

God's Will and Free Will

*These notes are derived from Catholic Morality by Fr. John Laux.
Section I, Introduction: General Moral and Chapter I-A: Free Will, pp 1-9.*

God's Will: The Basis of Morality

Purpose of life is to do **God's Will**. Acting in accordance with the Will of God is the Basis of Christian Morality.

Natural morality is based on **Natural law** and can be discerned with reason, unaided by Revelation.

Christian moral teaching upholds natural law, and also encompasses **Divine Law**:

- Directs man to **supernatural** end based on faith and grace.
- Upholds **motives** for good conduct that are based in Revelation as well as reason.
- Establishes its conclusions based on truths of **Divine Revelation**.
- Offers means (sacraments, prayer, grace) to achieve moral improvement that are not open to nonbelievers

Necessary Conditions of Morality

There are three necessary Conditions of Morality

- **Freedom of the will** — Ability to act
- **Law** — External norm of morality
- **Conscience** — Internal norm of morality

Free Will and Moral Freedom

Free will is the power of determining our own acts. **Free will presupposes knowledge.**

- We are responsible for an action only in so far as we know them to be morally good or bad
- People without knowledge, (small children, imbeciles, senile, etc.) are not morally responsible
- Drunk persons are morally responsible for their actions because they willed their condition
- Ignorance of the Moral law can be **vincible** or **invincible**
 - **Vincible Ignorance** applies to someone who is poorly taught or uninstructed in Catholic teachings. He may bear some responsibility for his ignorance, but is not fully responsible for actions he does not know to be wrong.
 - **Invincible Ignorance** applies to someone who has no possible way of knowing Catholic truth. He bears responsibility for violation of natural law, but not divine law.
 - Our will can influence our intellect. **Willful Ignorance** can darken judgment and mislead understanding

The reality of Free will is taught in Scriptures and upheld by Catholic Church

- Some heresies, including various Protestant theologies, deny or restrict free will
- **Predestination** is the doctrine that all events have been willed by God, limiting human agency.
- **Calvinism** adheres to an idea of Predestination that is in conflict with Free will

Catholicism upholds free will but recognizes **Hindrances** (obstacles) to the exercise of free will. In some cases hindrances to free will may lessen moral responsibility, but they do not absolve us from it. The following factors can be hindrances to exercise of free will.

- **Concupiscence** — Rebellion of sensual appetites against moral restrictions due to original sin.
- **Fear** — The existence of present or future threat reduces free will but does not eliminate it
- **Force or Violence** — Physical violence or force can excuse us from responsibility for "external" acts, but not internal thoughts. We must not give consent even under force. (Forced abortions, attendance at Atheistic schools, etc.)
- **Habits** — Bad actions repeatedly performed may become difficult to overcome.
- **Natural propensities** — Some evil propensities are inherited and associated with personality.
- **Vincible Ignorance** — Lack of knowledge that is correctable: lessens but doesn't eliminate moral responsibility.
- **Invincible Ignorance** — Lack of knowledge so extreme one cannot be held morally responsible for their actions.

Glossary of Moral Teaching Terms

Moral	Standard of behavior or guiding principle concerning right conduct.
Motive	Purpose or reason for doing something, especially one that is not immediately obvious.
Divine Revelation	Disclosing of Christian truth through Holy Scriptures or Sacred Tradition.
Ethics	Field of Christian philosophy that teaches how to direct our actions in accordance with God's will.
Free will	Ability to act at one's own discretion, without the constraints of force or necessity.
Predestination	Doctrine that all events have been willed in advance by God. Incompatible with the Catholic idea of free will.
Concupiscence	General inclination of human nature to wrongdoing as a consequence of original sin.
Culpability	The degree to which a person can be held morally or legally responsible for an action.
Precept	Law, command or instruction given by a lawful authority intended as a rule of action.