

The Catholic Lawyer

Volume 26
Number 1 *Volume 26, Winter 1980, Number 1*

Article 6

September 2017

Freedom Through Value

Rev. John S. Conner, C.M.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/tcl>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rev. John S. Conner, C.M. (1980) "Freedom Through Value," *The Catholic Lawyer*. Vol. 26 : No. 1 , Article 6.
Available at: <https://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/tcl/vol26/iss1/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at St. John's Law Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Catholic Lawyer by an authorized editor of St. John's Law Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact selbyc@stjohns.edu.

FREEDOM THROUGH VALUE

REV. JOHN S. CONNER, C.M.*

As an "old sailor," associated with airmen and soldiers during World War II, I have reflected frequently upon a valuable lesson in living learned from those shared experiences. By analogy, those several associations symbolize rather strikingly the problem which this paper confronts and, therefore, are helpful in delineating its basic outlines. Not unexpectedly, units representing either the Army, Navy, or Air Force ordinarily react quite differently, physically speaking, to a common pressing concern—a storm. Flying high, airmen rise above the disturbance and thus achieve a superior security. Roving on the ground, weather-beaten soldiers simply seek cover beneath whatever protective devices are available. Out at sea, where waves intensify the wind and rain's melee, sailors sharply "batten-down," reduce speed, and steam ahead into the upheaval, despite the difficulties that effort entails.

Expanding upon such distinctive problematic approaches as a further aid toward understanding their import for the present study, we consider a similar set of metaphysical correlations. Angelic creatures, hovering above our earthly domain, assume a superior, intuitive, near-pure qualitative or idealistic stance while handling human or other creaturely problems. St. Thomas Aquinas tells us this is due to the eminently spiritual, non-corporeal nature these agents enjoy.¹ At creation's opposite extremity—the earth-bound level below, where physical beings largely have their haunts—an inferior, instinctive, heavily quantified or pragmatic attitude prevails. St. Thomas explains that this necessarily follows from their chiefly corporeal, decidedly material nature.² The human condition fits between those two contrasting types, Aquinas advises, because the human condition combines both earthly, corporeal, and heavenly spiritual

* LL.B., University of Maryland, Baltimore; M.A., Catholic University of America; M. Div., Catholic University of America; B.S., Loyola College, Baltimore.

¹ ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGICA* Pt. 1, Quest. 55, Art. 2 (Fathers of the English Dominican Province, trans. 1947).

² *Id.* at Quest. 76, Art. 6, ad. 2; Quest. 83, Art. 1.

capacities.³ Humans consequently constitute what can be called creation's middle-class. They have a share of the angelically intuitive, qualitative, idealistic power; and they also possess the physical, instinctive, quantitative, and pragmatic traits. Their nature is therefore a consolidated kind, and it accordingly requires regular "battening-down" endeavors to cope properly with the problems of living.

Some Crucial Implications of the Human Condition

Since human beings are simultaneously spiritual and corporeal, hence possessing intuitive or qualitatively inclined abilities supplemented by instinctive or quantitatively attracted tendencies, a certain balancing must occur. On the theoretical plane, we recognize this as reason's inherent role. Choice represents its practical counterpart. Through the reasoning process, reality's qualitative and quantitative aspects can be correlated as befits both the subject's and the object's nature. The quantitative aspect contains the basic organic and dynamic pattern which guides a creature's proper development. It determines each individual's essential type, and the traits variously exercised for existential fulfillment. To the degree that the spiritual-qualitative element predominates, freedom of choice characterizes the agent. When the qualitative nature merely integrates rather than thoroughly dominates—the case with physical creation—only automatic, relatively indiscriminate activity transpires. Humanly considered reason makes the critical difference here.⁴ It enables these "blended" beings to discern clearly the corporeal (quantitative or particular) alternatives amid the spiritual (qualitative or generic) factors' controlling imprint. They then can make realistic comparative evaluations, and accordingly freely choose one over another.⁵ Humans cannot do this under simple intuitive or qualitatively all-embracing insights, however, because of their limited, consolidated condition. Such action involves guidance by blind faith, inevitably producing arbitrary, inconsistent, self-projecting, rationalized results.⁶

Some Significant Ramifications of the Human Condition

Confronting existential problems humanly entails analyzing and synthesizing relevant qualitative and quantitative features reasonably in proportion to the essential value they have. Intuitive and instinctive talents indeed help here, but more or less marginally as preparatory and conclud-

³ *Id.* at Quest. 77, Art. 2.

⁴ *Id.* at Quest. 79, Art. 1, ad. 4, A. 8; Quest. 83, Art. 1.

⁵ *Id.* at Quest. 58, Art. 3; Quest. 85, Art. 5.

⁶ "Pistis and Gnosis," H. U. von Balthasar; *Communio* (Intern. Catholic Rev.) V, 1 (Spring, 1978) pp. 91-94. (The implications are shown here in a supernatural context).

ing contributors. On the whole, it is reasoned judgment which rightly decides one's reaction to an existential situation by properly evaluating the situation's essential import and determining its inherent worth. Through that penetrating, correlating, and integrating impact upon intuitive and instinctive contributions, reason does not merely develop itself as the key human cognitive component, but sharpens and strengthens those other complementary, conceptual characteristics. Their opposing general and special intimations are moderated or disciplined and, hence, become better balanced and correspondingly clarified. Reason must, however, recognize a reciprocal dependency of its own on them, deriving pertinent stimulating (ultimately inspiring) and supporting (proximately promoting) assistance therefrom.⁷ St. Thomas explains that reason must have intuitive insights into first principles before it can theoretically evaluate observed data. To apply those conclusions practically requires assistance from instinctive inclinations.

Such a systematized truth-seeking attitude is not cultivated easily. Regular, responsible effort must be exerted for progressive success. We constantly experience the temptation to take relatively evasive action. One may follow the "high-flying," angelic-like, ideal-qualitative course, simplifying the complex human issues by supposedly rising above them. At the opposite extremity, an advocate may assume a cleverly compromised, "low-lying" cover-up position. Interior, essentially superior, qualitative elements are largely buried beneath exterior, physically appealing, factual details. Either way, a person avoids the trouble connected with a carefully consolidated and adequately balanced response. Intellectuals frequently appear to favor forensically these heady and handy popular causes. Despite finely articulated and extensively accumulated arguments, the net result represents the misanthropic machination termed rationalization. General and special, objectively valid principles are artfully aligned or obtusely manipulated in manners which seemingly substantiate individually experienced intuitions or instinctive perceptions. Those openly asserted, or perhaps only insinuated, subjective preferences in effect control the ensuing theoretical scenario.

Idealism in Pro-Life Positions

Unfortunately, some avid pro-life enthusiasts exhibit this unreasonable, hence humanly unrealistic, escapist reaction along the aforesaid high-rise, ideal lines. An excellent example of angelic pro-life advocacy is found among adherents who insist upon rising above the storm caused by the battle over values. They recommend soaring serenely beyond the strife, in the supra-sensible sphere, where human life can be considered simply,

⁷ *Id.*

abstractly, and intuitively sacred.⁸ They implicitly state that insight requires no reasonable justification; rather it stems from an individually felt experience. When offered for public acceptance though, such an approach needs some supposedly thoughtful support. This usually entails manifesting, either covertly or overtly, mainly adverse attitudes toward different stands. We thus avoid evaluation and the drawing of distinctions, and instead depersonalize the individual by measuring him against types. These comparisons are inadmissible, they advise us, because we inevitably make our value estimates too low. From their exalted, assumed angelic position, the purist pro-lifers evaluate the human reasoning process and find it fatally defective. The only feasible alternative, then, must be one which leaves each individual free to follow intuitions and instincts. The resultant actions should be explainable (rationalized) and restrainable (socialized), but need not be evaluable. "Hunch and go" is the rule here, publicly powered by sufficient consenting adults.

Anti-life forces (abortionists, contraceptionists, euthanasiasts) actually advance the same anti-disciplined, unreasonable theoretical line. Differences between the two opposing camps are more apparent than real, conceptually and argumentatively. Ideologists among pro-lifers can be seen "flying high" on the "wings" of a disembodied sanctity. Despite their disavowal of qualitative concerns, they in effect, if unconsciously, represent its glorification. Ideologists among anti-lifers roam around on the ground, as it were, frenetically and fancifully festering an instinctively felt and indulged, individual freedom. Despite their alleged avowal of qualitative concerns, they implicitly glorify quantity. Perceived and promoted instinctively, quality means bodily value primarily for adult, active, and acquisitive types. We have already seen, though, how corporeal reality largely reflects quantity, or limiting materiality.

Abortionists assert the woman's free control over her body. The baby is dispensable, therefore, if the woman so wishes, because it has no respectable body. Contraceptionists plan and promote programs designed to free individuals from the uncomfortable pressures of other human bodies. Those who get through the technically diversified and multiplied defensive screens are thus assured a bigger share in available material resources and have fewer restraints upon their self-satisfying exploitation. Euthanasiasts, seemingly sympathizing with the aged, infirm, and seriously ill, loudly proclaim such persons' freedom or "right" to die "with dignity." Besides interpreting the latter notion along bodily lines—avoiding pain, worry, embarrassment, and expense—these, like other "free choice" proponents, almost always align themselves publicly with those who would limit the number of human bodies. They thereby

⁸ Stith, *Toward Freedom From Value*, 24 THE CATH. LAW. 333-60 (1979).

help insure greater freedom for "sophisticated" indulgence among the remaining active, adult, acquisitive bodies.

Purportedly professional "intellectuals" provide pseudo-scientific conceptualizations and rationalizations as a mental maneuver to justify such advanced animalistic machinations. Remarkably resembling their purist or idealist pro-life counterparts, these pragmatic theorists start from an individually felt experience, but the experience is instinctive rather than intuitive. Elevated to the principle plane under the guise of respecting, even revering, freedom, evidence is marshalled subjectively to support relevant points. In this they follow the would-be angelic opponents' example—manipulating objective data whichever way best favors initial arbitrary assumptions. While pro-life idealism focuses excessively on responsibility and neglects freedom, anti-life pragmatism simplistically stresses freedom and ignores responsibility. Both sides employ evasive tactics forensically, foregoing an approach to the problem which is both reasonable and consonant with human nature's essential validating pattern. These extremist antagonists consequently project an absurd contest. The idealists advocate life's qualitative import, though allegedly arguing against it. The pragmatists belittle life's quality through the chiefly corporeal concern they manifest for it.

Practical Impact of Pro-Life Idealism

When we consider the typical practical conclusions presented by the purist pro-lifers, it becomes possible to detect their self-contradicting condition more clearly. "High-flying" artists, whether viewed sensibly or intellectually, are difficult to identify if sighted only at the uppermost "travelling" ranges. As they descend, however, characteristic features can be discerned more exactly. Such strategical adjustments ordinarily render them readily visible and somewhat radically vulnerable as well. These not exactly complementary effects are predictable of angelically disguised humans, as well as other less camouflaged airborne creatures.

From the special spokesman mentioned marginally above, we learn that purist pro-lifers extend their interdict upon reason right down to the earthly landing or living "strip."⁹ This surely is not surprising. Since they blindly follow an arbitrarily assumed course at the higher theoretical "altitudes," where reason best insures directional consistency, one can scarcely expect a change when nearer the "ground." The many particular, familiar objects available for practical guidance then make subjective estimates sufficiently reliable. "Hunch" having carried them safely thus far, why forsake it now amid recognizable surroundings? Besides, individual autonomy has more flexibility that way, and such ultimate, subconscious

⁹ *Id.* at 334.

value must be preserved actively, even if conflicts may occur. Those risks are more tolerable, though, than requiring conformance with common, essential or typical human values which depersonalize and degrade the independent subject. Like their rationalizing tactics in the theoretical sphere, purist pro-lifers implicitly admit the need of some appropriate socializing standards on the practical plane. These largely technical "traffic" rules should remain minimal, leaving the individual "free" for all possible personal maneuverings. Lacking any objective value norms against which to measure the ensuing engagements, and guided solely by arbitrarily asserted assumptions, instinctive expedience controls action.

The anti-value advocates accordingly propose two practical principles as adequately reflecting and respecting life's sanctity. They represent additional abstract intuitions deduced from the initial insight regarding sanctity; intuitions which have been reduced or compromised radically and ridiculously under pressure from instinctively felt contemporary values. We therefore are told: "that life must not be destroyed, but that it need not always be preserved; that . . . life is infinitely valuable, but that other things may sometimes be more valuable . . . [and] that death may occasionally be welcomed."¹⁰ Realistically considered, in the light of a truly reasonable or aptly balanced outlook, such stipulations of supposedly valid alternatives contain subtle contradictions. Life must not be ended through positive or overt attack, yet it may be terminated covertly or negatively by extensive nonsupport. Rationally or comprehensively interpreted, this clearly constitutes a double standard. Viewed simply and intuitively as arbitrary responses to felt needs, a distinction can be drawn. The principle that death may be welcomed holds only on the intentional (purposeful, purely theoretical, principally angelic) level, omitting the humanly important means and methods involved. A person still may culpably destroy life, if he or she does not exercise due care—in ways and means—when dealing with that life. Possessing no reasonable value standards, one cannot correctly judge whether the obligation has been fulfilled.

The second stated norm evidences even more absurdity. Although life is infinitely valuable hence sacred, life-supplements, having merely derivative or finite value, and even death, the ultimate non-value or evil, may be more valuable. Irrationality finds epic expression here, where parts take precedence over the whole and non-being outranks being. Consequent upon such artfully asserted, meaningless observations, the aforementioned author and purported pro-life advocate can calmly compliment the suicidists, euthanasiasts, and apparently the abortionists. "Perhaps they are right," he concludes, "although sanctity seems to be something one

¹⁰ *Id.* at 333.

cannot easily turn off."¹¹ The last-listed adverb implicitly discloses his chief concern—finding an easy way out of the “storm.” As explained earlier, these pseudo-intellectual, pro-life purists assume an angelic idealism because it enables them to ascend above the battle over values.

In a final extravagant effort to excise the subconsciously admitted and glaring inconsistencies, this ethereal, moral exponent offers a practical principle for guarding life’s sanctity. This contribution reflects another sudden surge toward the heavenly heights; supposedly removing confusion by simplifying it. The resulting “bolt from the blue” accordingly advises us: “Do not act or fail to act in order to have someone die.”¹² Even if the blinding contradiction battering thoughtful observers are discounted, the surely spellbound survivors are left—at least temporarily—morally stupefied. When they get the message’s meaning, however, many may be euphemistically relieved and released. Consonant with what their “high in the sky” seer tells them, humans need have no moral qualms regarding what they do or how they do it. The controlling criterion is why they do it. A non-destructive intention concerning life covers or cleanses everything else involved. The end, therefore, justifies or purifies pertinent ways and means.

Consequences of Pro-Life Idealism

Through a convenient and comforting mental twist—simply adopting a para-angelic attitude, where an action’s intent automatically determines its correct content—people are protected against bothersome and objective evaluations. Since such is the case on the score of life as a whole, this attitude implicitly includes its varied extensions. Lacking rationally discernable and guiding norms for selecting apt means and methods, humans have only instincts to follow. The same limitations also work their adverse effects at the more remote purpose or ends level. These pro-life purists cannot know the life they intuitively, abstractly revere, except through an arbitrarily accumulated and subjectively evaluated instinctive experience.

This largely involves the indulgence of quantitative, corporeal urges, which are stimulated and vindicated through sensibly subdued intellectual and volitional powers—pseudo-sophistication and rationalization. Despite their espousal of life’s sanctity, the purist pro-lifers actually approximate the anti-lifers’ practical approach. Both promote an individualistic, subjectivistic life-style, despite the polarity in starting positions. The former allegedly recognizes and reveres life’s sacredness. The latter purportedly recognizes and reveres freedom’s sanctity. Both arbitrarily

¹¹ *Id.* at 346.

¹² *Id.* at 350.

asserted and artificially applied claims are found seriously deficient, however, when analyzed and assayed according to reasonable or balanced (subjectively-objectively, essentially-existentially, qualitatively-quantitatively) standards. The two extremist types criticized here foster a fatuous, fanciful freedom. Each extols a mechanistic, bodily centered selfishness under the cover of a more or less idealistic, artfully manipulated shrewdness.

In the human context, this obstinately mounted and maintained controversy continues the age-old conflict between excessively fundamentalistic attitudes toward reality. Ideologists, like purist pro-lifers, concentrate exorbitantly upon abstract and generic, intellectual conceptions. They view their objects and subjects from the highest possible angle, and accordingly view them elementally as an integral whole. Romanticists, like anti-lifers, overemphasize empirical experience and, therefore, produce very specific and rather spontaneous conceptions. Representing a comparatively low-level viewpoint, their instinctive insights regarding subjects and objects stress differences or quantity. Since these opposing simplistic (theoretical) and mechanistic (practical) stands are human endeavors, they indicate some rational correlating or structuring tendencies. Such symptoms show through their efforts at theoretical explanation and practical justification for their respective polar positions. Whether realizing it or not, the contending partisans thus testify, forensically and fragmentarily, to human nature's inherent unity and multiplicity, as well as to the need for honoring the same.

Values for Freedom

We have seen how people cannot live humanly without values. Even while deprecating and deploring them, a critic must employ values if he or she is to be understandable or meaningful. Certain commonly accepted conceptions and related applications (norms) concerning human affairs inevitably underlie intelligent interaction. This holds true, and more exactly so, with respect to the exercise of freedom or any other duly proportioned qualitative-quantitative choice. What values will control constitutes the only relevant question. Additionally, we have found that, morally speaking, in a life versus freedom conflict, two perennially popular types—ultra-simplified idealism and ultra-diversified pragmatism—do not suffice. Both educe largely mechanistic or arbitrarily individualistic and materialistic (quantitative) actions. Such serious practical imbalance stems from their similar theoretical disorder—lack of moderation or reasonableness, the key human characteristic. This essential component is synonymous with the human condition—the middle, mediating, moderating class. Consequently, human beings cannot be guided solely by intuition, like the top-ranking angelic class, nor by instincts, like the lower

physical creaturely class.

Humans must exert a continuous conscious balancing or correlating influence upon those contrary, yet rightly complementary, competing traits. This represents reason's responsible role. In the words of St. Paul, this disciplining duty "begins and ends with faith," and requires a normal, humble, subjective acceptance of objectively given and guiding values.¹³ These initial value conceptions, intuitively inspired, are subsequently analyzed, synthesized, and made consonant with their comparative worth. Faithful, reasonable reflection on meaningful experience, when aided by instinct, fosters further fruitful application.¹⁴

Such conceptions intellectually penetrate and partition, as it were, the subjects and objects under consideration. They include common generic and specific characteristics abstracted from a myriad of particular manifestations. Recognized as bearing a controlling significance, these conceptions receive enduring respect (even reverence) as values. Interpreted and integrated in more or less general and special terms (principles), they designate one's essential or typical features. Overtly expressed or activated (practices), they delineate the actor's existential condition, circumstantially contained. Viewed holistically, those consolidated capacities—essential and existential—comprise a being's nature. Human nature is not merely an essence, therefore, but an existence also; exemplified individually, initially or fundamentally. The intelligible, durable, generalized and specialized factors provide saving guidelines for ensuing volitional expressions (existential practices).¹⁵

To insure thorough maturation, a responsible individual follows these prior theoretical and abstract intimations while empirically exercising proportionate practical inclinations. The resultant concrete engagements obviously occur in a multifold material matrix, subjectively and objectively. Real freedom involves applying the thus derived, qualitative value-norms (truths) when choosing amid multiple material, quantitative or corporeal alternatives. This profound discriminating ability accordingly indicates the presence of temporally and spatially "ascendent" as well as "transcendent" vital forces. It is this systematic unifying power, which substantially controls matter's fragile, fragmentating tendencies which we term spirit.¹⁶ Its proper predominance in human nature, proximately displayed through intellectual and volitional activity, makes humans personal, responsible, and autonomous agents. If correctly emphasized, spirit

¹³ Romans 1:17.

¹⁴ J.C. MURRAY, *WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS* 79-96 (1960).

¹⁵ K. RAHNER, *The Dignity and Freedom of Man*, *THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS* II 236-237 (1963).

¹⁶ See note 2 *infra*; see also C. G. JUNG, *On the Nature of the Psyche*, *THE BASIC WRITINGS OF C. G. JUNG* 52-54 (1959).

fosters balanced relationships within and between those subjects themselves, and towards the other creaturely categories. Likewise, it relates them rightly to the Creator, conceived as the ultimate value Source, essentially and existentially.

Consequently, recognizing and respecting humans' distinctive spiritual content constitutes the crux of the problem concerning their vital value. Such a specially created participation in the divine life fundamentally envelopes their nature with sacredness. Although principally a spiritual reality, that sacred element carries over into the material, corporeal, and quantitative realm since the human spirit naturally requires a body for its self-expression.¹⁷ All truly human values, therefore, derive from a properly proportioned consideration of the nature's basically blended condition. Christ stressed such a saving structural order during His earthly mediating mission. "Reform your lives" was the central theme. He showed this to mean reestablishment of the spirit's life-giving suzerainty. The liberating labors entailed an explication of those critical restructuring implications. Undergoing and overcoming death, the ultimate non-value, Christ proved the value inherent in His way and truth by providing access to eternal life. Humanity's true natural status is thus confirmed and completed.

The mediating message's middle term—truth, represents the core component. Truth's moral norms afford the reasonable means (initially and intuitively accepted on faith) whereby a person is able to correlate the way and the given goal—eternal life. They assure perfect freedom also, for as Christ exemplified they are the truths that "set you free." These freeing truths (values) positively advance life at all finite costs, even death. Death, however, is not advocated or "welcomed," rather it is accepted as a means of last resort in promoting a fuller spiritual life. It follows, therefore, that death cannot be proximately caused by the individual. It is simply permitted for the greater personal-communal good. Connecting the personal and the communal reflects the more comprehensive aspect of the foregoing freeing truth.¹⁸ "Whoever saves his life will lose it; whoever loses his life (for truth) saves it."

¹⁷ K. RAHNER, *The Theology of the Symbol*, THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS IV 245 (1969).

¹⁸ K. RAHNER, *Reflections On the Parochial Principle*, THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS II 293 (1963).

