

QUESTION 58

The Distinction between the Moral Virtues and the Intellectual Virtues

Next we have to consider the moral virtues: first, as regards the distinction of the moral virtues from the intellectual virtues (question 58); second, as regards the distinction of the moral virtues from one another according to their proper matter (questions 59-60); and, third, as regards the distinction of the principal, i.e., cardinal, virtues from the others (question 61).

On the first topic there are five questions: (1) Is every virtue a moral virtue? (2) Is a moral virtue distinguished from an intellectual virtue? (3) Is *virtue* adequately divided into *intellectual virtue* and *moral virtue*? (4) Can moral virtue exist without intellectual virtue? (5) Conversely, can intellectual virtue exist without moral virtue?

Article 1

Is every virtue a moral virtue?

It seems that every virtue is a moral virtue:

Objection 1: Moral (*moralis*) virtue takes its name from *mos*, i.e., custom (*consuetudo*). But we can become accustomed to the acts of all the virtues. Therefore, every virtue is a moral virtue.

Objection 2: In *Ethics 2* the Philosopher says, “A moral virtue is an elective habit consisting in a mean of reason (*in meditate rationis*).” But every virtue seems to be an elective habit, since we can do the acts of any virtue by choice. Also, as will be explained below (q. 64, aa. 1 and 2 and 3), every virtue consists in some sense in a mean of reason (*in medio rationis*). Therefore, every virtue is a moral virtue.

Objection 3: In *Rhetorica* Tully says, “A virtue is a habit consonant with reason in the manner of a nature.” But since every human virtue is ordered toward a man’s good, it has to be consonant with reason; for as Dionysius says, a man’s good is “to exist in accord with reason.” Therefore, every virtue is a moral virtue.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics 1* the Philosopher says, “In speaking about morals (*de moribus*), we do not say that a man is wise or intelligent; instead, we say that he is gentle or sober.” So, then, wisdom and understanding are not moral virtues, and yet, as was explained above (q. 57, a. 2), they are virtues. Therefore, not every virtue is a moral virtue.

I respond: To get clear on this matter, we have to think about what *mos* is, since it is in this way that we can come to know what a moral (*moralis*) virtue is. Now there are two things *mos* signifies:

Sometimes it signifies custom (*consuetudo*), in the way it says in Acts 15:1, “Unless you are circumcised after the custom of Moses, you will not be able to be saved.”

On the other hand, sometimes *mos* signifies a certain natural or quasi-natural inclination to do something; in this sense, even brute animals are said to have *mores*. Hence, 2 Maccabees 11:11 says, “Rushing violently upon the enemy, as lions do by inclination (*leonum more*), they slew them.” And it is in this sense that *mos* is taken in Psalm 67:7, when it says, “Who makes men of the same inclination (*unius moris*) to dwell in the house.”

And these two significations are not distinguished in any way among the Latins, as far as the pronunciation is concerned (*quantum ad vocem*). By contrast, they are distinguished in the Greek, since *ethos*, which signifies *mos* for us, sometimes has a long first vowel and is written with an *eta*, whereas sometimes it has a short first vowel and is written with an *epsilon*.

Now ‘moral virtue’ comes from *mos* (*dicitur virtus moralis a more*) insofar as *mos* signifies a certain natural or quasi-natural inclination to do something. And this signification is close to the other signification, by which it signifies ‘custom’. For a custom is in some sense turned into a nature and makes for an inclination similar to a natural inclination.

Now it is clear that an inclination to act belongs, properly speaking, to an appetitive power, whose

role, as is clear from what was said above (q. 9, a. 1), is to move all the powers toward acting. And so not every virtue is called a moral virtue, but only a virtue that exists in an appetitive power.

Reply to objection 1: This objection goes through for *mos* insofar as it signifies a custom.

Reply to objection 2: Every act of a virtue can be done by choice (*potest ex electione agi*), but only a virtue that exists in the appetitive part of the soul effects a correct act of choosing. For it was explained above (q. 13, a. 1) that the act of choosing is an act of the appetitive part. Hence, the only elective habits, i.e., habits which are a *principle* of an act of choosing, are those that perfect the appetitive power, even though the acts of other habits can also fall under an act of choosing.

Reply to objection 3: As *Physics* 2 says, “A nature is a principle of movement.” But to move something toward acting is proper to the appetitive part of the soul. And to be like a nature in consenting to reason is proper to those virtues that exist in the appetitive part.

Article 2

Is a moral virtue distinguished from an intellectual virtue?

It seems that a moral virtue is not distinguished from an intellectual virtue:

Objection 1: In *De Civitate Dei* 4 Augustine says, “A virtue is an art of living well.” But an art is an intellectual virtue. Therefore, a moral virtue does not differ from an intellectual virtue.

Objection 2: *Knowledge (scientia)* is often posited in the definition of the moral virtues. For instance, some define perseverance as ‘a knowledge or habit with respect to those things that should or should not be persisted in’, and sanctity as ‘knowledge that makes men to be faithful and to observe what is just with respect to God’. But knowledge is an intellectual virtue. Therefore, one should not distinguish a moral virtue from an intellectual virtue.

Objection 3: In *Soliloquia* 1 Augustine says, “A virtue is right and perfected reason.” But as is clear from *Ethics* 6, this pertains to an intellectual virtue. Therefore, a moral virtue is not distinct from an intellectual virtue.

Objection 4: Nothing is distinct from what is posited in its definition. But *intellectual virtue* is posited in the definition of *moral virtue*. For in *Ethics* 2 the Philosopher says, “A moral virtue is a habit of choosing the mean determined by reason, in the way that a wise man would determine it.” But as *Ethics* 6 explains, this sort of right reason, which determines the mean of a moral virtue, belongs to an intellectual virtue. Therefore, a moral virtue is not distinguished from an intellectual virtue.

But contrary to this: *Ethics* 1 says, “Virtue is determined by a difference, since we call some of them intellectual virtues and others moral virtues.”

I respond: Reason is the first principle of all human works, and if there are any other principles of human works, they in some sense obey reason, though in different ways.

For some of them obey reason completely at will, without any opposition—like bodily limbs, as long as they remain in their natural condition (*si fuerint in sua natura consistentia*). For as soon as reason commands, the hand or the foot moves into action (*movetur ad opus*). Hence, in *Politics* 1 the Philosopher says, “The soul governs the body by despotic rule,” i.e., in the way that a master governs a servant who does not have the right to oppose him. Thus, some have claimed that it is in this way that all the active principles that exist in a man are related to reason. And, indeed, if this were true, then reason’s being perfected would be sufficient for acting well. Hence, since a virtue is a habit by which we are perfected in acting well, it would follow that virtue exists in reason alone, and so there would be no virtues except intellectual virtues. And this was the opinion of Socrates, who claimed, as *Ethics* 6 reports, that as long as knowledge existed in a man, he was unable to sin, and that if anyone sinned, he sinned because of ignorance.

However, this opinion proceeds from a false assumption. For the appetitive part of the soul obeys reason not completely at will, but with some opposition. This is why the Philosopher says in *Politics* 1, “Reason governs the appetitive part by political rule (*principatu politico*), i.e., by the sort of rule by which one presides over free men, who have the right to oppose him in some matters.” Hence, in *Super Psalmos* Augustine says, “Sometimes understanding leads the way and desire follows slowly or not at all”—even to the point that the passions or habits of the appetitive part of the soul sometimes act in such a way as to impede the use of reason in a particular case. Accordingly, what Socrates said, viz., that when knowledge is present, one does not sin, is true in a certain sense, as long as this condition extends right up to the use of reason in a particular situation of choice.

So, then, in order for a man to act well, what is required is not only that his reason be well disposed through a habit of intellectual virtue, but also that his appetitive power be well disposed through a habit of moral virtue. Therefore, in the same way that appetite is distinguished from reason, so moral virtue is distinguished from intellectual virtue. Hence, just as an appetite is a principle of a human act insofar as it participates in reason in some way, so a moral habit has the character of a human virtue insofar as it is conformed to reason.

Reply to objection 1: Augustine commonly uses ‘art’ for any sort of right reason. And so ‘art’ includes even prudence, which is right reason with respect to what can be done, just as art is right reason with respect to what can be made. Accordingly, what Augustine said, viz., that virtue is the art of living well, belongs to prudence in its essence (*essentialiter convenit prudentiae*) and to the other virtues by participation (*participative*), insofar as they are directed in accord with prudence.

Reply to objection 2: Definitions of the sort in question, no matter who gives them, proceed from Socrates’s opinion and should be interpreted in the way that ‘art’ was just interpreted above.

Reply to objection 3: Something similar should be said in reply to the third objection.

Reply to objection 4: *Right reason that accords with prudence* is posited in the definition of moral virtue not as part of its essence but as something that is participated in by all the moral virtues, insofar as prudence directs all the moral virtues.

Article 3

Is human virtue adequately divided into moral virtue and intellectual virtue?

It seems that *human virtue* is not adequately divided into *moral virtue* and *intellectual virtue*:

Objection 1: Prudence seems to be something in between a moral virtue and an intellectual virtue; for in *Ethics* 6 prudence is numbered among the intellectual virtues, and it also commonly numbered by everyone among the four cardinal virtues, which, as will become clear below (q. 61, a. 1), are moral virtues. Therefore, *virtue* is not adequately divided into *intellectual* and *moral* with no intermediate (*dividitur per intellectualem et moralem sicut per immediata*).

Objection 2: Continence and perseverance, and patience as well, are not counted among the intellectual virtues. But neither are they moral virtues, since they do not hold to a mean within the passions; instead, the passions abound in them. Therefore, *virtue* is not adequately divided into *intellectual virtues* and *moral virtues*.

Objection 3: Faith, hope, and charity are virtues. Yet they are not intellectual virtues, since the intellectual virtues are such that, as has been explained (q. 57, aa. 2 and 3 and 5), there are just five of them, viz., scientific knowledge (*scientia*), wisdom (*sapientia*), understanding (*intellectus*), prudence (*prudentia*), and art or craft (*ars*). But neither are they moral virtues, since they do not deal with the passions, which moral virtue deals with especially. Therefore, *virtue* is not adequately divided into *intellectual virtues* and *moral virtues*.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says, “There are two sorts of virtue, intellectual and moral.”

I respond: A human virtue is a habit that perfects a man with respect to acting well. Now there are just two principles of human acts in a man, viz., (a) the intellect or reason and (b) appetite; for as *De Anima* says, these are the two things that effect movement in a man (*haec sunt duo moventia in homine*). Hence, every human virtue must perfect one of these principles (*perfectiva alicuius istorum principiorum*). Therefore, if the virtue in question perfects the speculative or practical intellect with respect to some good act of a man, then it will be an intellectual virtue, whereas if it perfects the appetitive part of the soul, then it will be a moral virtue. Hence, it follows that every human virtue is either an intellectual virtue or a moral virtue.

Reply to objection 1: As far as its essence is concerned, prudence is an intellectual virtue. However, as far as its matter is concerned, it fits in with the moral virtues, since, as was explained above (q. 57, a. 4), it is right reason with respect to what can be done. And because of this it is counted among the moral virtues.

Reply to objection 2: Continnence and perseverance are not perfections of the sentient appetitive power. This is clear from the fact that disordered passions abound in one who is being continent and in one who is persevering—something that would not be the case if the sentient appetite had been perfected by a habit that conforms it to reason.

To the contrary, continence (or perseverance) is a perfection of the rational part of the soul, which is holding itself firm against the passions (*se tenet contra passiones*), so as not to be led away by them. Yet such a habit falls short of having the character of a virtue, because an intellectual virtue that makes reason behave well in moral matters presupposes an upright desire for the end, so that it is correctly related to the principles, i.e., the ends, from which it reasons—something that is missing in the case of the one who is being continent and the one who is persevering.

Nor can there be a perfect operation that proceeds from two powers unless each of the powers is perfected by an appropriate habit—in just the same way that an agent’s action through an instrument is not perfect unless the instrument is well disposed, no matter how perfect the principal agent is. Hence, if the sentient appetite, which is moved by the rational part, is not perfect, then no matter how perfect the rational part is, the action that follows will not be perfect. Hence, neither will the principle of the action be a virtue.

For this reason, as the Philosopher points out in *Ethics* 7, continence with respect to sensory pleasures (*continentia a delectationibus*) and perseverance in the face of pain and sadness (*perseverantia a tristitiis*) are not virtues, but something less than virtues.

Reply to objection 3: Faith, hope, and charity lie beyond the human virtues (*sunt supra virtutes humanas*), since they are the virtues that belong to a man insofar as he has become a participant in God’s grace.

Article 4

Can moral virtue exist without intellectual virtue?

It seems that moral virtue can exist without intellectual virtue:

Objection 1: As Tully says, “A virtue is a habit in the manner of a nature, consonant with reason.” But even if a nature is consonant with a higher reason that is moving it, that higher reason still does not have to be joined to the nature in the same subject (*in eodem*); this is clear in the case of natural things that lack cognition. Therefore, it is possible for moral virtue to exist in a man, inclining him to consent to reason, even though that particular man’s reason is not perfected by an intellectual virtue.

Objection 2: Through an intellectual virtue a man attains the perfect use of reason. But it sometimes happens that individuals in whom the use of reason is not very strong are virtuous and acceptable to God (*Deo accepti*). Therefore, it seems that moral virtue can exist without intellectual virtue.

Objection 3: A moral virtue effects an inclination toward acting well. But some individuals have a natural inclination toward acting well, even in the absence of reason's judgment. Therefore, moral virtues can exist without intellectual virtue.

But contrary to this: In *Moralia* 22 Gregory says, "Unless the other virtues enact prudently what they desire, they can in no way be virtues." But as was explained above (q. 57, a. 5), prudence is an intellectual virtue. Therefore, moral virtues cannot exist without intellectual virtues.

I respond: Moral virtue can exist without certain intellectual virtues, e.g., wisdom, scientific knowledge, and art. But moral virtue cannot exist without *understanding* and *prudence*.

Moral virtue cannot exist without *prudence*, because moral virtue is an elective habit, i.e., a habit that effects a good act of choosing (*habitus faciens bonam electionem*), and two things are required for a good act of choosing. The first is that the act of intending the end be good, and this is effected by moral virtue, which inclines the appetitive power toward a good that is consonant with reason, i.e., toward a fitting end. The second is that the man correctly perceive the means to the end, and this cannot happen except through reason's correctly deliberating, judging, and commanding—and this, as was explained above (q. 57, aa. 5 and 6), pertains to prudence and the virtues joined to it.

Hence, moral virtue cannot exist without prudence and, as a result, it cannot exist without *understanding*, either. For it is through understanding that one has cognition of naturally known principles (*per intellectum cognoscuntur principia naturaliter nota*), both in speculative matters and matters having to do with action. Hence, just as in speculative matters right reason presupposes an understanding of naturally known principles insofar as it proceeds from those principles, so too with prudence, which is right reason with respect to what can be done.

Reply to objection 1: In the case of things that lack reason, the inclination of a nature exists without the act of choosing, and so an inclination of this sort does not necessarily require reason. By contrast, the inclination that belongs to a moral virtue exists with the act of choosing, and so for its perfection it needs reason to be perfected by an intellectual virtue.

Reply to objection 2: In a virtuous individual the use of reason does not have to be strong with respect to all things, but only with respect to what has to be done in accord with virtue. And this is the sense in which the use of reason is strong in all virtuous individuals. Hence, even those who seem simple because they lack worldly wisdom (*caerent mundana astutia*) can be prudent—this according to Matthew 10:16 ("Be as prudent as serpents and as simple as doves").

Reply to objection 3: The natural inclination toward the good of virtue is a sort of beginning of virtue, but it is not perfected virtue. For the stronger an inclination of this sort is, the more dangerous it can be, unless it is joined to right reason, through which correct choices are made with respect to what is consonant with a fitting end—in the same way that if a running horse is blind, the more vigorously it runs, the harder it falls and the more seriously it is hurt. And so even if moral virtue is not *identical with* right reason in the way that Socrates claimed it is, still, not only is it the case that moral virtue is *in accord with* right reason insofar as it inclines one toward what is in accord with right reason, as the Platonists claimed, but it is also the case that moral virtue *must exist along with* right reason, as Aristotle claims in *Ethics* 9.

Article 5

Can intellectual virtue exist without moral virtue?

It seems that intellectual virtue can exist without moral virtue:

Objection 1: The perfection of what is prior does not depend on the perfection of what is posterior. But reason is prior to the sentient appetite and moves the sentient appetite. Therefore, intellectual virtue, which is the perfection of reason, does not depend on moral virtue, which is the perfection of the appetitive part of the soul. Therefore, intellectual virtue can exist without moral virtue.

Objection 2: Morals are the matter of prudence, in the way that what can be made is the matter of an art or craft (*materia artis*). But an art can exist without its proper matter; for instance, a blacksmith without iron. Therefore, prudence can likewise exist without the moral virtues, and yet of all the intellectual virtues, prudence seems to be the one that is especially conjoined to the moral virtues.

Objection 3: As *Ethics 6* says, prudence is a virtue by which one deliberates well (*virtus bene consiliativa*). But there are many individuals who deliberate well and yet lack the moral virtues. Therefore, prudence can exist without moral virtue.

But contrary to this: *To will what is bad* is directly opposed to moral virtue, but it is not opposed to anything that can exist without moral virtue. But as *Ethics 6* says, sinning on purpose (*volens peccat*) is opposed to prudence. Therefore, it is not the case that prudence can exist without moral virtue.

I respond: The other intellectual virtues can exist without moral virtue, but prudence cannot exist without moral virtue.

The reason for this is that prudence is right reason with respect to what can be done—not only in general, but also in particular cases, among which are actions. But right reason requires principles from which reasoning proceeds, and with respect to particular matters reason needs to proceed not only from *universal* principles but also from *particular* principles.

As regards the universal principles of what can be done, a man is correctly related to them through (a) the natural understanding of principles, through which a man knows that nothing bad is to be done, and also through (b) some sort of practical knowledge.

However, this is not sufficient for reasoning correctly about particular matters. For it sometimes happens that a universal principle of the sort in question, known through understanding or knowledge, is corrupted in a particular case by some passion. For instance, when concupiscence overcomes a man who has an avid sensory desire, what he desires seems good to him even though it is contrary to reason's universal judgment. And so, just as a man is disposed toward being correctly related to the universal principles through natural understanding or through a habit of knowledge, so, too, in order for him to be correctly related to the *particular* principles of what is to be done, i.e., the ends, he must be perfected by habits in accord with which it becomes in some sense connatural to the man to judge correctly concerning the end. And this is effected by moral virtue. For the virtuous individual judges correctly about the end of virtue, since, as *Ethics 3* says, "Such as an individual is, so the end appears to him." And so what is required for right reason with respect to what can be done, i.e., for prudence, is that the man have moral virtue.

Reply to objection 1: Insofar as reason apprehends the end, it precedes the desire for the end, but the desire for the end precedes reason's reasoning about choosing the means to the end, which is what pertains to prudence—just as, in the case of speculative matters, the understanding of the principles is the starting point for reason's syllogizing.

Reply to objection 2: The principles of things that are made are judged well or badly by us not in accord with the disposition of our appetite—in the way that ends, which are the principles of moral matters, are judged—but only through reason's consideration. And so, unlike prudence, an art or craft does not require a virtue that perfects the appetite.

Reply to objection 3: Prudence not only deliberates well, but also judges well and commands well. But this is impossible unless one removes the obstacle of passions that corrupt prudence's judgment and command. And this obstacle is removed through moral virtue.