

1. *What is the relationship between Catholic Social Teaching and philosophy? It seems like many of the paradigms and modes of analysis we discussed borrow from philosophy. What then is the place of the Gospel in Catholic Social Teaching?*

To begin to answer this question, we might want to start with God's designs for Creation. God created the universe imprinted with an intrinsic order, and he gifted human beings with rational minds capable of reflecting upon themselves and the world around them – minds capable of being in-tune with God's created reality and of acting according to this same God-given inherent order. The *natural law*, the precepts of morality discernible through reason, reflects this "agreement with reality and with God's intentions." Now, through the Fall, humanity's moral discernment and moral resolution were weakened; Redemption through Jesus Christ heals, strengthens, and leads to the realization of the natural law towards which are ordered. Understood from the highest perspective, obedience to the natural law only ever amounts to participation in the divine law.

So, inasmuch as Catholic Social Teaching grounds itself upon the natural law, which adopts a universal view of the human person and a philosophical form of reasoning, CST does so in sight of *God's eternal law* and the *salvific grace of Jesus Christ*. We might see Jesus' words in the Gospel of Matthew – "I came not to abolish but to fulfill the law" (Mt. 5:17) – as an apt expression to encapsulate this logic. (Of course, Jesus' words refer directly to the Law of Moses.) Through the grace of Jesus Christ, we are able to recognize the requirements of the natural law more completely, and to fulfill them more exactly.

The strength of the natural law approach is twofold:

1. It provides the foundation for a universal ethic and genuine ground of dialogue, as it is capable of being recognized and understood by those outside of the faith.
2. It supports our Catholic affirmation in the existence and seriousness of objective morality, holding not according to cultural conventions or contingent agreements but rather according to the very nature of the reality that God has lovingly spoken into being.

Having said this, it is important to bear in mind that an authentically Catholic approach to morality does not restrict itself to natural law in a wooden or abstract fashion, but holds as precious the words and example of our Lord. For instance, his New Commandment to "love one another as I have loved you" and his moral teachings in the Sermon on the Mount are constant touchstones of the Church's teaching.

For a deeper dive into this territory, feel free to check out this document from the International Theological Commission, "In Search of a Universal Ethic."

["In Search of a Universal Ethic: A New Look at the Natural Law" International Theological Commission \(vatican.va\)](https://www.vatican.va/intercom/intercom_documents_en/in_search_of_a_universal_ethic_a_new_look_at_the_natural_law.html)

2. *What do we do with particular moral situations -- with those difficult problem cases that you might find in philosophy textbooks (or advice columns)?*

We might approach this second question taking in hand the response to the first. For particular moral situations, the Church looks to the precepts of natural law and the moral teachings contained within our Sacred Scriptures. For example, on the matter of abortion (which, admittedly, we as Catholics do not consider a difficult question but a straightforward one), we can refer to the precept of the natural law that killing constitutes a moral evil. This precept stands in agreement with the Sixth Commandment: "Thou Shalt Not Kill." Any time that the end of an action is killing, this action is impermissible. So, we find that in many cases, we can fall back upon the moral absolute that provides a decisive course of action. The

Church's Magisterium often guides consciences according to these received principles, interpreting and ruling upon difficult questions in the social, economic, and political sphere.

Still, we find that many of the scenarios we face in daily life do not admit of a definite resolution according to a certain moral rule. These scenarios become the domain of prudence, which requires the knowledge not only of universals but of singular cases. To act prudently is to do what the situation with which you are faced demands. Knowledge of the particular situation is so elemental to doing what is right that St. Thomas Aquinas says, "The prudent man must have both knowledge of universals and knowledge of particulars; however, if he happens to have only one, then it should be knowledge of particular things, which are closer to operation" (*Sententia Libri Ethicorum*, Lib. VI, 6). This line of reasoning gets at what Fr. Lucas was saying: it is not that Catholic Social Teaching resolves each and every social or political situation as if automatically, but it provides the principles from which to begin. Accurate knowledge of the particular context must complete the job.

Have a look at this article for all you (might ever) want to know about the virtue of prudence: [The Virtue of Prudence \(catholiceducation.org\)](http://catholiceducation.org)