or bad; specifically, morality refers to good behavior, virtue.
- **Moral** may likewise broadly refer to issues of right or wrong (as in "it's a moral dilemma"), or may more specifically refer to "that which is good" (as in describing someone as a **moral** person).
- **Immoral** generally refers to "that which is bad"—or to the way people ought **not** to act (as in "committing murder is **immoral**").
- **Amoral** refers to morally neutral actions—those which are neither good nor bad (for example, breathing). It can also be used to describe attitudes or behavior that show no sensitivity to the question of right and wrong, or to decisions made without any consideration of moral principles.

Thus, a **moral** issue is not always at stake in making a difficult decision. Morality

That is the issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent. It is the eternal struggle between these two principles—right and wrong—throughout the world. They are the two principles that have stood face to face from the beginning of time, and will ever continue to struggle.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

dilemma

a puzzle, something difficult to solve

guideline

policy or other indication for proper action

principle

fundamental law, rule, or code of conduct

moral

morality in general, that which is good in particular

immoral

that which is bad, how people ought not to act and behave

amoral

morally neutral (not good or bad) actions, people who act without reference to moral principles

is a consideration in making decisions when the results might be bad or good for someone.

Likewise, not all individuals, societies, or cultures evaluate *bad* or *good* in quite the same way. That raises this difficult question: **How it is possible to know for sure what truly is moral or immoral?** The rest of this book will address this basic question. For now, suffice it to say that the terms *moral*, *immoral*, and *amoral* commonly refer to a particular person's or society's ideas of morality—whatever those ideas may be.

So, according to their differing moral standards, one person or society might consider it immoral to drink alcoholic beverages in any quantity, others might deem it perfectly moral to do so, and a third may approve only of moderate use. Their views about behavior are based on different understandings of morality.

The following Scripture offers good advice about the task of moral decision making:

Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 5:13–19

Indeed, people learn a great deal about right living from the Bible. But, as you

Wet cement

Read the following true account and respond to the questions.

As nine-year-old Jeremy and a few of his younger friends were walking by a construction site, they saw a freshly laid cement sidewalk. One worker asked the boys if they would like to write their names in the wet cement after the workers had left for the day. The boys said that they would—and they did, also leaving their foot and hand prints.

Jeremy was arrested, strip-searched, and charged with the felony of maliciously destroying property. (His friends were deemed too young to be arrested.) Jeremy insists he had permission to write on the sidewalk. "The man said I could, so I did," he said.

A few weeks later, the sidewalk contractor contacted Jeremy's mother and told her she owed him the \$11,000 it would cost to repair the sidewalk. When she refused to pay, saying she didn't have the money, and didn't respond to messages to contact the authorities, Jeremy was arrested.

Although the contractor later withdrew his demand for money, the judge set a date for Jeremy to go on trial. For adults, this offense could mean up to six years in prison and a \$5,000 fine, but authorities thought it more likely that Jeremy, if convicted, would only be placed on probation.

People in their community were deeply divided about Jeremy's actions and his mother's responses and those of the authorities.

For discussion

- 1. Why does this incident have to do with morality?*
- 2. What attitudes or behaviors described do you consider moral? Immoral? Amoral? Explain.*
- 3. What moral issues were at stake in determining whether—and how—Jeremy and/or his mother should be punished?*
- 4. Following the advice given in the Scripture passage from Thessalonians, quoted above, how do you think the situation should have been handled? Why?*
- 5. If you were the judge, how would you decide Jeremy's case? Explain.*

How can you learn to make wiser moral decisions?

Can anyone really tell you what is right or wrong for you? Students sometimes enter this course expecting to receive answers to all their questions about what is right or wrong, good or bad. They are bound to be frustrated and greatly disappointed. For no one can give up his or her responsibility to make good personal moral decisions in good **conscience**.

There are, however, principles and guidelines that people throughout the centuries have relied on in making moral decisions. Among these are certainly the Catholic Church's teachings about **personal integrity** and goodness, social justice and love of others, and our accountability to our loving Creator. A great many of the Church's beliefs and guidelines, by the way, helped form the foundation of our own society.

Leaders around the world and in our own country still consult religion's **wisdom** with regard to moral concerns. World leaders often meet and discuss these issues with the pope or other religious leaders. Hopefully, you will also accept the opportunity and responsibility of benefiting from this moral guidance.

A main source of moral wisdom is God's word in the Scriptures:

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. . . .

2 Timothy 3:16



conscience

the human capacity to weigh and evaluate right and wrong

personal integrity

the quality of showing moral principles by knowing what is right or wrong and choosing to do the right thing

wisdom

insight, good judgment



know, the Bible can be misunderstood and its teachings misapplied—as when people quote passages out of context. An example is citing the phrase “an eye for an eye” in support of war, capital punishment, or vigilante revenge. This is why, in looking to Scripture for answers to life’s problems, Catholics also need to really think about what this or that passage truly does and does not mean. They should properly understand the true message of certain passages in light of Church teaching and the Church’s expert Scripture scholarship.

Likewise, we should consult and learn from each other’s ideas, experiences, common sense, and sound advice.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom. . . .

Colossians 3:16

We need to help one another sort things out. Yet we should also realize that, like ourselves, at times our friends can be mistaken. We must assume the responsibility for making our own decisions, rather than letting others make them for us.

Most regrettable decisions come not from bad intentions but from being mistaken about what’s best. In short, when we do unwise and harmful things, it’s usually from lack of good judgment. Our decision actually accomplishes the opposite of what we intended: it hurts instead of helps. This is often due to ignorance of the thought processes and guidelines (including those of the Church) which could help us decide wisely. Or maybe we are careless or apathetic about how we make our decision. If we had more skill and practice in making intelligent and proper decisions, we probably wouldn’t end up so often saying “If only I had. . . .”

Learning to decide intelligently is a bit like learning to walk or bounce a ball. The first efforts are awkward, slow, and imperfect. But with determination and consistent practice, eventually the person runs, or dribbles the ball with ease. Wise decision making is likewise an acquired skill. Like physical skill, decision making becomes a habit, enabling one to proceed much more confidently, correctly, and, when necessary, quickly—as when having to maneuver suddenly out of harm’s way.

So don’t be surprised if some of the processes you are guided through during this course at first seem cumbersome. As you consider the moral dilemmas presented throughout the text, resist the urge to make instant decisions about complex issues. Many grave mistakes are made because people are too impatient to stop and think things through before they act.

When this course ends, you probably won’t have the answers to all your questions about various moral problems. But you should be more insightful and adept at using your thought processes and religious beliefs to make better and wiser moral decisions. The major decisions you face now and in your future are important to your life and happiness, and to others. Take advantage of this opportunity to learn how to make these decisions more carefully, prayerfully, and wisely.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed. . . .

2 Timothy 3:14

Why be moral?

“Why bother trying to be good? It’s a dog-eat-dog world—just look out for yourself. Do whatever works for you.” People with this attitude think morality is for religious fanatics and goody-goodies, but not for the practical realist. They view morality as doing what one is “supposed” to do—as opposed to what one would like to do and what would really lead to happiness. They misunderstand morality entirely.

An eleven-year-old girl struggling with the “Why be good?” question couldn’t think of any reasons why **she** should be good. But when asked why her older brother should be good and stop picking on her, she arrived at a rather wise answer:

“Because he’s a **person**, because I’m a **person** in this world!”

In so concluding, this girl touched on key reasons Catholic and other religious teaching also gives for striving toward the good and the right:

- Every person has God-given dignity and an immortal destiny.
- Created in God’s image, we all share in God’s own loving nature.
- Thus, we can find lasting happiness and harmony only by freely imitating God, and by walking in love and working together.

In the long run, therefore, exercising the freedom God has given us to do what’s right is the only humanly good and fulfilling thing to do, the only choice that leads to life. Conversely, abusing our human freedom and failing to overcome evil with goodness leads only to destruction:

Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you?

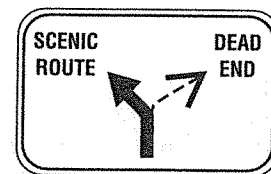
James 4:1

It’s funny, though, how many of us don’t think about the negative implications of our own behavior until we have reason to complain about the wrong somebody is doing to us!

Activity

1. List the ten historical figures you most admire and tell why.
2. List the ten historical figures you think have done the most harm in human history and tell why.

Nobody likes a crook—nobody, including the crook who gets double-crossed by another crook! People generally avoid those who are corrupt or ruthless or unloving and uncaring; people generally admire those who are good—who live up to their ideals. In fact, the most consistently admired, emulated, and influential figures in history are not political or military leaders. They are those whose words and example have brought greater goodness into the world: Jesus, **Buddha**, **Moses**, the prophets of Israel, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. . . . In recent times, the person whom polls cited as most admired was not a rich or famous or powerful figure, but Mother Teresa, a humble nun who came to the notice of the world after she began to help the dying in the slums of Calcutta, India.



fanatics

those who show excessive enthusiasm or uncritical devotion

Journal entry

List ten reasons why people should try to be morally good. Where you can, give the reasons behind your reasons.

Journal entry

List ten reasons why you owe it to yourself and others to try to be a morally good person. Where you can, give the reasons behind your reasons.

implication

close connection, consequence

Buddha

the enlightened one, a representation of Gautama Buddha

Moses

Hebrew prophet who is associated with the escape from slavery in Egypt and the Law and covenant at Mt. Sinai

prophets

those who speak divinely inspired revelations

There's a big difference between having a moral halo and having moral integrity.

Research

Find five Scripture passages which you think provide helpful guidance concerning the process of moral decision making. Explain how each of them might help you.

Journal entry

1. Describe (but do not name or otherwise reveal their identity) the three people you know personally whom you most admire. Explain why.
2. Describe (but do not name or otherwise reveal their identity) the three people you know personally whom you think the least of. Explain why.

But what's the difference between a "goody-goodie" and a good person? A goody-goodie does what is expected not out of conviction that it's the right thing, but because it's what is "supposed" to be done, or what will win others' praise and approval, or because she or he is afraid to do otherwise. Such persons can seem quite out of touch with how others view and face life's difficult decisions. And such persons may appear to look down on those who aren't always so sure at first which alternative seems right.

On the other hand, the truly good person **struggles** at times to understand why some things are right and others wrong, struggles to do the right thing. As a result, he or she is far more likely to understand human experience and to empathize with those who, in their honest search and struggle, sometimes fail and make mistakes.

For discussion

1. What reasons, other than those mentioned above, might people have for choosing not to do what is right and good? What is your response to these reasons?
2. What reasons can you think of for being good or moral—for doing what is right? Which of these make the most sense to you? Why?

The truly good person struggles to understand why some things are right and others wrong. As a result, he or she is far more likely to understand human experience and to empathize with those who sometimes fail and make mistakes.



The rabbit cover-up'

Read the following humorous account about the ordinary type of moral temptations which occasionally confront us all. Then discuss the questions that follow.

The woman is helpful by nature, and when her neighbors asked her to watch their house for a few days while they were out of town, she was glad to do it.

"They wanted her to water the plants, pick up the newspapers, you know, the kind of thing neighbors do for each other," said the man who told me this story. "They also had a pool, and they told her she was welcome to use it whenever she wanted."

So the woman watched the house. She is a nurse at a hospital in the city, and after work, in the worst heat of the afternoon, she walked over to see that the place was all right.

She brought her bathing suit and her dog, and after she'd checked the plants and the windows, she got into the swimming pool to cool off. She closed her eyes, floating. The dog sat at the edge of the pool, watching her.

She had been in the water perhaps a quarter of an hour when she realized the animal was gone. She called him from the pool, but he didn't come. She got out and called again, and heard the reassuring sound of his collar jingling as he came around the corner.

As the dog cleared the corner, however, some of the woman's reassurance disappeared. The dog was, first of all, covered with dirt, nose to tail. He was, second of all, carrying a wet, dead rabbit in his

teeth, changing his hold on it every few seconds, tossing it around in his mouth so you couldn't miss the fact that he had something dead.

His head at this point, I am guessing, would have been high and proud. A dog never looks better in his own eyes than when he's carrying a dead rabbit.

Anyway, the woman was at first repulsed, and then, remembering that the family kept a pet rabbit in a cage on the other side of the house, she was horrified. And she ran to that side of the house, and saw the empty cage overturned on the lawn.

She pictured herself trying to explain to her neighbors what had happened to their rabbit, murdered while she floated a few yards away in the swimming pool. Every way she thought to say it was worse than the last. And so she did what many people do when their dog kills their neighbors' pet rabbit. She panicked.

From what I have been able to put together about this, she turned to the dog, who had followed her over, scolded him, and instructed him to drop the rabbit immediately.

You might as well tell a dog to hold its breath.

She pried open his teeth and removed the rabbit, wet and dead. She laid the animal on her towel, rolled it up like a wet bathing suit, and started home. The dog walked alongside, worrying over the bundle in her hands, stepping into her path. I am guessing that more than once the words "Bad dog" came into the course of the conversation.

At home, she took the rabbit to the bathroom sink and washed off the worst of the dirt. She drained the water, and shampooed the rabbit, which was getting heavier all the time. She rinsed off the shampoo.

She put the rabbit on a fresh towel and began to blow-dry its coat. Ears, tail, feet, everything. One side at a time. I have no idea at all how long it takes to blow-dry a rabbit, but I am sure it seemed longer than it was.

When she'd finished with the dryer, she carried the rabbit back to the house she had been asked to watch—I assume she again hid the rabbit in the towel, as there isn't really much difference, for purposes of evidence, between carrying a clean dead rabbit and a dirty one.

I am also assuming she did not bring the dog. Bad dog.

And so she took the rabbit back to his cage, laid him peacefully inside, and went home.

"Natural causes" . . . she didn't know a thing about it.

A day or two later, the neighbors returned.

Shortly after they pulled into their driveway, the woman's phone began to ring. She stared at it, knowing who was calling. She picked up the phone, and yes, it was her neighbor, who was hysterical.

The woman steeled herself for the lies she was prepared to tell, but never got the chance.

It was something the neighbor was screaming that stopped her, that a maniac was loose. That some pervert had dug up the

neighbors' pet rabbit—who'd died the day before they'd left, by the way—removed the animal from its grave, and stuck it back in its cage.

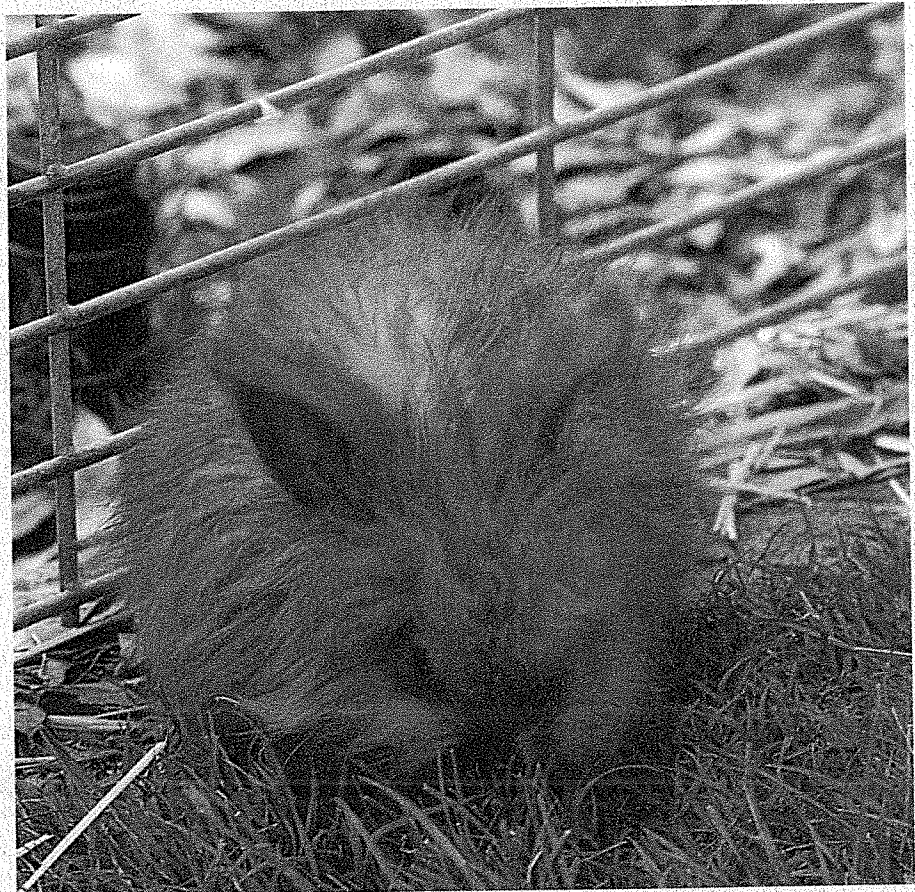
How sick can you get, right?

I am only guessing here, but somehow I think the dog got in trouble all over again.

For discussion

1. What was the woman's moral dilemma?
2. How did it involve choosing between things she valued? Between undesirable alternatives?
3. What kind of person is this woman? How can you tell?
4. What possible motives might she have had for deciding to conceal what she believed had happened to the rabbit? Which motive(s) do you think she probably did have? Explain.
5. To what lengths did the woman go to complete her cover-up? Why do you think she went to so much trouble?
6. To what extent do you think the woman's fears and feelings influenced her decision? Do you think her fears and feelings were reasonable under the circumstances, or somewhat exaggerated?
7. Was the dog really a "bad dog"? If the dog had killed the rabbit, who would have been responsible for its doing so?
8. For what, if anything, was the dog to blame? To what extent did the woman blame her own guilt on the dog? Whom did the neighbors blame?
9. Why do you think we often blame something or someone else for our moral weaknesses and failings?
10. What "moral" would you say this story illustrates about human nature? About morality?
11. How do you think you would have responded if you had been in this woman's situation? Why?
12. How was the cover-up's result worse than the consequences would have been if the woman had assumed responsibility from the beginning for what she believed had happened?
13. What mistakes and judgment errors are evidenced in this account? How could these have been avoided? How would avoiding them have changed what happened?
14. Describe a moral predicament you have faced, one in which you were tempted to cover up what happened rather than face the consequences.
15. Why, when confronted with unpleasant alternatives in everyday moral dilemmas, do people often fail to exercise the moral courage needed to do the right thing?
16. In what ways did this woman exercise poor judgment? What could she learn about making better moral decisions?

judgment
decision, discernment



Addressing current moral issues

There are good personal reasons for learning better ways to solve moral problems, and there are also broader reasons for doing so—some of which concern our world's very future.

You have only to turn on the daily news to hear many important moral questions being widely discussed:

- Should there be a death penalty for certain crimes?
- Should the terminally ill be allowed to choose to die?
- Should abortion be legal?
- Should the use of marijuana or other illegal drugs be decriminalized?
- Should scientists be allowed to clone or genetically alter human beings?
- Is our personal privacy being invaded in our society?
- What moral standards should we require of politicians and public figures—and how should they be held accountable?
- What, if anything, should be censored—on television, in print, in the movies, on the Internet?
- When does exercising one's freedom violate another's rights?
- How can we curb the increasing violence in society?
- What can we do to eliminate racism, sexism, **homophobia**, and religious prejudice?

These hotly debated questions are not just political or legal in nature. They are also important moral questions.

Furthermore, the world of tomorrow will be different from today's world. And your decisions will help to create and shape that world of tomorrow. Consider this fact: Humanity has attained more technological and scientific knowledge within the last thirty years than in its entire million-plus years of previous history. As the twentieth century began, not many people believed that a human being would really fly to the moon—much less walk on it, send televised pictures back, and then return safely home. Yet it happened. Scientific researchers predict that you will live to see equally amazing things accomplished within your lifetime in the twenty-first century.

People used to wonder if we would ever be able to talk to someone hundreds of miles away, fly to another continent in just hours, travel faster than sound. Today possible technological advances are viewed not in terms of **if** but in terms of **when**—when cures for diseases will be found or when we will be able to vacation in outer space. Due to the nature of scientific and technological possibilities, the world's major questions are now moral ones: **Should** we proceed down this or that technological path? If so, with what guidelines and restrictions for human good?

- The question is not “Can we keep on sending satellites to Jupiter and beyond?”—but “Should we? Is this the right way to use our resources?”
- The question is not “Can nuclear power meet our increasing energy needs?”—but, given its very real hazards, “Should we take the risks?”
- The question is not “Can we launch all-out nuclear war?”—but “Should we? Does humanity ever have the right to use this power at all?”



homophobia
prejudice against or fear of homosexual persons

A thorough education isn't just arithmetic; it's ethics and morality as well. Lawyers, no matter how smart they are, are not completely educated until they've studied ethics and morality and are proficient in them.
ATTORNEY MELVIN BELLI

moralists

those who weigh the good and bad, the right and wrong implications of various possible decisions

For discussion

1. *What do you think are the major moral problems facing society today?*
2. *What technological advances do you expect to see during your lifetime?*
3. *Which of these would you like to see occur? Why? Which ones would you not like to see? Why?*
4. *What moral issues are involved?*

Even if we can accomplish whatever we put our minds to—"Should we?" The most important questions facing our world from here on are, indeed, moral questions, questions of right and wrong.

Realizing this, international leaders have begun to call on expert moralists for help in weighing risks and benefits, right and wrong implications of decisions, and in deciding future directions and criteria for decision making. Some time ago scientists from around the world involved in researching the possible creation of new life forms agreed on a complete and international ban on further research in a certain area until the human hazards could be sufficiently minimized. They did this on moral grounds—not because they didn't have the know-how to proceed, but because their consciences would not let them. Once a technology exists, however, there is no guarantee that every scientist will abide by restrictions on its use. Given the possibilities of science and technology, there is great need for wisdom, careful deliberation, and moral decision making.

Alfred Nobel became one of the world's richest men by inventing many explosives that increased the terrible effect of weapons used in war. However, he tragically confronted the moral implications of his life's work when his younger brother was killed in an explosion caused by one of these inventions. Shortly before he died, Alfred himself wrote a will leaving all his money to establish the trust that, in accord with his stipulations, still presents the prestigious annual Nobel Peace Prize to those persons who, in the preceding year, have contributed the most to benefit humanity.

In studying moral decision making, you will find it easy to see how religion and moral principles spill over into all of life—and how your own moral principles affect your life and that of others. Throughout this course, you will be involved in one of the most crucial studies of our time. People around the world are now just an Internet link away, and many heatedly discussed chat-group topics have moral implications. You can have a voice in helping to influence how other people think and decide. This course can help you exercise this responsibility with intelligence and care.

Catholic teaching on science, technology, and human rights

- Science and technology each have a moral aspect; there is a direct link between them and human rights, human dignity.
- True scientific and technological advances must reflect an active awareness of the value of each individual's rights, and of humanity's rights.
- This awareness must include the knowledge that every person has the right to the benefits that science and technology offer.

For discussion

1. *Why do science and technology each have a moral aspect?*
2. *How does Catholic teaching define a true advance in science and technology?*
3. *Using that definition, how would you describe the difference between a technological development that is a true advance and one that expands human knowledge but is not a true advance? Give an example that illustrates this difference.*
4. *In Catholic teaching, what right does every person have with regard to scientific and technological development? Do you agree with this? Why?*
5. *Is it possible to really respect individual rights and still make full use of the benefits of science and technology? Explain.*

Amy's decision

Due to scientific advances in genetics and in the hope of one day finding better treatments or even cures, researchers are isolating many of the genetic defects that cause certain human illnesses. The discovery of these genetic flaws could make it possible for a simple blood test to reveal what debilitating or life-threatening illnesses we will experience in the future—perhaps long before a cure is available. Such a test might therefore tell us how we will die.

Read the following account about a college student for whom this scenario is already real, and respond to the questions. Then your instructor will tell you what Amy decided and her reasons for doing so.

Amy's father was afflicted with a debilitating hereditary disease that inevitably leads to an early death. Amy, a college student, learned that a genetic test could tell her whether she carries the defective gene for this disease.

Having this test done would tell Amy for sure whether she, too, will one day suffer from the same illness as her father. Positive test results would show that Amy does carry the defective gene. That would also tell her that she will most probably die at a relatively young age, perhaps in her thirties or forties.

Amy's friends at college have had differing views about what decision they would make in Amy's



situation. Amy's mother did not want her daughter to have the test done, but said she would support Amy in whatever she decided. It was Amy's decision.²

genetic

concerned with how certain characteristics pass by means of genes and chromosomes from parent to offspring

hereditary

can be transmitted genetically from parent to offspring

For discussion

1. If you were in Amy's situation, what reasons would you consider for and against being tested?
2. What choice do you think you would make in Amy's situation?
3. How would your beliefs about life and about death and dying affect your choice?
4. If the test results showed you did have the disease, would you plan to live your remaining years any differently than you hope to do now? Why or why not?
5. As more genetic tests like this become available, should everyone be allowed to have such testing done? If not all people, why not? If not all people, then who—and why them?
6. What guidelines do you think should be followed, or limits imposed on these tests? Explain.
7. What moral issues are involved here?

Chapter 1 summary

Why Be Good?

1. Why study moral decision making?

- Learning how to make decisions in tough situations is important and practical.
- Teenagers commonly struggle with obedience versus greater independence and freedom.
- Growing into adulthood involves learning to reach better decisions and solutions.

2. What is morality?

- Morality is concerned with how people ought to behave.
- The moral is that which is good.
- Immoral refers to that which is wrong—to how people ought not behave.
- Amoral refers to morally neutral actions, or to people who act without reference to moral principles.

3. How can you learn to make better moral decisions?

- Important moral decisions should be wisely, prayerfully, and carefully made.
- For Catholics, this includes prayer, understanding and applying Church teaching, and consulting Scripture and the wisdom of others.
- Making wise moral decisions involves skills and processes which can be learned through training and practice.

4. Why be moral?

- Created in God's image, every person has God-given dignity and an immortal destiny.
- Being moral is humanly fulfilling and leads to happiness, love, and harmony.
- Truly good persons understand the struggles involved in being good.

5. Addressing current moral issues

- Today's most important issues and questions have moral dimensions.
- Moralists are often called on to guide others in weighing moral matters and making moral decisions.
- Your religious and moral principles do affect your life and that of others.
- Morality is one of the most crucial studies today and for the future.

Key concepts

amoral
code of conduct
conscience
decision
dilemma
guideline
human dignity
immoral
intention

judgment
life-decision
moral
moralist
morality
obedience
personal integrity
principle
prophet