**eduqas**

## Key concepts:

- The **proportionalist debate** refers to ethical discussions in Roman Catholicism about the correct understanding and application of Natural Law.

- There is no one, clear proportionalist theory but Proportionalism has been rejected by the **Magisterium** – the Roman Catholic Church authority.

- Hoose's book 'Proportionalism' gave a historical overview of the developments within Proportionalism (**Revisionism**) at the time of writing.

- Proportionalists claim that they have the most accurate understanding of Aquinas' Natural Law.

- The **maxim** of Proportionalism is that it is never right to go against a principle unless there is a proportionate reason to justify it.

---

- The Proportionalist debate is partly concerned with achieving agreed definitions of ethical terms.

- The Catholic church sees '**evil moral acts**' as **intrinsically** bad actions: **ontic evil** as natural evil and **pre-moral evil** as human nature derived from the fall.

- Proportionalists conflate ontic and pre-moral evil since pre-moral evil is a natural evil resulting from the fall.

- Our intention must always be to eliminate or minimise ontic evil within an action but as it is part of nature, we may need to perform acts that contain it.

- Hoose's example: Cutting a body with a knife contains ontic/ pre-moral evil but is licit if a surgeon intends to perform life-saving surgery. If the patient could be cured by bedrest, it is disproportionate.

- 'Good' or 'evil' describe the intrinsic substance of an act, rule, or personal moral quality. This depends partly upon the motive for an action.

- 'Right' or 'wrong' are moral judgements concerning whether the action should take place or not.

- The Catholic church argue that good acts are always right. Proportionalists argue that a good act can sometimes be wrong.

- **Agape** is a theological virtue that is rightly applied to enforce moral judgments, but never replaces the law. It should motivate morally good acts.

---

- Proportionalism concerns Aquinas' Law of **double effect** – the principle of **proportionate reason**. One act may have two effects, one of them unintended.

- Aquinas' example: Killing in self-defence has two effects:

  1. saving a life (a primary precept)

  2. killing an aggressor (an accidental side effect).

- If the level of force is proportionate (not more than necessary), then killing the aggressor is **licit** (lawful).

- The good contained in an action must outweigh any evil inadvertently contained in it. There must be more **value** than **disvalue**.

- Proportionalism is **deontological**. It says there are moral laws that are good and should not be broken.

- Proportionalism is also **teleological**. It explains how to make moral decisions when moral laws conflict.

## Key quotes:

'**Though preceding from a good intention, an act may be rendered unlawful, if it be out of proportion to the end.**' – Thomas Aquinas

'**We should keep ontic evil to a minimum, but we cannot completely eliminate it in all its forms.**' – Bernard Hoose

'**These theories cannot claim to be grounded in the Catholic moral tradition.**' – Pope John Paul II

## Issues for analysis and evaluation:

### Key arguments/debates

Some argue that Proportionalism is dangerous because it does not offer any concrete guidance on how to determine the proportionate reason for an act.

Others point out that Proportionalism is misleading as it relies on illegitimate definitions of ethical terms to defend immoral actions.

The Magisterium argue that Proportionalism justifies doing evil to achieve good which is condemned in Romans 3:8.

### Key questions

Could you follow Proportionalism and still perform a morally evil act?

Have Proportionalists interpreted Aquinas correctly?

Is Proportionalism a practical way to make more difficult moral decisions?

## Key words:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Magisterium | Revisionism | double effect | proportionate reason |
| licit | disvalue | value | deontological |
| teleological | telos | evil moral acts | intrinsically |
| ontic evil | pre-moral evil | agape | |