

The structure of the human act is that we choose means in view of an end, and we do so on the basis of knowledge of the connection between a means and an end.

From the nature of the human act, it follows that the only locus moral evil moral evil can have is our conscious using of a means-end connection to direct our action. For that is the only way we can control our action rationally. So the question is in what can the evil of using means X for end Y consist?

To the extent that we behave rationally, we direct our actions or refraining from action by our rational beliefs about connections between ends and means. Assume that eating ice cream is seriously bad for your health. When you are tempted to have some ice cream your decision consists (at least in part, but it is an essential part) in selecting between different, but not contradictory, pieces of rational awareness about ends-means connections: (1) your belief that eating ice cream is a means contrary to the end of health; (2) your belief that eating ice cream is a means to the end of gustatory pleasure. Choosing not to have the ice cream amounts to using your belief about the ends/means connection in (1) to direct yourself toward the goals you will accomplish in life. Choosing to eat the ice cream amounts to using your belief about the ends/means connection in (2) to direct yourself toward goals.

The answer is that a rational decision selects means in view of an end. To the extent that we act rationally, we use our knowledge of what things are in acting. Here "use" means "allow knowledge of X to direct my behavior." (Direct in the sense of using knowledge as a map, i.e., knowledge that is act leads to this end.) What directs my external action is my knowledge action X will, e.g., cause Joe's death, the way my knowledge that ice cream causes pleasure directs my action, instead of the knowledge that ice cream causes an increase in weight and cholesterol.

To the extent that we act rationally, we use our knowledge to direct our external actions toward conscious ends. The knowledge we use is the knowledge that external act X will cause end Y.

This is what intending the death of someone as a means amounts to: using our knowledge that killing Joe will cause, e.g., pleasure as the knowledge by which we direct the external behavior toward the conscious end of pleasure. We might do some external act, e.g., act Y, in the knowledge that act Y will cause the death of Joe, but just knowing that act Y will cause the death of Joe while we do Y does not mean that the death of Joe was our intention in doing act Y. For the knowledge that directs us in doing act Y might be knowledge of act Y's connection with some other end than the death of Joe. If so, then the death of Joe is incidental relative to our intention, even though we know Joe's death will result. For whenever we direct our behavior by a piece of knowledge, we know many other things besides the piece of knowledge we are then using to guide our behavior. That is what the ice cream/pleasure/cholesterol example shows.

That we use some of our knowledge and not others to consciously direct our external behavior is both a fact of experience and a necessary conclusion of causal analysis. For how else could we consciously direct our external behavior, our purposeful external behavior, if not by some beliefs about a connection between an end or a means, or at least an hypothesis about a connection between an end and a means? Of course, the selection of the knowledge to use may have taken place a long time ago so that we no longer have to deliberate or make that selection or even consciously make use of that knowledge now; that is, we can act "unconsciously" now.

Why should this kind of causal knowledge be morally important, even to override great differences in the proportion of good and evil in the consequences of our acts? For one thing, knowledge of such necessary causal connections is what reason as something specific to and defining of human nature, is all about. To act rationally, therefore, is to select motives using such knowledge. We have no other way to select motives for our behavior rationally. Therefore, what ever is necessarily connected with motive X by

rational knowledge, rather than accidental circumstance, cannot be separated from our selection of motives, while what is only accidentally connected with motive X must be so separated, if we are to be able to select motives in the only way possible to do so.

For another thing, in evaluating ourselves relative to other human beings, and vice versa, we are evaluating ourselves precisely as causes, for we are evaluating ourselves as agents oriented to achieving ends by means of choices based on rational knowledge. In using one piece of causal knowledge rather than another, that causal knowledge becomes an extension of you. You become, you will yourself to be, a cause of end X by means Y. In choosing an act with whose nature the death of an innocent person is only accidentally connected, I am willing to become a cause with which the death of that person is only accidentally connected. In choosing an act with whose nature the death of an innocent person is connected by natural necessity, I am willing to be a cause of a kind with which the death of an innocent person is connected by natural necessity, ie., by the nature, the self-identity, of the kind of cause I am choosing to be. By necessity of its nature the act causes death. And hence by necessity of my nature as a cause that chooses this act, or as a cause by way of choosing this act knowing it's nature, I willing become a cause of death by necessity of what I am evaluating myself to be. (And though I am a cause, I do not cause the natures of my acts to be what they are. As a limited, created cause, I have no power over the natures of the acts that I can choose between; I am stuck with their being what they are. If I act as if I were not stuck with them being what they are, I evaluate myself as if I were not what I am. For example, it is not in my power to change the fact that in directly killing an innocent person for a "good" purpose, I am making what I am to be a cause of the death of an innocent person.)

Why should this analysis of the human act make any moral difference? That depends on our theory of moral value. If moral evil consists in evaluating myself to be other than I am with respect to human ends and means to ends, then . . . Likewise, my responsibility extends at least as far as what necessarily belongs to the nature of the act I choose knowing what belongs necessarily to its nature. The question is does my responsibility extend any further than that? It can.

For an explanation of why this merely causal analysis has moral significance (Hart), see my comments on Finnis's abortion article, p. 134. The question is not what is my duty toward another, or what right's she has, but what is just or unjust behavior toward her, what kind of behavior is she due given what she is and what I am. It would at least be unjust for me to so act that I choose to direct my behavior by the knowledge that act X, by necessity of its nature, will cause her death; for then I become a cause of her death by necessity of the nature I am adopting by so directing my behavior. But does it follow that it is also unjust for me to perform an act of any nature, in any circumstance and for any intention, that causes her death? No. There are many circumstances where choosing such acts would not be unjust, would not be opposed to what is due her by what she is and what I am as a rationally conscious agent. So now the converse. Since there are many cases where it is not unjust to choose an act that does not by necessity of its nature cause her death, does it follow that it is also not unjust for me to knowingly choose an act that is the same thing as killing her by necessity of the nature of the act so chosen? No, refraining from such an act on my part is due her, because of what she is and because of what I am as a decider who knows what she is and knows what the nature of my acts are.

Or put it this way, does it follow that in choosing such an act I would not be failing to achieve an end my decisions must achieve if they are to be decisions that are not defective morally? (But am I undercut by the analysis at the top of Finnis, abortion article, p. 137? Or, am I undercut by an example like that on p. 136, where removing the fetus kills it, but only because we have not yet invented an artificial womb? Two possibilities: Grisez is right that this case is not direct killing, though would only be justified if the mother's life is at stake. Or, it is direct killing because

any cause that by nature produces X might not produce X if other causes were present. So the mere absence of other causes won't do. Sight by nature produces seeing, but science might find a way to construct an environment where sight does not produce seeing, even in the presence of sufficient light.)

If we do not intend the death of Joe as a means to an end, we still may not be justified in performing act Y, because the good intended may not be commensurate with the evil constituted by Joe's death. But we at least have an explanation of the psychological causal relations involved in intending or not intending Joe's death as a means. That explanation may or may not be good for identifying individual instances, but it is good for understanding psychological causal relations. Is it also good for understanding causal relations between moral word-functions? Yes.

"Ceasing to consider, e.g., "the rule," consists in this: we cease deliberating about whether to use this piece of knowledge about the causal connection between means and end to direct our external action (or voluntary refraining from external action) toward an end consciously grasped as such (or just "a consciously grasped, contemplated, end"). You cease to consider a piece of causal knowledge relative to your need to use some, and not every, piece of knowledge to attain your end, or some end, in the situation you are in, i.e., a situation in which you cannot not make decisions concerning future ends using knowledge. This is as opposed to situations like, e.g., daydreaming. While deliberating about an end, you can drift off into daydreaming involuntarily; if so, you are no longer in a state where you cannot not use some knowledge to attain an end and so cannot not have to cease considering some piece of knowledge that may incline you to an opposite decision. You can voluntarily choose to daydream. If so, you used some rational knowledge to do it. If you drifted off involuntarily, then the situation was one where you cannot not use some piece of knowledge, unless some outside cause results in your ceasing to consider any piece of knowledge a directive of external action. Still, you had to cease considering; only the cessation of consideration was not an act you caused.

To act rationally, we have to use causal knowledge. If we have not decided on opposite courses of action, different pieces of causal knowledge must be competing for use in directing us toward ends. To act, therefore, we have to cease considering a piece of knowledge insofar as it bears on directing our external action toward an end here and now; we have to cease considering it as something that will direct our action. After we cease considering it, the die is cast; everything proceeds necessarily, unless we change our mind. The "die" is the knowledge that means X will produce end X.

This helps with the problem of why you can wish, hope, and pray for death (all acts of the will) but not choose suicide. The knowledge by which I direct my external action cannot be the knowledge that act X will be the cause of my death. I can choose to pray that I die. If so, the knowledge by which I direct my behavior is the knowledge the act may be the occasion for the legitimate agent with authority over my life to cause my death. Prayer does not "cause" God to do anything; nothing can be a cause relative to God. But if I choose to kill myself by act X, I am making myself the cause of my death. The end, e.g., of avoiding pain cannot justify a decision in which knowledge that an act will cause death and death will cause the end of the pain is used as a means to avoid pain. But it can justify a decision to pray for death for the sake of avoiding pain.

In suicide we are "alone with the bare problem of" (Finnis, abortion article, p. 130) the relation between one's act and the end of conforming our decisions to what reason knows about values, the end of evaluating ourselves and our actions, and our existence, and our life, to be what they are. Our existence is an orientation to ends, which orientation will be frustrated by the choice of suicide.

Also, the kind of cause we really are, as opposed to the kind of cause we may evaluate ourselves to be, is morally relevant. We are limited causes with limited knowledge and, hence, limited responsibility. But we can defectively evaluate ourselves as if we were causes responsible for the common good materially considered. It seems that, if we do not kill the baby, we become responsible for the destruction of mankind. No, we do not become responsible for it. (Or is the baby responsible, and therefore not innocent, because she is doing something that would be unjust in these circumstances, if she had the use of reason?) And trying to become so responsible would be an evil act, a decision defective by reason of evaluating us to be other than we are with respect to human value, i.e., with respect to being ends and means to ends.

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In directing ourselves toward ends, in selecting means for the sake of ends, we cannot avoid either relating to things as if they are what they are or as if they are not what they are. Or consider this paragraph on birth control from elsewhere in the notes files:

We cannot use our person-making power outside of a context in which we leave the use of that power open to making persons. Nature may close the context so that persons cannot be made, but we cannot. This illustrates the sense in which we are responsible for our actions, not for their results. Or better, the sense in which ethics governs good or evil actions, regardless of results. The action in question is the act of the will. Just as it is against the goal of the rational appetite to evaluate ourselves to be agents oriented to our own destruction, and to the cessation of our orientation to ends, it is against the nature of the rational appetite to evaluate ourselves to be agents oriented to the preventing our person-making power from making persons.

The knowledge that directs my action cannot be the knowledge that act X will cause a posited sex act to be infertile, i.e., to achieve the end of being free from children. But I can use the knowledge that nature will cause a posited sex act to be infertile as the knowledge that directs my choice of whether or not to have sex.

[SEE THE SECOND SET OF BRACKETED REMARKS IN THE PRECEDING PARAGRAPH. WANTING TO BE THE CAUSE OF MY DEATH OR WANTING TO SO DIRECT MY BEHAVIOR BY MY KNOWLEDGE THAT I MAKE MYSELF THE CAUSE OF MY DEATH IS THE THING THAT VIOLATES THE FINALITY OF THE RA TO EVALUATE THINGS TO BE WHAT THEY ARE.] I can wish that I or another person die; I can want for myself or another person to be dead. I cannot morally will that a human being, myself or another, die as a result of an action of mine chosen in knowledge of the fact that the person will die as a result of this action. [NOT JUST "CHOSEN IN KNOWLEDGE OF . . . AS A RESULT . . ." BUT "SO CHOSEN THAT THE KNOWLEDGE BY WHICH I DIRECT MY EXTERNAL BEHAVIOR TOWARD AN END IS THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THIS ACTION WILL PRODUCE THE RESULT OF THIS DEATH."] E.g., if I remove a cancerous uterus, I know the fetus will die; but I do not want it to die and am not choosing its death. I can want my own death, but cannot knowingly choose a course of action that will lead to that death. [NOT JUST "WILL LEAD TO . . ." BUT "WILL MAKE ME THE CAUSE OF THAT DEATH PRECISELY BY WAY OF MY DIRECTING MY EXTERNAL BEHAVIOR BY THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THE ACTION WILL CAUSE THE DEATH." FOR PRAYER IS CHOSEN IN THE HOPE THAT IT WILL "LEAD TO DEATH." BUT I CANNOT CHOOSE TO, FOR EXAMPLE, SMOKE IN THE HOPE THAT IT WILL LEAD TO MY EARLIER DEATH. Notice that here I expand the thought about directing my behavior by the knowledge that action X will cause end Y by the thought about knowingly choosing to direct my behavior by the knowledge that act X will cause death will make me the cause of that death. And not just that it will make me the cause of that death; for I could

be the incidental cause of that death. Rather, that choice will make me the cause of that death by way of intending that death as a means to my end.] But I can sacrifice my life for another, but I do not will that my death occur as a result of my act of sacrifice. I do not will that there be a connection between my act of sacrifice and my death.

I cannot will to be the cause of death, the agent of death. If so, I am knowingly evaluating something to be other than what I know it to be. That is, I am treating something as if it were not what it is. But I am not treating something as if it were not what it is, if I want to die; only if I want to be the cause of death. [SEE THE SECOND SET OF BRACKETED REMARKS IN THE PRECEDING PARAGRAPH. WANTING TO BE THE CAUSE OF MY DEATH OR WANTING TO SO DIRECT MY BEHAVIOR BY MY KNOWLEDGE THAT I MAKE MYSELF THE CAUSE OF MY DEATH IS THE THING THAT VIOLATES THE FINALITY OF THE RA TO EVALUATE THINGS TO BE WHAT THEY ARE.] Only if I want to be that which deprives a human being of any further pursuit of ends. My nature is such as to be an orientation to the further pursuit of human ends. I can want that pursuit to stop; but if I want to be the cause of its stopping, I want to be other than what I am; I even want my rational appetite to be other than what it is. [I CAN WANT TO BE OTHER THAN WHAT I AM, E.G., OTHER THAN A TECHNICAL WRITER. THAT IS NOT THE SAME AS EVALUATING MYSELF TO BE, NOW, OTHER THAN WHAT I AM.]

I am treating a human agent as if that agent were not an end in itself, treating a human cause, a cause of human behavior, as if it were not an end in itself. I am treating a causal system oriented to pursuing human ends in a human way, as if it were not an end in itself. For I am cutting off its further pursuit of ends. Better, I am choosing to be the agent that cuts off the further pursuit of human ends, rather than be what I am, an agent that pursues human ends, an agent that is what it is for the sake of the pursuit of human ends. [IF I CHOOSE TO CUT OFF THE PURSUIT OF HUMAN ENDS, MY CHOICE FAILS TO EVALUATE ME TO BE WHAT I AM, NAMELY, AN AGENT WHOSE CHOICES HAVE THE VERY END, HUMAN ENDS, WHOSE ACHIEVEMENT I AM PREVENTING.]

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