



Good and Evil Actions: A Journey through Saint Thomas Aquinas

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Modern philosophy has long dismissed the traditional moral notion that some actions are inherently good or evil, claiming rather that actions lack clear boundaries and have no set nature, whether good, evil, or anything else. We might expect to find resources to rebut these consequentialist assertions in the perennial philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. Unfortunately, the analysis of the moral species within Aquinas confounds even the most resolute. Thomists are far from unanimity on the very questions at issue, such as the role of intention in moral judgment and the importance of the exterior or "physical" act. One influential reading of Aquinas assigns intention a central role; another extols a return to teleology and to the physical nature of the action.

In *Good and Evil Actions*, Steven J. Jensen navigates a path through the debate, retrieving what is of value from each interpretation. Intention receives its proper due, while leaving room for physical causality and teleology. Jensen provides a novel explanation of self-defense and develops a much needed account of the dignity of the human person. With exceptional clarity, he identifies the essential issues, resolves conflicting views, and reveals the truth as conveyed by Aquinas.

In his foreword, Ralph McInerny praises the book as "a remarkable compendium of the status quaestionis of a large number of prickly issues associated with Thomas Aquinas's theory of human action, a fair look at proposed solutions, and finally Jensen's own best thought on the matter."

Steven J. Jensen is associate professor of philosophy at the University of St. Thomas in Houston and specializes in the areas of ethics and medieval philosophy.

Praise for the Book:

"An extraordinarily clear and complete synthesis of the philosophy involved in St. Thomas's understanding of the specification of human acts. Jensen delivers a compact presentation both of Thomas's thought on the topic and of the main current interpretations thereof."?Stephen L. Brock, Professor of Medieval Philosophy, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross

"A significant original contribution to a currently robust conversation in contemporary ethical debates. Jensen offers a novel interpretation of Aquinas's position on how to define an act as good or bad."?Thomas A. Cavanaugh, Professor of Philosophy, University of San Francisco

"A remarkable compendium of the status quaestionis of a large number of prickly issues associated with Thomas Aquinas's theory of human action, a fair look at proposed solutions, and finally Jensen's own best thought on the matter."?From the foreword by Ralph McInerny, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Michael P. Grace Professor of Medieval Studies, University of Notre Dame

"In recent years a very great deal has been written (mostly in English) about Thomas Aquinas's understanding of the moral specification of human actions. . . . Steven Jensen has taken on the daunting task of synthesizing this bulk of material, answering the questions, and explaining why he finds the major alternative answers unsatisfactory. In my opinion he has carried out the task with great success, substantially advancing our understanding of the matter. His book is rigorous and dense, but it is also very clear, concrete and linear, and it is not at all technical. Its readability and relative brevity belie the amount of labor and thought that must have gone into it." ?Stephen L. Brock, *Acta Philosophica*

"[The book] brings clarity to an ongoing contemporary debate on the specificity of human actions. The author offers a convincing interpretation of Aquinas's positions." ?Lucien J. Richard, OMI, *Catholic Library World*

"Jensen. . . walks readers through labyrinthine debates about what makes human actions good or evil. He traces rival positions surrounding the prickly issues of intention.

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