

QUESTION 42

The Objects of Fear

Next we have to consider the objects of fear. And on this topic there are six questions: (1) Is the object of fear something good or something bad? (2) Are evils of nature (*malum naturae*) an object of fear? (3) Is there fear of evils of sin (*malum culpae*)? (4) Can fear itself be feared? (5) Are things that happen suddenly (*repentina*) feared to a greater degree? (6) Are things for which there is no remedy feared to a greater degree?

Article 1

Is the object of fear something good or something bad?

It seems that the object of fear is something good (*bonum sit obiectum timoris*):

Objection 1: In *83 Quaestiones* Augustine says, “We fear nothing except (a) losing what we love and have acquired or (b) not acquiring what we love and hope for.” But what we love is something good. Therefore, fear has something good as its proper object.

Objection 2: In *Rhetoric 2* the Philosopher says, “Power, and someone’s being over another (*super alium ipsum esse*), is something to be feared (*est terribile*).” But something of this sort is a good. Therefore, it is something good that is the object of fear.

Objection 3: There cannot be anything bad in God. But we are commanded to fear God—this according to Psalm 33:10 (“Fear the Lord, all you His holy ones”). Therefore, there is also fear of what is good.

But contrary to this: In *De Fide Orthodoxa 2* Damascene says, “Fear has to do with a future evil.”

I respond: Fear is a certain movement of the appetitive power. Now as *Ethics 6* explains, what belongs to the appetitive power is to approach and to withdraw (*prosecutio et fuga*); approaching has to do with what is good, whereas withdrawing has to do with what is bad. Thus, every movement of an appetitive power that implies an approach toward something has for its object what is good, whereas every movement that implies a withdrawal from something has for its object what is bad. Hence, since fear implies a withdrawal, in the first instance and *per se* it has as its proper object what is bad.

Now fear can also have to do with what is good insofar as what is good bears a relation to what is bad. And there are two ways in which this can be the case:

In one way, insofar as some good is being stripped away by the bad thing in question (*inquantum per malum privatur bonum*). Now something is bad by the very fact that it strips away a good. Hence, when someone withdraws from what is bad because it is bad, it follows that he is withdrawing from it because it strips away a good that he is approaching out of his love for it. And this is the sense in which Augustine claims that there is no reason for fear other than that one might lose a good that is loved.

In the second way, something good is related to what is bad as its cause, viz., in the sense that something good is by its power able to inflict some harm on a good that is loved. And so, in the same way in which it was explained above (q. 40, a. 7) that hope has to do with two things, viz., (a) the good thing toward which one is tending and (b) that through which he hopes to acquire the desired good, so, too, fear has to do with two things, viz., (a) the evil that one is shying away from and (b) the good thing that is able by its power to inflict that evil. This is the sense in which God is feared by a man insofar as He is able to inflict either spiritual or corporeal punishments. This is also the sense in which a man’s power is feared, especially when it is harmful or unjust, since such a man is ready to inflict harm. And this is also the sense in which “someone’s being over another” (*super alium esse*) is feared, i.e., being subject to another (*inniti alii*) in such a way that it is within the other’s power to inflict harm on us; for instance, someone who is privy to a crime is feared because he might reveal the crime.

Reply to objection 1 and objection 2 and objection 3: The replies to the objections are clear from what has been said.

Article 2

Is there fear of evils of nature?

It seems that there is no fear of evils of nature (*timor non sit de malo naturae*):

Objection 1: In *Rhetoric 2* the Philosopher says, “Fear makes us deliberate (*timor facit consiliativos*).” But as *Ethics 3* says, we do not deliberate about things that come from nature. Therefore, there is no fear of evils of nature.

Objection 2: Natural failings (*defectus naturales*) such as death and other things of this sort threaten men at all times. Therefore, if there were fear of such evils, then a man would always have to be in fear.

Objection 3: Nature does not effect movement toward contraries. But evils of nature have their source in nature. Therefore, the fact that someone might shy away from such evils through fear does not have its source in nature. Therefore, natural fear is not fear of evils of nature, and yet it is this sort of evil that seems pertinent to natural fear.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics 3* the Philosopher says, “The most fearful of all things is death,” and death is an evil of nature.

I respond: As the Philosopher says in *Rhetoric 2*, fear comes from “imagining a future evil that is corruptive and causes sadness.” Now just as an evil that causes sadness is one that is contrary to the *will*, so a corruptive evil is one that is contrary to *nature*. And this is what an ‘evil of nature’ is. Hence, there can be such a thing as fear of an evil of nature.

But notice that an evil of nature sometimes comes from a natural cause, and in such a case it is called an evil of nature not only because it strips away a good of nature, but also because it is an effect of nature, e.g., natural death and other failings of this sort. Sometimes, however, an evil of nature comes from a non-natural cause, e.g., a death that is violently inflicted by an assailant. And in both of these senses, an evil of nature is in some way feared and in some way not feared. For since, as the Philosopher puts it, fear comes from “imagining a future evil,” anything that eliminates the imagining of a future evil removes fear as well.

Now there are two ways in which it can happen that an evil does not appear to be future:

In one way, from the fact that it is remote and distant, since because of the distance we imagine that it is not going to happen (*propter distantiam imaginamur ut non futurum*). And so either we do not fear the evil in question, or else we fear it very little. For as the Philosopher explains in *Rhetoric 2*, “Things that are a long way off are not feared; for instance, all men know that they will die, but because death is not imminent, they do not trouble themselves about it.”

In a second way, some evil that is future is judged as not future, and this because of an inevitability that makes one judge it to be present. Thus, in *Rhetoric 2* the Philosopher says, “Those who are already being executed are not afraid,” since they see the inevitability of their imminent death “but in order for someone to be afraid, there must be some hope of surviving.”

So, then, an evil of nature is not feared when it is not apprehended as future. However, if an evil of nature that is corruptive is apprehended as imminent and yet accompanied by some hope of escape, then it will be feared.

Reply to objection 1: As has been explained, sometimes an evil of nature does not have its source in nature.

However, insofar as such an evil does have its source in nature, it might nonetheless be capable of

being deferred even if it cannot be totally avoided. And given this sort of hope, there can be deliberation with respect to avoiding it.

Reply to objection 2: Even if an evil of nature is always threatening, it is nonetheless not always close by. And so it is not always being feared.

Reply to objection 3: Death and other failures of nature come from nature in general, and yet a particular nature fights against them as much as it can. And so because of the inclination of a particular nature, there is pain and sadness with respect to evils of this sort when they are present, and there is fear if they are imminent in the future.

Article 3

Is there fear of evils of sin?

It seems that there can be fear of evils of sin:

Objection 1: In his commentary on 1 John 4:18 Augustine says, “It is with a chaste fear that a man fears separation from God.” But nothing except sin separates us from God—this according to Isaiah 59:2 (“Your sins have divided you and your God”). Therefore, there can be fear of evils of sin.

Objection 2: In *De Tusculanis Quaestionibus* 4 Tully says, “The things that we fear when they are future are the things by which we are saddened when they are present.” But it is possible for someone to grieve over or to be saddened by an evil of sin. Therefore, it is likewise possible for someone to fear an evil of sin.

Objection 3: Hope is opposed to fear. But as is clear from the Philosopher in *Ethics* 9, one can hope for the good of virtue. And in Galatians 5:10 the Apostle says, “I am confident of you in the Lord, that you will not be of another mind.” Therefore, it is possible for there to be fear of evils of sin.

Objection 4: As was explained above (q. 41, a. 4), shame (*verecundia*) is a species of fear. But shame has to do with an unseemly deed, i.e., an evil of sin. Therefore, so does fear.

But contrary to this: In *Rhetoric* 2 the Philosopher says, “Not all evils are feared, e.g., that someone will be unjust or tardy.”

I respond: As was explained above (q. 40, a. 1 and q. 41, a. 2), just as the object of hope is something good that is future, arduous, and such that one can attain to it, so fear has to do with something bad that is future, arduous, and such that it cannot easily be avoided. From this one can infer that what is completely subject to our own power and will does not have the character of something to be feared (*non habet rationem terribilis*); instead, what is to be feared is only that which has an extrinsic cause.

Now an evil of sin has its proper cause the human will, and so, properly speaking, it does not have the character of something to be feared.

However, since the human will can be inclined toward sinning by something exterior, if that thing which inclines it toward sinning has a great power to incline it, then in this sense there can be fear of an evil of sin, insofar as that evil comes from an exterior cause—as, for instance, when someone fears spending time in the company of bad men, lest he be induced by them to sin. But, properly speaking, in such a situation it is the seduction that the man fears more than the sin in its proper character, i.e., insofar as it is voluntary. For insofar as it is voluntary, it does not have the character of being such that it is feared.

Reply to objection 1: Separation from God is a certain punishment that follows upon sin, and every punishment is in some sense from an exterior cause.

Reply to objection 2: There is one thing that sadness and fear agree in, viz., that both have to do with what is bad, whereas there are two things that they disagree in. First, sadness has to do with a present evil, whereas fear has to do with a future evil. Second, since sadness exists in the concupiscible

part of the soul, it has to do with evil simply speaking and so can be directed toward any sort of evil whatsoever, whether great or small. By contrast, since fear exists in the irascible part, it has to do with an evil that involves arduousness and difficulty. However, arduousness and difficulty are ruled out to the extent that something is subject to the will. And so it is not the case that everything we are saddened by when it is present is such that we fear it when it is future. Rather, we fear just some of those evils, viz., the ones that are arduous.

Reply to objection 3: Hope has to do with something good that one can attain to. But someone can attain to the good thing either by himself or through another, and so there can be hope with respect to an act of virtue that is within our power. By contrast, fear has to do with something bad that is not subject to our power, and so it is always the case that an evil that we fear has its source in an extrinsic cause. By contrast, a good that is hoped for can have its source either in an intrinsic cause or in an extrinsic cause.

Reply to objection 4: As was explained above (q. 41, a. 4), shame is fear not with respect to the sinful act itself, but rather with respect to the disgrace or ignominy that follows upon the sinful act. And this disgrace or ignominy comes from an extrinsic cause.

Article 4

Can fear be feared?

It seems that fear cannot be feared:

Objection 1: Everything that is feared is guarded from being lost by fearing; for instance, someone who fears losing his health guards it by fearing. Therefore, if fear were feared, then a man would guard himself from fearing by fearing. But this seems absurd.

Objection 2: Fearing is a certain sort of withdrawing (*quaedam fuga*). But nothing withdraws from itself. Therefore, fear does not fear fearing.

Objection 3: Fear has to do with the future. But someone who fears already has fear. Therefore, he cannot fear the fear.

But contrary to this: A man can love his own love and be pained by his own pain. Therefore, by parity of reasoning, he can likewise fear his own fear (*potest timere timorem*).

I respond: As has been explained (a. 3), whatever has the character of something to be feared has its source in an extrinsic cause and does not have its source in our own will.

Now fear has its source partly in an extrinsic cause, and it is partly subject to our will. It has its source in an extrinsic cause insofar as it is a passion that follows upon imagining some imminent evil. Accordingly, someone can fear fear, i.e., he can fear that there might be an imminent necessity for fearing due to the onslaught of some overwhelming evil.

Now this fear is subject to the will insofar as the lower appetite obeys reason, and so a man can repel the fear. In this respect, fear cannot be feared, just as Augustine claims in *83 Quaestiones*. But because someone could use the arguments adduced by Augustine in order to show that fear cannot in any way at all be feared, it is necessary to reply to those arguments.

Reply to objection 1: Not every instance of fear is a single fear, but instead there are diverse instances of fear corresponding to the diverse things that are feared. Therefore, there is nothing to prevent its being the case that by one instance of fear someone saves himself from another instance of fear, and in this sense by fearing he guards himself against that later instance of fear.

Reply to objection 2: Since the instance of fear by which the imminent evil is feared is different from the instance of fear by which that very fear of the imminent evil is feared, it does not follow that the same thing withdraws from itself or that the same withdrawal is a withdrawal from itself.

Reply to objection 3: Because of the diversity among the instances of fear that has already been explained, a man can fear a future instance of fear by means of a present instance of fear.

Article 5

Are unfamiliar and sudden things more to be feared?

It seems not to be the case that unfamiliar and sudden things are more to be feared (*insolita et repentina non sint magis terribilia*):

Objection 1: Just as hope has to do with something good, so fear has to do with something bad. But experience makes for an increase of hope in the case of good things. Therefore, it also makes for an increase of fear in the case of bad things.

Objection 2: In *Rhetoric 2* the Philosopher says, “It is those who are quiet and astute, and not those who are prone to sharp anger (*illi qui acutae irae sunt*), who are more to be feared.” But it is clear that those who are prone to sharp anger have movements that are more sudden. Therefore, what is sudden is less to be feared.

Objection 3: Things that are sudden are less able to be thought about. But some things are such that the more they are considered, the more they are feared; hence, in *Ethics 3* the Philosopher says, “Some men appear to be courageous because of ignorance; for if they discover that things are different from what they suspected, they run away.” Therefore, sudden things are less feared.

But contrary to this: In *Confessiones 2*, Augustine says, “Fear shudders at what is unfamiliar and sudden and stands opposed to things that are loved, and it takes precautions to secure those things.”

I respond: As was explained above (a. 3), the object of fear is an imminent evil that cannot be easily repelled. This occurs because of two elements: (a) the magnitude of the evil and (b) the weakness of the one who is fearful. Something’s being unfamiliar and sudden contributes to both of these elements.

First, it makes the imminent evil seem greater. For all corporeal things, both good ones and bad ones, appear less daunting (*minora apparent*) the more they are thought about. And so just as pain with respect to a present evil is lessened when it lasts for a long time, as is clear from Tully in *De Tusculanis Quaestionibus 3*, so, too, the fear of a future evil is diminished by one’s thinking about it ahead of time.

Second, something’s being unfamiliar and sudden contributes to the weakness of the one who is fearful insofar as it eliminates the remedies which a man can prepare ahead of time in order to repel future evils; such remedies cannot exist when the evil occurs unexpectedly.

Reply to objection 1: The object of hope is something good that one can attain to. And so whatever increases a man’s power is apt to increase his hope and, for the same reason, to diminish his fear, since fear has to do with something bad that cannot easily be resisted. Therefore, since experience makes a man more able to operate, it diminishes his fear in the same way that it increases his hope.

Reply to objection 2: Those who are sharply angry do not hide their anger, and so the harms they inflict are not so sudden that they cannot be foreseen. By contrast, quiet and astute men hide their anger, and so the harm that they threaten cannot be foreseen, but instead comes unexpectedly. And this is why the Philosopher says that it is the latter who are more to be feared.

Reply to objection 3: Speaking *per se*, corporeal goods or evils appear greater at the beginning. The reason for this is that each thing appears greater when its contrary is placed right next to it. Hence, when someone suddenly passes from poverty to wealth, he overestimates his wealth because of his previous poverty (*propter paupertatem praeexistentem divitias magis aestimat*), and, conversely, the rich have a greater fear of poverty immediately upon falling into it.

However, it can happen by some accident that the magnitude of a given evil is hidden, e.g., when

enemies cleverly conceal themselves. And in such a case it is true that the evil becomes more fearful upon careful consideration.

Article 6

Are evils for which there is no remedy more to be feared?

It seems not to be the case that evils for which there is no remedy are more to be feared (*ea quae non habent remedium non sint magis timenda*):

Objection 1: As was explained above (a. 3), it is required for fear that some hope of escape should remain (*quod remaneat aliqua spes salutis*). But in the case of evils for which there is no remedy, no hope of escape remains. Therefore, such evils are in no way to be feared.

Objection 2: No remedy can be applied to the evil of death, since, in accord with nature, no return is possible from death to life. Yet, as the Philosopher points out in *Rhetoric 2*, it is not death that is most to be feared. Therefore, it is not the case that evils for which there is no remedy are more to be feared.

Objection 3: In *Ethics 1* the Philosopher says, “A good that lasts longer is no greater than one that lasts for a single day, and a good that is everlasting is no greater than one that is not everlasting.” But evils for which there is no remedy do not seem to differ from other evils except because they are long-lasting or everlasting. Therefore, they are not for that reason worse, or more to be feared.

But contrary to this: In *Rhetoric 2* the Philosopher says, “The fearsome things that are most to be feared are those which, if they have gone wrong, cannot be corrected or those which we cannot help, or cannot easily help.”

I respond: The object of fear is something bad, and so anything that contributes to an increase in the badness likewise contributes to an increase in the fear. Now as is clear from what was said above (q. 18, a. 3), badness is increased not only because of the species of the bad thing itself, but also because of its circumstances. And, of all the circumstances, being long-lasting, or even everlasting, seems to contribute most to an increase of badness. For things that exist in time are in some sense measured by temporal duration, and so if enduring something for such-and-such a length of time is bad, then the same thing endured for twice that length of time is thought of as twice as bad. And according to this line of reasoning, to endure the same thing for an infinitely long time (*pati idem in infinito tempore*), i.e., to endure it forever, in some sense makes for an infinite increase in the evil (*habet quodammodo infinitum augmentum*). But evils which are such that once they arrive, they cannot be remedied, or cannot be easily remedied, are taken to be everlasting or long-lasting. And so they are to be feared most of all.

Reply to objection 1: There are two sorts of remedies for an evil:

One, by the future evil’s been prevented from arriving at all. And if this sort of remedy is excluded, then hope is removed and, as a result, so is fear. Hence, we are not here talking about this sort of remedy.

The other sort of remedy for evil is one by which an evil that is already present is removed. And this is the sort of remedy that we are talking about here.

Reply to objection 2: Even if death is an evil without remedy (*irremediabile malum*), nonetheless, as was explained above (a.2), because it is not immediately threatening, it is not feared.

Reply to objection 3: In this passage the Philosopher is talking about something that is good taken in its own right (*de per se bono*), i.e., good by its species. In this sense of ‘good’, a thing becomes a greater good because of the nature of goodness itself and not by virtue of being long-lasting or everlasting.