

Chapter 2

Feelings, Freedom, and Morality

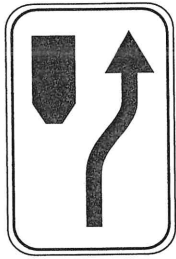
Overview questions

1. What makes a decision right or wrong?
2. What role do feelings play in making moral decisions?
3. Why are some common approaches to making moral decisions inadequate?
4. What is human freedom? Why is it so important?



Prayer

*Loving God,
You have created us free to
make our decisions in life.
May our hearts help guide
us toward goodness,
but keep us from letting
our feelings rule our
heads.
Help us to seek and follow
the Truth—which you
are,
and which you have
promised will make us
truly free.*



subjective reality

that which a person perceives to be so; a personal perception influenced by one's feelings or state of mind

logic

the science of reasoning correctly

objective reality

that which actually is so or exists, apart from whether or not a person thinks it is or does; that which actually exists as distinct from how people perceive it

The human struggle

Life's main drama is the basic struggle between good and evil. This moral struggle isn't a concern of religion only; it's a life concern. It is the theme—and the drama—of most of the comedies and tragedies you see on television and in the movies. For all of us, this struggle between good and evil involves the two main facets of moral decision making: (1) Figuring out the right thing to do, and (2) summoning up the courage to do the right thing.

This chapter will address the first of these.

Activity

Of the dramas or situation comedies you have seen on TV or in the movies recently, list five that dealt with one of the two facets of moral decision making. Describe how each drama or comedy involved the struggle between good and evil.

What makes it right?

"If I think it's right, does that make it right?" is one of the most common questions asked about morality. Many people are convinced that "right" and "what I think is right" are synonymous, but experience tells us that is **not** the case. Sometimes what we honestly thought was right turns out to have been one grand mistake! Two people who have contradictory views of what is right can't both be right. Simple logic tells us that. So what is the relationship between what **is** right and what **I think** is right?

It helps to look at this question from two different viewpoints: the **subjective** and the **objective**. **Subjective reality** is that which I perceive to be so. For example, if I think there is a puddle of water in the middle of the road, then to me there is a puddle of water in the middle of the road! I might arrive at the spot in the road where I "saw" a puddle, only to find that it was a mirage. The puddle represents how reality can be quite different from our **subjective** perception of it. A dog named Brandy learned this the hard way when she tried to run through a glass door that appeared to her to be open. A hard bump on the nose convinced the stunned dog otherwise.

People can perceive the same situation in completely opposite ways. If I say "There's a puddle there" and someone else says "No, there isn't," **logic** demands that the puddle is or is not there. Both of these things can't be true simultaneously, not in reality. One of us must be wrong, even though we both think we're right.

Objective reality is what actually is so or exists, apart from what I think about it. It might not make too much difference whether there really is a small puddle in the middle of the road. But, as with the dog, if I intend to go through a doorway, it can make a great deal of difference to my health and safety to double check that the door is open before I charge through it at full speed!

The same holds true with morality. Objectively speaking, in a given situation, there must be the possibility of an ideal, or good, decision. It is true that, when we make our decisions, we must ultimately rely on our subjective perception of what the right thing is. Therefore, we need to determine—especially if much is at stake—exactly what we think the right thing is, and why.

Catholic teaching helps us in our search for objective truth as we try to discover what is right and to make our decisions accordingly:

- Using our ability to reason, we can tell the difference between what is objectively right and what is objectively wrong, and the difference between the various degrees of right and wrong.
- Answering these three questions can help us determine the moral rightness or wrongness of our actions:
 1. Is the object of my action truly good in the objective sense?
 2. Do I aim and intend to do the right and good thing?
 3. Are circumstances involved which may diminish or increase my responsibility for the action—even though these circumstances can't make good or right something that is wrong in itself?
- A good end does not justify using an evil means.
- Having morally wrong intentions can turn an otherwise good act into a bad one.
- Making moral decisions requires prayer, study, consulting with others, and, for Catholics, understanding and applying the pertinent Church teachings.

Discussion activity

A terrorist group threatens to destroy a city of a million people unless the government immediately executes a particular individual. This individual is innocent of any wrongdoing. If it were the only way to save all these lives, would it be morally justifiable for the government to take the innocent person's life?

Activity

Assess the rightness or wrongness of these person's actions:

1. Because he loves his mother, Julio wants to buy her a nice birthday present. Since he can't afford to buy a nice gift, he shoplifts one—a necklace—and gives it to her.
2. Cheryl was terribly upset when her boyfriend broke up with her. When she got home from school, she started an argument with her sister.
3. Robert made an insulting remark, intending to start a fight with Tony. Tony just laughed it off and walked away.

As we make our moral decisions, we need to try to bring our subjective view of reality as close as possible to the objective reality. Otherwise, we can end up making a decision that we and/or others will truly regret.

Remember then: **Thinking** something is right doesn't necessarily mean that it is right. It may or may not be. But if you've tried your best to reasonably and objectively discover what is **in fact** right, the perception and conclusion you arrive at will be, indeed, right for you.

objective morality

judgment that corresponds to an action or attitude's goodness or badness in itself, without reference to how its moral quality is perceived

subjective morality

judgment concerning the perceived goodness or badness of an action or attitude, which may or may not correspond with its actual moral quality

responsibility

accountability, trustworthiness, reliability

Activity

Poll ten teenagers about whether they think the end justifies the means—and why. Summarize your findings for the class, and, in view of class discussion about means and ends, talk about your own reaction to the poll findings.

Journal entry

Describe a time when someone used, betrayed, or hurt you—and then tried to justify it by saying that he or she was only trying to achieve something he or she thought was good. Explain how you felt.

For discussion

1. According to Catholic teaching, what things make an action right or wrong? Explain each.
2. Why do you think each is so important?
3. Why doesn't a good end justify using a bad or wrong means?
4. What would the world be like if everybody usually used bad or wrong means to achieve good ends? Give three examples that illustrate what would probably happen if teenagers did this all the time.
5. Do you agree that what a person might **think** is right might not be what actually is **in fact** the right or best possible thing to do? Explain and illustrate with examples from your own experience.

A snake bit

Read the following true account and respond to the questions.

Not long ago, on his way to school, a young boy (who loved animals of all kinds) saw a small orangish and yellow snake. Wanting to show the unusual animal to his friends at school, he picked it up—gently—and put it in his backpack.

When he got to school and showed the snake to his teacher, she too was impressed, but for an entirely different reason than the boy had been! She immediately recognized the snake as the deadly coral snake—whose venomous bite can—within minutes—be fatal to a person. The teacher guided the boy to gently release the snake in the woods, out of harm's way. Then she gave the students a classroom lesson they'd never forget about why it's so important to know—before you get too close—if something can hurt you. She helped the students see how something that seems very pretty can sometimes also be very dangerous.

For discussion

1. What does this snake story illustrate about the difference between subjective and objective perceptions? About why it's important to seek objective truth?
2. What point might the story illustrate about the need to understand and apply Church teaching, and consult others' wisdom in forming and following our conscience?
3. How might this incident represent the way sin or strong desires can mislead us in moral matters?



Feelings and morality

Feelings in themselves are not good or bad. But they can and do steer us toward or away from what is good or bad. As Chinese wisdom points out, you can't prevent birds from flying above your head, but you can keep them from building nests in your hair! We can't always control the fact that certain feelings arise in us, but we can control the extent to which we let them influence our decisions and actions.

Emotions, then, become good or bad only insofar as we encourage or discourage them within ourselves, or let our passions rule our reasoning. Feelings become good when they lead us to do what is right and good, and bad when they lead us to do what is wrong. All of us are certainly influenced by our feelings, and most often this is a very good thing. Feelings help give us the drive and courage we need to do good things in life for ourselves and for others.

One of the most confusing and difficult emotions to deal with is affection coupled with romantic attraction, because people often mistake this experience for real love. It may be—or it may be a cruel and crippling selfishness and possessiveness. Genuine love is the most noble of all human emotions. At the same time, it is also more than an emotion. It is an act of the will and desires only what is truly good for the one loved.

It is important to understand that feelings are not bad in themselves. Consider hatred and anger. Hatred of and anger toward injustice, evil, and intolerance have propelled human rights movements worldwide to achieve greater equality and respect for all persons. But when directed at people rather than at wrongdoing, and when turned into revenge rather than toward goodness, anger and hatred have destroyed millions of lives. Like rocket fuel, these emotions are extremely volatile. When we handle them carefully and direct them properly, they can help propel us to new and better futures. When we let them get out of control, they can cause explosive damage.

Hopefully, we manage our emotions sensibly, rather than repress them or unleash them indiscriminately. People who are truly unable to control their emotions suffer from a psychological or medical disorder for which they need professional help. Many other people have so much difficulty controlling their emotions that they too would benefit from such help. All of us at times experience feelings which are so strong or sudden that we need to take "time out" to be sure we respond properly to the situation. For we must use our head to direct our emotions toward what is truly, objectively good—and not let feelings carry us into doing things just because we "want to."

Scientists can't create the laws of physics by which the universe operates. They can only discover those laws and work within them. Morality isn't purely subjective either. We can't turn feelings and wishes into fact; feeling or wishing something were so doesn't make it so in reality. We can't make moral decisions based just on what we feel or on what we wish were so. We cannot make our own morality. We can only do our best to recognize the truth and reality of a situation and, based on that, try to determine what is objectively the right and best thing to do.

feelings, emotions

internal sensations and responses that are both mental and physical in nature and draw us toward or away from certain ideas, things, or persons perceived as good or bad

Journal entry

List the emotional "birds" that you find hardest to keep from "building nests in your hair;" the feelings you find at times most bothersome and difficult to handle appropriately.

Journal entry

What feelings lead you to be the kind of person you want to be and to do the good you want to do?

will

the God-given ability to make rational, free, and intentional choices—especially between right and wrong, good and evil

repress

to hold back so as to keep from naturally expressing

**RIGHT
TURN
ONLY**

Journal entry

What emotion do you find the most difficult to deal with?

*To love is to will
the good of another.*

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

What is right for you, therefore, is not merely what you may **feel** like doing or **wish** were right. What you honestly think **is** right, after you've carefully weighed and considered the matter, including the objective truth insofar as you can discover it—that is how you can know what is right for you.

The faith that you have, have as your own conviction before God. Blessed are those who have no reason to condemn themselves because of what they approve.

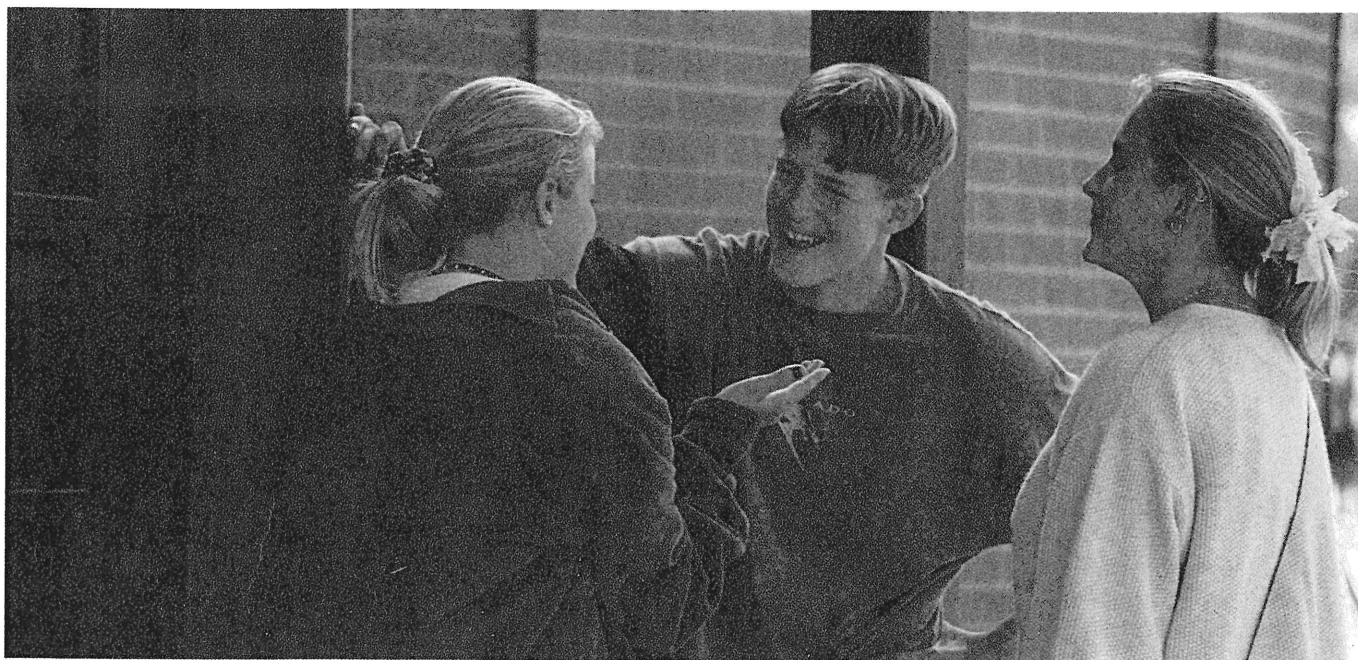
Romans 14:22

For discussion

1. Explain why it's not feelings (emotions) themselves, but what you do with them that is good or bad.
2. When and why do feelings lead to something good or right? When do they lead to something bad or wrong? Illustrate with examples.
3. Why can affection, when coupled with romantic attraction, be such a confusing and difficult emotion to deal with? How often do you think teenagers confuse their **feelings** of attraction and affection for someone with **love**? Explain.
4. To what extent should people be able to control their emotions? Why? How is this different from not letting oneself feel or express emotion appropriately?
5. If everyone always did what they felt was right for them without first trying to discover the objective truth, what kind of world would we live in? Would you want to live in such a world? Why or why not?
6. What happens when people do behave that way? What impact does it have on society? On you?
7. What is meant by saying that we can't make our own morality? How would you answer this question: How can you tell what's right for you?

society

an organized group working together to achieve a common end



Road rage

Read the following true accounts. Then respond to the questions.

The tailgater's tantrum

A station wagon driver, upset that a pickup truck was tailgating him, slammed on his brakes to stop the tailgater. The pickup driver then pulled alongside the station wagon, threatened to kill its driver, and aimed his truck at the station wagon. The station wagon driver had to keep swerving into oncoming traffic lanes to avoid a collision.

The pickup driver pulled in front of the station wagon and braked, trying to cause the station wagon driver to slam into the truck. The pickup driver then followed the other man home, where the two drivers argued over the incident.

Luckily, the pickup driver left before the incident escalated any further. Other drivers, however, have been killed—by women as well as by men—for driving too slowly, played their car stereo too loudly, or displayed an obscene gesture after being tailgated or cut off on the road.

The parking lot punch

Renee and her husband, Richard, were pulling out of a parking lot one evening when another young driver almost ran into them.

Scared and upset by the near-miss, Renee angrily yelled at the driver that he had almost hit her and her husband. Then she got out of her car and went over to the offending driver's car, waved her hand at the driver, and again yelled that he had almost hit their car.

Jai, the offending driver, slapped Renee's hand, whereupon she slapped him back. Richard then slapped Jai, and the two men began scuffling. By that time, a crowd had gathered. A few men tried to separate the drivers, but Jai still managed to deliver a fatal punch to Richard's head. Richard died in the parking lot. Jai was charged with second-degree murder for Richard's death. All of this happened because of anger over a close call in the parking lot.

For discussion

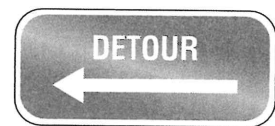
1. How did each of the individuals in these situations let his or her emotions get out of control? What harm resulted, or could have resulted?
2. Which of the individuals were in the right to begin with? Did that also give them the right to lose their tempers as they did? Explain.
3. Did any of these persons try, in a sense, to make his or her own morality? Explain.
4. Describe a situation in which you have been sorely tempted to lose your temper when someone wronged you. How did you respond? Why?
5. How do you think you would have responded in each of the road rage situations? Why? How should you respond? Explain.

Questionable approaches to morality

How does moral decision making differ from other approaches to decision making? Isn't it good enough just to try to be a good person? Isn't that the same as being "Christian"? Well, it all depends. Some ideas of what being a good person means agree with Christian principles, while others do not.

Let's look first at some of the faulty or questionable approaches people often take regarding ethics and morality. To help you understand, each faulty approach will be described in the extreme. In reality, manifestations of each approach are more subtle.

Keep in mind that we're all tempted at times to base our behavior on these faulty or questionable approaches to morality. Being honest with ourselves can help us avoid that and can help us shape our moral life around correct standards.



ethics

moral conduct; standards of moral judgment and behavior

code of ethics

a system of principles, rules or values by which to live

philosophy

the principles an individual chooses to live by

rationalize

positively: to bring into accord with reason; negatively: to provide plausible but untrue reasons for conduct

manipulator

one who directly or indirectly tries to control or take advantage of others

“Anything goes”

“Morality is just a bunch of rules and regulations that religious people make up to keep other people in line.” “Nobody can tell me what to do.” “What’s right for me is right for we.” There are always people who think this way. They believe there is no fundamental **code of ethics** by which everyone should live.

Such persons usually have just one explanation for what they think or do: “Because that’s what I think, that’s why!” Their moral **philosophy** amounts to “It’s everyone for themselves”; there are no constant standards, rules, or principles. Everything changes with every situation.

These “anything-goes” decision makers bend laws and regulations to suit themselves and their decisions. The one consistent thing is that their decision-making pattern centers around themselves and, indirectly, those they may like or love—at the moment. But when those close to them fall from favor, concern for their welfare quickly evaporates. The boy who tells a girl he loves her just to get her to have sex with him, or the girl who tells a boy she likes him just to get a date to the prom are examples of “anything goes” behavior.

Such persons **do** as they please to **get** what they want. They often **rationalize** and try to persuade themselves—and others—that what they’re doing is right. They are great **manipulators**. But “right” to them is simply “what I want” or “what I feel like.” It’s almost impossible to predict what “anything goes” followers will decide next—except that it will be something which suits themselves.

Reflection

1. When are you most tempted to rationalize that it’s okay to do something, when you know deep down it’s really not?
2. Do you ever bend the rules, use or manipulate people, or treat them selfishly in order to do or get what you want?

Journal entry

1. In what ways can you be more honest about your real reasons for doing things?
2. In what ways would you like to put caring for others above self-interests?

For discussion

1. What is wrong with the “anything goes” approach to decision making?
2. What would happen if everyone in the world followed this approach to making moral decisions? What would the world be like?
3. Give other examples of this approach to life.

“It’s the law”

This approach to decision making centers on strictly abiding by the laws, rules, and regulations of society—civil or religious, family or friends, school or business. The “It’s the law” person tries to learn and to abide by the “letter of the law,” every detail of the law. Such people have little tolerance for ideas and moral codes other than their own.

“What are the rules?” is the law moralist’s only concern. Why do this or that? Because you’re **supposed** to in order to belong to the group. Only when no law or regulation covers the situation does the law moralist have to really think about what to do. Otherwise, decision making means simply following the rules, regardless. Circumstances and other influences that affect individuals facing moral decisions aren’t considered important.

Lest you think only stuffy adults operate this way, reconsider. What about teenagers who feel inwardly (or outwardly) pressured to obey their peers’ unwritten laws, codes, or pressures? What about those willing to do most anything to please authority figures? And, being honest, do you ever put being accepted and included above more important values?

Conformity is the hallmark of the person who above all needs to be accepted, to “fit in.” Being an individual and standing on one’s own, whatever anyone else thinks, just seems too hard. Conformists’ primary law is whatever brings them acceptance in others’ eyes.

Reflection

1. How important is being accepted to you?
2. When does your desire to be accepted or included most tempt you to override your better judgment?
3. When have you said or done something just to feel accepted or included—and then later wished you hadn’t said or done it?



... *the letter*
[of the law] kills, but
the Spirit gives life.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:6

law

binding custom or practice of a group; rule of conduct or action

conformity

agreement in behavior with that of another person or group

Journal entry

How can you increase your sense of self-confidence and self-worth so you don’t feel pulled to do things just to be accepted?

For discussion

1. What are the problems with the “it’s the law” approach to decisions?
2. What would happen if everyone followed this approach?
3. Give other examples of this approach to decision making—including those based on conformity.
4. Would you put organized teenage gangs in the conformist category? Explain.

“It’s only ‘natural’ ”

The “doing what comes naturally” approach to decision making views right and wrong in terms of what feels or seems “natural.” Followers of this approach may argue, for example, that “It’s women’s ‘nature’ to bear and raise children; women belong at home and not in the workplace.” But the standard for these “naturalists” is purely subjective—their idea of what it is natural or unnatural to do.

Thus, one who holds this “If God wanted us to fly, we would have been born with wings” mentality generally has trouble defending what “natural” or “unnatural” is and explaining why. What some of these persons consider “natural” and therefore right, others might consider “unnatural” and wrong. (Do not confuse “doing what comes naturally” with belief in the natural law, which we will discuss later in this text.)

natural law

the God-given ability to distinguish right and wrong

Journal entry

Name one thing that would help you follow your better judgment rather than simply following the feelings that pressure you.

Reflection

1. When do you feel most tempted—or pressured by others—to do something just because it seems “natural” or feels good?
2. Which feelings exert the most pressure on you to behave in certain ways—for example, anger, romantic feelings, jealousy, or some other feeling?
3. When has following your feelings instead of your better judgment gotten you into trouble, hurt others, or otherwise made you regret your behavior?

This approach to morality is unfortunately a common one—among teenagers as well as adults. Consider, for instance, those who say that premarital sexual intercourse or marital infidelity is “only following your natural instincts and feelings.” These individuals don’t think first about meaning or consequences. They simply determine right from wrong by what they would like to believe is “natural” to do at the time. Practically speaking, this ends up being very similar to—and just as dangerous as—the “anything goes” approach.

infidelity

being unfaithful or untrue, not keeping one’s solemn promise or commitment

instincts

inborn tendencies to act in certain ways

For discussion

1. What is wrong with the “it’s only natural” approach to making moral decisions?
2. What do you think would happen if everyone followed that approach in making decisions?
3. Give other examples of this type of thinking among teenagers and adults.

Do you not know that . . . you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

ROMANS 6:16

Journal entry

In what situations are you most tempted to just follow your “natural inclinations” rather than thinking things through first?

The Spur Posse

Read the following true account. Then respond to the questions.

A group of high school buddies, most of whom were athletes, began calling themselves the "Spur Posse" and competing among themselves to see who could have sex with the most girls.

Many kids at school considered the boys "studs" and their female sexual conquests "trash." Some of their parents defended Posse members' behavior by saying "boys will be boys." Their girlfriends actually seemed proud that their boyfriends could score with so many other girls. Other students and parents, however, found it thoroughly disgusting.

When some of the "conquests" and their parents filed criminal complaints against the Spur Posse, Posse members gained national attention. On several nation-wide talk shows (some of which paid them for appearing), they explained how every girl they had sex with counted as a "point." They referred to these girls as "easy marks." One boy bragged of "scoring" over 60 points. Sex, for a member of the Spur Posse, was just another athletic contest.

The boys also boasted on television that they were better than everyone else and that girls were drawn to them because of their good looks, athletic ability, and popularity. They said if they considered the girl "easy," they just had sex with her quickly and then left. If a girl was considered "good" and "respectable," they would first "romance" her by taking her out to eat and doing what she wanted for the day or evening. The boys admitted that their friends' opinion of their conquests was as important to them as the "scoring" itself. They said they considered bragging about

it part of the "fun" and that their buddies look up to guys who can brag about their sexual conquests.

Several girls, however, told police that the boys had threatened, intimidated, and forced them into having sex—had raped them. The boys, of course, denied ever raping anyone. Police authorities said the Posse especially targeted younger girls who were in awe of the boys' popularity at school. One police sergeant called the boys a pack of wolves.

The female targets of the Posse's sexual game later said that they felt used and robbed of their dignity, self-respect, and self-esteem. Others regretfully admitted they had voluntarily had sex with a Spur Posse member because they had wanted to be valued—especially by someone popular. Later they described how stupid they felt for not realizing that they were just another "point."

The boys defended their behavior by saying society had "made" them that way by considering them more important than others because of their athletic abilities. One Posse member said all teenage boys want to have sex and will whenever they have the chance. He said the only difference in the Posse's behavior is that they talked about it openly and called their sexual conquests "points."

Other observers have called the boys' attitudes and behavior a sick effort to enhance their own self-esteem.

For discussion

1. What approach(es) to decision making were used by the Spur Posse members? By the girls who voluntarily had sex with them?
2. How does this case illustrate why it's important to have a personal code of ethics before getting into situations where one might be tempted to do something regrettable?
3. What do you think of the Spur Posse members' behavior and attitudes? Why?
4. What do you think of the fact that some TV talk shows were willing to pay the boys to appear on the show? Do you think they should have been invited to appear on any TV show—whether or not they were paid for it? Explain.
5. What do you think of the reactions of the boys' parents? Of their girlfriends? Explain.
6. How responsible do you think the female targets of the Spur Posse were for what happened to them? How do you think you might have felt in their situation? Explain.
7. What do you think of the things the boys and others said in defense of the Spur Posse's behavior? Why?
8. Which of the attitudes and behaviors illustrated by this case exist at your school, though perhaps in less exaggerated or obvious ways? Explain.

*... freedom consists not in doing what we like,
but in having the right to do what we ought.*

POPE JOHN PAUL II

rational

able to reason, form judgments, and reach logical decisions

freedom

the ability to use our abilities of will and reasoning to make moral choices and act on them

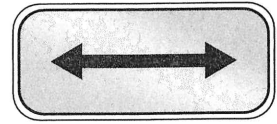
Journal entry

1. What kinds of personal choices do you experience as uplifting or freeing?
2. Which of your choices have dragged you down or somewhat enslaved you?

For discussion

1. What does it mean to be rational? To be free as a human being?
2. What is the goal of your freedom? How can you best achieve this goal?
3. Why is there no such thing as absolute freedom? Illustrate with examples.
4. Why is it enslaving to habitually do wrong? Why is it freeing to habitually do right? Give examples based on teenagers' experience.
5. Give examples of specific social conditions that you think keep people from fully exercising their freedom: in our society, in the world, in your school.
6. Why isn't personal freedom unlimited?
7. What would help you most to make moral decisions more freely and confidently?

Morality and human freedom

**What is freedom?**

You are **rational**, and you are free. God gives you the **freedom** to choose, and the mental ability to choose wisely and correctly. Your freedom empowers both your decisions and your actions, enabling you to choose to love or hate, be just or unjust, become a good or a bad kind of person. How you use your freedom shapes your life, who you are, and who you become—and affects everyone your life touches.

The ultimate goal of human freedom is to choose, for all eternity, the Goodness which is God. The decisions we make in this life draw us toward or away from God as our final happiness. In choosing what is right and good, we choose to grow closer to God. In choosing wrong, we push ourselves away from God's love and from others. Christians believe that redemption by Christ has given us the freedom and power, grace, of God's Spirit to overcome being alienated from God and enslaved by evil.

Freedom and responsibility

There is no such thing as absolute freedom—freedom **from** or **for** everything. Choosing one thing is choosing to give up another. To choose against something is to choose in favor of something else. We can't have it both ways. Making a moral choice is always a decision to embrace one thing and to reject another. It is a commitment to something—to the goodness that lifts us up or to the evil that drags us down.

Constantly choosing what is wrong abuses human freedom and inwardly enslaves people. Often enough, it outwardly enslaves them as well—as any addict whose addiction started with one wrong choice at a time knows. Habitually choosing goodness, as Jesus did and showed us, is the only thing that can make us truly free.

Being free and being responsible for how we use our freedom are essential to being human and to our human dignity. Freedom and responsibility are what enable us to love God and others. No one can take away our right to exercise this freedom responsibly—especially in religious and moral matters. In fact, civil authorities have a duty to acknowledge and protect this basic human right, which not incidentally upholds public order and the common good.

Too often social conditions like poverty, intolerance, and injustice keep people from fully exercising their human freedom. We should all do our part to oppose whatever violates human freedom. For a threat to anyone's freedom is a threat to everyone's.

But people don't have the right to do or say whatever they please. **Personal freedom above all involves recognizing and respecting our relationship with God and others.** It includes exercising freedom in ways that respect others' rights.

The more you listen to God—in prayer and Scripture, in Church teaching, and in others' wisdom—the more free and confident you will feel to do the right thing, and the easier it will become to resist the things that pressure you to do what's wrong.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

2 Corinthians 3:17

Cloning

Read the following, and then respond to the questions.

When Scottish scientists cloned the first mammal—an adult sheep named Dolly—the “freaky future” of science fiction became a startlingly real possibility. Since then, the issue of cloning—especially of cloning humans—has raised worldwide storms of concern and controversy.

Scientists who research animal cloning say they want to benefit humanity by helping to increase the world’s food supply and by helping to conquer disease. They speak of breeding animals whose organs could be transplanted into humans



to save lives. Other scientists fear, however, that even applications of animal cloning such as this might unknowingly transmit to humans highly contagious and incurable diseases that could destroy much of the world’s population.

One of the Scottish scientists who cloned Dolly told the U.S. Congress that “it would be quite inhumane” to try to clone humans. He says he hasn’t heard of any possible reason that could morally justify cloning humans.

Most scientists, government officials, and religious leaders have strongly agreed with him, but some others have not. One U.S. senator is convinced that cloning humans will surely happen, says he’s not afraid of it at all, and believes it could greatly benefit the search for medical cures. He says that limits should not be put on human knowledge and scientific progress, that it’s “demeaning to human nature” to even try to impose such limits.

Both the pope and the World Health Organization have condemned the cloning of humans as “ethically unacceptable.” Most scientists agree, believing that some things such as human cloning are simply off limits—that humans are not, and should not be, allowed to play God. Besides, the scientists point out, the risks are far too great.

For discussion

1. What is cloning? What issues does cloning raise about human dignity and what it means to be human?
2. Why is cloning an important moral concern for everyone? How does it illustrate the “Should we?” question discussed in this chapter?
3. Why must everyone—including you and I—participate in the debates and decision-making processes about cloning?
4. How do Catholic teaching about science, technology, and human rights apply to animal and human cloning?
5. What is your response to the idea of cloning humans? Why? What risks do you think there are?
6. Why do most scientific, government, and religious leaders strongly disagree with the senator who thinks “scientific progress” can’t and shouldn’t be stopped or even limited? What is your response to him? Why?
7. How does this senator’s idea of “progress” compare with what Catholic teaching says about “true advances” in development?
8. What types of cloning research, if any, do you think should be allowed to proceed? What limitations would you place on cloning? Why?

Project

Search the Internet for what others have to say about the pros and cons of cloning humans. Write a paper giving your responses to their reasons in view of what Catholic teaching says about the topic.

cloning

producing a genetically identical copy of a living thing

Chapter 2 summary

Feelings, Freedom, and Morality

1. What makes it right?

- Being moral involves determining and then doing the right thing.
- Subjective reality is what is perceived as so, and objective reality is what actually is so.
- Objectively, there is always an ideally right or best possible decision.
- Using our reasoning, we can identify the nature and degrees of right and wrong.
- A good end never justifies using an evil means.
- An action's morality is determined by whether its object, goal, and intentions are right and good, and whether the circumstances diminish or increase a person's responsibility.
- Making moral decisions involves prayer, study, consulting others, and, for Catholics, understanding and applying Church teaching.
- To determine what is right for me, I must first reasonably try to discover the objective truth.
- Then, what is right for me is what I honestly think is right and in accordance with objective truth.

2. Feelings and morality

- Feelings themselves are not good or bad; they steer us toward or away from the good or bad.
- Our response to emotions may be good or bad. If we encourage the negative or discourage the positive within ourselves or let our passions rule our reasoning, our response will be bad.
- Love, the noblest emotion, is also an act of will that desires only good for the one loved.
- We should manage and express our emotions sensibly, rather than repress them or unleash them indiscriminately.
- We must direct our feelings toward what is objectively good.

3. Inadequate or questionable approaches to morality

- Some approaches to morality lead one astray.
- The "anything goes" approach lacks fundamental, unchanging standards of morality.
- The "it's the law" approach evaluates morality by laws only, without considering the people or circumstances involved.
- The "it's only natural" approach arbitrarily decides, based on feelings or ideas about what seems "natural," without considering meaning or consequences.

4. Morality and human freedom

- As persons, we are rational and free to choose.
- How we use our freedom shapes our life and draws us closer to or away from God, the ultimate goal of human freedom.
- No one has absolute freedom—moral choice is always a commitment to embrace one thing and reject another.
- Constantly choosing what is wrong is an abuse of freedom and enslaves people—only choosing goodness can make us truly free.
- Freedom and responsibility for how it is used are every person's right, and protecting freedom is civil authorities' duty.
- Personal freedom above all respects our relationships with God and others.

Key concepts

“anything goes” moral approach

code of ethics

conformity

end or object of an action

feelings, emotions

freedom

habitual choices

ideal right or good

inadequate approaches to morality

intention

“law” morality

managing emotions

means used to achieve a goal

moral philosophy

natural instincts

natural law

natural, unnatural

objective morality

objective reality

objective truth

one's better judgment

personal ethics

rational

rationalize

repressing emotion

responsibility

subjective morality

subjective reality