

ABSTRACT

The principle of double effect has a very long history and continues to play an important role in ethical and bioethical discussions. However, the principle has been subject of incessant debates in the last few decades and many ethicists and bioethicists have explicitly denied its validity and applicability to solving important moral dilemmas. Many authors endorsing consequentialism have claimed that the principle of double effect, based on an intention-sensitive ethics, is not valid as a moral principle. Their rejection of the validity of this principle follows a well-established ethical tradition according to which intentions have no role in the moral evaluation of human actions. This dissertation has three overall aims: i) It aims at showing, in the course of textual analysis and interpretation of Aquinas's *œuvre complete*, that Thomas Aquinas was indeed the first author who explicitly discusses actions with one good and one bad effect and can be therefore considered the founding father of all subsequent moral tradition endorsing the principle of double effect. ii) Secondly, it demonstrates that from a historical point of view it is inadequate to continue to talk about "the principle of double effect". In the moral tradition from 13th century to present days more than one principle of double effect have been proposed and each of them has been situated in a different moral and theoretical context. iii) If we accept the thesis that intentions of moral agents are important in the ethical evaluation of their actions, the principle of double effect can be sustained and successfully applied to a wide range of moral dilemmas.

KEY WORDS: ethics, bioethics, principle of double effect, trolleyology.