

QUESTION 53

The Corruption and Diminution of Habits

Next we have to consider the corruption and diminution of habits (*de corruptione et diminutione habituum*). And on this topic there are three questions: (1) Can a habit be corrupted? (2) Can a habit be diminished? (3) How are habits corrupted or diminished?

Article 1

Can a habit be corrupted?

It seems that a habit cannot be corrupted (*corrumpi non possint*):

Objection 1: A habit inheres like a nature (*inest sicut natura*); this is why operations in accord with a habit are delightful. But a nature is not corrupted as long as the thing whose nature it is remains. Therefore, neither can a habit be corrupted as long as its subject remains.

Objection 2: Every instance of a form's being corrupted is effected either by the corruption of its subject or by some contrary; for instance, sickness is corrupted either when the animal is corrupted or when health supervenes. But scientific knowledge, which is a certain habit, cannot be corrupted by the corruption of its subject, since, as *De Anima* 1 says, "The intellect," which is the subject of scientific knowledge, "is a sort of substance and is not corrupted." Similarly, it cannot be corrupted by any contrary, since, as *Metaphysics* 7 says, intelligible species are not contrary to one another. Therefore, a habit of scientific knowledge can in no way be corrupted.

Objection 3: Every instance of corruption occurs through some movement. But a habit of scientific knowledge, which exists in the soul, cannot be corrupted by a *per se* movement of the soul itself, since the soul is not moved *per se*, but is instead moved *per accidens* through the body's movement. But no corporeal change seems able to corrupt the intelligible species that exist in the intellect, since the intellect is in its own right (*per se*), without the body, a locus of species, and this is why it is claimed that intellect's habits cannot be corrupted either by old age or by death. Therefore, scientific knowledge cannot be corrupted. And, consequently, neither can the habit of a virtue, which likewise exists in the rational soul, and, as the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 1, "The virtues are more permanent than the scientific disciplines (*virtutes sunt permanentiores disciplinis*)."

But contrary to this: In *De Longitudine et Brevitate Vitae* the Philosopher says, "Forgetfulness and deception are the corruption of scientific knowledge." Again, by sinning one loses the habit of a virtue. And, as *Ethics* 2 says, the virtues are generated and corrupted by contrary acts.

I respond: A form is said to be corrupted in its own right (*secundum se*) by its contrary, whereas it is said to be corrupted *per accidens* by the corruption of its subject.

Therefore, if there is a habit whose subject is corruptible and whose cause has a contrary, then it can be corrupted in either of these ways, as is clear in the case of corporeal habits, e.g., health and sickness.

By contrast, habits whose subject is incorruptible cannot be corrupted *per accidens*. Still, there are certain habits such that even though they exist principally in an incorruptible subject, nonetheless exist secondarily in a corruptible subject, e.g., a habit of scientific knowledge, which, as was explained above (q. 50, a. 3), exists principally in the passive intellect and secondarily in the sentient apprehensive powers. And so on the part of the passive intellect, a habit of scientific knowledge cannot be corrupted *per accidens*; instead, it can be corrupted only on the part of the lower sentient powers.

Therefore, we have to think about whether habits of this sort can be corrupted *per se*. Thus, if there is a habit that has a contrary, either on its own part or on the part of its cause, then it will be able to be corrupted *per se*, whereas if it does not have a contrary, then it will not be able to be corrupted *per se*.

Now it is clear that an intelligible species that exists in the passive intellect does not have any

contrary. Nor, again, can there be any contrary to the agent intellect, which is a cause of the intelligible species. Hence, if there is a habit in the passive intellect that is caused immediately by the agent intellect, then such a habit is incorruptible both *per se* and *per accidens*. Now there are habits of this sort with respect to both speculative and practical first principles, and these habits cannot be corrupted by any sort of forgetfulness or deception—just as, in *Ethics* 6, the Philosopher says of prudence that “it cannot be lost through forgetfulness (*per oblivionem*).”

On the other hand, there is a certain habit in the passive intellect that are caused by reason, viz., a habit with respect to conclusions, which is called scientific knowledge (*scientia*) and the cause of which can have a contrary in two ways. In one way, on the part of the very propositions (*propositiones*) on the basis of which reason proceeds; for instance, according to the Philosopher in *Ethics* 6, the proposition (*enununtiatio*) *The good is not good* is contrary to the proposition *The good is good*. In the second way, with respect to the very process of reasoning (*quantum ad ipsum processum rationis*), in the way that a sophistical syllogism is opposed to a dialectical syllogism or a demonstrative syllogism. So, then, it is clear that a habit of true opinion, or even a habit of scientific knowledge, can be corrupted by false reasoning (*per falsam rationem*). That is why the Philosopher claims, as was said above, that deception is the corruption of scientific knowledge. Now as *Ethics* 6 says, certain virtues, which exist in reason itself, are intellectual virtues, and the same explanation that holds for scientific knowledge or opinion holds for them as well.

By contrast, some virtues, viz., the moral virtues, exist in the appetitive part of the soul, and the same explanation holds for their opposite vices. Now the habits of the appetitive part are caused by reason’s capacity to move the appetitive parts. Hence, the habit of a virtue or of a vice is corrupted by reason’s judgment effecting a contrary movement in some way or other—namely, out of ignorance or from passion or even by choice.

Reply to objection 1: As *Ethics* 7 says, a habit bears a similarity to a nature, and yet it falls short of being a nature. And so given that there is *no way* in which a nature can be removed from a thing, it is *with difficulty* that a habit is removed.

Reply to objection 2: Even though there is nothing contrary to the intelligible species, still, as has been explained, there can be something contrary to the propositions and to the process of reasoning.

Reply to objection 3: Scientific knowledge is removed by a corporeal movement not with respect to the very root of the habit, but only with respect to an impediment to the act, and this insofar as the intellect in its own act needs the sentient powers, which are impeded by corporeal changes. However, it is even with respect to the very root of the habit that a habit of scientific knowledge can be corrupted by an intelligible movement of reason. And the habit of a virtue can likewise be corrupted in a similar way.

However, the claim that virtues are more permanent than the scientific disciplines should be understood to apply not to the subject or to the cause, but rather to the act. For the use of the virtues, but not the use of the disciplines, is continuous through all of one’s life.

Article 2

Can a habit be diminished?

It seems that a habit cannot be diminished (*diminui non possit*):

Objection 1: A habit is a quality and simple form. But what is simple is possessed as a whole and is lost as a whole. Therefore, even if a habit can be corrupted, it cannot be diminished.

Objection 2: What belongs to an accident belongs to it either in its own right (*secundum se*) or by reason of its subject. Now a habit does not increase and decrease in its own right (*secundum seipsum non intenditur et remittitur*); otherwise, it would follow that a species is predicated of its individuals as more

and less. Therefore, if it could be diminished with respect to the subject's participation, it would follow that something proper accedes to the habit that is not common to it and the subject. Now if something proper belongs to a form over and beyond its subject, then, as *De Anima* 1 says, that form is separable. Therefore, it follows that a habit is a separable form—which is impossible.

Objection 3: The notion and nature of a habit, just as of any accident, consists in its being united to its subject (*in concretionem ad subiectum*), and this is why every accident is defined through its subject. Therefore, if a habit does not increase or decrease in its own right (*secundum seipsum*), then, likewise, it cannot be diminished with respect to its union with its subject. And so there is no way in which a habit is diminished.

But contrary to this: Contraries are apt to affect the same thing. But growth and diminution are contraries. Therefore, since a habit can grow, it seems that a habit can likewise be diminished.

I respond: As is clear from what was said above (q. 52, a. 1), there are two ways in which habits are diminished, just as there are two ways in which they grow. And just as they grow by the same cause by which they are generated, so they are diminished by the same cause by which they are corrupted. For diminution is a path toward corruption, just as, conversely, the generation of a habit is the foundation for its growth.

Reply to objection 1: A habit, considered in itself, is a simple form and diminution does not happen to it on this score. Rather, diminution happens to it because of a diversified mode of participation that stems from the indeterminacy of the power itself, which is able to participate in diverse ways in a single form, or which is able to extend itself to more or fewer things.

Reply to objection 2: This argument is based on the assumption that the very essence of a habit is not in any way diminished. But we do not claim this. Rather, we claim that a sort of diminution of a habit's essence has its source not in the habit, but in the one participating in the habit.

Reply to objection 3: No matter how an accident is signified, it has by its very nature a dependence on its subject, though in different ways.

For an accident signified in the *abstract* implies a relation to the subject that begins from the accident and is terminated in the subject; for instance, *whiteness* is defined as *that by which something is white* (*albedo dicitur qua aliquid est album*). And so in the definition of an accident taken as abstract (*in definitione accidentis abstracti*) the subject is posited not as the first part, i.e., the genus, of the definition, but instead as the second part, i.e., the difference. For instance, we define *snubnosedness* as *the curvature of the nose*.

By contrast, in the case of the *concrete* terms, the relation begins from the subject and is terminated in the accident. Because of this, in the definition of an accident [taken in the concrete] the subject is posited as the genus, i.e., the first part of the definition; for instance, we say that what is *snubbed* is a *nose that is curved*.

So, then, what belongs to accidents because of the subject (*ex parte subiecti*), and not by the very nature of the accident, is attributed to the accident in the *concrete* and not in the *abstract*. And it is in certain accidents of this sort that there is increase and decrease (*intensio et remissio*); this is why it is a *white thing*, and not *whiteness*, that is said to be more or less white.

The same explanation holds for the case of habits and other qualities—except for the fact that, as is clear from what was said above (q. 52, a. 2), some habits grow and diminish through a certain sort of addition.

Article 3

Is a habit corrupted or diminished just by a cessation from its acts?

It seems that a habit is not corrupted or diminished just by a cessation from its acts (*per solam cessationem ab opere*):

Objection 1: As is clear from what was said above (q. 49, a. 2 and q. 50, a. 1), habits are more permanent than passive qualities (*passibiles qualitates*). But passive qualities are neither corrupted nor diminished by a cessation from their acts; for instance, whiteness is not diminished if it is not affecting anyone's sight, and heat is not diminished if it is not effecting heat in anything. Therefore, neither is it the case that habits are diminished or corrupted by a cessation from their acts.

Objection 2: Corruption and diminution are changes. But nothing is changed without some cause effecting the movement (*absque aliqua causa movente*). Therefore, since a cessation from acts does not imply any cause that effects movement, it does not seem that the diminution or corruption of a habit can occur because of a cessation from its acts.

Objection 3: Habits of scientific knowledge and virtue exist in the intellectual soul, which is beyond time (*est supra tempus*). But things that are beyond time are not corrupted or diminished by a long temporal duration. Therefore, habits of this sort are not corrupted or diminished, either, if they persist for a long time without being exercised.

But contrary to this: In *De Longitudine et Brevitate Vitae* the Philosopher says that the corruption of scientific knowledge comes not only from deception but also from forgetfulness. And in *Ethics* 8 it says that a lack of interaction (*inappellatio*) dissolves many friendships. And for the same reason, other habits of the virtues are diminished or destroyed by a cessation from their acts.

I respond: As *Physics* 8 says, there are two ways in which something can effect a movement. One way is *per se*, i.e., by effecting a movement in accord with the nature of its proper form, in the way that fire effects heat. The other way is *per accidens*, as in the case of something that removes an obstacle.

It is in this latter way that a cessation from their acts causes the corruption or diminution of habits, viz., insofar as what is removed is an act that poses an obstacle to the causes that corrupt or diminish the habit. For it has been explained (a. 1) that habits are corrupted or diminished *per se* by a contrary agent. Hence, if any habit is such that its contraries grow over the course of time (*subcrescunt per temporis tractum*) and have to be counteracted (*oportet subtrahi*) by acts that proceed from the habit, then this sort of habit is diminished or even totally destroyed by a long cessation from its acts—as is clear in the case of scientific knowledge and of virtue.

For it is clear that the habit of a moral virtue makes a man prompt in choosing the mean in his operations and passions. But when one does not use the habit of a virtue to moderate his passions or operations, then many passions and operations outside of the mode of the virtue necessarily arise from the inclinations of the sentient appetite and of other things that effect movement from the outside. This is why the virtue is corrupted or diminished by a cessation from its acts.

Something similar happens as well with the intellectual virtues, in accord with which a man is prompt in judging correctly about things he has in his imagination (*de imaginatis*). Therefore, when a man stops using an intellectual habit, things arise in the imagination that are extraneous and sometimes lead to the contrary (*insurgunt imaginationes extraneae et quandoque ad contrarium ducentes*), so that, unless these extraneous imaginings are in some way cut off or restrained by the frequent use of the intellectual habit, the man is rendered less apt to judge correctly and sometimes becomes totally disposed toward the contrary. And in this way an intellectual habit is diminished or even corrupted by a cessation from its acts.

Reply to objection 1: Heat is likewise corrupted in the same way by a cessation from effecting heat if, because of this cessation, coldness, which corrupts heat, increases.

Reply to objection 2: As has been explained, the cessation from an act effects a movement toward corruption or diminution in the sense that it removes an obstacle to the corruption or diminution.

Reply to objection 3: The intellectual part of the soul is in its own right (*secundum se*) beyond time, but the sentient part is subject to time. And so through the course of time the soul changes with respect to the passions of the appetitive part and also with respect to the apprehensive powers. This is why the Philosopher says in *Physics* 4 that time is a cause of forgetfulness.