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Challenging Religious Issues

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on Ian Ramsey on
Religious Language

Samuel Tranter
on Protestants and
Natural Law: Rejection
and Retrieval

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on The Earliest Easter
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Just Cause for War

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Supporting Religious Studies at A-level and beyond

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Challenging Religious Issues is a free, open access on-line journal designed to support teachers and students engaged in A-level Religious Studies. *Challenging Religious Issues* is designed to bring recent and relevant scholarship and research from the University into the A-level classroom. Three issues are published each year, and each issue contains four original articles.

Ian Ramsey on Religious Language

Jeff Astley

This article critically surveys the account of descriptive religious language provided by Ian T. Ramsey.

Specification links:

WJEC/CBAC/EDUQAS Unit 5: Philosophy of Religion, Theme 3: Religious language (part 1) = Component 2 Philosophy of Religion, Theme 4: Religious language, C.

Religious language as non-cognitive and analogical: Proportion and attribution (St Thomas Aquinas) and qualifier and disclosure (Ian Ramsey).

OCR Philosophy of Religion, 5. Religious Language: Negative, Analogical or Symbolic.

AQA 1 Philosophy of Religion and Ethics, A: Philosophy of Religion, Religious Language.

Also: *All Religious Experience topics.*

Born and brought up in Bolton, Lancashire, Ian Thomas Ramsey (1915-1972) was a philosopher of religion and liberal Christian theologian who taught at Cambridge and Oxford, before serving as Bishop of Durham. (He is not to be confused with Michael Ramsey, who was also once Bishop of Durham, and eventually Archbishop of Canterbury; and was not a relative.)

Ramsey's theory of religious knowledge

I. T. Ramsey came to describe his characteristic philosophy of religion as a 'broader empiricism', arguing that religious belief can only be justified if it is grounded in some form of religious experience. This view provided his

defence of religion and metaphysics against the positivist critique that they were meaningless because their statements were not verifiable by *sense* experience.

Moments of religious experience or 'discernment' (intuitions) are an individual's responses to active 'disclosures' (non-propositional revelations) on the part of God. Ramsey argued that there were parallel disclosures in practically all other areas of knowledge – including mathematics, poetry, morality and ordinary human situations.

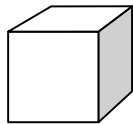
I use 'disclosure' not in relation to information, but to refer to situations about which various metaphorical phrases are commonly used. Such

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phrases, e.g., are those which speak of situations 'coming alive', 'taking on depth', situations in which 'the penny drops', where we 'see' but not with eyes of flesh, where something 'strikes us', where 'eye meets eye' and where 'hearts miss a beat'. (Ramsey, 1972, p. 115)

In such contexts, the 'ice breaks' and the 'light dawns'. These are *disclosure-situations* in which, for example, we may:

- recognise a pattern (Ramsey refers to a 3D cube discerned through the two-dimensional lines of a drawing – see figure);
- grasp an idea (say of the colour yellow, which is more than and other than any or all yellow objects);
- discern a duty; or
- recognise another person (or 'another mind').



We then respond to these disclosures with an appropriate commitment.

In the *religious* disclosure-situation, the discerned object (and active subject) of the disclosure is God, mediated mainly through nature or history. It is in such a – often 'cosmic' (all-inclusive and unlimited) – disclosure that people respond with the ultimate commitment of faith, and also supremely 'come to themselves'.

Ramsey claimed that all disclosures reveal a transcendent 'more' through and beyond the *empirical medium* of its disclosure.¹ This medium is made up either of objects and events that are known through sense experience, or of the language that describes them. In the case of disclosures of persons, duty or God, for example, the media are (respectively) human bodies and their behaviour, situations in our personal or

social life, or the whole of the physical creation. None of these 'mores' can ever be adequately captured in straightforward language – in the 'plain, flat descriptive language' that characterises the medium through which they are disclosed.

In order to speak about these 'mores', we therefore need to use words and phrases that will appear to many to be rather 'odd', by comparison with the more everyday, empirical language that describes their observable media.

Ramsey's theory of religious language

In particular, Ramsey claimed that religious language is often made up of *models* drawn from our sense experience of the world ('good', 'powerful', 'Father', 'rock', etc.), which are regularly coupled with *qualifiers*. These qualifiers are usually adverbs or adjectives whose significance it is easy to overlook, such as 'infinitely', 'all', 'eternal' and 'heavenly'.²

As the models themselves are essentially analogies and metaphors derived from this-worldly language, their meaning must change when they are applied to a God who transcends this world and this language. Such models, Ramsey insists, are not 'picturing models' (Ramsey, 1971a, p. 213).

Qualifiers have no descriptive meaning of their own, any more than a square root sign has a numerical value. (If you doubt this, ask yourself how to solve the sum: $3 + \sqrt{\quad}$.) Like the square root sign, qualifiers tell us to *do* something with the value they sit next to. In fact, they tell us to do two things.

¹Ramsey argued that, in the end, all disclosures reveal the same object, for these many disclosed realities are all part of the One Reality of God.

²Although the qualifiers are not always explicitly expressed, they are implied. So, when people speak of God simply as 'king' we (and they) need to remember that God is actually the 'heavenly king'.

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Religious language as representative

First, qualifiers help us to represent the transcendent God (that is, to 'describe' God, as well as any language about humans and nature can). As God is different, our language must show this. *Qualified* models ('infinitely good', 'heavenly Father', 'eternal Rock', etc.) tell us to note the *difference* between descriptive God-talk and our usual descriptions of this-worldly fathers, goodness, rocks, and so on. But the model words these phrases contain also speak of a *likeness*, for God is not utterly different.

Technically, Ramsey was a 'critical realist' who believed that the transcendent God may be represented but not literally described. One of his catch phrases was that we can be 'sure in religion', indeed 'sure of God', but must always be 'tentative in theology': certain of the reality of the object of our disclosures, but never more than provisional about any account of the nature of that reality (Ramsey, 1965, p. 89).

Ramsey strongly maintained that God is a mystery, and claimed that only one word – 'activity' – can be used of God with the same basic sense that it has for us.³ All other language must be heavily qualified. As we have seen, this may be done explicitly by adding qualifier words. But it can also be done by means of the *mutual qualification* that happens through a jostling together of different models in the 'riotous mixture of phrases' that is especially evident in the Bible and in hymns (Ramsey, 1957, p. 156). So, when Jesus is spoken of, in John Newton's hymn, not just as a shepherd, but also as a rock, brother, friend, prophet, priest and king, we know that he cannot be regarded as being literally any one of these (Ramsey, 1963, p. 10). According to Ramsey, heresy results

from fastening onto a single model to understand (say) God, the church or the atonement; whereas 'orthodoxy aimed at having every possible model' (Ramsey, 1957, p. 170).

Yet Ramsey allows us to express some *preference* among religious models. Indeed, that is one of the prime tasks of theology. 'A model like person is better than, say, shepherd or potter because it can say all that these other models can say and more besides; in this way it can absorb the discourse from two or more models' (Ramsey, 1971a, p. 214).

Religious language as evocative

Qualified models not only have a cognitive (fact-asserting) function of representing the nature of God, they also serve the non-cognitive function of evoking a disclosure in which God is known. Ramsey makes the empirical claim that most of our models of God are ultimately derived from religious experiences, being drawn from the medium of religious disclosures. God has been disclosed to people 'through' or 'around' the being and behaviour (or language about the being and behaviour) of fathers, mothers, kings or shepherds, and even of rocks, fortresses, fire and wind.⁴ That is why God may be

³Ramsey believed that he was presenting a form of *analogical* religious language that was independent of the Thomist's metaphysics of an 'analogy of being' between God and the created world. He replaced that link by his own claim that 'activity' is a word that is used *univocally* about God and human beings. However, we may argue that: (a) activity in God cannot possibly have the same meaning as activity in humans; (b) there are other terms that may plausibly be regarded as (at least) literally applying to God; and (c) it doesn't really matter if *all* descriptive religious language is analogical (or figurative), provided that theology can – as it should – seek to partially *specify its meaning*, in order to reveal more about the extension or shift in the meaning of its words and phrases when they are applied to God.

⁴God may also become known through a disclosure of the correspondence between certain 'patterns in the Universe' and (say) 'loving patterns of fatherly conduct' (Ramsey, 1967, p. 266).

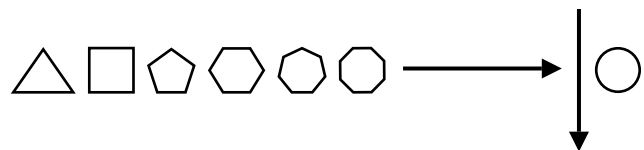
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spoken of using such images, provided that they are suitably qualified – since God is certainly ‘more’ than a rock, or even a father or king, etc. In fact, Ramsey contends that ‘all words, if suitable qualified’ can lead to a disclosure of God (Ramsey, 1957, p. 80); although it sounds rather bizarre ‘to suggest that any and every part of creation can serve as a model for its maker’ (Astley, 1984, p. 435; but cf. Ramsey, 1971a, p. 216).

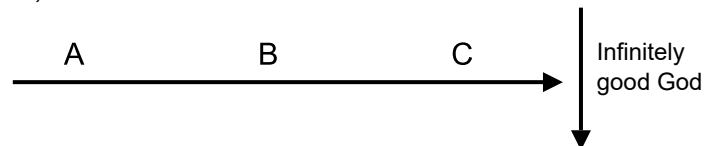
The evocative function of religious language is Ramsey’s most original, if problematic, contribution. He claimed that religious language can lead to religious experience, to a discernment of God. Religious language-users tell religious tales or pile up religious images until the penny drops and the light dawns as discernment comes, and God – who is beyond all our models – is disclosed (although no disclosure can ever be *guaranteed*). Ramsey has put his finger here on an important feature of religious language, which is sometimes described as ‘opening people up’ to religious insight or experience, or ‘putting them in the right position’ to receive God’s revelation. In particular, this appears to be a significant function of the language of worship, prayer and meditation.

Unfortunately, Ramsey’s accounts of this process often seem rather strained. Thus, he holds that spotting the words ‘infinitely’ and ‘heavenly’ before the words ‘good’ and ‘Father’ tells us (causes us?) to meditate on a range of people of increasing goodness, or of fathers of various kinds. This continues until a disclosure occurs, in which we *grasp the concepts* of infinite goodness or eternal Fatherhood, through a religious experience in which we *encounter the divine object* to which this language refers.

This account of the mechanics of the process is most convincing in the illustrations Ramsey provides from mathematics. For example, he describes a situation in which people who only know about polygons can come to understand what a circle is, by being told that a circle is a ‘polygon with an infinite number of sides’, or by being encouraged to think about a *series* of polygons. These acts may generate in people’s imagination a sequence of figures with increasing numbers of sides – triangle, square, pentagon, hexagon, etc.; and they may continue that sequence until they grasp in an intuition a figure *of a different kind altogether* (one with *no* sides) (Ramsey, 1957, pp. 69-70; 1971a, pp. 215-16; 1973, pp. 64-5). Thus:



Ramsey claims that, in a similar way, the ‘infinitely good’ God may be disclosed as we survey a series of increasingly good people (1957, pp. 66-8). Thus: (just good) A, (very good) B, (intensely good) C, ...



In both cases, that which is disclosed is not another term in the series (not even its last term), for a circle isn’t a polygon and God is not another (only better) person. ‘Infinite polygon’ and ‘infinitely good’, however, are reasonable approximations to what is disclosed – although portrayed in the (ultimately inadequate) language of regular polygons and good people.

But in the first example no real circle appears in the world, or on the page.

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Only the *idea* of circularity dawns on us. Is that all that religious language can give us, as well? Does it only reveal the *concept* of Unlimited Goodness, without delivering any real encounter with the One who is 'Love Divine, All Loves Excelling'?

And, anyway, *does* something happen to people when they use these religious phrases, even in prayer, that is at all comparable to what happens when you run your eye along a series of polygons?

Does praying 'Heavenly Father' take people *in this way* into a moment of vision, a moment of silence where God discloses Godself, and where in God's presence they can begin to articulate their thoughts about God, using language about the world and about human relationships? (cf. Ramsey, 1971b, p. 21).

Glossary

Analogical: the use of the same language with a similar meaning.

Analogy of being: similarity between God as creator and God's creation, especially that which results from humans being created in God's image.

Intuition: direct knowledge of an entity or truth, involving no conscious reasoning process (as, e.g., in direct sense awareness).

Transcendent: that which goes beyond the limitations of our being, experience and language.

Univocal: the use of the same language with exactly the same meaning.

Links

http://www.st-marys-centre.org.uk/resources/challengingreligiousissues/Issue%203_ChallengingReligiousIssues.pdf (Jeff Astley, 2013, Describing God, *Challenging Religious Issues*)

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian_Ramsey (Wikipedia entry)

http://pracownik.kul.pl/files/10351/public/On_Ramsey_religious_language_1461573.pdf (McClendon and Smith, 1973, Ian Ramsey's model of religious language: A qualified appreciation)

Ramsey on Religious Language

Discussion points

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Ramsey's account of the rôle of models and qualifiers in religious language?
2. Critically evaluate Ramsey's claim that *any* language, 'suitably qualified', may serve to evoke and represent God.
3. What part does the Bible play, if all religious language arises through disclosure experiences?
4. What do you make of Ramsey's account of the *mechanism* by which religious language evokes a disclosure?

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Protestants and Natural Law: Rejection and Retrieval

Samuel Tranter

This article explores a recent trend in ethics: the turn to natural law by Protestant thinkers. It examines characteristically Protestant anxieties about natural law approaches to morality, before investigating some elements of a recent retrieval.

Specification links:

WJEC/CBAC/EDUQAS Unit 2: Section A - An Introduction to Religion and Ethics, Theme 2: Aquinas' Natural Law - a religious approach to ethics; and Unit 4 Religion and Ethics, Theme 2: Deontological Ethics: Knowledge and understanding of religion and belief, A. Synoptic link: how the study of ethics has, over time, influenced and been influenced by developments in religious beliefs and practices and the philosophy of religion.

OCR Religion and Ethics, 1. Normative Ethical Theories: Religious Approaches, Natural Law.

AQA 1 Philosophy of Religion and Ethics, B Ethics and Religion, Normative ethical theories.

Introduction

Natural law and Protestantism might seem an unlikely topic. Certainly, the 'New Natural Law' school associated over the last few decades with John Finnis and Germain Grisez has attracted no little attention, and plenty of critique. Yet much of this conversation went on in Catholic theology and philosophy, and natural law tends to be thought of as a distinctly Catholic approach to ethics, even though it aims at universality and sometimes gains traction outside that tradition – for instance, in legal

philosophy. Much ink has been spilled debating whether natural law approaches can commend universal assent, even whether they have as comprehensive a reach as some recent proponents suggest (e.g. Cunningham, 2009). How can natural law be convincingly argued to be universally helpful if it cannot even find a hearing within other parts of the Christian tradition?

More recently, however, partly through interacting with these new approaches and with St. Thomas directly, *Protestant*

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thinkers have begun to consider their own tradition's relation to natural law.

Reasons for rejection

At this point it is necessary to survey a few common Protestant objections to natural law, to see what this attempt at retrieval is up against.

(1) A first, characteristically Protestant, worry about natural law reasoning concerns *sin* and human knowledge, and regards the natural law approach as overly optimistic. This is essentially an *epistemological* critique, which contends that sin severely damages our human ability to know ourselves well, and to know the good easily and accurately, without divine help – that is, without grace. The question this puts to natural law is something like this: Even if there were universal features of human nature that gave us some basic moral content, can we see them clearly and reliably enough (in our current 'fallen state') to act upon them, or for them to form the basis of a universal ethic?

(2) A related worry is more closely linked to the general worries people have had about natural law, and is probably more philosophical than theological in form, though some theologians have expressed it too – especially Stanley Hauerwas, who is widely considered the most prominent figure in recent Christian ethics. He has been an outspoken critic of natural law reasoning (e.g. Hauerwas, 1983), worrying that natural law posits a false universalism that is not sustainable in view of what we know about the way knowledge and morality differ from community to community, and are transmitted by particular traditions through particular practices (here he relies on Alasdair MacIntyre's work: see

MacIntyre, 2007). In addition, Hauerwas observes that the Christian church and its practice(s) has its own specific basis in, and is governed by, its own narratives. It cannot therefore make recourse to an abstract authority in natural law, which is the moral reasoning of no community in particular, let alone one shaped by the authorities that Christians claim to hold as normative. Thus, teaching about the naturalness of self-preservation (central to natural law) cannot be presumed by Christians to be morally neutral and basic. Alongside this, Hauerwas suspects that the claims of natural law have often sponsored violence, since claiming to know some basic features that everyone *should* know about human nature and morality, provides a reason to coerce those whose way of life does not accord with these features. Yet Christian ethics involves commitment to non-violence, though this has often been forgotten.

(3) A third worry concerns the *ontological* impact of sin, as well as its impact on our ability to perceive the good. Some Protestants have suggested that the impact of the fall upon nature in general is of such a magnitude that appeals to nature as such are misguided. This concern about sin's reality-shaping effect issues in what is perhaps an even stronger caution against the natural law than the concern about the epistemological effect of sin. Philip G. Ziegler (2011) contends that in Scripture sin, in the first place, and indeed grace, in the second, alter the structures of creation so radically that it is meaningless – in fact, dangerously misleading – to talk about a natural law that is unchanging.

(4) Another worry relates to the apparent remoteness of the language of natural

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law from language about God's will as the arbiter of morality. It might seem – at least in modern natural law theories, including those that are apparently Catholic in origin – that morality becomes *anthropocentric*, and sets up another moral authority alongside the command of God.

For these and other reasons, it has become something of a commonplace that Protestant theology and natural law approaches to ethics are irrevocably opposed.

Elements of retrieval

Nonetheless, some recent scholarship has suggested that, contrary to this assumption, it is possible and desirable – even necessary – for Protestants to embrace some kind of conception of the natural law.

(1) In the first place, there has been an historical dimension to this claim, with various scholars observing that, far from thinking it inherently incompatible, until quite recently Protestant theologians in fact *assumed* a natural law approach. They have identified natural law reasoning in John Calvin and Martin Luther themselves (e.g. Herdt, 2014; Baker and Ehle, 2011). Some contemporary attempts at the retrieval of natural law by Protestant (largely Reformed, i.e. Calvinist) scholars have also made reference to a whole host of thinkers across the first three centuries of Protestantism, who have largely been forgotten since (e.g. Grabill, 2006; Charles, 2008; VanDrunen, 2010).

Many of these studies in retrieval have suggested that Karl Barth (perhaps *the* major theologian of the twentieth century, of any tradition) made a mistake in rejecting natural law, or at least in doing so as unequivocally and forcefully as he did. This is a very complex matter, not

least because Barth's reasons for rejecting natural theology and natural law were so urgent and serious in his own context (when natural-law-type arguments were made in support of the Nazis). The gist of the claim made by those who take Barth seriously but still want to retrieve natural law has been that his criticisms of natural law theory, though in many ways still sharp, were in fact directed at a particular version of it, and do not implicate all natural law reasoning.

Among those who take this position, various hybrid models of ethics have begun to appear that recognise, mitigate or circumvent the kinds of worries about natural law outlined above. Some combine certain distinctive Protestant emphases with, for example, a retrieval of St. Augustine's thought. More relevant still has been the emergence of so-called 'Protestant Thomism' (John Bowlin's term) or 'Barthian Thomism' (e.g. Biggar, 2011 and Reed, 2013). Bowlin, in particular, has been keen to distinguish between these integrative approaches and some other (more politically conservative) retrievals of natural law. He suggests that contemporary Protestant Thomists like himself, though they 'do not doubt that practical reason *has* first principles [a core assertion of natural law theory, which builds morality on these first principles of practical reason], do resist the notion that reason's first principles can, by themselves, generate concrete moral agreement among human communities sharply divided by time and place, culture and convention' (accepting something like Hauerwas's worry). Although first principles 'set the terms of all human moral conversation and deliberation ... they do not specify the outcome of either' (Bowlin, 2002, p. 250). To appeal to the

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natural law, in this view, though legitimate within Protestant ethics, does not short-circuit the operation of moral deliberation or avoid moral perplexity. Indeed, Bowlin characterises some other kinds of retrieval of natural law very negatively, observing that they are using natural law reasoning for nostalgic 'culture-wars' reasons (p. 251).

(2) A second element in the rehabilitation of natural law is more philosophical. Protestant ethics has often been thought to focus on *divine command*. In recent philosophical theology and ethics, however, a divine command approach has come in for fierce criticism on account of its apparent features of: (a) the arbitrariness it seems to locate at the centre of morality; (b) its picture of God as a capricious tyrant; (c) its prioritising of the *right* over the *good*; (d) the associated *voluntaristic* prioritising of God's will over God's reason, and of our will over our reason; and (e) its lack of concern for the flourishing of humankind, which other (broadly *eudaimonistic*) ethical systems foreground. (Human flourishing has increasingly become a topic of Protestant theologising, rather than the object of its suspicion, though rumours of earlier Protestant misanthropy have often been exaggerated – Protestantism has been from the beginning, in its own way, a humanistic tradition.)

Among Protestant philosophical theologians and ethicists, Robert M. Adams, Nicholas Wolterstorff and John Hare (perhaps *the* contemporary philosopher of divine command) have all sought in some way to register these concerns and modify their accounts, even if they would not advocate a thoroughgoing return to natural law (see, e.g. Hare, 2015). Protestant theologians, however, have tempered this kind of

recognition with a tendency to avoid the vocabulary of natural law, mindful of the Barthian disavowal and potential a-theological abstraction of the term; and have sought to make much of the doctrine of *creation* when talking about natural moral goods (see O'Donovan, 1994; Barth himself also developed a theological ethics of creation).

These approaches, like the historical ones, stress that Protestantism has taught an *extensive* rather than an *intensive* notion of sin, arguing that the damage caused by sin extends to every natural and human capacity (and so has both epistemological and ontological effects) but does not *destroy* them – allowing room for natural law (see Arner, 2016).

Conclusion

I have focused here on Protestant thinkers. But it is also worth noting that the direction of travel between the Catholic and Protestant moral traditions has, in recent times, been two-way. There have been sustained efforts by Catholic thinkers, following in the footsteps of Servais Pinckaers, to elaborate upon the biblical reasoning in Thomas' account of morality in general, and natural law in particular (see Levering, 2008). Other Catholic moral theologians have also drawn deeply from the wells of Barth. By no means all Catholic thinkers appeal to natural law, either, and many of those who do are aware of its serious challenges.

All these conversations about natural law are to a certain extent still unresolved. Just as the wider jury may still be out on the validity and helpfulness of natural law arguments, the jury of Protestant thought is still deliberating about them, too.

Glossary

Anthropocentric means focusing on humankind as central; often used of focusing on humankind to the exclusion of our focus upon God or on other animals.

Divine command theory: meta-ethical theory which claims that what makes an action good is that it is commanded by God.

Epistemological: related to ways of knowing and their validity.

Eudaimonism: moral philosophy that links right action to well-being, ultimately to happiness or beatitude.

Fall, the: the Christian teaching that humankind finds itself in a state of guilty disobedience before God. It sometimes refers specifically to the story of Adam and Eve and their disobedience in the Garden of Eden (though this may be understood literally or figuratively).

Natural law: in traditional understanding, the rule of conduct which is prescribed to us by the creator in the constitution of the nature which we are given.

Ontological: relating to being.

Voluntarism: in philosophy and theology proper, the notion that God's will is the dominant factor in ethics. In terms of philosophical or theological anthropology, the notion that our will is the dominant feature of our nature, especially our moral nature. (It is often suggested that these (deficient) pictures of God and humankind are strongly linked.)

Links

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09076a.htm> (Kevin Knight, 2012, Catholic Encyclopedia)

<https://www.firstthings.com/article/1992/01/002-protestants-and-natural-law-1992>, Protestants and Natural Law)

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Discussion points

1. Given what you know of Protestant theology, do you think it can be compatible with a natural law approach to ethics?
2. Do you find the attempt by those who claim that natural law gives a universal basis for morality convincing? What do you think they are trying to achieve? Do you find it helpful?
3. Do you think natural law approaches can surmount criticisms coming from within Christian theology?
4. Can natural law and divine command approaches to ethics be integrated?

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The Earliest Easter Narratives

James Francis

Following a brief contextual overview, this article explores some key insights from the two earliest New Testament perspectives on the Resurrection by Paul and Mark.

Specification links:

WJEC/CBAC/EDUQAS Unit 1: Option A – An Introduction to the Study of Christianity, Theme 1: Religious figures and sacred texts (part 1) Knowledge and understanding of religion and belief, B. Jesus – his resurrection.

EDEXCEL Paper 3 New Testament Studies.

OCR 2. Foundations The origins and development of Christianity, and the sources of wisdom on which it is based, The Person of Jesus Christ.

If one were asked what is the central message of the New Testament it would be the Resurrection, which is more or less presupposed on all its pages. It affirms in various ways the End-encompassing destiny of all things in God through Christ. While explanations such as Jesus' physical revival, the stealing of his body (by the Jewish authorities or by his own disciples) or the hysteria of women going to the wrong tomb can all be critiqued to the point of showing them to be scarcely credible, the Resurrection itself cannot be proved.

When we look at the NT Easter stories, the evidence is rather different from that for the Passion narratives. With the latter, there is a basic framework of common traditions, whereas here the traditions are varied: Jesus appears to a person

and to a group; he appears in Jerusalem and in Galilee. The appearances must have been over a length of time if we include (as we should) Paul's Damascus Road experience.

The Resurrection tradition

We may note certain tendencies in the tradition.

(1) *An expansion of words and speech.*

In the light of Acts 1:1ff, we can see how the development of gnostic secret teachings given by Jesus before his ascension could come about.

(2) *An apologetic motive*, as in Matt.

27:62ff; 28:11, where watchers guard the tomb in face of claims that the body had been stolen. This also lies behind a tendency to emphasise the physical nature of the risen Christ (Luke 24:39-43;

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John 20:20) over against the counter claims of Gnostics who had little interest in the body generally, or claims that the disciples had suffered hallucinations. (3) Making *the appearances fit with the church* calendar as at John 20:26, or church endeavour as at Matt. 28:16ff; Acts 1:4-8.

In terms of testimony, we are on the strongest ground with the tradition quoted by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:3ff, written circa AD 54 and therefore earlier than the Gospels (unless John is dated early), but quoting a much earlier tradition. Paul uses the formal language of tradition as 'received' and 'delivered'. Here the first appearance is to Peter, whereas the Gospels never portray this as the first appearance. One wonders, however, whether the summary has filtered out the testimony of the women as a consequence of patriarchal motives. Equally, it may be more a summary that centres on the main points and the authority of the apostolic witness. It is significant that Paul includes his own vision, and so perhaps the original may have been similar to this kind of experience as well. There is strong evidence to suggest that the appearance to 'more than five hundred' approximates to the Pentecost experience (cf. John 20:22, where the appearance of Jesus and the giving of the Spirit are linked).

Background

(1) The background to the Resurrection is pre-Christian and is found in Pharisaic Judaism in particular (see the discussion on Levirate marriage in Matt. 22:24-33; cf. Deut. 25:5-10; Gen. 38:8ff).

In part, this may stem from a hope that the Maccabean martyrs had not given their lives in vain but were vindicated by God. At any rate, it is primarily a theological idea: i.e. it is about the

purposing of God rather than a story genre of a shadowy life beyond the grave (akin to other cultures, as in Homer or the Epic of Gilgamesh). The Pharisees held out the hope and reminder that all would be brought at the last before God's judgement seat (cf. Daniel 12:2). In this way, it would be possible to address the problem of the oppression of the righteous who passed away without redress in this life. We find echoes of this in the NT. Significantly, Matt. 27:52 and the strange story about the saints coming out of their tombs is linked to Jesus' death (rather than his Resurrection) as the eschatological (i.e. End-time) moment of truth and judgement. And we might also note 1 Peter 2:23b, 'He trusted in Him who judges justly', as a commentary on Jesus' self-giving in his hope of God's just outcome.

Pharisaic Judaism found encouragement in the sovereign power of God even over death. In its Scriptures were stories of people who had been resurrected/revived (e.g. Elijah's prophetic healing, Elijah himself being caught up to heaven and Ezekiel's vision of Israel's dry bones). We might also find this trajectory of hope in the NT, where Jesus' own healing miracles are seen as 'resurrections' in the power of the kingdom. God's rule as king is over death as well as life (so Lazarus, in John 11:1-44).

Thus, Resurrection is primarily speaking of the action of God. The NT tends to speak far more of God raising Jesus from the dead than of Jesus rising from the dead. According to N. T. Wright, this indicates that resurrection is not (primarily) about 'an after life to this life' (what happens when we die), but Life in God as the basis of the transformation of the world (Wright, 2011).

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(2) Resurrection and exaltation were alternative affirmations in the earliest tradition – Jesus dies and is resurrected, or Jesus dies and is exalted. Hence the language of light and height attend equally as descriptors of the experience.

(3) The empty tomb tradition originally circulated independently of the Resurrection narratives and is then built into the latter. This is especially so in Mark and Matthew. Perhaps the empty tomb narrative represents the last historical word on what is essentially an a-historical experience. The attachment of the empty tomb narrative gives some historical counterpoint to a claim of faith.

Points of interpretation

(1) For the NT, (a) Resurrection is not simply that which is added to Jesus' life as if it were a new thing on a different plane, but has to do with the historical meaning of his own existence which is brought to fulfilment; and (b) the Resurrection cannot be separated from Jesus' mission and message (cf. John 20:29).

(2) Resurrection as experience leads to the forging of community – in Pauline language, Christ as 'first fruits' from the dead is associated with the work of the Spirit described as 'fruit'. (Note that Paul does not speak of 'the fruits of the Spirit' but 'the fruit of the Spirit' as a corporate singular.)

(3) Jesus' message of the kingdom of God is characterised by a sense of God's fulfilment breaking in upon the present. The church's belief in Resurrection continues this idea of the cosmic significance of Christ for all things realising itself in the life of the world.

The earliest accounts

1 Cor. 15:3-8 and Mark 16:1-8 are the earliest records, in that order.

1 Cor. 15:3-8

Paul is countering here a claim that the Resurrection is already past (cf. 4:11-13 and 2 Tim. 2:18), and therefore reminding the church of future fulfilment and God's judgement upon Christian life and witness. The chapter also contains a note of consolation for those who doubt the Resurrection, in the light of believers who have already passed away. In the tradition that Paul transmits, the phrase 'according to the Scriptures' in verses 3 and 4 seems to be an interpretative addition by the church transmission process. The phrase 'was buried' is the confirmation of the fact of Jesus' death, and 'was seen' is the confirmation of his being raised. We may note the way in which the experience of the Resurrection forces a shift in grammar – 'Christ died / Christ was buried' are in the past complete tense (called the aorist in Greek); but 'Christ has been raised' is a true perfect tense (i.e. an event whose significance is not past completed but which continues). The grammar is being constrained by the experience. It emphasises that 'Christ has been raised and is alive now'.

'He appeared' in verses 8 and 9.1 raises questions about what kind of seeing and what was seen.

(a) What kind of seeing?

Here the verbs (Greek: *heoraka* / *ôphthê*) can cover a wide range from mental to physical perception. If we proceed by elimination, one could say the following.

(i) It means 'mental perception'. So 'seeing' Jesus is the same as Gal. 1:15ff, 'God revealed his son in me'.

Resurrection is the dawning of truth in Paul's own calling, i.e. something like a realisation of a vocation. Yet these verbs in biblical Greek always imply some

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vision, i.e. something that a person believes he/she is actually seeing.

(ii) So, one might say it is a physical perception, and yet for Paul it also does entail an inward experience (Gal. 1:16). Equally, the different accounts of Paul's Damascus Road experience (Acts 9:3ff; 22:6ff; 26:12ff) suggest Paul's own personal encounter – what he sees, which is not available to others around him.

(iii) This leaves a visionary experience – whether it was something wholly internal or involved something 'out there' we cannot be sure. But the evidence seems to be that it caught Paul completely unawares and that he was convinced that it was something/someone he saw. It was not an event he caused, but which happened to him wholly unexpectedly, and which changed his life.

We can reinforce this by reference to the following:

(i) There was nothing in Paul's mind to prepare him – cf. 15:8 where he refers to himself as 'one untimely born' (in the Greek: *ektrōma*) which implies a sudden/lack of gestation. This is an odd metaphor for Paul to use. The problem is not that Paul arrived too early but too late, so to speak. Some scholars think that Paul is referring here to a gibe that others have made against him, perhaps with reference to his physical appearance (cf. 2 Cor. 10:10) or more widely as an 'incomer' – not one of those who were part of the company of Jesus. Perhaps some referred to Paul as a 'freak'? But the metaphor has this edge, that Paul's experience of Jesus was unexpected. As a Pharisee, he would have believed beforehand in the idea of a general Resurrection, and he was no doubt aware that the early church spoke of Christ resurrected. But this was not what he was anticipating.

(ii) The Greek verb *ôphthê* is passive, and indicates that the initiative lies with what is seen and not with the seer. 'He appeared' really means 'he showed himself' rather than 'he was seen by' (cf. Gal. 1:12 'revelation of Jesus Christ' = revelation of/by Jesus himself, as a subjective genitive rather than an objective genitive: i.e. Jesus' own revelation, rather than Jesus as the content of revelation/revelation 'about him').

(iii) Paul distinguishes between this and other spiritual experiences. He attaches it quite unselfconsciously to the list of Resurrection appearances and he knows of no other appearances after this. His claim, 'I have seen' (*heoraka* is the perfect tense in Greek), signifies an initial experience that defines his apostleship and shapes the subsequent course of his life.

(b) What was seen?

For Paul it was quite simply Jesus (glorified), and he nowhere goes on to describe him (contrast Rev. 1:12ff). We have to assume that Paul knew it was Jesus – something in the experience identified Jesus, whether Paul had actually previously seen Jesus or not. What Paul encountered was a simultaneous blinding light and perception, according to Acts (cf. 2 Cor. 4:6), and in Jewish perspective this described a manifestation of God (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:4; cf. Phil. 3:21 'his body of glory'). Paul's reticence might arise from there being no further detail available (compare the Transfiguration stories in the Synoptic Gospels), or because it eluded description as eschatological reality. Paul was convinced he had seen 'the glory of God in the face of Christ' (2 Cor. 4:6), noting how the two (God and Christ) are inextricably bound up together,

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and that it was an experience without comparison in his subsequent life.

Mark 16:1-8

This ending (which is likely the original ending of Mark) is difficult, not least in that the commandment in v.7 is not fulfilled by the women, though it recalls 14:28. Perhaps the best meaning of the words 'And they went away and said nothing to anyone' is, quite simply, 'And they spoke to no one on the road back'. It could also have a metaphorical reference to the great awe which falls upon witnesses who have come across the End of all things, the eschatological reality that stuns into silence. After all, it is the fear of God which is the beginning of all wisdom.

Notably, the story of the tomb is not about proving the Resurrection; it produces only puzzlement, and a connection has to be drawn by the angel (cf. John 20:1ff, where Mary goes only to lament and runs away in bewilderment on discovering the tomb to be empty). Its discovery does not lead to faith in and of itself.

The empty tomb narrative lies alongside that of the Resurrection. (There is in fact no Resurrection appearance but only an allusion to a promise, as in 14:28.) Luke 24:34 also has a Christophany aspect, independent of the tomb narrative. The viability of the tomb narrative rests to some extent on an understanding that if Jesus is raised, the tomb must have been empty. But the earliest Christology summons us back to Jesus' vindication after rejection. It may be that the developing message (*kerygma*) of the church drew into it the empty tomb tradition as a didactic support, though that is not to pass any comment itself on the historical reliability of the tomb narrative.

It is difficult to say that no one went back to have a look at the tomb (cf. John 11:39 – Jesus was buried for less than four days). Of course, the absence of a body does not prove a Resurrection. This takes us to a discussion of the nature of Resurrection. The NT speaks of the resurrection of body rather than the 'flesh' (cf. Paul's extended discussion in 1 Cor. 15:12ff). But it is possible that the empty tomb tradition is itself early, a Resurrection tradition unit that circulated in parallel to the Resurrection narratives, and later became joined to them.

The location of the Resurrection appearances is problematic. Mark and Matthew emphasise Galilee, while Luke and John focus on Jerusalem. Some have attempted a resolution on the basis of pilgrim festivals: i.e. the disciples leave at the end of Passover and return at Pentecost. But it may be that the accounts cannot be harmonised. Instead, they reflect the special interests of the Gospels or of their underlying communities. Accordingly, they weave the experience of Resurrection into their own particular contexts.

Conclusion

The dynamic of Resurrection affirmed for the church the eschatological presence of God in Christ, and linked this intimately and indissolubly to the work of the Spirit in worship, witness and service.

Accordingly, it did not necessarily distinguish between historical and revelatory sayings. Paul and the other apostles believed that they were speaking with the authority of the present Christ, and therefore sayings, ethical teachings, prophetic exhortations and warnings could become harmonised as 'inspired utterance' within and for the church. Luke 24:44, 'while I was still with you', reflects a certain awareness of the paradox.

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Mark 9:38ff suggests that some awareness of Jesus' exaltation is in the background in the invocation to overcome evil spirits. In the tradition transmission process, the time of the church is not necessarily distinguished from the time of Jesus (Matt.

7:21/Luke 6:46; Matt. 18:20), and consequently we can detect debates and discussions of the church within the narrative of Jesus' teachings and actions across the Gospels (e.g. in some of the parables and their outcomes).

Glossary

Apologetics: the working out of the explanation and defence of a particular belief or doctrine.

Christology: the doctrine or study of the person of Christ.

Gnostic / Gnostics: from the Greek *gignōskō* meaning 'know/get to know'; a belief in a special or esoteric knowledge that brings salvation.

Eschatological: from the Greek *eschatos* meaning 'last', that which has to do with the conceived End (of ordinary reality).

Links

<http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcantorbury.org/articles.php/1380/risen-indeed-the-resurrection-in-the-gospels> (Rowan Williams, 2008, 'Risen Indeed': The Resurrection in the Gospels)

<http://www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk/archives/000556.html> (Rowan Williams, 2004, Easter Sermon)

Discussion points

1. How do you think the early church came to understand the meaning of resurrection to include not just humanity but the whole created order (Romans 8:19-24; Colossians 1:15-20; cf. Proverbs 8:22-36)?
2. Compare and contrast the Christian belief in resurrection with the idea of fulfilment expressed in other world religions.
3. Paul speaks of the resurrection of the body as distinct from the resurrection of the flesh (Romans 8:9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:35-58). How do you understand this distinction?

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Thomas Aquinas and Just Cause for War

Emily Pollard

This article discusses Thomas Aquinas' definition of a just cause for war, and offers criticisms of his argument.

Specification links:

EDEXCEL Unit 1 Foundations, Area B Ethics, 2 A study of ethical dilemmas, Issues of war and peace.

AQA 2B Christianity, Good conduct and key moral principle.

According to just war theory, in order for a war to be considered just one of the most important requirements is a just cause. Many just war theorists explain what a just cause is by listing examples of possible just causes. Some of these derive from the definitions and examples given by early just war theorists such as St. Augustine, who argued that 'just wars are defined as those which avenge injuries ... or to return something that was wrongfully taken' (Augustine, 1983, p. 135).

Thomas Aquinas also defined a just cause as one of these two reasons, but added an explanation for why these reasons justify war – it is because, he argues, the 'wrongs inflicted' or the fact that something (territory or assets, perhaps) has been 'seized unjustly' means that 'those who are attacked, should be attacked because they deserve it' (Aquinas, 1947, p. 1360). It is this explanation I intend to analyse in this article.

Aquinas' account of just cause

Thus, Aquinas' account of just cause states that one has a just cause if the enemy 'deserve it on account of some fault' (1947, p. 1360). In other words, the justification for war that a just cause provides is based not on the moral position of the country that is considering whether they have just cause for war, but on the moral position of *the country they are contemplating fighting*. If the latter 'deserves' to be fought, then one has just cause to fight them.

It seems that the justification for war provided by a just cause is, according to this account, based on the latter group's deserving to be fought in order to be punished for their misdeeds or corrected in their errors. According to this interpretation, then, Countries A, B and so on do not have a specific just cause to make war on Country C; the point is, rather, that it is just that Country C be made war upon. To put it another way, there exists a subject-independent just

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cause to wage war against Country C 'on account of some fault'.

Aquinas' answer to the question of what 'fault' can make a country 'deserve' armed attack is to refer to the just causes listed by Augustine. Augustine suggested such causes as: a war to 'return something that was wrongfully taken', to 'avenge injuries' and to 'punish a wrong committed by [the enemy country's] citizens', if the leaders or government of that country have 'neglected' to do so themselves (Augustine, 1983, p. 135). From these proposed just causes, we can see that Aquinas' definitions of a 'fault' that would make a country 'deserve' attack (1947, p. 1360) would include: (1) 'injuries' against other countries, such as an unprovoked aggressive attack, or the invasion of the injured country by the injurer; (2) 'unjustly seizing' something that belongs to another country or people – for instance territory, or citizens' lives, liberty or means of subsistence; and (3) the 'punishment' of wrongs that it is the injuring country's responsibility to punish or prevent, but has failed to do so – perhaps because it (or its leaders) were performing or profiting from the 'wrong'.

War as punishment of a wrong

The third 'fault' that Aquinas recognises, that of a 'wrong inflicted' by the citizens of a country which the country in question has failed to punish, requires further definition. Obvious examples, which have been accepted by many just war theorists besides Augustine and Aquinas, include unprovoked aggression against or invasion of a fellow nation and the subjugation, ill treatment or massacre of other groups within that nation, either state-sponsored or ignored by the state.

But there is another category of 'wrong' that Augustine appears to endorse: that of 'religious wrong'. He writes, for

instance, that 'it is not permissible to doubt that it is right to undertake a war which men undertake to wage under God's authority either to strike terror into, wear down, or subdue the pride of mortals' (Augustine, 2007, p. 352).

The 'wrongs' in the first category, such as aggression or subjugation, are wrongs against people which can clearly be seen as 'wrong'. The second possibility, however, which includes wars undertaken 'under God's authority' to 'subdue the pride of mortals', seems to suggest a war fought to punish some deviation from God's plans or commandments, such as voluntary moral 'corruption' amongst the citizens of a country (an echo of the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah), which might, in Augustine's words, 'help them in practicing patience and in humbling the soul' (2007, p. 352). Thus, the 'wrongs' that Augustine argues we are justified in waging war to 'punish' and 'correct' (an argument that Aquinas continues, elaborating upon but not substantially altering) are *both* actions which are morally wrong for consequentialist reasons (such as aggression), *and* actions which, he argues, are morally wrong because they contravene the 'divine law'.

The problem with this second 'fault' is the most obvious (to twenty-first century eyes, at least); and I shall therefore explain it very briefly. Religion is, in many ways, an unsuitable moral standard to apply universally. Aquinas (and Augustine) believed that the Christian way of life is 'divinely appointed', set out by God as the *only* right way for *all* men and women (not just Christians) to live. This belief that God's rules and commandments constitute a 'divine law' that it is morally wrong to break, leads them to treat this 'fault' as though it were an unquestionably absolute moral

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standard. Not only is this doubtful, but it is a dangerously slippery slope towards absolute religious war.

What does it mean to 'deserve' to be warred against?

Even if transgressions against what Aquinas saw as the one 'true' religion are excluded from the list of 'faults', however, his argument is still problematic, as A. J. Coates pointed out. Coates wrote a critique of traditional just war theory's 'one-sided and exaggerated emphasis on just cause' (Coates, 1997, p. 146), but I believe this criticism is applicable as an objection to the argument that just wars are just because the country being fought 'deserves' to be punished for its faults by means of military attack. Coates wrote of the danger of governments or countries succumbing to 'a moral triumphalism and a moral enthusiasm for war that transform a "just" war into a "holy" or a crusading war, and that have more in common with the militarist tradition than they have with the just war tradition'. Coates argues that such a tendency can be generated by an emphasis upon just cause to the exclusion of all other *jus ad bellum* criteria, because the 'absolute conviction that their cause is just' can lead people into this dangerous attitude (1997, p. 146).

I believe, however, that fighting a war solely because of the 'conviction' that the enemy, collectively speaking, are guilty of various crimes or 'faults' may generate similar 'triumphalist' views. This is the case whether these 'faults' are religious or moral (such as greed, in stealing the land or resources of another country); 'pride' that needs 'subduing'; a cultural tendency towards aggressive behaviour; or customs that one's own moral standards find repugnant (enforced

marriage, for instance). For when it is claimed that a war is justified because the enemy *deserves* to be attacked, since there is something wrong with them and their actions that must be 'punished' by morally superior countries, it is just as easy to slip into the 'absolute conviction' that a war for such a cause is not merely 'justified' but 'holy' – as it is a war against people who 'deserve it', the transgressors, the 'evildoers', those who are 'the consummation of evil' (Coates, 1997, p. 146).

One possible illustration of the danger of such a conviction might be Nazi Germany, as it could be argued that Hitler's campaign against the Jews had many similar elements to a war. Jeffrey Herf, for instance, argued that 'the war against the Jews was in their [the Nazis'] mind synonymous with World War II' (Herf, 2006, p. 264). Hitler and his followers were similarly convinced that the Jews deserved to be 'fought', and this conviction was soon accompanied by another conviction, equally strong, that they were somehow inherently evil.

The slippery slope problem

In this example, wars (or non-military campaigns of hatred) were driven past the point where they might otherwise have stopped, largely by the notion that the enemy deserved what they were getting. Whatever defensive motives might have played a part were twisted out of shape by this notion, in that (in the example of the Nazis, for instance) without the belief that the enemy were in some way 'evil' there might have been less, or even no fear that they posed a danger.

Coates succinctly defines the reason why such attitudes as 'moral triumphalism and moral enthusiasm for war' are undesirable. Such attitudes, he argues, 'encourage combatants to override

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the moral limits of war or to neglect other equally weighty moral considerations, such as the costs of war or the shedding of innocent blood'. This is because the idea, encouraged by this definition of just cause (that the 'adversary' one is facing in battle is 'the consummation of evil'), can lead combatants to believe that, if defeating an enemy so evil necessitates breaking one or two rules of just military conduct, then doing so for the greater good may be acceptable.

This is because the definition of just cause as the fact that the enemy 'deserves' to be attacked 'on account of some fault' (Aquinas) also means that the enemy 'deserves' to be defeated by that attack, since if one's opponent deserves to be the target of military attack then one's opponent must deserve to lose the ensuing war. The idea of his culpability, his 'deserving' to be fought and defeated, can lead to what Coates describes as 'the absolute conviction that ... the adversary against whom [one] fight[s] is the consummation of evil'; and, therefore, to the conviction that this adversary must be defeated at all costs: that the rules of just conduct in war can be overridden by the necessity of defeating such an enemy, an enemy whom, if one's cause is just, deserves its defeat.

The problem inherent in a definition of just cause that leads to governments and

combatants sometimes justifying the overriding of *jus in bello* constraints, whenever it becomes necessary to win a war with such a just cause, is clear. The *jus in bello* rules were established to show that there are certain kinds of behaviour that are morally unacceptable in any war, just or unjust. If Aquinas' definition of just cause were accepted, then the grounding of the justifiability of war upon the evil deeds or nature of the enemy, and the fact that the natural conclusion of this basis for justification is that the defeat of such an enemy is a paramount goal, are in danger of giving any who accept this view the idea that *just cause has overriding priority over other moral considerations such as the just conduct of war*. This is a dangerous slippery slope, which means that 'just' wars are likely to degenerate into the bloodiest and most violent of wars.

Thus, it seems clear that the ideal definition of just cause is that of a cause which justifies recourse to war as a means of achieving it, but does *not* justify resorting to any means of warfare in order to do so; a cause, in short, which can be overridden by *jus in bello* rather than the other way around. It is also clear that Aquinas' definition of just cause is *not* such a definition.

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Glossary

Consequentialist: an advocate of the ethical theory of consequentialism, which states that the morality of any action depends entirely upon the value of its consequences.

Jus ad bellum: A set of criteria that, according to just war theory, must be fulfilled for anybody to be justified in declaring war – including just

cause, legitimate authority and reasonable chance of success.

Jus in bello: Moral rules that constrain the military actions and tactics that are ethically permissible in war.

Links

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aquinas/> (Ralph McInerny, 2014, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aquinas-moral-political/> (John Finnis, 2017, Aquinas' Moral, Political, and Legal Philosophy, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/aquinas/> (Thomas Aquinas, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

Discussion points

1. What do you think of the list of 'faults' that Aquinas argued would justify war against the country that committed them? Would you disagree with any of them?
2. On what grounds might you argue that a military response could be justified to halt and correct another country's 'faults'?

3. Do you agree that a slippery slope results from the assertion that one only has a just cause for war if the enemy *deserves* to be fought? Why?

Thomas Aquinas and Just Cause for War

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