



Action in Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de la Motte Guyon (1648–1717).

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According to Madame Guyon, there are two types of human acts: exterior and interior. Exterior acts are without moral import because the moral quality of the act derives from the intention of the moral agent who performs the act. “Exterior acts are those that appear outside, related to some sensible object. They have no other moral goodness or evil than that which they receive from the interior principle from which they spring” (1686: 99). Only internal acts possess moral and spiritual significance. The moral quality of these acts depends on the posture of the will toward the objects it embraces or refuses to embrace. “Interior acts are the acts of the soul by which it attaches itself to certain objects or removes itself from certain other objects” (1686: 99).

The key drama in the posture of the will is whether the soul will attach itself to God or to material creatures in the world. Only a will firmly rooted in God can provide an accurate moral compass for action. Arriving at this moral/spiritual maturity involves a gradual conversion toward complete abandonment to God. “Turning one’s heart to God is always having the vision, the strength, and the vigor of the soul attached to God, in order to follow God’s will” (1686: 101). In the mature moral agent, particular acts of the will concerning immediate moral choices operate over a deeper continuous, often non-reflective, immersion in divine love.

Primary Sources:

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