

MAKING EXCUSES

Gabriel Meurier (d. 1601) wrote, “He who excuses himself accuses himself.” Morality involves accepting responsibility for our own actions and attitudes. Yet people often try to disown their behavior, pretending that they didn’t really do it or are not responsible for it. This is where rationalization sets in. Rationalization means devising self-serving excuses for one’s behavior.

Listed below are several comments. Write a “V” for those that seem to be valid reasons for certain behavior. Write an “R” for those that are clearly rationalizations. Be prepared to explain your answers.

- _____ 1. “I didn’t know you could not take a lefthand turn there.”
- _____ 2. “I flunked the test because the teacher doesn’t like me.”
- _____ 3. “I came in late because the car had a flat tire.”
- _____ 4. “I didn’t give the homeless man a dollar because I thought he’d spend it on a cheap bottle of wine.”
- _____ 5. Eve to God: “The serpent tricked me into it, so I ate it [the forbidden fruit]” (Gn 3:13).
- _____ 6. “Everybody else was drinking so I did, too.”
- _____ 7. “I simply forgot about your birthday.”
- _____ 8. War criminal: “I was only following orders.”
- _____ 9. “I didn’t realize he could make me so mad. When he started poking fun at my sister I just got violent. I have a short fuse.”
- _____ 10. “So I littered. Big deal. There were no trash containers around.”
- _____ 11. “I don’t see how you can blame me for hating them. It’s how I was raised.”

- What other facts would you like to know about each item to judge it more fairly?

- Name a popular statement of rationalization used by you or your friends.

- “Be an owner, not a blamer.” What does this quotation mean?

NAME: _____

FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

Responsible decision-making implies the presence of two kinds of freedom. External freedom enables us to act without undue restraint or control of another. Internal freedom, on the other hand, comes from within. It is the state of mind and spirit which enables us to achieve our full human potential.

Here are three situations where external freedom is present. Thus, the situation is present where you can choose to act in a way that will enable you to grow as a human person, a child of God with dignity. How would you exercise your freedom?

Your father and mother have gone out of town. Your brothers and sisters are staying with relatives. You will remain alone in the house. Your parents have instructed you not to have any friends over. What would you do?

You work in an ice cream shop. Store policy is that employees are allowed one sundae or its equivalent every night they work. They may not give free ice cream treats to friends. However, as the store owner is rarely there, it is impossible for the employees to be monitored. What would you do?

The night before an important game against a rival school, your best friend asks you to go out with her. Your coach told you to be in bed by 9 p.m. You know your friend will want to stay out much later than that. What would you do?

Discuss

1. Would it be morally wrong for you to go against the wishes of any of the authority figures in the various stories? Explain.
2. What principles of good behavior are at stake in each of the cases?

OPEN-ENDED CASES

Here are some open-ended cases. Write two conclusions to each, one a good, Christian action, the other an irresponsible, immoral response.

You have worked hard for your money and for once have a good nest-egg saved for some personal items you want to buy. A classmate approaches you to ask you to sponsor her for a Walk to Fight Diabetes. She wants at least a \$25 contribution.

Christian response:

Other:

You have been told the identity of a classmate who has stolen something of value out of your locker.

Christian response:

Other:

You are at a party where alcohol is being served. You did not drive to the party.

Christian response:

Other:

A coworker is teasing another coworker who has a speech impediment.

Christian response:

Other:

- Share your Christian responses for each case. Vote on the most creative Christian response given by your class members.
- Select several of the irresponsible actions described. Give some of the rationalizations people typically would give to justify this kind of behavior.
- Apply the “STOP Sign” method of moral decision-making to one of the situations above to come up with a good, responsible action.

LAW AND MORALITY

Good law is like the foul line in baseball or the boundary lines on a football field. These lines show where the game should be played. Once the ball goes outside the lines the ball is dead and play must start over again.

St. Thomas Aquinas taught that good law is 1) reasonable, 2) issued by proper authority, 3) directed at the common good, and 4) advertised in a way that people know about it. Good law is an objective measure against which we can assess our behavior. It usually points out the minimum behavior for harmonious human living. If we violate the law, we are usually “out of bounds” in the moral life, too.

Here is a list of various laws societies have promulgated (issued) over the years. Decide if the law is good (**G**) or bad (**B**).

- ____ 1. The speed limit for school zones is 20 mph.
- ____ 2. All eighteen-year-old males must register for the draft.
- ____ 3. Catholics must receive Eucharist at least once a year, during the Easter season.
- ____ 4. No alcoholic beverages may be sold or consumed by anyone under the age of twenty-one.
- ____ 5. There should be mandatory, random testing for drug use among air traffic controllers.
- ____ 6. Everyone earning over \$70,000 is liable to a 30 percent income tax.
- ____ 7. Same sex couples have the same legal benefits as married couples.
- ____ 8. Smoking in public places is prohibited.
- ____ 9. It is illegal to burn the American flag.

- For a good law above, how is it reasonable and protective of the common good?
- How are each of these laws designed to help people live happy, productive lives?
- Analyze ten school rules as good or bad.

AN IMMORAL CIVIL LAW

The following quotations from Pope John Paul II's encyclical *The Gospel of Life* offer strict evidence that any civil law that permits abortion is wrong.

Everyone has the right to life.

The human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception; and therefore from that same moment his rights as a person must be recognized, among which in the first place is the inviolable right of every innocent human being to life. (*Gospel of Life*, §60)

Abortion is contrary to the natural law; it is always wrong.

I declare that direct abortion, that is, abortion willed as an end or as a means, always constitutes a grave moral disorder, since it is the deliberate killing of an innocent human being. This doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written Word of God, is transmitted by the Church's Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium. (*Gospel of Life*, §62)

No circumstance, no purpose, no law whatsoever can ever make licit an act which is intrinsically illicit, since it is contrary to the Law of God which is written in every human heart, knowable by reason itself, and proclaimed by the Church. (*Gospel of Life*, §62)

We must oppose an immoral law that attacks human life.

Abortion and euthanasia are thus crimes which no human law can claim to legitimize. There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; instead there is a grave and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection. From the very beginnings of the Church, the apostolic preaching reminded Christians of their duty to obey legitimately constituted public authorities (cf. Rm 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-14), but at the same time it firmly warned that "we must obey God rather than men." (*Gospel of Life*, §73)

Christians may never cooperate in abortions.

Christians, like all people of good will, are called upon under grave obligation of conscience not to cooperate formally in practices which, even if permitted by civil legislation, are contrary to God's law. Indeed, from the moral standpoint, it is never licit to cooperate formally in evil. (*Gospel of Life*, §74)

- Develop a plan that would allow you to protest an unjust civil law.

- How would this plan help to protest laws that legalize abortion?