



- The theory and language of Cooperation is often used, but rarely given philosophical exposition.
 - Neither Aristotle nor Aquinas have a prolonged discussion of cooperation.
 - The *Summa* deals with the issue in several articles, but not extensively.^{1 2}
 - That job was taken up by Alphonsus Liguori, especially in his *Theologia Moralis*, 1st published in 1748, which is considered the definitive text on Cooperation.
 - It's built on the framework of Thomistic moral theory³ and is such an important work that it wasn't translated into English from Latin until last year.⁴
 - There are a few other good resources to know:
 - Background: NCBQ 2013 Two Factors in the Analysis of Cooperation in Evil
 - Explanation: NCBQ 2012 Catholicism, Cooperation, and Contraception
 - Application: <http://www.cogforlife.org/vaticanresponse.htm>, [Catholic Medical Quarterly 1994 Cooperation in Evil](http://www.catholicmedicalquarterly.com/1994/Cooperation-in-Evil)
 - Also good: *Catholic Encyclopedia* entry for "Accomplice"
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01100a.htm>
 - They're all in English.
- Cooperation means to *Co-operate* – to share in the operation
 - In formal cooperation, the agent and cooperator share a common *end*.
 - In Material Cooperation, the agent and cooperator merely share a common *action*.
 - In *Formal* Cooperation, the cooperator shares the intent of the agent – that is, the cooperator and principal agent have the same ends.⁵
 - The will of the cooperator is attached to the same end as the agent
 - This makes the *formal* aspect of the cooperator's object the same as the agent's object.
 - In *Material* Cooperation, the cooperator does *not* share the intent of the agent.
 - But the action of cooperator *is* used in accomplishing the action of the agent.⁶
 - The cooperator's will is not attached to the end of the agent, but the cooperator's actions are still assisting the agent's object.
 - The cooperator is thus providing *matter* to be used in the agent's act.
- For example, consider the various agents and actions in the performance of a direct abortion

¹ [ST 2.2.62.7.Resp](#) "Whether Restitution is binding on those who have not taken"

² [ST 1.2.111.7.Resp & RO3](#) – "Whether grace is fittingly divided into operating and cooperating grace?"

³ 10 2014 NCBQ 2013 Two Factors in the Analysis of Cooperation in Evil pg 668 cites ST 1.2.18.6 as the source of the distinction between the material and formal nature of cooperation = Aquinas' distinction of formal/material nature of object.

⁴ [Moral Theology](#) by St. Alphonsus Liguori, Trans: Ryan Grant, Mediatrix Press, 2017

⁵ The formal aspect of the object is brought about by the interaction of the chosen object and the intended end. The formal aspect of the object is the part of the object that the agent chooses it for because it enables the accomplishment of his intended end.

⁶ The material aspect of the object is what the object itself is ordered towards. The material aspect of the object is determined by the end which the object will of necessity and essentially accomplish even if it is not the part of the object that the agent is choosing it for.

- The abortionist is the principal moral agent performing the direct abortion
 - The patient asking for the abortion is *formally* cooperating b/c she shares the intent of the abortionist to kill the fetus.
 - The power company supplying the electricity for the abortion clinic is only *materially* cooperating in the abortion.
 - We're assuming the power company doesn't share the intent of the abortionist, so they're not formally cooperating with him.
 - Nonetheless, the abortion would not take place without electricity.
 - The power company thus provides material used in abortionist act.
- Material cooperation is further distinguished by proximity and directness to the act of the agent.
- In *Immediate* material cooperation, the cooperator's actions are directly and *per se* involved in the act.
 - Immediate material cooperation is therefore also called *direct* material cooperation.
 - It is always proximate – it is always close to the agent's act.
 - The agent and cooperator share the same *material* aspect of the object, but not the same *formal* aspect.
 - They are, in effect, doing the same act, but for different ends.
 - The material nature of the cooperator's object is naturally ordered to the agent's object.
 - So even though the cooperator may not formally intend the agent's end, their act is naturally ordered to it.
 - For example, if a nurse who objects to abortion assists the abortionist, she would thereby be directly and immediately involved in the act of abortion.
 - Her actions are *per se* involved in the act of abortion, even if she does not share the intended end of the abortionist.
 - She could be intending to merely assist the abortionist as she would assist any other physician.
 - This makes the *formal* aspect of her object different from the abortionist's.
 - This is not formal cooperation.
 - Assisting, in general, is a good thing.
 - Assisting doctors in the care of patients is not *per se* immoral.
 - But, in *this* act, her assistance is naturally ordered to the abortionist's evil object.

- A cooperator's culpability with an agent's immoral act decreases the further away from the act the cooperator is.⁷
 - As one 1950s moralist put it:
 - "It is one thing to tell a youth where he can buy pornographic post cards, another to drive him to the place of purchase, and still another to sell them to him"⁸
- The closer we are to providing essential matter to an act, the closer we are to being responsible for the act.
- This is why getaway-car drivers can and have been executed even when they did not actually pull the trigger in murder cases.^{9 10}
 - If someone is driving a car, intending to aid in the escape after a murder, they're just as guilty of murder under the law.
 - Though the material aspect of the objects are different – pulling the trigger vs driving the car, their formal aspects are the same – to murder.
 - Both gunman and driver intend the murder, but they choose different material objects to accomplish it.
 - Both are therefore guilty of murder.
- Intent matters – intention determines whether someone is a formal cooperator or merely a material cooperator.
 - And the *material* of cooperation also matters.
 - Cooperators who provide specific, necessary, and essential matter to an agent are immediately and directly cooperating with the agent.
 - Cooperators who provide matter that isn't necessarily essential to the agent's act are only *indirectly* cooperating.
- The moral praise or blame that cooperators deserve depends on their level of cooperation.

⁷ The Vatican's Statement on Vaccines Derived from Aborted Human Fetuses (Rubella, Hepatitis A, Chicken Pox, IPV, Rabies, Smallpox) applied the principles of cooperation as such:

Anyone sharing the intent of aborting babies for the use in vaccines is formally cooperating with evil actions and is therefore immoral. The cooperators engaged in producing and distributing the vaccine derived from aborted fetuses *are* providing indirect proximate material cooperation in an immoral act and are proximate enough that it is immoral.

The market for these vaccines consists in large government health systems, private health systems, doctors, and parents. All are remote mediate material cooperators with some more remote than others. The parents of a child needing the vaccine are most remote, then doctors, then the health systems. All may licitly use the vaccines if there is a compelling medical reason to do so (to maintain herd immunity seems to be compelling enough) and there are no licit alternatives but each have a different level of responsibility in voicing their objections and seeking alternate vaccine sources.

⁸ 1955 book "Science of Ethics"

⁹ [LA Times 1990 State Justices Affirm Death Penalty for Getaway Car Driver](#)

¹⁰ [NYTimes 2007 Serving Life for Providing Car to Killers](#)

In fact, under the "felony murder rule", if a murder takes place in the midst of another felony, even if that murder was not premeditated, getaway car drivers can be given the death penalty. The idea is that in committing a felony such as armed robbery or rape, the likelihood of murder is very high. Criminals are presumed to know that committing violent felonies can also result in murders. So, too with the getaway car driver – if he intends the felony, then he is just as guilty of any subsequent non-premeditated murder.