

Einladung zum GASTVORTRAG

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## Morality and Mystery in Catholic Thought

Mi., 6. 6. 2018, 18.00 Uhr s. t., Seminarraum VI (Karl-Rahner-Platz 3)

Should one commit an intrinsically evil act in order to avert catastrophe? Consequentialists say yes, denying the very concept of intrinsic evil, since the action that leads to the best consequences is by definition right. Moral absolutism, in contrast, insists that it is never permissible to commit an action that is inherently evil, regardless of the consequences: fiat justitia ruat cælum. There is a middle ground, however, that claims that in rare and extreme cases it is necessary to perform evil acts, and yet these acts remain evil, despite their apparent necessity. This position acknowledges the concept of “dirty hands,” so called because people are tainted by their immoral actions, even when those actions are unavoidable. I argue that Catholic moral theology, although generally associated with moral absolutism, can and should make room for the idea of dirty hands, and there are moral and doctrinal resources within the tradition that render this possible. I further suggest that a necessary-but-immoral action may be akin to a “mystery of faith,” insofar as such mysteries affirm two statements that are seemingly incompatible, but nevertheless both true.



**Evan Sandsmark** is a PhD student in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia, where he studies philosophy, theology, and ethics. His central research interest is the problem of evil - how it has been addressed in the history of Christian (and more broadly monotheistic) thought, and how contemporary philosophers, theologians, and ethicists continue to reckon with it. Before starting his PhD at U.Va., he did an MA in Theology and Religion at Durham University, and a BA in philosophy and English literature at the University of Colorado.

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